

The Whole Story
Luke 18:18-30

A question as we begin our study of these precious scriptures today, do we, when ministering to those that we know need to receive Christ as their Savior, sometimes, perhaps often, present Christ and His salvation in a confusing and sometimes less than accurate manner.

By that, I mean, in our zeal for a person to receive Christ and be saved, do we sometimes hold back and not give that person the “whole story”?

A preacher friend of mine would often complain about how we as evangelicals too often try to “sell” Christ and His Christianity to an unbeliever, much like a salesman would do, saying to them, “we have a product that you need. It's Jesus! And you need to come to Him and He will fix all your problems for you”.

And yes, those words might be an exaggeration, but I do see my preacher friend's point. Salvation is not something that can be sold to a person. There is so much, much more involved with our Lord.

As I think about my own presentation of the gospel, I know that I will often say to a person or to a congregation that Salvation is free, completely free. It doesn't cost a person anything. Our Lord Jesus has paid the full and complete price to wipe away all our sins. All a person has to do is “receive” His blessed free gift of salvation.

And that is true, so very true. Our salvation is completely free to us. But that is not the complete story. And that is the important part of the answer that Jesus was explaining to this “Rich Ruler” who had come to Him asking how he could inherit eternal life. And that is why I am so convinced that follow-up discipleship is so very essential.

Let's pause for a moment and read these words given to us in Luke chapter 18. Here, in response to the man's question about eternal life, Jesus said,

“²² . . . “One thing you still lack. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.” ²³ But when he heard these things, he became very sad, for he was extremely rich. ²⁴ Jesus, seeing that he had become sad, said, “How difficult it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God! ²⁵ For 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.”²⁶ Those who heard it said, “Then who can be saved?”²⁷ But he said, “What is impossible with man is possible with God.”²⁸ And Peter said, “See, we have left our homes and followed you.”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.” (Luke 18:22-30)

At first reading, these words of the Lord Jesus might seem to be implying that the sacrifice of this man giving up his wealth is a prerequisite part of his salvation. But that is why it is so important that we study all of the words of these scriptures, so that we can have a fuller, more complete understanding of God’s truths.

The truth that God would have us to know and understand is that while yes, the salvation of our soul really is completely free, the next step, the “following after” the Lord Jesus will often not be so completely free of cost and especially of suffering. That there is a real cost that we will pay within our discipleship.

And that is part of the message that I would like for us to understand within this study of these scriptures given to us in this passage today. Salvation does take place as a free gift from our Lord and it is a once for all transaction between Him and us.

But while these scriptures are clear that yes, salvation is a once for all time gift from God, salvation is also an ongoing transaction. In these scriptures we are clearly told that yes, “we were saved” at that moment we gave our heart to Christ, but that “we are also being saved” in all of our future transactions of daily life. And then also, that the final step of salvation will take place when we enter heaven to be with our Lord.

But while we yet remain here in our flesh, our daily and ongoing part in our salvation is that we are to “work it out”. Listen carefully to these familiar words that we quote so often from Ephesians chapter 2, but note especially the words of verse 10.

⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God,⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast. (And Listen to these next words)¹⁰ For we are his workmanship,

created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. (Ephesians 2:8-10)

Did you notice that right after we are told that our salvation is a gift from God, He then tells us that He has work for us to do,

¹⁰ For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. (Ephesians 2:10)

And then also in the Book of Philippians chapter 2 we are told that we are to, ¹² . . . work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, ¹³ for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure. (Philippians 2:12-13)

Folks, those words tell us more of the “whole story” about our salvation that we need to always not only believe for ourselves, but to also be sure to tell others about, especially new believers.

Yes, salvation is free! But as we then move on ahead and become our Lord's disciples, the cost to us can often have its difficulties. And that was what Jesus was saying in these words, making sure that this “Rich Ruler” knew that while yes, his salvation would be free, but that his “following after our Lord” would cost him.

I can recall hearing other people say, “but I don't want to get too deep into explaining those difficult things right at first. It might scare the person away”. But folks, notice here that Jesus did not hold back. He told this man right up front what it was going to cost him.

And dear Christian, as we read these precious scriptures, we need to always be pondering why our Lord gives us the record of each of these accounts and instructions.

His reason for telling us about his encounter with this Rich Ruler is clear, so that you and I could read it and begin to comprehend the truly difficult nature of “following after Him, the difficult nature of true “discipleship”, the all-important “next step” that He commands us to take right after we have received Him as our Savior.

And it is also to face us with the question of whether or not we are going to allow Him to be our “Lord”, the “Lord of our daily lives”. Folks, yes, as we have just said, it is relatively easy for us to simply bow our knee and receive the Spirit of Christ into our soul in salvation. But yielding our “will” to Him and allowing Him to be our “Lord” is not the same as salvation. Yielding our “will” to Him as our Lord is part of our “following” Him. And that will often be difficult and sometimes cost us a great price.

All throughout His ministry, we see that Jesus called out to men and women of every social order and position to come and follow Him, to come and be His disciples.

And as we can see, especially from the response of this ruler, they, like us, did not fully grasp the difficult cost that is presented within His call upon our souls, that discipleship would not only at times be difficult, it most often would be as Jesus tells us here completely “impossible”.

To obey these simple words spoken to this man, spoken to you and me, that as a part of our having eternal life, we might truly have to “sell all that we possess, rid ourselves of everything that entangles our soul, and then come and follow Jesus” is not only difficult, but is really beyond our natural ability to comprehend and to do.

And please understand! This is not difficult just because this man was very wealthy. That was so, yes, but we need to understand that such effort is just as impossible for men and women like you and me, men and women of very little wealth.

Some would argue that Jesus might not truly understand the impact of His demand upon this wealthy man. After all, Jesus Himself was never rich. He was the simple son of a simple carpenter. And did He not say on another occasion that foxes have holes, but that He does not even have a place to lay His head. So what then could He have known about wealth?

Folks, please, we must never allow our minds to think so small. Jesus could easily have been very, very wealthy, at any moment in time. Recall that He caused a silver coin to suddenly appear within the mouth of a fish. Could He not also have produced ten thousand pieces of silver?

And besides that, remember that while yes, Jesus was fully a man, He was also fully God. And in heaven, before He came to earth to be a man, He was the noblest of all nobles, creator God of the universe, regaled in glory and majesty and honor and power. His position was above all creatures and above all things. Even Solomon in all his glory could not compare to the glory, power, honor and beauty of Jesus.

But in coming to earth, Jesus did exactly as He commanded this young ruler to do. He gave up all of His power, His majesty and His honor to become a mere man, just so He could save a wretch like you and me.

Listen to these words given in Philippians chapter 2, describing the humility of the Lord Jesus, we read,

⁵ Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. (Philippians 2:5-8)

Jesus, the King of Glory, gave up more than we could ever imagine when He became a man to come to this earth to save you and me.

But some might argue that as God He didn't suffer the temptations like we do, to have and to own the wealth as did this Rich Ruler.

And yes, to some degree that argument is true, Jesus, having God the Father as His Father, was not born with the same sinful nature that you and I are born with. But still, these scriptures tell us clearly that as a man, Jesus was tempted in every way, just as you and I are tempted, but He was able to resist those temptations that He encountered each day.

And folks, listen. There is a real truth that you and I need to accept. And that is that that same privilege becomes ours, yours and mine, once we have been "born again", reborn from above. Being freed from the power and the control of sin is part of the "equipping" of our souls that our Lord provides to those of us who receive Him as our Savior and Lord.

In our rebirth, our own sin nature really has been defeated within us, and we are no longer controlled by that old nature. And like Jesus, We also can resist sin. Read about that in the Book of Romans, and especially in Romans chapter six.

But also, and unfortunately so, when you and I first come into our life with Christ, we do come into it having experienced a very powerful and controlling sinful nature. And even after we have been “born again” we still do retain a residue of that old nature and those old feelings within us.

And oh, the good, good feelings that we have within us when we possess nice things, and also when we have special titles of honor and respect printed after our name, and when we know that we are dressed well. And for the ladies, perhaps being adorned with some special pieces of jewelry.

And we take such pleasure when we know that onlookers are giving us approving glances. In truth, we spend most of our lives devoted to gaining and to keeping and to enjoying all those high positions in life, and all those things we acquire along the way.

And that seemed to be the struggle that the Rich Ruler was experiencing. To simply cast aside all of that “feel good” wealth and privilege, even for such a lofty and righteous thing as “eternal life” is still too often too great a tradeoff, an “impossible” decision for anyone to make. And that will be so whether it be a rich ruler, or it be not-so-wealthy you and me. And Jesus said so here in these words. He said that it is an utterly “Impossible task!”

So why then did Jesus give these “impossible” instructions to this man, and even also intend them for you and me? He gave the command first because it is necessary for righteousness. As we said in an earlier study of these words, we must not minimize the holiness of God and the holiness that He requires of you and me.

And you and I do also have to do our part, a very serious part, within this special equation of righteousness. And though it be an impossible task, we must nonetheless surrender our hearts to its conditions.

May I say all of this again so that we can clearly understand it . . . Jesus was very intentional when He used the word “impossible”. It would be “impossible” for a rich man, but it would also be every bit as impossible for you and me. That is

because, in truth, there is no one who can, solely by their own strength and power, divest themselves of all they possess and then come and follow Jesus. It really is "Impossible"!

But that was where this man would have to begin. And, likewise also, that is where you and I must begin.

Jesus would have each of us to search deep within our heart, our soul, our mind, our strength and to the best that we can understand, know that there will be a very difficult cost exacted upon our souls if and when we truly do "come to follow Him".

And that cost will come to each of us in different ways, dependent upon the kind of circumstance that is unique to each of us. Sometimes, as with this man, it is wealth and position. At other times, it is our family involvements.

On one occasion, when Jesus was teaching His disciples a similar thing about the cost of following Him, He said,

²⁶ "If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. ²⁷ And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. (Luke 14:26-27)

This Rich Ruler had asked Jesus a simple sounding question, "what must I do to have eternal life"? And no doubt, this man was hoping for a far simpler answer. But he did not get a simple answer. He got the only answer that Jesus could give. And the answer made the young man very sad. And he turned and walked away.

Did he stay away forever, and never again pursue his quest for eternal life? We don't know. That part of the story isn't given to us. But as I mentioned in an earlier study, over the several years since I first began to ponder this portion of scripture, I have hoped and prayed that this man did come back and fully give his life to Christ.

And I personally believe that he might have. Too much of his earlier life had been given to seeking after the things of God for him to simply give it all up.

But where does all of this leave us, you and me? And again, what is God's purpose in recording this account within these scriptures for you and me to read today.

God's intent is so that you and I also can know that there is an impossible cost ahead for us if we truly desire to follow after Jesus.

But again, why is it impossible? The first answer is, God made it "impossible" so that in and through it all, He would be the One who would enable us and deliver us out of our condition. If we could do it ourselves, we could be our own Savior. And He can never allow that. Jesus and Jesus alone is to be our Savior.

Here, when this rich ruler heard Jesus' words about the cost it would be for him to have eternal life, he became very sad. And we are told in another place in scripture that he turned and walked away.

But how could it have turned out differently for this man? And how can it turn out differently for you and me?

As for me, I am now well along in my life's journey, but there was a time in the earlier years of my life that I was faced with a similar set of decisions involving my work, my possessions and my family.

As a young man, I had chosen banking as my career. And fortunately, I was successful and progressed well within my profession, a nice home in a prosperous community in Florida with my next step to be the President of the bank.

Along the way though I had come to know the Lord as my Savior. And I soon realized a change taking place in my priorities and desires. And that was when I was asked to come and be the Business Manager in a ministry to youth in a rural town in Mississippi.

And we did. My family and I left the lucrative career in banking and joined a low paying career in ministry.

Now, as I compare my response to that of this Rich Ruler here in this passage, in my earliest years as a banker, I also, no doubt, did not want to give up my

successful career for any reason. Life was oh so comfortable and promising to me.

But then, unbeknownst to me, the Lord began to do His "impossible work" in my heart, changing my plans and my desires for all those fineries of wealth and position. And I must confess to you that God's "Impossible work" within my heart made my decision to give it all up and to join that ministry to kids to come relatively easily. But again, it was because of His "Impossible work" in me that brought it all about.

And I do believe that that is the way it will take place for most people who have been called into a deeper relationship with the Lord. Perhaps that preparation process was yet to take place in the life of this Rich Ruler. And that is why I have prayed that he did eventually turn and follow Jesus.

May I also quickly add here that for most people that Jesus calls to come and follow Him, it does not always require that the person leave their jobs, their families, even their wealthy life provisions. Not everyone who is called to follow Jesus will become a preacher or a missionary in some foreign land. Most people will remain right where they are, living and serving within the Body of Christ within their church and community.

But still, the cost of being a disciple of the Lord Jesus will often be difficult all throughout the matters of each person's daily life. Our sin-filled personalities will always be trying to take back control over the circumstances of our day, impatience, anger, frustration, temptations to stray and on and on. But thanks be to God, we will now be better equipped to handle those circumstances.

What God asks you and me to do is to give our hearts freely over to being His disciple, daily bible study, discipling other believers, and actively reaching for the opportunities to share the Lord's will and His ways with other people. And yes, if we are ever drawn to go into a fulltime ministry, to surrender our hearts to that also.

The understanding that you and I must have and must accept is that once we have given our hearts to Christ in salvation, we are now His, bought with a price, His own blood. And we need to be willing to go and do whatever He wants us to do.

May I close with these words from the Lord Jesus. He said,
"If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his
cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but
whoever loses his life for my sake will find it". (Matthew 16:24-25)
May we pray.