

THE WEALTHY AND THE NEEDY AND THE KINGDOM OF GOD

LUKE 18:18-43

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Introduction

Pastoral Reflection on Luke's Gospel: The more I travel interpretatively through the Gospel of Luke, I am reminded of at least two challenging thoughts: (1) How much grace that we are all in need of to hear and understand and obey the teaching of Jesus Christ concerning His Kingdom; this has been an extremely challenging experience for me - - and I hope for you, too!

(2) As I go through Dr. Luke's Gospel I am also newly aware of the fact of how little many people really understand the message of the Bible, particularly the teaching of Jesus.

Going through the Gospel of Luke and preaching Jesus' words particularly has caused me to pause and think how little people actually understand the demands that Jesus makes on His disciples. This frightens me to see how little people today, particularly those in Bible-believing Evangelical churches, actually understand the seemingly audacious and impossible things our Lord taught to His people. I wonder how much we as a congregation (this includes me!) actually understand the words of Jesus at times!

Perhaps this is why "verse-by-verse" expositional preaching is no longer popular in many churches today- -the people (and pastors!) could never stomach the difficulty of preaching through every aspect of our Lord's words. Talk about a "school of hard *theological* knocks"! My friend recently said to me that for him reading theology is easier spiritually compared to actually reading the Bible and understanding Jesus' theology- -reading Jesus' words can be much more challenging when we are 'face to face' as it were with Jesus in His Word!

Let us thank God that we are hearing these hard words of Jesus and let us seek the grace of God to do what he commands as our great and sovereign King (we must remember that the Kingdom of God is *not a democracy* as I have tried to point out before).

We must understand as the people of God that the reason Jesus taught these seemingly impossible things is so that people of faith in Christ would understand that what is impossible with man, is indeed **possible with God!** (18:27). It would seem if Jesus' teaching were taught more faithfully today, then many more people would rely less upon themselves and their supposed good works and beg for God's mercy and grace found in Christ alone!

It would seem to me that if Jesus' teaching were taught more faithfully today, then men might be more faithful to God in reliance upon His grace. Can you imagine? God would

be glorified in our weakness and inability rather than our constant boasting of what we have thought we have done for God. Humbling...hmmm.

We should be reminded that one of Dr. Luke's goals in the writing of His Gospel to Theophilus (1:4) is to reveal the Kingdom of God to all who believe, and to make known the impossibility of following Jesus Christ *without the initiating, powerful, chain-breaking, and forceful work of the Holy Spirit sent from God, to turn men from sins to the LORD Jesus Christ.*

Those who are "safe and secure" in the visible Church can also fool themselves into believing they are fairing better in the Christian life than they really are. The story of the rich ruler in our passage today is a man considered pious by his community. He is a notable "church-going" man; a real pillar of the religious community (cf. 18:9-11). ***He thinks he is committed to God and that he keeps God's commandments! In his own estimation of himself ("all these commandments I have kept from my youth"), he is righteous before God.***

I am reminded that Jesus spoke to the visible church at Laodicea in this way, rebuking them for their living "at ease in Zion" in a lukewarm manner:

^{ESV} Revelation 3:15-17: "I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot!"¹⁶ So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth.¹⁷ For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.

Sobering.

In our passage from Dr. Luke's Gospel this morning two men approach Jesus for help. One man who is a rich ruler desires to know how he can inherit eternal life (18:18-30). Although this wealthy rich man is told clearly by Jesus how to receive eternal life, his wealth prevents him from leaving everything to follow Jesus as a believing disciple and to have true treasure in heaven (18:22-25). A second man comes to Jesus who is blind and needy and seeks Jesus for mercy, and he finds sight -- and sees and enters the Kingdom of God (cf. John 3:3-11).

Two men come to Jesus but only one man receives salvation and enters His Kingdom rejoicing and glorifying God (18:43), while the other man leaves very sad (18:23). ***What is impossible with men is possible with God*** (18:27; cf. 1:37). Although men continue to find salvation in Christ, Jesus reminds his disciples that before the Kingdom is fully manifested he must first go to Jerusalem to undergo great humility, suffering and death, which is to fulfill all the prophets had written about him (18:31-34).

A Jesus has taught: ^{ESV} **Luke 18:17** Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it." If a person does not receive the Kingdom of God like a trusting child, if one does not receive the Kingdom like a helpless and needy child, shall not enter it.

The people in the crowds that are following Jesus at this point in His ministry are very diverse as he approaches Jerusalem. We have been told that his disciples (especially the one's who will become his apostles, 17:22) are with him, the Pharisees are listening (17:20), there are people with children (18:15), and also the wealthy like this ruler who speaks to Jesus in our passage.

I. **A Wealthy Man Who Does Not See Nor Enter the Kingdom**: “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” (18:18-30)

The first man in our story today is described as a “certain ruler”. This was a rich Jewish magistrate or civic leader who was known for his piety and had high status and influence in his culture. He had just heard Jesus speak of entering the Kingdom like a child and he seeks better to understand how a person in his position is supposed to enter the Kingdom. Unlike the Pharisee who asked a similar question earlier in Luke’s Gospel, the rich man’s motives are not wrong as were the Pharisee who was seeking to “test” Jesus (cf. Luke 10:25).

Jesus desires his people to once again contrast two people: a wealthy rich ruler and a needy blind beggar. The wealthy man does not receive the Kingdom of God like a trusting child, the needy blind man does.

- a. “Good Teacher, what must *I do*...” It seems the rich ruler is getting off the spiritual track from the very beginning.

The conversation begins with: “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” (v. 18). The wealthy man condescendingly calls Jesus a “good teacher”. The man was flattering Jesus rather than speaking the truth about what he truly thought about him. The rich ruler thinks highly of himself and is approaching the Lord of Glory as if he has the power and status to define his teaching and instruction.

Doing this in ancient society was like saying “my good man” or calling another “sir” today not because of respect, but with the hopes that an equally nice title or flattering statement will be returned. It is similar to modern “power games” where one person says something complimentary (implying their approval of the person) and then desiring that the same kind of compliment or approval is returned (“You are a gifted man!” (the compliment of flattery) “Well thank you, but *you’re the gifted one*...” (the expected returned compliment of flattery that is expected).

“In addressing him as “Good Teacher” the ruler is engaged in a word game deeply rooted in concerns with status” (Green, NICNT, pg. 655).

The rich ruler specifically asks how to get eternal life. Eternal life (Gk. ζῶην αἰώνιον) was the eschatological blessing and expectation for those who would inherit the promises to Abraham (cf. Rom. 4:13). The rich

ruler is asking how he can be assured that he will be saved in the final resurrection. He desires to know if he will inherit the promises to Abraham as Abraham's child (cf. 19:1ff).

The Old Testament taught that believers would inherit eternal life (although it was not as clearly revealed as in the New):

ESV Daniel 12:1 "At that time shall arise Michael, the great prince who has charge of your people. And there shall be a time of trouble, such as never has been since there was a nation till that time. But at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone whose name shall be found written in the book. ² And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.

This expectation of resurrection or inheritance of eternal life was taught in the Old Testament but is also a common expectation in Jewish Intertestamental writings- See Psalm 37:9, 11, 18; 4 Macc. 15:3; 1 Enoch 37:4; 40:9.

- b. Jesus responds NOT in kind to his condescending flattery, but with a theological point (he is God-centered and not interested in the "power games" of men:

- i. **"No one is good except God alone"** (Psalm 34:8)

ESV 1 Chronicles 16:34 Oh give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever!

Jesus doesn't respond to the social greeting custom of the day, but rather teaches theologically that only God is good (thus implying that if he is indeed good, then he is also God).

The implication of Jesus here: "If you really mean what you say and the teacher is good then one should follow the teacher's instruction" (which he will not).

Jesus is NOT denying his divinity and being one with God (as he goes on to command the rich ruler as only God to obey his commandments), rather he has no room for someone who would just flatteringly address him without truly submitting to His Lordship.

- ii. **"You know the commandments..."** (v. 20; Exodus 20; Deut. 5)
Jesus specifically calls the wealthy ruler to keep the commandments (specifically quoting the second table of the Law of God that addresses how people should show love to their neighbor).

Jesus is calling the wealthy and rich ruler to keep the covenant that Israel made with God under Moses:

ESV Exodus 24:1-8: Then he said to Moses, "Come up to the LORD, you and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, and worship from afar. ² Moses alone shall come near to the LORD, but the others shall not come near, and the people shall not come up with him." ³ Moses came and told the people all the words of the LORD and all the rules. And all the people answered with one voice and said, "All the words that the LORD has spoken we will do." ⁴ And Moses wrote down all the words of the LORD. He rose early in the morning and built an altar at the foot of the mountain, and twelve pillars, according to the twelve tribes of Israel. ⁵ And he sent young men of the people of Israel, who offered burnt offerings and sacrificed peace offerings of oxen to the LORD. ⁶ And Moses took half of the blood and put it in basins, and half of the blood he threw against the altar. ⁷ Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it in the hearing of the people. And they said, "All that the LORD has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient." ⁸ And Moses took the blood and threw it on the people and said, "Behold the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words."

ESV Deuteronomy 27:26 "'Cursed be anyone who does not confirm the words of this law by doing them.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen.'

Jesus is answering the rich ruler by essentially saying that those who will inherit eternal life will be those who are committed to and known by living by God's commandments (as Jesus says clearly to His disciples: "If you love me, keep my commandments"). Those who inherit eternal life will be those who are "good" by God's power and grace- those who are obedient because God has given them the Holy-Spiritual ability to respond to his teaching!

Jesus is specifically quoting to the rich ruler the commandments found in the 2nd Table of God's Law (v. 20) that teaches the duty that God's people have to our neighbor and how we show forth our love for God and man through our concrete obedience.

Geldenhuis wrote: "If a man throughout his whole life observes the commandments of god without any failure or deviation, he will inherit eternal life. No one, however, expect Jesus, has ever been able, or will ever be able in this life, to be perfect" (*Luke*, pg. 458).

- c. Rich ruler responds: "All these [commandments] I have kept from my youth" (v. 21).

Like the Pharisee in our sermon passage from last week (18:9-14), the Law has not humbled the wealthy man; the man has not realized before the Law of God just ***how little he loves his neighbor as himself***.

Rather than being humbled and broken by the Law, the wealthy man thinks that he has kept all of the commandments from his youth. It was commonly thought in Jesus' time by some of the Rabbis based on the

teachings of *The Talmud* that it was possible for one to keep the whole law of God (cf. Phil. 3:6 in the Apostle Paul's prior estimation of his own righteousness, then read the true Christian interpretation of this so-called righteousness that follows in Phil. 3:7-14).

We should be reminded that Israel was to keep the covenant perfectly in order to gain or merit life. Like Adam, Israel miserably failed throughout redemptive-history, getting off to an idolatrous start immediately after the giving of the law and the covenantal response to be obedient (Exodus 20-32). In fact, it was not long after the covenant was cut and blood was shed that the people sat down to eat and drink and then rose up to play, worshipping a golden calf!

ESV Exodus 32:6 And they rose up early the next day and offered burnt offerings and brought peace offerings. And the people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play.

ESV 1 Corinthians 10:7 Do not be idolaters as some of them were; as it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play."

Like all other Israelites, this wealthy ruler was also a covenant breaker before God's Law (cf. Rom. 3:23ff). He had not lived perfectly according to the Law in word, thought and deed (cf. Matthew 5:21-48).

He had not truly "*kept all these*" commands from his youth (v. 21).

Like the Apostle Paul realized later after he had been spiritually regenerated by God's initiating grace, this man still failed to realize his inability to keep God's Law:

ESV Romans 7:7-12: What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, "You shall not covet."⁸ But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness. Apart from the law, sin lies dead.⁹ I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin came alive and I died.¹⁰ The very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me.¹¹ For sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me.¹² So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.

Jesus seeks to reveal through God's Law the fact that the rich ruler not only was idolatrous toward his possessions (first table of the Law), but he was covetous toward material gain and greedy (second table of the Law).

If he had been realistic before God's Holy Law, he would have realized that he was in need of a substitute Law-Keeper. He would

have realized that “all fall short of the glory of God” and seek mercy rather than merit and reward! (Luke 18:13-14; cf. Romans 9:11-16).

- d. Jesus answers, saying one thing you lack (or literally, “There is one area where you fall short” [Gk: ἔτι ἕν σοι λείπει]; I can’t help but hear Romans 3:23 here: “**All have fallen short of the glory of God...**”):
 - i. “Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven...” (v. 22a)

Jesus literally says in Greek using three imperatives to make his point clear: “All that you own or possess, sell (command), give to the poor (command), and follow me (command) [πώλησον καὶ διάδος πτωχοῖς ... ἀκολούθει μοι.].

Jesus is telling the wealthy man to have a huge yard sale or asset liquidation sale where all the proceeds go to the poor; this will demonstrate that he loves God and His neighbor as himself; this concrete act of love would show that he is a covenant-keeper and an obedient servant of God (cf. James 2:14-18).

Jesus, knowing that the wealthy ruler does not love his neighbor as himself- -nor does he love God because his riches are the first priority in his life, he commands him to show forth the keeping of God’s commandments by selling all that he owns and distributing it to the poor- -then he will have true and lasting and eternal treasure in heaven (v. 22).

Now Jesus is not saying that all rich people should rid themselves of all their possessions and holdings- -but ***if the possessions and holdings possess and hold them in bondage to sin, and cause them to disobey God’s commands for taking care of the needy, then they must sell, distribute to the poor and follow him.*** This was this particular man’s call to repentance for his lifestyle and trust in riches rather than God.

The man’s possessions owned him and he was enslaved to his riches and showed his unregenerate state through his disobedience to God’s clear commands to love his neighbor. ***His wealth defined his only hope in this world not merely socio-economically, but his wealth was also his only eternal hope as well—rather than trusting in the LORD.***

- ii. ...Come, follow me (v. 22b)

Jesus commands him to come and follow him. We are reminded here of God's love and commands given by Christ to all who have ears to hear. Christ's commands to do these things do not imply an inherent strength or ability to perform them in response. Rather, Christ's commands are to make those who have ears to hear and those who have eyes to see to realize that if God's commands are to be performed, they must be done *for them* by a substitute.

If one is truly a Kingdom Disciple then they will realize that the power and ability to obey God's commands are not found inherently within a person, but within Christ himself.

The rich man went away very sad (the text says he *became very sad*- v. 23- Greek word περιλυπος, ον very sad, or "deeply distressed"). This is the Greek word that is used in the Psalms that describes being "downcast" in one's soul; it is also the word used in the text to describe the sorrow in Jesus' soul as he faced the cross (Matt. 26:38; Mark 14:34).

Given the choice between Mammon and God, the rich man sadly chooses Mammon *because he was very wealthy* (v. 23b).

This is an example of worldly sorrow that does not lead to repentance but rather to death. The rich ruler is truly saddened and downcast in his soul, but he does not repent. It would have been better for him to have repented than to be merely saddened by his lack of faith; it would have been better for him to have trusted Christ for His performance and obedience to God's Law and receiving Christ's righteousness by faith.

This sorrow unto death in contrast to sorrow unto repentance is what the Apostle Paul speaks of in his second letter to the Church at Corinth:

As it is, I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved into repenting. For you felt a godly grief, so that you suffered no loss through us. ¹⁰ For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death. – 2 Corinthians 7:9-10

The man is very sad that he cannot comply and therefore see and enter the Kingdom; the man is very sad that he cannot respond in obedience implying also that he knows this is the right thing to do; the man is very sad because he cannot perform the commands of selling, distributing and following him- -because his possessions mean just too much to him! The man was simply "filthy rich" or "extremely wealthy" (v. 23b- πλούσιος σφόδρα) and so he did not believe.

ESV Galatians 5:14 For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

The rich man simply did not love his neighbor as himself and so he was not characterized as a Law-Keeper; rather, he was a Law-Breaker who could not break from his sinful bondage.

Jesus has taught many times throughout His ministry the importance of avoiding idolatry and an unwillingness to part with one's possessions previously in Dr. Luke's Gospel:

ESV Luke 12:32 "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. ³³ Sell your possessions, and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys. ³⁴ For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

ESV Luke 14:33 So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.

We should remember from past sermons, that Jesus does not tell people to rid themselves of wealth because becoming a monk, or being an ascetic and depending on the giving of others is an ideal lifestyle in the Kingdom. Rather, Jesus says that people are to rid themselves of wealth to avoid two things:

- (1) **Idolatry**- Loving Mammon more than God and keeping focused on merely a treasure that is temporal that will fade and wear out and be destroyed along with this present age (cf. Matt. 6:21ff; 2 Peter 3:3ff); and...
- (2) **Stinginess rather than Godly Generosity**- Hoarding one's wealth and not taking care of the needy and poor that are right under their noses in the covenant community (see sermon on *The Rich Man and Lazarus* in Luke 16:19-31; cf. Exodus 23:11; Lev. 19:9-16; Deut. 15:1-18).

So, as I have said before, even though it is contrary to the thoughts of many rich Americans (and most Americans are truly rich in comparison to the rest of the world) - -we are to be generous with all that we possess because we are stewards of what God has granted to each of us!

Jesus does not say that it is wrong to be rich (Abraham and Job were rich, and riches can be God's blessing), **but there is great responsibility before God that comes with riches** (1 Tim. 6:10-17). Many people's riches will indeed prevent them from looking to

Christ for salvation, trusting God with everything that belongs to them, and they will suffer everlasting torment because of their unwillingness to trust and believe the Gospel (see sermon on *The Rich Man and Lazarus* from Luke 16:19-31).

But we also must understand that if we were to get rid of everything we own and we decided to live in sackcloth and ashes and monastic poverty the rest of our lives, the problem of our greed and covetousness would still be with us. We need an internal change of heart and mind by God's grace. What is impossible with man is possible with God!

We need to clearly understand that just because someone is might be willing to give up everything he owns does not mean that he could merit and inherit the Kingdom. Jesus is pointing the rich man in our story to his inability so that in Christ and His Kingdom he might be granted the ability to live righteously and lovingly before God and man *because of God's grace!*

As George MacDonald said: "It is not the rich man only who is under the dominion of things; they too are slaves who, having no money, are unhappy for the lack of it... The money the one has, the money the other would have, is in each the cause of an eternal stupidity" (Quoted in Hughes, Vol. II, pg. 206).

Clarification: Jesus is NOT teaching here that to sell everything is to earn salvation and the Kingdom of God; Jesus is not teaching salvation by merit or obedience. There are a few reasons why Jesus specifically tells the rich ruler to sell everything and give it to the poor:

(1) The command for him to sell was to show that he could not; that is, it was to show the man's inability to obey God's Law and love his neighbor (it was to expose his covetousness); (2) The command is given so that the ruler will trust God rather than Mammon; that he would be like a little child in his response and trust God with all he has been given (cf. Luke 19:1 as we will see in our sermon on Zacchaeus). Jesus' command is to reveal the true primary commitment of the wealthy rich man.

What means this much to you? What is so important to you that you could not part with it if God called you to do so? What idols and love priorities do you have before God? Why have you stowed and hidden these idols in Achan's tent? (cf. Joshua 7).

e. Jesus' instruction to his disciples:

i. ***“How difficult it is for those who have wealth to enter the Kingdom of God!”*** (v. 24) **Just HOW difficult?**

This is a very sad scene; not only is the wealthy man sad because of what Jesus said- -Jesus too, is saddened by his inability to respond (v. 24: “Jesus, looking at him with sadness...”).

It is important to note the image that Jesus gives of the difficulty of rich people getting into the Kingdom of God (humanly speaking because of their trust and preoccupation of their riches; see previous sermons on Luke 6:24; 12:15-21; 16:9). Jesus compares the difficulty by saying that “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” (v. 25).

Now there are some rumors that creep into our interpretation of the Bible. We hear some say that this “eye of the needle” was a gate in the ancient world in the wall of Jerusalem, and other stories supposedly to teach us what Jesus was saying. This is false and there is no evidence of this (although many seem to “buy” this fanciful interpretation easily!).

We do our souls a disservice if we do not fully understand this correctly (cf. Hughes, pg. 206).

Jesus’ imagery here of the “eye of the needle” is simply that – imagery or ***hyperbolic imagery***; Jesus is using the stark image of a camel (the largest animal that lived in Palestine) going through the teeny-tiny eye of a sewing needle; if you imagine a camel trying to squeeze his way through this teeny-tiny hole, even if he could get his head and neck through, he’d have a hard time with the two humps- - then you have the picture of how hard it is for ***the fat-and-happy-self-important-and-self-possessed-wealthy who trust in themselves to squeeze their way into God’s Kingdom***. This is the reason for the imagery here.

“Wealth can shrink the door of the kingdom down to an impassable peephole. The self-focused security of the wealthy is a padlock against kingdom entry” (Bock, Vol. II, pg. 1486).

There are quotations in the *Babylonian Talmud* (a Jewish Book of discussions of Law and ethics) that was studied during the Intertestamental Period that describe other large beasts such as elephants passing through the eye of a needle in order to stress impossibility.

Jesus is using this imagery to describe the sheer impossibility (humanly speaking) of pulling away from the gravity of wealth in order to embrace a Kingdom world order in which status distinctions are irrelevant on account of the extension of God's grace to His people (cf. Green, NICNT, pg. 658).

Jesus is describing the virtual impossibility (humanly speaking) of a rich person thinking of himself as a mere slave or servant of Christ and thinking of himself as less important than the poor and needy.

- ii. ***“Then who can be saved?”*** (v. 26) - It should be noted that v. 26's question is in response to entering the Kingdom of God. “To enter the Kingdom of God (vv. 24-25) is synonymous with being saved or “inheriting eternal life (v. 18).

This question is in response to Jesus' shocking imagery describing the difficulty of the wealthy to enter the Kingdom of God. “Who then can anyone be saved?” ***What is impossible for men is possible by the power and grace of God!***

Mark's Gospel gives more of a description of the disciples' reaction to what Jesus said:

ESV Mark 10:24 And the disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said to them again, "Children, how difficult it is to enter the kingdom of God!

In Ancient Israel, some of the Rabbis had taught the people that rich people could be rewarded with eternal life for being rich and doing good to the poor. Some of the Rabbis taught a kind of “health and wealth gospel” where riches showed forth God's favor on one's life.

In contrast to this, Jesus is saying that riches do not get one into the Kingdom of God; in fact according to Jesus riches can actually handicap and hinder one from entering the Kingdom of God! Wealth is a spiritual handicap for our faith and trusting God like little children (cf. 18:15-17).

ESV 1 Timothy 6:17 As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy.

- iii. ***“What is impossible with men is possible with God”*** (v. 27)

God makes salvation or entering the Kingdom possible by His grace! (Eph. 2:4-10)

All mankind has a sinful inability to respond to God's commands (whether rich or poor). However, by God's Holy Spirit, this can be made possible by God's power. Sinful mankind who looks to Christ for mercy (cf. 18:13-14) can find the power and ability by God's Spirit to do His commands and live the life that God has called us to live.

Only those that God has sovereignly regenerated or made alive by His Spirit can actually perform and respond to God's commands. One must be saved or "born from above" in order to see and enter the Kingdom of God.

As Jesus taught Israel's Teacher Nicodemus elsewhere in John's Gospel:

ESV John 3:3 Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." ⁴ Nicodemus said to him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" ⁵ Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. ⁶ That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. ⁷ Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' ⁸ The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit." ⁹ Nicodemus said to him, "How can these things be?" ¹⁰ Jesus answered him, "Are you the teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand these things?"

f. Peter says on behalf of the other disciples:

i. ***"We have left our homes and followed you"*** (v. 28)

We should recall our earlier sermons on the call of the disciples (see sermon on Luke 5:11, 28). We are told of the disciples showing forth their faith in this way:

ESV Luke 5:11 And when they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed him.

ESV Luke 5:28 And leaving everything, he rose and followed him.

A disciple of Jesus Christ and His Kingdom as we have learned many times throughout our sermon series is defined by a willingness to part with all (including beloved family relations), to leave everything to follow Jesus without hindrance (Luke 8:19-21; 9:57-62; 12:51-53; 14:25-26)!

g. Jesus' response to the disciples' faithfulness:

i. You will receive a greater inheritance than you can imagine (v. 30).

Are you trusting God like a child and helplessly dependent upon God for all that you need like a child?

II. **The Fulfillment of the Prophetic Word** (18:31-34)

- a. “Everything that is written about the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished (v. 31; cf. Luke 24:25ff; 44-48; John 5:39).

We will look closer at how specifically Jesus fulfills the Old Testament later in Dr. Luke’s Gospel (D.V.- Luke 24:24-48), but for now we should understand a few points.

This is Jesus’ third prediction and description of His death to His disciples that will occur in Jerusalem (cf. 9:22, 43-45, 51, 53; 12:50). This time the focus is not only on the Son of Man being handed over to be killed by the Jewish leaders (as in 9:22), but here more detail is given in that the Gentiles will be involved as well.

- b. “[The Son of Man] will be delivered over to the Gentiles...” (v. 32)

- c. “...The third day he will rise (v. 33c)

The hope of the humiliation and suffering of Christ upon the cross, being betrayed by a disciple named Judas and being handed over to be killed by the Jews to the Gentiles for crucifixion will end in his resurrection from the dead.

In the midst of pain and suffering there will be hope in God. What is impossible for men is possible for God!

Why is this saying of Jesus here in this context? The rich ruler put his trust in his social status, his riches, his glory if you will. This glory and important position of exaltation in this present age prevented him from seeing and entering the Kingdom of God in Jesus Christ.

In contrast to this worldly way of thinking, true Kingdom disciples must be like their Lord is denying social status and giving up all to be a follower of Jesus, including one’s own life (cf. 17:33). Jesus is reminding His disciples that although he is the King of Glory and the long-anticipated Messianic Son of Man (17:20ff), he nevertheless must suffer great humiliation and suffering and weakness in this world- -he will be despised, betrayed, rejected and killed (the furthest thing that the rich ruler would be willing to do for anyone!).

And because the disciples are identified with him as his followers, they too will suffer great loss and be treated with contempt in this world. But there is always resurrection hope and thus the reason they are to persistently pray (18:1-8) and trust in the righteousness that comes from faith alone (18:9-17).

To be identified with Jesus Christ means that we cannot live and think like the rich ruler –we must live humble and sometimes be despised, betrayed, rejected and martyred if God calls us to it! We must be humbled in reliance upon God’s grace. The disciples were being reminded that Jesus’ great mission was to end in what seemed to be failure- -but he would rise...!

d. The disciples do not understand what Jesus has just said (v. 34).

Yet the disciples do not understand this yet. God waits fully to reveal it to them at a later time (after the resurrection-ascension of Christ). For now, they cannot fathom nor understand how suffering and humiliation in this world can bring in the consummation and full realization and revelation of God’s Kingdom. The disciples are still a bit “dull of hearing and understanding” (cf. Luke 24:).

^{ESV} Luke 9:43-45: And all were astonished at the majesty of God. But while they were all marveling at everything he was doing, Jesus said to his disciples, ⁴⁴ "Let these words sink into your ears: The Son of Man is about to be delivered into the hands of men." ⁴⁵ But they did not understand this saying, and it was concealed from them, so that they might not perceive it. And they were afraid to ask him about this saying.

We too cannot fully understand this at times. How can we be sons of the King and yet we suffer? How can we be sick when the Kingdom promises healing? How can we experience the sorrow of death, and can even ourselves be killed for our faith and yet preach and hope in a resurrection *from the death*? Jesus turns things upside down with his teaching and paradoxically we realize that through meekness, suffering, death and humility is greatness, hope, life, power and exaltation in Jesus Christ!

The disciples struggled with wanting to be great not necessarily always wanting to be like Christ in his humiliation (cf. Luke 9:46; 22:24, 26- In fact, it is when Jesus first predicts his suffering, humiliation and death and when he is about to be betrayed by Judas that the disciples’ conversation turns to talk of who is the greatest!!). We too struggle with thinking of ourselves more highly than we ought- -and we too must repent and think rightly God’s thoughts after him as they are revealed in our Lord Jesus’ words!

Jesus turns our lives upside down and what is great and important and rich in this world does not mean a hill of beans to God! What matters to God is a humble and contrite spirit before his Holy Throne (Isaiah 57:15); a person who submits to his sovereignty and bows the knee before His Majestic Throne; a person who calls upon God for mercy *even though he realizes he doesn’t deserve anything from God*.

We *see this* in a blind man who hears Jesus passing by!

III. **A Blind Man Who Sees and Enters the Kingdom**: “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” (18:35-43)

Jesus shows His Kingdom to a man who cannot see; a man who receives the Kingdom like a child.

We should be reminded that healing of blindness was part of what characterized Jesus’ Messianic-Mission and revealed to all who had eyes to see and ears to hear that the Kingdom of God had dawned with Jesus’ coming:

ESV Luke 4:18 "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed..."

ESV Luke 7:22 And he answered them, "Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them."

In contrast to the wealthy rich man with loads of money, there was a needy blind man with nothing begging at the roadside. No pomp and circumstance had ever characterized this man’s life—only darkness and groping in his darkness for survival and reaching out to stingy and self-centered men for hope and help in his time of need.

The blind man is needy and NOT self-satisfied and self-dependent (and self-possessed) as the rich man. In modern descriptions this man is like a poor homeless man who is blind who approaches you for some spare pocket change in the subway in New York, or as you rush to meet your reservation into your favorite posh restaurant in Washington D.C.

He is the dusty man, with unkempt greasy hair with the grocery cart and all of his belongings tied together by some rope he has found along his journeys that we have all met. Where he has come from...where he is going...only God knows!

This is the person that the rich ruler would not have time for; this is the person who would not be called “good” when he passed him; why he wouldn’t even give him the time of day. (Uh oh!). There would be no complimentary “power word games”, no compliments from the rich ruler. Why? Because he just would not care for this man. The blind beggar would mean nothing to the rich ruler because of His social status and he could never understand (it would be impossible!) for him to think that this was somehow a brother of his or a neighbor who he should help (“Why doesn’t he just get a job?!” “I’ve worked hard for what I have- -he’s a bum!” the rich ruler would have said).

Yet the LORD OF GLORY serves him...why can’t we?

We often think: “What good is it going to do me showing help or mercy to this kind of man- -he’ll never change.” Yet what is interesting to note here is that the impossibility of the change is possible with God for this man- -and not the rich ruler! We should be reminded of the smallest acts of mercy done in Jesus’ Name can be by God’s grace burned into the memories of others who are in desperate need; especially when we interpret our kindness and mercy as an expression of God’s compassion and an extension of Jesus’ hands.

“Nothing is impossible with God!” even our lack of compassion and stinginess can be changed to love for God and neighbor! Right?! If we *can be changed by God’s grace*, why are we so slow to believe that God can change others too?!

As the blind man “hears” (v. 36), but does not “see” a crowd going by, he musters up the faith to ask what is all the commotion.

He is told that “Jesus of Nazareth is passing by” (v. 37).

The blind man cries out to Jesus describing him in rich theological language (v. 38):

“Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” Like the tax collector in the previous parable in Luke 18 (v. 13), this man too, cries out for mercy. He describes Jesus as “Son of David” which was a very important and loaded theological term for the long-anticipated Messiah of Israel. Ironically, this blind man understands Jesus’ mission even better than his closest disciples apparently (cf. 18:34); this blind beggar has eyes to see Jesus’ Kingdom.

Dr. Luke’s Gospel is written so that we would understand that that Kingdom of God that has come in Jesus was the Messianic Kingdom where David’s Greater Son would sit on His eternal throne having reestablished the Golden Age of Israel’s power and deliver her from all of her enemies (Luke 1:27, 32-35; 2:4; 2 Samuel 7:12-16; Psalm 89).

How this man knows this theology is a surprise—but know it he does- -better than many of the Pharisees (again the point that Luke is making here is that those like the Pharisees who should have had insight do not and those who should not have insight *do*). This man’s theology is right! The long-awaited Son of David that God covenantally promised to King David is here:

ESV 2 Samuel 7:12-16: When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. ¹³ He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. ¹⁴ I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. When he commits iniquity, I will discipline him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men, ¹⁵ but my steadfast love will not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you. ¹⁶ And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever.”

ESV Luke 1:27 to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary.....^{ESV} Luke 1:32-35: He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David,³³ and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."³⁴ And Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?"³⁵ And the angel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy- the Son of God.

The blind beggar (or expendable in this culture) understands that the Son of the Most High is present--the One who will have the throne of David and rule over the house of Jacob forever and that his Kingdom is eternal! The blind beggar understands that the gracious covenant promises to David (2 Sam. 7:12ff) are found and received in Jesus Christ! Jesus has come to rule and reign over the Israel of God! He realizes that Jesus proclaims "good news to the poor" (4:18-19), "gives sight to the blind", and "exalts the lowly":

ESV Luke 1:52 he has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate;

When the crowd tries to silence the blind man (they tell him to shut up), he cried out all the more seeking the LORD [δὲ πολλῶ μάλλον ἔκραζεν] (v. 39): "Son of David, have mercy on me!" He intensified his calling persistently because he had faith in Jesus (although he could not see him he could hear Him and believe His word).

The blind man is relentless and persistent in seeking God's mercy in Jesus Christ (like the widow in the parable previously in Luke 18 (vv. 1-8). As Jesus asked earlier: "**When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?**" (v. 8b) Here, although this is not the Second Coming, there is hope that there are some men who are awaiting his arrival (and the implication is that there will be when he returns).

Here, as "Jesus passes by" he finds faith on the earth as this man who cannot see the people around him, nor can he see Jesus Christ, nevertheless because of God's grace extended to him, he is able to see more clearly the Kingdom of God in Jesus than those who have healthy eyes of sight.

Jesus commands the blind man to be brought to him (v. 40).

Jesus asks him "What do you want me to do for you?" and the man responds: "Lord, let me recover my sight." (v. 41)

Jesus says to him: "Recover your sight; your faith has made you well (or your faith has saved you). Again, as in Luke 17:19 (cf. 7:50; 8:48), the blind man's faith saves him. That is to say that Christ saves him wholly in body and soul because the man believes in Him as the Son of David.

As the response of those who have been wholly healed in body and soul, so this man responds with glorifying God and praising him. This causes the people also to praise God for this great healing miracle that signaled the dawning of the Kingdom of God in Jesus Christ (v. 43).

The Blind man receives the Kingdom like a trusting child (cf. 17:17).

A formerly needy blind man without hope and without community and without help finds hope, community and help in Jesus Christ and the reconstituted Israel of David's Greater Son! This man has become a disciple of the Kingdom and he will leave the little he had to follow Christ now and to look forward to a great inheritance in the Kingdom of God:

^{ESV} Luke 18:29 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, ³⁰ who will not receive many times more in this time, and in the age to come eternal life."

IV. Conclusion

Which of these two men were like a child (not in behavior or in thought but) in the way they trusted God and His mercy found in Jesus Christ?

The blind man.

The former blind man's name was Bartimaeus (Mark 10:46) and the early church recognized his great service to the Church. After darkness and blindness, you can imagine the things he saw: The man who healed him was mocked, shamefully treated and spat upon (18:32); the man who healed him was flogged and killed (18:33a); the man who healed him was resurrected from the dead (18:33b).

Bartimaeus saw these things as a witness to God's Kingdom and made them known in Jerusalem (according to early church history). Bartimaeus was once blind, but now he could see and he witnessed the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ!

Are you blind? Or can you see the Kingdom of God?

Important question: Are you the self-important wealthy or are you a needy blind man in need of God's grace to make your impossible situation of never entering the Kingdom a possibility because of His sovereign grace?

Two men came to Jesus: The rich man walked away sadly from Jesus with nothing, dead in trespasses and sins; Formerly blind Bartimaeus walked away a child of the Kingdom, a disciple of Jesus Christ and heir to eternal riches (18:30).

How will you walk away today?

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Next Sermon: “*Who Are the True Children of Abraham?*”- *Luke 19:1-27*

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