

February 15th, 2009 “The Last Year of the Life of Christ, Part 34”

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Luke 18:18-23

18 Now a certain ruler asked [Jesus], saying, “Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?”

19 So Jesus said to him, “**Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God.**

20 **You know the commandments: ‘Do not commit adultery,’ ‘Do not murder,’ ‘Do not steal,’ ‘Do not bear false witness,’ ‘Honor your father and your mother.’ ”**

21 And he said, “All these things I have kept from my youth.”

22 So when Jesus heard these things, He said to him, “**You still lack one thing. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.**”

23 **But when he heard this, he became very sorrowful, for he was very rich.**

Thank you very much for coming to hear the message for today. Before we begin our next lesson, let us reiterate our reason for attending Church.

We attend Church to obtain the mind of Christ, meaning, to have the Bible illuminated in our minds so that we can clearly understand the principles that Jesus taught and base our daily personal decisions on those principles.

We come to Church because we want to be obedient to the Bible, which is the doctrine of Jesus Christ, in an informed, insightful and intelligent manner.

By way of introduction, let me just say that although Jesus tells the ruler to sell all that he has, this parable is not actually about money or possessions. Keep that mind as I speak.

In our last lesson, I made the point that we all need to rethink the way that we are living our lives. And we need to rethink continually. As Christians, we have access to the greatest gift ever given in the history of creation, that being the gift of eternal life through Jesus Christ. But our access to the gift is in potential danger, because unless our relationship to Jesus Christ grows as we develop our faith, we may decide that obtaining the gift is too much trouble.

In our passage of Scripture for today, the ruler in question has heard about the ministry of Jesus Christ. Jesus started His ministry immediately after John the Baptist was put into prison, and His teaching theme was the same as that of John, as **Matthew 4:12, 17** tells us:

12 **Now when Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, He departed to Galilee.**

17 **From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”**

Jesus equated the Kingdom of Heaven with Eternal Life, as He taught Nicodemus in **John 3:13-16**:

13 **No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven.**

14 **And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be**

lifted up,

15 that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.

16 For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

The discussion that Jesus most often had with those with whom he came into contact was about everlasting life. As a matter of fact, that is also the question about which the church is the most concerned. So, how do we get to heaven, or receive everlasting, or eternal life? Jesus tells us, in our text, **Luke 18:20**:

20 You know the commandments: 'Do not commit adultery,' 'Do not murder,' 'Do not steal,' 'Do not bear false witness,' 'Honor your father and your mother.' "

According to that which Jesus told the ruler, we receive heaven by keeping the commandments. The ruler was glad to hear Jesus' criterion for heaven, as he responded, in **Luke 18:21**:

21 And he said, "All these things I have kept from my youth."

Now, there was a problem with the ruler's confession that he kept the commandments. Although it was probably true that the ruler was a pretty good person, and kept the commandments to some degree, it is also true that the ruler did not keep the commandments well enough to actually merit heaven. And the ruler did not stop to consider this, although Jesus told the ruler as much in His initial response to the ruler's question. **Luke 18:18-19** records:

18 Now a certain ruler asked [Jesus], saying, "Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?"

19 So Jesus said to him, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God.

If no one is good except God, how can we imagine that we have kept the commandments well enough to merit eternal life? In our last lesson, I made the point that the fact about ourselves about which we are probably in the most denial is that we are sinners. Not accidental sinners, not people that are forced to sin because of circumstance, but rank sinners that willfully disobey God because we disagree with Him and have decided to do that which we want to do. We are all willfully disobedient, and we need to acknowledge that fact, even as the ruler did not.

Just consider your personal position. Do you actually think that you act in agreement with the teaching of the Bible on each and every subject that it contains? You may agree with the ruler that you ought not commit adultery, murder, steal, or bear false witness, and you may agree that you should honor your parents, but if you examine your thinking closely, you may find that your definitions of these commandments may not match those of God. Let's look at **Matthew 5:21-22**, in which Jesus says:

21 "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.'

22 But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, 'Raca!' [which is a term of contempt], shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be in danger of hell fire.

It is probably true that you and I have never actually intentionally did anything that would stop someone's heart from beating, but ask yourself if you have ever overreacted to something that someone has done? Has your spouse ever frustrated you to the point that you

might be tempted to use a term of contempt when referring to him or her or to think of him or her as a fool? My point is that the Bible sets the bar for Godlike behavior pretty high, and most of us have missed it a few times recently.

Jesus told the ruler, in our text, that no one is good except God, which means, as **Romans 3:23** tells us:

23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

If the ruler had really been listening intently in order to understand the meaning of that which Jesus was saying, the ruler would have realized that he, himself also was a sinful person, and thus would not have responded that he kept all the commandments from his childhood days. But the ruler, like many well-meaning people, had his thinking locked by his preconceived misconception that he actually was a good person, especially as he compared himself with his peers. Jesus is telling the ruler, the disciples, and us by extension, that the standard against which we will be measured on Judgment Day is not a subjective comparison with our peers, but the objective standard of the Law as interpreted by God. In comparison with that standard, Jesus tells us that none of us grade out as good.

These are the facts of the case. I am not giving you the information about your personal sinfulness to make you feel bad, but to inform you that our way to heaven and to pleasing God goes through a completely different route than being protectively defensive about our sinfulness. That we are sinners is a fact, but it is also a fact that God has developed a wonderful plan, giving us a relationship with Jesus Christ, to work around our sinfulness and get us into heaven. The purpose of the Church is to inform the world about God's plan.

But, the ruler had not received the memo. Since the ruler missed the point of Jesus' answer, Jesus amended His answer in such a way as to get the ruler's attention. **Luke 18:22** records:

22 So when Jesus heard these things, He said to him, "You still lack one thing. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me."

Now, this statement is an individual invitation from Jesus to the ruler, rather than universal Christian doctrine. Jesus is not condemning wealth or calling for us to sell all of our possessions in this world or inviting everyone to join the number of the Apostles. Jesus is giving a specific invitation to a specific individual at a specific time to join a specific group.

You may remember the episode of Jesus preaching at Lake Gennesaret, when Jesus used Peter's boat as a pulpit. Peter and the boys happened to be in the harbor because they had had a bad night fishing and caught nothing. When Jesus finished preaching, He instructed Peter to let down his nets again, and when Peter and his partners did so, they caught so many fish that both Peter's boat and his partner's boat began to sink from the weight of bringing them back to shore. Peter realized that something supernatural was going on, and a man that could command the fish to jump into the nets at that rate had too much power to stand near. **Luke 5:8-11** records:

8 When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!"

9 For he and all who were with him were astonished at the catch of fish which they had taken;

10 and so also were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon.

And Jesus said to Simon, **“Do not be afraid. From now on you will catch men.”**

11 So when they had brought their boats to land, they forsook all and followed [Jesus].

Peter and the boys did not take the time to sell all of their stuff, but they left it where it was and followed Jesus. While the specific circumstances of each call from Jesus may be different, in each case, the focus is on following Jesus, rather than trying to establish our own righteousness by following our interpretation of the minutia of the law. Jesus entered a certain town, and had a confrontation with the leaders of the town, as recorded in **Matthew 12:9-13: 9 Now when He had departed from there, [Jesus] went into their synagogue.**

10 And behold, there was a man who had a withered hand. And [the synagogue leaders] asked [Jesus], saying, “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?”—that they might accuse Him.

11 Then [Jesus] said to them, “What man is there among you who has one sheep, and if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will not lay hold of it and lift it out?

12 Of how much more value then is a man than a sheep? Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.”

13 Then [Jesus] said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.” And [the man] stretched it out, and it was restored as whole as the other.

Jesus made a good argument. A man is more valuable than a sheep. But in **Matthew 12:14-15:**

14 Then the Pharisees went out and plotted against Him, how they might destroy Him.

15 But when Jesus knew it, He withdrew from there. And great multitudes followed Him, and He healed them all.

The scribes, Pharisees and teachers of the law were so wrapped up in the letter of the law that they missed the spirit, that is, God’s true purpose in giving them the law. Jesus pointed the meaning of the law out to them with a very simple analogy of a sheep in a pit that they should have been able to understand. Jesus was teaching both they and the Apostles that which God had in mind when He gave the commandments to Moses, so that they would know how to administer the Church when Jesus turned it over to them.

But one class does not a degree make. That’s why the Apostles had to follow Jesus. We generally can’t understand that which Jesus is saying as He brings a radical redefinition of reality to the world with His unique pastoral presence.

The truth of God was too great and too different from their own thoughts for the Apostles to understand from one lesson; they needed an immersion into the life of Christ to even begin to think as He did. And Jesus gives the command “follow me” when he sees a student whom He feels has the credentials to enroll in His school.

Of course, Jesus also knew that everyone would not allow their minds to be rearranged. He gave the Apostles instructions when He sent them out to preach, in **Luke 9:1-5:**

1 Then [Jesus] called His twelve disciples together and gave them power and authority over all demons, and to cure diseases.

2 He sent them to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick.

3 And [Jesus] said to them, “Take nothing for the journey, neither staffs nor bag nor bread nor money; and do not have two tunics apiece.

4 “Whatever house you enter, stay there, and from there depart.

5 And whoever will not receive you, when you go out of that city, shake off the very dust

from your feet as a testimony against them.”

Understanding the preaching of the Kingdom of God and having access to the power of God is an introduction to Jesus' course. But people reject Jesus' course because they can't absorb the different way of looking at God that Jesus proposes and they can't stand the introspection and the discipline that Jesus' course homework requires. Think of it yourself. Just imagine that you came into a town having the power that Jesus gave the Apostles. When you began healing the sick, the people of the town refused to receive you. "But, I'm here to save you and to help your sick people", you might tell them.

"We don't care", they might reply, "get out of our town."

People that refuse to acknowledge and benefit from the power of God should be destroyed, shouldn't they? They are hopeless and worthless and not worthy to use up the oxygen that they breathe every day, wouldn't you agree? Jesus ran into that very situation, in **Luke 9:51-56**:

51 Now it came to pass, when the time had come for [Jesus] to be received up, that He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem,

52 and sent messengers before His face. And as they went, they entered a village of the Samaritans, to prepare for Him.

53 But they did not receive [Jesus], because His face was set for the journey to Jerusalem.

54 And when His disciples James and John saw this, they said, "Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, just as Elijah did?"

55 But [Jesus] turned and rebuked them, and said, "You do not know what manner of spirit you are of.

56 For the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives but to save them." And they went to another village.

Do you see the difference in perspective between Jesus and the sons of thunder, James and John? The Godly view is always the long view. "Of course, we ought not kill them", Jesus tells the Apostles. "Although they rejected us today, this is not the last day. Didn't you reject God at some earlier time during your life? God let you live long enough to change your position and join the Christian band. Shouldn't you have the same mercy on your brother that God had on you?"

But, James and John, like most Christians, take the short term perspective because they are personally offended by the rejection. Their egos are tied up in their decision. Their perspective is not that the people of the town are rejecting God, but that the people of the town are rejecting them personally. And if there is one thing with which people have a difficult time, it is rejection.

But being a good Christian means having the ability to calmly accept rebuke and rejection. After all, as Christians, we really aren't that good. If we had to stand before God with all of our sinful methods of keeping the letter of the law while ignoring the spirit of it spotlighted, and with all of our ulterior motives for doing good works shown, we would be in pretty sad shape. Since Jesus is giving us a chance to learn and grow as Christians, ought we not give the same chance to others? So, when Jesus was rejected at the one village, He didn't destroy them, but He just took His ministry to another village.

When Jesus challenged the ruler to give up his possessions and join the Christian band, **Mark 10:22** records:

22 But [the ruler] was sad at this word, and went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

Jesus is offering the ruler a glorious future, and the ruler is sorrowful, because, in order to grasp the future, he has to give up the past. In his past, the ruler was rich and powerful, but Jesus is calling him to give up his earthly riches in order to receive treasure in heaven. The ruler had a decision to make, and in the parable of the seeds in the field, in **Matthew 13:22**, Jesus says:

22 Now he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful.

That is why the command to “sell all you have” is not a universal admonition. The only people that have to sell all that they have are the ones who receive their seed among the thorns. There are some that are planted in good soil and produce a crop regardless of the amount of riches that they have.

But Jesus did not condemn the ruler nor did Jesus follow him seeking acceptance, because Jesus knew that the ruler had to make up his own mind. Jesus hoped that the ruler would repent so that his sins, of arrogance if nothing else, could be forgiven.

Last week, in our discussion about forgiveness, I mentioned that when someone sins against us, we do not have the responsibility to forgive them unless they repent. Jesus tells us, in **Luke 17:3-4**:

3 Take heed to yourselves. If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him.

4 And if he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times in a day returns to you, saying, ‘I repent,’ you shall forgive him.”

Repentance and forgiveness are the whole point of the Gospel. In **Luke 24:46-47**:

46 Then [Jesus] said to them, “Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day,

47 and that repentance and remission [meaning forgiveness] of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.

Repenting of our sin is a requirement before God will forgive us. So, when the ruler went away, on the one hand, the Lord did not curse him, and on the other hand, the Lord did not go after him. The Lord gave the ruler an invitation, but He left the decision to accept or reject the invitation in the hands of the ruler.

That is why we ought not forgive someone that does not repent. To do so would take the decision to repent out of their hands and put it in ours, but, as much as we might wish to, we cannot repent for someone else, just as Jesus could not accept eternal life for the ruler. Nor can we make someone else repent when we want them to do so, on our timetable. If someone is going to repent, they are going to do so on their own schedule, not on ours. It is our job to give the invitation, to give the person space as God works in his or her life, to pray for them that they will come to repentance, and be ready for reconciliation should they decide to do so.

Jesus does not demand that every rich person that He meets divest himself of his income to be saved. Sometimes, Jesus challenges, and other times Jesus comforts. Let me explain using a family scenario.

Mothers and fathers have different roles in raising children. When a boy goes out to play, sometimes the game becomes rough, and the boy may come home with an injury, like a skinned knee or a sprained finger. Generally speaking, it is Mommy's job to kiss the boo-boo, put some Neosporin on it, and comfort her son in his pain. Generally speaking, it is Daddy's job to evaluate the injury, make sure that it is not serious, and then send the boy back out there to get back in the game. The general parameters of parenthood are this: mothers protect their children's feelings, and fathers send their children out to get their feelings hurt so that they will learn to get over their hurts and function in the real world. The design of God is that children have the polarity of both parents so that each parent can function when their type of input is more appropriate to the situation.

For example, in **Luke 19:1-10**:

1 Then Jesus entered and passed through Jericho.

2 Now behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus who was a chief tax collector, and he was rich.

3 And he sought to see who Jesus was, but could not because of the crowd, for he was of short stature.

4 So he ran ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see [Jesus], for He was going to pass that way.

5 And when Jesus came to the place, He looked up and saw him, and said to him, "Zacchaeus, make haste and come down, for today I must stay at your house."

6 So he made haste and came down, and received Him joyfully.

7 But when they saw it, they all complained, saying, "He has gone to be a guest with a man who is a sinner."

8 Then Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord, I give half of my goods to the poor; and if I have taken anything from anyone by false accusation, I restore fourfold."

9 And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because he also is a son of Abraham;

10 for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost."

We see that Jesus used different tactics to influence different rich men. Jesus used comfort to influence Zacchaeus, rather than the challenge that He used to confront the ruler. Jesus knows when the situation calls for the challenge of a father to his son, as in the case of the ruler, and then when the situation calls for the comfort of a mother for the feelings of her child, as He exhibited in the case of Zacchaeus. Interestingly, we, as men and women, tend to travel to the pole to which we are accustomed until we have developed sufficient Christian maturity. That is part of the reason that God says, in **Genesis 2:18**:

18 And the LORD God said, "It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him."

God made the woman a helper for the man, and not the other way around, because, especially as the child grows and develops, challenge is more often appropriate than comfort. That is why God says, in **Ephesians 5:22-24**:

22 Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord.

23 For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body.

24 Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything.

But although God has designated the husband as the leader, the husband ought always be aware that the reason that God has given women a different perspective is that the combination of a woman's comforting perspective with the challenge of a man is also often appropriate as well, which is why God says, in **Ephesians 5:25, 28**:

25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her,**28 So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself.**

Marriages go poorly when wives refuse to submit to their husband's leadership, and marriages go equally poorly when husband fail to be loving and considerate of their wives' gentleness. And, like the situation with the ruler in the prior parable, you generally do not have the ability to change the other person's perspective, because you cannot induce someone else to repent. The solution to the problem of an intended that doesn't have the proper respect for male/female polarity is to do your due diligence before you make your commitment.

If a woman is disdainful of masculinity and the masculine perspective in general, don't marry her. If a man does not respond lovingly to the comforting administrations of femininity, and can never see the value of the feminine perspective, don't marry him.

So, one of the major purposes of marriage is to increase each of our perspectives. Challenge and comfort are equally useful when used properly, and God has decreed that it is good if spouses combine their perspectives to come to the best method for raising children and for dealing with situations in life. That is why the normalization of out-of-wedlock births and single parent families is one of the great sociological tragedies of our time, and is a major contributor to the more antisocial nature of our community. Single parent families are contrary to the plan of God, because when a family is led by only one perspective, the polarity that God plans for the family is lost and the child is either over-mothered, and develops a self-centered, self-indulgent perspective, or over-fathered, and becomes driven or vicious.

But Jesus gives us His Word for perspective and the tools to develop perspective in our lives. As I said earlier, we all need to rethink the way that we are living our lives. And we need to rethink continually, because one class does not a degree make. Keeping the commandments is the foundation of Christianity, but keeping the commandments is much like having the proper breathing techniques in swimming. You can't swim without breathing properly, but just breathing properly alone will not enable you to win the race. There's much more to it than that.

That is another reason that marriage, particularly longevity in marriage, is so important. You can't develop the type of perspective that you need to emulate Jesus Christ in a short period of time. That is why Jesus gives us eternal life and the tools with which to live it, and then sends us into the world to develop our Christian perspective through our interactions with others, particularly, our spouses, children, family and friends, so that we can learn how to swim well enough to win the race. So let us use our intimate relationships to develop our long range perspective, emulating God and His Son Jesus Christ, let us not reject the differences in one another's points of view, but decide to combine our spouses thinking with our own as tools that

we bring to one another to learn the lessons that the Lord is trying to teach us, and let us, through our marriages, continue to grow in grace, and in the knowledge of Jesus Christ.

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