

Quest for Immortality by David Foster

Luke chapter 18:18-30 tells the story of a rich young man who fell on his knees before Jesus with an urgent question:

“Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” And Jesus said to him, “Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone. You know the commandments: ‘Do not commit adultery, Do not murder, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Honor your father and mother.’” And he said, “All these I have kept from my youth.” 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.” But when he heard these things, he became very sad, for he was extremely rich. Jesus, seeing that he had become sad, said, “How difficult it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God! 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.” Those who heard it said, “Then who can be saved?” But he said, “What is impossible with man is possible with God.” And Peter said, “See, we have left our homes and followed you.” 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, who will not receive many times more in this time, and in the age to come eternal life.”

Last week we learned that a person cannot enter God's kingdom unless he humbles himself like a child. (Luke 18:15-17; cf. Matthew 18:1-5) Interestingly, the situation which prompted Jesus to teach this key lesson was people bringing babies to him to bless them. He immediately recognized this situation as a teachable moment and made a simple observation about infants. Small babies in arms are weak and helpless. These little ones who Jesus tenderly took in his arms, are not unlike adults. All of us are utterly helpless and dependent on God. The fact is: Babies cannot feed or clean themselves, so also, adults are helpless and unable to gain entrance into heaven by their own efforts. We can't cleanse ourselves from sins but God can and does. We can't achieve righteousness through our own efforts either but God graciously credits Christ's righteousness to us. As it is written, “For our sake God made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” (1 Corinthians 5:21) God is the best of Fathers and we love him for it.

Today's story teaches a similar lesson about humility, albeit from a different perspective. The Scripture passage we're looking at today involves a full grown man coming to Jesus, in fact, he wasn't your average kind of person, he was a rich man with high standing in the community as a ruler – quite the opposite of a weak, helpless child! It's so interesting how God's Word teaches the same basic point about humility from different perspectives! And what an important lesson it is!

This prominent person posed a timeless question to Jesus that is still very relevant today, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” Down through history philosophers and scientists have explored this theme. One example is a book published a few years ago in Canada, *The Book of Immortality: The Science, Belief and Magic Behind Living Forever*. Another book is titled, *Immortality: The Quest to Live Forever and How It Drives Civilization*.

It doesn't take much imagination to appreciate the concerns and fears that might have prompted this Jewish leader to ask this kind of question. Perhaps the topic of death was on his mind because he had recently lost a loved one. Maybe he had had a near-death experience or in his spare time he liked

thinking about the wise sayings of Solomon which talk a lot about death. In Ecclesiastes 3:11 Solomon observed that, “God has planted eternity in the human heart, yet even so people cannot see the whole scope of God's work from beginning to end.” Or maybe this rich person simply wanted Jesus' approval as a good person basically confirming that he had already done enough to earn eternal life.

Whatever triggered him to ask this question, one thing is clear: he was quite a self confident person who had earned a fairly 'good' reputation. (As we will see later, even the 12 disciples thought as much.) On the other hand, it is entirely possible this man had moments when he felt a twinge of uncertainty and fear about what lies beyond the grave. Whatever were the reasons behind his question, he was clearly relying on his own goodness to gain God's approval and enter heaven.

So how does Jesus respond to the polite flattery when the rich man addressed Jesus as “GOOD teacher”? So often we hear people say, “I'm a good person.” Or at a funeral, “So and so was such a good person” thinking that this is what will make them acceptable to God.

But Jesus said, “Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone.” Notice Jesus did not deny he is good, he was focusing on the perfect goodness of Almighty God who alone is worthy to be worshiped. At the same time Jesus challenges the motives behind the man's polite flattery. The rich man would surely have agreed that God is perfectly good. Jesus went on to answer the man's question about eternal life by quoting five out of the ten commandments, fully aware that the man knew all the other commandments. Without hesitation the ruler confidently affirmed that he had kept all the commandments from his youth. This is an indication of how highly he thought of himself. But “pride goes before a fall.” (Proverbs 16:18)

Of course, Jesus knew this man's heart problem and proceeded to reveal his real motives. “One thing you still lack.” Jesus replied, “Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.” This simple test was an indirect way to reveal the true problem. The real object of this leader's worship wasn't God, but money! He had failed to keep the very first commandment! As it is written, “I am the LORD your God, ... You shall have no other gods before me.” (Exodus 20:2-3)

Interestingly, the kind of generosity Jesus was talking about is frequently mentioned throughout Scripture, as seen in Proverbs 14:31; “whoever is kind to the needy honors God.” The rich man **deceived** himself, thinking he had done all God that requires. Tragically, however, he ended up choosing to hold onto his wealth instead of honouring God by generously giving it to the poor. He resisted this simple yet challenging truth, not willing to think deeply about it. God's word spoken so plainly was choked out by the **deceitfulness** of riches. (Mark 4:19; cf. Luke 12:15-21)

“For if anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself.” (Galatians 6:3) “The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; Who can understand it?” (Jeremiah 17:9) “If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us.” (1 John 1:8)

So what was the bottom line that Jesus expected from this man? Did he expect absolute moral perfection – keeping the entire law without one fault? One think we do know for sure: God expected complete obedience from Adam and Eve. If they had perfectly obeyed God they wouldn't have died but would have lived forever.

However, we also know that no one, except Jesus Christ, has ever lived a perfectly good life. This should not surprise us since Jesus is, Emmanuel, 'God with us'. (Matthew 1:23) Jesus did not come to

remind humans to keep the law of Moses or perhaps revise and update it. He did not come to re-impose a heavy burden of obeying the law in all its minutia. Jesus knew no one can keep the law. All have sinned and fall short of God's glory. (Romans 3:23; Ecclesiastes 7:21) And if you break one command it amounts to breaking the whole law, as it is written in James 2:10, "For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it."

Jesus alone perfectly fulfilled the Divine requirement of keeping the whole law. God did not send him to the world to bring down God's judgment. His mission was to save the world as foretold by the prophets. (Isaiah 49:6) He brought God's salvation as the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. (John 1:29) Even more amazingly, God credits Christ's righteousness to those who truly believe in him. Of course, this means we must confess and turn from our sin and follow Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour which includes "taking up our cross daily," following him.

This story in Luke 18 concludes with Jesus underscoring his call to **leave everything and follow him**. Peter heard Christ make an incredibly difficult statement about humans being saved and attaining eternal life.

"Jesus, seeing that the wealthy man had become sad, said, 'How difficult it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God! 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.' Those who heard it said, 'Then who can be saved?'"

Jesus assured his disciples that although saving someone is utterly impossible for humans, with God, it is possible. Peter responds to this mind-blowing statement of Jesus, "See, we have left our homes and followed you." [Mark's account of this same story captures the fuller meaning of Peter's statement, saying, "we have left everything and followed you."] Then Jesus said to them, "Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, who will not receive many times more in this time, and in the age to come eternal life."

Notice that we've come full circle. The story begins with the young man asking Jesus "What must I do to inherit **eternal life**?" Jesus plainly answered him, "follow me." And now at the end Christ repeats his point for emphasis. He makes a promise to anyone, like Peter, who follows him, leaving everything for the sake of God's kingdom. He promises that they will gain so much more, including eternal life. Notice also Jesus says that those who truly follow him will become part of God's bigger family with many more genuine brothers and sisters.

Christ acknowledged that Peter and his disciples had left their secure homes and incomes to follow him and travel to various towns healing people and preaching the good news. But then he also reassured them that God is faithful to provide and care for them in keeping with Matthew 6:33, "seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you."

As followers of Jesus we must learn "not to fix our eyes on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal." (2 Cor. 4:18)

So how do we apply Jesus' teaching to our own lives? "Sell your possessions, and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." (Luke 12:33-34) This passage does not necessarily mean each and every one of us must sell

everything we have in order to be certain of having eternal life. No, it teaches us that we must love God supremely, more than anything or anyone and love others because all humans are made in his image. Jesus declared that the most important command is to “love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all our mind and love your neighbor as yourself.” (Luke 10:27)

As we conclude let us look at a parable of Jesus which underscores the principle of laying up treasure in heaven, an idea which the rich man in today's story could not see or understand. Jesus taught this parable in Matthew 13:45-46, “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it.” Notice that the “merchant ... sold all that he had and bought it.” (the pearl of great value)

If you and I have found this priceless gift of salvation/eternal life, this special pearl of great value, let us express our deep thankfulness and overflowing joy by going out to tell others about the great things God has done for us. (Mark 5:20)

The question “How can I inherit eternal life?” is a crucial one that we all need to ask. We never know when our life on earth will end. Just yesterday we heard the very sad news that our friend Nicole passed away. I'm sure she didn't expect that yesterday would be the end of her earthly journey. But even in this terrible news there is some good news.

Last year I met Nicole in the King Edward apartments. Not long afterwards she and Trevor started attending our church and heard the good news. Our hope is that she put her trust in the Jesus as her Lord and Saviour and is now with him. This gives us comfort in our grief. Please do pray for Trevor in this time of deep sorrow.

I want to conclude by mentioning one very special thing that is included in the same story of the rich young ruler. As recorded in Mark 10:21 we read that “Jesus looked at him and loved him.” Isn't that encouraging and beautiful? Even though Jesus knew this man was not perfect, even though he knew this man would make the wrong choice and walk away, Jesus loved him. I have no reason to think this man later reconsidered what Jesus had said. Possibly he did repent and return to follow Jesus. I hope that he did. But this I do know for sure: “God is not willing that anyone should perish but that all should come to repentance.” (2 Peter 3:9)

So, in light of eternity, I urge you today: Allow God to examine your heart and show you where you might have sinned or turned away. Humbly ask yourself, “Where do I need to repent?” “Have I accepted God's free gift of salvation through believing in His Son Jesus Christ?” “Have I back-slidden and do I need to return and follow Him?” Jesus loves you. He is waiting for you with open arms. “Today is the day of salvation.” “Come to Him.” (2 Corinthians 6:2; Revelation 22:17)

If you wish to correspond or ask questions feel free to contact me here: rolandclarke1139@yahoo.com

Below is a list of further articles/sermons exploring key themes in this sermon.

Childlike Humility: Key to entering heaven - <https://www.answering-islam.org/authors/clarke/childlike.html>

Is Death the end? - https://www.answering-islam.org/authors/clarke/death_end.html

Solomon and Jesus: Eternity & Immortality - https://www.answering-islam.org/authors/clarke/solomon_jesus.html

The Rich Man and Lazarus - <https://www.answering-islam.org/authors/clarke/lazarus.html>

Timeless Truth Encrypted in Ancient Wisdom - https://www.answering-islam.org/authors/clarke/timeless_truth.html

Endnote: Surah 19:19

Readers who are familiar with the Muslim scripture realize that the Qur'an acknowledges Al Masih Isa (Jesus) is "faultless/pure" (Surah 19:19). But what does this mean, especially considering that Christ is the only sinless and perfectly good human being who ever lived? (cf. Ecclesiastes 7:21; John 8:46; 1 Peter 1:18-19; 2:22-24; Hebrews 4:15; 7:26)

Also see, *More Proof from the Quran that Jesus is God Incarnate! Pt. 3* by Sam Shamoun available online here: https://www.answering-islam.org/authors/shamoun/mpq_incarnate3.html

See also, *Was Jesus sinless? Available here:* <https://www.gotquestions.org/Jesus-sinless.html>

We can gain a better understanding of Christ's sinlessness by examining his repeated claims to be the (unique) Son of God. See *Jesus the Son of God* available online here: https://www.answering-islam.org/authors/clarke/jesus_the_son.html

Endnote: Surah 7:40

Surah 7:40 alludes to a memorable metaphor involving a camel passing through the eye of a needle as taught by Jesus in Scripture (Luke 18:25). Muslim scholar, Dr. Abdulla Galadari has recently published a journal article comparing how this peculiar word picture is used in the Qur'an and Bible. He is Assistant Professor of Islamic Studies at Khalifa University. The abstract summarizes his article as follows;

The Gospels seem to suggest that it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. The Qur'an, on the other hand, puts the metaphor in the context of disbelievers who are arrogant (*istakbarū*) toward God's signs. At the outset, it would seem that the passage's contexts in the Gospels and the Qur'an are different; however, through a closer analysis of the keywords, there are textual parallels that can be extracted from both texts and go beyond simply the use of this analogy in common, as previous scholars have thought. For instance, the rich man in the Gospels is asking about inheriting eternal life, while the Qur'an also discusses eternal life and inheritance in the same context. These and several other textual parallels suggest that the Qur'an is alluding to the same context for the metaphor as the Gospels do. (*A Qur'anic Interpretation of the Gospels*, *Ancient Near Eastern Studies*. 55. 77-89. 10.2143/ANES.55.0.3284684. by Abdulla Galadari)

Interestingly, the Jewish Scriptures (OT) similarly underscore the utter impossibility of a wealthy person using their riches to avert death or as a bargaining chip to gain eternal life. A prominent example is Psalm 49 where terms like wealth, riches. etc, are mentioned eight times along with the notion of death, grave etc, which recurs even more frequently in this Psalm. (The Qur'an likewise rejects wealth as a bargaining chip with Allah, Surah 2:70)

Thoughtful readers may wish to explore why key themes as taught by the prophets such as being redeemed or saved which correlate with eternal life, are overlooked, minimized or even denied by Ulema. (cf. Psalm 49:5-7, 15; Luke 18:26; cf. Isaiah 49:24-26) It is significant that after fourteen centuries Muslim leaders still do not acknowledge the Divine names **Redeemer** and **Savior**. Tragically, they refuse to include these famous, time-honoured titles among the Ninety Nine Beautiful Names of Allah! See *God our Savior, Redeemer* available online here: https://www.answering-islam.org/authors/clarke/god_savior_redeemer.html