



When Riches and Righteousness Lead to Sadness

Luke 18:18-30

Study Helps and Application

Discussion 1: Lessons for Belief

- *How hard is it to fit a camel through the eye of a needle?*

[Sorry--but a lot of really silly things have been said about this. Jesus is illustrating that it is *impossible*. Make sure everyone sees Jesus is talking about the *impossible* here--not the difficult. His response to the clarifying question makes it even clearer in the next two verses.]

- *Now that we know it is impossible with man... contrast the Rich Young Ruler with Zacchaeus. (Luke 19)*

- *Rich or poor? [both rich]*
- *Which more likely to be thought righteous or chosen of God? [Zacchaeus was a despised tax collector while the Rich Young Ruler was a highly respected holy man.]*
- *Was Zacchaeus told to sell all that he had? [No, but notice he did bear fruit in keeping with repentance with his wealth and gave much of it away as a result of a changed heart.]*

[Bring out how absolutely awesome it is that Jesus saves sinners like Zacchaeus (and you). What is impossible with men is possible with God and Jesus demonstrates it in a big way here. "Today salvation has come to this house," (Luke 19:9). That's something worth boasting about!]

- *Do you feel or sense your need for a Savior?*

- *Do people think they are good enough to be saved today?*

["Do you consider yourself to be a good person?" almost always solicits a "yes." When people speak of the dead, where are they almost always considered to be? What is the worldly standard of "good enough"? (the line is drawn just below "me")]

- *Can we trust in righteousness for our salvation? [Yes, but not our own.]*

^{ESV} **Philippians 3:8** Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in him, not having a

righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith-- ¹⁰ that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ¹¹ that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead. ¹² Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own.

^{ESV} **2 Corinthians 5:21** For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

- *So does our righteousness matter?*

[When you teach God's radical grace, you will often get this question¹. Yes it matters. We are not saved *by* our good works, but *for* them]

^{ESV} **Ephesians 2:10** For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

- *Do you trust in your own "goodness"? ["Self-righteousness" carries a cultural negative connotation, but we are talking about the same thing.]*

[Consistent and re-occurring *battles with assurance* of salvation are a symptom of us looking to our own faithfulness rather than to God's ability to "save to the uttermost." Rejoice that your salvation rests on His righteousness rather than your own!]

- *Are you equipped to speak gospel truth to those who trust in their own goodness?*

Discussion 2: Lessons on Money (or other Idols)

- *What is the idol of your heart that Jesus would pick at?*

[Where do you find your satisfaction and security? We find this an easy area to know the right answer, but a difficult one to live out. Leaders--lead out in confession and repentance]

- *Do you continue to ponder the danger of riches?*
- *Are you rich toward God and laying up treasures in heaven (Luke 12)?*
- *Are you equipped to speak gospel truth to those who trust in their possessions and to one another?*

Discussion 3: Lessons for Our Witness

¹ Paul deals with it extensively in Romans 6 revealing that the Christian's relationship to sin is not a freedom *to* sin, but a freedom *from* sin. "You mean people can do whatever they want?" (implication: sin freely--antinomianism). A regenerate person *wants* to obey God. Paul exposes the folly of the objection.

- *How is pointing a person to God's righteousness helpful? ("No one is good except God alone.")*

[We're all pretty good at finding someone who is a worse sinner than us and comparing ourselves with them. The only true standard of righteousness is God's perfect holiness.]

- *What does it imply about the guy asking the question?*

[Is he good? Does he really understand who he is talking to? What does he mean by "good"? (like me)]

- *Jesus points to God's Law. Is this a common thing for Jesus to do?*

[Yes. Jesus repeatedly used God's Law (explicitly or implied in probing questions) to bring a knowledge of sin to people. This established pattern was continued by the Apostles and should be used faithfully (and gently!) today.]

^{ESV} **Romans 3:19** Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. ²⁰ For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.

^{ESV} **Romans 7:7** What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, "You shall not covet."

^{NASB} **Galatians 3:24** Therefore the Law has become our tutor *to lead us* to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith.

"Law to the proud -- Grace to the humble"

- *Note other examples from Jesus and the Apostles.*
 - *Luke 10:25ff* -- Asked the same thing by a lawyer (expert in the Torah rather than a litigator).
 - *John 4:7ff*--Woman at the Well. [How does Jesus bring her to knowledge of sin? -- "Go, call your husband ..."]
 - *Acts 16:27ff* -- The jailer asks the same question but gets a very different answer. Why? [He's broken at this point... grace to the humble. And you see immediate fruits of repentance in the next few verses]
 - *Acts 2:36ff* -- We've marveled at the change in the disciples once empowered at Pentecost. What is the content and effect of this

emboldened message? Notice here, they ask the question again and receive grace again. Why?

[Their message invariably brought knowledge of sin to the hearers... and it wasn't always popular.]

- *How easy is it to be fooled by outward appearance?*

[Again contrast Zacchaeus with the rich young ruler.]

- *Do you guard your heart against discouragement?*

[You are called to be faithful not “successful.” To speak the truth in love, not close the deal. You cannot possibly bear the weight of the responsibility for salvation of others. Some will accept, some will reject, and many will leave you wondering. God will be glorified in all of it.]

Memory Verse

^{ESV} **1 Timothy 6:17** As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy.

Additional Resources

- *Counterfeit Gods* by Tim Keller
- *Learning Evangelism from Jesus* by Jerram Barrs



When Riches and Righteousness Lead to Sadness

Luke 18:18-30

Often referred to as the story of the Rich, Young Ruler

- Matthew's account (ch 19) tells us that he was young
- Mark's account (ch 10) tells us that he *ran* to Jesus – implies he's healthy
- A "ruler" = a synagogue elder, a religious leader
- A good upbringing – he's known the law and tried to keep it since his youth
- He's seeking Jesus out with questions of eternal life

Five Questions we can pose to this passage

1. Who is Jesus? (18-19)

- This man comes to Jesus calling him "good teacher" (18).
- Of course, he's right – Jesus is good. And he is a good teacher.
- But this isn't enough.

Jesus can see hearts and know thoughts, unlike us, so he knows exactly what this guy means by good. So he asks "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God."

Clearly what Jesus is asking is whether this guy understands that Jesus is God.

- Jesus is a good teacher. But he's not good in relative terms. He's God.

2. How do we get eternal life? (18-22)

The goal is eternal life (18). This idea is put differently in the Bible -- being made right with God, being forgiven, being reconciled with God, entering the kingdom, or going to heaven – but they're all talking about the same thing.

- **No question is of greater importance.**
- And it's not a question merely for our future peace, but also for our present life. Remember at the end of the story this man goes away confused and sad.

What we've seen in Luke, over and over, is that the first step in salvation is to feel your need.

Or to put another way, before we can understand the medicine, we need to understand something of the illness. Medicine offered to you or prescribed for you doesn't make much sense unless you've come to believe that you are sick.

So Jesus tests this man's sense of need on two different levels:

How does he do on the first test – some basic commandments?

- In one sense I'm sure his answer is correct

- In another sense, it's horribly wrong
 - He's self-righteous
 - He's overly optimistic

How does he do on the second test – sell all and follow Jesus?

- Again, not well. He refuses to sell what he has.
- This really proved that he didn't care much about the horizontal / love-neighbor commands.

3. What stands in the way of salvation? (21,23)

Jesus isn't saying that any of us can obtain salvation by giving away wealth. Jesus knows this man's specific specific road block, and he is exposing it to the man. Money is this man's idol, his savior – the thing that keeps him from feeling need and seeking help.

The man demonstrates a two-fold problem standing in the way of his salvation.

1. He trusted in righteousness for salvation (21)
2. He trusted in his riches for satisfaction (23-24)
 - These often go together.
 - That's why Jesus exclaims, "how hard it is for a rich man to enter the kingdom!" (24)

Why is wealth such a problem for salvation?

- Rich people are often self-reliant.
- They know well the process of *Work* → *Earn* → *Reward*
- They're not needy. Not in the habit of asking and receiving.
- All this means an extra measure of temptation for arrogance and pride
- The Bible says in several places that God *resists the proud and gives grace to the humble*.
- On top of all that, riches come with an increased preoccupation with them (Eccl)
- On top of that, riches and greed have an inherent deceitfulness about them (no one thinks they're greedy).
- Remember, you have to come like a child or you can't come at all (17)

We shouldn't find encouragement by thinking that we're not rich like this guy

1. Most of us **are** rich.
2. The disciples, who weren't very rich, wonder what chances they have of making it if Jesus is speaking of this guy in such drastic terms.

4. How will anybody be saved? (24-27)

Common perception in the 1st century was that rich people were blessed people. That's why the disciples are so shocked that Jesus says "*getting a guy like this saved is so hard.*"

And he says that the righteous guy isn't righteous. That's the shocker.

He likens it to getting a fat camel to go through an eye of a needle.

- Preachers have said that Jesus was referring to a specific gate in ancient near East that was small, and it was tough for camels to get through - they would have to crouch down and shimmy through it. That's not what Jesus was referring to.
- He was saying just what we would at first think he said.
- It's a ridiculous word picture; it's hyperbole. A literal camel going through the eye of a needle.
- He later tells us that what he is talking about is impossible (27). It is not just difficult, but humanly impossible for a rich man to get saved.

Blind Side movie--School's slogan: They changed the Bible verse to read "*with men this is possible.*" It seems impossible to say "with men it is impossible."

- He trusted in righteousness for salvation
 - He trusted in his riches for satisfaction
- } Jesus alone is the answer to both

I think that Jesus is saying a little more here than you might think. It is humanly impossible for us to see our need for Christ - only God can get us there.

- This passage speaks to what we call "divine initiative" in salvation.
- It's what Jesus called "drawing" in John 6 and the "being born from above" in John 3.

5. Can't we ever commend ourselves to God? (28-30)

- Peter commends himself to Jesus (28). 'If the name of the game is giving stuff away, leaving stuff behind, then, Jesus, we must be in for sure!'
- Jesus' reply (29-30) is essentially, "you haven't given squat. You haven't earned squat. You haven't sacrificed squat. It's all been given to you. It's all a gift. Everything is a gift. You think you're earning the kingdom right now?"
- And then he points them to his death (31-33)

Applying this Passage

1. Lessons for Belief

- Are you trusting in your righteousness for salvation?
- Do you feel your need?
- What is the idol of your heart that Jesus would pick at? Trusting in riches for satisfaction?

- Christian, are you tired of hearing this teaching once again?

2. Lessons on Money

- Do you continue to ponder the danger of riches?
- Are you rich toward God and laying up treasures in heaven (Lk 12)?

3. Lessons for Our Witness

- Jesus doesn't make this as easy as possible. See how Jesus asks probing questions that get to the heart.
- Notice that this guy seemed so close and then went away still in his unbelief. Do not be surprised or discouraged when the same happens to us in our witnessing.

Next Week's Text

The gospel of Luke (a big picture message)



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- *Do you feel or sense your need for a Savior?*
 - *Do people think they are good enough to be saved today?*
 - *Can we trust in righteousness for our salvation? (Eph 3:8-12; 2 Cor. 5:21)*
 - *So does our righteousness matter? (Eph 2:10)*
 - *Do you trust in your own “goodness”?*
- *Are you equipped to speak gospel truth to those who trust in their own goodness?*

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