

Luke 18:15-34

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[0 : 00] Take a step back and focus our attention on the gospel itself, the ministry of Jesus, the sacrifice of Jesus, the resurrection of Jesus, the reason why the church exists in the first place.

This is a long tradition in the history of the church to take the days or weeks leading up to Easter to immerse ourselves once again in the story that is told us in the New Testament gospels.

So this week we're looking at Luke 18, starting at verse 15, as Jesus approaches Jerusalem. Next week we'll look at Luke 19, the triumphal entry. On Good Friday we'll look at Jesus' crucifixion in Luke 23.

On Easter Sunday we'll read Luke 24 and also from Colossians about being raised with Christ. So that's where we're going the next three weeks. But let's start today, Luke 18, starting at verse 15.

Now they were bringing even infants to him, to Jesus, 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.

[1 : 15] 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 to a 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. 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 man is possible with God.

[2 : 23] 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, brothers, parents, children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, will not receive many times more in this time and in the age to come eternal life.

And taking the twelve, he said to them, See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written about the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished, for he will be delivered over to the Gentiles, and will be bombed, and shamefully treated, and spit upon.

And after flogging him, they will kill him, and on the third day he will rise. But they understood none of these things. This saying was hidden from them, and they did not grasp what was said.

Well, there are three episodes for our passage this morning, which we'll consider in order. First, episode 1, verse 15 to 17, is about children entering into the kingdom of God.

Episode 2, is about a rich ruler missing out on the kingdom of God. And episode 3, verse 31 to 34, is how Jesus would establish the kingdom of God.

[3 : 33] So we're going to take these in turn, and I think you'll see how they fit together as we go along. So first, children and the kingdom of God. People are bringing children to Jesus, so that he might touch them, that is, so he might bless them, or perhaps even heal them.

What we see is Jesus not only received the children in his arms, he pointed to them as models for what it means to trust and follow him. Verse 16, to such belongs the kingdom of God.

Verse 17, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it. Now this is probably one of the better known stories from Jesus' ministry. But I think the meaning of this

episode is not always so clear.

Because the key question we need to ask is, what exactly does it mean to be like a child? What quality of children is Jesus pointing to and saying, we need this, you need this, to enter the kingdom?

Now, there are a few ideas out there, right? So some people say, a very common view today is that children are naturally pure and innocent. And that's why Jesus points to them as models for receiving the kingdom of God.

[4 : 45] But there are several problems with this idea. First, let me suggest that if you say, children are naturally pure and innocent, I suggest that you have probably not raised children.

Or it was long enough ago that you have forgotten what it was like. Second, the idea that children are naturally pure and innocent originated in the 19th century, in the Romantic period.

We have no evidence that any of Jesus' time would have considered children models of pristine purity and innocence. Third, the Bible as a whole does not teach that children are born pure and innocent and then become corrupted by the world as they grow up.

It teaches that people of all ages bear the image of God, and people of all ages are corrupted by sin and self-centeredness. Fourth, if this view were true, then Jesus would be saying that the kingdom of God belongs only, because he says, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it, then it would mean the kingdom of God belongs only to those who are pure and innocent.

But if you look at the story just beforehand, which Matt read at the beginning of the service, the whole point is that the kingdom of God belongs to sinners, who cry out to God for mercy, people who aren't pure and innocent.

[6 : 04] So we need to throw that idea out. Second idea. Some people say children represent an attitude of humility and trust. This one's closer to the point.

If you look at verse 14, right beforehand, Jesus says, everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who commends himself will be exalted. Jesus clearly wants to teach us to adopt an attitude of humility and trust, and he's pointing to the figure of a child who teaches that.

But Jesus doesn't say that children naturally, or always, or mostly, exhibit humility and trust.

Sometimes they do. But children are also naturally very fearful.

Sometimes wisely so. Sometimes irrationally so. Children also naturally exhibit self-centeredness.

Just wanting to get their own way. Not wanting to share. Always wanting more. So I don't think Jesus is pointing to a character quality that's particularly prevalent in children more than adults.

Because Jesus never defines such a character quality. What is Jesus pointing to? Jesus is pointing to the objective status of a child.

[7 : 14] Children by their very nature, in every culture, in every period of history, are some of the most dependent and vulnerable human beings. Right?

These children didn't even bring themselves to Jesus. They were brought to Jesus. Luke points out they were even infants. The most helpless of all. The ones who can't even hold on to something for a minute or two.

Let alone know or manage anything. Children are all wrong. They can't survive independently.

Every meal they eat has been brought and prepared by someone else.

Every toy they play with has been given to them. The only thing a child, especially an infant, can do is receive. And in Jesus' society, children were seen as relatively unimportant.

In Jesus' society, the social hierarchy was men, women, children. So most religious teachers in Jesus' day spent time only teaching other men. Most rarely spent time with women.

[8 : 16] Even more rarely with children. And so the disciples carried this assumption in. They assumed children are not worthy of Jesus' time and energy. Probably half of them would die of diseases before ever reaching adulthood.

And that affected people's perceptions of children back then. The disciples' assumption was, if you're building a kingdom, if you're doing something important in this world, don't waste your time hanging out with kids.

Jesus disagreed. When the disciples tried to send away the children, Jesus intervened. And he called the children to himself and touched them and blessed them and embraced them as his own.

And he says, my kingdom is for children and those like them. For the helpless. For the vulnerable. For the lowly. For those who have nothing.

Nothing to bring. Nothing to boast about. Nothing to distinguish them as more worthy than others. Nothing to give. That we haven't simply received.

[9 : 18] Jesus is saying, no one is excluded from the kingdom of God or marginalized in the kingdom of God because of what you don't have. This is good news.

This is good news for children. That Jesus receives kids with open arms. Not because kids are poor and innocent. But because simply he loves you. It's good news if you're helpless.

It's good news if you feel like you don't measure up to society's standards. It's good news if you're conscious of all that you don't have. Or haven't achieved. Or can't achieve. Jesus is saying, all you need is nothing.

Come to me like a child. And I'll receive you with open arms. That's what it means to enter the kingdom of God like a child.

That's the first episode. Second episode. A rich ruler. Who misses out. On the kingdom of God.

Now on the surface. This guy could have seemed best qualified to have a prominent position in the kingdom of God.

[10 : 23] Some reasons. First he's a ruler. At the very least that means he's a respected community leader. Perhaps he was a ruler of the synagogue. Like Tyrus. Perhaps even a member of the Sanhedrin.

Like Nicodemus. He was certainly well versed in the Bible. He knew the commandments. He had kept them from his youth. Even more than that. He was listening to Jesus.

He was keen to inquire of Jesus about spiritual matters. And finally he was rich. And many people would have seen his wealth as a visible sign of God's favor on his life.

After all. In Deuteronomy 28. God had promised that when his people entered the promised land. If they were obedient they would be blessed. The Lord will make you abound in prosperity.

The Lord will make you the head and not the tail. You shall only go up and knock down if you obey the commandments of the Lord your God. You know if you're building a business. Or starting a non-profit.

[11 : 23] Or leading a church for that matter. And someone like this guy comes along. Well respected. Well trained. Leadership experience.

Financial resources. They immediately go to the top of your list. Right? Oh. I'm going to recruit them to be a board member. A faithful donor.

The public face of our organization. And so Jesus' response to this man is very unexpected. Verse 22. One thing you still lack.

Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor. And you will have treasure in heaven and come all the way. Now Jesus doesn't say this to anyone else.

To give absolutely everything away. Distribute it all to the poor and only then follow him. It's not a universal command. That Jesus gives to all of his followers in the same way.

[12 : 22] But notice. Jesus doesn't just say to the man. Your problem is that you're too inwardly attached to your possessions. The solution is for you to practice interior spiritual detachment.

See for this particular man Jesus knew the only way he would be free from his excessive attachment to his possessions was to literally give them away.

To give it to the poor. To give it to the poor. And to trust Jesus promised that in following him he would gain treasure in heaven that he would never lose. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus said a similar thing.

He says if your right eye causes you to sin tear it out. If your right hand causes you to sin cut it off. Now Jesus is not promoting physical mutilation. He was making a point.

Sometimes the only way to be free from an idolatrous attachment is to cut it off completely. Like a leg that is so deeply infected with gangrene that the only way to preserve the whole body is to amputate.

[13 : 30] Jesus works with his men are strong but they're not unparalleled. And if you think about it in almost every case when Jesus calls people to follow him there's something that they must leave behind.

You see their new loyalty to Jesus Christ reshaped and reframed all their other identities and relationships into the same pattern as us.

You see what Jesus was summoning this rich, religious, respected, fooler to do was to become like a child.

And we're going to enter the kingdom of God. To lay aside his wealth, his worldly status, his claims to moral goodness, his polite pretensions. You know that's why Jesus challenges his good teacher remark in verse 19.

Calling a rabbi good teacher was an over-the-top compliment. It was not a normal way of addressing a rabbi. It was an over-the-top compliment. It was the kind of remark that's sort of saying, good teacher.

[14:35] And it's sort of calling for a response, good student. And Jesus says, uh-uh-uh. I'm not playing a flattery game. Just as Jesus, the same message that Jesus communicated to the children who were being brought to him.

In order to enter God's kingdom, in order to inherit eternal life, to have treasure in heaven, to be saved, all those really mean the same thing. Jesus is saying, all you need is nothing.

All you need is to come to Jesus like a child. For the children and those like him, that was the most welcoming message in the world. For the rich ruler and those like him, it was the most disturbing and threatening message he could have imagined.

Because nothing was the one thing that this rich man didn't have. And so he went away. Extremely rich and very sad.

Jesus said, it's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God. And you know, if we're anything like the rich ruler, we're in a position of authority, we earn a decent salary, we're well-respected in certain social circles, and we diligently sought to live by poor principles, our default mode is to approach God and say, look at my gifts and abilities and accomplishments.

[16:11] I've done a pretty good job, haven't I? Or, look at my good world track record. I've stayed on the straight and narrow since my youth. Not everybody else has.

Or perhaps, look at all I've suffered. Don't I deserve a break? Shouldn't you affirm me? Don't I deserve a good position, an honored position in your kingdom?

Jesus says, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child. A lowly, dependent, vulnerable child shall not enter.

In John chapter 3, Jesus said a very similar thing to another rich, religious, respected ruler, Nicodemus.

He said, in order to enter the kingdom of God, you must be born again. In verse 26, Jesus here has got the point. If this man can't be saved, who can?

[17:13] Who can? Thankfully, Jesus responds in verse 27 with the word of hope. What is impossible with man is possible with God.

Don't despair. What is impossible with human beings is possible with God. And Jesus' disciples are a case in point.

You see, the disciples were far from perfect. In this chapter alone, the disciples were the ones who rebuked the children. And tried to hinder them from coming to Jesus.

And Jesus had to say, no. And you know what? Back in chapter 9, Jesus already taught them. Whoever receives a child in my name, receives me. He had already taught them that they needed to receive children.

They had learned. And then verse 34. It says, they understood nothing of what Jesus said. Even though his words were quite clear.

[18:16] The disciples had a long way to go. And Jesus had to teach his disciples this lesson about dependence. And identifying with the lowly over and over again.

You see, it's not like we enter the kingdom of God as a child, recognizing our dependence and vulnerability, and then we grow up to be a self-sufficient adult who deserves lots of perks.

Jesus said, the greatest in the kingdom is the one who receives a child in Jesus' name. The greatest in the kingdom is the one who loves and serves people who are dependent and vulnerable and lowly with sincerity and without superiority.

The greatest in the kingdom is the servant of all. So the disciples had a lot to learn.

But as Peter points out in verse 28, they had left what was most dear and dear to them in order to follow Jesus. There was something about Jesus that had sort of magnetically attracted them.

[19:30] Even if they couldn't explain what it was, they weren't even clear in their own minds who he was, or where he was leading them, or what was the nature of this kingdom he was talking about, they had been drawn to Jesus.

And they had taken steps of obedience to follow him and learn from him and listen to him. And Jesus gave them a word of encouragement. Verse 29 and 30, he says, Whoever and whatever you have left behind for the sake of the kingdom of God, you will perceive many times more in this life and in the age to come eternal life.

So if you have paid, or if you are paying, a high cost in order to follow Jesus, whether that's financial cost, emotional cost, or relational cost, know that your sacrifice is not a thing.

And know that every time you can issue a difficult command, it is a penalty, and I think you are waiting for promise. So, so far we've seen dependent, vulnerable, lowly children received by Jesus with open arms, and we've seen a rich, religious, respected ruler who missed out, who was unwilling to give way his most prized possessions even when he was personally summoned by the kingdom side.

There's one more episode I want us to consider this morning, verse 31 to 34. And in this episode we see another rich, religious, respected ruler who was summoned by the divine call to lay down all that belong to him for the joy of gaining an everlasting reward.

[21 : 15] Verse 31, taking the twelve Jews, said to them, See, we are going out to Jerusalem, and everything that is written about the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished.

For he will be delivered over to the Gentiles, and will be mocked, and shamefully treated, and spit upon, and after flogging him, they will kill him, and on the third day, he will rise. You see, Jesus Christ outranked this rich ruler, who he had just been dialoguing with in every way.

He wasn't just well-off in his own society. His wealth surpassed all comparison. He owned the entire universe. He designed, constructed, and maintained it all.

He could have chosen any corner of it to be his dwelling place. He wasn't just a well-off scribe who knew the commandments.

Since his youth, he had come to actually fulfill, to accomplish, what was written about him in the prophets. He wasn't just a respected ruler of a local synagogue, or a member of a local ruling council.

[22 : 24] He was a king whose authority knew no boundaries. If you notice, Jesus doesn't just say, follow these laws, or follow my teachings.

He says, follow me. He says, let the children come to me. For to such belongs the kingdom of God. He identifies himself with the kingdom of God. He's saying, I'm the king. God's anointed king. The son of God himself. Destined to rule the nations in glory.

What we see in this last part is that Jesus Christ was willing to surrender everything he had. His riches. His power. His honor. He set his face to go up to Jerusalem.

The city where David had once established his kingdom. And where God had promised David, one of your descendants, will rule forever. And yet, in Jerusalem, Jesus knew.

[23 : 25] He would be rejected by his own people. Delivered to the pagan Gentiles. He was following the path that the prophet Isaiah had described of.

The servant of the Lord. Who would set his face like flint. And who would suffer greatly. Before he could be vindicated. Though he deserved the acclaim and honor of all.

He was mocked. Shamefully treated and spit upon. Stripped naked. And nailed to a cross. And he knew. Every step along his journey to Jerusalem.

He knew where he was going. Nobody else really did. His disciples didn't get it at all. Even when he told them to blame him. He had no one.

Alongside of him. To encourage. And affirm. And sympathize. He took his journey. He left the way.

[24 : 25] And he left the way alone. You see. Jesus had come to establish God's kingdom. But he would only rise. The resurrection life. Eternal glory. After a painful journey.

The reason that we're here today. The reason the Christian church exists. Is because Jesus Christ did this for us. Did for us. What we could never do for ourselves. Jesus did all that he asked the rich ruler to do.

And a thousand times more. Jesus had everything. And he held on to nothing. He laid it all down. For the sake of obedience. To God the Father. And for the salvation.

Of his people. This is the king. Whom we worship. This is the king. This is the king's glory. We proclaim. This is our king. Who hung on a cross.

And was raised to the dead. This is the king. Who willingly embraced. The status. Of a child. Who became dependent. And fallen.

[25 : 26] And low. So that all who come to God. With nothing. In their hands. Can be freely. And forever received. Into God's kingdom. And glory. This is the king who summons us to surrender.

To surrender our lives. Our identities. Our possessions. Our present. Our future. Without reservation. And in that surrender. To find joy. Because whatever we lay down.

To follow Jesus. We will receive many times. And I think most of us. When we read. When we hear. Jesus summons to the rich ruler. To sell all that he has.

And distribute it to the poor. And then follow Christ. I think we are immediately struck. By the costliness. Of it all. The difficulty. Of what Jesus is asking.

The level of absolute surrender. That Jesus demands. The ability. Jesus is inviting. This man. Inviting us. Into a life of joy.

[26 : 28] The joy of knowing. That. Like a child. Longing to their parents. That we belong to God. Completely by. His grace. The joy of knowing. We receive.

As dearly loved children. Of the heavenly father. Who don't have to do anything. To prove ourselves. The joy of knowing. There's nothing we can do. To make him love us more. Or less. The joy of knowing.

Our past. And our present. And our future. Are secure in his hands. And our best days. Are yet to come. If you look at the next two stories. In Luke's gospel.

We see two pictures. Of that joy. We see that joy. Of a blind man. Dependent. Vulnerable. And lowly. Sitting by the roadside.

Banging. And he heard. He hears that Jesus is passing by. And he cries out. Jesus. Son of David. King. Have mercy on me. The people treat him.

[27 : 21] Just like the disciples. Treated the children. They rebuke him. Tell him to be quiet. And not bother Jesus. And he still cries out. And Jesus responds.

Just as he did with the children. Huh? He says. Bring his men. And he restores his sight. And the blind man. Gets up and follows Jesus.

He starts glorifying God. He came to Jesus with nothing. And he became a worship leader. And then we see. Zacchaeus. Chapter 19.

1 to 10. Not just any old child tax collector. But a cheap tax collector. Who was rich. Another rich. Ruler. When Jesus said to Zacchaeus.

I must stay. At your house today. It says Zacchaeus. Received him. Joyfully. And without him being prompted. He gave away half of his possessions.

[28 : 19] To the poor. And Jesus proclaimed. Today salvation has come to this house. For the son of man. To keep his seat. And to save. The lost.

1600 years ago. The young British man. Found that same joy. In surrendering his life to Jesus. He grew up in a wealthy family. He grew up going to church.

He never paid much attention. Until one day. He was on vacation. And a band of Irish raiders. Kidnapped him. And took him across the sea. And put him to work as a slave.

Tending sheep. Now he was all alone. Dependent. Vulnerable. And lowly. For the first time in his life. He wrote there.

The Lord opened my mind. To an awareness of my unbelief. In order that I might remember. My transgressions. And turn with all my heart to the Lord. And he watched over me. Before I knew him.

[29 : 15] And comforted me. As a father would his son. Six years later. He escaped from slavery. Returned home. Over the next several years. He became a prominent church leader. In Britain. And then one night.

He had a vision. In which he heard people from Ireland. Rying out. Come and walk again. Among us. He says. God was calling him. To go back to Ireland.

The land for him. And enslaved. Or also the land for him. And found. Freedom. And joy. And Christ. Almost everyone else. Thought he was crazy. Why would you choose to return to the land.

Where you were enslaved. The Irish or island barbarians. They'll kill you. You're from a good family. Why would you leave your parents. Who clearly would want you to stay. But he would not be dissuaded.

He sold everything. Went to Ireland. And never came back. For the rest of his life. He preached to the people. Who had kidnapped and enslaved him. He preached about King Jesus.

[30 : 11] About the good shepherd. Who had come to seek and save the lost. He faced false accusations. He was put in chains. All kinds of difficulties. But by living his life.

Hundreds. Perhaps even thousands. Of people had abandoned their idols. In their violent ways. And bowed their name to Jesus Christ. He wrote this in his autobiography. Before I was humbled. I was like a stone. Lying in deep mire. And he that is mighty. Came. And in his mercy. Raised me up. And indeed.

Lifted me high up. And placed me on top of the wall. And from there. I ought to shout out. In gratitude. To the Lord. For his great favors. In this world. And forever. That the mind of man. Cannot measure. I should give thanks. Unceasingly to God. Who frequently forgave. My folly. And my netvisions. Who took pity upon me. Thousands. And thousands. Of times.

[31 : 08] I certainly am wretched. And unfortunate. Daily. I expect to be murdered. Or betrayed. Or reduced to slavery. If the occasion arises. But I fear nothing. Because of the promises of heaven.

For I have cast myself. In the hand of almighty God. Who reigns everywhere. I pray God. That he gives me a perseverance. That I should be a faithful witness. For his sake. Right up to the time of my passing.

For beyond any doubt. On that day. We shall rise again. In the brightness of the sun. That is in the glory of Christ. Jesus our redeemer. As children of the living God.

And co-bears of Christ. Made in his image. For we shall reign through him. And for him. And in him. That's the joy that sustained. The real saint.

Patrick. That's the joy of being. A child of God. Let's pray. Let's pray. Almighty God.

[32 : 12] You alone can bring into order. The unruly wills. And affections. Of sinners. Grant us grace. To love.

What you command. And desire. What you promise. That among the swift. And varied. Changes. Of the world. Our hearts.

May surely. Be fixed. Where true. Joys. Are to be found. For Jesus Christ. Our Lord. Lives and reigns with you.

And the Holy Spirit. One God. Now forever. Amen. Let's be the key.