

The Rich Young Ruler's Great Need

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Luke

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Turn with me in your Bibles to Luke 18. Luke 18. I'm going to be preaching on another passage that has meant a lot to me in recent weeks and months. I mentioned that we finished up our study of the books Ezra/Nehemiah a while back and I plan to start a New Testament book in the new year but I've got some topical series that I'll begin the new year with, Lord willing, and then hopefully in February we'll move into a new book. Continue to pray for me about where the Lord wants us to be. But I wanted to spend some time going over some passages that have really meant a lot to me and I think would be a blessing, hopefully will be a blessing to you as well.

So we've been looking at gospel passages the last few weeks and we come again, and we've been looking at the subject of faith and what is the nature of true faith and what is essential to true faith, and we come to another passage that deals with his issue. It's a familiar passage but one, I think that, I fear that we often misunderstand and misapply. It's the story of the rich young ruler in Luke 18. We'll be reading verses 18 to 27 and the title of the message is "The Rich Young Ruler's Great Need." The rich young ruler's great need. We're going to see that Jesus says to him there's one thing he still lacks. What is that one thing? I'm going to suggest to you, though, Jesus gives an answer, the answer that he gives to the rich young ruler of the one thing he lacks actually is aimed at getting to a deeper issue in the man's heart, and so we're wanting to understand what that deeper issue is.

The rich young ruler's great need, and we're going to see as we read this, I want to remind you as you read the Scriptures, it's so important to try to read with a freshness every time you read God's word. What I mean is, when you're reading a passage that's familiar to you, that you've read a number of times before, it's easy not to read it with the surprise that you ought to. What I mean is, you've seen it before, it's become familiar, and you forget the initial impact that a passage had when you first read it and you didn't know where it was going to go, and we miss the force of the word because we sometimes fail to do that, to read it as if we're reading it for the first time, and I think when we do that, this passage like so many in the gospels, is astonishing, surprising the way Jesus deals with this man, and I think you'll see he doesn't deal with him the way we would have expected. We, as the children just sang, that passage from Isaiah, that the Son to be born, the child to be born would be the Wonderful Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father,

the Prince of Peace. I love those titles for the Messiah. Wonderful Counselor. One of the things we see about the Lord Jesus Christ when we really read the gospels and observe his dealing with people is what a wonderful counselor he is. He knows exactly what the need of the heart is and he does not settle for less than getting to the bottom of the issue. That's what he's going to do in this situation. I'm going to suggest to you, and I think as we read you'll see this, that there are several times where you would have expected or you and I might have done something very different than he did but the Lord Jesus does what this man needs, and in that, I think we see what may be a need for some of you this morning because the rich young ruler, in many ways, has a lot in common with people in Bible-teaching, sound, orthodox churches. He has a lot in common and yet he is lacking the one thing he must have, to have eternal life.

So let's read God's word together. Luke 18:18-27.

18 A ruler questioned Him, saying, "Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" 19 And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good except God alone. 20 You know the commandments, 'DO NOT COMMIT ADULTERY, DO NOT MURDER, DO NOT STEAL, DO NOT BEAR FALSE WITNESS, HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER.'" 21 And he said, "All these things I have kept from my youth." 22 When Jesus heard this, He said to him, "One thing you still lack; sell all that you possess and distribute it to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me." 23 But when he had heard these things, he became very sad, for he was extremely rich. 24 And Jesus looked at him and said, "How hard it is for those who are wealthy 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 They who heard it said, "Then who can be saved?" 27 But He said, "The things that are impossible with people are possible with God."

Let's pray together.

Our Father, we come to You this morning aware of our great need of grace and, Lord, even aware of the fact that we don't know how much we need grace; we're like this man in so many ways. Open the eyes of our hearts by the power of Your Spirit and the power of Your word. We pray that You would search us and know us, try us, know our thoughts, see if there be any wicked way in us and lead us in the way everlasting for the glory of Christ. We pray in His name. Amen.

The rich young ruler's great need. Jesus said, "There's one thing you still lack." This one thing, what is that one thing? That's the question that this passage invites us to consider and like I said, when you first look at it, it's easy to miss the full impact of this passage. In fact, I'm going to show you that I think that it's really important to read this in context as we work through this because God orders his Scripture exactly as he intends to, and this passage about the rich young ruler which occurs in three gospels, all the synoptic gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke are the synoptic gospels, as they follow basic historical

organization, synopsis, and so these three gospels all have this passage and they all also share the immediately preceding passage that precedes this one here in Luke. They all, this passage is preceded in Matthew, Mark and Luke by the story of Jesus blessing the children, the little children and we're going to understand it's very important to help us understand because we see that even, again, as you look at... Well, let's read verses 15 to 17, this passage that is repeated in all three gospels right before the story of the rich young ruler. Verse 15, it says this, "And they were bringing even their babies to Him so that He would touch them, but when the disciples saw it, they began rebuking them. But Jesus called for them, saying, 'Permit the children to come to Me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it at all.'" How do you enter the kingdom of God, that's the question.

Now that story you have in those three verses, it's interesting, Jesus when it talks about in verse 15 they were bringing even their babies, some translations say infants, this is a word that's distinct about helpless little children. It's actually used several times in, actually a couple of times in the gospel of Luke to refer to preborn babies, the embryo. It's also used of Jesus right after his birth in Luke's gospel, you're to go find the baby wrapped in swaddling clothes lying in a manger. It's the same word here. It is an infant. It is a child that has to be cared for completely. It is a child that can do nothing for himself. They were bringing babies to him. They weren't bringing their little toddlers or their little 7 and 8, 9 year old children, this passage is talking about they were bringing their babies, the parents were bringing their babies asking Jesus to bless them. The disciples are like, "What are you guys doing? He's got big things to deal with here. It's the adults that He's preaching to. It's the people that He's healing. Please get out of the way." And Jesus says, "No, no, let them come to Me." And he does bless them. There's so much in that. You're never too young to go to Jesus. But he uses these infant children as an illustration when he says, "Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it at all."

How do you enter it? That's the last words that are said before you then hear these next words, "A ruler questioned Him, saying, 'Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?'" In fact, Luke adds another story before the one we just read in verses 15 to 17 that also speaks to this. He is the one gospel writer who tells us the story of the Pharisee and the publican in verses 9 to 14 that immediately precede the story of the children, the infants being brought to him. "He also told this parable," verse 9, "to some people who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and viewed others with contempt: 'Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector.'" Verse 11 says, "The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself: 'God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.' But the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, the sinner!' I tell you, this man went to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted." Who's justified, who's not justified? Not the one who thinks he's righteous but the one who knows he is a sinner. In fact, it's interesting in some of the

translations it doesn't come out like it needs to. When he says, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner," some translations say that, it's actually "the sinner" as it says here in the New American Standard that I'm reading. "God, be merciful to me, the sinner!" This publican, this tax collector, this man who was a Jew by birth more than likely but who was colluding with the Romans and was an ungodly and tax collectors were known to be, you know, basically corrupt individuals, everyone despised them, he knew his sin and he calls himself not just "a sinner," he calls himself "the sinner," as if the only sinner. He's not comparing himself to anyone else, he's comparing himself to God and he sees himself as the sinner, "have mercy on me, the sinner."

Then you see how do you come into the kingdom of God? You have to be like an infant child. Then we read about a ruler who questions him. "Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" If we don't see that in proper context, we are prone to think that Jesus' words to him, "you shall go sell all that you have," is actually putting before him gospel message. "Hey, what you need to do to be saved is to be willing to let go of everything. That's what you have to do to be saved." That's not what you have to do on the front end of salvation, to do that is to make it a work. That is what the true believer does on the other side of salvation. The gospel makes that clear in a number of places. The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure buried in a field. A man goes and sells all that he has to buy that field. Or it's like the pearl of great price. He goes and sells all that he has to have that pearl. Yes, that's right, when the kingdom of heaven comes into your heart, that's the response but it's important that we understand that that's not the way into the kingdom of heaven is you can't make your heart that way, you can't give yourself repentance, you can't work it up, you can't even give yourself true faith. God must do it but you're called to wait upon him to do it and to trust in him.

So now when we look at this passage, what I want us to look at is asking ourselves what is that one thing? What is he really saying here? And I think what he's doing is he's assaulting the man's legal disposition. He is demolishing spiritual pride in this passage. This man's great need is to see himself and so let's look at this. I've got six points but I think they'll move pretty quickly to move us through the passage. Normally six points would take us three weeks but I think we, Lord willing, I hope we'll do it today. Just to help us observe what Jesus is doing and, remember, to try to see it with a freshness, to look at this, what is the one thing he lacks? What is the one great need that he has?

First of all, let's look at what the man didn't lack. I was blessed in reading Charles Spurgeon's sermon on this. He begins one of his sermons on this passage that way, what the man did not lack. He says there's one thing that he lacked, what did he not lack? So number 1: what did the man not lack? I think there are four things that we can see in the passage. He didn't lack spirituality. He was a man interested in spiritual things. He was concerned about spiritual things. He was concerned about his soul. He was concerned about what happens after death. He was greatly concerned.

So he did not lack spirituality, he was a spiritual person, he was someone concerned about spiritual things. Secondly, he didn't lack orthodoxy. He, first of all, has a high opinion of Jesus when he says, "Good Teacher." Now he doesn't have a high enough

opinion of Jesus but he has a high opinion of Jesus relatively speaking. He calls him "Teacher," which to the Jewish mind was the greatest appellation that you could give to someone, to call them Rabbi. But he not only calls him "Teacher," he calls him "Good Teacher." Jesus is going to take issue with that because Jesus sees the man's heart. He says, "You don't really understand what goodness is." But he was orthodox. He believed in eternal life. There were many Jews that did not believe in life after death, those were the Sadducees. You see the Pharisees and the Sadducees, a large sect of the Jewish population did not believe in life after death, they were the theological liberals of the day. This man wasn't in a theological liberal camp. He was in the conservative camp. He believed in eternal life and he believed in the law. He was a man who apparently had a high regard for the law of God.

So he was orthodox. He didn't lack spirituality, he didn't lack orthodoxy, he didn't lack sincerity. He seems to be a relatively guileless person. I mean, he's very confused. He is wrong. He is lost. But he doesn't seem to be putting on airs. I mean, he answers just quite frankly. He believes he's kept the law. Had he been kind of a deceiver or dissembler, he might have acted with some false humility. There's no false humility. He's trying to speak what he really believes and he seems to be very earnest. In fact, the comparison, I mean the parallel passage in Mark says that when he came to Jesus, he fell down or he bowed down before him as he asked his question. He seems to be very sincere in his desire to know, "How can I have eternal life?"

So he has spirituality, orthodoxy, sincerity, and we can add a fourth thing, he has morality. He is a relatively moral man. Now we have his words telling us that but we also know that he's a ruler, Luke tells us he's a ruler in verse 18. This means that he's highly regarded in Jewish society, probably means an officer in the synagogue. This means that he is relatively morally exceptional compared to the people around him, and they regard him to be a leader spiritually, morally.

So he doesn't lack spirituality, he doesn't lack orthodoxy, he doesn't lack sincerity, he doesn't lack morality, you see how he could fit right in here at our church. But what does he lack? What he did lack, second point. What he did not lack were those things, what did he lack? At first glance it seems what Jesus says is he lacked full surrender, and he did lack that. He truly did lack that but he lacked something even more fundamental than that which this probing instruction of Jesus is designed to expose. What he lacked was a true knowledge of himself. He did not see himself as he truly is before God. He did not have any concept of his real sinfulness, his utter depravity. He didn't see it. He didn't see how sinful he was and he did not see how much he loved his sin. That's what he lacked, true knowledge of himself.

You could add to that under what he lacked, the reason he didn't have true knowledge of himself is because he didn't understand God's law. He didn't have a true knowledge of God's law. We see that in the moment when Jesus asked him about the commandments. He didn't have a true knowledge of himself because he didn't have a true knowledge of God's law because he also didn't have a true knowledge of God. This is what's in that first remark of Jesus. Here again, a surprising response. Think about this. When a man came

up to him and said, "Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" What would you expect Jesus to say then? Forgetting that you know the rest of what happened, what would you expect? What would you have said? I mean, you're on an airplane and the guy next to you, you're reading your Bible, hoping to have a spiritual conversation but you're not sure if you're going to be able to, the person may not be open and he says, "Hey, what can I do to inherit eternal life?" This is the easiest witnessing opportunity that you could imagine. He's ready. Wouldn't you expect, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved"? Wouldn't you expect Jesus to say when he says, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" "Believe on Me and My finished work." But he doesn't say that. In fact, I'm already moving into the third point: what Jesus didn't do. That's the third point.

The first point was what the man didn't lack; second point was what he did lack; the third point is what Jesus didn't do, and what he didn't do was preach the gospel, at least the good part of the gospel. Truly, rightly speaking, he didn't preach the gospel. He didn't say, "Believe on Me." He didn't say, "I've got good news. I've come into the world to save people like you. I'm going to the cross and all you need to do is believe." I mean, how many times has somebody in this situation, someone just says, "Pray this prayer. Pray these words after me. You want to inherit eternal life, just pray this prayer." Jesus knows that if he gives the gospel to this man at this point, he will have a shallow faith, that he would be a false convert, that he would have a false faith.

We were this morning in Sunday morning Bible study in the study being taught by Todd Guthrie in Mark talking about the parable of the sower. The seed is sown into four types of soil but in one type of soil it brings forth fruit, in the other three types of soil there is no fruit, there is no lasting fruit, there is no salvation. It's the good soil, and so what Jesus doesn't do is preach the gospel because this man needs some soil preparation. He needs his heart to be tilled, but even then he doesn't do the tilling that I would have expected because the man asked the question, in his question he's asking the wrong question.

So Jesus is the Wonderful Counselor, as I think about how I would handle when it says, "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" I recognize there's a problem there. Do you recognize the problem in his question? The word "do, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" Why didn't Jesus direct a frontal assault on this man's, what the Puritans called legal disposition? That is, that the heart of fallen man, that sin in us creates a legal disposition, that is, a disposition of the soul which believes we must do something, that we can do something to be saved, that we can contribute something. It's in the hard-wiring of fallen man and it's in every one of our hearts, this deeply held belief that, "I can do something." I mean, if you ask the question and even if you just try this with each other from time to time, you may find yourself surprised with this stuff coming out of you. Ask, you know, if you were to be before God today and God would ask you, "Why should I let you into heaven?" What would you answer? Would you be prone to say things like, "I've tried to live for You. I've tried to obey Your word. I've tried to live in Your word. I've tried to love You. I've tried to do good to other people, especially those of the household of faith. I've done. I've done. I've done. I've done." That's not the gospel. It's not about what you do, it's what God has done, what Christ has done. That's the gospel, right?

It's interesting, Leviticus 18:5 is a great summary of the old covenant. Ted's talked about the covenants that we're going to be and the covenants that we're celebrating in the coming of Jesus or the covenant of grace expressed in a series of covenants, but the original old covenant was like this, Leviticus 18:5, well, verses 4 and 5, "You are to perform My judgments and keep My statutes, to live in accord with them; I am the LORD your God. So you shall keep My statutes and My judgments, by which a man may live if he does them; I am the LORD." The law says do this and live, and God gave us the law, he gave it to Israel and to all of us, and it says do this and live. The gospel says – listen to this – the gospel says live and do this. You can do nothing, you must simply go to Christ and let him give you life, and now on the other side of life, do this. And if you really live with the power of Christ, you would even be willing, though this is, if God called you to let everything go like this man does you would do it if you belong to him, in the right moment. It takes God's grace and all of that, yes, yes, yes, but it's not going to happen on the front end. It's not a condition of salvation. Jesus is exposing this man's legal disposition in a deep and painful way.

But he didn't preach the gospel and he didn't then say, because he could have said, "Your problem is you said what must I do to inherit eternal life. It's not what you do, it's what I'm going to do." Jesus didn't say that, though, to him, did he? This is where we see what a wonderful counselor he is. He did not diagnose the problem, because he knows the problem, like you and I tend to do, we diagnose the problem, cut right to the solution because we want to just get it done quickly and we're like let's cut to the chase, you know, we've got things to do, people to see, whatever. I mean, I don't think we necessarily think that way but that's just kind of the way that we tend to go, we don't think about.

What Jesus does is he goes all the way to where this man is. He doesn't stand over here and say, "You have a legal disposition and you need to repent of that." He actually goes with him into his world for a little bit. He says, "You are thinking that you must do something to inherit eternal life but what have you done? You know the commandments." And he lists five of the 10 Commandments. He lists 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9 of the 10 Commandments. Jesus tells them to him. "Do not commit adultery. Do not murder. Do not steal. Do not bear false witness. Honor your father and mother." Interesting, 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9. He doesn't list the first four and he doesn't list number 10. Something that we all should know, you should memorize the 10 Commandments. Your children should memorize the 10 Commandments and you ought to know them in order. I'm not saying that it makes you, you're not going to go to heaven quicker because of that. I'm not saying that at all. No. No. No. But you should and when you understand the 10 Commandments, it's so rich and they're to be a part of our lives as Christians. On this side of having received the gospel, now that you're saved by grace and grace alone, through faith alone, now you're to live like this because you have the power to live like this. You have a new heart. You have the Spirit of Christ and you, by his power, you can die to sin and live to righteousness. But the 10 Commandments, go back to what he's saying here, the first four commandments are the first table of the law, and the second six are the second table of the law. The first four relate to your relationship with God, the second six

relate to your relationship with other men and that's why Jesus said that the two commandments that summarize the 10 are, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your might," that's the first four summarized in one commandment, love God with everything you are, and the second summarized with another one commandment, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." On these two commandments the whole law and prophets hang. Do you see that? One table, the second table.

What Jesus does, though, is he asks him about the second table. He doesn't ask him about the first table. Why? I think because the man had, he would have thought he was doing well with the first table. It would be even harder for him to see how he's not doing well. But I think it's also interesting he omitted number 10. Number 10 is, "You shall not covet." He covers all five of the second six, five of the second six but he doesn't say, "You shall not covet." We'll come back to that. Keep that in mind.

So we've moved on to point 4. I told you we'd cover points quickly. I'm moving right through points without even telling you. What Jesus did do, what Jesus didn't do was he did not preach the gospel, what Jesus did do is he preached the law. So he gives him these five commandments. "Hey, you know the law. Here it is. You know the commandments. Do not commit adultery. You said that you want to inherit eternal life, that you want to do something to inherit eternal life, what must you do to inherit eternal life? You must keep the law." You see, he goes to where the man is. The man's approaching God through that covenant and he goes to where he is and says, "Okay, let's talk about what that looks like. You know the commandments."

And so he preaches the law and what he does in the preaching of the law and holding up the commandments, one of the things God's word tells us is that to hold up the commandments is to hold up a mirror to someone. James 1:23-25, he says this, he says, "Don't be merely hearers of the word, be doers," and a doer of the word is one who looks into the perfect law of liberty as a mirror, he sees himself in the perfect law of liberty, and he changes and does what it says. Now he's talking about on this side of, on this side of salvation but it's an important point, you see yourself in the law. The same thing is also true in 2 Corinthians 3:12-16, the Apostle Paul basically says that the law is like a mirror and that the believer, the unbeliever has a veil over his face as he looks in the mirror. So when he looks in the mirror he can't see himself. He has a veil over his face. But the believer has an unveiled face as he looks at the law, and as he looks at the law, now on this side of grace, he sees Christ in the law and he becomes more like Christ through the law. That's sanctification and that's complicated and we can't go into all that today but the point is Jesus holds up to this man the mirror of God's law and he sees nothing.

He says these five commandments: don't commit adultery, don't commit murder, don't steal, don't bear false witness, honor your father and your mother. And he said, "All these things I have kept from my youth." He is a liar. He is blind. And this is where I would expect Jesus to say, "Listen, were you not there when I preached the Sermon on the Mount? I went over this. I told everyone that it's not just the commandment to not murder, it's not just about murder, the heart of murder is that you would hate someone

without cause, you would be angry without cause, you would call someone a fool or an empty-head. If you do that, you're guilty of murder." Now given that, who is not guilty of murder in this room? Every one of us are murderers. He said, "You shall not commit adultery. You've heard it said that but I tell you that everyone that lusts after a woman in his heart has committed adultery already." Who has not fantasized about sexual sin? Who has not looked lustfully on another person? You're a murderer and you're an adulterer. Who has not stolen? Who has not lied? Who has never told a white lie? Who has never shaded the truth, exaggerated? And have you honored your father and your mother truly?

And the Bible tells us that to really fulfill the law, if you want to come to God through the law, you must do it this way, you must keep every single commandment, every single day, for every single year of your entire life, that if you keep the whole law, James 2:10 says, and offend in one point, you're guilty of all because God cannot abide with sinners. One sin, too much. One sin of the heart, one sin of motivation and you're lost forever if you come to God that way. You would expect Jesus to have said this to this man but he doesn't do that. He has a much more insightful way of getting to the man's heart and laying him bare and bringing him to himself even though he doesn't immediately respond as we hope he will.

He says, "One thing you still lack, sell all that you possess and distribute it to the poor and you shall have treasure in heaven and come follow Me." Christians throughout the centuries have misunderstood this, particularly it's a tendency in Roman Catholicism to think that this is like a vow of poverty and you become a monk, you're willing to let go of everything and that's how you have eternal life, and so that Jesus is calling for a work, but in reality what he's doing is he's, remember I said he didn't talk about the 10th commandment and he didn't talk about the first four commandments? Here he's talking about those commandments. He's essentially saying, "Okay, you think you've kept the law, let's talk about the first commandment. You shall have no other gods before Me. Your problem is you love your money more than you love God. You are a wicked idolater, the second commandment. Money is your idol. Wealth and privilege, pleasure, comfort, security, all of these things are your idols. You are an idolater and you are covetous because you don't want to give your stuff away. If you weren't covetous, you would be loving, you would love your neighbor as yourself and you'd want to do that and, of course, you're not because you are a wicked covetous person."

Now he doesn't say that. To say that with a statement like that, people put up their defenses if you come after them and you tell them how bad they are just right out like that in general. Jesus gets to his heart by saying, "Okay, here's the thing you can do, go and sell all that you have, distribute to the poor, you'll have treasure in heaven, come follow Me." He preached the law to this man. He preached the first and second and 10th commandments and he did so with such skill that the man suddenly sees how far he is from heaven. He thought he was not that far.

"What must I do? I've really been working hard. I think I'm almost there but You're a good teacher, a teacher clearly sent from God. You're good in the way that I understand goodness." And Jesus says, "You don't understand goodness at all." Jesus is not denying

his divinity, here he's saying, "You don't understand what you're saying because you think you're good." And the way we use the word "good, he's a good man," and I'm not saying there's never, it's terrible to say something like that. I'm not saying that but we have to discipline our thought process. It's probably maybe better not to say it but I'm not trying to get into that. The point is we tend to think in terms of relative goodness. Jesus is saying, "Listen, the standard for goodness, the only thing that is good is God." Good, in a sense, means to be as you are supposed to be. The only thing that is as he ought to be is God. Every one of us are wretched and wicked perversions of what we ought to be when you really compare it to the standard of what God made us to be. Now there's still good in us, common grace, there's still good in every single human being, there's a sense in which every fallen human being no matter how sinful and depraved they are, they still bear the image of God and there's beauty and dignity there, yes, but when you compare it to the standard of God's holy perfection, what is apparent is how far we all are from God. That's what Jesus is getting at and he's saying, "Not only do you have a wrong view of goodness but you have a wrong view of Me. You don't understand that I am good. You are talking to God Incarnate."

But what Jesus didn't do was he didn't preach the gospel, what he did do, he preached the law so that's the fourth point we just finished. How the man responded, number 5. How the man responded. Jesus has exposed his lust for the things of this world, his love of the world, his love of the pleasures of life. He's exposed them, he's unmasked his spirituality, his orthodoxy, his sincerity, his morality, and shown it to be completely false. And it says the man is sad. Verse 23, "he had heard these things, he became very sad, for he was extremely rich." He's sad about the wrong things.

This word "very sad" is a strong word. Literally in the Greek it means "to be surrounded by grief." It's a word that is used twice in the gospel accounts of Jesus when he says, "I am grieved to the point of death," at Gethsemane. Surrounded with grief. This man is surrounded with grief but what he's surrounded with grief is not over his sinfulness, he's surrounded with grief that he has to give up his sin in order to come to Christ.

That's how the man responded. He was grieved that to follow Jesus meant to let go of sin. Now please understand, he can't let go of sin without following Jesus first. Jesus isn't telling him, "Kill your sin and then come to Me." He's exposing the fact that, "You are such a sinner and such a wretch and you don't understand how much you need salvation. You need Me and My grace," Jesus is saying because that brings the sixth point. We said how the man responded, how the man should have responded and we're going to spend a little time here.

How the man should have responded. I mean, he's come to see and as Jesus comments about him, even as he is seeing his sadness, Jesus looked at him and said, "How hard it is for those who are wealthy to enter the kingdom of God." He looks at the man in his grief and he says, "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." The man should have come to an understanding of exactly what Jesus

is saying. "Yes, it's impossible." He should have acknowledged the impossibility of his salvation. "It is utterly impossible for me to enter the kingdom of God."

That's what Jesus is saying with that metaphor and it's interesting that this is one place where the disciples get it right to an extent, because at first glance you could think, well, it's just wealthy people that have trouble getting into eternity. You might misread it that way and Jesus is saying that but when you have the things of this world, the power of sin is so great that there is great, such a lure of the things of this world and a love of this world that it keeps many people from God.

But they who heard it said, "Then who can be saved? If it's true that You're saying that rich people it's that hard, then who in the world can be saved?" No one can. This really is an appropriate passage for us as those who live in the most prosperous country the world has ever known. When you really look at it, there are people that will say that's not true but they're wrong. When you look at standard of living, no other nation in the history of the world has been where we are and is not now. You look at what your money can buy as an American versus other people in the world today. They may have a higher income in a few select countries but they don't have a higher standard of living. They don't have the access to things that you have. You and I live in the most prosperous land the world has ever known. We are the richest people the world has ever known. If you are poor in America, you are richer than most of the population of the world today and far richer than most of the population of all the world of all history. Now that doesn't mean that poverty is not to be a concern, of course it is, but let's just dial into reality.

So when the pleasures of this world are so readily easily available, Jesus is saying that makes it very hard for people to be saved. How much do you love the world? How easy do you find it to love the things of the world? How much do you love comfort? Pleasure? How much do you want to avoid pain? All of these things are in some sense part of what we're wired to do. Originally we were created for a perfect world, right? In Eden everything worked perfectly. Everything was perfect. God made you for a perfect world. So there's a sense in which there's a rightness about wanting things to be right but sin has twisted that normal right desire and made it a demand and made it something that we value above knowing and loving God and anything that comes to that place must be hated.

That's what Jesus is doing with this man, he's trying to show him, "You have an apparent spirituality, an apparent orthodoxy, an apparent sincerity in some sense of wanting to deal with spiritual things, you're a moral person, but you don't see how utterly sinful and utterly lost you are. And so you need to see that. You need to have the essence of your soul laid bare." The beauty of God's law is that it does that but it's interesting, turn to Romans 7 for a moment. Romans 7. The function of the law. Why did God not come into the world, I mean, you think about when Adam sinned, he promised that he was going to save us through a seed to come. That's what the Lord told Adam and Eve as he spoke judgment on the serpent. He said, "I'll put enmity between your seed and the woman's seed." He says this to the serpent, "I'm going to put enmity between your seed," the serpent's seed, "and the woman's seed. You shall bruise his heel and he will bruise your

head." That's the first preaching of the gospel, Genesis 3:15. God is going to save sinners through a seed of a woman which, I think, is a picture of the virgin birth. The seed comes from the man but the seed of the woman. That's only happened one time in history, the virgin birth of Christ.

But that's the gospel but what happens is, as we walk through the Old Testament, we're told that Abraham's going to, that God is going to save him by faith, by grace he believes in the Lord and it's credited to him as righteousness, Genesis 15:6. The way of salvation is going to be by faith but then God gives Moses and the law, and why does he give Moses and the law? That is to break down our spiritual pride and to show us how utterly lost we are so that we might then in our poverty reach out to God in faith. But until you're in your poverty, you cannot reach out to God in faith. You cannot be saved until you know what you need to be saved from and that's why Jesus is dealing this way with this man. If he had just said, "Hey, here's the four spiritual laws and just work through them. Pray this prayer." He would have prayed and he would have been lost. He might have gotten baptized, might have joined the church, but he would have been lost.

So he preached God's law to him to show him his despair. Romans 7 tells us what the law does. In this passage, Paul is telling us that we're no longer under law in the same way we were formerly. The law still has a place in the Christian life but it is now a guide not a means to being right with God. It's just a guide for how we live by grace and it's to be a mirror we look at so that we can keep running to Christ. You look at the mirror, see what's wrong with you, run to Jesus. That's sanctification in a nutshell. You grow in holiness by daily letting God's word come to you, show you what I should be, show me how far I'm from that, run to Jesus not just for forgiveness but for power to be like this now.

But this is what the law does, it shows us what sin is. Romans 7:7, he says, "What shall we say then? Is the Law sin?" He's talking about, "Because I've been telling you that we had to be delivered from the law as a means of salvation. What shall we say then? Is the Law sin? May it never be!" Paul says. The law is not sinful, "On the contrary, I would not have come to know sin except through the Law; for I would not have known about coveting if the Law had not said, 'You shall not covet.'" The law comes and this is what the nature of sin is, the law comes and tells you, "You shall not," and what sin does in you says, "I shall." And the more it says, "You shall not," the more your soul says, "I will." Paul said, "I wouldn't have known what coveting was if the law hadn't said you shall not covet." I think, I'm hopeful that this rich young ruler is in heaven. He may be. We don't have any evidence that he ever came but I think what Jesus is doing is Jesus is preaching the law to him so that he can go home and covet and covet and realize what an idolater he is and what an idolater he is, so that one day he will come to understand, "I need Jesus." We'll see when we get to heaven.

But Paul says the law creates and it brings sin out, it brings sin out of hiding. Look what he says in verse 8, "But sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, produced in me coveting of every kind; for apart from the Law sin is dead." Sin is dormant. You bring the law in, sin awakens. "I was once alive," verse 9, "apart from the Law; but when the

commandment came, sin became alive and I died; and this commandment, which was to result in life, proved to result in death for me." What he's saying is the commandments are all good. If there wasn't something major wrong with us, the law would be a treasure that we would just look at and it would just be a guide. If we had never sinned, we would just love the law and we would do the law. Now as those who have sin, the law comes and exposes, it now for Christians you should still love the law. Look at Psalm 119, the truly godly person loves God's law because God's law shows me how much I need Christ, and every time I see I need Christ, I'm reminded to run to Jesus, and when I run to Jesus, then I find he's everything I need. So the law is my best friend next to Jesus because it's the thing that keeps pointing me back to him. That's what the Christian life is supposed to be.

Look what he says in verse 13. Verse 12 says, "So then, the Law," this is Romans 7:12, "So then the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good. Therefore did that which is good become a cause of death for me? May it never be!" It's not the cause of death. "Rather it was sin, in order that it might be shown to be sin by effecting my death through that which is good, so that through the commandment sin would become utterly sinful." What this man needed was to see sin as utterly sinful and Jesus, the great physician of the soul, knew that and he wields the word of God like a scalpel, the word is living and active. What does he say? Sharper than any two-edged sword. It pierces to dividing to joint and marrow, soul and spirit, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intentions of the heart, and it lays us bare before God with whom we have to do, Hebrews 4:12-13.

So that's what Jesus does to this man, he lays him bare, he hasn't yet fully recognized it, he's thinking about how unhappy he is he has to give up his sin, the hope is that Jesus by laying this bare, he will have time to sit and contemplate the fact that he loves his sin so much more than he loves God, that he can be appalled at himself. "What wretched man that I am! I thought I was a good man but I am the sinner," like the tax collector said. The person who's really come to see himself as he is doesn't get as bothered about other people's sin as he does his own because the sin he's come to know better than any other is his own sin, his utter sinfulness.

And how the man should have responded, he should have seen his sinfulness, despaired of his need, and he should have entered heaven like a baby. This is the thing, when he sees that he's supposed to go sell all that he has, Jesus is saying, "Listen, the problem is that you are so wicked that you love your stuff so much that you won't do it." He may end up telling him to. If he got saved, he might have ended up selling all his stuff. I don't know. We can ask that question in heaven too. But the issue wasn't to do that in order to be saved, the issue was to show him how wretched and lost he was and what he should have done is not, Mark tells us that he became sad and he went away from Jesus. Luke doesn't tell us that he went away, he just leaves us with the assurance that he must not have received at this moment, salvation. Mark tells us he went away sad. The one thing he shouldn't have done is he shouldn't have gone away from Jesus. He should have been like the publican who said, "Have mercy on me, the sinner! Here I am, the most covetous man exposed. I thought I was a good man. Here I am, an idolater filthy of worshiping.

I've looked down on people that bowed," this is in his time, "would bow down before gold and silver and I have been bowing down before gold and silver. O wretched man that I am! Have mercy on me, the sinner!" And Jesus would have said, "You go home today justified."

You enter heaven like a baby, you enter heaven. When you know you can do nothing for yourself, it must be all of God, for his glory, by his power, through all that Christ has accomplished, "Nothing in me, nothing in my hand I bring, only to Your cross I cling." When you come to that point, you are welcomed into heaven and that means the most filthy and wretched sinner and we look at it comparatively. I find myself thinking things like, you know, God, I had this thought. Jesus would have saved Adolph Hitler. Of course he would. If Hitler heard the gospel and responded to the gospel, repented of his sins, he would save him. But the reality is why do I even think about Adolph Hitler? Why not just say, "I'm amazed that He would save Ty Blackburn. Why would He save me?" Why would he save you? When that captivates our hearts, when we understand what God has done for us, then certainly we're willing to leave everything else. I mean, it's a daily process of remembering and preaching the gospel to yourself, showing how wretched you are, looking to Jesus and he will create in you a heart that is willing to lay down everything just out of love. Not to earn anything because you can't earn anything, but because you've been given everything.

That's what the rich young ruler needed and that's what you and I need. Are you a person who you're interested in spiritual things, you're orthodox in your faith, you think you're sincere, you pray out of your morality but you're not really aware of your sinfulness? If that's the case, ask God. Go to him now and even ask him, "Lord, I don't yet see it like I need to but I'm going to stay here until You show me. I'm going to cling to You until You show me. Show me my sinfulness and show me my Savior."

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

Our Father, how grateful we are that You are a God who is always saying, "Come," to sinners. Thank You that even when You pronounce judgment there is an implied, "Come." Even when You tell us how wretched and wicked we are, even if You tell us that we are worthy of hell, going to hell, we're on the way, we're almost there, even in that word of judgment there is an implied, "Repent and trust in Me now." When You sent Jonah to Nineveh, he said nothing about the gospel, he said, "Forty days and Nineveh is no more," and yet the Ninevites hoped in Your goodness and Your mercy and they turned from their sin and You saved them. But it made Jonah mad. He was angry that You are a God of such amazing, enormous, compassion and lovingkindness. Lord, don't let us be like Jonah. He needed to see how he was an object that needed such exceedingly great compassion and lovingkindness. Thank You for Jesus, that He's able to save to the uttermost the one whose hope is in Him, that He can save the most filthy and vile sinner, and He can also save the most self-righteous legalist. Hallelujah, Lord Jesus. What a Savior! May You be glorified. Amen.