

4) Who Can Be Saved?

- A) The disciples, recognizing what is required, have a panicked moment with Jesus, asking him "then who can be saved?" (Luke 18:26). In essence, the disciples are asking, "If this is the requirement, is there hope for anyone to get to Heaven?"
- B) Note that Christ's essential answer is "NO" (18:27). Rather, that which is impossible for people is only possible with God. Only God can secure salvation for people, since in reality, no one can "obey themselves" (earn their way) into Heaven.
- C) Peter, often a spokesperson for the 12 disciples, notes that all of Jesus' disciples have left everything for Jesus Christ (18:28), implying a question of "where do we stand?"
- D) Jesus assures His disciples that anything which has been given up in this life for the sake of the Kingdom of God will be rewarded both in this world and the world to come, most notably "eternal life" (18:29-30).
- E) Jesus' comment is illustrative that there is great reward in following Jesus Christ in this life. The greatest of these rewards is the opportunity to invest in the community which Jesus Himself is establishing, His chosen church. In this sense, there is an "already" to God's Kingdom.
- F) Further, there is great reward in the future life for being a disciple of Jesus Christ in this life. The greatest of these rewards is the opportunity to invest in the community which Jesus Himself is establishing, our Heavenly dwelling. In this sense, there is a "not yet" to God's Kingdom.
- G) Only God can make possible the impossible. Clearly though, what we invest in this world, resonates into the future. The ultimate example of this is Christ's own investment of His life (18:31-34). Jesus calls each of us to a complete and unimpeded devotion to God, to King & Kingdom.

Impossible Possibilities

Long Beach Alliance Church • August 24th, 2008 • Pastor Chris Lankford

**HOW HARD IT IS FOR THOSE WHO ARE WEALTHY 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 MAN TO ENTER THE KINGDOM OF GOD.
~LUKE 18:24-25 (NASB)**

1) A Sincere Question Insincerely Asked

- A) A young and wealthy ruler* comes to Jesus and asks Him what he must do to inherit (obtain) "eternal life" (Luke 18:18). In asking, he addresses Jesus Christ as "Good Teacher," a title to which Jesus strongly objects (18:19).
- B) There are many opinions as to why Jesus rejected the title of "good" from the rich young ruler.[†] It is sufficient for our purposes to view the address as being rather flippant and insincere, and as such, damaging to God's character.

* Only Luke calls the man a "ruler," while Matthew 19:20 notes that the ruler is "young." All three Synoptic accounts (Matthew 19:16-29; Mark 10:17-30; Luke 18:18-27) attest to the wealth of the rich ruler, thus the common parable title, "The Rich Young Ruler." Because of his age, we are probably viewing a civic leader or influential wealthy man with a pious reputation in the community. He is noted, in each Synoptic account, as being distinct from the religious structure, which probably means he was not a synagogue official of any kind. Various sources, esp. Darrell L. Bock, *Luke 9:51-24:53*, Baker Exegetical Commentary, Page 1476.

- C) Keeping the focus on God's righteous character, Jesus notes that the only way to inherit eternal life is to keep the commandments, representative of the Law (Luke 18:20).
- D) Surprisingly, the rich young ruler responds with great confidence to this standard, noting that since the age of being a teenager (youth), he has "measured up" (18:21).
- E) In essence, the rich young ruler says "if this is what it takes to get to heaven, then I am confident of my standing." There seems to be a sense of disappointment in the young man's response, wanting to know if there is more that he is lacking (Matthew 19:20).
- F) This inquiry is profound in the exchange with Jesus Christ. Jesus feels a love for the rich young ruler (Mark 10:21), and clarifies what total devotion to God truly means in the life of this young man.

2) Total Devotion To King & Kingdom

- A) Jesus notes that there is still something "lacking" in the righteousness of the rich young ruler (Luke 18:22). He must sell what he has, and redistribute his wealth to the poor.
- B) Jesus' request is not without reward. If the young man will do this thing, he will have "treasure in heaven." Jesus calls him to exchange earthly goods for heavenly rewards.

† Why does Jesus chafe at being called good? Answers canvassed range from seeing the response here as an implicit claim to divinity to finding here Jesus' recognition of his own sinfulness. Others claim that Jesus has detected insincere flattery or an attempt to trade on his kindness and to seek from him a less demanding path to eternal life. One commentator offers the distinctive suggestion that in the original context Jesus is denying the possibility of being able to offer a new and better way to eternal life than that already given by God in the commandments. Perhaps best here is to understand that Jesus is pressing the man about what has been no more than a casual use of the term "good" and challenging him to understand the relationship between his (Jesus') own activity and God as the only truly good one (cf 11:20). Clearly, Jesus know that the young man is missing something in his understanding of both God and Christ, and thus drills this pious Jewish man on God's good character. Various sources, esp. John Nolland, *Luke 1 - 9:20, Volume 35A, Word Biblical Commentary Series, Pages 885-886.*

- C) On the face of it, it would appear that Jesus has given the rich young ruler a route to "earn" his way to Heaven. However, this runs against all of Scripture (cf. Ephesians 2:8-9), especially Luke's own presentations on humility and dependence on God.
- D) Rather, the question is one of devotion to God, of trusting in God with everything one possesses. Jesus' emphasis is on "following Him," a call to discipleship (Luke 18:22).
- E) Jesus is essentially asking the young man to be totally devoted to God, to remove anything from His life which the rich young ruler could derive security. Jesus invites the rich young ruler to be His disciple, but to "sell out" to God.

3) A Haunting Response

- A) The rich young ruler is disappointed in the requirement of total devotion, because of his extreme wealth (18:23). He is not ready to come to God on God's terms. His response reveals his security in his own wealth.
- B) We should not be too quick to condemn the rich young ruler, especially since he probably perceived his wealth as a blessing from God, a sense of divine approval.
- C) The selling of everything is intended to force the rich young ruler to humbly rely on God, to make a determined choice to live in dependence on God alone. Jesus calls him to trade earthly security for heavenly security.
- D) Of course, Jesus recognizes the rich young ruler's response by simply looking at him (18:24). Christ laments his response and notes the difficulty in total reliance on God when one is financially wealthy.
- E) Jesus emphasizes his point with an absurd illustration which stuns and disillusions His disciples (18:26).