

Christ Reformation Church

Tillamook, Oregon

You Must be Born Again!

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The Words, Works, and Person of Christ

The Gospel of Luke

The Free Gift that Costs
Everything (Pt 7)

October 30, 2022

Sermon Text: Luke 18:18-30

Scripture Reading:

1Ti 6:6-10 But godliness with contentment is great gain, (7) for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. (8) But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content. (9) But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. (10) For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this

craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.

This morning we see this very warning played out in the man commonly known as *the rich young ruler*. He came to Jesus for all appearances in a humble and eager manner. But that initial impression is soon demonstrated to be false. Here was a man who was used to *success*. He was a ruler of the Jews. He was rich. He was popular. And his apparent piety as shown in his outward keeping of the Law no doubt earned him a reputation of saintliness among the people.

Imagine then someone in our day who seems to have everything going their way. Who seem to have that Midas touch so that everything turns to gold for them. Rarely, if ever, have they ever experienced anyone pointing out some flaw or

failure in their life. They even are confident that God Himself would praise them.

And then comes the blow. This man comes to Jesus and perhaps for the first time in his life he is told that *nothing he has ever done is good*. That he in fact does not measure up to God's standard. That is exactly what happens here – listen to it once more:

Luk 18:18-30 And a ruler asked him, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” (19) And Jesus said to him, “Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone.

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

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

(22) 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.”

(23) But when he heard these things, he became very sad, for he was extremely rich.

(24) Jesus, seeing that he had become sad, said, “How difficult it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God! (25) 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.”

(26) Those who heard it said, “Then who can be saved?” (27) But he said, “What is impossible with man is possible with God.”

(28) And Peter said, “See, we have left our homes and followed you.”

(29) 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, (30) who will not receive many times more in this time, and in the age to come eternal life.”

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

We saw last time that this man had a seriously flawed view of “good.” He thought HE was good and his notions about God’s attribute of “good” were far inferior to the true, infinite and perfect goodness which God alone possesses.

Are there not many, many such people today? Even many who claim to be Christians? They think themselves good enough to be approved of by God. They think that their “goodness” measures up to God’s required standard of which He alone possesses? Just ask them and they will tell you.

(22) 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.”

“All these I have kept from my youth.” I think that this man fully expected Jesus to respond with something like, “You lack nothing.

You are perfectly suited for God’s kingdom and eternal life.” I don’t think he was humble at all. His eagerness and kneeling were simply a false confidence that once again he was going to be commended for his successes.

But instead –

(22) 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.”

Jesus had just cited commandments to him from the second table of the Law which concerns love for our fellow man – don’t steal, don’t murder, don’t commit adultery, and so on. This man had of course entirely missed the fact that, as Paul says, *the Law is spiritual*.

Did you notice that Jesus omitted the 10th commandment – “*you shall not covet*”? I think He did this because now he is bringing it home to this man to show him how

miserably he had failed to keep any of the Law.

Think about coveting. You can claim to not be a murderer or a liar or a thief or an adulterer or a sabbath-breaker by simply not committing any of these outward acts. That is what Paul had done as a Pharisee. In fact, his law-keeping excelled all his fellow Pharisees.

But eventually it was that last commandment that nailed him –

You shall not covet.

Again – think carefully about this sin of coveting. Can you fake it? By that I mean, can you perform an outward act of not coveting? No. I can not kill. I can not steal. But how do I not do something that is committed *in my heart*?

Rom 7:7-10 What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, “You shall not covet.” (8) But sin,

seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness. For apart from the law, sin lies dead. (9) I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin came alive and I died. (10) The very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me.

Paul finally got it, and it hit him hard.

Rom 7:14 For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin.

The Law, which this young man so confidently maintained he had perfectly obeyed all his life, *is spiritual*. That is, it must be obeyed *in the thoughts and intentions of one’s heart and mind*. And this is impossible. In fact, what the Law is meant to do is show us our sin:

Rom 7:12-13 So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good. (13) Did that which is good, then, bring death to me? By no means! It was sin, producing death in me through

what is good, in order that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure.

And again:

Rom 3:20 For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.

1Co 15:56 The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law.

This is why, incidentally, *the Law's demands had to be perfectly and fully dealt with for us by Christ so that we are no longer under the Law's demands and resultant curse.* If we are in Christ, if we have been born again, then the Law no longer has dominion over us. We are no longer under its condemnation. *But you must be born again!*

All of this the young man had missed. The Law is a mirror to show us our sin, but when this man looked in the mirror all he would say is “my, what a good boy am I.”

And so I believe that Jesus here is bringing this man's face right into the mirror to show him his miserable condition before God. And what He is showing him is this 10th (and the first also) commandment – *you shall not covet.* Because once the man would realize that he was guilty of covetousness which is a sin committed from the heart and mind, he would be forced to see that he was in fact an unholy idolater who never got past even the first commandment

Exo 20:3 “You shall have no other gods before me.

And you can be sure that this man had a god. And idol. Jesus is commanding him to give up that idol.

Luk 18:22 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.”

“Just one more little thing, and you will have real treasure in heaven.” The man’s ears perked up I am sure. It’s just going to be one more small detail – no problem. But it is here that Jesus hits him with the bombshell – *sell everything you have and give the money to the poor. Then come and follow me.*

This had to be one of those moments (and remember, the crowd is probably looking on) when the person addressed responds with, “excuse me. What did you say?” I think the crowd was shocked too. I mean if this guy didn’t measure up, where did that leave them?

NOTE: It is necessary to give up our idols, but it is not enough. We must then follow Jesus! It is only in Him that we can be justified – by HIS righteousness. To merely give up something is not sufficient. You can sell all your possessions, take a vow of poverty, live as a religious hermit, but if you do not follow Jesus, if you do not believe in Him – in WHO He is and in WHAT He has done for the redemption of sinners, then all is still lost.

So Jesus is not here teaching that everyone must sell all their possessions in order to be saved. What He is teaching is that to be saved we must repent of our idols, put them away forever, and no longer have any other gods except God alone.

The rich young ruler’s response is the typical and predominant response to Jesus that most people have:

Luk 18:23 But when he heard these things, he became very sad, for he was extremely rich.

Matthew adds:

Mat 19:22 When the young man heard this he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

He left. He walked away from the only One who could give him the eternal life he asked about. He clung to a penny and rejected billions. Extreme wealth, great possessions in this world are mere pennies compared to Christ’s kingdom.

Consider this matter of real treasure:

...and you will have treasure in heaven

Luk 12:20-21 But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?' (21) So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God."

1Ti 6:17-19 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. (18) They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, (19) thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life.

I am certain that there is an increasing covetousness and greed spreading in our day. It is idolatry:

Col 3:5 Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, **and covetousness, which is idolatry.**

Many are being swept away by it and if they do not repent, give it up and follow Christ, they will perish in hell. Let me ask you this:

If Jesus stood before you - put yourself in the shoes of the rich young ruler - and He said to YOU, sell all you have, give the proceeds to the poor, and come and follow Me - what would you do? What ARE you doing? And remember, selling all your idols and not keeping a penny of the proceeds is just the start. THEN you must follow Jesus, deny yourself, go where He went, believe all He has said, trust Him for who He is.

It is easy, you see, to point our finger at the rich young ruler for walking away - but what are we doing? Are we craving popularity with people? Jesus is commanding us to let it go. Are we trying to go

to heaven but at the same time unwilling to be hated by family?

Jesus knows our idols. He knows your idols. He sees them hidden in your mind and heart. And if you won't give them up, you cannot follow Him.

And this point brings us to the next:

Luk 18:24-25 Jesus, seeing that he had become sad, said, "How difficult it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God! (25) 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."

As you may know, much has been written and many theories proposed about what this camel and the eye of a needle is. Some suggest that there was a camel gate of some sort in Jerusalem which was small and narrow so that only the camel could barely fit through but none of its cargo. R.C. Sproul notes however that there is not historical support that such a gate ever existed.

So what did Jesus mean? I think I can tell you and I think it is quite simple as shown by the context:

You cannot enter the kingdom of God packing along your idols. To enter, to follow Christ on that Narrow Way through that Strait Gate, you must jettison everything calling for your worship and worship God alone. A camel loaded down with cargo stands a better chance of going through the eye of a needle than an idolater has entering the kingdom of God. And the rich are in particular danger here.

1Jn 5:21 Little children, keep yourselves from idols.

"I am well thought of in the community for all of my service."

Get rid of that idol.

"I have done a fine job of raising my children and I am a model parent."

Get rid of that idol.

“I come to church every Sunday (as well we should), I have been baptized and I tithe generously.”

Get rid of that idol.

“I am working hard and making money so I can fulfill my dream of a nice house and land and enjoy my retirement years.”

Get rid of that idol.

What is the single sin that takes the sinner to hell? What is the fundamental, root sin of the sinner? It is the worship of a false god. Idolatry. And you are all living in a time when the lure and pull of idolatry is powerful. Satan’s ultimate goal is to cause us to worship an idol, which is to worship him, and his favorite weapon it would seem is *riches*.

Luk 18:24 Jesus, seeing that he had become sad, said, “How difficult it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!

Finally, let’s consider the question:

Luk 18:26-27 Those who heard it said, “Then who can be saved?” (27) But he said, “What is impossible with man is possible with God.”

Those who heard it. This included the disciples but apparently there were lots of others there too. You can be sure that when the crowd saw one of their model citizens walk away from such a hard saying of Jesus, many if not most were very critical. “What?! This guy is way overboard. Way too harsh. Way too narrow. We are going to some other rabbi who is more pleasant to hear.”

But it is a good question, isn’t it? Who can be saved then? I mean, a camel CANNOT go through the eye of a needle! And Jesus, you are saying that this impossibility is more possible than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God! An impossible impossibility!

(27) But he said, “What is

impossible with man is possible with God.”

And, in fact, next time we are going to see just such a divine miracle performed. We are going to meet a short, little rich man name Zacchaeus.

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NOTE from J.C. Ryle:

We learn, lastly, from these verses — how mighty is the power of God's grace. We see this in the words which our Lord addressed to those who heard Him speaking of the rich man's danger. They said, "Who then, can be saved?" Our Lord's reply is broad and full, "The things which are impossible with men — are possible with God." By grace, a man may serve God and reach Heaven in any condition of life.

The Word of God contains many striking instances in illustration of this doctrine. Abraham, and David, and Hezekiah, and Jehoshaphat, and Josiah, and Job, and Daniel — were all great and rich. Yet they all served God and were saved. They

all found grace sufficient for them, and overcame the temptations by which they were surrounded.

Their Lord and Master still lives — and what He did for them, He can do for others. He can give power to rich Christians to follow Christ — in spite of their riches.

Let us beware of allowing ourselves to suppose that our own salvation is impossible, because of the hardness of our position. It is too often a suggestion of the devil — and our own lazy hearts. We must not give way to it. It matters not where we live — whether hovel or palace. It matters not what our income may be — whether we are burdened with riches, or pinched with poverty. Grace, and not place, is the hinge on which our salvation turns. Money will not keep us out of Heaven — if our hearts are right before God. Christ can make us more than conquerors. Christ can enable us to win our way through every difficulty. "I can do all things," said Paul, "through Christ who strengthens me." (Philippians 4:13.)

