

## Luke 18:18-30

### Eternal Life and Earthly Losses

Introduction: There is a saying, “attitude is everything.” It’s generally true. If you hire workers, you want them to have the right attitude. A coach will probably opt for lesser talent if the players have the right attitude. Sometimes parents will need to give certain attitude adjustments to their children.

Our text today shows two polar opposite attitudes when it comes to listening to Jesus.

Overview of Lk. 18

- 1-8; the parable of the unjust judge ends with the probing question: when Jesus returns, will he find people who have *faith*?
- Next, an example of faith from the tax collector (9-14). Justifying faith is when we see our *desperate need* and the true *filth* of our sin; we are hopeless unless God is merciful.
- Then, the precious example of childlike faith (15-17). God looks for the *complete trust* that an infant has.

\*Notice the similar theme of humility. That’s what catches the eyes of Jesus. A faith that is humble at the core.

- Yet a truly humble attitude is tested when things are taken away from us. Think of Job’s story. (Job 1:9-10) “Does Job fear God for no reason? Have you not put a hedge around him and his house and all that he has, on every side. You have blessed the work of his hands and his possessions have increased in the land.”
- Satan suggests Job has such a good attitude because he has so much good in his life. So it’s through how we handle loss that exposes if we have an attitude of faith.
- Or, think of the example of Abraham. God tested his faith to see how he would handle loss when he called him to offer up Isaac (Gen 22).

- The text in Lk divides into two main units. A conversation Jesus has with the Rich Young Ruler and follow up with his disciples.
- Some think the ruler was either a religious ruler (e.g. synagogue leader, or like a local magistrate). His position is not the main issue, his possessions are. They reveal his real attitude toward God.

### **1. A poor attitude of refusal that leads to eternal death (18-23)**

- Our passage begins with a critical question. What must I do to inherit eternal life?
- Let's assume that we know nothing about this man. His question is really on target.
- But with questions, every word counts. And Jesus pushes back with his choice of adjective.
- (v19) "Why do you call me good?"

We apply the word good pretty generally. I have good parents. My wife is a good wife. My boss is pretty good. We even call our dog good boy. So the term good is pretty relative. But Jesus reminds this man that God is the ultimate standard of goodness. True goodness belongs to God alone. Jesus directs this man's attention away from himself to God. Any good we do is only because we are created in the image of a good God.

- Jesus moves on (v20) by giving a modified list of the 10 commandments. These all emphasize our horizontal responsibility to love others.
- The purpose of this is not to give a checklist—the 10 Commandments was how a Jew knew he was doing God's will.
- The Rich Ruler thinks he has it.
- But then Jesus has one observation that is going to bring the house crashing down (v22); "One thing you lack. Sell everything. Give to the poor. Find your eternal treasure. Follow me."

The key to doing God's will is to listen to the voice of Jesus.

(Jn 10:4)—the Sheep listen to the voice of the Shepherd.

- But the man was unwilling. And the story ends in failure. This guy probably changed his opinion of Jesus being a good teacher by now. He is no more than a teacher to this man; he is not Lord.
- There is also another warning in here about the hidden danger of wealth.
- The Bible does not always present wealth as a blessing. Often it is a great burden more than blessing.

(Prov 30:8-9)

give me neither poverty nor riches;  
feed me with the food that is needful for me,

- 9 lest I be full and deny you  
and say, "Who is the Lord?"  
or lest I be poor and steal  
and profane the name of my God.

- It is wise to have a healthy fear of what wealth can do to the human heart. Too much wealth can cause us to forget God.

\*\*Notice Jesus's words are an invitation to discipleship, "then come, follow me" (v22).

This man had a battle going on. *A battle of competing loves.* It's been phrased in different ways. John Calvin called our hearts an idol factory. Kyle Idleman said that there are gods at war in a book. Tim Keller called them Counterfeit God's. They all describe the same human condition. *Our hearts are hardwired to love something more than Jesus.*

For some it's money, for others it's some other forms of success. Some have the god of pleasure and lust. These fake gods are deceptive. Just like this man's possessions, they lie about offering peace and security when really they lead to death.

Let me say it as plainly as I can. If there is something that we love more than Jesus in our life, we cannot follow Jesus. Embracing the gospel means that there will be earthly loss. There are things we need to say goodbye to that stand in the way of Jesus.

Paul understood this.

(Phil 3:7-9)

<sup>7</sup> But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. <sup>8</sup> Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ <sup>9</sup> and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith—

- I think what mattered most to Paul at one point in his life was his reputation. But he says that Christ is all to him. He was willing to have the earthly loss of reputation in exchange for the surpassing worth of Christ.

Friends, I need to ask—are you willing to exchange earthly loss in order to have Christ? Is there anything standing in the way of you and the Lord Jesus today? Anything that you are wrestling to part with?

The Rich Ruler is an example of a poor attitude that ends in failure and leads to eternal death. *He warns us.* My guess is that 2000 years later this man would say from his grave, “I wish I would have just listened to Jesus”

And that’s the main takeaway from this first point. Listen to Jesus. His voice carries ultimate authority. If there is something standing between you and him today, detach from it. It’s not eternally worth it to hang on.

## **2. A proper attitude of faith that leads to eternal life (24-30)**

- In this next section the attitudes are completely opposite. We actually get two examples of a proper attitude—the disciple and Christ.

## Disciples

- The disciples have already said goodbye to earthly things to have Christ as Lord.
- (v24) Jesus stresses the difficulty of the rich inheriting the kingdom with a wild illustration. A camel was the largest land animal in Israel. The eye of a needle was the smallest household item.

The point is, it is humanly impossible for us to set our hearts free from our love affair with the world. It's not a matter of our willpower or forming new habits. Having Jesus as our supreme treasure has to be a miraculous work! Or, to put it this way, God's sovereign grace is the only way of overruling our poor attitudes.

- That is the sum of v27. We are powerless in ourselves to kill our competing loves, and therefore be saved. It has to be a work of God grace.
- And so Peter pipes up (v28) "Look at us. We've parted with earthly things to be your followers."
- At first, it sounds self-exalting. But Jesus does not correct or rebuke.

We need to remember how radical the disciple's sacrifice was, as they gave up 3 years of their earthly lives to follow Jesus. Leaving home and family meant leaving the security of stable work and secure financial provision. They left family protection, intimacy, and comfort. That's what is behind Peter's remarks. And that's what it looks like to completely trust Jesus. There simply can't be some other security, stability, identity, or higher love that takes the place of the Lord Jesus Christ. Anything that does is rightly called an idol. It's a competing love.

Whatever we give up for Jesus is always worth it. If someone chooses to remain single to serve the Lord Christ without hinderance, it is worth it (1 Cor 7). If others sell the house of their dreams to pursue a ministry calling—let's say to move to a major urban city to church plant with an unreached ethnic people—it will be eternally worth it!

Whatever earthly loss we shed for the gospel is worth it.

- Final principle—Eternal life is God’s reward for the self-denying.

This is not about merit or works-based salvation, it’s simply God’s gospel economy.

### Christ

- Jesus is the ultimate example of a life eternally rewarded by God because of self-denial.
- No surprise we find another prediction of the cross (31-32)
- Jesus is the forerunner of a humility that denies self and finds God’s eternal reward.

(2 Cor 8:9) <sup>9</sup>For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.

Gospel: The only way any of us has a shot at eternity is because of this. The only way to win an eternal reward is to trust the One who won it for us, when he lovingly bled to death on the cross. The good news is that we can detach from lesser things, because our Lord and Savior detached from the infinite glory of heaven to come and rescue us.