

To Receive Eternal Life

Luke 18:15-30

Key Verse: 18:22

“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.’”

Last week we heard two parables in which Jesus taught us to pray persistently and humbly. God accepts the humble prayer, **“God, have mercy on me, a sinner.”** In today's passage Jesus says we must all be like little children to enter the kingdom of God. Jesus also tells a rich young ruler what he must do to receive eternal life. There is real challenge and struggle for every person to have a right priority and treasure before God. Jesus challenges us to trust in God and have treasure in heaven. Jesus gives a wonderful promise to all those who have left earthly treasures for the sake of God's kingdom. Let's listen to Jesus with ears to hear and hearts to receive the words that show us the way to eternal life.

I. Receive the kingdom of God like a little child (15-17)

Jesus was intensively teaching the crowds, the Pharisees and his disciples. In the midst of his teaching, people were also bringing their babies to Jesus to have him touch them. When the disciples saw this, they rebuked them. Obviously, these people wanted Jesus to touch and bless their babies. Don't all parents want their children to be blessed? I do. Once, an unbelieving man was ridiculing my Christian faith. Suddenly he asked me sincerely, “Should I have my children baptized?” Everybody wants their children to be blessed. Then why did Jesus' disciples rebuke them for bringing their little children to Jesus? The disciples thought that Jesus had no time for these children. To them, children were better out of sight. As we all know, children are often times noisy and bothersome. Besides, they don't understand adult talk.

Jesus' response was different from his disciples. Look at verse 16. Jesus called the little children to him. Perhaps they were toddlers in their ‘terrible twos.’ Perhaps they were shy, hiding behind their parents' legs and the parents had to tell them, “Go on, it's ok. He won't hurt you.” Perhaps some ran into Jesus' open arms. Jesus said, **“Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.”**

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Jesus said, **“Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them.”** Jesus had taught his disciples in Luke 9:48, **“Whoever welcomes this little child in my name welcomes me.”** It seems that Jesus’ disciples had already forgotten this teaching. Jesus wants us to bring our children to him for his blessing. There are many ways we can bring our children to Jesus. We can pray for them; we can pray with them by teaching them to pray; we can get them Bible-themed coloring books and picture Bibles and read them Bible stories. We can bring them to Children's Bible Fellowship class on Saturday mornings. This week our 3rd to 8th grade children are having a Bible conference in Indiana. Jesus delights in blessing the children who come to him, even through their parents’ faith.

Jesus also said, **“the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.”** What is it about children that makes them more suited for the kingdom of God? Jesus gives a hint in verse 17, **“anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.”** Children are very good at receiving things. They take what is offered them. Also, when they want something, they simply ask. They don’t worry since they trust their parents to provide for them and protect them. Children simply believe what you tell them without arguing. We must be like children in our relationship to God: simple, teachable and trusting. Especially, we must simply believe God's word and promises, like a child. Any person who is too proud or complicated to receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it. Receiving the kingdom of God is not complicated and sophisticated. Even a child has simple faith and trust to receive the kingdom of God.

II. How to receive eternal life (18-30)

A certain ruler then came to Jesus and asked, **“Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?”** Matthew tells us that the man was young. So he was a rich young ruler. In his youth, he already had authority and wealth, which all people naturally would like. Even so, his wealth and position did not solve a troubling question in his mind and heart: “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” He brought this question to Jesus. How commendable that he brought this sincere question to Jesus! He wanted to know about eternal life and what he had to do to receive it. He had received many earthly blessings and privileges in life. Now he wanted to know about eternal life.

It is not clear why he had this deep question. Obviously, this man’s wealth and achievements did not deeply satisfy him or give him peace. He seemed to have some nagging doubts and fears in his mind and heart. Perhaps he was shaken by a death of a loved one. Maybe his father died and left him a rich inheritance. Perhaps

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he had a failed relationship which made him lose his joy of living. He had money and power, but these could not give him any confidence or assurance about eternity, heaven or God's kingdom. So he came to Jesus, a good teacher whom he respected, to find the answer which would guide him on the path to eternal life. If Jesus had written a book, he would've run to the bookstore to buy it.

Jesus answered him in two steps. **Firstly, Jesus addressed his use of the word "good."** "Why do you call me good?" Jesus answered. "No one is good--except God alone." Jesus did not tell him directly not to call him good. Rather Jesus questioned him, "Why do you call me good?" Unless this man believed absolutely that Jesus is God, he should not call Jesus good. If he believed Jesus is God, then he should have called Jesus "Good Lord," not "Good Teacher." Jesus called himself "the Good Shepherd." With faith in Jesus, we give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures forever.

In Jesus' second part of his reply, he directed the rich ruler's attention to the commandments of God: "You know the commandments: 'Do not commit adultery, do not murder, do not steal, do not give false testimony, honor your father and mother.'" This man knew the commandments of God in the Bible. Jesus quoted the second part of the Ten Commandments, the commandments related to loving people properly. Obeying God's commands is essential to loving God. In Leviticus 18:5 God said, "Keep my decrees and laws, for the man who obeys them will live by them. I am the LORD." Jesus said, "If you love me, you will obey what I command." (Jn14:15)

How did the rich ruler reply to Jesus? "All these I have kept since I was a boy," he said. He was confident that he had kept the commandments of God perfectly. Outwardly that may have been true. Paul said that as a Pharisee he had kept all the commandments outwardly. But as we know, Jesus was not only concerned with outward obedience or actions alone. Jesus' teaching went much deeper into a person's mind and heart. For example, Jesus taught that hate is like murder in thought and lust is like adultery in heart. By this standard, no one has kept God's law perfectly. Rather, as Paul wrote in his letter to the Romans, "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God," and, "there is no one who does good...no one righteous, not even one."

Jesus did not rebuke the man but graciously accepted his reply. Next Jesus helped him with the real answer to his question on a very personal level. Look at verse 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

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heaven. Then come, follow me.” Jesus knew that he lacked one thing: treasure in heaven. The rich young ruler already had treasure on earth. The man knew that he needed treasure in heaven. He knew he needed eternal life. Jesus helped him to know the way to receive it.

Jesus gave him an extreme command: **“Sell everything you have and give to the poor.”** The man came to Jesus evidently ready to do whatever the “good teacher” told him to do. But he was not prepared for such a command. In fact, when he heard this, he became very sad, because he was a man of great wealth. Matthew and Mark tell us that he went away sad. He could not accept and obey Jesus’ words. He could not give up his great wealth.

Does this mean that it is impossible for rich people to get into heaven? It's not impossible, but it is very difficult. Jesus looked at the rich man and said, **“How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God! 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.”** The camel was the largest animal in that area. The needle is the smallest opening. It is literally impossible for a camel to go through the eye of a needle. It is also impossible for anyone to save oneself. Those who heard Jesus asked, **“Who then can be saved?”** Jesus replied, **“What is impossible with men is possible with God.”** What man cannot do, God can do. Man cannot save himself. Only God can save us.

Why did Jesus tell this rich young ruler that he had to give all his wealth away and then follow Jesus? Jesus knew that this is what the man needed to do to receive eternal life. This man’s problem was that his wealth was his god, his idol, his real treasure. Jesus once said, **“Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”** If we love anything or any person more than God, that thing or person becomes an idol in the place of God. For this man, his wealth was everything to him. We don't know whether he inherited his wealth or whether he worked hard to earn or achieve it. How he obtained his wealth is not important. How he regarded his wealth was the problem. He loved money more than God.

Then why is it so hard for the rich to enter the kingdom of God? It is easier to trust in riches than to trust in God. It is easier to love money, which has obvious and quite tangible benefits in this world, than to love God, whose benefits are not as obvious or immediate. The real issue is not how much money one has. The issue is whether we put something or someone ahead of God as an idol. Indeed, for many people in America, the love of money is a real idol or hindrance to trusting God. For many, the love of pleasure hinders them. Many refuse to give up the

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pleasures of sin, such as a boyfriend or girlfriend they cling to as an idol. For others, it's their independence or personal freedom that hinders them from loving God and obeying his word. Still for others, it's their pride, thinking they know best and cannot learn from others, even from God's word. We all have idols or other things that we need to give up to follow Jesus. We all have treasures on earth we need to give up for treasure in heaven.

At this point in the dialogue, Peter had something to say to Jesus on behalf of all the disciples: **"We have left all we had to follow you!"** In Matthew 19:27 Peter adds the words, **"What then will there be for us?"** Indeed, Peter had given up his fishing career in order to follow Jesus full time. So did James and John. They also left their father in the boat when they decided to follow Jesus. Peter wanted to make sure that what he and the other disciples had given up for Jesus they did not have to regret. Jesus reassured them that there was no need to regret giving up anything for God's kingdom, for it would be worth it all. Look at verses 29-30. **"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 will fail to receive many times as much in this age and, in the age to come, eternal life."**

Jesus' promise is clear: those who make any sacrifice for God's kingdom to follow Jesus will get repaid many times over, even while on earth. They also receive a great bonus: eternal life in the age to come. In other words, the best investment one can always make is to follow Jesus and live for the sake of the kingdom of God. Jesus' disciples are those who have left treasured things on earth to follow Jesus. They choose Christ over the world. And they are doubly blessed, now and forever.

There's only one catch: this requires faith. Without faith, no one can make such a sacrifice. Without the faith and trust of a child, no one can enter the kingdom of God. Rather, without faith, our hope or treasure, is firmly planted in this world. One hymn writer sang: "My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness. I dare not trust the sweetest frame, but wholly lean on Jesus' name. On Christ the Solid Rock I stand; All other ground is sinking sand." Another hymn writer sang, "All to Jesus I surrender; Humbly at his feet I bow, Worldly pleasures all forsaken. Take me Jesus, take me now. I surrender all. I surrender all. All to Thee, my blessed Savior, I surrender all."

Is it really true that Jesus gives us more, even in this world? It is Jesus' promise, so it must be true. Jesus wants us to try and experience the truth of his

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word. There is one living example I am often reminded of. Our ministry co-founder Sarah Barry offered her life to God to bring the gospel to South Korean people after the war. She never married. To my observation, about 99% of all young ladies have a dream to marry and have children. Though Mother Barry gave up the chance to have the love of a husband, I see so many people who love her dearly. Though she gave up the chance to experience the joy of bearing and raising children, she has many spiritual children constantly around her. Jesus keeps his promises.

I know a young man who was building a nice home in the Ukraine when he decided to give it up to move to a Muslim country. At first he lived in a small shack in the Muslim country. After some time, he was blessed to receive a church, fully furnished to do ministry in. I recently heard the life testimony of a young Mexican woman. She had lived in sins of drinking and a sinful relationship. Then through a 10-minute Bible study on the Lord's Prayer she began to open her heart. At a Bible conference, joy and love from God came into her heart. She left her worldly friends. But she received many new Christian friends instead. Her father told her to make a choice: leave the church or move out? She chose to stay with the church. As a result she was kicked out of her family home. But she was not sorry. Rather she was happy. She received a new family in Jesus who loved her and prayed for her. Later, her father even welcomed her back when he saw the real love and joy in her life. Jesus' promise is true.

We must ask ourselves honestly, **“Where is my treasure? In what or whom am I trusting?”** Without real treasure and trust in God, life is ultimately sad and empty. According to Jesus and according to so many people's testimonies, living such a life is not worth it. There are people all around us living such empty lives. The so-called “American dream” is mainly about treasure on earth. Still, too many foolish people pursue it. Jesus calls them and each of us to have treasure in heaven and to follow him. Those who choose heaven and follow Jesus have no regrets. Those who do so receive much more in this life and in the age to come, eternal life.