

Luke 18:18-27 (WCF 10:4) “Something Lacking”

For the Children: People often think they are very good at something when they are not. A young person may think he is good at art, while others look at his work and think, “That’s awful!” Sometimes we think we have done well because we don’t know enough to see the faults. Other times, it is our pride. The Rich Young Ruler thought he was good at keeping God’s laws. He didn’t see his own sin – or His need for the saving grace of the Lord Jesus. Some unbelievers behave quite well on the outside – even better than some of God’s children – but we shouldn’t assume that God is pleased with them until they have turned in faith to the Lord Jesus. Then He saves them. It is impossible for sinners to save themselves. Only God can do this. **Questions:** How do we know that the ruler hadn’t entered God’s Kingdom? What was he lacking? What should you do if you feel that you might not be part of Jesus’ Kingdom?

Introduction:

First Point: The Ruler’s Calling

- 1) Familiarity with the Word: The ruler was obviously familiar with the OT. He was young to be in the Sanhedrin, which suggests that he was seen as very pious. He knew the 10 commandments and believed he had kept them all from his youth.
- 2) Knowledge of the Christ: He seems to know something of Christ as well, since he comes with a serious question, calls Him “Good” and “Teacher” and kneels before Him (Mark.10:17). However, the Lord pushes him on this point: Why does he call Jesus “Good”? Only God is perfectly good. The ruler does not yet understand the problem of total depravity – he thinks that men can be good – and he does not realize that Jesus is both God and perfect man.
- 3) The Noble Unbeliever: Unbelievers can sometimes seem to be better people than many believers. This nobility is due to “common grace” (God’s non-saving love of His creatures, His handiwork). Part of this involves the Holy Spirit restraining sinners from going further in their sin; and His work in them by way of “common operations,” e.g., enabling some to be outwardly more patient, self-controlled, generous etc., than many Christians. See Mt.13:3-9,18-23. This in no way lessens “total depravity.”

Second Point: The Ruler’s Failure

- 1) A 10th Commandment Lack: The Lord singles out the ruler’s failure with the 10th commandment – he is unwilling to give up his money and possessions to follow the Lord. This shows that the ruler had not understood that all the commandments were to be kept in heart and mind as well as external behaviour. If he had understood that, he would never have claimed to have kept them all. In fact, it is impossible for men to keep any of them properly (v.27).
- 2) Outside the Kingdom: The Lord looked at the ruler when He made the comment about the impossibility of a camel going through the eye of a needle. He then talked about the difficulty of a rich man entering God’s Kingdom. V.27 implies that it is, in fact, impossible for anyone without God’s help. Sinners cannot earn their way into the Kingdom. The ruler simply did not have faith in the Lord Jesus – right knowledge, commitment and assurance. He was not saved cf. “Then who *can be saved?*” (v.26). Since this is true of a man who was outwardly very pious, how much less can a man not professing the true religion be saved? See WCF 10:4. If we say that sinners can be saved in their own strength and don’t need the grace of God in Christ, this is a “pernicious and detestable” error.

Third Point: The Ruler’s Need

- 1) The Need of Grace: Sinners like the ruler need God’s grace if they are to be saved. For what is impossible for man – to earn salvation – is only possible with God. Only He can elect, send His Son to die for particular sinners, and send His Word and Spirit to regenerate and give the gift of faith.
- 2) Responding to the Gift: The Lord also enables His people to respond to His gracious initiative, by following Jesus. We do not all have to sell everything and follow Jesus as itinerant missionaries. But we do have to follow Him in personal commitment, trust and obedience – putting Him first in our lives, as the ruler failed to do. If we believe that we lack these things, we can ask the Lord for help – for He is the only One who can do the “impossible.”

Conclusion: