

Previous passages have shown us how Luke tends to link his stories as examples or contrasts of the preceding account. In our previous passage, those who accept the kingdom of God are like children coming to Jesus in total trust to be blessed. Today's passage that followed is about one who rejected the kingdom. The Rich Young Ruler came expecting to have heaven's riches while hanging on to his earthly ones. But he came with the feeling of somehow falling short or he wouldn't have asked the question. Ironically, he thinks he has kept the commandments. However, he has not yet seen clearly that he is a sinner in desperate need of putting God first in His life.

*<sup>18</sup> And a ruler asked him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"*

Luke 18:18 He sincerely wants to know how he can be assured of eternal life. Jews believed all children of Abraham would be in God's eternal kingdom, but this man has some doubts about that. Those doubts probably came from the conviction of the Holy Spirit. He was sincerely impressed by Jesus and believed Jesus could tell him what he lacked to be assured of eternal life.

That is a spiritually healthy place to be. What percentage of people wouldn't even think of asking this question? It was the question on your heart when you found Jesus. Or perhaps it is a fear you've buried and are afraid to confront. That nagging conviction of where our soul would be when we die haunts us for a good reason. Even if we think we are "a good person," how good is good enough for God? That is at the core of what the man was asking.

*<sup>19</sup> And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone."* Luke 18:19 Jesus first confronted him on the title the rich man used to address Him- "Good Teacher". The way Jesus asked the question gives skeptics the opportunity to say, "See, Jesus is claiming He is not God." You could read it that way. But not one rabbi in the entire Talmud is called "good." From that we can see it was an unusual way to address someone (Psalm 14:3<sup>i</sup>). Taking the rest of the Gospels into account, I read it as Jesus calling out the man's conviction on whom he thinks Jesus is. In other words, "Are you saying I am God, because only God is good; or are you saying what I teach is good?" Anyone can teach good things. We flippantly say someone is a good person, but from God's perspective all who are not in Jesus are fallen beings in rebellion against Him (Romans 3:23<sup>ii</sup>). Goodness is defined by the nature of God. In fact, the two-line ancient anthem of Israel declares "the Lord is good" (1 Chronicles 16:34<sup>iii</sup>).

This man is basically asking how he can be good in God's eyes. He called Jesus good. What does it mean to be good? That is what the whole account hinges upon. Goodness is that childlike faith in God mentioned in the previous passage (18:16,17<sup>iv</sup>). It is faith and trust that acquires the goodness of God. But from the outset the man is hedging his conviction that Jesus is the Messiah by calling him merely a "good teacher."

*<sup>20</sup> You know the commandments: 'Do not commit adultery, Do not murder, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Honor your father and mother.'*" Luke 18:20 Jesus could see right off what the man's problem was, but He took a circular route to get at it. The man was trusting in his good works rather than the desire of his heart. By bringing up the commandments, Jesus was not saying that keeping them will get him into heaven. Rather, He was pointing out that even in keeping them, our hearts know there is more. No

matter how good we try to be, there is still the conviction that we are falling short. That is because we know our hearts don't measure up the goodness of God (Job 42:5,6<sup>v</sup>).

Jesus was referred to the last half of the Ten Commandments, commandments five through nine. These are the only ones we might say with some conviction that we have not physically disobeyed. The first four and the tenth are about the heart. Jesus avoided mentioning them because he wanted the man to see that even in keeping those that we might possibly be able to keep, there is still something missing.

<sup>21</sup> *And he said, "All these I have kept from my youth."* Luke 18:21 The man said he was faithful to observe those. We know from Jesus' teaching that this was not true, for Jesus explained to hate someone was the same as murder (Matthew 5:21,22<sup>vi</sup>). To lust after a woman in one's heart is the same as adultery (Matthew 5:28<sup>vii</sup>). But this man apparently had not heard that teaching. He sincerely thought he had obeyed those commands. He had not killed anyone, or slept with someone else's wife, or stolen anything, or lied in court, or dishonored his parents.

Remember the account of the lawyer who asked Jesus who was his neighbor (Luke 10:29<sup>viii</sup>). He was trying to escape the conviction of the law by narrowing the definition of neighbor. Jesus made it many times more severe by saying it was anyone you come across, including those people groups you despise. We try to justify our sins by using our own definitions that leave us some wiggle room. God never accepts our justification, for He sees our hearts. Jesus saw the problem in this young man's heart.

<sup>22</sup> *When Jesus heard this, he said to him, "One thing you still lack. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me."* Luke 18:22 Jesus put His finger on what was troubling the man. It was the breaking of all the commands Jesus had not mentioned. He had another god. He made false image of money, and by working so hard for it he had in fact worshiped another god. He may have done business on the Sabbath (Exodus 20:3-11)<sup>ix</sup>. His heart coveted money (Exodus 20:17<sup>x</sup>). Jesus challenged him to break free from his false god of money by leaving it all behind and following Him. It was a call to discipleship. And in the process the man would have real treasure- eternal treasure in heaven (Matthew 6:19,20<sup>xi</sup>).

I think many pastors today would be tempted to tell him how he could serve God by supporting the ministry. While that may be true to some extent, the issue was the man's salvation, and that had nothing to do with good works.

I've had someone offer to give the church whatever we needed. But I sensed there was something wrong in the offer, so I declined to express any need. The Holy Spirit made me aware the offer was a good work rather than a surrendered heart. On the other hand, I have had someone with a broken heart surrendered to Jesus give the church half our yearly budget. The issue isn't the money. God is our provider. The issue is the heart; and the rich young ruler's heart was clinging to another god.

<sup>23</sup> *But when he heard these things, he became very sad, for he was extremely rich.* Luke 18:23 Can you imagine how the man's countenance saddened when he heard Jesus call? He would not give it up. Wealth was like a drug to him. He had to have more and more to feel content. He couldn't exercise that childlike faith that says, "Here I am, Papa. I know You will care for me. I need no longer trust in the deceitfulness of riches" (Matthew 13:22<sup>xii</sup>). He couldn't say that because he trusted his wealth more than he trusted God. The issue was that he *loved* his wealth more than he loved God.

Think of the timing in which this took place. It was near the end of Jesus' ministry. This chapter ends with Jesus last journey to Jerusalem, and the next chapter tells of the Triumphal Entry. Had the rich young ruler forsaken all (Luke 14:33<sup>xiii</sup>), he would have been with the disciples that last week and heard some of the most powerful teaching recorded in the Gospels. He would have been at the Last Supper, seen the crucifixion, and been with the disciples in that locked upper room when Jesus appeared alive, resurrected. He would have been there when the Holy Spirit was poured out. What an opportunity he was walking away from, all for what is mere pavement in heaven! Could there be a worse decision in life? We are all called to follow Jesus and put Him first. What LIFE we miss when we don't accept His call to us! What glorious adventures so many forsake for the mundane passing things of this life!

The rich young ruler was sad because he realized he couldn't have his money as his god and at the same time have the spiritual assurance of eternal life. Wealth had such a grip on his soul that he would rather live with it in depression than have real joy without it. He couldn't bring himself to simply trust God like a little child.

*<sup>24</sup> Jesus, seeing that he had become sad, said, "How difficult it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God! <sup>25</sup> For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God."* Luke 18:24,25 If the man's expression turned to joy, Jesus would have known he made the right choice. But seeing the sadness was a sign that he could not give up his trust in wealth. Jesus then commented on the power of wealth to keep those who have it from entering the kingdom of God. He compared it to a camel going through the eye of a needle.

A popular interpretation was that there was a gate in Jerusalem that was small and called eye of the needle and that camels had to get on their knees and unload their freight to get through. It is a fitting a description but there never was such a gate or example in ancient literature. The Talmud used the expression "an elephant through the eye of a needle" to express impossibility. Jesus was saying it would take a miracle. But then, all salvation events are miracles. No one who trusts in riches can enter the kingdom of God. **The point is that we are tempted to place our trust in money which keeps us from placing our trust in God.** Money is a popular choice of gods and one from which it is impossible to be freed without the intervention of God (Matthew 6:19-21<sup>xiv</sup>).

Luke gave us the parable of the rich man and Lazarus as warning of how wealth can harden our hearts (16:22,23<sup>xv</sup>). He also recorded the parable of the rich fool who thought a big harvest had him set for life (Luke 12:15<sup>xvi</sup>). Paul told Timothy to *"Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth"* (1 Timothy 6:17<sup>xvii</sup>). Jesus warned that in the parable of the seeds and soil that the deceitfulness of riches can choke out His life in us (Matthew 13:22<sup>xviii</sup>). Our tendency to put our hope in wealth is the issue Jesus is warning against. We tend to think wealthy people have it easier. Jesus is saying that in spiritual matters the wealthy people have a much harder time because of the great temptation to trust wealth to be the answer to life's challenges. The totally dependent trust of a child is harder to come by because of the deceptive promises of wealth (Revelation 3:17<sup>xix</sup>).

*<sup>26</sup> Those who heard it said, "Then who can be saved?" <sup>27</sup> But he said, "What is impossible with man is possible with God."* Luke 18:26,27 Jews believed wealth was a sign of God's blessing. The ruins of Jerusalem reveal that the priests were quite wealthy.

Pharisees were for the most part wealthy as well. So, the disciples asked if priests and Pharisees weren't likely to be saved, then does anyone have a chance?

Jesus responded that what is impossible with man is possible with God. We should give a big sigh of relief, for our possessions today would be considered great wealth in that day. The rich young ruler couldn't do it, but God can. We can't turn away from false gods, or our trust in money, but God can make it possible. The grace of God can empower us to do what we can't do on our own. Only by accepting that grace could the rich young ruler let go of his wealth and follow Jesus.

Is there something in your own life that you cling to that keeps you from following Jesus wherever He leads? Realize how meaningless it is compared to an ongoing relationship with your Creator. He has good things planned for our lives if we will just let go and follow (Ephesians 2:10<sup>xx</sup>).

*<sup>28</sup> And Peter said, "See, we have left our homes and followed you." <sup>29</sup> And he said to them, "Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, <sup>30</sup> who will not receive many times more in this time, and in the age to come eternal life."* Luke 18:28-30 Jesus stated a spiritual fact that when we are willing to leave loved ones and material things behind to follow Him, God rewards us both in this life with a spiritual family and all we need and in the next with eternal life. Take it as a promise, but it is more like a declaration of reality. You can't out-give God. That does not mean if you drive an old Ford and leave it behind that you'll get a new Ferrari. It does mean you won't want for needed transportation, and you won't have to worry about it.

Childlike faith is always grateful because it knows Abba cares and delights to give us what is good for us (Luke 11:13<sup>xxi</sup>). Is wealth holding you back from putting Jesus first and doing whatever He leads you to do? Ask for the grace to do the impossible and quit trusting in it. As far as we know, Peter did not sell his home. But since he began to follow Jesus, it was given to the Lord to do with as God pleased. It became a gathering place for the early church in Capernaum.

It appears that Paul the apostle used his wealth to finance his initial missionary journeys. Then the churches and his own labor supported his daily needs, though sometimes he was hungry and poorly clothed (1 Corinthians 4:11<sup>xxii</sup>).

The majority of Christians in the first century were slaves. Paul told them they shouldn't try to obtain their freedom unless it was offered (1 Corinthians 7:21,22), but to serve their master as they would serve Jesus (Ephesians 6:5-8<sup>xxiii</sup>). It is not wrong to own things or have savings. The issue is who or what is first in our hearts. Are you ready to walk away from those things if Jesus invites you to do so? Is Jesus first in your heart?

What may be even more challenging is to follow Jesus in your present form of employment. How does Jesus want you to represent Him in your current occupation? How would your work change if you did it as unto the Lord? How can you represent Jesus at work? What if the Holy Spirit prompted you to start a Bible study during lunch break? Will you follow no matter what He asks you to do in your workplace? Will you give when He asks you to give?

Here at Wayside it is rare that I ever bring up finances. I believe that if we are doing God's will that God will provide what we need. You won't get a yearly tithing series of sermons here. That's because I believe that as you mature from the good food of God's Word, you will learn to hear the Shepherd's voice (John 10:4<sup>xxiv</sup>). If you are

following Jesus and He is first in your life, He can prompt you when and where and how much to give of your time and money. God loves a cheerful giver (2 Corinthians 9:7<sup>xxv</sup>).

If you find the chains of wealth are keeping you from following Jesus, know that He can break those chains (John 8:36<sup>xxvi</sup>). We sing about it, and it is absolutely true. In Jesus our chains are gone. We've been set free. We don't follow the letter of the Law, but the Spirit who resides in us. We can give even when it hurts, for we know that it helps us to trust the Lord even more than we already do. Whatever chains your past has placed upon you, know that Jesus is the chain breaker (Isaiah 61:1<sup>xxvii</sup>). You just need to hand your life over to Him to do what He designed and prepared you to do. All your life to this point was preparation for the good things He has planned for you to do (Ephesians 2:10<sup>xxviii</sup>). It's an adventure following Jesus. It's unpredictable and exciting. It's scary at times, but always full of inner joy and peace.

On Friday there was a free showing of the movie *Steve McQueen: American Idol*. It showed his meteoric career to become the highest paid actor. Then he walked away from it all, empty and searching. He ended up living in an airplane hanger in Colorado. His flight instructor was a Christian. As they soared through the clouds, he shared Jesus with him. Steve asked if he could go to church with him. After a few Sundays he received Jesus as his Savior. He was a weekly attendee of that little church. When he realized he was dying of cancer he asked his pastor if he could arrange an interview with Billy Graham. Billy met Steve as Steve was boarding an airplane to Mexico for experimental treatment. Billy shared with him and they prayed together. Steve mentioned he had forgotten his Bible, so Billy Graham handed him his own Bible. When Steve's body was flown back to the states, they opened the body bag and found Steve's hand was clutching that Bible. In his last interview before his death, he stated his hope to be able to tell more people about the peace he had found in Jesus. Unlike the rich young ruler, Steve McQueen had accepted the grace to put Jesus first in his life.

Just last week I was speaking with a pastor who was saying that his congregation doesn't seem to want to exercise the gifts God has given them. What a shame! They are missing out on that joyful adventure of following Jesus. I asked him to tell them what they are missing, joy and peace now and glory every after! It is real living (John 10:10<sup>xxix</sup>). What is your gift from the Holy Spirit? Are you letting God use it or are you putting something else first? You are free in Jesus to live a life of meaning and purpose. Don't settle for anything less. Don't let the allure of wealth or the lies of temptations cause you to be anything less than all God is calling you to be in Him. And don't believe for a second that God can't use you where you are. He put you there for His purposes.

## Questions

- 1 What is Jesus' first question addressing?
- 2 What was Jesus' first answer? Why?
- 3 How are those commandments different from others?
- 4 Had he really obeyed commandments 5 through 9?
- 5 Which commandments had he broken? How?
- 6 Why did he go away sad?
- 7 What was he missing by rejecting Jesus command?
- 8 Why did Jesus' disciples ask, "Who then can be saved?"
- 9 What is the real issue confronting us? 10 What is God calling you to do?

---

<sup>i</sup> **Psalm 14:3 (ESV)**

<sup>3</sup> They have all turned aside; together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, not even one.

<sup>ii</sup> **Romans 3:23 (ESV)**

<sup>23</sup> for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

<sup>iii</sup> **1 Chronicles 16:34 (ESV)**

<sup>34</sup> Oh give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever!

<sup>iv</sup> **Luke 18:16-17 (ESV)**

<sup>16</sup> But Jesus called them to him, saying, "Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God. <sup>17</sup> Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it."

<sup>v</sup> **Job 42:5-6 (ESV)**

<sup>5</sup> I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you; <sup>6</sup> therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes."

<sup>vi</sup> **Matthew 5:21-22 (ESV)**

<sup>21</sup> "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.' <sup>22</sup> But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire.

<sup>vii</sup> **Matthew 5:28 (ESV)**

<sup>28</sup> But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

<sup>viii</sup> **Luke 10:29 (ESV)**

<sup>29</sup> But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

<sup>ix</sup> **Exodus 20:3-11 (ESV)**

<sup>3</sup> "You shall have no other gods before me. <sup>4</sup> "You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. <sup>5</sup> You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, <sup>6</sup> but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments. <sup>7</sup> "You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain. <sup>8</sup> "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. <sup>9</sup> Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, <sup>10</sup> but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. <sup>11</sup> For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

<sup>x</sup> **Exodus 20:17 (ESV)**

<sup>17</sup> "You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor's."

<sup>xi</sup> **Matthew 6:19-21 (ESV)**

<sup>19</sup> "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, <sup>20</sup> but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal.

<sup>21</sup> For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

<sup>xii</sup> **Matthew 13:22 (ESV)**

<sup>22</sup> As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful.

<sup>xiii</sup> **Luke 14:33 (ESV)**

<sup>33</sup> So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.

<sup>xiv</sup> **Matthew 6:19-21 (ESV)**

<sup>19</sup> "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, <sup>20</sup> but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. <sup>21</sup> For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

<sup>xv</sup> **Luke 16:22-23 (ESV)**

<sup>22</sup> The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried, <sup>23</sup> and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side.

---

<sup>xvi</sup> **Luke 12:15 (ESV)**

<sup>15</sup> And he said to them, "Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions."

<sup>xvii</sup> **1 Timothy 6:17 (ESV)**

<sup>17</sup> 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.

<sup>xviii</sup> **Matthew 13:22 (NIV)**

<sup>22</sup> The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful.

<sup>xix</sup> **Revelation 3:17 (ESV)**

<sup>17</sup> For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.

<sup>xx</sup> **Ephesians 2:10 (ESV)**

<sup>10</sup> For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

<sup>xxi</sup> **Luke 11:13 (ESV)**

<sup>13</sup> If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"

<sup>xxii</sup> **1 Corinthians 4:11 (ESV)**

<sup>11</sup> To the present hour we hunger and thirst, we are poorly dressed and buffeted and homeless,

<sup>xxiii</sup> **Ephesians 6:5-8 (ESV)**

<sup>5</sup> Bondservants, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ, <sup>6</sup> not by the way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, <sup>7</sup> rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man, <sup>8</sup> knowing that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether he is a bondservant or is free.

<sup>xxiv</sup> **John 10:4 (ESV)**

<sup>4</sup> When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice.

<sup>xxv</sup> **2 Corinthians 9:7 (ESV)**

<sup>7</sup> Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

<sup>xxvi</sup> **John 8:36 (ESV)**

<sup>36</sup> So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.

<sup>xxvii</sup> **Isaiah 61:1 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup> The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound;

<sup>xxviii</sup> **Ephesians 2:10 (ESV)**

<sup>10</sup> For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

<sup>xxix</sup> **John 10:10 (ESV)**

<sup>10</sup> The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.