

What must I do to inherit Eternal Life

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Preacher: Rev John Forbes

[0 : 00] Well, please turn with me again to Luke's Gospel, chapter 18, and reading again at verse 18. And we're going to look together at this account that we have.

It's in three of the Gospels, it's in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, about this man that came to Jesus with this question. Luke 18, and at verse 18, And a ruler asked him, Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?

And so on. Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life? Well, it's a good question.

It's a very important question. It's a question that really wasn't, he wasn't the only man to ask this question in the Bible.

We have it echoed in other places, and we know that it's a good question, because of the outcome. When a question like this was asked, Acts, on the day that the Spirit was poured out, on the day of Pentecost, in Acts chapter 2 and verse 37, we read about the men of Israel.

[1 : 26] We're told that after Peter preached to them, they were cut to the heart, and they said, What shall we do? Men and brethren, what shall we do?

They were really saying, what shall we do to be saved? How can we be saved? Because Peter had said to them, save yourselves from this adulterous generation.

What shall we do? And he told them to repent, and to be baptized. And 3,000 people were added to the church that day, because they asked a question like this.

And we read also of the Philippian jailer, later on in Acts chapter 16, and he asked a very similar question. Yes, slightly different words again, but the same question essentially. He had been just about to kill himself.

And then Paul shouted to him, don't do yourself any harm. And he rushed in, and he fell down before them, and he said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved?

[2 : 26] And he said, believe, and be baptized. And he believed, and his household believed, and we have a family that was saved because a man asked this question.

Well, it's the very same question. Phrased slightly differently, but it's a really important question, and it's a question that each one of us should ask.

Even if we think we've got the answer already, it doesn't harm to ask this question again.

Sometimes. And just remind ourselves of what it's all about.

And if we don't have the answer to the question, if you don't have the answer to this question, then you shouldn't rest until you get the answer to this question. What must I do to inherit eternal life?

This world's not what it's all about. It's the world to come that we look forward to, and we long to have that eternal life.

[3 : 29] Well, this man asked this question. Often in Scripture, in the Gospels, when we read about our Lord Jesus, and in the times of the apostles, and before that in the times of the prophets as well, I suppose, we often read about our Lord, or a person of faith, going into a situation that's really a desperate situation, or a situation that they come across, and it's so negative, and there's so little hope.

And then our Lord speaks, or acts, and it all comes good. How many people do we read about that came to Jesus, falling down before him, saying, Lord, help me.

And then they go their way rejoicing, because he's spoken into their situation, and he's given them the answer they wanted. And we get that feel-good factor, because our Lord went about doing good.

Well, when we come to this account, we actually have the very opposite. We have actually what seems like such a positive situation at the beginning.

There's so much optimism. And yet, what begins so promisingly, in the end, it's sad.

[4 : 58] It's one of these tragedies that the scripture sometimes brings before us, just to make us stop in our tracks. Our Lord was sad at the outcome.

Verse 24 says, Jesus looked at him with sadness. And the disciples were shocked at the outcome. It wasn't what they expected. And we read this account, and I think in all honesty, we're not just indifferent to it.

We read it, and we're pretty sad. We're pretty sad. When this man gets his answer, and he walks away, and he hasn't taken the step necessary to receive eternal life.

Well, we need to consider passages like this, of course, and take them to heart. You know, the way this thing is recorded for us in scripture, and the very fact that the Holy Spirit and his providence, God and his providence, caused this to happen, it is to, it's meant to affect us.

[6 : 15] It really is. And I think we should, and we will be affected if we read this with open hearts and consider it. Well, what I want to consider with you, first of all, just so that we understand, really, what's going on.

First of all, I just want to say a little bit about this ruler who came to Jesus. Who was this man? What's his background? What's behind his question?

What's he like? Well, I'm pretty sure most of you are familiar with this account, with this narrative. We call him the rich young ruler.

Well, we do that because, well, here he's called a ruler, and we're told he was exceedingly rich. We're also told in Matthew's gospel, that he was young.

He was a young man. So we call him the rich young ruler. And Mark tells us, and that's one of the nice things when you put different gospel accounts together, you just get, you can build a full picture.

[7 : 23] Mark tells us, in Mark chapter 10, that this man came running to Jesus, and he knelt down before him. And then he asked his question, what must I do to inherit eternal life?

So we really get quite a picture about this man. He was, he was the sort of man that you actually just can't help liking. He was well liked. He was a ruler.

People had put him in a position of trust, even though he was just a young man. And he was respectable and responsible. And he was wealthy.

I mean, you can't, some people have a bit of a chip on their shoulder, but you can't help, you know, sort of liking people that are well dressed. And I'm sure he was well dressed. All the things that went along with wealth, he was dignified.

His outward appearance was good. Apparently, you make your first impressions of people in the first 30 seconds. Well, he made a first, a good first impression. Polite. And he had this enthusiasm.

[8 : 24] We know that from Mark's account. He didn't just walk up to Jesus. He came running to Jesus. And he knelt down before him. So he was wealthy, but he wasn't, he wasn't aloof.

He wasn't a snob. He was enthusiastic. He had all this bounding enthusiasm of youth. And he recognized something in Jesus.

He recognized a good teacher. He didn't mind humbling himself before him. We see this humility. Really, this man has a lot going for him.

And I think the way it's presented to us, we're meant to like him. And Mark actually tells us that at some point in this interchange that Jesus looked at the man and he loved him.

Jesus not only liked the man, Jesus loved the man. And his question was a genuine question.

[9 : 32] He wasn't asking a trick question. You know, some people would come to Jesus sometimes, especially the Pharisees, and we would say they asked him a question testing him. But this man didn't ask a question testing him.

This man asked a question genuinely. He wanted the answer. We read about our Lord Jesus on one or two occasions anyway when when he was in a a room or a synagogue with the Pharisees and there was something going on and we read about Jesus looking around at them with anger because of the hardness of their hearts.

But he didn't look at this man like that. He looked at this man and humanly speaking it opened the heart of our Lord Jesus to him. There's a lot that we can say about this man.

And I think well I've no doubt that that's what we're meant to discern from this passage. He's the sort of person that we would probably say he would make a good Christian.

He would be very useful in the church. He would be an elder soon or something like that. That's the sort of person. You know we can be quite fickle like that sometimes.

[11:07] We can we're so starved I suppose so often you know we can why do more people not come to the Lord and then we see someone who's interested and they're asking the right questions and they're the right sort of person.

When I was in university the same university that I got my 8% in my maths exam the captain of the football team started getting quite interested in Christianity.

There was a couple of us on the football team that were Christians and I didn't really go pursuing him or anything but he started asking questions and he came to church sometimes and one of my friends said to me oh it would be great if he became a Christian because that would make other people become Christians.

Humanly speaking you would think so. he was a popular guy and he was the captain of the football team and you might have thought well that's going to influence people. It didn't really come to much on that situation.

It was one of these sad situations like this where he went away and I don't know where he stands nowadays. Well that's the rich young ruler and I think it's important that we understand that before we consider our Lord's response to him.

[12:28] Well our Lord did respond to this question he wasn't going to refuse a genuine question and there's two answers that he gives as the whole situation unfolds.

First answer we have in verse 19 down to verse 20 Jesus said to him why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone. And then he says you know the commandments do not commit adultery, do not murder, do not steal, do not bear false witness, honour your father and your mother.

That was Jesus' first response. He pointed him to the law. Actually he said something else first. He said no one is good but God alone.

And then he pointed him to the law and he said you know the commandments. If somebody asked you that question what must I do to inherit eternal life I don't think you would say to them well keep the commandments.

[13:44] I'm pretty sure you wouldn't. It wouldn't really be the right answer. And that's not what Peter said on the day of Pentecost. he said repent be baptized become disciples of this man.

That wasn't the immediate answer that Jesus gave here. And of course our Lord well it's the Lord Jesus. He perceived what was in this man's heart and he is drawing it out of this man.

There's a progression in his lesson and there's a progression in his answer. But first of all he points him to the law and there's a lesson in it for us. And I think the words that we need to let sink down into our hearts are these.

No one is good but God alone. No one no one is good but God alone.

It was a real hint that Jesus gave to this man before he said you know the commandments. In Matthew's gospel we have it put slightly differently.

[14:59] According to Matthew Jesus said if you want to enter into life keep the commandments. How true is that?

How true? If you want to enter into life keep the commandments. how true but how unattainable. And our Lord wasn't suggesting otherwise.

Our Lord was saying that very thing. There's a law of God. There's a perfect standard. And nobody reaches it.

Our Lord Jesus was really saying to this man you are not good. You are not good. have you considered the commandments?

If you want to enter into life keep the commandments. Well that is true. It's a true statement. Our Lord of course entered into life. The Psalms say that he asked life of the Father and the Father gave it to him.

[16:10] Why? Because he was perfect. He died for our sins. But death couldn't hold him. Why? Because he was perfect.

Death had no claim on the Lord Jesus Christ. Because if you want to enter into life keep the commandments. And he kept the commandments. Every single one of them perfectly.

No one is good but God alone. Our Lord Jesus was telling the man something about himself and he was telling the man something about the man himself.

Christ is God and that man was not good. Now these things might sound a little bit obvious.

Do you need me to come here and tell you these things? You know these things. But these words need to sink down. They really do. Because how easily we deceive ourselves and we tell ourselves actually I am quite good.

[17:20] We're not. You're not. I'm not. But how easily we deceive ourselves. The Bible tells us, I'm always repeating it to my congregation because I think it's one of these things that we just need to accept about ourselves so that we can go on and receive salvation.

the Bible tells us the heart of man is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. Who can know it? And that's a description of your heart.

And I can say that unequivocally. And yes, it's a description of my heart. It's the description of every human heart. It is deceitful and it is desperately wicked.

And you don't even know your own heart. The Bible tells us that about ourselves. When I was young and growing up and going to church, I was in a Christian family and we went to church and I remember quite a number of sermons and the minister would say about people thinking they were very good.

Well, I was brought up in a Christian family where we were taught the basics and people. I knew I wasn't good. That's what I was taught, that I wasn't good.

[18:38] And I used to hear ministers saying, oh, some of you think you're good or some people think they're very good. And I honestly thought, surely nobody thinks that about themselves. Surely nobody thinks they're actually good enough to be saved.

And I used to think ministers were making it up. And, well, I'm a minister myself now and I get into all sorts of conversations with people along the way and I'm astonished.

So many people actually think they're good. They're good enough. I'll be fine. I've lived a good life. How many times is it said? It's a delusion.

No one is good but God alone. It's the beginning. Of everything that we can talk about in order to find eternal life. I once had a conversation with a man who was telling me that he was fairly good. You know, didn't really come to church but I said, but, you know, I live a good life and he explained a few things that made why I should think that he actually was good.

[19:57] In many ways he was. And then he compared himself to another man who he didn't like, who wasn't very good. And he said, about this other man, how terrible he is in the way he carries on.

And do you know the astonishing thing that this man told me? He said that there was once a chance that he got, or he could have murdered that other man.

He could have killed him. and he thought about it. And he almost did. And afterwards he still wonders, maybe I should have. Now, that is astonishing.

I've never heard anybody telling me something like that before. But this man was telling me that he was good. And in the very same sentence he told me something nobody else has ever told me, that he seriously thought of killing a man.

How deceptive is the human heart. It's astonishing. And I don't think he really saw the irony of it.

Well, this man that responded to Jesus, he didn't see it.

[21:03] Jesus said nobody is good but God alone. Have you kept the commandments? Yes, I've kept the commandments. Ever since my youth, right from the very beginning, I've always kept them. And you know, the man isn't being dishonest.

At least, there's the deceptiveness of our own heart. But he's not being insincere. He's looking at his life and saying, yeah, I'm a pretty good guy.

Yes, I've tried to keep all these things and I've kept them. How deceived. How deceptive is our human heart.

And I really believe that man was a pretty good man. Everyone would look at him and say, that's a good man. He's upstanding. You know you can trust him and how hard it is to find people you can trust. But you can trust that man. He was good from a human point of view, but he hadn't kept all the commandments.

And he wasn't getting the hint from our Lord Jesus Christ. And he shows that his heart is far from God. Far from grasping God's purity and his righteousness holiness and far from grasping his own sin.

[22:20] And these are the things that we need to grasp if we're to have eternal life. So let that one sink down. No one is good but God alone. And then Jesus gave a second answer.

Of course the man, this first answer seemed to have no effect. The man thought he was pretty good. good. So Jesus gave a second answer and he said, 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. What was our Lord Jesus saying to this man? Well, he was really saying to him, you need a new life.

you need a new life. He's still saying your life is not good enough. You need a new life. And he's saying more than that because he says come follow me.

He's saying you need a new priority in your life. You need me in your life. This man had thought he would add something to all the other things that he'd got.

[23 : 37] As if he would go on a mission. If only the Lord had sent him on an important mission. What good thing can I do to inherit eternal life? That's how Matthew puts it. He thought he would just add something to all the other good things that were in his life.

And this one would clinch it for him. And he would find himself absolutely certain that he would inherit eternal life. And probably his ears pricked up and he was delighted when Jesus says you just lack one thing.

We say what do you give to the man who has everything? Well he's a little bit like this. I've got everything. What else do I need? You lack one thing. Oh what one thing can I add to my life?

But our Lord Jesus didn't tell him really to add anything to his life. he told him he needed to put away his life.

He lacked a new life. One thing you still lack.

[24 : 51] Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven and come and follow me. But when he heard these things he became very sad for he was extremely rich.

You know our Lord Jesus asked this man to do a very difficult thing. It's particularly difficult for this man because he had so much and the Lord didn't just say give half of what you have.

half. You know how the kings would sometimes say that they would give up to half the kingdom.

They still kept to half and still nobody would have more than them. But Jesus doesn't say give away half your goods to the poor because this is not about the poor at all.

This is not that the poor need some money although they do of course. But that's not the point. This is not about doing a good deed. He asked him to give away everything.

Now that's a really really hard thing to do. If I said it to you if you came and asked me the question and I said to you you need to sell your house and sell your car and give up your job and you need to come and work for me for nothing.

[26 : 10] Well maybe I shouldn't add that bit in because I don't think Jesus was quite saying that. But you would say well that's too much. That is too much. That's a big ask because we have our possessions and they're ours.

And we have our homes or we have our cars and we have the things that we have and they're ours. I've got them legally and rightly and all that.

I think if we preach that from the pulpit our churches would be empty pretty soon.

Nobody's going to sit and listen to a gospel like that that you have to give away everything. Well Jesus and I think we need to be absolutely clear of it and I'm sure I don't need to point it out to you but Jesus is not saying this to everyone.

He is not saying to you today sell all that you have and give it to the poor. This was a message particularly for this man and Jesus was showing him his heart.

[27 : 21] But there's a principle that applies to each one of us. There are things that you need to give up for the sake of the kingdom of God.

You need a new life and to have a new life. It sometimes involves making a very conscious decision between one thing or another thing between the things that you have or the things that you prioritize and the Lord.

Who is going to have the priority in your life? What's your idol? Is God your God? Have you got any other gods beside him?

This man had. What he had was his idol. It was precious to him. Jesus effectively says to him, you need a new life.

I, one of the villages in Sutherland where a minister, one of the ministers was telling me that all the young people in the village used to go to Sunday school.

[28 : 36] You know, some went to the church of Scotland Sunday school and some came to the free church Sunday school, but pretty much every young person in the village went to Sunday school for years and years and years as they went up through primary and maybe into secondary as well.

And it was a good thing, they got taught the scriptures. And then something happened. Football training started on Sunday. And he said that was the end of Sunday school.

Nobody came to Sunday school after that. Because parents said, well, which one do I want? I'm not going to have my kids losing out on what all the other kids are doing.

I'm going to send them to that. And the kids themselves are saying, choice between God and football. Football it is. We can multiply examples of these kind of choices that we get given.

But astonishing. Would parents really choose football for their children over eternal life?

[29 : 44] Would anyone? Would anyone choose what this man chose? The fascinating thing is that we come, it comes to a conclusion.

This man had asked a genuine question and he got a genuine answer. It was a hard thing that Jesus asked him. I just want to add one little point, I'm sort of progressing a little bit here.

But you know what Mark's gospel tells us, it was at this point that Jesus looked at the man and he loved him. What does that mean? It's a really interesting saying.

Jesus looked at the man and he loved him and then he said to him, you lack one thing, go sell all that you have and give it to the poor. Why are we told that? That Jesus looked at him and loved him.

Well I heard one minister saying in preaching about this, that he looked at him and he loved him and that meant, well, what he did next was effectively that he took the sword of the word of God and he plunged it right into this man's heart.

[30 : 59] It was a hard, hard thing that he said to him. And that's why we're told Jesus looked at him and he loved him. He wasn't being vindictive, he wasn't making life unnecessarily difficult for this man.

It was out of love that he said it to him. He looked at him and he loved him and so he asked him this hard thing. The man asked a genuine question and he got a genuine, loving answer.

you need a new life. Come and follow me. Prioritize me and you will have eternal life.

And the man knew what the answer was. He was absolutely clear on what Jesus was saying to him. He was left with a choice, a cold, hard choice.

would he choose eternal life or would he choose to keep everything he had in this life? And here's the tragedy.

[32 : 05] Here is the tragedy. This nice young man, respectable and dignified and all that and enthusiastic, went away dejected because he chose this life.

the cold, hard choice. He knew what he needed to do for eternal life but he chose death.

That's solemn. That's astonishing. Why would anyone do it? But this life has such a pool on us and our idols have such a pool on us.

I wonder if there's anyone sitting in this room today and you know what your choice is. You know that you've got a cold, hard choice. Are you going to choose what you've got in this life?

Are you going to choose your reputation? Are you going to choose your job? Are you going to choose your things? Are you going to choose your lifestyle? Or whatever it is? Or are you going to choose eternal life?

[33 : 14] It comes down to a choice. Sometimes, yes. It's by the grace of God that he makes us able to make that choice. It's a tragedy.

This man went away sad. He wasn't going to have eternal life. He couldn't give up the things he loved.

Jesus was sad. The disciples were astonished. I'm sad when I read it.

And I'm sad when I look out and see the lives of men and women who know the truth. They've asked the question and they've chosen this life.

It's a tragedy. we need to pray that the Lord would give us his spirit to make us able and make us willing to choose eternal life.

[34 : 19] Yes, this life has its pool, but the life to come is so much more important. This life is nothing. And all the things it promises, it never pays us what it promises us.

It never gives us the things that we desire. We need the Lord's spirit. We need to acknowledge what we are.

We're not right before God. We're not good. Christ alone is good. And if it means, in the vast majority of cases it doesn't mean, but if it means giving up everything, to be guaranteed eternal life, only a fool would turn it down.

Don't be a fool. Well, may the Lord bless these things to us.