

God Gives Back
Luke 18:22-30

As my wife and I attend church each Sunday, I am so encouraged by all that I see. The church we attend is a community church, but it is also a campus church, serving the students, the teachers and the staff members there in the ministry at French Camp Academy.

And I am especially delighted as I see the dedicated believers who have not only given their hearts and lives to Christ, but who have also given their lives in service to the ministry to those young people who attend the school . . . houseparents, teachers, office workers, maintenance workers, all of them well qualified to be in professional jobs elsewhere, but have left those opportunities to give themselves and their families in ministry to those young people who attend the school.

And for some of them, the choice they made to join the ministry there at French Camp was not an easy one.

Let me pause for a moment and read our scripture passage, given here in Luke chapter 18. Because here, a man described as being a "Rich Ruler" is being asked to do a similar thing, to give up what he believes to be a greater opportunity for something less than he has, and then to come and follow Jesus.

Here, this man approached the Lord Jesus and asked Him how he could inherit eternal life and Jesus responded to him saying,

"²² . . . "You still lack one thing. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me."

²⁴ And when Jesus saw that he became very sorrowful, He said, "How hard it is for those who have riches 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 man to enter the kingdom of God." ²⁶ And those who heard it said, "Who then can be saved?" ²⁷ But He said, "The things which are impossible with men are possible with God." ²⁸ Then Peter said, "See, we have left all and followed You." ²⁹ So He said to them, "Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or parents or brothers or wife or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, ³⁰ who shall not receive many times more in this present time, and in the age to come eternal life." (Luke 18:22-30)

As we begin today, may I again say to us that the “cost of being a disciple of the Lord Jesus” can often come at a very, very difficult price!

And this encounter that we read about here between the Lord Jesus and this rich ruler is only one of many ways that cost might come to us.

Again, the question from the man, and then the answer from the Lord Jesus!
Verse 18, the

. . . ruler asked him, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?”
(Luke 18:18)

And Jesus replied,

. . . “You still lack one thing. Sell all that you have and give it to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.” (Luke 18:22)

We who desire to follow after the Lord Jesus do, so much, want our quest for eternal life to be an easy one, a pursuit in which we and our loved ones would simply be able to bow our heads quietly, pray the “sinner’s prayer” and be eternally saved.

And then further, that the simplicity would continue all the days of our lives, with us needing only to sit quietly in our church pews each Sunday, soaking up the goodness of the Lord, and then at life’s end, to wake up in heaven.

I confess to you, I have sometimes wished that my own walk with the Lord could be that simple. But it isn’t, and it probably will never be.

May we pause here for a moment and remind ourselves again of the reasons why our discipleship, our faithful following after the Lord Jesus, is ever and always so difficult for us. And please, let’s listen carefully, because the opposition that we encounter, the roadblocks, the barriers are not just limited to something personal within us, our own “weak will” or our personality trait, or the like.

It is that, yes, but there is also so much more that is taking place in and around us. As these scriptures tell us, there is a battle, a warfare that is being waged to get control over our souls and to keep it.

Remember, before salvation takes place, every soul is already completely lost, controlled in every way by the world, the flesh and the devil. And neither of those three enemies are ever willing to give up their control over us.

And when, as with this rich ruler, we are confronted with the high cost of following after Jesus, we can fully expect that all those forces, the world, the flesh and the devil will immediately come forward in complete battle array to defeat the offer that Christ is making to us.

And if our circumstance be, as with this rich ruler, a choice involving our possessions, our public position, our coveted lifestyle, immediately everything within us will begin to cry out, NO, NO, we can't sell our house, our car, give up our job, our title, our prestige.

We love all those things. And besides that, we have worked so hard to gain them. We struggled for so long in college and we have worked such long hours and made such wise investments. There must be another way, there simply must be.

And in those moments, something else also sometimes comes into our minds, this one straight from the devil himself, an indictment that God is "unfair" to ask us to give up all that we have worked so hard to gain.

We might not think that we would ever have such thoughts as those, but oh, beneath the surface of our ordinary thoughts lingers many such indictments of God. And the world, the flesh and the devil continually feed those vile arguments.

Considering this circumstance before us today, and as we observe the response that Jesus had to this rich ruler, the average evangelical of today would have probably tried to use more clever language than Jesus used, words that would have been designed to keep the man standing there instead of causing him to walk away. And if he did walk away, we would probably have chased after him, trying just one more time to get him to understand and accept Jesus into his heart as Savior.

But Jesus did not do that, not in this case and not often on other such occasions. And there were times when Jesus spoke even harder words.

On one occasion, Jesus told a large group of His disciples that they would have to eat His flesh and drink His blood. And those words were far too difficult, even bizarre. And most of the people who were listening just turned and walked away from Him.

On another occasion, a man asked Jesus if he could first go back and bury his father. And Jesus told him that he should "let the dead bury the dead".

And again, as we said in last week's study, there was a time when Jesus said to His disciples that,

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)

And then again, here with this young ruler, the demand that the man give up all his possessions, his wealth, his lifestyle, was too hard for him. And he, like so many others, just turned and walked away.

And so it goes, whether Jesus' demands be high and lofty with Spiritual meaning, or they be low and personal, having to do with temporal possessions, the choices required are very often too difficult to bear, and many, perhaps most, do turn and walk away, back to the lifestyle they know and love.

But lest we be left in despair and think that there is no hope for any of us, may we ask ourselves, "What could have taken place to bring a different result in this man's life? What could he have done differently?"

May I suggest, that if he had simply stood there and listened for just a few more moments, he might have heard something that would have made things turn out very differently for him.

He might have heard Jesus' response back to something Peter had said to Him. Listen to that conversation again, beginning in verse 28.

²⁸ Then Peter said, "See, we have left all and followed You." ²⁹ So He said to them, "Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or parents or brothers or wife or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, ³⁰ who shall not receive many times more in this present time, and in the age to come eternal life." (Luke 14:26-27)

Think about those words for a moment. What could they mean and what could they portend for a person's life?

As I considered these words, I recalled that yes, Peter and some of his fellow disciples had given up their fishing businesses to come and follow Jesus and to be as Jesus said, "fishers of men".

But then I also remembered that in those days immediately following Jesus' crucifixion, Peter and those other disciples were right back out on the water again, fishing for fish.

Folks, sometimes part of the experience that our Lord takes us through involves our stumbling with uncertainty, we wonder and we question. But our Lord knows us well, even our thoughts and our anxieties and He will reach to bring us back to confidence.

Recall for a moment, after Jesus had risen from the dead and He met with Peter and some of the other disciples there on the beach on the Sea of Galilee. When the disciples first saw Jesus, He told them to cast their nets into the water again, and with that cast, they caught an abundance of fish like they had never caught before.

I'm confident that one of the reasons that Jesus did that miracle for those men at that time was to convince them that He would continue to make provision for them and for their families as they carried on forward the ministry that He had called them to do.

Folks, God's provision is never-ending, for His disciples then and for you and me now. He does not just insist on us giving up everything and then leave us to live a destitute life.

And His words here declare that special truth to us. Listen to them again!

"Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or parents or brothers or wife or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, ³⁰ who shall not receive many times more in this present time, and in the age to come eternal life." (Luke 14:29-30)

These words of our Lord are a very precious promise, both for the remainder of this life and for our eternal life to come. And their truth has been proven out time and time again, and especially in my own personal life?

As I shared with you in an earlier study, during the first stage of our lives, my family and I lived the life of what could be called a successful banker. We lived in a nice home and we received an excellent income. But then God put a call on our heart to go into full-time ministry. And through the power of the Holy Spirit, we answered that call.

And yes, we did give up our good job, good income and our sought-after titles. Am I boasting about that? Not at all! The truth is, I now barely remember how it all took place. But we are confident that it was God who was the true strength behind our efforts.

But also, as we now look back, we have to ask ourselves, what did we really give up that has not come back to us just as Jesus promised? Those words again, "Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or parents or brothers or wife or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God,³⁰ who shall not receive many times more in this present time, and in the age to come eternal life." (Luke 14:29-30)

Looking back over the many years we had while in the ministry there at French Camp, my family and I enjoyed living in a good house, not a fancy one, but a really good one. We worked in an excellent job and received enough income to support our needs. And I even reacquired a title after my name.

And even now, as my wife and I look forward into our days of retirement, we have everything that we could possibly need. Folks, it is just as Jesus promised, "many times more in this present time, and in the age to come eternal life."

And don't you love those kinds of sweet promises from the Lord! Recall the promise given in Luke chapter 6,

³⁸ give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you." (Luke 6:38)

Oh dear Christian, God will not ask that we give up everything, and then leave us destitute. No, this is what He does, and the way that He does it.

³⁸ give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you." (Luke 6:38)

As I sit in my chair and think through these precious words of scripture, I am comfortable within a warm house, drinking a pleasurable cup of my favorite coffee. In back of me is a lovely patio and yard, in a quiet and peaceful neighborhood. Such a plentiful provision.

And yes, God has done exactly as He promised . . .

³⁸ give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you." (Luke 6:38)

Thinking back on some of those first decisions that my family and I made, the decision to give up a comfortable lifestyle and career as a banker to spend the next several decades in a ministry to youth, yes, we gave. But that which we gave or gave up was nothing in comparison to all that God has poured back out into our lap.

And I am confident that God's provision will never end. As He promised, while we remain in this life, His provision will continue. We will have a house to live in, a car to drive and an adequate amount of money to pay the bills.

But far more and far better than all of the temporal provisions we will receive, we also know with confidence that when this life comes to a close, Jesus will immediately continue to provide us with eternal life in heaven.

It is and it will be just as He promised, many times more in this present time, and in the age to come eternal life. That promise again,

³⁸ give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you." (Luke 6:38)

Before we close our study of these precious words of scripture given here, may I add one more blessing that is so very important to me personally.

Another of the sweet gifts that our Lord gives to us as we join with Him, as we become one with Him as we journey through this life. It is the sweet gift of "Hope", "Hope"!

As age begins to become a dominating factor in our lives, my dear wife and I find that we now have very few wants and needs that this world can provide. Over time, we have acquired an abundance of those earthly treasures, so much so that now we are wondering what we will do with them all.

With our value systems changing and becoming far more simple, it is people, our loved ones that are the focus of our thoughts, our hopes and our behaviors. And it's not so much that we want those loved ones to have "more", especially of the world's wares, but rather, ourselves having learned the valuable lesson that worldly possessions have very little lasting value, our hopes and our dreams for those dear loved ones is that their value systems will also change.

Yes, as the Lord Jesus tells us in Matthew chapter 6, He knows very well that we really do need many of those worldly possessions to help us live and to thrive in the ordinary matters of our day.

But if you'll recall, within those same words, the Lord Jesus reminds us that if we will "seek first His kingdom and His righteousness" then He'll not only provide the things that we need, He'll give us an abundance more.

And therein lies my "Hope", especially for those dear loved ones. In these waning years of my life, I now have extra available time. And I very often use that time for prayer, praying that my dearly beloved ones will learn at an earlier stage in their life than I did that many of their earthly pursuits are often not much more than a "chasing after the wind". That if and as they will give their hearts more fully to the Lord Jesus, then not only the blessings of this life will continue to accumulate, their "treasures in heaven" will also begin to build. And that is a far more valuable asset.

And so then, yes, I do pray, a lot, and I "hope", a lot, that each of those dear souls will begin to fix their eyes and their hopes on the more valuable things of this life, the Lord Jesus, His kingdom and His righteousness. And if they do, I then know, with confidence, that He will add all that they need back to them.

That promise from the Lord Jesus again,

³⁸ give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you." (Luke 6:38)

Pray with me.