

Luke 18:15-34

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[0 : 00] Our passage tonight is from the Gospel of Luke, chapter 18, verses 15 through 35.

That can be found in page 877 in your pew Bible. I'm going to go ahead and read the whole thing so you can follow along with me.

Luke 18, verse 15. 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 your mother. And he said, All these I have kept from my youth. When Jesus heard this, he said to him, One thing you lack.

[1 : 35] 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 is it 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.

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.

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.

[2 : 53] 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.

But they understood none of these things. This saying was hidden from them, and they did not grasp what was said. Well, tonight we are confronted with the question.

We are confronted with the ultimate question of all of reality. What must I do to inherit eternal life? How do I enter the kingdom of God? How can I be saved from my sins and go to heaven and be with God forever?

And I would like to present three things that we need from the text tonight. We need to recognize the kingdoms.

[4 : 05] We need to repent of our idols. And we need to receive salvation. So we need to recognize the kingdoms.

You know, in our house, we have five children in our family, and sometimes more. And Mona and I have installed a government in our house, and it has rules, and it has sanctions, and it has...

There's a paradigm. And within our house, however, there's another little government that exists, and it's run by the little people that live in our house.

And so we'll find ourselves from time to time, as parents do, coming in on the tail end of the argument. Usually it's downstairs. It's in the basement. And by the time we perk up and hear the end of the discussion, someone is saying something extremely ugly to someone else that violates the parental government's paradigm of grace and mercy and kindness.

In fact, kindness is just a word that Mona and I blurt out at our house, although we just walk around saying, kindness, kindness, kindness. So when I dig into what's happened and what caused such an outrage, I usually get a story about why the person that was just annihilated by verbal assault deserved what they got.

[5 : 57] And my typical response is to get down, on eye level, and say, well, Sam, are you getting what you deserve?

And then there's a big pause, and then there's a sort of a weak, no, sir. I say, did Jesus die on the cross for your sins?

Yes, sir. Well, I think we can have some grace and mercy for this sibling. And the point I'm trying to make is that there are, there's a kingdom, there's a kingdom, and then there's a kingdom within the kingdom.

And if we're going to enter the kingdom of God, we need to be able to see the kingdom of God and discern which kingdom we're in before we can even get started.

The broad context of our passage today in the Gospel of Luke is Jesus is on a three-year march to Jerusalem where he's going to die for sinners.

[7 : 09] And on the way, he's constantly teaching and preaching about a lot of things, but one thing that he keeps preaching about is the kingdom of God, the kingdom of God. And even in our passage tonight, we have how to enter the kingdom of God.

And I would like to suggest that the kingdom of God and the kingdom of man sit side by side. Then they have competing value systems, they have competing worldviews, and they have competing paradigms.

And Jesus is constantly confronting and exposing that people close to him, such as his disciples, and people on the outside, and people, religious leaders, and just about everyone he comes into contact with is operating under the kingdom of man paradigm.

So, even as we look at our passage tonight, we see right off the bat in our first story that the disciples have a kingdom of man paradigm operating when they deal with this situation where the parents are bringing children to Jesus.

[8 : 34] So, here's Jesus. He is on his way to give up his life for murderers, liars, tax collectors, the dregs.

And meanwhile, his disciples are guarding him from infants and children because they think that Jesus is too important to care about unimportant members of society such as children.

You know, Jesus is drawing huge crowds, right? He's, he's, he's, he's a rock star at this time. He's healing people. People, people are, crowds and hordes of people are coming and the disciples are kind of along for the ride.

They're, they're on team Jesus, you know, and they're like the bouncers now and, and they're, they, they guard Jesus from all the little people. And I think that when we keep in mind Jesus' mission, it sharpens, it sharpens the, it sharpens the distinction and the absurdity of this, of, of the, of the disposition of the disciples.

And how did Jesus respond? When the disciples were pushing parents away that would have infants in their arms to bring them to Jesus, they're like, no, Jesus too, he's too busy, he's too important.

[10 : 22] Um, how did Jesus respond? Well, first of all, obviously he said, don't do that, stop that, let the children come to me. But then he turns to them and he says, you must become like these unimportant children if you're even going to be saved.

Jesus is always dropping these bombs on, on, on, on the paradigm of the kingdom of man.

They're, they're, I think they're designed to, to, to wake us up, to wake up the disciples, to wake us up to, they're like smelling salts. It's like, you know, one minute the disciples are like, Jesus is too busy, you can't go to him.

The next minute Jesus is like, if you even want to go to heaven, you're going to have to become like these unimportant children. Whoa. Whoa. Whoa. In the kingdom of God, everyone is in equal need of Jesus.

God is not choosing people or loving people based on their status or based on their performance. And these stories that Luke gives us are intentionally designed to communicate that fact.

[11 : 54] The next story we have is Jesus interacting with the rich ruler. So right out of the gate, the rich ruler comes to Jesus.

He was probably part of the religious ruling class, obviously an important person, obviously a prominent member in the community, well respected.

And he, he also appears to be a sincere, he, he's, you know, Jesus is always sparring with different people. Sometimes it's Pharisees that are trying to trap him and who, who hate him and are trying

to bring him down.

This man doesn't fall into that category. I mean, for we, I think we should take him at his word that he's genuinely coming to Jesus with a sincere question. So he starts off good teacher.

He calls Jesus good teacher. What good thing must I do to inherit eternal life? He says in the parallel passage in Matthew.

[12:55] So, well, what do we see about this man's paradigm? What's the rich ruler thinking?

He's thinking God rewards good people with blessing and honor. People get what they deserve from God. Salvation must be earned by doing your part.

I'm a good person. I am blessed. I am approved by God. So he goes to Jesus and he says good teacher, I think this is sort of a we're in the club of good people.

I recognize you're in the club. Can you give me any advice about is there anything more that I need to do to kind of seal the deal for getting into heaven?

right away Jesus drops the hammer again. He says no one is good except God alone.

[14:04] Now, I think that when you're reading the Bible and the lines just come one right after another, some lines there ought to be like a big space after because they're so profound.

You know, it's like you're reading along and Jesus says no one is good except God alone. Why do you call me good? And then it just keeps going. You're like wait, wait, wait, wait, wait. We need to stop and feel the weight of that.

That is hammer time. In the chapter four, Jesus, Jesus, there's a passage where Jesus says that when you as a servant of God have done everything that God has commanded, you are to consider yourself an unworthy servant.

That's huge. That's the kingdom of God mentality. That's the kingdom of God paradigm. When you serve God and you do everything perfectly, you are to consider yourself an unworthy servant.

So you see how out of sync this man is with Jesus and you see how out of sync the disciples are with Jesus. And I wonder if you've ever wondered, because I have, why don't the disciples get it?

[15:37] You know, there are so many passages in the Bible and you hit them and you wonder how can you not get it. For example, right after Jesus institutes the Lord's Supper coming up in chapter 22, he literally gives his disciples tokens of his body and his blood that is going to be broken and bled out for them.

They leave and the disciples start arguing over which one of them is the greatest. kings. Now, this is the clash of kingdoms, kingdom mentalities.

So, we have a problem. So, the first item on our to-do list is to see the kingdom if we're going to enter it. The problem is we can't see the kingdom on our own.

We cannot do item number one. Jesus said to Nicodemus, truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot even see the kingdom.

But we do need to see it if we're going to go there. Okay, so we also need to repent of our idols. If we're going to enter the kingdom of God, if we're going to be saved, we need to repent of our idols.

[17:07] My father used to take me fishing in Rhode Island. And if you've ever been on the coast of Rhode Island, you know, they have these huge rocks out there.

And he would take us, my siblings and I, out fishing. And we'd get out in the rocks. And it was our job to find the mussels and crack them and tie a string on the mussels because we were going to hunt these little crabs about that big.

And then when we got the crabs, my dad would take them and do horrible things to them and put them on hooks and then the fishing would begin. But we loved the crabbing. We didn't care about the fishing.

To us, this was so fun because the water would come up into the cracks and get trapped. And then we'd drop the mussels into the cracks.

Well, sure enough, after a while, the crabs would come out and they'd grab a hold of the mussel that you have on a string, which, by the way, isn't hidden. We're not talking about dental floss.

[18:09] We're talking about full-on like, you know, they grab on and you pull it out of the water and they are clinging to that thing and not letting go.

And I remember as a kid, and then you take it and hang it over the bucket and they're still clinging onto it and you have to go like this just to even get them off. And I remember as a kid thinking, I mean, I know they're just crabs, but I mean, how stupid do you have to be?

Like, if something's pulling you out of the water, that's not a good sign. You need to let go. You need to stop. And in a way, this story is sort of a visual, I think, for the human heart with regard to idols.

The heart clings to what it loves, even if clinging to what it loves is bad for you. Even if clinging to what it loves is going to end in death.

There's a power at work with idols, a supernatural power that is outside of our control. Let's take another look at the rich young ruler now.

[19 : 19] I'm going to reread verses 18 through 23. 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, 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. Notice in verse 22, one thing you lack, one thing.

What is it? What is the one thing? Could Jesus possibly be telling this man that the one thing he lacks is to go and do this good deed of giving all his money away, and if he does that, that one deed is going to secure his entry into heaven.

[20 : 29] Meanwhile, Jesus is marching to Jerusalem where he's going to bleed to death on a cross and die a horrible death. That's not what Jesus is saying. The one thing that the rich ruler lacks is Jesus.

Come and follow me. What's in the way is this muscle on a string that you are on. let go of your wealth and status and grab hold of me.

But this idol has a power on him. It has a grip on him. To give it up would mean to give up his whole worldview, to give up his whole life.

It would mean losing the honor and respect that he probably worked hard to develop and his status. Quick sidebar here.

I think this is obvious, but I feel like we need to acknowledge that this is for us as well.

[21 : 37] Jesus forces all of us to choose. Jesus will not take second place in a human heart. We all face this same dilemma as the rich ruler.

We cannot cling to wealth, status, power, self-sufficiency, our intelligence, you fill in the blank, you fill in the blank, and cling to Jesus as Savior at the same time.

It's not possible. Let's continue verse 24 through 27. 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. Notice verse 26. Then who can be saved?

[22 : 45] The disciples are thinking, if this devout, holy, good, there's no reason to doubt this man's claim on the surface of things, that he was a good man that was obeying the laws of God.

And in the eyes of the disciples, God's blessing him. He has money, he has wealth, he has status, he's good, God has rewarded him. And if this man can't be saved, what hope is there for us fishermen who are hanging out in the bars and everything until Jesus came.

If he can't be saved, what hope is there for any of us? And I think that this is, I think Jesus is saying exactly, exactly, now you're getting it.

Why do you think I'm here? Why did I come? It is impossible for people to save themselves. Verse 27.

It is impossible to be saved by the power of man, by your own power. And Jesus is telling the rich man, you can't save yourself.

[24 : 01] And Jesus is telling the disciples, you can't save yourself. And Jesus is telling us, we cannot save ourselves. Look back at verses 15 and 17 with me.

Now they were bringing even infants to him that he might touch them. Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.

So if we connect the infants with the children, then what Jesus is saying is you have to become like an infant in order to receive the kingdom of God.

Now I think this is an important distinction because I do think it's true obviously that we need a child like faith to receive the kingdom. We need to trust Jesus and children are trusting and I think that's great but I actually believe what Jesus is saying here is no you need to be like an infant.

How many of you have ever held a two day old baby in your hands? Their necks go like this. I mean they are helpless. They are utterly helpless.

[25 : 26] They can't even hold their head up. Let alone they're not going out and getting their own food. They're not going to go rent an apartment. They are helpless.

And I think Jesus is saying you cannot save yourself. You must become in your own estimation spiritually speaking like a infant like a helpless what do infants do?

Here's what they do. They receive things. They receive milk. They receive blankets. And the only other thing they do is cry to get what they receive.

And I think that's what Jesus is teaching us here. I think that task number one, we can't make ourselves see the kingdom of God, let alone enter it.

Task number two, we can't change our own hearts and turn from idols. we can't do it. And this is actually very good news, I think, as we're going to see in just a second.

[26 : 34] But when we read this passage, Jesus comes out as the Savior.

He's the Savior. How do I know, how do we know that? Well, look what Luke does. These juxtapositions of stories are not random, they're not accidental, right?

First, we get the story about becoming like an infant, and you must receive the kingdom. Then we get the story of someone who if anyone was going to earn it, this guy was going to earn it.

And he's even sad that he can't do it. He's a good guy. We probably like him, you know? And he can't get in. And then we're left kind of hanging, and the disciples literally say, well, then who can be saved, and how are we going to be saved?

And Jesus says, it's impossible with you, but it's possible with God. And then we look at verses 31 through 33. This is so incredible. taking the twelve, he said to them, see, we are going to Jerusalem, and everything that is written about the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished.

[28 : 05] 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. Can you imagine if Jesus pulled you aside into a quiet place with a few of your friends and looked you in the eyes and said, I love you, I know you, I understand you and your problems.

Instead of serving me to earn my friendship, I am going to serve you. I am going to get on my hands and knees and wash your feet.

I am going to go all the way with my love for you, holding nothing back. I am going to allow wicked people to spit in my face and whip me and pin me to a tree.

I am going to die for you and set everything right again. You will not have to pay for your sins. I am going to pay for your sins.

[29 : 13] I am going to be raised from the dead and one day bring you home to live with me forever. Can you picture that? You know, the disciples, we have it in our passage, they still didn't get it.

Jesus has told them that several times and they still didn't get it until they saw him later and they saw it all come down. And you know, I think that is meaningful for us.

I think this is the answer to what must I do to inherit eternal life. we must not try to save ourselves, but rather we behold Jesus Christ as a beautiful savior and we receive him as a free gift of God.

The apostle Paul says, the gospel is the power of God to everyone who believes. if your idols have a power over your heart, the gospel has a greater power.

And it's this power that enables us to see the kingdom of God and it is this power that changes our hearts and enables us to repent from our idols. And then when we're saved, we keep seeing Jesus.

[30 : 53] we keep repenting from our idols and our sins. And this is a dynamic that goes on.

Let me conclude by reading the promise that Jesus makes in verse 29 and 30. 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.

So I think on top of it all, Jesus is saying, hey, if you still have a little of the kingdom of man paradigm, it's like, hey, is this going to be worth it? Is this trade going to be worth it? Jesus is so gracious, he's even saying, listen, this is going to be a huge payout, a huge payout in this life and of course in the life to come, eternal life with Jesus forever, which is beyond our imagination to conceive.

That's what the Bible says. All right, let me pray for us. Our Father in heaven, we thank you for such a glorious savior.

[32 : 26] We pray that if we're tempted to get right with you by being good and trying harder, that you would show us Jesus, you would show us him vividly so that we would love him and trust him and receive salvation from him.

Thank you for giving us everything that we need so richly and so abundantly.
In Jesus' name, amen. Amen.