

PM Luke 18:1-30 "4 Characteristics of a Christian"

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 16 August 2026

Preacher: Dr Neil Macdonald

[0:00] Bibles to the Gospel of Luke, Luke chapter 18. Luke chapter 18. Luke chapter 18. Luke chapter 18.

! And Jesus told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart. He said, In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor respected man.

And there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, Give me justice against my adversary. For a while he refused.

But afterward he said to himself, Though I neither fear God nor respect man, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will give her justice, so that she will not beat me down by her continual coming.

And the Lord said, Hear what the unrighteous judge says. And will not God give justice to his elect who cry to him day and night?

[1:31] Will he delay long over them? I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?

He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and treated others with contempt.

Two men went up into the temple to pray. One a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus, God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector.

I fast twice a week. I give tithes of all that I get. But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast saying, God be merciful to me, a sinner.

I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.

[3:15] Now they were bringing even infants to him that he might touch them. And when the disciples saw it, they rebuked them. But Jesus called them to him, saying, Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God.

Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child, shall not enter it. And a ruler asked him, 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.

[4:45] 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 men, 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.

[6:14] Amen. May God bless to us that reading from his word and to his name be the praise.

Please turn back with me in your Bibles to the passage we read, Luke's Gospel, Chapter 18.

Luke, Chapter 18. We are looking at this passage this morning under the title, Four Characteristics of a Christian.

Four Characteristics of a Christian. Lord Mackay of Clashfern, who died recently, was a former Lord High Chancellor of Great Britain.

He achieved great distinction in public life, but he remained until the very end a humble Christian.

At his funeral, it was said that he was particularly fond of the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector. On one occasion, he pointed out to a family member how it illustrated the message of the Gospel.

[7:44] The Gospel is quite simple, he said. We are all sinners who need to be forgiven. We all need to pray with the tax collector, God be merciful to me, a sinner.

In this passage, in Luke, Chapter 18, Luke recounts for us two of Jesus' parables and two meetings, two encounters Jesus had.

They all teach us something about how we should relate to God. We are dealing here with what we could call Christian basics, but it is good to remind ourselves of these things from time to time.

Let's begin with the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector in verses 9 to 14. Let's do so under the heading, A Christian is humble before God.

two men go up to the temple to pray. One of them a Pharisee and the other a tax collector.

[9:17] As we know, the Pharisees were very religious. They thought that the Old Testament law should be observed very strictly. this particular Pharisee was very pleased with himself.

This was how he prayed, God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector.

I fast twice a week. I give tithes of all that I get. This man wasn't really praying.

He was reporting progress. He was telling God and anyone who happened to hear him just how good he was.

Notice how many times he uses the word I. I am not like other men. I fast. I give tithes.

[10:24] He begins his prayer with the words God, I thank you. And that's not a bad way to start a prayer by any means. But instead of thanking God for what God has done for him, he brags about all he is himself and all he does.

in fact a possible translation of verse 11 is that he prayed to himself. His prayer was so much about himself that there was no real Godward aspect to it at all.

This man took no account of how he measured up in God's sight. He was full of self-righteousness. He thought he was good enough for God. Not least because he looked down on other people and compared himself favorably with them.

I'm not an adulterer like X. I'm not an extortioner like Y. but you know it's a dangerous thing to put yourself up by putting others down.

[11:47] Look at what Jesus says in verse 14. Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.

the other man praying in the temple that day was a tax collector. In the Palestine of Jesus day tax collectors were widely disliked and despised.

Not only did they collect taxes for the occupying power of Rome many of them were not above helping themselves to some of the revenue they brought in.

The big difference between this man and the Pharisee was that he was only too aware that he wasn't good enough for God.

He had nothing to boast about. He had no bargaining power with God. He felt ashamed in God's presence. His manner showed that.

[12:57] He stood at a distance. He wouldn't even raise his eyes heavenwards. And he beat his breast in sorrow and shame.

And his prayer was quite different. God have mercy on me a sinner. Instead of telling God how good he was, he acknowledged he was a sinner.

And he cast himself unreservedly on God's mercy. And what is Jesus' verdict? He says, I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other by acknowledging his sin and pleading for mercy.

This tax collector was accepted by God and had his sins forgiven. He received the gift of righteousness.

righteousness. While the Pharisee, who thought he was righteous, remained in his sin. The Pharisee was worshipping, it would appear.

[14 : 23] But in reality, he was just going through the motions. But the tax collector was a true worshipper whose prayer was heard.

The Bible makes clear that we are all sinners. We are sinners by nature. That's what we are. And we're sinners by practice.

None of us is good enough for God. It was to save us from our sins that Jesus came into the world and died on the cross. Through his death he paid the penalty for sin and now offers forgiveness to all who will turn and put their trust in him.

As long as we refuse to see our sin for what it is, as long as we think like the Pharisee that we can earn our way into God's favour, we cannot be made right with God.

We need to be humble enough to confess! our sin and cast ourselves on God's mercy. That is the gospel. As Lord Mackay said, it's a simple message but it is humbling.

[15 : 45] God be merciful to me a sinner. Upon a life I did not live, upon a death I did not die, another's life, another's death, I stake my whole eternity.

We need to be humble, to come humbly to the Lord, to become Christians in the first instance.

And that remains the case for us as long as we live, since we need daily forgiveness for daily sins. There never comes a time when we don't need to pray, God be merciful to me, a sinner.

Secondly, the parable recounted in verses 1 to 8 highlights the need for persistent faith.

Our heading is A Christian keeps on trusting God. A Christian keeps on trusting God.

[17 : 12] The parable concerns a judge and a poor widow. This widow is being treated badly and she comes to the judge to ask for justice.

you would expect the judge to do something but he is not concerned about justice. He refuses to help.

But the widow keeps coming and eventually the judge relents not because he now wants to see justice done but simply because he sees the widow as a nuisance.

he wants rid of her though I neither fear God nor respect man he says yet because this widow keeps bothering me I will give her justice so that she will not beat me down by her continual coming. All the widow can do is keep coming back and eventually she wears the judge down. this is how Jesus applies the parable.

[18 : 25] He says hear what the unrighteous judge says and will not God give justice to his elect who cry to him day and night will he delay long over them I tell you he will give justice to them speedily.

this parable works by way of contrast. Jesus isn't encouraging us to think that God is like the unjust judge.

Instead his point is that God is so unlike him he's so unlike this unjust judge that if an unrighteous judge was eventually worn down by this widow and gave her justice then how much more readily will God intervene on behalf of his people.

How much more readily will he respond to his people's calls for help. Jesus is encouraging us here to keep on praying to God about difficult issues in our lives and not to lose heart.

He highlights circumstances in which Christians may face injustice. That could be a Christian being misunderstood or misrepresented by friends or colleagues.

[20 : 12] A Christian employee being discriminated against at work. A Christian being treated badly or unfairly by people in authority.

But the parable could apply to any situation in which we find ourselves asking the question why? Why is this happening to me? It's so unfair.

the parable implies that Christians may sometimes be tempted to think that God is unresponsive to their prayers.

That's why they may lose heart and their faith may falter. God doesn't work to the timetable we might want to set.

he may not provide the answers we want immediately or indeed at all but even when his answer is no or wait he knows what is best for us and he is at work for our good.

[21 : 24] And a day is coming when all the wrongs of this world will be righted. that's easy to say. It's not so easy to accept when we are in the eye of the storm.

It requires persistent faith. How do we keep going when situations are difficult and when God doesn't appear to be answering our prayers as we would wish.

We do so by reminding ourselves of what our God is like. He is just. He is utterly righteous. He cares for justice unlike the unjust judge and he will vindicate his downtrodden people. He will do right. In view of God's character we should pray with persistent faith and not lose heart. [22 : 47] A Christian trusts God when things are tough. a Christian is humble before God.

A Christian keeps on trusting God. Thirdly in verses 15 to 18 a Christian depends on God. A Christian depends on God. people were bringing young infants to Jesus so that he might touch them and bless them.

But the disciples weren't happy. Presumably they thought that blessing children was inappropriate and an unwelcome distraction.

Didn't Jesus have more important things to do? In Jewish society as in other ancient cultures children weren't given much prominence until they were considered old enough to assume adult responsibilities.

[24 : 07] But Jesus disagreed with the disciples. He rebuked them. He told them not to hold the children back. Let the children come to me and do not hinder them for to such belongs the kingdom of God.

Jesus words show that he has time for children. He wants them to come to him.

That's something the children here today need to hear. Jesus wants you to come to him. He wants to bless you.

He no longer lives on earth but he is alive. Remember how he died on the cross and rose again and then ascended to heaven to be with his father.

You can get to know him. He wants you to trust him. To hear and obey what he says in the Bible and to pray to him.

[25 : 25] Is that something you will do? In fact Jesus wants us all to come to him. Children and grown ups too.

And he makes a further point here. Do not hinder the children to such belongs the kingdom of God. To such belongs the kingdom of God. Jesus doesn't mean that children are automatically members of God's kingdom.

Rather he's saying that entry to the kingdom is for those at whatever stage in life who have childlike dependence on him.

He makes this clear in verse 17 truly I say to you whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.

[26 : 32] We can enter God's kingdom only on his terms. We don't set the criteria he does. We need to put simple faith in the Lord Jesus.

We need to accept his lordship over our lives. In doing that we don't become childish.

No we become the people we were meant to be because we were made to live under God's authority and to his glory.

Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever. To live in trustful dependence on the Lord, on our creator and saviour is our privilege and our joy.

Christians depend on the Lord. Fourthly and finally in verses 18 to 30 we see that the Christian puts God first.

[27 : 52] The Christian puts God first. Jesus is approached by a ruler a man of some religious standing.

He may be the leading man in the synagogue or he may be a member of the Jewish ruling council the Sanhedrin. He comes to Jesus with a question.

Good teacher what must I do to inherit eternal life? That's a good question. question. It's a question we all ought to ask.

It's also a question which has already been asked in Luke's gospel back in chapter 10. On that occasion it was a lawyer a scribe another religious man who posed the question.

Luke tells us that when he asked the question he was putting Jesus to the test. He was playing something of a game. But here in chapter 18 the ruler is sincere in asking the question.

[29 : 05] He wants to hear what Jesus has to say. He is genuinely interested in his answer. But before answering his question Jesus asks him a question.

Why he asks why do you call me good? Why do you call me good?

He then adds no one is good except God alone. In some ways Jesus' question is a surprising one. Why does he challenge the man's description of him as good? After all Jesus is God in human form he is in the highest possible sense good.

Perhaps that is precisely the point. The ruler may be sincere in calling Jesus good but what does he mean by good?

[30:14] How does he define goodness? Does he see that it's God who sets the standard of goodness? Does he recognize that Jesus is supremely good?

Only by understanding that God is infinitely good and that human goodness falls far short of the standard God requires can he see that good deeds cannot earn eternal life.

Jesus then goes on to answer his original question he says simply you know the commandments and he proceeds to list some of them by way of example is he telling the man that the way to inherit eternal life is to keep the ten commandments that would be true only if the man could keep God's law perfectly and no one can do that no I think Jesus replies designed to tease out what this man thinks his response is illuminating he says all these I have kept from my youth there's probably an element of truth in what he says he has lived an outwardly good life he has done his best to avoid breaking the commandments but he doesn't give any indication that his best simply isn't good enough for

God up to this point the ruler probably feels quite comfortable with the way the conversation is going but Jesus next comment shatters that he says 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 there's something you don't get you think you've made a good job of keeping the commandments but tell me are you keeping the first commandment you shall have no other gods before me are you putting God first in your life or are you giving your wealth the place God should have are you trusting in your earthly riches rather than

God that's not the way to lay up treasure in heaven the ruler becomes sad because as Luke tells us he was extremely wealthy the thought of giving his wealth away is just too much for him the ultimate answer to his question what must I do to inherit eternal life is to follow Jesus that's what Jesus invites him to do but the cost is just too great and he holds back the ruler was a decent man he was attracted to Jesus but he was not prepared to cast his lot in with him on

[34:08] Jesus terms he was not prepared to put God first and that's a challenge for all of us we don't have to be wealthy to be like the ruler riches are only one of the things that can hold us back from following Jesus wanting to do our own thing being concerned about family and about what family and friends might think an unhelpful relationship all these things could hold us back from following Jesus all these things and many more they can hold us back from giving God the place he deserves and demands a friend of mine when he was a student shared the gospel with one of his friends in his college and he was very encouraged by his response but over the long summer vacation his friend got involved in an unhelpful relationship and wrote to my friend to say that he was no longer interested in the gospel his reason was simple he wrote

Sarah is now my God Sarah is now my God he did not want to put God first when Jesus highlights how hard it is for rich people to enter the kingdom of God the people who have been listening into the conversation ask a good question they ask then who can be saved in Jesus time it was assumed that wealth was a sign of God's favor if it's so difficult for someone who enjoys God's blessing apparently to enter the kingdom of God then surely the chances of anyone entering the kingdom are low but

Jesus doesn't encourage such a negative line of thought he says what is impossible with men is possible with God God can do what is humanly impossible it takes a miracle for anyone to become a Christian so if you find your heart hard towards the gospel pray to the God who can melt hard hearts and bend stubborn wills what is impossible with men is possible with God there's an interesting addendum to this encounter given that Jesus has called on the ruler to sell his possessions and follow him Peter points out how he and the other disciples have given up everything to follow Jesus see we have left our homes and followed you and

Jesus assurance is unequivocal truly I say to you there is no one who has left houses 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 Jesus says that those who put him first will not lose out either in this life or in the life to come he looks after all who put their trust in him and countless Christians down through the centuries have testified to that four characteristics of a

Christian from these verses in Luke's

Gospel a Christian is humble before God a Christian keeps on trusting God the righteous God a Christian depends on God a Christian puts God first all these characteristics present us with a challenge but God's grace is sufficient at the outset of the Christian life we must cast ourselves unreservedly on God's mercy in Christ acknowledging our helplessness and need and putting him first and as Christians we must continue to do so as we exercise persistent faith in the [40:07] God who will do right by his people shall we pray gracious God we pray that you would write your word on our hearts and enable us to live it out in dependence on your help we ask it for Jesus sake Amen