

TO INHERIT 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.’”

In the last passage Jesus taught us about prayer. We learned that we must always pray and not give up. Usually, we like to have instant food, instant service, and instant answers to prayer. But God does not always accommodate us in that way. Our God is great and he is absolutely sovereign. God answers prayer in his own time and in his own way. He wants us to be persistent in prayer as the expression of our faith in him. For the last five years we have prayed for a Bible house in Moscow. It was difficult because the Russian government has prohibited private ownership of land for many years. Once, we tried to buy a house, giving \$50,000 in earnest money. Someone took the money but did not allow us to buy the house. It seemed that we lost \$50,000 for nothing. But we offered it as prayer for Russia. Then God enabled us to continue to pray. For the last three years, it seemed not much was happening. But God enabled us to pray persistently. Then a new law was passed in Moscow that allowed the private ownership of land. Our coworkers applied again. Last month they received permission to purchase a building. They signed a contract, paid the sale price and received the keys to the building. Now they can use it as a Bible house. Right now they are using it for the glory of God. This is the answer to prayer. When we always pray and not give up, we can experience the power of God.

In today’s passage there are two events. In the first event little children come to Jesus for blessing. Through them, Jesus teaches us how to receive the kingdom of God. In the second event a rich ruler comes to Jesus asking how he can inherit eternal life. Although Jesus lovingly teaches him how to do so, he fails. This sad event is included in all three synoptic gospels as a warning to us. On the other hand, Jesus’ disciples are found to be members of the kingdom of God who have eternal life. Let’s learn from Jesus how to inherit eternal life.

First, receive the kingdom of God like a little child (15-17).

Our Lord Jesus Christ is the Son of God. Though he came to this world in the form of a man, he is in very nature God. His touch was not the touch of an ordinary man. It was the touch of our holy God. Miracles happened at the touch of Jesus. When Jesus touched a man with leprosy, he was healed immediately. When Jesus was touched by a woman subject to bleeding, she was healed immediately. People recognized Jesus as the source of God’s blessing. Big and small alike wanted to be touched by Jesus. Look at verse 15a. “People were also bringing babies to Jesus to have him touch them.” Perhaps it began with one woman bringing her little baby to Jesus. Then other parents began to bring their babies. Soon, there was a long line of parents with babies.

When the disciples saw what was happening, they felt Jesus may be overrun by demanding parents and crying babies. To them, it seemed a useless burden. Probably they wanted to protect Jesus. They began to rebuke the parents, “We are not running a nursery!” They meant well, but their strict, authoritarian manner wounded parent and child alike.

When Jesus saw the little children going away from him, with tears streaming down their cheeks, he was heartbroken. So Jesus intervened. Look at verse 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.’” Jesus affectionately called their names one by one, smiling, with arms open wide. They lifted up their heads, felt the love of Jesus, and went running to him with new joy and hope. No doubt, Jesus laid his hand of blessing on each one and prayed for them. Perhaps future spiritual leaders were anointed by Jesus that day.

We must know that Jesus welcomes little children. Children are ready to hear the message of the kingdom of God and believe. One five year old boy heard his father talking seriously about heaven and hell. Because his father believes that hell is real, the little boy was convinced that hell is real. He became quiet and serious for a few days. Then he came to his father and said, “Dad, if someone says a bad word will they go down there?” His father told him, “Yes. But if you tell Jesus you are sorry he will forgive you and take you to heaven. Do you want to pray to Jesus?” The little boy thought for a moment and said, “Yes.” They prayed and he accepted Jesus into his heart. After that he was no longer serious. The simple joy of Jesus came into his heart. In a few minutes he was playing happily.

Dr. John Rice was an evangelist in America during the middle part of the 20th century. He participated in many national conferences. According to his research, about half of those who became Christians did so by age fifteen. He himself accepted Christ at the age of nine. Jesus loves little children. Little children are receptive to Jesus' kingdom.

The disciples made a mistake. Jesus was sorry that they were boorish and harsh. They understood neither his heart nor the hearts of little children. Worst of all, they violated the rule of the kingdom. Jesus invites anybody and everybody to come to him personally and directly. In John 6:37 Jesus says, "All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away." The disciples had no right to hinder little ones from coming to Jesus. They must have a great respect for everyone who struggles to come to Jesus. They must be shepherds who know the heart of Jesus and welcome sinners. Moreover, they had something to learn from these little ones.

Look at verse 17. "I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it." Children know how to receive properly. When little children are loved by their parents, they receive it simply and respond with loyalty and obedience. We must receive the kingdom of God with the same attitude. We must trust and obey. When we simply trust Jesus and accept him as King in our hearts, he will protect us, provide for us, bless us, and guide us. So we obey him with loyal devotion. When we receive the kingdom of God like this, Jesus is happy to enter our hearts as Savior and King. Let's learn from little children how to receive Jesus.

Second, Jesus teaches a rich ruler how to inherit eternal life (18-25).

A certain ruler came to Jesus. This man had an important position, responsibility and authority. He was also a man of great wealth (23). Many people envy rich rulers like him throughout their lifetimes, thinking that they are happy. But this man was not really happy. He came to Jesus with a big problem. He asked, "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" This man had everything. But he could not relax and enjoy his life. The thought of death and the power of the devil had begun to harass him. Desperation was seeping into his heart little by little, day by day. This is the agony of the rich and famous.

How did Jesus answer? Look at verse 19. "Why do you call me good? No one is good—except God alone." Jesus immediately perceived that this man did not have God in his heart. So his concept of good was based on human relativism. This man probably thought that Jesus was good because many people followed him, and he himself was good because he graduated with honors, and life was good; everything was good. It was easy for him to think this way when he enjoyed a privileged life. Those who suffer on the bottom of society amid tragic events would not share his concept of good. The Bible teaches us that man without God is only evil all the time (Gen 6:5). The best man is a mixture of good and evil, being good to the degree that Jesus rules his heart. Jesus said, "No one is good—except God alone." God alone is good.

Therefore, we must learn God's standard of good. Jesus started with the Ten Commandments. Look at verse 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.'" It is interesting that Jesus shared only these commandments which deal with loving others. Jesus did not mention the first commandments that deal with loving God. And Jesus left out the commandment, "do not covet." Perhaps Jesus limited his discussion to make it simple for this man to find his problem. As 1 John 4:20 says, "If anyone says, 'I love God,' yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen."

How did the man answer? Look at verse 21. "All these I have kept since I was a boy." How could he say that? Probably, according to the most cursory understanding of the commandments, it may have been true. The man did not kill anyone or rob a bank or break into his neighbor's house and terrorize the family. But his understanding of the commandments was shallow. He did not know the spiritual meaning at all. As Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount, to look at a woman lustfully is sinning in the heart; hatred in the heart is akin to the sin of murder. This man disregarded motive in practicing the law. He is like some students who decline Bible study, saying, "I am okay," or "It's alright, I'm good," without any deep thought.

When Jesus heard his answer, he wanted to perform major surgery on the spot. Still, Jesus tempered his words. 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 heaven. Then come, follow me.” He lacked one thing: treasure in heaven. Jesus taught him how to have treasure in heaven.

In the first place, “sell everything you have.” As a wealthy man, he must have had many kinds of treasures among his possessions that he enjoyed and valued. When his heart was set on these things he had no room for heavenly things. Jesus does not want us to lose our hearts to the things of the world. We must be ready to sell worldly goods for spiritual gain. One young missionary seriously prayed about how to make his wife happy and serve Northwestern student ministry well. He came to a conclusion that he should get rid of his television. So he gave it away. Since then, he has had more intimate prayer time with his wife. He has had room in his heart for God’s word and for his sheep. Now, even though he works full time, he feeds ten sheep per week and several of them attend Sunday worship service regularly. By simply getting rid of his television, he gained treasure in heaven.

In the second place, “give to the poor.” Until now, this man seems to have shown no concern for the poor. There were so many needy ones around him. He could have helped them, but he totally ignored them. He was really selfish. Selfishness made him hardhearted. Selfishness was like cancer to his soul. Jesus said, “give to the poor,” to help him overcome selfishness. One young man felt sorrowful all the time because his family situation was unstable. This sorrow consumed his thoughts and energy day and night. But a good shepherd helped him begin to think about others by telling him to make lunch for his roommate every day. At first, it was hard for him. But as he did so faithfully, a giving spirit grew in his heart. Now he has become a most compassionate American shepherd in UBF. A giving life may seem hard at first, but it is the way to grow as true human beings and it is the way to know the heart of God.

Our God is the God who gave his one and only Son to sinners. John 3:16 says, “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” And what about Jesus? 2 Corinthians 8:9 says, “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.” Young Americans seem to be really good at selfishness. But selfishness blinds the heart and mind and makes us evil. May God help us to practice a giving life and have treasure in heaven.

In the third place, “Then come, follow me.” This was a call to discipleship. This was a most precious blessing of Jesus. Implied is Jesus’ commitment to raise him in Christian character and to make him a fruitful gospel worker. It would lead him into God’s redemptive history and everlasting blessing. There was a young Frenchman named Francis, the son of a successful cloth merchant, in the 12th century. For a time, he lived in sin with some unwholesome friends. After seeking fulfillment in romance, business, pleasure, and military glory, he was left empty and meaningless. So he began to seek God earnestly. He read Jesus’ words to the rich ruler, “Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.” He accepted these words and obeyed them literally. He renounced his father’s fortune and declared himself a child of his heavenly Father. He began to serve whoever he met sacrificially with whatever he had. He was persecuted a lot for his decision. But through a pure and poor and giving life, he tasted the joy of heaven every day. The love of God grew in his heart. The image of Jesus was gradually formed in his soul. His influence had a great impact on his times. Within ten years, five thousand people began to live poorly and purely for the sake of God’s kingdom. Francis could have lived and died as just another rich man. But when he obeyed Jesus’ words he became a most influential member of God’s history.

Let’s return to the rich ruler. How did he respond? Look at verse 23. “When he heard this, he became very sad, because he was a man of great wealth.” He could not accept Jesus’ invitation. This man loved money and was a slave to it. No one can serve both God and money. He knew he should follow Jesus. But when he had to make a right decision, he had no power to do so. So he became very sad.

When Jesus saw this man’s failure, he grieved over him. Look at verses 24-25. “Jesus looked at him 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.’” When people hold on to the dust of the earth and forsake eternal blessings, God is really sorry. They become eternal losers. We should not envy the rich, but realize their deep inner misery and pray for them.

Third, Jesus’ disciples blessed life (26-30).

Those who heard Jesus' words were surprised and asked, "Who then can be saved?" When we think about human beings, even the best people can be utterly hopeless and a source of despair. The rich ruler's failure discouraged everyone and made salvation work seem impossible. Jesus replied, "What is impossible with men is possible with God." Jesus turned their attention back to God. God can work miracles in any human heart to turn men back to the kingdom of God. When Peter heard Jesus talk about God, new hope came into his heart. He stopped thinking about the miserable rich ruler and began to think about God. With God all things are possible. Peter must have thought about God's work in his own life and in the lives of his fellow disciples. Then he realized that they were not like the rich ruler. They had made definite decisions of faith to leave all they had to follow Jesus. So he blurted out, "We have left all we had to follow you!" It means, "What is our reward?"

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 deeply acknowledged the sacrifices his disciples had made. Their most difficult sacrifices were not leaving behind material possessions, but their homes and family members. Jesus promises them blessing that is overflowing. First of all, they would receive many times as much in this age. This means that they would become members of his family, the church. They may have left behind one mother. But in the church of Christ they would find many spiritual mothers who would love them even more. They may have given up the chance to have children. But they would have spiritual descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky. For example, Mother Barry sacrificed her marriage and chance to have children for the kingdom of God. But in return, God has given her so many spiritual descendants that she is busy traveling all over the world to visit and pray with them all.

The most precious blessing Jesus gives is not in this world. It is eternal life in the world to come. Eternal life is what we really need. When we have eternal life we have everything. Those who have eternal life are like those with an unlimited bank account. They can spend freely of their time and energy for others because they have an everlasting supply. Those who have eternal life are the truly rich people. They have peace and joy like a river in their souls. When we follow Jesus we may lose in the short run. But in the long run, Jesus blesses us exceedingly and abundantly beyond what we can even imagine.

Today Jesus teaches us how to receive the kingdom of God and inherit eternal life. We must receive Jesus with simple faith like a little child. We must make a clear decision to sell everything, give to the poor and follow Jesus. Then we can enjoy God's blessing in this life and eternal life in the world to come. May God help us to do so.