

Luke 18:15-30
May 3, 2020

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

The opening verses that we will cover today has great significance in the life of Riverbend, so I thought I would start our time together with a history lesson, in case you weren't a part of our fellowship at the time this all occurred. For those of us who were here, you will recognize our opening text as being rather pivotal in the life of Riverbend! So I will do the best I can to summarize what happened, and then some of you who were here will be invited to tweak it or add a little more if you think I left something significant out of this summary. So...

It was the Spring of 2015 when the Supreme Court legalized gay marriage. Dr. Haney understood the significance of this decision. The mission statement of Riverbend is to "reclaim lives for Christ by reaching the bruised, the battered, the bored, and the broken." At its core, anyone can "come as they are" and experience the love and grace of God without judgment.

When the Supreme Court legalized gay marriage, Dr. Haney saw what he believed could become an issue at our church, and he wanted to get ahead of it. He saw the real possibility that a same-sex couple would approach Riverbend and ask him/Riverbend to dedicate their child, just like we do for children of heterosexual couples. So how did he get ahead of it?

He led his church staff, the leadership team, and the Church Council via bible studies throughout the Summer of 2015. They wrestled with how they would answer a same-sex couple who wants their child to be dedicated. Remember, this was a hypothetical that may never occur.

After all of the struggle and wrestling with Scripture, they landed on the question, "What Does Love Require?" And the Scriptures that led them to a clear answer is the one we're getting to read, along with other passages regarding children. It became clear to our leadership that we would say "yes" to a same-sex couple who might ask us to dedicate their child.

So Dr. Haney decided to share that decision with the congregation through a sermon he delivered on Labor Day weekend of 2014. It was entitled, "What Does Love Require?" This sermon came with a significant cost to our church body. Dr. Haney had already rec'd the resignation notice from our worship pastor, who believed that his Christian testimony would be weakened by standing on the same stage with a same-sex couple. It would be a form of "condoning" their lifestyle. So we lost him. Then, after the sermon was delivered, we saw more members leave the church over this message for similar reasons. [Invite any clarifications, or if I misstated anything]

Transition: So that is a quick summary of how the opening text for this morning has great significance for Riverbenders. So I don't think we need to spend a lot of time on this passage, other than I want to make sure we understand the real point of it. Let's begin.

BOOK:

The Little Children and Jesus

¹⁵ People were also bringing babies to Jesus to have him touch them. When the disciples saw this, they rebuked them. ¹⁶ But Jesus called the children to him and said, **“Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. ¹⁷ I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.”**

Transition:

Q: True or False. Rich people have a hard time giving up their trust in their possessions in order to put their complete trust in Christ. [Let people engage]

The Rich Ruler

¹⁸ A certain ruler asked him, “Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?”

¹⁹ **“Why do you call me good?”** Jesus answered. **“No one is good—except God alone. ²⁰ You know the commandments: ‘Do not commit adultery, do not murder, do not steal, do not give false testimony, honor your father and mother.’”**

²¹ “All these I have kept since I was a boy,” he said.

²² When Jesus heard this, he said to him, **“You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”**

²³ When he heard this, he became very sad, because he was a man of great wealth. ²⁴ Jesus looked at him and said, **“How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God! ²⁵ Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.”**

²⁶ Those who heard this asked, “Who then can be saved?”

²⁷ Jesus replied, **“What is impossible with men is possible with God.”**

²⁸ Peter said to him, “We have left all we had to follow you!”

²⁹ **“I tell you the truth,”** Jesus said to them, **“no one who has left home or wife or brothers or parents or children for the sake of the kingdom of God ³⁰ will fail to receive many times as much in this age and, in the age to come, eternal life.”**

Process Observations/Questions:

Q: What did you most like about this passage? What resonated with you? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you least like about this passage? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you find in this passage that you didn’t understand? [Let people engage]

Q: What do we learn about Jesus in this passage? [Let people engage]

LOOK:

Nobody is saved by giving all his wealth to the poor, but nobody can be saved who will not repent of his sins and turn away from them. This young man was possessed by the love of money and he would not let go.

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). The Bible Exposition Commentary (Vol. 1, pp. 249-250). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

In contrast to the proud Pharisee are the children who were brought to Jesus (Luke 18:15–17). It was customary for the Jews to bring little children to the rabbis to receive their special blessing, so it is strange that the disciples would stand in the way. Perhaps they thought Jesus was weary and needed rest, or they may have decided that He was not really interested in children. How wrong they were!

However, this was not the first time the disciples had attempted to “get rid of” people. They wanted to send the crowd away hungry, but Jesus fed them (Matt. 14:15ff); and they tried to stop the Canaanite woman from asking Jesus to heal her daughter (Matt. 15:21ff), but Jesus answered her prayer. The Twelve did not yet have the compassion of their Master, but it would come in due time.

Jesus wants us to be *childlike* but not *childish*. An unspoiled child illustrates humility, faith, and dependence. A child has a sense of wonder that makes life exciting. The only way to enter God's kingdom is to become like a child and be born again (John 3). If the proud Pharisee had become like a child, he too would have gone home justified.

A Dishonest Youth (Luke 18:18–30)

The rich young ruler (Matt. 19:20) may be the only man in the Gospels who came to the feet of Jesus and went away in worse condition than when he came. And yet he had so much in his favor! He was moral and religious, earnest and sincere, and probably would have qualified for membership in the average church. Yet he refused to follow Jesus Christ and instead went his own way in great sorrow.

What was wrong with him? In a word: *dishonesty*. In spite of the fact that he came to the right Person, asked the right question, and received the right answer, *he made the wrong decision*. Why? Because he was not honest with God or with himself. Therefore, he would not do what he was commanded to do. He was a superficial young man who said one thing but did another. Consider the areas in which he was dishonest.

His view of Christ (vv. 18–19). The rabbis were called “Master” (Teacher), but it was most unusual for a rabbi to be called “good.” The Jews reserved the word *good* for God (Pss. 25:8; 34:8; 86:5; 106:1). This explains why our Lord asked the young man what he meant, for if he really believed that Jesus was “good,” *then he had to confess that Jesus was God*. By asking this question, our Lord was not denying His deity but affirming it. He was testing the young man to see if he really understood what he had just said.

His subsequent behavior proved that the young ruler did not believe that Jesus Christ was God. If he really thought he was in the presence of Almighty God, why did he argue politely about the Law, brag about his character, and then refuse to obey the Word? Surely he knew that God sees the heart and knows all things!

His view of sin (vv. 20–21). He also had a superficial view of his own sin. No doubt the young man sincerely tried to keep the Law; in fact, this may have been what brought him to the feet of Jesus (Gal. 3:24). Jesus did not quote the Law to him as a means of salvation, because obedience to the Law does not save us. He held the Law before the young man as a mirror to reveal his sins (Rom. 3:19–20; Gal. 2:21; 3:21).

But the young man looked into the mirror and would not see the stains and blemishes in his life. When Jesus quoted from the second table of the Law, He did not quote the last commandment, “Thou shalt not covet” (Ex. 20:17). Jesus knew the young man’s heart, so instead of preaching to him about covetousness, He asked him to do something that a covetous person would not do.

Nobody is saved by giving all his wealth to the poor, but nobody can be saved who will not repent of his sins and turn away from them. This young man was possessed by the love of money and he would not let go.

His view of salvation (vv. 22–30). The young man thought that eternal life came to those who “did something” (Luke 18:18), which was a typical Jewish conviction (Luke 18:9–12). But when Jesus gave him something to do, he refused to obey! He wanted salvation on his terms, not God’s, so he turned and went away in great sorrow.

The disciples were shocked when Jesus announced that it was difficult for rich people to be saved. They were Jews and the Jews believed that riches were a mark of God’s blessing. “If rich people can’t be saved,” they reasoned, “what hope is there for the rest of us?” John D. Rockefeller would have agreed with them, for he once said that riches were “a gift from heaven signifying, ‘This is My beloved son, in whom I am well pleased.’”

It is not possessing riches that keeps people out of heaven, for Abraham, David, and Solomon were wealthy men. It is *being possessed* by riches and *trusting* them that makes salvation difficult for the wealthy. Wealth gives people a false sense of success and security, and when people are satisfied with themselves, they feel no need for God.

Peter’s comment in Luke 18:28 suggests that he had a rather commercial view of discipleship: “What then will there be for us?” (Matt. 19:27) Jesus promised all of them (“you” in Luke 18:29 is plural) blessings in this life and reward in the life to come, but then He balanced His words with another announcement about His impending suffering and death. How could Peter be thinking about personal gain when his Lord was going to Jerusalem to be crucified?

The rich young ruler is a warning to people who want a Christian faith that does not change their values or upset their lifestyle. Jesus does not command every seeking sinner to sell everything and give to the poor, but He does put His finger of conviction on any area in our lives about which we are dishonest.

Martin, J. A. (1985). Isaiah. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, pp. 250-251)

d. Jesus’ teaching about childlikeness (18:15–17) (Matt. 19:13–15; Mark 10:13–16).

18:15–17. Luke placed this short section here to follow up on the message of the previous parable. Jesus had taught that it was necessary to be humble before God. In these verses He compared that humility to childlikeness: **Let the little children come to Me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.** In these words, Jesus was stating that a person must come to Him in humility in order to enter **the kingdom. Children** come with expectation and excitement. They come realizing that they are not sufficient in themselves. They depend totally on others. If these same attitudes are not present in adults, they can **never enter** into the kingdom.

e. Jesus’ teaching that wealth is a hindrance to the important issues of life (18:18–30) (Matt. 19:16–30; Mark 10:17–31).

18:18–20. A **certain ruler** (who was very wealthy, v. 23) came to **Jesus** to talk about how to **inherit eternal life**. This man was perhaps a member of the Sanhedrin or perhaps an official in a local synagogue. “To inherit eternal life” meant to enter the kingdom of God (cf. John 3:3–5). The man wanted to know what actions (**what must I do**) would make him right with God.

The man had called Jesus **Good Teacher**. Jesus responded that **God alone is good**, that is, only God is truly righteous. Apparently, the man thought Jesus had gained a measure of status with God by His good works. Jesus was implying that if He were truly good, then it would be because He is God. This, then, is another of Jesus’ claims of deity.

Jesus responded to the man’s question by instructing him to keep the seventh, sixth, eighth, ninth, and fifth commandments (Ex. 20:12–16), each of which pertain to man’s relationship to man. (The first four of the Ten Commandments pertain to man’s relationship with God.)

18:21–22. The ruler’s reply that **he had kept** all these since childhood was probably correct. He may have been a model citizen.

Jesus then told the man **one other thing** he needed to do: he needed to **follow** Jesus, and in order to do that he had to **give** the money from his possessions **to the poor**. This action would touch on the 10th commandment against coveting, which included the idea of greed and holding onto things which are one’s own as well as wanting things that belong to others. It was at this point that the man faltered.

Jesus’ reasoning was clear: (a) one must keep the Law perfectly in order to inherit eternal life (cf. James 2:10). (b) Only God was good—truly righteous. (c) Therefore, nobody can obtain eternal life by following the Law (cf. Rom. 3:20; Gal. 2:21; 3:21). The only course of action left to an individual is to follow Jesus in order to obtain eternal life.

18:23–25. The ruler was not prepared to take that step (but contrast Zacchaeus, 19:8). The ruler was more attached to his wealth than to the idea of obtaining “eternal life” which he had so nobly asked about at the beginning of his conversation with the Lord. **Jesus** responded that riches are a hindrance to one’s obtaining eternal life. Riches often cloud a person’s thinking about what is truly important in life. Jesus used a common hyperbole of something that is impossible—a **camel going through the eye of a needle** (*belonēs*, a sewing needle, not a small door in a city gate). Likewise, it is most difficult (but not impossible; cf. Zacchaeus, 19:1–10) for a **rich** person to be saved.

18:26–27. The disciples were dumbfounded. They had the mistaken impression, like the Pharisees, that wealth was a sign of God’s blessing. If a person such as the ruler could not be saved, **Who then can be saved?** Jesus, by His reply, did not rule out all wealthy people from salvation. He noted that **God** can do the **impossible**.

18:28–30. In response to the disciples’ sacrifice in following Him, expressed by **Peter**, Jesus affirmed that they would be amply rewarded. Though they had **left** their families (cf. 14:26–27), their reward would consist of **many times as much in this age and also eternal life**. Jesus was obviously referring to the community of believers who would share with the disciples during their ministries. Those believers became a closely-knit family, all sharing together, so that none had any need (Acts 2:44–47; 4:32–37).

Cabal, T., Brand, C. O., Clendenen, E. R., Copan, P., Moreland, J. P., & Powell, D. (2007). *The Apologetics Study Bible: Real Questions, Straight Answers, Stronger Faith* (p. 1488). Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.

18:15 X-Ref Mark 10:15 Jesus was not commending unthinking credulity to enter the kingdom, as if Christians must be fools. He was commending an attitude of dependence, without which it is impossible to be saved. Sin is fundamentally independence from the rightful rule of God, and unbelief can be as much a matter of the will as of the intellect.

18:19 For more detail on this encounter, see note on Mk 10:18: Jesus was not denying that He was good, nor was He denying that He was God. Rather, He was rejecting the flattery offered by the man and challenging him to consider both his concept of goodness and his concept of Jesus. Matthew's version (Mt 19:16–22) makes the same point but renders the exchange differently to bring out the erroneous focus of the man's thinking more directly. Mark included this saying to indicate his interest in reporting the actual sayings of the historical Jesus, for no one in the early church would have invented such a saying and placed it on the lips of Jesus.

18:22–23 For elaboration of Jesus' call to radical obedience, see notes Mk 10:21: The demand placed on the rich man was radical and one that Jesus did not require of all His disciples. Jesus' goal was to discover the extent to which the man really desired eternal life and to underscore the radical self-denial of discipleship (8:34–38), a self-denial more difficult for “the haves” (the first) than the “have nots” (the last).

18:29–30 For further explanation of Jesus' promises to His followers, see note on Mk 10:29–30: Jesus did not promise health and wealth to His followers. That He was speaking hyperbolically is made clear by the promise of receiving a hundred mothers and fathers in return for the loss of one. Rather, Jesus did promise that Christians are amply compensated in the new community for what they give up of their former lives. On the denial of family relationships, see notes on 3:31–35 and Lk 14:26.

Butler, T. C. (2000). Luke (Vol. 3, pp. 298–301). Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

C. Dedication to Childlike Faith: Possessing the Kingdom (18:15–17)

SUPPORTING IDEA: *Dedicated kingdom living begins with childlike faith and continues with open invitations to all children.*

18:15. In a time and environment plagued by infant illness and death, parents brought infants and children for Jesus to heal. The disciples made themselves the clearinghouse to Jesus. Too many adults needed his attention. There were already more than enough children. So the disciples sent the parents away to give Jesus time to do more important things.

18:16. Jesus put a stop to their action. He held out his arms to the children. Bring the children here, he declared. The kingdom belongs to such as these. Did you not hear me say not to cause a little one to sin (17:1–2)? Here are some of the little ones. This marks off God's ways from men's ways. God deals always with the little ones, the unknown ones, the powerless ones. The world seeks people of power, influence, and wealth. God seeks the children. God builds his kingdom on childlike characteristics: trust, love, innocence, lack of power, lack of pretension, lack of credentials. God wants children whom he can make into disciples, not power brokers whom he has to steer away from political and military expectations.

18:17. Jesus went one shocking step further. You must be like a little child to enter the kingdom, he said. Childlikeness is not just one possible way among others to be part of Christ's kingdom. Being like a child is the only way to kingdom living. If you cannot do away with your

pretensions, your greed, your claims to fame, your need to dominate and control, your grasp for identity and power, you cannot be part of Christ's kingdom. Christ constantly seeks those who have no hope of power and position: the poor, Samaritans, women, children, blind, crippled, lame, tax collectors. These lack the vanity and self-assurance that keep a person from entering the kingdom.

D. Dedication to Kingdom Living over Wealthy Living: A Worthy Reward (18:18–30)

SUPPORTING IDEA: *Kingdom living gives up the luxury of wealth for the rewards of Christ.*

18:18. A Jewish civil administrator interrupted Jesus with a question. The question centers on the divisive point between the two leading groups of Jews, the Pharisees and Sadducees. Sadducees, using only the first five books of the Old Testament, found in these books no reference to resurrection, so they denied that resurrection of the dead was possible. Pharisees, following all three parts of the Jewish canon—Law, Prophets, and Writings—saw definite proof of resurrection in Daniel 12:2 and many other references, particularly in the Psalms and Isaiah. Was this administrator trying to get Jesus to take sides, or was he searching for certain hope in his own life? Luke does not give us his motivation, just the question.

This man called Jesus “good teacher.” This represents a common politeness of speech and recognition to some degree of Jesus’ role as an intelligent, caring teacher.

18:19. Jesus caught the man’s attention by challenging his description of Jesus as good. Only one person can be truly good. That is God. Thus, unknowingly, the administrator had linked Jesus to God. Jesus caught the link and brought it out into the open. He repeated traditional Jewish theology in confessing that God alone is good. In so doing, Jesus did not affirm or deny his own claim to deity. Luke expected his readers, however, to see the link that Jesus made and to affirm the obvious—that Jesus, being good, was also God.

18:20. Jesus turned to the source of authority that all Jews accepted—the Law, the Torah of Moses. He quoted part of the Ten Commandments from Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5.

18:21. The man with the question also had a personal testimony. He had rigorously obeyed all the commandments since youth. We must not quibble with his answer at this point and try to point out that all have sinned. That is not under discussion here. Here the issue is obedience and eternal life. This Jew apparently thought on the criteria of his religion that he deserved eternal life, but internally he felt something missing. What was the *more* beyond moral living?

18:22. Jesus had the answer. He returned to the theme that he had addressed so often—wealth and dedication. Do you trust possessions more than you trust God? he asked the man. Are you trying to put your trust in both possessions and God at the same time? Can you live without your possessions but cannot live without your God? Sell your possessions and find out (see 6:45; 12:13–21, 33; 16:13). I have told you all along that your relationship to the poor and needy is of paramount importance from a kingdom perspective. Take the money you get from your sale and give it to the poor. Then follow me with the rest of my penniless disciples and see what kingdom living is about.

18:23. These words cut to the quick. Jesus had found the man’s weak spot. He had great riches and evidently trusted in them to make life meaningful and hopeful. Grief and mourning set in. There was no way he could give up his money, even for God’s kingdom.

18:24. Jesus spoke in the form of lamentation, much as a deep sigh would be used at a funeral to express grief at personal loss. The sad truth is that the rich have a hard time giving up their trust in their possessions. They cannot take the long-term look and realize that one day they

will lose control over wealth. Then they will be robbed of eternal treasure, too. No wonder Jesus issued his sad lament: How hard for the rich to enter the kingdom. They have never experienced the need to trust someone or something outside their own intelligence and wealth.

18:25. Jesus turned to hyperbole to make a point. He described the utterly impossible. The lure of wealth overpowers the lure of the kingdom, not just in this rich Jewish administrator's life, but in the lives of virtually all rich people and many who are not quite so rich. Thus, the first step to the kingdom is not to solve the problem of putting a camel through a needle's eye. The first step is to get rid of the burden of riches, so a person has nothing to trust but Jesus.

18:26. The audience was amazed. If the blessed rich cannot be saved, they declared, who can? They saw that Jesus had described an impossible situation.

18:27. God does the impossible was Jesus' quick answer. Don't try to figure out the hows and whys. Just let God do it. Trust him with your life more than you trust your riches. Place your riches in his control. Watch God work the impossible.

18:28. Blunt and to the point, Peter piped up, "We left all and followed you. Does that qualify us for the kingdom?"

18:29–30. Jesus told Peter not to worry. Those who had given up life's closest relationships, greatest responsibilities, and strongest commitments to follow Jesus had a reward coming. Luke is imprecise in describing the reward, but he puts it in two stages. In this age, the committed, self-denying follower will receive many times as much as he has given up. Is this strictly parallel to the preceding verse, so that the reward is in terms of family? The family of believers will be more important, more numerous, and more meaningful than a follower's family of origin. Or is this much more indefinite so that Jesus was calling for faith even as he promised rewards? God has a reward for you, but you do not need to know exactly what that reward is. You just need to trust God. The second part of the disciples' reward is eternal life, a quality of life beginning here on earth with Jesus as Lord and extending through resurrection to the eternal kingdom.

The Holy Bible: New International Version. (1984). (Lk 18:15-30). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.