

Better to have Jesus and Nothing instead of Everything and not have Jesus

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 06 August 2017

Preacher: Daniel Ralph

- [0 : 00] I will turn to Luke, Luke 18, Luke chapter 18. So we're going to pick this up at verse 18.
- So this is Luke chapter 18, beginning at verse 18. And I'm going to read through to verse 30. So it's only a few verses. So now hear God's word.
- 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.
- [1 : 15] 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 great 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 have those who have those who have those who have those who have those who have 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 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.
- [2 : 21] Well, we certainly ask God to bless the reading of his word. I really do think that that is a wonderful hymn that we've just sung.
- I mean, I just think it's really, really good. And that chorus is just fantastic. I was thinking that as I was singing through the chorus the second time through, just how good those words are and how it finishes.
- You know, a thought popped into my head. It doesn't happen often, but I thought I'd like that at my funeral. Now, you know, I've dealt with a lot of people that says, you know, can you sort out my funeral service?
- These are the hymns that I would like. Well, I found myself doing it this evening. Ian, you can play for it. Or else we won't have it.
- That's it. That's all I say. Well, we're going to come this evening to the third part in the series of Gospel Basics. And by Gospel Basics, perhaps I should really say Gospel Bedrock or Gospel Foundation.

[3 : 24] In other words, this is the starting point. I want to highlight these two messages so far and this one to what it is to not only understand the Gospel, but to appreciate the Gospel and to know what Jesus Christ has done for you.

So over the last couple of weeks, as this evening, we have been looking at three things, whether you've realized them or not. They've been this, meeting Jesus, knowing Jesus, and the call to follow Jesus.

Those three things have always been involved, meeting, knowing, and following. Last week, we also saw how important it is to have a view of Jesus, that your view of Jesus matters.

But also, what you think about yourself equally matters. Because what you think about yourself could be the very thing that brings you to Christ, or the very thing that holds you back from coming to Christ.

So it's not just about what you know about Jesus. It's also about what do you know concerning yourself, or rather, what do you believe concerning yourself.

[4 : 37] Now, the reason I say that this evening is because we come to the rich ruler, and everybody has their blind spots. And the person says, well, I have none.

They're blind to the fact that they have some. Everybody has blind spots. The trouble is, is that the blind spots that Jesus gets us to see are the blind spots that are the things that actually cause us to be held back from Jesus.

They are the very things that hold us back from following Jesus. So when Jesus shows us our blind spots, he's not exposing you before God. Rather, he is God who understands all and sees all, and that includes you completely.

So you are exposed to God, but you're exposed to God in the most gentlest of ways. A way that's not embarrassing, a way that's not a shameful way.

God sees everything. And God has the right, in fact, God has the power, and not just the right, to be able to reveal to us those blind spots.

[5 : 49] So the challenge here this evening is a question. And the question is, do you see the things that are holding you back from committing your life to Christ?

Do you see the things that are holding you back from committing your life to Jesus Christ? There's a second thing here to notice, and that is loss.

Okay? Christians are not losers. Okay? People who follow Jesus don't lose things. Though it seems as though they do, it's kind of an oxymoron when you actually understand the gospel.

But many, many people feel that if I come to Jesus, then I have to give up so much. If I come to Jesus, I have to lose so much.

But what you actually realize when you come to Jesus is that the things that you're actually losing, you don't actually need. Okay? The things that Jesus calls us to lose and to leave behind are the things we don't actually need because of what God gives us in return.

[6 : 59] The passage here ends with multitude of blessing. That we make a decision that has God at the very center, God at the very focus, and in return, God blesses that decision.

Okay? God is a rewarder of those who put God first. Okay? God blesses you. So, yes, it seems on the surface I have to give up so much.

But in reality, you're actually giving up nothing at all. Okay? What Jesus is actually asking us to give up are the things that hold us back, are the things that cause us not to follow Jesus.

These are the things that cause blind spots and cause barriers to following Jesus. Another barrier is perhaps the fear of, well, I don't know who Jesus is yet.

Another thing you have to understand is that people who follow Jesus here followed Jesus that they didn't really understand. Jesus is having to say on numerous occasions, this is who I am.

[8 : 08] This is what I do. This is what I'm about to do. This is why you should follow me. That they're following a Jesus that they don't fully understand, but that didn't hold them back. They learn as they follow.

And it's the same for Christians today. It's the same if you came to Christ today. You will learn about Christ as you follow Christ. So don't think that the barrier that's holding me back is I don't know enough about Jesus.

That's not a reason for being held back. Rather, what is holding you back is your blind spots. That you don't know yourself that well either, Jesus is saying.

There are things about you that you cannot see. And you cannot see that they are the very things that are holding you back from me. This is what Jesus is saying here. Okay.

There are things that you cannot see. And those things that you cannot see, you cannot see that they're holding you back from following me. That's really important.

[9 : 10] That we come to Jesus who tells us who he is, but then takes a long time and very patiently to show us who we really are.

So the passage here begins with blind spots. The rich ruler says, good teacher. Now he does follow this with a question.

The question is, what must I do to inherit eternal life? But let's just focus on the good teacher part alone. And the fact that Jesus says in reply to this, why do you call me good?

No one is good except God alone. Well, there are a couple of things here to notice. Jesus is not denying that he is good. And Jesus is not denying that he is God.

Jesus is both God. And if he's God, he's good. So he's both God and good. Rather, what Jesus is saying here is that the standard of goodness is God.

[10 : 07] And that's what this man had to understand. That Jesus is calling Jesus, who he didn't know to be God. And Jesus is getting him to understand that the standard of what is really good is not man and how well he can perform God's law on earth, but actually God.

Only God is good. That's the standard of goodness. So Jesus is highlighting the real standard of what is good.

Now, once he's done that, he then gets on to the question. But before he gets to answering the question, he lays down God's laws. And the laws are, you know, don't do this, don't do that, don't do this, honor your mother and father.

There's a lot of do nots. And the reason why we need to understand this is because the law is a mirror of God. So do not steal. Why not?

Because God doesn't steal. Okay, so instead of just seeing it as a law for something that we are not meant to do, which is the right way to see it, we should also see it as a representation of what God is like.

[11 : 15] Do not bear false witness. Why not? Because God doesn't. God is good. God is good. No one is good except God alone. So Jesus takes this man to the law, already stating that no one is good but God alone.

And the man in return says, well, I've kept all of these from my youth. Kept them all. And what I find interesting is that Jesus doesn't argue with him.

He doesn't say, oh, and what about this one? Oh, and what about when you were? Jesus doesn't argue with him. Oh, I've kept all of these from my youth. But then Jesus recognizes one thing.

And it's this. You lack one thing. And the one thing that he lacks is God. Okay? He has God's law. He keeps God's law.

But he doesn't have God. The one thing that he actually lacks is the one thing that you need for eternal life. God. Okay?

[12 : 19] Keeping God's law, trying to keep God's law, is not going to get you eternal life. Trying to be as good as you possibly can is not going to get you into the place where you can inherit eternal life.

He lacks one thing. And the one thing that he lacks is God. He lacks relationship with God. So remember the question. What must I do to inherit eternal life?

Now, you ought to take time on that question for this reason. Especially on the word inherited. Something inherited is not something earned. Something inherited means that you get given it.

Okay? You don't work for it. So what must I do to inherit eternal life? Well, there's one thing that you lack. God. Okay? So the one thing that he lacks, which is God.

Because unless you belong to God, you cannot inherit from God. Okay? Unless you belong to God the Father, then you cannot inherit what God the Father has.

[13 : 24] This is Jesus' main point. Okay? You lack one thing in order to inherit eternal life. God. Because if you do inherit eternal life, then you have to inherit it from the one who is eternal.

God. So he's done all these good things, which Jesus doesn't argue with. But he lacks one thing. And the one thing that he lacks is the answer to his question.

Eternal life. So Jesus says this, verse 22. Sell everything you have. Give it to the poor. And you will have treasure in heaven.

And come and follow me. Well, it seems, doesn't it, on the surface, that Jesus is asking this man to do something to then get something else in heaven.

Treasure in heaven. But what Jesus is doing, because he knows where this man's heart actually is, it's actually in his treasure. It's actually in his riches.

[14 : 27] Jesus is picking on the very one thing that he knows is the man's blind spot and the very thing that's going to hold this man back. Jesus doesn't say anything for any reason.

He picks on that one thing for a very specific purpose. He's trying to get the man to see the one thing that is holding him back from eternal life.

Okay? It's not about what you give away. It's about what you hold on to that actually holds you back from coming to God, from coming to the Lord Jesus Christ.

In other words, what do you hold on to rather than trusting in God? What are you unwilling to let go of rather than coming to Jesus?

The issue here is getting us all to see, which only Jesus can do, the things that hold us back from Jesus. Getting us to see the things that hold us back from coming to God.

[15 : 26] So notice verse 23, which is the observation. And this is where the reality sets in for the ruler. The blind spot that this man has lived with ever since he was a young boy now becomes apparent to him.

And in verse 23, this is what it says. But when he heard these things, he became very sad for he was extremely rich.

Suddenly reality sits in. And Jesus is asking him to give up the one thing that he doesn't want to give up. But the one thing that he doesn't want to give up is the one thing that's holding him back from eternal life.

It is the one thing holding him back from coming to the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus is trying to get this man to see something that he didn't see before.

He's trying to get this man to see that what he has a hold of actually has a greater hold over him than what he has over it. Jesus says, sell everything that you have.

[16 : 38] And his heart hits rock bottom. Give it all to the poor. If I give it all to the poor, then what am I going to have? Well, only God. Only God.

See, the issue here is that you get God. You don't need anything else. Of course we need other stuff. But remember how it finishes. God blesses us.

The issue here is, are you going to give up the thing that holds you back from God? Whatever it may be. Jesus then says that the one issue here is the issue of trust.

Now this is seen in the fact that people back then, just like people now, trust in riches. They trust in wealth. They trust in what they have. And then Jesus goes on to explain why it is so difficult for people to give things up.

So he gets to the rich man, and this is what he has to say. The rich man is extremely rich. Jesus, verse 24, looking at him with sadness, said how difficult it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God.

[17 : 52] And here's why. Number one, it has nothing to do with wealth as such. Though wealth is a big barrier. But here's the reason. It's actually to do with loss aversion.

This man here, just like us today, makes decisions on what he can not lose. Now you think about it for a moment.

How many decisions you make, all the time, based on the motivation of loss aversion. I will make this decision because I don't want to lose this. I will do that because I don't want to lose this.

And you start adding them up. You will get to a large number very, very quickly. Most of your decisions are loss aversion decisions. You, just like this man here, want to hold on to what you have because it's what you have.

The trouble is, is the very thing that this man is holding on to, that he doesn't want to lose, he's trying to avoid the loss, is actually going to cost him losing his life in the end.

[18 : 55] He doesn't want to lose. And by not wanting to lose what he has, he loses massively in the end. So the issue here is that do you make the decisions you make out of loss aversion?

That I don't want to lose what I have. Now we wouldn't call that greed. But you think about it, it is a form of greed. There's not too many people I know, well there's a few I know that want more and want more.

And the trouble is with wanting more and, dare I say, getting more, is that when you get more, you want more again. And then when you get more, you want more again.

The thing is with loss aversion is that it's an equally powerful motivator. You have what you have, you justify it by saying I've worked really hard for this and I deserve it, and then you can't lose it.

And what Jesus is saying is if that's the thing that's holding you back from trusting in me, that's the thing you have to lose. That's the very thing that's getting in the way from you trusting in me.

[20 : 02] This is why this man became sad. Because he had a dilemma in front of him. I want eternal life, but I don't want to lose what I have. I want eternal life, but I don't want to lose what I have.

And him not wanting to lose what he had meant that he did lose out on eternal life. The issue here is not wealth.

The issue here is being unwilling to deal with those barriers that hold you back from God. And his wealth had a hold on him, and he didn't realize it until Jesus told him to do this very thing.

How difficult it is for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than it is for a rich person to enter the kingdom of heaven.

In other words, camels cannot go through the eye of a needle. Whether it be the gate at the beginning of the city or you take a normal needle, the point that Jesus is making is that camels can't go through.

[21 : 07] And if camels can't go through the eye of a needle, then it is equally impossible for a rich man to get into heaven. Why? Because he's rich? No.

The issue is that rich people have so much that they can't let go of. They trust in so much. Jesus warned against mammon. Not because mammon is wrong.

Not because money is wrong. Not because having these things is wrong. But because these things, which we think we hold in our hands, actually hold us.

And the question that faces us here is, do you see the things that are holding you back from following me? Now, the people hearing this, verse 26, say, well, who can be saved?

In other words, if you've got a rich man that's kept God's law since he was a young boy and he can't be saved, who can be? To which Jesus responds, what is impossible with man, it's possible with God.

[22 : 09] In other words, God makes what is impossible for you possible for you. What does that mean? Well, God makes what is impossible for you possible for you.

Peter thinks he's got it. So he says to Jesus, verse 28, well, we've left our homes and followed you. And Peter, too, misunderstands.

So the rich man, okay, thinks, well, I've not got it because I'm not willing to give up what I have. Peter makes the mistake of thinking, well, I have got it because I've given everything up.

And Jesus has to correct both issues because the issue is not what you give up to get eternal life. It's rather what you give up that gets in the way of you inheriting eternal life.

So you may sit here this evening and think, I don't have any wealth. I don't have any riches. I don't have the extreme rich state that this man has here.

[23 : 11] You know, I understand that, but that's not the issue. The issue is what's getting in your way from not coming to Christ? What is the thing that's holding you back that you're unwilling to lose to stop you from coming to Jesus?

It just so happens that people who have a lot recognize that they have more to lose, and that's why the hold is so great. For poor people, yeah, they've still got things that they want to hold on to that could stop them from coming to Jesus, but they have less to hold on to, materially speaking.

Jesus is making two points. The first point is, if you have more, it could be the case that there's more of a barrier. But in either case, what is the one thing that you have that you're unwilling to lose?

Because that is the thing that could keep you back from following me. That is the one thing that could keep you back from trusting in God. What are the things that you hold on to that keep you back from Jesus?

And let me add this. Whatever it is, it's not worth the value that you put on it. Whatever it is, the value you have placed on it, it's not worth that much.

[24 : 25] Jesus says, to make this point clear, that there is being 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.

Now, Jesus is not saying here that you should abandon your wife or you should abandon your family or you should abandon anything. What he's saying is, is this, that if your house is the thing that holds you back, get rid of it.

And in relationships, it's even more difficult because you can't get rid of your wife. You can, but you shouldn't. And you can't get rid of your husband, you know, and you're going to say, there's a few wives going, well, actually, give it a try.

No, trust me, you cannot do that. As your pastor, I'm telling you, you're not allowed to do that because I stand on the authority of God's word. The issue here is not give them away, but rather recognize in relationship terms what happens when they are the very things that actually stop you from following Jesus.

So no person, no man who has decided to follow Jesus when his wife is against him, okay, will lose out in the end. No wife who decides to do it when her husband is against it will lose.

[26 : 03] No one leaves the house and becomes worse off. No one leaves the family and becomes worse off. Now, for you who are saved in a family of people who are not saved, you know what that feels like.

I'm isolated, on my own. There's no one to talk to about the things of God because there's no one in my family who are engaged in the things of God.

But you belong to Jesus. Those things, however close they are to you, however dear they are to you, however much you love them on a human level, you recognize are not going to be the things, however much they are yours, are going to be the things that hold you back from following Jesus.

On one level, you've lost them, okay? On one level, you've lost them. But on another level, they're still there. Jesus understands that difficulty totally.

This is why he says next that the blessing is that there will not receive, for the sake of the kingdom, who will not receive many times more in this time and in the age to come eternal life.

[27 : 09] The church here this evening is the very vehicle that God uses for people who are saved in environments where nobody else is saved. If you're the only person saved in your home, okay, you're not the only person saved in here.

So while you're alone in one area, you're not alone here. This is your new family. This is your new home. This is where God will abundantly bless you, especially if you find yourself in that type of category.

And there are many people who do. Jesus will not leave you stranded. Remember, as you choose God first, God honors that decision and blesses you mightily.

So this one thing that this man lacks is God. The one thing that this man is unwilling to lose is the one thing that will cause him to lose everything in the end.

So as we come to conclusion, consider these things. Consider this. If you're at the point this evening where you are already forming a pros and cons list in your head as to whether or not to follow Jesus, you have already decided not to.

[28 : 35] If you've got to the point where you're trying to weigh up the pros and cons as to whether or not you're going to follow Jesus, you're already creating the barrier to stop you from following Jesus. Also, Jesus flips the whole idea of loss aversion on its head.

This is what Jesus says elsewhere in scripture. Whoever chooses to save his life, that is to keep your life to yourself, will lose it. But whoever loses his life for my sake, that is to give it to God, will save it.

For whoever would save his life would lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul?

So the question that remains, the only question remains is this. What are you willing to lose and when are you willing to lose it? What are you willing to lose and when are you willing to lose it?

You can either lose in a good way, that is give it all to God now and have God forever, or you can lose it in a bad way. Will you keep hold of everything now and then lose everything forever?

[29 : 46] You can choose when you're going to lose, okay? It can either be a loss in a good way or a loss in a bad way, but you will lose. But there's one loss that leads to blessing, okay?

I will lose it all for the sake of Christ because Jesus plus nothing equals everything. But having everything and not have Jesus means you have nothing.

To have everything and to not have God is really to have nothing. But to have God and to not have anything else is to have everything. This is the reality that Jesus gets us to see.

So you're going to lose either way. You choose which loss you want. You can either lose now to God and be blessed for it, or you can keep hold of everything that you have, but lose in a very terrible way in the end.

You've got to realize that this man is faced with a real test of faith, a real test of trust. If he gives up everything and gives it to the poor, he won't have anything left.

[30 : 52] If he gives up everything and gives it to the poor, where is he going to live? What is he going to eat? What clothes will he wear?

So for you who think that trust is sort of just a bit of an ambi-pambi idea, that, you know, no, this is a real test. This is real trust in the real Jesus.

This is real material. It's going to make a difference tomorrow. Whatever decision I make for Jesus today, it's going to make a big difference tomorrow. Well, the lesson is the same for that man then as it is for us today.

It is much, much better to have Jesus and nothing than to have everything and not have Jesus. That's the reality. It is much better to put God first, but what is impossible with man is possible with God.

Okay? We find it hard to put God first, but what is impossible with man is possible with God. So trust God. Don't do it yourself. Let God do it for you.

[32 : 07] For what is impossible for you, God makes possible in Christ. So come and commit. Amen.