

Communication has certainly changed over the last 20 years. Emojis have replaced words. Emojis (in many cases – especially for the 50-year-old-and-above-crowd)... have made communication more difficult.

Did you hear about the recent court case up in Canada that emojis can be legally binding? It seems that Canadians (now) need to adapt to new modes of communication, a judge in Saskatchewan ruled in favor of a grain buyer suing a farmer for backing out of a business deal.

According to court documents, grain buyer Kent Mickleborough sent a mass text message to a variety of potential vendors expressing a willingness to purchase a certain tonnage of flax at a set price. Chris Achter, a local grain farmer, responded in the affirmative. Mickleborough says he spoke to Achter over the phone, then texted a photo of a contract, asking in a text to “please confirm flax contract.”

Achter responded to that text with a thumbs-up emoji. He ended up not delivering the flax by the agreed-upon date, however, because the market price of the flax had increased and he was looking for a better deal. In the lawsuit, Mickleborough claimed that the thumbs-up emoji indicated a willingness to adopt the terms of the contract; Achter, however, disputes that claim, saying that he intended only to confirm receipt of the document, not a commitment to sign it.

Justice Timothy Keene wrote in his ruling:

This court readily acknowledges that a (thumbs-up) emoji is a non-traditional means to “sign” a document. But nevertheless, under these circumstances this was a valid way to convey the two purposes of a signature ... This appears to be the new reality in Canadian society.

Courts will have to be ready to meet the new challenges that may arise from the use of emojis and the like.

We may have difficulty today whenever we try to communicate by society's standards. In the college classroom... I am told that I must avoid using pronouns like "him," "her," "his," or "hers" – until I know which one the student prefers.

Why do I bring all of this up...? (I mention it as a contrast.) Because one of the first things to "hit us" in today's passage is how effective Jesus was in His communication. Listen to these words from Chuck Swindoll:

Any study of the life of Jesus reveals Him as a master communicator. He didn't merely talk; He connected. He didn't ask aimless or random questions; He pierced through pretense to expose the real issues of the heart, often without others realizing what was happening. But Jesus never used His skills to humiliate or demean others; He used truth like a scalpel, never a dagger. He interacted with others to educate and then to liberate. He sought out sinners—not to condemn, but to redeem.

All of this is true (which is what we will clearly see in our passage today.)

It was also obvious in the passage that we studied last week (the passage that comes before today's in Luke's Gospel.) ... Jesus' jarring declaration: *"I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it"* (Luke 18:17)... stunned His listeners into considering a truth that is so essential to salvation. Heaven is only for those who come to God in total helplessness. ...

But the Gospel writer (Luke) was not finished making this point. Luke (under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit) was also being a master communicator. Following last week's lesson... Luke presents a strong contrast. Right after... we have the rich young ruler... in whom... as we

examine this passage... we will find is the exact opposite of a helpless babe. The character of our passage today... had “great wealth” and the clout that went with it... He was powerful and affluent. He wanted to come to God on the basis of his natural inclination - DOING something – instead of as a helpless babe who can’t do anything (or bring anything.)

Luke 18:18-20

Maybe he had watched Jesus tenderly hold the little children... as we saw in the verses just before these. ... Perhaps he stood and watched Jesus lift His eyes to Heaven... and pronounce individual blessings on every child. This might have made him emotional and positively inclined to Jesus.

Three Gospel writers include this exchange between Jesus and the rich young ruler. From each we gain a little more of the details about the scene. Luke (*alone*) tells us that the man is a ruler. Mark says he is rich... Matthew says he is young. (This is why I have been referring to him as “the rich young ruler.”)

Mark’s description of this ruler’s action is the most vivid of the three accounts. ... As he tells it... not only did this young man run up to Jesus... he also dropped to his knees in front of him. ... (Luke - as he often did - abbreviates the entire event... and simply states that a certain ruler asked Jesus a question.) ... But knowing what Mark reveals about the man’s highly emotional state... (running up and dropping to his knees)... he may well have been gasping out with a sincere question that was disturbing his heart and mind.

This man is probably not a synagogue ruler. They were (normally) older men and Matt. 19:20, 22 tells us that he is young. ... So... he is probably

an influential and wealthy lay-person or civic leader... a leading man of his community who may have been known for his piety.

He then responded with an impressive question, “*Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?*” ... The ruler appears to be a sensitive man with unusual openness. Unlike the Pharisee who earlier had asked the same question (in Luke 10:25)... this man was not testing Jesus. He truly wanted to know what to do.

As we shall see... even though he meticulously observed the Law... he evidently had found no assurance of eternal life. He assumed that some additional generous action (some great sacrifice) would secure his highest good. And he was willing to do it. He had always been able to pay for what he had in this life, and he was quite prepared to do so now. “*Name the price! I’m ready to do whatever it takes!*”

But there is a subtle negative here... because the ruler’s question assumed that he had the inner power to do whatever was required and that he was intrinsically good. As drawn to Jesus as he was (however)... this rich young man had a fatal flaw in his thinking. ... He thought that he would have to do something to inherit eternal life.

The Bible is clear that THIS is NOT the way.

Titus 3:5 (ESV)

⁵ he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit,

No doubt... the rich young ruler was “good”... when compared to most men. The ruler indeed had a winsome spiritual attractiveness... but his “goodness” is about to be seen as a two-edged sword.

Before the Lord answered the man’s question... He challenged the young ruler’s choice of terms - for two reasons. ... First... because Jesus had no tolerance for flattery. He didn’t have an ego to stroke. ... Second... because the man’s concept of “good” didn’t amount to much (as we are about to discover.) ... Therefore... his compliment of calling Jesus “good” didn’t mean very much.

Jesus realized that if they were going to talk about eternal life... He must redefine “good” for the man. ... The moral worth of a person must be measured against a proper example of goodness. ... God is the only valid benchmark of goodness...

Jesus (the Master communicator) asked a pointed question: “*Why do you call me good?*”

In that day... the Jewish people taught that *only* God should be called “good.” Pharisees... scribes... or rabbis were never referred to as “good.” There is not one example in the *Talmud* of a rabbi being addressed as “good.” (It was carefully avoided.) So for this man to refer to the Lord Jesus as “good” would either have to be to recognize the deity of the Lord Jesus Christ... or that it was extreme flattery.

Jesus tries (here) to find out what this man believes. He didn’t deny that He was God at all. He was confirming the truth that He was God when He said: “*There is none good except God.*” He was not saying, “*You should not have called me good, for God alone is good. I am not God; therefore I am not*

good.” The Lord was not saying this at all. He was trying to get the ruler to see that He **was** God. He was trying to get this guy to connect the dots.

... “Well, young man,” Jesus implied: “*am I absolutely good? Am I God?*”

... .. “*Think, man! If I am good... and if only God is good... then who am I... and what am I doing? Think!*” but (it will soon be apparent) that his words were only in his mouth - not in his heart. It was flattery.

Luke 18:20-22

Jesus knew that the rich young ruler... in addressing Him as “Good Teacher”... was being very superficial. ... His shallowness is evident from the praise the man bestows on himself in verse 21. (And) If this young man had really believed with all his heart that Jesus was good in the highest sense of the term... then he will obey the command (which Jesus gave him.)

But Jesus (the Master communicator) was also doing something else. The rich young ruler wanted to **do** something... and the Lord *obliged* him... showing him the foolishness of his approach.

To gain entrance to the kingdom of God, one must obey the Law of Moses with sinless perfection. Jesus then rattled off a partial list of commandments, more than enough to indict most people:

1. Do not commit adultery. (Exod. 20:14)
2. Do not murder. (Exod. 20:13)
3. Do not steal. (Exod. 20:15)
4. Do not bear false witness. (Exod. 20:16)
5. Honor your father and mother. (Exod. 20:12)

While Jesus didn't present these five of the Ten Commandments in any particular order... it's worth noting that He quoted a partial list - only those

regulating **human** relationships. He deliberately omitted God's prohibition of coveting... and He skipped over the first four regarding our relationship with God Himself.

The young man may have been sincere... but his arrogance ran high. ... He was quite sure that he passed that test with flying colors. ... By his own estimation... he was **good** and deserved to take his place in the Messiah's kingdom... affirming his obedience to all five commandments throughout his life. ... And by the standards established by the Pharisees... he probably did! ... But because no one can obey the Law of God **perfectly**... the religious leaders modified the Law with their own rules and traditions... thereby lowering the standard in order to call themselves "good." ... In other words... if you can't jump high enough to clear the moral high bar - set the bar **lower**.

Tragically... the rich young ruler missed the whole point: "*All these I have kept since I was a boy,*" he declared." ... But Jesus replied: "*You lack one thing. You have a deficit.*" There was a deficit that this young man needed to deal with in his own life.

What was ironic was the fact that the deficit was created by his wealth. It had a grip on this young man. His wealth is what made him **spiritually poor**. ... Jesus told him, "*Sell everything you own and give it to the poor, then come and follow me.*"

Christ touched the weak point in the man's character. It was his **passion** for wealth. Selling his possessions and then giving them away was too much for the man... because he was too attached to his possessions to give them away.

Many wealthy individuals are this way. Their acts of charity are too often only inspired by either the worldly recognition they will receive in giving... or by some exemption or reduction they will get in their taxes.

But giving away his wealth was one thing... however Christ demanded even more... if this man would gain “*eternal life.*” - He was to follow Christ. Sadly... though... the rich man had too much affection for (and involvements with) his riches... to follow Christ. Following Christ properly... does not permit us to attach ourselves to this world... nor to depend on worldly wealth.

The selling of all was intended to force the ruler to *trust God and humbly rely on Him*. ... Luke will present a different example of this... in the next chapter. In Luke chapter 19... we will see the positive example of Zacchaeus. He will show a complete willingness to heed the call and to be generous... as an explicit contrast. (Jesus’ disciples will do this too) – They will be contrasted with the rich young ruler (here) - who would not trust God and humbly rely on Him.

Earlier in Lukes Gospel... we saw Jesus state that true disciples must make the kingdom of God their number one priority - over family... wealth... possessions... and even their own lives.

Luke 14:26-27 (ESV)

²⁶ “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. ²⁷ Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.

Luke 16:13 (ESV)

¹³ No servant can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.”

This was not a new requirement of the kingdom. When God brought the Hebrew people out of Egypt to establish them in the Promised Land (intending to make of them His kingdom on earth)... the first four commandments set the standard. The first rule of citizenship: God is first.

Jesus simply applied the first four commandments to the young man's situation in life. He said (in so many words) *“Put God first by sacrificing your worldly treasure.”*

At first... it might seem Jesus had responded to the man's salvation question with a works answer. In all other instances... Jesus forgave sins on the basis of faith alone - but in this case... He called for the man to do an extraordinary good deed. ... That's because genuine belief always changes a person's behavior. ... People act on what they believe to be true... and they cling to what they treasure. ... By commanding the young man to relinquish his wealth... Jesus exposed the man's lack of trust in God's provision... and Christ laid bare this man's true priority. ... When given the choice between his money and his God... the young man chose money.

Please know for sure that Jesus is not advocating a “works” salvation here. (And) He is not saying that it is wrong to be wealthy. He is advocating faith in God. He is asking this particular ruler to trust in Him by selling all that he had... give to the poor... and follow the Lord. That would require this young ruler to (first of all)... humble himself by going from wealth to poverty (from

his popularity to obscurity.) ... It would require him to trust in the Lord by faith to meet all of his needs. Surrendering his possessions would be the test of whether he would put the Lord first in his life or his possessions. Would he deny himself or keep "self" number one? Would this young man seek heavenly treasures or earthly ones? Jesus knew his area of weakness and zeroed in on it. You have one thing you lack.

When we stop and think about it - in our own lives - there is almost always at least one thing or one area we lack.... A Christian can be outstanding in many areas of his or her life... but there is usually one thing he or she lacks. ... It doesn't matter who they are... what they do... or where they have been - there is at least one weak area in each one of us.

** Those who are constantly harsh and grumpy lack joy and patience.*

** Those who are bitter and angry all the time lack forgiveness.*

** Those who are greedy and selfish lack generosity and gratitude.*

** Those who are hateful lack love and compassion.*

** Those who are arrogant and proud lack humility.*

** Those who are lazy lack character and discipline.*

** Those who worry and are doubtful lack faith and trust in the Lord. The list goes on and on.*

One thing - one thing - one thing - you lack! ... In most cases... folks know their weakness. ... Some... however are blind because of their arrogance or unteachableness.

(LISTEN!)... if you want to grow and really be all that God wants you to be... then confront you weakness and do something about it. If you really

don't know... then ask those closest to you... and they will tell you and also help you. ... We make no spiritual progress at all... because we are anchored to something here on earth. We are anchored to some sin... some weakness... or some worldliness that we will not give up in our life. Unless we deal with our deficits... we will never be what God wants us to be.

Luke 18:23

When this young man heard this... he was “**very sorrowful.**” This is a strong word in the Greek language. It is from the word *perilupos {per-il'-oo-pos}* which means “to be exceedingly sorrowful; to be overcome with grief as to cause one's death.” ... He was full of regret. The young man thought that eternal life came to those who “did something”... which was a typical Jewish conviction... but when Jesus **gave** him something to do... he refused to obey! ... **He wanted salvation on his terms... not God's**... so he turned and went away in deep grief. He was not willing to deal with his deficit.

His love for his earthly possessions was his god. He did not have control over his wealth. His wealth had control over him. This man was rich - but in reality - he was poor.

Before we get too tough on him... we want to take a real good look at ourselves. ... In the lives of millions of Christians... this exact same problem exists. ... The motto of many Christians today is: “*Don't ask me to do anything that is difficult or requires sacrifice. Don't ask me to serve the Lord. Don't ask me to give anything. Just let me sit on the pew.*”

Such attitudes demonstrate a deficit in a person's life. **We want a relationship with God (only) on our terms!** ... We show such a deficit in maturity... a deficit in dedication... and therefore we experience quite a deficit in God's blessings!

Luke 18:24-27

Mark's Gospel says the disciples were "amazed" at these words (Mark 10:24). ... Why? Why were the disciples so amazed? ... Because they believed in the common "prosperity gospel" of their day... which was taught by rabbis... who used Old Testament passages to equate God's blessing with material prosperity. They taught that the rich could build up future merit and reward for themselves... by giving to the poor. To the Jewish mind it was inconceivable that riches could be a **barrier** to the kingdom.

I have seen it so abundant in the poor countries that I have visited... (Colombia... Indonesia... and the Philippines.) But it is also very prominent in the large churches here in America... and has been since the 1970's. It is the errant thinking... that ignores passages like the one we are studying today. It is the crass materialism of the "name it and claim it" ... "health and wealth **FALSE** gospel" that says "*God wants you rich... and without any physical problems.*"

*Name it and claim it, that's what faith's about!
You can have what you want if you just have no doubt.
So make out your "wish list" and keep on believin'
And you will find yourself perpetually receivin'.*

We need to hear what Jesus was really saying... and to hear it well: *wealth is a handicap!* We think the rich to be overprivileged. Jesus said they were underprivileged by depending on it. The health and wealth Gospel says:

“Go ahead and depend on it. God wants you to...” No – He doesn’t! You lose out on heaven by trying to... .. Jesus categorically says it is impossible for a man or woman who *trusts* in riches to get into Heaven.

There is to be a proper fear of being rich. There are disadvantages to having wealth — primarily what it can do to the soul. How easy it is for an earnest man or woman to become so attached to material riches that he or she forgets what is infinitely more important. Wealth can pervert one’s values. We soon know the price of everything and the value of nothing.

Jesus exposed the distracting... deluding effects of material wealth. His analogy compares wealthy people to camels and the gate of God’s kingdom to the eye of a needle. ... Jesus used this *hyperbole* (this exaggerated example) to stress the idea of human *impossibility*...

James Freeman’s book... *Manners and Customs of the Bible* states that the needle refers to a certain little gate in the wall of Jerusalem. It was called the “Needle’s Eye” and was tall and wide enough for a man to crawl through it. This little gate was used when the city gates were closed. This gate was too low for camels to get through without removing everything from their backs. The analogy was - those who were rich needed to unload the baggage of their wealth to enter in the kingdom of Heaven. They needed to stop clinging to their possessions and to stop allowing them to be a hindrance in entering the narrow way.

This all sound good... except for one little problem. (I’m sorry James Freeman)... but there has never been discovered such a gate! There has never been *one scrap of evidence* that points to this being true.

Others have noticed and written about the word for “camel.” ... In the Aramaic language (which many believe is the language that Jesus spoke... this word (“gamla”) can also be translated “thick rope.” Just as it would be difficult to thread a needle with thick rope... it would be difficult for a rich man to enter the kingdom of Heaven. So some believe that Jesus was stressing the difficulty for the rich to enter God’s kingdom - not the impossibility.

Again... just one problem... Jesus may have spoken in Aramaic... but Matthew... Mark... and Luke... all wrote in Greek... and they all used the Greek word for camel. No. Jesus is saying: “Think of it: a camel (Palestine’s largest animal) passing through the very tiny opening of a needle! IMPOSSIBLE! ... Ridiculous! ... It cannot be done. Only those who come to God as a helpless infant can enter the Kingdom of God – NOT those who trust in their wealth... or anything else.

We can only trust God to do something on our behalf deep within our hearts. ... Jesus says in verse 27: “*Nothing is impossible to God. It takes a miracle – indeed - for anyone to be saved...*”

Luke 18:28-30

The disciples react to Jesus’ statement. Peter (as usual) speaks up for them. He notes that they had already made the choice that the rich ruler refused to make. ... Peter... James... and John... had left lucrative fishing enterprises... abandoned their wealth... sacrificed their future. Peter had even left his wife in the care of others to devote himself exclusively to the Messiah and His mission. In a very literal way... these disciples (along with Matthew) had done what Jesus required of the young ruler. But (now) they

needed reassurance. ... (And) the Lord lovingly gave it to them. Theirs was a wise investment.

Three important things are said about the character of the reward. God's rewards are always the best... and the description the rewards given here confirms that truth.

First - the *size* of the reward. "*Manifold more.*" Matthew's account reads "a hundred fold more" or as we would express it: 10,000 percent! ... No one pays better interest than God. ... You will get much more than what you have sacrificed to follow Christ.

Second - the *span* of the reward. "*In this present time, and in the world to come.*" ... God's rewards to the faithful span from time to eternity. No one else can reward like that. The world may reward you for a season now... but they cannot keep rewarding you on into eternity. But God can reward over a longer period than anyone else. His rewards not only come in this life but also in eternity.

Third - the *spirituality* of the reward. "*Life everlasting.*" God's rewards include the spiritual. One who follows Jesus Christ will gain eternal life. There is no greater reward. This reward is spiritual. Not many folks are interested in the spiritual. They look only at the material for rewards. But the spiritual is the best part of the reward. Nothing beats "*Life everlasting.*"

The rich young ruler is a warning to people who want a Christian faith that does not change their values or upset their lifestyle. Jesus does not command every seeking sinner to sell everything and give to the poor, but He does put His finger of conviction on any area in our lives about which we are dishonest.