

**THE GOOD**  
March 27, 2011

By Pastor Stan  
Luke 18:18-30

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SERIES: ON THE WAY TO THE CROSS  
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INTRO.

-- One of my favorite candies when I was a kid was a box of "Good 'N Plenty." There were 2 reasons I liked it: its taste and its sound when you shake the box. Some of you remember the old commercial that used the box to make the sound of a train, and then when the box was empty, you could blow into it and make a sound like the train's horn (that doesn't work with the new boxes).

-- Now, you're probably wondering what in the world this has to do with Jesus' journey to Jerusalem. Here's what: on the way to Jerusalem Jesus meets a "good and plenty" man.

Of course, this man doesn't have anything to do with the candy. I'm calling him a "good and plenty man" because he's what nearly all of us would consider a good man with plenty of good things. That's probably how everyone who knew him looked at him. But when he meets Jesus, the "good and plenty" man finds out that he isn't as good as he thinks he is and that his plenty can't get him what he was searching for - in fact, his plenty gets in the way. What happens to this man could make an eternal difference in your life as well.

So turn to the story in Luke 18.

I. THE ENCOUNTER (VV. 18-23)

A. THE MAN'S QUESTION (V. 18)

-- What we have here is a story about a seemingly good man who comes to Jesus with a seemingly good question.

1. The Man

-- The fact that this story appears not only in Luke but also in Matthew and Mark emphasizes its importance. Matthew tells us that the man is young - most likely in his 20s. Luke tells us that he was a "ruler," which probably indicates that he came from a prominent family and had considerable status, power and influence. All three Gospels note that he was a man of great wealth. In other words, here's a man who has it all - youth, prestige, power, and lots of money - everything that our culture craves.

2. The Question

-- But the man knows that he doesn't have it all. He also wants eternal life, and that's why he comes to Jesus. -- At first it looks as if this is a good man who comes to Jesus with a good question about how to obtain eternal life. But everything's not quite as good as it seems, and we see that in the way Jesus replies to the man's question.

-- Before we look at how Jesus replies, I want you to think about what you would say to this man. For example, if you were a prayer counselor and he came to you at the end of the worship service today and asked you this question, what would you say to him? Ok, let's see what Jesus says.

B. JESUS' RESPONSE (VV. 19-20)

1. Unexpected Assertion about Goodness

a. Jesus' response to this man is very different from what we probably would have expected. Many evangelicals today would probably be eager to lead this man in praying a sinner's prayer and would then immediately point him to verses that would assure him of his salvation based on the prayer he had just prayed. But surprisingly that may be the worst thing to do, because you may be giving this man a false assurance of salvation.

b. That's certainly not the way Jesus responds. In what would be unexpected for most of us, Jesus seems to get real picky over this man's use of the simple adjective "good."

Cf., v. 19

c. There are two important implications in Jesus' assertion that only God is good:

(1) The first implication is that goodness - goodness in the ultimate sense of the word, goodness in the context of what it takes to obtain eternal life - that kind of inherent, innate goodness belongs only to God. Jesus is not denying that He is good; He's pointing out the implication of such goodness. Jesus can be called good in an unconditional and unreserved way only if He is God. The only way Jesus can be genuinely good is if He is God, which, of course, is exactly who He is.

(2) The second implication is that this man isn't good in this same sense - he's not fully and thoroughly good, and he can never make himself good in this sense because that would require for him to make himself into God. The problem with this man, as we're about to find out, is that he sees himself as a good, moral man, which means that he isn't ready for the Gospel (the good news). Before anyone is ready for the good news of the Gospel, they must be persuaded of the bad news about themselves. Before you can accept the Good News of forgiveness of your sins, you have to acknowledge that you're a sinner and be broken over your sinfulness and repentant of your sins - desiring to turn from them.

These are the implications in Jesus' concise assertion about goodness, and that sets the stage for what Jesus says next.

## 2. Unexpected Reference to the Commandments (v. 20)

-- If Jesus' comment about goodness is unexpected, then His reference to the Commandments as the answer to the man's question is even more surprising.

v. 20

-- So, let me ask you: do you think that Jesus is really suggesting that the way to obtain eternal life is by obeying the commandments?

I think that He is.

Let me explain. Remember what the young man asked: "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" That's the question Jesus is answering - what the man must do to obtain eternal life. The answer is to obey God's commandments. The man can have eternal life by obeying the commandments - BUT he would have to do so perfectly, and that, of course, is something he can't do - no one can.

The problem is that this young man doesn't understand that.

## C. THE MAN'S SELF-DECEPTION (V. 21)

-- The young man's response to Jesus' statement about obeying the Commandments reveals a serious self-deception and erroneous self-assessment.

As he sees it, this young man has always tried to live by God's commandments. Now, I fully expect that if you pressed him the man would readily admit that he wasn't perfect, but clearly he sees himself as a good man, someone who has done far more good than bad, so that the scales of God's judgment would tip in his favor. By human standards good means good enough, but by God's standards being good enough to obtain eternal life means being perfect. This young man has a serious misunderstanding about his sinfulness in the eyes of God who is completely good and holy. The truth that this young man is failing to understand is that he can never obey God's commandments perfectly and, therefore, can never obtain salvation that way.

Jesus is about to break through this man's self-deception.

## D. JESUS' COMMAND AND CALL (V. 22)

-- This man thought he had kept all of God's commands, but the truth is that he had failed in obeying even the first of the Ten Commandments: "You shall have no other gods before me."

-- The instruction for the man to sell everything he has and to give it away to the poor and then follow Jesus will demonstrate who or what is really first in the man's life - God or money.

## E. THE MAN'S CHOICE (V. 23)

-- As soon as he hears Jesus' command and call, the man's demeanor changes and he becomes immediately sad. The idea of giving away all his wealth isn't even something that he's willing to consider. He can part from Christ more easily than he can part with his money. He goes away sad, but he goes away. He can't obey even the first commandment. He has put his possessions ahead of God; his possessions are his god.

## II. THE FOLLOW-UP TEACHING (VV. 24-27)

-- Jesus uses this encounter as a teaching opportunity. In the discussion that follows the encounter Jesus

makes two important observations - one about money and one about salvation

#### A. THE OBSERVATION ABOUT MONEY (VV. 24)

-- As the rich young man walks away, Jesus makes the observation: "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God."

1. To understand why this is the case, you need to go back to what happens right before this encounter with the rich young man, in verses 15-17.

vv. 15-17

Jesus says that in order to enter God's kingdom, to find salvation and obtain eternal life, we have to become like children - we have to recognize our helpless dependence on God. Just as babies and small children are totally dependent on their parents for the things of life, so we are totally dependent on God. It's this sense of dependence that propels us to seek after and cling to God, but riches blind us to our helplessness and dependence. In Revelation 3 Jesus is talking to members of a well-to-do church and says this in verse 17:

Revelation 3:17 You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked.

Riches create an illusion of self-sufficiency and rob us of our sense of dependence on God.

2. And in case you're thinking that none of this applies to you because you're not rich, let me say that you don't have to be rich to make a god of money or to believe that money can solve all your problems. Lots of people are dirt poor but have made money and possessions their god and are pursuing them with more zeal than they are pursuing the true God.

3. One more comment about Jesus' command for this man to give away everything: Jesus didn't require that of everyone. What Jesus does require of everyone, however, is to surrender their lives and possessions to His lordship, to look on our lives, our money, and our possessions as a stewardship, that everything we are and have belongs to Jesus, and we're His managers, seeking to serve and please Him.

#### B. THE OBSERVATION ABOUT SALVATION (VV. 25-27)

##### 1. The Illustration (25)

-- To illustrate the difficulty of entering the kingdom of God, Jesus uses what was probably a common illustration.

v. 25

This was likely a proverbial way of saying something was impossible - to compare it to trying to fit a camel through the eye of a needle. It's impossible - there's no way you can do it.

##### 2. The Disciples' Question (v. 26)

-- The Disciples get what Jesus is saying and react to it in verse 26.

v. 26

The Disciples are shocked and perplexed because they share the pop-theology of the day, a first century version of the prosperity gospel, the belief that riches are a sign of God's favor and blessings. But Jesus has just asserted that riches are more often an obstacle that actually keeps people from finding God. Totally confused, the Disciples wonder out loud how anyone can be saved. And that's exactly what Jesus wants them to wonder. He now proceeds to give them the answer in verse 27.

##### 3. Jesus' Answer (v. 27)

-- Humanly speaking, obtaining salvation is an impossibility. It doesn't matter if you're rich or poor or in-between; there's nothing you can do to be saved, to make yourself good in God's eyes and obtain eternal life. That's the bad news, and once you understand that you're ready for the Good News. The Good News is that what's impossible for you is possible with God, and only with Him.

God is sovereign over salvation. The salvation of any person is a work of God's sovereign grace from beginning to end.

John 6:65 no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled them.

Ephesians 1:4-5 For he [God the Father] chose us in him [Christ] before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love 5 he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will

Romans 8:30 And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.

Philippians 1:6 being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

As Stuart Townend writes in his great hymn "In Christ Alone":  
No guilt in life, no fear in death  
This is the power of Christ in me;  
From life's first cry to final breath  
Jesus commands my destiny.

## CONCLUSION

John Blanchard is a well-known preacher, Bible teacher and apologist in England. Several years ago he was speaking at a church in Northern Ireland and after the service the pastor of the church introduced John to a man and said "This man is very religious, but he's not a Christian." (Obviously, a pastor who was rather frank.)

As they talked, the man said to John, "Well, I know the gospel. I was raised in this church. I've been coming here since I was a little boy. All I need to do is to take one small step, and I shall be a Christian."

John Blanchard said to him, "You're not telling me the truth." (Obviously, John's as frank as the pastor). Well, the man was rather surprised; so he repeated how he had been coming to that church since he was a child and he knew the gospel, and all he needed was one little thing - to take one small step, and he would be a Christian.

And once more John Blanchard said, "You're not telling me the truth."

"What do you mean?" the man asked.

Blanchard replied, "You need more than a little step. What you need is a big miracle. What you need is the sovereign intervention of Almighty God in your life."