

Gospel and the Kingdo,

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Preacher: Daniel Ralph

[0 : 00] knowing Jesus and attending a church. The two are not the same and they never will be. And so as we come to this reading, it is a fairly long one in comparison, but it is an important one.

So let's begin in Luke 18, verse 18. And the 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. You 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 things 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, looking at him with sadness, said, how difficult it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God.

[1 : 11] For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God. Those who heard it said, then who can be saved?

But he said, what is impossible with men is possible with God. And Peter said, see, we have left 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 brother 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 12, he said to them, see, we are going up to Jerusalem and everything that was 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 spat upon. And after flogging him, they will kill him.

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

[2 : 26] As he drew near to Jericho, a blind man was sitting by the roadside begging. And hearing a crowd going by, he inquired what this meant.

They told him Jesus of Nazareth is passing by. And he cried out, Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me. And those who were in front rebuked him, telling him to be silent.

But he cried out all the more, son of David, have mercy on me. And Jesus stopped and commanded him to be brought to him.

And when he came near, he asked him, what do you want me to do for you? He said, Lord, let me recover my sight. And Jesus said to him, recover your sight.

Your faith has made you well. And immediately he received his sight and followed him, glorifying God and all the people. When they saw it, gave praise to God.

- [3 : 27] He entered Jericho and was passing through. And there was a man named Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector and was rich. And he was seeking to see who Jesus was.
- But on account of the crowd, he could not because he was of small stature. So he ran ahead and climbed into a sycamore tree to see him. For he was about to pass by the way.
- And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, Zacchaeus, hurry and come down. For I must stay at your house today. So he hurried and came down and received him joyfully.
- And when they saw it, they all grumbled. He has gone to be the guest of a man who is a sinner. And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, behold, Lord, half my goods I give to the poor.
- And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold. And Jesus said to him, today, salvation has come to this house.
- [4 : 30] Since he also is the son of Abraham. For the son of man came to seek and to save the lost. Well, may God bless the reading of his word and, of course, the understanding of his word upon it.
- Well, as I have said, this is the sort of final message for now on the gospel and kingdom. And we have been concentrating on this over the past three weeks and now the fourth week.
- And we have seen just how costly it is to follow Jesus biblically understood. And the cost of following Jesus is measured in a few different ways that you can be too quick to follow, where you haven't counted the cost, and then sometime in the future, turn away.
- And there are many examples. Many of our friends are examples of this very thing, where perhaps they came to faith in Jesus Christ, or they looked as if they were following at the same time we were, but then years later their hand is no longer on the plow, no longer willing to carry the cost of following Jesus and have turned back.
- And then, of course, we have other friends that fit into the example of being too slow to respond to Jesus. And they do not see the urgency, and they do not see the importance, or how important Jesus is to be listened to and to follow at all times in all of life, for all of life.
- [6 : 13] And then thirdly, there is the but. Those who have valid interests, but who place those valid interests above the interests of God, as if they are of greater value and greater importance.
- And as we see in our opening psalm this morning, that the man is saying that if I even forget Jerusalem, if I forget the place of God, if I take my eyes, even for a moment, may my hands lose their skill.
- In other words, he understands the value of God in comparison to everything else that he has, and he is willing for all of that to go if he, for a moment, forgot God.
- But the third man who didn't follow, of course, would not place the priorities of God above his own, and of course, would not follow. And so what we have here in this lengthy passage, of course, is somewhat of a conclusion.
- And the conclusion is that Christians make sacrifices that are not really sacrifices. How's that possible? Well, it takes a little reading to get to, but we will get to it this morning.
- [7 : 28] Now, with the reading being slightly longer than usual, hopefully, you have seen the bookends, how it began and how it ended. And what you notice is a contrast between two rich men.
- Now, these rich men are of different standings, the rich ruler and Zacchaeus being a tax collector, but in both cases, they are both extremely rich, and we're told that in the text in our readings.

But the rich ruler is one who cannot leave his wealth behind to follow Jesus. He cannot do what Jesus asks and leave it behind.

It makes him extremely sad to do so and to follow Christ. Zacchaeus, on the other hand, responds to Jesus saying, I'll give back everything that I've taken.

I will even go as far as to pay back the debts on a fourfold of what I have defrauded anyone of. So we have a wonderful contrast of two rich men.

[8 : 37] One who cannot leave his wealth, who in the eyes of society is extremely good, not only extremely rich. And then we have another rich man at the other end who is not good in the eyes of society.

He is a tax collector, but who doesn't hold on to his wealth and gives it away to the poor. And, of course, receives Christ Jesus. Salvation has come to his house.

And so the contrast really couldn't be much greater between these two men. And, of course, everything in between allows us to see the content of this contrast in particular.

Well, what is the summary of this section at large? Well, the cost of salvation is highlighted another time. Another time we have the cost of following Jesus.

Jesus is in conversation in different ways with the rich man, with the disciples, with the blind man, and, of course, with Zacchaeus. And in all cases, following Jesus involves cost.

[9 : 46] It involves giving up. But it also involves receiving. And then we have a blind man who sees. Well, how does he see?

Well, he calls out to Jesus with the title, Son of David. Well, to say that Jesus is the Son of David is to recognize Jesus as the Messiah.

It is to identify Jesus as the Messiah. Now, the rich ruler calls him good teacher. He has sight, but he does not see who Jesus is.

The blind man hears who's passing by, Jesus of Nazareth, and rightly sees that this man is the Son of David, the Messiah who has come.

And so we have a blind man who sees when we have a rich man who doesn't. Well, the blind man is healed because of his faith in Jesus, and he praises God for this gift.

[10 : 47] And all who witness this event happening also give praise to God. And Luke then moves from that account of speaking with the rich man and then speaking with his disciples about sacrifices, and then to the blind man who actually sees, to Zacchaeus.

And we learn that Zacchaeus is not a seeker. At least he's not the true seeker. He climbs a tree to see Jesus pass by. But when we read the passage, the true seeker in the passage is Jesus, who has come to seek and to save the lost.

And this gives us a huge amount of encouragement in a world where no one is seeking Jesus. Well, the truth is they never have been seeking Jesus. But they don't need to be because the Savior that has come is one who has come specifically to seek and to save the lost.

Their confidence is not in people's interest in God, but rather God's interest in them, in seeking and saving the lost.

And that's where our focus should be. Now, Luke sets it up brilliantly, as Luke often does, because by the time we get to the end of Luke's gospel, we have another man up a tree.

[12 : 10] And he has been put there by the very men he has come to save. And the man up the tree is Christ on the cross. And it is on the cross that we see this other man, Christ Jesus, saving sinners.

This is how he will accomplish the seeking and the saving. How salvation is able to come to any of our homes, to any of us as an individual before God, families, nations, whatever the case may be.

This is how salvation is accomplished. And that is how Luke's gospel leads us from introducing Jesus through to the final accomplishment.

Now, one of the greatest contrasts, of course, is this idea of wealth and riches and giving it up and following Jesus, which is seen throughout all these sections.

The poor man, by implication, is not wealthy. And, of course, the true contrast between these rich men in Zacchaeus and the rich ruler and Jesus, of course, is that he truly is the rich man.

- [13 : 26] The one who has kept all the commandments of God and who, indeed, gives it up. As Paul says, that though he was rich, he became poor, that we, through his poverty, might become rich.

And so there's plenty of comparisons here being made, ultimately leading us to who we are and what we have in the person of Christ Jesus.

And so there are really only two headings, and they both are really a combination of one heading, and that is the desire for eternal life and the question that follows from that, who can be saved?

The desire of eternal life and who can be saved? You'll notice that this whole section begins with this rich ruler coming to Jesus with a question.

The question itself is problematic, but we'll get to that in a moment. And he calls out to Jesus, Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?

- [14 : 30] And Jesus very quickly has to put him in his place for the title that he has given him. No one is good but God alone, Jesus says. Why do you call me good?

No one is good but God alone. And of course, this man is perhaps failing to see what Jesus is getting at, but what Jesus is getting at is revealing, in part, what this man's heart is really geared towards.

And Jesus calls his attention to the very commandments of God. And the man says, Well, I have kept all of these commandments since my youth.

So he says, Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life? Jesus says, No one is good but God alone. Jesus moves on to talk about the commandments of God, and he boasterly, or perhaps humbly says, I have kept all of these from my youth.

It is remarkable that he, having just being told that there is no one good but God alone, and here he is saying, I am.

- [15 : 47] I have been that way since my youth. I am as good as God alone. I have been that way since my youth. The whole point of Jesus introducing the commandments is for him to recognize that God's goodness cannot be compared to our goodness.

And so, even though he is told that no one is good but God alone, he fails to see that he isn't. In fact, he says the very reverse, I am. I have kept all these commandments even from my youth.

And so, this man's apparent goodness is contrasted in part to Zacchaeus' lack of goodness. A tax collector is not known for being a good person or a person full of goodness.

And the contrast made after these men have met Jesus is also remarkable because the rich ruler is one that does not give away his wealth and cannot actually listen to Jesus.

In other words, listening to Jesus does not take priority over his sadness. He is dictated by his own sadness, the sadness of having to give that riches up because he is extremely rich.

- [17 : 12] Where Zacchaeus, on the other hand, gives it all away. He even goes further than that by paying back 40% over the top of anything that he has defrauded anyone of.

Such is the transforming power of the gospel. The point here is a simple, observable one, but it's one that cannot be bypassed too quickly.

And that is, disciples follow Jesus. Jesus doesn't go chasing after them. He lays out to the rich man what it is to follow him, but he doesn't go any further than that in the same way he did with the three men in the previous passage.

The one who was too quick, the one who was too slow, and the one who had other priorities. Jesus lays it out what it means to be a follower, and you either just make that decision and count that cost, or you don't.

And of course, these types of contrasts are being made again. But the question is really the problem. And the question is, what must I do to inherit eternal life?

[18 : 32] Well, the answer, if I can put it bluntly, is we cannot give enough and we cannot do enough because we are not good enough compared to God to get eternal life.

We cannot give enough, we cannot do enough, we are not good enough to inherit eternal life. And so the conclusion that we can arrive at is that there is nothing that we can do to inherit eternal life.

What Jesus calls this man to do here and sell his riches and give to the poor is in the context of following Jesus, is in the context of what it costs to be a disciple.

Now, of course, following Jesus and listening to Jesus and having faith in Jesus and repenting and believing leads to eternal life. These are gifts from God. But this man is challenged on the initial following of Jesus.

It must begin with listening to the very words of God as we saw in our first section where God reminds us of the importance of listening to his son.

[19 : 43] And this man is extremely sad because he is extremely rich and he cannot give up his riches to come and follow Jesus. It's just not doable.

He does not want to do that. And of course, this prompts the disciples to say, well, then who can be saved? And now we begin to see their misunderstanding even as a follower of Jesus that wealth is not just a problem for initially following Jesus.

It's a problem for continuing to follow Jesus. It is something that can get in the way. And so Jesus has to point out to the disciples, look, you've made sacrifices that are not really sacrifices.

That what you have given up is nothing compared to what you will gain by giving all of that up and following me.

But there is this idea within the heart of man that we can contribute contribute to following Jesus. And that contribution often comes in the form of a kind of ownership over our life and walk with God that we can perhaps, just perhaps, dictate the terms of our following.

[21 : 00] No. That's just not possible. So there are many obstacles that get in the way of following Jesus.

There are many things that people cannot get past to actually make the decision to listen to Jesus and to follow him.

And it's clearly the case that one of the greatest obstacles to following Jesus is wealth, is the accumulation of what we have to actually give that up because one of the greatest motivators that we have is not greed in that sort of sense, but the loss aversion in the sense that greed takes two forms.

It's not, it doesn't just come in the form of wanting more, but it often comes in the form of not wanting less. That some people are not greedy in the sense that they want more and they want more and more and more and more, but their greed manifests itself in the context of not wanting less than what they currently have.

And of course, as I've often said, that when people's wages goes up, so does their means of living go up. And so when we don't live within our means, we live to our means. So if you get a pay rise or you come into money, all of a sudden you have nicer things.

[22 : 31] There's nothing wrong with that other than it's worth pointing out the observation that to live within your means is very different than to live to your means.

So, loss aversion is a powerful motivator. The idea of having accumulated a lot and not wanting to give it up is not the same as wanting more, but ultimately the motivation is still the same.

it can still get in the way of us following Jesus as we should. And of course, this is the truth for a person initially or it is true for a disciple as they follow.

It is a constant battle of what we are willing to give up. And Jesus said, sacrifice is not really sacrifices. What you get in this age and in the age to come cannot be compared to anything that you currently give up.

And so, the rich ruler does not want to give up. He doesn't want more. He wants eternal life, but he doesn't want to give up what he has. And so, he loses out on eternal life because he doesn't want to lose what he has.

[23 : 45] And that's really the contrast being made here. like the third man that we saw last week, he has misplaced priorities. In other words, the value of Jesus is not truly appreciated compared to the current value of his own priority or the current value of his earthly riches.

And so, this man listens to Jesus, but what he's really listening to is the sadness of his own heart that then prevents him from following. He's not a greedy person for more.

He just doesn't want to have less than what he currently has. And so, following Jesus is not founded on a tit-for-tat basis, that I'll listen to you if you listen to me, that I'll do what you want if you can do what I want.

No, following Jesus is very much of he commands and we follow. He commands and we submit. And this is strong language indeed, but it is spoken by God who loves you and who clearly has the right to command you, to command me.

And so, money may be one obstacle. It's certainly not the only obstacle to following Jesus or continuing to follow Jesus properly. and of course, there is a clear difference between following Jesus and simply being here in church or being here in our home.

[25 : 18] There's a big difference between the two and they cannot really be compared because they are not even likely, they're not the same even in the smallest of details.

And so, this cost of following Jesus is something that we have seen week after week after week. Jesus wants genuine followers to appreciate the gift that they have received in Christ Jesus and to not turn back.

Well, the question asked then is who can be saved? And the blind man gets it. The blind man that the son of David, the Messiah, is able to save.

That what is impossible with men is possible with God. and so, we cannot give enough, we cannot give up enough, we cannot do enough, we cannot be good enough to get salvation, but it is possible with God to give us all of that, to make us that saved person.

And sometimes, as I've said, we want that contribution so that we can have that part ownership, so that we can perhaps have some control over the life that we have allegedly given up to Christ.

[26 : 41] And so, Peter says to Jesus, we'll see what we have left. We have left our homes and followed you. And Jesus has to point out that you have left nothing at all that will not be added to you many times more in this life and in the age to come eternal life.

And we can perhaps talk about and in the age to come at another time. Well, let's come to our exhortation. The very point that Jesus is arriving us at.

Well, in these last four weeks, we have seen the call to follow Jesus and it is a strong call indeed. We've seen the urgency of following Jesus.

We have seen the cost of following Jesus. We have seen why it takes priority over everything else, the gospel and the kingdom of Christ Jesus takes first place.

It's easy to attend church. It's perhaps even easier to watch online. But it is really hard to follow. It's really, really hard to follow Jesus.

[27 : 51] And this is why Jesus is so abundantly clear on what it means to be a disciple, on what it means to be a true follower, a true worker of the kingdom, a maker rather than a taker.

The pressure to turn back is always going to be great. And sometimes it gets even greater. But you must understand the value of Jesus and the kingdom and the gospel compared to everything else in our lives.

So I'll finish this final message, at least for now in the gospel and kingdom, with a call. And the call is perhaps an unusual one, not a boastful one.

I hope you receive it as intended in humbly as I try and present it in humility. humility. And that is that the call is that to follow me as I follow Christ.

To follow me as I follow Christ. And I will make the same commitment. And that is to follow you as you follow Christ.

[29 : 11] To follow you as you follow Christ. Christ. And this way, if we make this commitment, this way we will avoid an individual following of Jesus that looks more like doing your own thing.

In other words, we have to know what following Jesus looks like. So I ask you to follow me as I follow Christ. I am humbly and hopefully confident that I'm doing that.

And I will promise to follow you as you follow Christ. So that we can together avoid an individual following that looks more like doing your own thing.

Well, my prayer is for this church is that we would know the lead and know what to follow. That God would give us wisdom to know where the lead is and how to follow.

And I pray very much that God would give us that. I also recognize that what we pray for must be in the context of what Jesus places the importance on.

[30 : 27] And Jesus never said that we didn't have enough elders. He never said that we didn't have enough deacons. He never said that we didn't have enough people in the church.

what he said was is that the harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few.

And so the call in the light of these last four messages is to look at the cost of the kingdom, the value of the kingdom, the urgency of following Jesus, the importance of Jesus Christ himself.

And don't take your hand off the plow. Amen. We're going to come to our final hymn and then back for the blessing.