

TO INHERIT ETERNAL LIFE

Luke 18:15-30

Key Verse: 18:22

When Jesus heard this, he said to him, "You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."

In this passage, we meet three different groups of people who came to Jesus. Each had different views of Jesus. Our Lord taught them how to inherit eternal life. Do you personally have assurance of eternal life? What will happen to you when you die? Let us find out how to inherit eternal life from this passage.

I. LIKE A LITTLE CHILD (15-17)

Look at verse 15. *People were also bringing babies to Jesus for him to place his hands on them.* Jesus' personal touch changed the lives of many people. A man with leprosy was healed immediately when Jesus touched him. A blind man received his sight when Jesus touched his eyes. Jesus' healing touch gave them new life and new hope. So people were bringing their babies to Jesus to have him place his hands on them. They wanted Jesus to bless their children. Mothers with their children in their arms formed a long line to see Jesus. When the disciples saw this, they rebuked them, thinking they were bothering Jesus. They thought Jesus had more important matters to take care of than spending time with children. *But Jesus called the children to him and said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these"* (16).

The society in Jesus' time often marginalized children (Mt 14:21). But Jesus welcomed them with open arms. He did not ignore them just because they didn't have social clout. Furthermore, Jesus wanted his disciples to learn from children. What should we learn from little children? How are they different from grownups? Children have certain attributes that we do not, such as their innocence, humbleness, and learning mind. Most of all, we must learn from them how to simply trust. Many grownups are full of pride, doubt, hatred, and so on. They lose their childhood innocence as they grow up. They become less like child while often behaving childishly. Nicodemus in John 4 was proud. When Jesus explained the work of the Holy Spirit by comparing it to the wind, he became sarcastic and said, "How can this be?" He was not childlike. Look at verse 17: *"Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it."* Jesus wants us to be like a little child. He wants us to trust him, as children trust their parents. He wants us to listen to the word of God and humbly accept it. In his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God" and "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." I have a three-year old granddaughter named Abby. I call her my "Sunshine" because her face lights up with a big smile when I give her even a small gift. She receives the gift with a joy and happiness. There is no pretention. God has given us

the best gift, the gift of eternal life in his kingdom through his Son's sacrifice. May we accept this gift of love as a little child accepts a gift!

II. A RICH RULER (18-25)

Look at verse 18. *A certain ruler asked him, "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"* To become a ruler in his society, this man must have worked hard. We know that at that time a person had to live a disciplined life from his childhood to become a ruler. He had to memorize many books and keep the law of God meticulously. No doubt he had to sacrifice many hours of sleep to get ahead of others. Finally, his effort paid off and he rose to the position of a ruler. He should have been happy. But he wasn't. Something was bothering him inside. Like Nicodemus, he had emptiness in his heart. No amount of money could fill the void. Like Nicodemus, this ruler came to Jesus, seeking for answers to his problems in life. He had no peace in his soul. He wasn't sure what would happen to him when he died. So he came to Jesus and asked, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" No matter how much we accomplish, no matter how many things we possess, without assurance of eternal life, we cannot be truly happy. Jesus says in Mark 8:36-37 "What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?"

Look at verse 19. *"Why do you call me good?" Jesus answered. "No one is good—except God alone."* The ruler thought that he was pretty good. He thought that he was better than others. After all, he was not only rich and powerful, but also very religious. He wanted Jesus to consider his goodness and give him credit for it. He expected Jesus to tell him to do a few more things so that his emptiness would go away. Jesus told him that the first thing he had to know was who Jesus is. Only God is good. The answer to his life problem can be found in God only. Only God can give him eternal life. When Jesus asked, "Why do you call me good?" he was actually asking the man, "Do you know who I am? Because if you knew me personally, you would have eternal life!" The man called Jesus "Good teacher," but he didn't know that Jesus is God. He called Jesus good, and he was right, but he didn't know why Jesus is good. Jesus is good because he is God.

What else did Jesus teach the ruler? Look at verse 20. *You know the commandments: 'You shall not commit adultery, you shall not murder, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, honor your father and mother.'* Jesus reminded him of the Ten Commandments. The Ten Commandments can be divided into two parts, the first part concerning our relationship with God and the second part concerning our relationship with our neighbors. Jesus drew the ruler's attention to the second part: "Do not commit adultery" (7th), "Do not murder" (6th), "Do not steal" (8th), "Do not give false testimony" (9th), and "Honor your father and mother" (5th). Jesus wanted to help him to examine his relationship with other people.

What was the man's reply? He said, "All these I have kept since I was a boy" (21). Wow! This was a bold claim. Who among us can claim this? We must say that this man must have been a pretty decent guy. He was a model citizen. He always stopped fully at stop sign and he never had any parking tickets. But we can also say that he was

overconfident, for no one can keep all these commandments perfectly before God. For example, Jesus said, “You have heard that it was said, ‘Do not commit adultery.’ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Mt 5:27-28). Like many religious leaders of his time, this ruler thought that he was good, just because he kept the law outwardly. Jesus did not even ask him about the first four commandments concerning the love of God. Neither did he ask him about the 10th commandment, which even St. Paul had a trouble in obeying. Since the ruler did not keep the law of God from his heart, he could not experience God’s love in his soul. No wonder this man didn’t have peace in his heart!

Jesus did not rebuke him for his audacious claim. Instead, he gently guided him to overcome his fundamental problem in life. Look at verse 22. *When Jesus heard this, he said to him, “You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”* This verse reveals that this rich ruler was a selfish man. “All these I have kept since I was a boy,” he said. He was very confident. However, he observed the law but did not obey it. He did not really love his neighbors. He kept the law passively. But he did not do anything for his neighbors actively. Outwardly he seemed to obey the law of God, but his inner heart was selfish. So Jesus said, “You still lack one thing.” When Jesus said, “Sell everything and give to the poor,” it did not mean, he had to become a homeless person in order to inherit eternal life. It meant that he had to obey the word of God from his heart.

Look at verse 22 again. *When Jesus heard this, he said to him, “You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”* Jesus told the ruler that he would have treasure in heaven. We, the children of God, are treasure hunters. Jesus says in Matthew 13:44: “The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field.” The “treasure” refers to eternal life. Those who have assurance of eternal life are joyful. They know that this world is temporary, while the kingdom of God is everlasting.

Whatever we have in this world is temporary. Only the treasure in heaven is eternal. So Jesus told the rich ruler, “Then come, follow me.” Jesus invited the man to be his disciple! Likewise, Jesus invites each of us to become his disciple. Jesus wants us to participate in his salvation work with the hope of eternal life in the kingdom of God. Following Jesus as his disciple is not easy. We have to carry the cross of mission in addition to our daily struggle to make a living. But this is the way of life. Jesus said, “I am the way, and the truth and the life.” And he wants us to follow him—the way of cross. It is a narrow road, but it leads us to eternal life. A life of mission is hard, but life without mission is meaningless and has no purpose.

How did the rich ruler respond to Jesus’ invitation? Look at verse 23. *“When he heard this, he became very sad, because he was very wealthy.”* It was a tragedy that this man rejected Jesus’ invitation. He decided to hold on to his great wealth in this passing world rather than treasure in heaven--eternal life. His decision proved that he loved his money more than God and his neighbors. He let money come between God

and him. The love of money is a root of all kinds of evil (1Ti 6:10). Jesus looked at him and said, “How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!” (24) Jesus was heart-broken over his decision to choose money over eternal life. Jesus continued in verse 25. *“Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.”* We live in a material-oriented society. We still have the phrase on the dollar bill, “In God we trust,” but it sounds hollow. Like the rich ruler in this story, many people chase after money rather than follow the Lord Jesus as his disciples.

A boy came to school late one morning. He was a good student who was never tardy. So the teacher asked him why. The boy said he was late because on the way to school a man lost his coin. The teacher said that it was good for him to help the man to find the coin, but he should have told the man that he was late for school. The boy shook his head. So the teacher asked him why. The boy said he could not leave because he was standing on the coin. The boy wanted the coin and he did not leave until the man gave up the search for the coin! There are people around us who put things of this world over God and eternal life. Are you the one who is reluctant to take your step toward Jesus because you are standing on a coin? Do you have areas in life that requires your courage to take the step? If so, may the Lord help you to take the step!

III. THE DISCIPLES OF JESUS (25-30)

Look at verse 26. *Those who heard this asked, “Who then can be saved?”* In their eyes, the ruler seemed pretty good. He was a model citizen. He seemed to deserve eternal life. In fact, they envied his life. But Jesus told them that the man was not right with God. So they thought it was impossible for anyone to be saved. What did Jesus say to them? Look at verse 27. *Jesus replied, “What is impossible with man is possible with God.”* It is difficult for wealthy people to realize their need for salvation and their powerlessness to save themselves. Unless God reaches down into their lives, they will not come to him. But it is not impossible. Jesus surprised some of his followers by offering salvation to the poor; he may surprise some people today by offering it to the rich. Salvation is totally the work of God! Apart from the grace of God, no one can be saved. One might ask, “Who can follow Jesus in this wicked generation?” But there are many people who love Jesus more than their possessions. There are many who believe that the greatest return to their investment can be obtained not in the Wall Street, but in God who gives eternal life.

Peter said to Jesus, “We have left all we had to follow you!” (28) Peter had given up his job and a comfortable family life to become a disciple of Jesus. Peter and the other disciples were different from the rich ruler. They made commitment to Jesus. They made a decision to follow Jesus. What did Jesus promise them? Look at verses 29-30. *“Truly I tell you,” Jesus said to them, “no one who has left home or wife or brothers or sisters or parents or children for the sake of the kingdom of God will fail to receive many times as much in this age, and in the age to come eternal life.”* The disciples sacrificed a great deal to follow Jesus. But Jesus reminded them that following him has its benefits—eternal life! We must not dwell on what we have given up, but think about

what we have gained and give thanks to God. God has already given us the best gift—the gift of salvation. We can never out-give God. In our spiritual accounting book, credits are much greater than debits.

Jesus knows that our family is very important to us. It is a great blessing to have a family who loves the Lord and serves him together. But even our family must not come between God and us. And family is not eternal. No one can expect to keep his family as it is and live in this world forever. The human history is moving toward the glorious day of the Lord. We must make a decision of faith to follow Jesus and secure our treasure in heaven.

Truly rich people are those who have eternal life. Truly rich people are those who have treasure in heaven. Truly joyful people are those who have eternal life. The rich ruler had wealth and social status. But he felt he was empty. He could not boldly decide to follow Jesus because of his selfishness. He was a rich man. But he was poor because he did not have eternal life.

We can have assurance of eternal life by knowing Jesus personally and serving him joyfully. May God help us to be poor in spirit like a little child so that the kingdom of heaven may be ours! May God help us to follow Jesus as his committed disciples!