

The Christian's Assurance, Part 1

Luke 18:24-30

Well, we are back in Luke 18. One final look at this section that began with a question, as we've seen, from a rich young ruler, Luke Chapter 18 and verse 18 and following. That's where you'll find us in the text. We see that the rich young ruler in verse 18 came to Jesus with a question. And he asks that question in Luke 18:18. "What must I do to inherit eternal life." Jesus answered the man's question. We've kind of gone through that the past couple of weeks. He told him how to find certainty, the certainty he sought. Told him how to find certainty about eternal life, but the man, as we've seen, walked away sad because, frankly, he didn't like the answer.

We've been in the text for a couple of weeks now, and we know that the rich young ruler walked away, and it was ostensibly because he was extremely rich. He just couldn't part with his money, with all that was caught up in the tangled web of his wealth. When Jesus told him how he could find assurance

of eternal life. Sell all, verse 22, distribute to the poor, then come follow me. Well, the young man just couldn't bring himself to do it, couldn't part with this stuff.

And that's how it seems on the surface of the text. That he just couldn't part with his stuff. He had so much. Then it really eclipsed any promise of God, any promise of Christ, any command of Christ. That's how it seems. Truth is, it was not his stuff that was the real problem. The problem was his heart. If this man had half the stuff that he had had, he still would not have obeyed.

If he had one quarter of the stuff that he had had, still wouldn't have obeyed. If he had one tenth of his wealth, or even one percent of whatever was in his bank account, whatever that sum was, I guarantee you he would not have obeyed. Why? Because the problem is not with the money or the lack of the money.

The problem is always a problem with the heart. It's about whether one has faith to believe unto eternal life or not. It's about whether the source of one's hope is in this life, in any

capacity, in any way, or whether hope is in God. It's about whether one loves God's supremely or if there happened to be rivals to the love of God. Whether or not idols occupy the heart.

It's not a matter of bank account, it's not a matter of income. It's not a matter of holdings, wealth, not a matter of whatever one has or doesn't have by way of title possession, opportunity, influence. It's about those intangibles of the heart. I know that because I've seen the same dreadful malady at work in my own heart. Trying to deceive me. Trying to turn me away from trusting in God, from hoping only in him from loving Christ supremely. And I would guess if you've been a Christian for anytime, you've seen that in your own heart as well.

That even after coming to Christ, making a decision to forsake all and follow him, but sometimes this idolatry, which is very subtle, which is, easily insinuates itself into our heart, and there are so many opportunities of an aggressively idolatrous world that we live in, coming after us. I would suggest and believe that you also have had the same struggle.

I've seen the same malady at work in the hearts of others as well.

Others who have professed Christ. Others who vehemently claim to know him, claim to love him, even in the face of great disobedience on their part, claiming to know him, love him. They're fine with God, fine with Christ. And it doesn't really matter what the evidence says. And sadly, I've also seen some that when tested, they walk away from Christ. They walk away, frankly, for a whole lot less than this rich young ruler had in his bank account.

So what is it that marks the difference between the true Christian and people who are more like this rich young ruler? Those who may be very religious. Maybe they're upright, upstanding people, good neighbors. Maybe they're moral and ethical people. Maybe they're well regarded, outwardly blessed. What is the difference between them and us? Why do so many of them walk away while we remain? What is it that marks us as special, as different.

What keeps us, what holds us fast in obedience to Jesus Christ? What keeps us continuing to follow him. Might say it another way, as we've been saying in the past couple of weeks, what is the source of our assurance? What's the source of our assurance? We'll go back to the rich young ruler's question. A good question, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" Or how can I know that, I will have with certainty have eternal life? Where do I find assurance?

We're going to get some insight and clarity about answering that question from what Jesus said to his disciples here after the rich young ruler walked away. Let's read the entire account starting in verse 18 and read through verse 30. "A ruler asked him, 'Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?' And Jesus said to him, 'Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone. You know the commandments. Do not commit adultery. Do not murder. Do not steal. Do not bear false witness. Honor your father and mother.' And he said, 'All these have kept from my youth.' When Jesus heard this. He said to him '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.'

"When he heard these things. He became very sad. For he was extremely rich. Jesus, seeing that he had become sad said, 'How difficult it is for those who have wealth 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 person to enter the Kingdom of God.' Those who heard it said, 'Then who can be saved?' But he said 'What is impossible with men is possible with God.' And Peter said, 'See, we have left our homes and followed you.' 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, who will not receive many times more in this time and in the age to come eternal life.'"

This conversation that Jesus is having with his disciples, it's after the rich young ruler has walked away. So, verses 24 to 30, that's all a section where the rich young ruler is gone and now Jesus is there with his disciples. We hear the disciples expressing some degree of anxiety about their own spiritual condition. Seeing what's happened with the rich young ruler, they seem troubled by his departure.

He seemed to be the perfect candidate for discipleship, but he walked. So if he, this young man who really seemed to be like the poster boy of true religion, like he was going to be great for the messianic campaign entering into Jerusalem. This guy had connections. This guy had wealth. He had influence. He was promising. He was on the rise.

This guy who seemed like the perfect prospect for discipleship man, if he walks away, what certainty that, can I have that I won't walk away at some point? And once again, we're kind of coming back to Luke's purpose in writing this Gospel. And remember, he addressed Theophilus at the very beginning, Luke 1:4. He writes this Gospel that "you may have certainty concerning the things you've been taught."

So he raises an issue that, that troubles the certainty, it troubles the certainty of the disciples who are there on that occasion, and it troubles with, with any depth as we read this, it troubles the certainty of sensitive consciences as well. It's meant to do that. It's meant to cast away any false sense of assurance. To tear away any props that have set you up that

ought not to be there and whittle everything down to just one thought.

So how is it that we have assurance? How is it that we know that we have eternal life? How is it that we know that we know that we know, right? That we have treasure in heaven, that we ourselves will enter the Kingdom of God. That lying on our deathbed, whenever that comes, that we're not filled with anxiety and terror in the heart. Cowering in fear about the prospect of crossing over and passing through that veil and coming to the other side and hearing "Depart from me, I never knew you." Those are the things that keep us up at night, right?

So how do we know that we possess true salvation? That's what this text answers for us. Three qualities here, or three characteristics that form the backbone and the substance of our Christian assurance that we find those three qualities here in this text. Here's the first, number one, we hope in nothing but Christ. We hope in nothing but Christ. You could say we hope in nothing but God in Christ, but you could just simplify it to say we hope in nothing but Christ. Rich young ruler has walked away and as Jesus helps his disciples process this you may think his,

his approach to doing this, to helping them process and helping them interpret it might seem to us as somewhat counterintuitive.

Because he really does begin by troubling them even further. Like "If that bothered you, wait till I show you this." Verse 24, "Seeing [Jesus seeing] that he [the rich young ruler] seeing that he had become sad." Jesus does not say "Awe." There's no hint of that, right? And make no mistake, he loved him. Mark tells us that. He wasn't trying to drive him away, he was loving him and answering his question.

But there's no sentiment here. There's no sentimentality. He speaks plainly and straightforwardly when he says, "How difficult it is for those who have wealth to enter the Kingdom of God." He does not chase the man down and say "Whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, wait. I think you took me all wrong. See, let me explain."

He didn't do any of that. He lets the man go. "How difficult it is for those who have wealth to enter the Kingdom of God." Now he doesn't say that to the rich young ruler. He

says that to his disciples. The two other accounts, Matthew and Mark, they make that very clear. They tell us that the man walked away before Jesus said this. Mark says, "Disheartened by the saying he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions." And then, seeing the man's face, observing his reaction followed by his behavior, Jesus was able to discern his heart.

This man had chosen the wealth of the world over the treasure of heaven. He had chosen his own way instead of obedience to Jesus Christ instead of following Jesus' way. He decided to hold on to this life and continue in his current lifestyle with all his current duties and obligations and responsibilities and all the meaning and significance that he found in those duties, responsibilities and obligations. He chose to hold on to that instead of obeying Jesus' call to discipleship.

So Jesus said "How difficult it is for, for those with wealth to enter the Kingdom of God." Wealth here is the word *chrema*. *Chrema* in a singular form refers to a sum of money. Here it's in the plural form, so it's expansive and it comprehends

all that money can buy. Okay, so property, holdings the wealth that money generates and creates. You know you have to have money to make money, as the saying goes. The influence that money can buy. The power of riches, the way you can extend your influence, reach out to others, influence politics, influence legislation, influence policy in your favor and the favor of your business. All the stuff that money can do.

So the greater the wealth, the harder it is, and to ensure they get the point he emphasizes this with an illustration, "How difficult it is for those who have wealth to enter the Kingdom of God [verse 25 he says] 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." Now if his disciples had been uneasy about the rich young ruler, a singular instance of somebody walking away, this comment that wealth is a hindrance to any heart, this illustration about the impossibility of entering the Kingdom of God, this really troubled them. This really made their hearts quake.

And the reason is because of what they believed about wealth. The illustration that Jesus gives here of a camel going

through the eye of a needle, it was a common illustration. It was passed around, used to illustrate impossibility. It's a vivid picture of something that is so difficult that it really does defy the imagination. Edersheim calls it a common Jewish proverb. He says it's mentioned twice in the Jewish Talmud in a different form, instead of camel using elephant, but it says twice in the Jewish proverb it talks about that a man did not even in his dreams see an elephant pass through the eye of a needle. You can't even imagine it. You can't even dream it up.

Some, because they've tried to say this is so impossible you can't imagine it, they've tried to do away with it, coming up with alternative illustrations about Jesus talking about some camel gate or not, instead of the word camel, it's a different word that sounds very much like camel, but it's actually talking about a big thick rope. It's so hard to put a thick rope and really jam it through the eye of a needle and that's not what he's saying at all. Some have even said, "Well, I guess you could liquefy a camel and pour it through the eye of needle." But it is impossible.

People have to come up with foolish alternatives even to make sense of it, and you can't even make sense of it then. Jesus is giving this little proverbial little illustration because he intends to communicate impossibility. Picture this massive beast of burden as they would have in Palestine, loaded up to travel across the desert. Baggage, water, all the stuff that they're going to need for their journey, loaded up to travel and then trying to squeeze itself through an impossibly small space, much less through the eye of a needle. The image just stymies imagination. So this massive beast of burden, squeezing through an impossibly small space. What does this massive animal illustrate? What he's trying to talk about, it's illustrating those who love wealth.

Those who love wealth are like this huge animal, elephant camel loaded up. They are inflated to this, in our imagination, to this unwieldy size by the wealth that they love all its entanglements. By this complex, tangled web of commitments that wealth brings. The duties, the interests of concerns that occupy the hearts of all of those who harbor any love of money. And again, it's not the stuff itself, it's the love of the stuff. It's the heart attachment to the stuff.

As Jesus has taught parable, and the parable of the soils, the heart that's love, that loves money is a, is a thorny soiled heart. It's a place where the good seed of God's word cannot take root and cannot bear fruit. And Jesus said, as those people who have a love of money, when they go their way, they are choked out by the cares and the riches and the pleasures of life. No fruit matures.

So Jesus illustrates the wealthy, and those who love wealth, whatever that wealth is. If they're illustrated by a massive camel, what does the eye of a needle illustrate? Well, the eye of a needle illustrates entrance into the Kingdom of God, doesn't it? The way of salvation is comparable to entering through the eye of a needle.

I mean, he could have said it's impossible for a camel or an elephant or a human being to enter through the eye of a needle. Or a rat, or a cat, or any, anything. A pebble can't go through the eye of a needle. Salvation is a narrow gate, Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 7:13, "Enter by the narrow gate," and by narrow he's talking about small,

constricted, squeezed, "for the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many."

What is that easy way? What is that wide gate? It's not the irreligious. That's for the religious. That's people who go to church. That's people who say they're pursuing God. But they find a, a wide gate to go through one that doesn't really squeeze them too much. They find an easy way that leads to destruction. One with no sudden turns, none with sharp bends. They want a road that's easy to travel.

Jesus goes on to say, "But the gate is narrow." Squeezed, constricted, tight, painful to go through. "And the way is hard that leads to life. And those who find it are few." When Jesus says how difficult it is for those who have wealth to enter the Kingdom of God, what he actually means is how impossible it is.

It's impossible. That's what the illustration's intended to convey, the impossibility of salvation, not just for the wealthy, but for all mankind to attain. And notice that's exactly how those who heard him took it. "Then who can be

saved?" Who? Who can be saved? And notice they're not asking, they didn't say, "Well then, what rich men can be saved?" That's not how they took it.

Inferring from the rich man, they inferred to all man. Everyone, who in general can be saved. They saw the implications of Jesus teaching and especially in their own expectation, they said. What sort of person can be saved then. If not the wealthy, then what kind of person has the ability to be saved? If the rich can't be saved, if that's impossible for the rich, well, what's to become of us?

His approach again, Jesus', it seems so counterintuitive to us because the disciples here, they're already a bit nervous. Watching this rich man walk away, they're anxious about the departure of this prime candidate for discipleship, and Jesus does not at this point assure them. Not yet.

He doesn't say "They're there. No, no, no, not talking about..." Instead he, he doubles down and he troubles their

hearts even further. Why would he do this? Is he just being unfriendly? He's just kind of getting at them.

No, Jesus intends to disabuse the disciples of any false notion, of any false assumption about salvation. He intends to strip away any hope whatsoever of finding salvation in and through mankind. What man has, what man can do, what man can achieve. He's gonna strip that all away. And then having taken away any and all hope and man, that's when Jesus is going to replace that void that he created with, he's going to replace it and fill it with God and God alone. That's where we all need to be.

The Jews believed, and really, I think that this attitude is common to all of us, no matter where we live, what time we live in, what part of the world, what language we speak, what theology is informed our culture, because this attitude is actually endemic to the human condition. But they believed that the wealthy had a greater advantage of entering the Kingdom and attaining salvation than anyone else. They believed that, they weren't necessarily resentful about that point of view, they

just simply believed that wealthy people were recipients of divine favor.

That the more a man was pleasing to God the more God would bless him with wealth. And we can get into their first century heads a little bit by acknowledging there is a law of behavior and consequence. And we see it in the Proverbs, right? Isn't that how we're supposed to teach our children? My son, listen to me. Follow my ways. Don't turn apart from your path. Listen, you'll be blessed. God will reward you. He'll bless you with long life and wealth and prosperity. Isn't that generally true? Yeah, it is.

That is the promise of the Law isn't it, do this and you shall live? It's not completely wrong, is it? Wise living leads to blessing. Action, reaction. Behavior, consequence. What people do when God prescribes it, if they do what he prescribes, blessing results. We see that all around us, don't we? Definitely.

People in our society who depart from God and turn away from his ways oftentimes they're suffering for it. We see the bold or those who have born, been born into privilege, but we see the bold all the time. The liars, those who are ruthless and cruel, will take advantage of other people and build their wealth upon the backs of the weak. So we see that all the time. Generally, speaking, those who live in foolish ways, depart from God's wisdom, they're the ones who live under a curse.

They're the ones who live under poverty and destruction and hurt and pain and sorrow. They ruin all their relationships and they're not better for it. Doing what God forbids results in trouble. That is generally true. And conversely, as the Jews saw it especially, the more wealth that a man could accumulate, the more generous he could be.

So he had the means to give larger sums of money. He had the means to offer greater sacrifices at the temple, sometimes even pay for somebody else's sacrifice that they couldn't afford. They could make religious donations, they could contribute to projects to benefit the community, give alms to the poor. And they could do that far beyond what any common

person could do or afford. And so to the common mind, the religious rich, those people were definitely closer to Heaven than anyone else. And Jesus says time out. Stop the truck, put it in park. Not so fast.

The problem with wealth, it's not a problem of possessing wealth. The problem with wealth is the heart attitude toward wealth. Because if anyone, whether rich or poor, thinks that the money of earth can open up the gates of Heaven, we've got a serious problem. Serious problem. That idea represents a fundamental misunderstanding of what salvation is. That it is not like anything on earth.

Salvation is not based on your merit. It's based on the merit of one, Christ and Christ alone. And what he has accomplished, God is willing to give to us as a gift of his grace. He's willing to show mercy. So the metrics that we use to judge things in this life, we can apply that to the grace of God in salvation. Salvation is a gift of God, not by works lest anyone should what, boast.

Salvation is not by works. It's not by money, it's not by what you give, it's not by what you achieve, not by what you merit, attain, it is the gift of God. And so Jesus bluntly and vividly demolishes any idea that the wealthy have the leg up on anybody else. He does that in verse 24-25.

He's there to upend this false notion that the wealthy are somehow ahead of the game, that they have any advantage on anybody else when it comes to salvation. Why? Because all ground is level at the cross. If the problem is fundamentally a heart issue, if it's fundamentally a problem of sin, the sin nature, sinful humanity, all ground is level at the cross.

Everybody has the same heart problem. Everybody has the same sin condition. Everybody's in the same trouble. Leon Morris says that all of this, that Jesus is saying here, all this represents a reversal of accepted ideas. If the rich, with all their advantages, can scarcely be saved, what hope is there for others? And Jesus makes it clear, none. No hope.

No hope for you. But the person who's very, very poor, very, very rich, that's why it's a foolish thing for anybody who says listen, the key to the Christian life and the key to living a godly life and a pious life is to get rid of all your wealth. Get rid of all your wealth. The wealthy ought to just divest themselves of everything and kind of come down to a, a lower level.

It's kind of the whole idea behind communism, marxism, socialism, those ideas. No one should have a leg up on anybody else. That does not gonna deal with the sin problem. That is not gonna deal with the covetousness problem, the greed problem of the heart. It's a sin issue.

It's Alfred Plummer who says the whole world either possesses or aims at possessing wealth. If then what everyone desires is fatal to salvation, who can be saved? That's the disciples' question, isn't it? The salvation is impossible for the rich. And I'm trying to attain riches. Well, what hope is there for any man at all?

So this, what Jesus says here, and he has to say at first, doesn't he? Before he tries to give any hope or assurance, he has to start by decimating any false assurance and any false hope. This is a radical corrective. And I don't mean radical like "whoa." I mean radical, like deep. He's going deep down profoundly to radically correct their thinking. Going down to a base level of their thinking, of their belief system.

He is subverting here an entire worldview. And listen, we need to subvert this at all times for ourselves too, because we tend to think the same way they do. We tend to drift back into that kind of thinking. So Jesus doesn't, when they say, "Well then who can be saved," he doesn't relieve them. He doesn't let them off the hook.

He doesn't say "Wait, hold on guys. I was only talking here about the mega rich like this guy, you know, the uber wealthy, let the, let the billionaire go, you know? You who are of more modest means. You guys are going to be just fine when it comes to the Kingdom, all right?" Instead, now he presses the point.

If it is the case that those who seem to you to have more reason than anyone else to be certain that they'll enter the Kingdom of God, that they'll enter into and inherit eternal life if it's the case that you think that way, which you do, you've got a flawed understanding of how this whole thing works. Listen, it is impossible. Salvation is impossible even for them.

And then, humanly speaking, there's no hope for anybody else either. Humanly speaking, no one on his own can be saved. That is the message that Jesus wants them to receive. Let me tell you, they got it. They got it. So now that Jesus has disabused them of hope in man, all man's efforts, ambitions, all his wealth, all his contributions, all external marks of blessing, and the ability to show generosity, after Jesus stripped all of that away, only then does he come to the punch line. And here it is in verse 27 where Jesus sets the foundation of all assurance. He says, "What is impossible with man is possible with God."

That is good news. That is good news. That sentence, it's, it's very smooth there in the ESV. It does come across, if you translate it more literally, it comes across a bit awkwardly in

English, but it's helpful to expose it here. The, the preposition that Jesus uses, and the syntax he uses, he's making here a contrast between man's realm and God's realm. Man's realm and God's realm. Literally he's saying the things impossible in the sphere of man are possible in the sphere of God.

He's talking about two separate spheres of existence. This is theology 101. He is taking his disciples back to the creator creature distinction. He's maintaining this separation. Between God the Creator and his ability, and man the creature and his inability. Man in his limitations in the sphere of human existence that is bound by creaturely limitation. That's by God's design that we have limitations. It's a good thing.

But in the sphere of the divine, there are no boundaries, no limitations, except for that which is consistent with God's nature, God's character, God's will. God's will is never to violate his own will in other words. People sometimes throw this little stupid little mental thing at you and say, "Is God all powerful?" And you say, "he's all powerful" and they say, "Okay, well, can God create a rock that's so heavy that even he can't lift it?"

It is a meaningless question, isn't it? That's stupid. They're just trying to play with your thinking there, because what they're asking you to do is enter into a world where God can violate himself, where you can violate his own attributes, violate his own character, violate his own will. No, God does not do that. He's bound within his Godness. It's strange to say that he is bound within his infinity, right? He's bound and limited by his omnipotence. But even his omnipotence is directed by his will.

So whatever does not violate God's nature, character, will, whatever is consistent with him, those are the things that are possible with God. The salvation of the elect is not only possible with God, it's not just a potential with God. The salvation of his people is a matter of divine certainty with God. He chose them when? Ephesians 1:4, "Before the foundation of the world."

He selected his people and when he sent the Lord Jesus Christ to die, Jesus did not die for potential salvation. He died for certain salvation. He had his people on his mind when

he died for their sins on the cross. Salvation is a matter of his declarative will, his eternal decree.

We could see that spelled out very clearly in Romans 8:28 to 30. So Jesus sets here a foundation. He is establishing the only ground of hope for human salvation in the only ground that there is, in God and God alone. There is no hope in man or anything else. And if you're depending on man's free will, remember those spheres.

Those who are in Adam, those who are fallen, those who are in the sphere of Adam, the only place that there will can go is towards sin. Is toward that with which displeases God. Even, Isaiah 64:6, even their righteous deeds are as filthy rags to God. When they try to offer them up to God and say be pleased. People have to be taken out of that sphere and put it into the sphere of Christ to be regenerated, to have a new nature in order that they will believe. They're made to want to believe.

And then their free will runs in the path of God's commands. They do what he wants. They do what he commands. They

love to do what he commands. So if salvation in any way is, if we're banking on human ability. If we're banking on the will of man to find some kind of innate goodness and spin it up toward eternal life. Hopeless. Lost.

Our only hope is in God, working in and through Christ to reconcile us to himself. And that's what Paul meant when he wrote in 2 Corinthians 5:19 that in Christ, in Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them. That is the very one that the rich young ruler walked away from. Tragic.

But beloved, you have not walked away have you? You haven't walked away. You've remained with him. You remained steadfast, tied to him. You continue following along after him. You know, by some miracle of grace, you know Christ is your only hope. You know that because God was kind to you. Because he gave that to you.

Don't take your faith in Jesus Christ, your seeing in him, your only hope. Don't take that as a small or minor thing. You

didn't drum that up out of your own intuition. You didn't come up with that because you're so smart, because you're so able, because you're so well educated, or because you've eschewed all bad education and you've remained ignorant of all that stuff, and you've got a more holistic and, and kind of earthy form of faith. It's not in us.

Reminds me of John 6 verse 66 after a crowd of would be disciples heard some very hard teaching from Jesus and the text says there, "After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him. And so Jesus said to the twelve, 'Do you want to go this way, go away as well?' Simon Peter answered him." He's always speaking up for other, other, guys right? "Simon Peter answered him. 'Lord, to whom shall we go?'" Where we gonna go? We've got no hope and anything else. "'To whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed and have come to know that you are the holy one of God.'"

Why does Peter know that? Because all those years on the lake fishing made him such a great observer of things. No. Peter's a knucklehead, just like the rest of us. When he

confessed Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, what did Jesus say to him? "Blessed are you, Peter son of Jonah, because flesh and blood has not revealed this to you but my Father who is in heaven." You've confessed it, because he's done it.