

Luke 18 v 18

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[0 : 0 0] Let's turn back to Luke chapter 18 and the story of the conversation that Jesus had with the man that we now know as the rich young ruler. Chapter 18 and page 1057 and verse 18.

And a ruler, as a synagogue ruler, wasn't a council ruler or some sort of politician, he was a synagogue ruler. He asked him, good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?

And Jesus' answer was, in verse 22, one thing that you lack, 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. In fact, Mark's gospel tells us he went away sad because he was extremely rich. If Jesus were to come into this church this morning, and if you were given the opportunity of asking him one question, and I say this with all reverence, what would that question be?

This is your opportunity to put to the Son of God himself any question that is on your mind. There are probably loads of questions on your mind. All of them are good questions. We have loads of good questions. I have, you have. That's why I would recommend to you that if you do have questions about the Christian faith, that you start going to Caber Faith on a Tuesday night at 8 p.m. And there you have an opportunity of answering or asking or discussing some of the questions that you have and possibly had for a long time about the Christian faith. But this is your opportunity to ask this of Jesus. And you've only got one chance. You've only got one question. What question would that be? I reckon that my question, if I wasn't a Christian, would be exactly the same question as this man had. Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life? Because you can have all the other questions, philosophical questions, ask questions about how the world was created right at the very beginning. You could ask questions about why is evil or sin in the world. And of course, if Jesus was to give an answer to that, it would be the right answer. But that still leaves you with this question. How can I be right with God? How can I know that my sins are forgiven? And how can I know that when I die, I will go to be with God and have everlasting life? That, after all, is what Jesus on several occasions promised to those who followed him. He spoke often about life that lasts forever.

And here's this man. He's obviously heard Jesus, been listening to him. He knows something about him. He doesn't know everything about him. And he's running to him. Another gospel tells us that he came running to Jesus, he's also coming to Jesus in the right way. He's running to him. This is not just a, by the way. This is a man who seizes the opportunity. He sees that Jesus is on his own for a split second.

[4 : 1 1] He's not surrounded by people. And he seizes the opportunity to ask this question. He may not ever get it again. So this is something that's uppermost on his mind. He comes running to Jesus with all sincerity. There were some people who came to Jesus and they were trying to trip him up.

They're trying to get him to say something wrong. Of course, they never achieved that. But this man's not trying to trip him up. He comes with all his heart. He's really wanting to know the answer to this question. And he came to the right person. You can't get better than Jesus. There were plenty of wise men, clever men, experienced people in the Jewish faith at that time. And yet nobody was a patch on this Jesus of Nazareth because of what he was able to do. He knew that this man had extraordinary power.

He stood alone. He was different from everyone else who had ever come across. And so he came to him. This surely was his opportunity of finding an answer to the question he longed to have. And he came to the right person. And it gets even more extraordinary than that because during the course of the conversation, Mark's gospel tells us that he was loved by the Son of God.

During the conversation, Jesus looked at him, Mark tells us, and he loved him. It doesn't get better than that, does it?

He loved him. And he came with the right understanding. This man had a background. He was talking the same language as Jesus. He knew all about the Old Testament. He knew all about Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, David, Elijah, Elisha, all of the Old to the prophets. And so there was no problem with understanding with many people in our own culture. There is a massive problem with understanding because people don't know what you're talking about when you talk about the Bible. They don't even know who Jesus was, let alone Moses or David or Elijah. But with this man, there was absolutely no problem with understanding.

[6 : 34] They sang from the same page. And yet after all of that, after such a promising conversation, asking what appears to be the right person, question, coming in what appears to be the right attitude, with the right understanding, after all of that, this man went away sad, disappointed. How can this be? Surely all the conditions were right. I mean, if this man doesn't get saved, if this man doesn't get into the kingdom of God, then who, what chance do the rest of us have? And yet that's the fact of the matter. This man, with all the promise that he showed, coming to the right person, and even after a conversation with the Son of God Himself, he went away not having received what he knew he needed to have and what he knew he didn't have.

This story is a tragedy. It's one of the saddest stories in the whole Bible, because it starts off with such enthusiasm and such promise, and yet it finishes with such a deflation and a disappointment, and leaves us all very confused and wondering, well, if a man like this doesn't achieve the question, then what chance or what hope do the rest of us have? Well, I'd like us to look then for a few moments at this conversation and where it is that this, that the man went wrong. You can't say that Jesus went wrong. Jesus doesn't go wrong, but if he didn't achieve or if he didn't obtain what he asked, then he must have gone wrong somewhere in his reckoning or in this conversation. Let's try and look at it. I want to just look at the very beginning, even from the very beginning of the conversation. You can tell a lot about a man by the way he greets someone else. He said, good teacher. And even then, Jesus said to him, wait a minute, hold on, hold on. Before you go any further, what do you mean by good teacher? And it was very clear that whilst the man showed respect and honor for Jesus, to him he was no more than just a good teacher. It's very clear as the conversation goes on that the rich young ruler was not your average rebellious teenager when he was growing up. Here was a man who was studious his whole life, serious his whole life. He took God seriously and got to know the Bible of his day and tried as far as he possibly could to keep God's law.

We'll find that out in a minute. But he made the mistake that millions of people make in thinking that just by keeping God's law and just by a life which is good, that that equated to everlasting life. But the very fact that he knew he needed to find that everlasting life means that he knew he lacked something. There was something missing in his life. And that's because, that's because he believed that he could achieve it by himself. He spent his whole life believing that he could achieve rightness with God by living a good life. And that's the very thing that we can't do.

[10 : 27] So for him, as he observed this extraordinary rabbi and teacher in Jesus Christ, someone who seemed to live for the first time in his life, he had come across a man who was better than he was.

In his character and his conduct and his behavior, as he looked at Jesus and observed him, he knew that he put him to shame. For the very first time, probably the first time this ever happened to him, he had grown up thinking he could compete with the great rabbis and the teachers and the Pharisees. Well, that wasn't actually very difficult because they were full of holes.

They were full of hypocrisy. This young man believed that he could outdo them. And he did until he met with Jesus. As far as he was concerned, Jesus was only a good rabbi, a good teacher. And Jesus had to stop him right away and say, you are wrong right from the very beginning. Because you believe that you can have your salvation just by being good. The fact is, there is no one good except God alone. So if you really want to be saved, if you really want to be right with God, you have to come to know God and you have to come to a personal understanding of who God is and a relationship with him. So right from the very beginning, you can see flaws in the way that this man asked his question. Even the question that he asked. People are not agreed as to what he meant by everlasting life, eternal life. Did he mean what you and I know from the rest of the Bible is life beyond the grave, either in heaven or in hell? That's what the Bible teaches. That after death, there is either heaven or hell without a middle ground. But is that what this man understood it to be? Was he asking for life in this world that lasted forever? Well, we don't know.

[12 : 39] There are plenty of people that want everlasting life, aren't there? Wouldn't it be great to know that we were to live forever? There are plenty of great men and women in the world who have sought, they've longed for everlasting life. They would have done anything in their power just to be able to have the secret of everlasting life. I was reading about Genghis Khan, the great emperor, the great Mongolian emperor who lived in around about the 12th or the 13th century. And he conquered vast amounts of empires and cultures and villages and towns and he wreaked havoc on people. There was nobody, I don't think, in the history of the world more violent than this man. It didn't matter what it was, he was able to conquer it. And he became so powerful that he reckoned that the world was his.

And yet he knew he was going to die. And so he made up his mind that he would do everything within his power to see if there was anything in the world that could stop the process of death and allow him to live forever. Maybe there was some potion, some substance somewhere, something he could do to prevent death taking place.

And so he heard of this Taoist monk called Chang Chun. He lived in China. And so he sent his servants, I think he was in Afghanistan at the time. So he sent his servants thousands of miles, cross-country, mountains, impossible terrain, to look for this man called Chang Chun. So eventually, after years, they found him. The man was 74. And he was being summoned to travel thousands of miles. There was no airlines or trains or anything in those days. You had to travel by donkey or mule or whatever. It took him, his entire journey was four years there and back. He was commanded by Genghis Khan to come all the way over the mountains. And so he had to do that. Eventually, after years, he got there. And Genghis Khan was so happy that he had come at last to meet him. He was willing to come and meet him. He took him into his presence and he said to him, Chang Chun, I have a question for you. Is there a way in which I can live forever?

[15 : 11] And Chang Chun's answer after two or three years traveling was, no.

That's what I call a wasted journey. The fact is, there is no secret in this world. There's nothing we can do to extend life. There is no secret of everlasting life except in the Bible. God is the author of life. And if anyone can give us everlasting life, it is God. The fact is that we die because of sin in the world. The Bible explains to us clearly why there is death and all the misery and the sadness that death brings.

Because we're all sinners. We've fallen. We've become separated from God. And God has cursed the world and cursed humanity because of our sin and death. For God means more than just physical death.

When we come to the end of our lives in this world, it means eternal death as well on the day of judgment when God will say to some, Depart from me, you workers of iniquity, because we haven't come to Jesus. So there is, and yet there is, a promise that Jesus will have for some when He says, Come, you blessed of my Father, into the kingdom that's prepared for you.

And right now God is preparing a kingdom for His people, those who are looking in trust and in faith to Jesus and have their sins forgiven. There is eternal life, but it's found only in God. Now what takes place after that is really like a map. It's like a chart in which this man is asking the way to heaven. And Jesus is going to tell him the way to heaven. He's going to give him directions as to how to get eternal life. That's what the Bible is. It's a map that shows us God's way in which we are able to enter into His kingdom. But the first thing you have to do when you want to get to a certain place is to find out where you are. In the old days, I mean, the old days I can look back to. You're driving your car, there's no GPS, there's no mobile phones.

[17 : 43] You're driving your car in a city or in a complicated area. You absolutely needed a map. You had no clue where you were. And sometimes with the new towns, I remember trying to find my way in the town of Livingston many years ago. And of course, Livingston is just like a nightmare. It certainly was in those days. But on the main street, you knew where there was a lay-by. There was this big lay-by. And in that lay-by, there was this massive great map of Livingston. And that's where everybody went if you needed to find your way. I remember using it on a number of occasions. You went there, you drove your car in, and you got out, and you had to study this great map. But the first thing you needed to find was where you were. You needed to see an arrow that says, you are here, because the rest of the map was no use without it. If you didn't know where you were, you didn't know where the starting point was. So you wouldn't know whether to go north or south or east or west or which road to take, because you didn't know where you were. So the first thing you needed to know is, you are here.

That's what happens here. When you're asking the question, what is the way to heaven, you have to start with where you are? Because without it, everything else is meaningless. That's why Jesus said to him, what does God say way back in the Old Testament? That's the Bible He had. What does God say? So that's why Jesus took him all the way back to where God gave the Ten Commandments to Moses.

Moses. That's where we are. That's why we need to be forgiven. That's where the problem lies, because we have failed to keep God's law. But we'll never know that until we know what God's law is.

So today, Jesus told him, go back to what God said to Moses, because there is what God demands and requires of every one of us. You shall not have any other gods before me. You shall not make to yourself a graven image or likeness of anything that's in heaven above or earth beneath and so on.

You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain. Remember the Sabbath day to keep it only. Honor your father and mother. You shall not kill you. You shall not commit adultery, not steal and so on.

[20 : 09] You know them. If I want to know today whether I am right with God, the very first thing I have to do is to go to God's law and measure my life honestly and exactly against what God commands. That's the starting point, and the point is always the same. If I'm honest with myself and with God, the answer to the question, am I right with God, is no. Because when I measure my life against God's perfect commands, there are flaws and defects, and there's guilt, and there's darkness, and there's shame.

We're all the same. Don't try and deceive yourself or delude yourself into thinking that somehow you're better than anyone else and that you have a chance by your own life. That's what happened to this man.

But it's just simply not true. It's not true for him, and it's not true for any one of us. We are failures. We are bankrupt. We have nothing to come to God with. Even although tonight you might have spent your whole life trying to convince yourself that you are a good person, you are not a good person, I am not a good person, because we are sinners. Now, that's not very popular in the 21st century Western world, where we're told that's so negative, and it's such an indictment on the human being. I know, but the reason I'm so confident about saying this is because God says that he's our creator. It was in his image that we were created. So we have to listen to him. We don't just make up what we are.

We don't just pretend to be something that we're not. You listen to him, and he says, your sin and your iniquity have separated you from me. That's the bottom line. I know you don't like it. I know you prefer it was something else, but what if that something else is not true? What I'm asking today is not what you prefer, but what is the truth? Where am I?

Where is the starting point? And the Bible tells me the starting point is that I'm dead in trespasses and sins. That's the starting point. And that was the case with the man. He was so confident in his answer when Jesus confronted him with what God demanded. You know the commandments, said Jesus.

[22 : 54] Do not commit adultery. Do not murder. Do not seal. I'm quite sure he listed all of them. It's only some of them that are given here. Do not bear false witness. Honor your father and mother. And he said, just quick as a flash, that's not a problem to me. It's almost like I knew you were going to say that. I'm okay with that. Because I've kept them all since I was young. I've grown up with them. And this man truly was sincere in what he believed about himself. And that's the danger, isn't it? It's the danger with so many people. Sincerity is not salvation.

You can be sincere, but you can be sincerely wrong. And if you're sincerely wrong, then you're blind. And you don't know what the truth about yourself is. And that's why we need to come to the Bible to be reminded and to be told what we really are like. This man had full marks for sincerity. All these have I kept since I've done all that. Well, Jesus says, do you think so? Well, let's put that one to the test.

You have money. I'm just paraphrasing this. Yes. The man knew he had money, loads of it. He was a rich, young ruler. But he's probably thinking to himself, well, what's that got to do with me being right with God? What's that got to do with, that's got nothing to do with whether I have everlasting life. And that's the way that many of us think, isn't it? Many of us think that, well, I'm quite happy to give God some of my life.

If you'd asked that man to give God some of the money or to give away some of the money, I'm quite sure he would have done it. And it's the same with ourselves. You're quite happy to say, well, I'm quite happy. Well, let's just negotiate how much of my life I am willing to give to God.

[25 : 02] But God doesn't negotiate. God's terms are not flexible. He is God. It's me that needs to be saved. I need to listen to him and accept what he tells me. And he tells me it is all or nothing.

It's all of your life, all of what you are, your past, your present, and your future. It's not just your soul that I want. I want all of it because it all belongs to him anyway. You can't keep it back from him.

What did you and I get in this world that we didn't receive? What do we have in this world that we didn't receive from God? Everything that we have in this world, we've received from God.

We actually are worth nothing. Okay, you say, well, I've earned it. You've earned it with the breath that God has given to you. You've earned it with the intelligence that God has given to you, the opportunities that God has given to you, with the strength and the health that God has given to you. It all belongs to him. And yet, when he tells the rich young ruler, well, it's all or nothing.

The ruler wants to hold on to it. Can't let it go. And in doing so, Jesus is pointing out the very basic first commandment of all, the one that Exodus 20 begins with. You shall not have any other gods except me. And if you know that commandment, you'll know that it can be understood in three ways.

It means you must not have any other gods other than me. It can mean you must not have any other gods beside me, two running alongside each other. Or, and listen to this, you're breaking the first commandment if anything comes between you and God.

[27 : 08] And that's exactly what happened to this man. His money, which is not sinful of itself. I'm quite sure that many of us are asking with, it's not the first time people have asked, well, what's sinful about having money? There isn't anything. Money is not sinful by itself. But the fact of the matter lies that when put to the test, this man had to admit that his money came between him and the very question he longed to have in his heart, eternal life. The one thing stopping him from coming to know Jesus and having the answer to the question that he asked was his love, his obsession with what he had worked so hard to achieve in this life and what he held dear to him, he couldn't let it go. It came between him and the Lord himself. I'm going to ask you a question.

Is the reason why you are not a Christian this morning something that is standing between you and God? I know the answer to it. The answer is yes. There is something standing between you and God.

It may not in itself be sinful, but because it stands between you and God, it is an idol. You're worshipping it. It means more to you than the Lord himself. To know God is to love him. Remember the first commandment? You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul and all your mind and all your strength. The Christian life is not just signing on the dotted line. It's not just identifying with the church.

It's not something that takes place on the outside. It's something on the inside. It means, it always means a turning away. You absolutely have to forsake everything that is sinful in your life. You say, well, I don't know how I can do that. I can't do that by myself. I know.

But the Lord has promised to take you through it. It means counting the cost. That's exactly what this man did in a split second. It didn't seem to take him long. Before he came to the conclusion, it was the wrong conclusion, that it just was all too much. He could not possibly part with all his riches. It means paying the price. It means carrying the cross. Jesus said, if anyone will come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.

[30 : 09] There were these people who came to Jesus and they said, Lord, I will follow you wherever you go. And he said, foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.

Being a Christian means dying to yourself. It means the old has to go. It has to die. The old Ivor Martin has to die.

I can't take any of him with me. And as a follower of Jesus, it must be the new Ivor Martin, the one that God has created in the gospel by the Holy Spirit.

That's what it means to be a Christian. And I would love to think that right now, perhaps even as a result of what we've been thinking about today, you'll be asking the question, well, where am I?

Do I have everlasting life? Is there something that is standing between me and God that is actually more dear to me? And I know I would have to leave it and forsake it.

[31 : 17] And I have to confess, I just can't do that. Well, you ask the Lord to give you that strength and that place where you come to and you say, that's it.

Forsaking all. You know, I learned something. Say this to the young ones. Do you know what faith means? Do you know what faith means? I'm going to tell you, I'm going to teach you something here.

I'd like you to remember it. It's because I learned something as a boy in my Sunday school class. And somebody said that faith was F-A-I-T-H. F-A-I-T-H.

You know what it means? It means forsaking all I take him. You remember that? Forsaking all I take him.

Did you hear that? Forsaking. It's not just taking Jesus. It's forsaking turning your back on the past.

[32 : 21] And everything that has been dear to you in the past. Everything that has been a God to you in the past. Even things that aren't sinful of their sin. Jesus knew well where this man's heart lay.

And he knew that as long as his heart lay in his money he could never be a disciple of Jesus. This man went away sad because in a split second he counted the cost and decided it was too much for him.

You know this story is so disappointing, isn't it? You start off with the story and you think, yes, this is a way in which I'm going to get the answer to the question. Because you want to follow this man. You want to think, well, that's the same question as I would like to answer. Let's see how Jesus answered it. And you're hoping that you can follow him as he makes his way through the open door into the kingdom of heaven.

And he doesn't. He turns away. He's right at the door and he turns away. And he's lost. It's so disappointing, so deflating, isn't it? This story.

[33 : 27] And it leaves you wondering, well, what is the answer then? Is there anywhere in the Bible where I can find a person who actually does come into the kingdom of God so that I can know what it means?

Well, there is. The very next chapter. A very different person. Zacchaeus. I don't know what his background was, but I do know what his job was.

His job was a tax collector. He was hated by the people. And he probably hated himself at the same time because he knew he wasn't in the right place. He knew he was a sinner.

And when he heard of Jesus, all he could do was climb up a sycamore tree because that's as near as he could get to Jesus because that's as near as he dared to go. He knew he didn't deserve anything to do with Jesus, but Jesus knew him.

And he stopped where he was and he said, Zacchaeus. He got the shock of his life when Jesus stopped. He thought he could just spectate. He thought he was too sinful to do anything else.

[34 : 28] He knew his own depravity and darkness and shame, but when Jesus stopped at that tree, he said, Zacchaeus, you come down because I'm going to stay at your house. Do you know what happened after that?

His money meant nothing to him. As far as he was concerned, compared to ever, the everlasting life that he had just received from Jesus, nothing else mattered.

Half of my goods, I'm going to give away to the poor. The other half, well, I've cheated loads of people out there and that's the other half because he was a different person. And when God makes you a different person, then that makes all the difference.

You need a new heart. God can give you a new heart. You'll never get there with the old heart. You need a new life, a new beginning. God can give you that. When you come to him, when you ask, that's what Jesus meant when he said, ask and you shall receive.

Please ask. You don't need to ask me. I can't give it to you. But God can and he will. You know, I remember hearing a very famous, a missionary once in Glasgow was preaching on this very thing and he made four points.

[35 : 42] I'll never forget them. I'm going to leave you with these four points this morning. Time's gone. He was talking about the rich young ruler and he said four things. He said, this man was so good and yet so bad.

This man was so clever and yet so ignorant. This man was so rich and yet so poor.

And this man was so near and yet so far away. Let's pray together. Our Father in heaven, we pray that you will open our eyes.

