

What would you think of an evangelist who made it hard for people to "get saved"? There was an evangelist one time who in the midst of his travels encountered an influential leader. The young fellow had a great deal of money as well as power, but also was interested in spiritual things, so much so that he asked the evangelist, "What should I do so I can go to heaven?" Quite a ripe opportunity, wouldn't you say? In a world full of people who don't seem to have much interest in spiritual things, here's a guy wanting to know how to get to heaven!

The answer he received from the evangelist was quite shocking. The traveling evangelist pointed him to the ten commandments which the candidate said he'd kept since childhood. Next, he told him liquidate his estate and give it to people who were living in welfare conditions. When the young leader heard what the evangelist told him to do, he hung his head and walked away. And the evangelist let him go.

What do think of that evangelist? A man comes to him wanting to "get saved" and he lets that man get away. Would you want that preacher to come and have meetings here? You say, "What's the name of that evangelist? Have I ever heard of him?" Oh yes, you've heard of him. His name is Jesus.

What kind of message would Jesus preach if He came to this church? Specifically, what kind of invitation would He give if someone said they wanted to know what to do to go to heaven? I think we'd be surprised.

We live in a day in which the integrity of the gospel is at stake. I would suggest to you that the "gospel" that is preached in many evangelical, fundamental churches is very different than the gospel that Jesus preached. The difference is not petty, nor semantic, but enormous. I am convinced that church pews are full of people who have heard and responded to a deficient gospel, and who are clinging to a false assurance.

You may be skeptical of such a bold assertion. That's okay, for if it's merely my opinion it matters little anyway. But...what if it's true? What if it's true that the gospel message that is being promoted today in churches and evangelistic rallies and crusades is different from the gospel Jesus preached? The implications are eternal.

There's only one way to address this crucial issue properly, and that's to take a close examination of the gospel Jesus preached. You decide whether we're being offered a deficient gospel. This morning, I want to take you to the scene I just described, the conversation between the evangelist Jesus and the rich young ruler in Luke 18.

**Proposition: In the episode of Luke 18:18-30, we discover a very unusual invitation. As we listen, we will hear two matters which reveal the gospel that Jesus preached.**

- I. We hear the candidate's question (18).
  - A. He is respectful.
  - B. He is spiritual.
  - C. He is teachable.
- II. We hear the Lord's answer (19-30).
  - A. Jesus gave an inquiry (19).
    1. We must grasp the truth about Jesus.
    2. We must grasp the truth about ourselves.

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\*\*\*Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

- B. Jesus gave instructions (20-21).
  - 1. He pointed the man to God's Law (20).
  - 2. The man pointed to himself (21).
- C. Jesus gave an invitation (22).
  - 1. Sell everything and give to the poor.
  - 2. Start living in light of eternity.
  - 3. Come and follow Me.
- D. Jesus gave the implications (23-30).
  - 1. We must follow Jesus on His terms, not ours (23).
  - 2. It's hard for rich people to be saved (24-25).
  - 3. No one can be saved apart from God (26-27).
  - 4. We must receive eternal life, for we can't earn it (28-30).

Concluding Question: Am I truly a follower of Jesus?

I. We hear the candidate's question (18).

We have come to week 3 in our series "The Cost of Discipleship." We are learning that though salvation is free, it is not cheap. In our examination of selected texts in Luke's gospel, we are learning how Jesus dealt with the crowds, with people who were interested in Him. In Luke 18, we are introduced to an influential man who came to Jesus.

The context is important. This meeting comes on the heels of two significant events. In the first, recorded in verses 9-14, Jesus told a parable because He had confronted people who "were confident in their own righteousness" (9). Don't miss that, for the man in our story fits that mold. Then, in verses 15-17, Jesus blessed some children and taught that, contrary to the self-sufficient, self-sufficient notions of many, the kingdom of God belongs to those who receive it like a child.

Next we see our man. Verse 18 states, "And a certain ruler asked him, Good Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" What a question! What a candidate for the kingdom! We learn three things about this individual from the text.

**A. He is respectful.** He addresses Jesus with respect, "Good Master" (or, "Good Teacher"). His name is not given. His status is. Verse 23 says he's rich. Verse 18 says he's a ruler. Matthew's account reveals he's young (19:20). Apparently, he was a Jewish religious leader, possibly a ruler of the synagogue. There he is, a respectful man who had everything. He's devout, young, wealthy, highly respected, and influential. Not a bad catch for the kingdom!

**B. He is spiritual.** What's his request? He wants to know about eternal life. He's not a materialist (Or is he? We'll soon see). He feels a need in his life. He wants to be right with God. He wants to make sure he will not miss out on God's gift of eternal life.

Mark 10:17 says he came running, and in fact, knelt before Jesus. And unlike Nicodemus, who came by night, this reputable man approached Jesus openly, in broad daylight. For a man of his position to ask such a question took great courage.

**C. He is teachable.** "What shall I do?" he asks. He wants to know. He's sincere. He's a respectful, spiritual (I use the term with caution), and teachable candidate for the gospel. Or is he?

In His answer, Jesus shows that the man was indeed *not* ready. We see a hint of his problem in the way he phrased his question. "What must *I do* to inherit eternal life?" What is his view of salvation? He thinks he can *do* something. He believes he can achieve eternal life by his own efforts.

My friend, lest you think, "Well, that's just a small thing, isn't it? After all, this man wants to have eternal life! It's a free gift, isn't it?", watch carefully the Lord's answer.

## II. We hear the Lord's answer (19-30).

Speaking bluntly, it is relatively easy to get people to profess faith. Getting them to follow the Lord is another story. But I ask you--Is a person who professes to believe in Jesus but who refuses to follow Jesus truly a Christian? It grieves my heart to think of the number of people I've led in the sinner's prayer, and even baptized, who are no longer living in obedience to Christ.

I've seen them shed tears. I've heard them say they wanted Jesus in their lives, and that they wanted to go to heaven. Just like the rich young ruler. But I have learned from Jesus' example, that just like the rich young ruler, they may have made a decision for which they were not ready. They had not counted the cost.

Listen beloved, the issue in Luke 18 is this man's salvation, not some higher level of discipleship subsequent to conversion. He wants to know how to obtain eternal life.

In our evangelism efforts, we spend most of our time trying to get people to admit their need. Here's a young man who admitted his need before he ever came to Jesus. He is a perfect candidate for salvation! He was ready to sign the card, walk the aisle, do whatever. There was no need to tell him that he needed something. He appeared ready. He was a hot evangelistic prospect. He was eager. But Jesus chased him off.

You say, "Jesus did what?! Why would He do that?" Frankly, John MacArthur is right in his observation that Jesus would have failed personal evangelism class in almost every Bible college or seminary in America! Here was a man who wanted to go to heaven, and Jesus gave him a message of works. He didn't mention faith or the facts of redemption. He didn't challenge the man to believe. He failed to pull in the net. He didn't ask the man to pray the sinner's prayer. After all, a good evangelist wouldn't let a guy get away who wanted to have eternal life, would he?

The very reason we ask that question shows how far off track our view of evangelism is these days. John MacArthur hits the nail on the head in his classic book, *The Gospel According to Jesus*, when he writes (79), "Modern evangelism is preoccupied with decisions, statistics, aisle-walking, gimmicks, prefabricated presentations, pitches, emotional manipulation, and even intimidation. Its message is a cacophony of easy-believism and simplistic appeals. Unbelievers are told that if they invite Jesus into their hearts, accept Him as personal Savior, or believe the facts of the gospel, that's all there is to it. The aftermath is appalling failure, as seen in the lives of multitudes who have professed faith in Christ with no consequent impact on their behavior. Who knows how many people are deluded into believing they are saved when they are not?"

Jesus' aim wasn't to get a decision, but to make a disciple (which should be our aim, too). How do I know that? From Jesus' answer to this man. Jesus gave four things in His answer to this candidate.

**A. Jesus gave an inquiry (19).** "And Jesus said unto him, Why do you call me good? None is good, except one, that is, God." The title "Good Teacher" is extremely rare in the rabbinic traditions. It's presence on the leader's lips indicates he's trying to impress Jesus with a compliment hoping to get one in return. In the Oriental world, one compliment requires a second (Bailey, 162).

But Jesus answers him with *no* title at all. In fact, Jesus's response sounds abrupt, almost harsh, "Why do you call me good?" It's as if Jesus is asking, "Do you really mean that or are you just saying it to sound pious?"

Jesus' next statement has caused debate for centuries. He says, "No one is good--except God alone." If Jesus is truly God, why did He say that? He said it because He knew the

heart of this seeker. By making the statement He is clarifying the two options regarding His Person--"One, either I am not good or I am. And if I am good, I am God! Young ruler, which are you asserting by calling Me good?"

My friend, none of us will ever become a genuine Christian until we grasp the truth regarding two people.

1. *We must grasp the truth about Jesus.* That's what Jesus was forcing His seeker to see. Who is Jesus? Who do you believe Him to be? A great teacher, or the Lord God?

2. *We must grasp the truth about ourselves.* In our story, Jesus is taking the man from where he was to where he needed to be. Where was he? The man's question indicates he thought he could do something to earn eternal life. He had a faulty view of himself.

Ironically, after asking the follow-up question, Jesus doesn't wait for an answer

**B. Jesus gave instructions (20-21).** By the way, what would the average Christian do if someone asked the question, "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" I doubt we'd give the answer Jesus gave. We'd say, "Pray this prayer! Don't delay. Go forward in church. Ask Jesus to come into your heart!" Why didn't Jesus do that when the candidate asked Him this question? Because He knew the man *wasn't* ready. There was a barrier.

We can't depend on canned approaches in evangelism. People are different. People bring different baggage with them to the Cross. When the Philippian jailer asked, "What shall I do to be saved?" Paul answered, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved." But when the young ruler asked Jesus practically the same question, Jesus gave a different answer. Did Jesus and Paul preach a different gospel? Absolutely not. They were dealing with different people who were at different levels of spiritual receptivity.

Notice what Jesus told the heaven-seeker in 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.'" Don't miss what Jesus did.

1. *He pointed the man to God's Law (20).* Most modern evangelistic presentations fail to do this, but Jesus didn't. He started with God's Law. Why? Because God's Law exposes man's sin. The truth is we have no business preaching grace to people who do not understand the implications of God's law. Law always precedes grace. It's the tutor that brings us to Christ (Gal 3:24).

When we talk to unsaved people, we must remember this. What happens if we by-pass the Law? We ask them, "Would you like to know that you're going to heaven when you die?" and they reply, "No thanks, my life is as good as the next persons." Or, "Would you like to be saved?" and they respond, "Saved? Why? I'm not lost." And when we ask, "Would you like to trust Jesus?" they reply, "What do you mean 'trust Him'? I have no problem with Him."

Listen carefully. By quoting the Law, Jesus wasn't insinuating that this man could achieve salvation by obeying the Law. In fact, Jesus doesn't tell the man to *do* the Law, but merely points the man to the Law by saying, "You know the commandments." To which the man, in essence, replies, "I've done that!" In other words, here's what he did.

2. *The man pointed to himself (21).* "And he said, All these have I kept from my youth up." This fellow had a narrow view of sin, and an inflated view of himself. He's not claiming perfection. He has the common mentality of our day, "If the good outweighs the bad, if I don't commit mortal sin, I'll be okay." Keep the Law? Yep, done that.

I need to call your attention to something very important. Jesus quoted from the Ten Commandments here, but He was very selective. He skipped over commands one to four, and referred to five of the last six commands.

That's interesting. Commands one to four have to do with our covenant responsibility to God (See Exodus 20--No other gods; no graven images; no blasphemy; no abuse of the Lord's day). Why didn't Jesus mention those commands? Why was He selective? Because He knew the key that would unlock the door to help this man see the corruption of his heart was in the second section of commands, those dealing with our covenant responsibilities to people.

But not only was Jesus selective, He also rearranged the Ten Commands. "Do not commit adultery (7th command), do not murder (6th), do not steal (8th), do not give false testimony (9th), and honor your father and mother (5th)." Any good Jew, including this young ruler, knew that Jesus switched the order. And that He omitted one command, the tenth. But why? Because command #10 is the punchline, the arrow that will pierce this self-righteous man's heart.

Here was a man who thought he was okay with God, and wanted Jesus to affirm and tell him so. But Jesus didn't. He used the Law to pierce His heart.

**C. Jesus gave an invitation (22).** "Now when Jesus heard these things, he said unto him, Yet lackest thou one thing. Sell all that you have, and distribute unto the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me."

There's no canned approach to evangelism with Jesus. He listens not only to what the person *said* but also to what he *meant*. On the surface, here was a man who seemed to want to be saved, but did he really? No, he didn't even know he was lost. So Jesus pushed the hot button in his life--"You still lack one thing"--and followed up with a most unusual invitation. He invited him to do three things.

1. *Sell everything and give to the poor.* He had a lot to sell, for he was rich. After Clarence Darrow had solved a client's legal problem, the client asked, "How can I ever show my appreciation?" The lawyer replied, "My good friend, ever since the Phoenicians invented money, there has been only one answer to that question." (in Sweeting, 331)

To a man who loved his money, Jesus said sell out. You say, "I don't get it. What would selling prove?" It would prove the man loved God more than the things God had given him. He claimed he had kept the Law. Had he? Externally, perhaps, but what about internally? In effect Christ said to him, "You say you have kept the Law, that you love your neighbor as yourself. Okay, prove it. That should be no problem for you." Nobody is saved by giving money to the poor, but nobody can be saved who will not repent of his sins and turn from a life focused on self.

2. *Start living in light of eternity.* If you sell out and give to the poor, you will have treasure in heaven! Charles Stanley made the interesting observation, "Each of us will eventually give away all our earthly possessions. How we choose to do so, however, is a reflection of our commitment to the kingdom of God."

3. *Come and follow Me.* Do you want a good definition of a Christian. A Christian is a follower of Jesus. Are you a follower of Jesus? I'm not talking about perfection, but I am talking about passion. Is it the passion of your life to know Jesus, to learn from Jesus, to walk in Jesus' steps (1 Pet 2:21)? If it's not, you have no reason to claim to be a Christian. It is a deficient gospel to say we can be saved and not follow Him.

**D. Jesus gave the implications (23-30).** How did the man respond to Jesus' invitation? Verse 23 tells us, "And when he heard this, he was very sorrowful; for he was very rich." Matthew's account adds that "the man went away sad" (19:22). He left!

Did Jesus go after Him? Did Jesus call out, "Don't go! Come back! You must have misunderstood Me. Surely, we can work something out."? The fact is Jesus let him go! In so doing, He taught us four implications regarding the gospel.

1. *We must follow Jesus on His terms, not ours (23).* The Lord made a frontal attack on the man's weakness--the sin of covetousness. He was living in violation of commandment #10, and blind to the fact. Until Jesus said to him, "Do you really want eternal life? Unless I am the highest authority in your life, there's no salvation for you."

Instead of going after the young ruler, Jesus revealed a second implication.

2. *It's hard for rich people to be saved (24-25).* "And when Jesus saw that he was very sorrowful, he said, With what difficulty shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God! For it is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God."

Don't water this down. In comparison with the world, *we* are rich, for we have more than we need. This man's riches kept him out of heaven. Why? It's not having money that keeps people from eternal life, for Abraham, David, and Solomon were wealthy men. It's *being possessed* by riches and *trusting* them that makes salvation difficult for the wealthy (Wiersbe, 250). Why is it hard for rich people to be saved?

As author Kenneth Bailey observes in his book *Through Peasants Eyes* (164), "People of wealth are often proud of their own achievements. They accept no favors, ask for no special consideration, and with exceptional effort achieve wealth. But status in God's presence cannot be earned. It can only be received with gratitude...With God there is no pulling up of one's self by the bootstraps." Lest we become smug, a third implication.

3. *No one can be saved apart from God (26-27).* At this point, the people spoke up, "Who then can be saved?" They'd just seen Jesus turn away a person who was, to them, a prime candidate for salvation. If he can't be saved, after all he's done, who can?! Jesus replied (27), "The things which are impossible with men are possible with God." The fact is, no one can be saved apart from the gracious working of God. God chooses. God calls. God grants repentance and faith. Salvation is of the Lord.

4. *We must receive eternal life, for we can't earn it (28-30).* The climax of the story is seen when we notice the contrast between what the rich ruler said and what Peter said in verse 28, "Then Peter said, Lo, we have left all and followed thee." By God's grace, Peter and the apostles did what the rich man refused to do--follow Jesus. To them, Jesus said (29-30), "Verily I say unto you, There is no man that has left house, or parents, or brethren, or wife, or children, for the kingdom of God's sake, who shall not *receive* manifold more in this present time, and in the age to come life everlasting."

There's the point of the story. The young ruler erroneously thought eternal life could be earned, but Jesus clarified for Peter that it must be received.

We've heard the sad story of what one young man, full of potential, did with Jesus. I'd like to tell you about the choice made by another young man.

On January 8, 1956, Jim Elliot and four of his missionary companions shed their blood on the soil of Ecuador as martyrs for Christ. Five Auca Indians took their lives as they were trying to bring the gospel to the Auca tribe of sixty people. Four young wives lost their husbands and nine children lost their fathers.

Jim Elliot's widow, Elisabeth Elliot, wrote that the world called it a nightmare of tragedy. Then she added, "The world did not recognize the truth of the second clause of Jim Elliot's credo: He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose." (in Piper, 210-11).

Faith is not nodding the head to a series of facts about Jesus. It is following Jesus (see Walter Chantry, *Today's Gospel: Authentic or Synthetic?*, p. 61). Ask yourself...

Concluding Question: Am I truly a follower of Jesus?

Response:

This morning we have considered the true story of a man who came to the right Person, asked the right question, received the right answer, but made the wrong decision (Wiersbe). What about you? Will you be honest with God and yourself this morning? Being a Christian is more than believing *about* Jesus. It's believing *in* Jesus. It's having a personal relationship with Him. In the following song, I invite you to sing to the Lord and tell Him you love Him.

*Hymn of Response: #364 "My Jesus, I Love Thee"*

Let's allow what we've learned from God's Word to penetrate our hearts. Are you a follower of Jesus? Maybe you've prayed a prayer before, been baptized, and have been in this church for years, but right now, your heart is shaking. You are wondering, "Do I really have eternal life?"

Don't presume your spiritual condition. The young ruler walked away sad from Jesus, and we don't know if he ever came back. He walked away religious, but lost.

Will you repent of your sin today and become a follower of Jesus? Perhaps you are wondering, "What must I do to be saved?" The truth is, you must do something. You must admit the truth about yourself, that you are a sinner, and repent of your sin. And you must admit the truth about Jesus, that He alone can save you, through His atoning life, death, and resurrection. What you must do, God will enable you to do if you will call out to Him. Will you do so right now?

*Time for Response in Prayer*

Ken will come now to minister to us in music during this time of response.

*Ministry in Music: Ken Henry*

Following Jesus begins the day we repent and believe in Him. But following Him is also a daily decision we must make. Our closing song will help us recommit our lives to Him today.

*Song of Commitment: #379 "Take My Life and Let It Be"*