

**18:18 A ruler questioned Him, saying, "Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?"**

**18:19 And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good except God alone."**

Luke is the only gospel writer who identifies the man in this story as a ruler (ἄρχων ; *archon*). Luke uses the term ruler 17 times in Luke and Acts, often in reference to the leadership that was opposed to Jesus. This man may have been part of that social group, but it appears that he approached Jesus sincerely. He was an influential person in society. His concern was how he could gain eternal life.

Jesus first responded by commenting on the ruler's address, "good teacher." Jesus said that no one is good except God alone.

Jesus' response was not simply reiterating what every Jew already believed, nor was He denying that He was good or that He was God. Rather, He was pointing out that if God alone is good, and if He is good, then He must have something in common with God. Jesus was attempting to draw from the ruler the specific reason he had called Him good. Why would he call Jesus this if from his point of view it was unwarrantable? But if the ruler believed that Jesus was sent by God he should listen to His instruction. As Edwards says, "Jesus does not affirm His goodness but implies that His goodness is the goodness of God, the source of all goodness working in Him; 'The Son can do nothing by Himself, He can do only what He sees the Father doing' (Jn. 5:19). Given Jesus' servant posture and reticence regarding His messianic status, He directs the ruler unambiguously to God" (Edwards, 512).

**18:20 "You know the commandments, 'DO NOT COMMIT ADULTERY, DO NOT MURDER, DO NOT STEAL, DO NOT BEAR FALSE WITNESS, HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER.'"**

Jesus' response comes directly from the law and was part of the Jews' understanding of salvation (Deut. 27:26).

Deuteronomy 30 sums up this understanding. In verses 15-20 God told His people,

15 "See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, and death and adversity;

16 in that I command you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in His ways and to keep His commandments and His statutes and His judgments, that you may live and multiply, and that the LORD your God may bless you in the land where you are entering to possess it.

17 "But if your heart turns away and you will not obey, but are drawn away and worship other gods and serve them,

18 I declare to you today that you shall surely perish. You will not prolong your days in the land where you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess it.

19 "I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. So choose life in order that you may live, you and your descendants,

20 by loving the LORD your God, by obeying His voice, and by holding fast to Him; for this is your life and the length of your days, that you may live in the land which the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give them."

It should be remembered that in every age salvation was tied to what God had revealed up to that point of time. Therefore the content of what one was required to believe changed as more truth was revealed. At the time that Jesus spoke to the ruler, God had revealed Himself in the Law and the prophets; therefore, the ruler was responsible for being obedient to the law. But God had also revealed Himself in the Son. Thus, the ruler also needed to follow Christ. The necessity of both come out in the passage, but the first to be mentioned is obedience to the law.

***18:21 And he said, "All these things I have kept from my youth."***

Edwards explains why the ruler specified that his obedience to the law was "from his youth." He writes:

A Jewish father was responsible for the deeds of his son until the age of 13, at which age the son was obliged to fulfill all the commandments. In asserting, "all these I have kept since I was a boy" (v. 21), the ruler claims to be a *bar mitzvah*, a "son of the commandment." Christian readers who recall Jesus' teaching that intent is equivalent to deed (Matt. 5:21-48) often doubt the sincerity of the ruler's claim. It is important to recall that, with the exception of the final commandment against coveting, the Ten Commandments require acts, and these could indeed be kept – even if one thought or intended otherwise. Paul himself boasted of having been blameless in his moral activity as a Jew (Phil. 3:6). . . (Edwards, 513)

***18:22 When Jesus heard this, He said to him, "One thing you still lack; sell all that you possess and distribute it to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me."***

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

"When Jesus heard this" that is, when He heard the ruler say that he had kept the law, He responded with two directives. The first consists of two imperatives, "sell ... distribute."

The ruler was to sell what he had and give to the poor; by doing so he could demonstrate his love for the destitute which reflected the love that Jesus Himself had for them. In return, the man would be given treasure in heaven, the blessings of eternal life.

The second directive was to follow Jesus in a discipleship relationship. This was necessary for true obedience to the law. Unless the law leads one to Jesus, something is lacking. If the ruler truly loved the Father (if he truly kept the first commandment), he would love the Son whom He had sent.

Edwards comments:

It is often assumed that, if one followed the law perfectly, one would be assured of eternal life. We may assume that the ruler has indeed kept the law, for Jesus does not challenge his claim. Nevertheless, says Jesus, "You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have a treasure in heaven. Then come, follow Me" (v. 22; also 12:33-34). Peter, Andrew, and the Zebedees were not commanded to sell their possessions in order to follow

Jesus (5:1-11). This particular command is a clue that the ruler's "exceeding wealth" exerts a power over him that the boats and nets did not exert over the first four disciples. "Luke sees a direct relationship between the quantity of one's possessions and the difficulty of one's discipleship." The irony between the ruler and the children of the former story is palpable. The children possess nothing, yet the kingdom of God is theirs; the ruler possesses everything, yet he lacks something. Only when he becomes like a child, i.e., sells all he has, will he possess everything (Edwards, 514).

"So the ruler stood at the crossroad of eternal destiny. He really wanted eternal life. He wanted Jesus to lead him to God. He wanted peace and rest and joy and happiness, assurance, security, hope, heaven. But he wanted it in addition to, not in the place of, all his priorities" (MacArthur). When push came to shove he could not free himself from the things he loved most. He had no power to let go of his wealth, power, and privilege.

Jesus' question revealed what the man really loved. He did not love God above all else. When given the choice between keeping his possessions or inheriting eternal life with God forever, he chose the former. Eternal life is only for those who love the Lord their God with all their heart, soul, mind and strength, more than self and more than worldly possessions.

The ruler departed with great sorrow. We are given no clue if his sorrow was a final resignation from which there was no return, or if it eventually led to repentance.

***18:24 And Jesus looked at him and said, "How hard it is for those who are wealthy to enter the kingdom of God!"***

***18:25 "For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."***

***18:26 They who heard it said, "Then who can be saved?"***

***18:27 But He said, "The things that are impossible with people are possible with God."***

Out of that incident Jesus taught the disciples a crucial lesson: "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."

For some reason people seem to stumble over the simple illustration in verse 25. Some say that "camel" is a wrong translation and the actual word was "rope." This view is based on the word "rope" appearing in two later manuscripts that are of little consequence (Edwards, 516). Furthermore, such a translation does not change anything since a rope cannot fit through the eye of a needle any easier than a camel can.

Another popular teaching has circulated that claims that there was a gate in Jerusalem called "the eye of the needle" through which a camel could not pass unless all its baggage was removed and it went through on its knees. It is then claimed that Jesus was referring to this gate and was picturing our need to give up everything and come to God on our knees in order to enter the kingdom. That would be interesting if true, but there is no evidence for the existence of such a gate.

Jesus' words are not intended to teach that the rich *can* get into heaven if they give up everything and come on their knees; instead, He is teaching *by way of hyperbole* that entry into the kingdom is *impossible* for the rich (18:27); in fact, it is impossible for everyone. In Jewish society it was believed that the more wealth someone had the more favor they had with God. As the thinking went, if they were blessed by God in this life, they would surely be blessed in the life to come. This is why the disciples were shocked and asked, "Who then can be saved?" If even the rich cannot be saved, who could?

Verse 25 illustrates that the love of wealth and the corresponding inability to give it up even if demanded to do so, becomes a barrier to eternal life. "Wealth can shrink the door of the kingdom down to an impassable peephole. The self-focused security of the wealthy is a padlock against kingdom entry" (Bock, 1486). However, what is *impossible* with men is *possible* with God (v. 27). Though the rich cannot free themselves from their love of wealth, God can free them from it. Paul said in Romans 1:16, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation . . ." Only God can change the heart, there is no heart that He cannot change.

**18:28 Peter said, "Behold, we have left our own homes and followed You."**

The word "homes" is not present in the original text. It is an interpretation of the literal wording, "we have left our own . . ." What was left is not specified although the word often refers to one's belongings, possessions, or home. However, in this context it seems better to take it as meaning "everything." Peter is contrasting himself and the other disciples to the rich young ruler. "We have left everything we own and followed You." To paraphrase, he is saying, "We did exactly what the ruler refused to do. We followed You. We left home, friends, family, work, and synagogues." In the wording of Matthew 19:27, "We have forsaken all and followed You."

**18:29 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,  
18:30 who will not receive many times as much at this time and in the age to come, eternal life."**

Jesus implicitly agreed with Peter's assessment of the disciples' commitment and assured them that whatever is perceived as loss in this life is nothing compared to what is gained in the life to come.

"The church in the modern West often compromises the gospel by proclaiming an 'inviting' faith, without costs or demands. Jesus respects both the integrity of the gospel and his hearers by declaring from the outset the demands of discipleship – demands, in fact, that deterred would-be followers in His day (9:57-62). Ironically, these demands did not deprive and deplete those who accept them. In the second mission journey, the disciples are sent out in want (10:4), but they return in joy and empowerment (10:17). Likewise, those who forsake homes and family for Christ receive from Christ many times more than what they forsake (v. 30)" (Edwards, 518).

Bock summarizes the story of the rich ruler as follows:

Luke 18:18–30 is a study in contrast. Commitment to Jesus is serious. The rich ruler thought that he was devoted to God and could earn acceptance on the basis of his own good works. He thought that he had kept God's Commandments. Jesus offers him a challenge that reveals the condition of his heart, a challenge designed to show that God was not really first: sell all, give the proceeds to the poor, and follow Jesus. Even with the promise of reward from heaven, the ruler prefers earth's riches, causing Jesus to reflect on the ruler's choice. The rich have difficulty entering the kingdom because they have difficulty leaving the false security of wealth.

The remark shocks the disciples, who assumed that wealth is a sign of God's blessing. So the question is raised, who then can be saved? Jesus knows that humans cannot save themselves, but God has the power to do what is humanly impossible. Peter then notes that the disciples have left everything to follow the call, so Jesus assures them of the benefits of obeying the call to put God first. The disciples have done what the ruler failed to do.

The lesson of this pericope deals with fundamental discipleship: God is to have first place. Putting God first is what brings divine blessing. This involves recognizing in childlike trust that one must rely upon God. Eternal life is the result of such faith. One cannot trust wealth or one's righteous works. Rather, one is to recognize and respond to God's call. The rich ruler would not do this, but the disciples already had. Two sets of people picture two types of humanity. The passage asks readers to reflect on their choices. Do they rely on themselves and their possessions, or do they trust God? (Bock, 1491 -1492)