

## The Rich Young Ruler, Part 1

Luke 18:18-21

I invite you to turn back to Luke 18:18, and this is Jesus' encounter with the rich young ruler. And as you turn to Luke 18:18, I'd like you to think about how you would answer this question. If someone came up to you and said, "What should I do to inherit eternal life?", what would you say? If someone asks you, "How can I know that I'll have eternal life?", how would you answer that question? I mean, after you recover from the shock of someone coming up and saying that to you, doesn't happen much, but if that did happen, how would you answer? Because that's the question that the rich young ruler asked Jesus Christ on this occasion. And before we see how Jesus handled this evangelism encounter, how would you answer?

My guess is that for a number of you, you'd push "play" on some formulaic pattern of sharing the gospel that you've picked up in evangelism class, or read in a book on evangelism, or maybe learned from an older, more experienced Christian about sharing your faith. And as you would start that presentation of

the gospel, you'd hope you remember that script that you were taught. You'd hope that it comes to mind. And you'd start with the holiness of God, as you should. You'd be teaching the perfections of God. You'd explain God's right, by virtue of who he is and what he's done as creator and lawgiver and judge, to receive exclusive worship and perfect obedience from all of his creatures.

You'd talk about God, and then you'd talk about man's failure to do that very thing, to honor God as God and to give him thanks, to live obediently before God. Men need to know about salvation, right? And so it stands to reason, they need to know what they are being saved from. And your job is to tell them they're being saved from God. They're being saved from God and his wrath and God and his just condemnation due to their sinfulness.

As you talk about man and his sinfulness, you'd want to disabuse him of any notion that he can earn his salvation, that he can somehow pile up enough good deeds, stacking them one on top of another, to overshadow his sins before God, because no one can pile up enough good deeds to please God. "All have

sinned and fallen short of the glory of God," and no man can erase his sins. So you would help him to narrow down his options for the path to salvation to one option only, the narrow gate through faith in Jesus Christ.

And this would take the conversation, then, to your favorite subject in mind, to talk about the most unique person you have ever known, Jesus Christ. You'd talk about the most perfect work that he completed, that he finished. You'd teach about the grace of God to provide in him a substitutionary sacrifice for the sins of all sinners who repent and believe, fulfilled in Christ's all-sufficient, perfect substitutionary atonement.

Then you'd bring it home. You'd want to tell this sinner that if he'll repent of his sins, and if he'll believe in Jesus Christ, not trusting at all in himself, not trusting in his own righteousness, his own good works, but trusting only and ever in Jesus Christ, that he can have everlasting life. You would explain the nature of this saving faith that you're calling him to, so he does not misunderstand because there are so many

misunderstandings out there; that biblical faith understands, assents to the truth intellectually.

Biblical faith receives and embraces the truth emotionally. It changes the affections so that we desire what God desires, and we hate what God hates; and true biblical faith acts on the truth volitionally. All three of those elements, the mind, the emotions, the will, those are the elements of true biblical saving faith, and they characterize the life of one who truly believes. It becomes a life that is marked increasingly over the years, marked by obedience to the truth.

Then you would call this person to obey the gospel that you just explained, and you would inform him that after entering through that narrow gate through Jesus Christ, well, the way is hard that leads to life, not easy, and few there be who find it, but find it he must, and follow it he will only and always by the grace of God.

You'd inform him, then, of the consequences of his decision, whether to obey the gospel that you've just explained to him, or to disobey it. There are two and only two destinies:

eternal heaven for all those who believe, and eternal hell for those who refuse to believe, who go their own way. And all of us will give an account to God of our obedience to the truth; and thus the gospel starts and ends with God.

Some use the letters GMCRC. God, Man, Christ, Response, and I want you to notice the final C, which stands for "consequence." It's a good way to remember a pattern for explaining the gospel. There are other faithful patterns as well which contain those basic elements. There are also many unfaithful patterns out there that confuse people with what can only be called a sub-Christian gospel. So watch out for those. Stay away from those. Don't repeat those bad patterns that you've learned in your mind.

But we want to ask, when Jesus shared the gospel, how did he do it? Did he use a formulaic approach? Did he recite a pattern like we are commending to you? Or are we all wrong in how we're presenting this? Well, we've got the perfect test case before us because on this occasion in Luke 18:18, a man asks him the most important question of all. He gets right down to brass tacks and asks, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" It's

the perfect test case to test our own evangelism against his, and as we read this account, see if you can identify our gospel pattern as Jesus answers this man.

The account runs from verses 18-30, but we're going to read just from verses 18-25. We start out in verse 18: "And 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.'" Okay, so step number one: start by picking apart the man's language, even if it means you risk offending him or antagonizing him and putting him on the defensive right from the beginning.

Okay, I'm being facetious, obviously, because that's not what Jesus is doing, here. He is ever and always gracious and wise and intentional in how he speaks to people. So I want to make it clear from the front I'm not accusing our Lord. I'm not even implying in any way that he's being pedantic, here. But that is how it can seem to us at first glance, especially with the myriad and multitude of bad evangelism patterns that we have learned. 'You never want to cross the sinner. You never want to make him offended; he might go away.'" As we read the rest of

account, we realize Jesus isn't too worried about people walking away. Our evangelism has been so man-centered for so long that offending the sinner is a graver error to us than offending God and getting his gospel wrong.

So is that step one? Pick apart the man's language? Let's keep reading, verse 20. "'You know the commandments,'" he says. "'Do not commit adultery, Do not murder, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Honor your father and mother.'" Okay, so Step 2 in our evangelism pattern to inherit eternal life: Tell him he needs to obey the Ten Commandments. Is that what you've been taught? Obey the Ten commandments. Okay, got it. Let's see if he's done that. Verse 21: "And he said, 'All these I have kept from my youth.'" Okay, good to go. Perfect. Leave that unchallenged and accept his profession, and move on to Step 3: radical philanthropy. Verse 22: "When Jesus heard this, he said to him, 'One thing you still lack. Sell all that you have, distribute it to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. And then come follow me.'" "

Make a mental note: After this conversation, you're going to have to call others to radical philanthropy, and you need to

see if you've done this for yourself. Don't be surprised when the sinner fails to reach the high bar you set. Verse 23: "When he heard these things, he became very sad, for he was extremely rich. Jesus, seeing that he'd become sad, said, 'How difficult it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God. 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.'"

I've been speaking facetiously, obviously. The situation, here, is not as it appears at first glance, as we'll see, but it does seem difficult for us to see that Jesus seems to have made this really difficult for this sincere seeker to believe the gospel. He's made the bar extremely high for this man, made it hard for him to believe and hard for him to follow him. And I'm not just saying that as a 21st-century squishy evangelical. Even the people standing there, his own disciples, reacted to his approach, here, with this man with bewilderment. Verse 26: "'Then who can be saved?'" Even Peter, his conscience is unsettled, here, and he asks, "Well, what about us? Are we okay?"



Listen, Jesus' handling of the rich young ruler unsettles all of us, and it should, including the many commentators I've read, by the way. It's represented in the many sermons I've heard on this text. On the surface, this account seems disturbing and perplexing. We don't know quite what to make of it. I mean, is Jesus, here, laying down a pattern of evangelism that we need to follow? Are the formulaic patterns of evangelism that we have learned, are they all wrong?

I'll be quick to say, as I already said, that much of what we have been taught about evangelizing and discipling people has been very, very wrong for many, many years in our country in mainstream evangelicalism. So I want to emphasize that footnote: Don't just trust everything you read on an evangelistic website. Go back to the word of God. Go back to what Jesus actually did and said.

But again, the pattern that I recited a few moments ago, the one we commend to you and the one we teach, the one I practice, is that the wrong approach? Should we be telling those who want to know how to have eternal life, "Obey God's law, sell all your stuff, give it all the way to the poor, follow Jesus

with nothing more than the clothes on your back"? Are Christians to be a band of humble mendicants, homeless beggars who are united by this one great sacrifice that they made to gain heaven and guarantee eternal life? Or is something else going on, here?

Short answer: yes. Longer answer: It's my sermon. So we'll get into the text and take a closer look. And here's the first point, verse 18, number 1, the ruler and his question. We're going to consider the ruler and his question separately. First, the ruler, then his question. Look again at verse 18: "And a ruler," literally, "a certain ruler," "asked him, 'Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?'"

So here's this certain ruler. He's anonymous. He's unknown to us. He's got no back story. No name is given. We might think there's not much to know about him, but actually when we combine the other synoptic gospel accounts, we get the composite picture. And there is actually a lot we can know about this man. In fact, there's more to know about this man, more to explain in detail than I have time for. So I have to reduce it down to keep it flowing here.

But there's a lot we can know. He's been known to the church through the centuries as the "rich young ruler." Three identifying marks from this composite picture, this summary we get from Matthew, Mark, and Luke. He is the "rich young ruler." All three synoptic accounts tell us that he is rich. Matthew and Mark say, "He had great possessions." Luke says, verse 23, "He was extremely rich." From Matthew's account, and only Matthew's account, by the way, we know that he is young. He's not an older ruler, he's not middle-aged; he's a young ruler. Twice in Matthew, Matthew 19:20 and 22, Matthew identifies him as a *neaniskos*, which can mean "youth," it can mean "a young bachelor," it can mean maybe an older teen.

Here, it means "young man." He's between 24 to 40 years old. He's in the prime of his life. It's a season of life, as we all know, some of us remember fondly, some of us even more faintly, remember a season characterized by strength and capability and increasing skill and competency and growth in muscle tone and all the rest, and upward mobility. That was a good day, wasn't it? Yeah.

Luke is the only writer, though, to tell us that the man is also a ruler. The word *archon*. He is a significant man. He's a man of social and political influence in his community. He is a highly esteemed man. He's a man who is in authority. He's a man in public prominence. He has a public face. He's known, and he's looked to as an example. Now, the exact position that he holds isn't known to us, but most commentators see this man as a local synagogue ruler. I'm inclined to agree with them. The word can refer to a number of ruler positions. It can refer to a member of the Sanhedrin, which is how John identified Nicodemus in John 3:1, as a ruler of the Jews. The man's young, young age argues against his position on the Sanhedrin.

Some say by "ruler" Luke meant "magistrate," but that's an entirely different word, so it's not likely. For the Jews, all civic duties of magistrates were handled by these synagogue officials. Others think that he may have been an official of the high priest, that his environment and his duties were occupied in the temple. But that's really unlikely because the priesthood was dominated by the Sadducee party, and the Sadducees were theological liberals. That does not at all fit the profile that we see of the man who's come to Jesus. Doesn't fit him at all.

So he's most likely a synagogue ruler, in charge of a local synagogue, and probably closer to Jerusalem, which is probably where they are right now. Probably a large synagogue, probably very prominent. And it's quite remarkable for a man of his age to be in this position, very uncommon for a young man to have such a high and honored role. But it is likely that his significant wealth had a hand in that. We can suppose he comes from a prominent family, that he has received inherited wealth, and he's also improved upon it. He has increased the wealth, and he's used his family's wealth in a very generous and charitable way. The young man has made a name for himself. He's turned from the path of any self-indulgence that is common for sons raised in great means. He's given himself, instead, to building his family's business, improving his family's wealth, and then all to turn back and benefit his own community, and thus he's received this honorable position as synagogue ruler.

It's also likely that considering his high regard for the law, which is evident in the text, that he's a member of the Pharisee party. We don't know that for sure, but it seems likely that he is religiously, politically conservative and connected to the Pharisee party. He's morally upright, and so much so that he's become respected in the community. He's well-known. He's

one of the leading men of his city, even though he's a young man. Obviously, this is a remarkable and exemplary young man. He has turned away from the sins of young men that are self-indulgent and undisciplined and lacking self-control, and has given himself instead to the good of his community, to the good of other people. He is certainly a model for others to follow.

But as we see here, indicated in verse 18, he is also a troubled young man. He's troubled. He's got a nagging question on his mind, his conscience has been bothering him, and he's been no doubt provoked even further by Jesus in his teaching, as Jesus has shown up and has been teaching. He's seen the character of Jesus, the power in his ministry; and if we accept his word in verses 20-21, as Jesus seemed to, he's been a moral, law-abiding man, keeping the Torah ever since his youth. But in his heart of hearts he has this nagging lack of assurance about his true standing with God, about his fitness for the kingdom. In Jesus he sees this quality of life that he himself is lacking, and so he's compelled to come to him, compelled to put the question to Jesus.

We can imagine, wherever this is along the journey that will eventually end up in Jerusalem, Jesus has entered this town or city, as he always did, and that he had been doing what he's been doing all throughout his ministry. He's been preaching the kingdom of God. He's been healing the sick, casting out demons, showing mercy and compassion to all the people. And after the ministry of healing and preaching and teaching, and during this interval that is provided for a brief respite for Jesus and his disciples before they get up and move on to another place, that's the setting for the previous account when parents started to bring their children to Jesus and asking him to bless them. We went through that last time, Luke 18:15-17.

And as we saw last time, Jesus was eager to take these children in his arms and bless them. He received parents and their children alike. He took the infants and children into his arms and blessed them. He said to his disciples, "'Let the children come to me, and don't hinder them, for to such belong the kingdom of God.'" And then he said in verse 17, "'Truly, I say to you, whoever doesn't receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.'"

What does that mean? We talked about this last time: just as infants. They've got no power of their own, no strength, no wealth, no social standing, no ability to exercise their will. That is how all kingdom citizens must receive the kingdom of God: like helpless babes, utterly, totally dependent on God. And that is why every newborn infant, every helpless baby, including those in the womb, everyone is a living picture of a true kingdom citizen. Just want to strengthen your understanding of the sanctity of life in this evil age we live in.

Well, that's what Jesus meant by that. What does that mean, then, for this rich young ruler? What does it mean for him? He stands there already troubled in his conscience, and any doubt he's been having about the state of his soul has been amplified by hearing Jesus teach. He's troubled, and now he's perplexed. He is anxious. He's wondering how he can know that he'll ever enter into the kingdom, how he can know he'll have eternal life. Infants are weak, but he's strong. Infants are dependent and incapable. He's not. He's independent. He is self-sufficient. Perfectly capable. Infants can't do, achieve, or gain, but he has already done much. He's kept the law. He's achieved much. He's gained status, gained prominence. He's increased his



wealth, improved his station. So what's to become of him with regard to the kingdom?

So as Jesus and his disciples prepare to move on, as they are getting ready to leave this town, wrapping things up and moving to another town, we get the picture from Mark's account, which tells us, "As Jesus was setting out on his journey, a man ran up and knelt down before him and asked him, 'Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?'" But for a man of his stature to run in public? To kneel down in public, to risk denigrating his office, his personal dignity? He shows a flagrant disregard for any social propriety at this point, for any dignity that benefits his status, his station, his person. He doesn't seem to care about any of that at this point.

That's why I think this man is sincere when he comes, and he comes to Jesus with a sincere question, with a burning question in his heart, on his mind. The verb Luke uses there in verse 18, "a ruler asked him," it's *eperotao*. It's an intensified form of the verb "to ask." And it's used often in this gospel to describe a hostile form of questioning, such as when the Pharisees would interrogate Jesus and try to set him up

to fail. But in this context, *eperotao* conveys an intense concern in the question. There's a total focus in the question. He's dogged. He's intentional. He's got a sincere, staunch intent to search out, discover the answer to this particular question, and not leave until he finds it. That's the idea. This man is sincere. He's asking a sincere question.

Some say they see in his address to Jesus as "good teacher," they think that by using the word "good" and using that, especially in the way Jesus corrects it, they think that maybe he was trying to flatter Jesus, and Jesus called him on it, threw a flag. Maybe. But we see that when Nicodemus came to Jesus, he addressed him in a similar way. He said, "Rabbi, we know that you're a teacher from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him." I think that's not flattery. I think that's respect. It's complimentary. Certainly, it falls far short of what is due to Jesus, who is the Son of God. He's not just "a teacher come from God." He's not just "a good teacher." He's God. If they truly recognized who he is, they'd be bowing on their face before him.

Still, along with many other commentators, Alfred Plummer says this, he says, "In the whole Talmud, a rabbi being addressed as 'good teacher,' the title was absolutely unknown among the Jews." So this address, "good teacher," this really is beyond the pale. This is totally out of the ordinary. Yes, I think he's paying Jesus a compliment, here. I think it's a sincere compliment, not flattery. When he sees Jesus, the only adjective that comes to his mind is "good." He just hasn't thought carefully enough about what that adjective really means. He hasn't thought carefully enough about what he's saying. I think all of us have used language loosely at one time or another. And this is a time like that. More on that in a minute.

But look again at his question. He says, "'Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?'" or "'What doing life eternal will I inherit?'" , literally how he says it. Eternal life is a concept that Jews believed and discussed and hoped in, just as we do, but it's obviously without the fullness that comes together in the New Testament. But they get this concept, you can go back to, you can look at it or write it down, in Daniel 12:1-2, Daniel 12:1-2. They read about the time of the end, "when Israel," it says, "shall be delivered, and everyone whose name shall be found written in the book, and many of those

who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt."

So this word "everlasting," it's the Hebrew word for "eternity," *olam*, and it's used repeatedly in the Old Testament, most often describing God's covenants, his covenants with Noah, with Abraham and Israel and David, and most particularly in the New Covenant. The word *olam* also describes the statutes of God, the word of God, all of its covenant promises to Israel. The word *olam* describes the throne of David as being forever. The kingdom over which David's son will rule and reign is forever. The word *olam* describes the temple of the Lord as well, the place where God will put his name forever.

In all those ways and more, *olam* conveys this concept of eternity. It's rooted in the concept of everlasting life, which is the life of God. It's sourced in God. Abraham called on the name of the Lord Yahweh in Genesis 21:33, "who is *el olam*, the Everlasting God." Moses told Israel in Deuteronomy 33:27 that "the eternal God," that is the word *olam*, "the eternal God is your dwelling place, and underneath are the everlasting arms." "The Lord Yahweh, he's king forever and ever"; that's *olam*,

Psalm 10:16. "And his throne is forever and ever"; that's *olam*, Psalm 45:6. And why is his dwelling place in his arms and his throne and his kingship forever and ever? Because God's essence is eternal. Moses said in Psalm 90:2, "Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting, you are God." "From *olam* to *olam*, from eternity to eternity, you are God."

And so when God shows his love, in Psalm 103:17, that love, too, is an everlasting love. "But the steadfast love of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear him and his righteousness to children's children." Isaiah asks in Isaiah 40:28, "Have you not known? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the creator of the ends of the earth. He doesn't faint, he doesn't grow weary, his understanding is unsearchable." And then Jeremiah 10:10: "The Lord is the true God. He is the living God and the everlasting king." This concept of eternal life, everlasting God, and the concept of *olam*, they knew this, the Jews knew this about God. This is not foreign to them. For them, this is Theology 101, that Yahweh is the everlasting God.

So when this man comes to Jesus, he already has a high view of God. He already knows the God with whom he has to do. When he comes seeking eternal life, he doesn't come seeking a quantity of life. It's not like the billionaires today who are trying to preserve their bodies in cryogenic chambers and wake up in 200 years when the technology is enough to give them everlasting life. It's not quantity of life. Living on, whether a billionaire or a total pauper, living on in this flesh for eternity, you know what that's called? Hell. We don't want to do that. We need a change. We need a life from God, an eternal kind of life, so that the eternal quantity of life is bearable. Not only bearable, but majestic and holy and righteous. He understands that. He's seeking a God-sourced quality of life, the kind of life that's found in the coming kingdom of God.

And I want you to turn to some texts, starting with Isaiah chapter 60, and just to fill in what this man is seeking when he says, "What do I do that I would inherit eternal life?", this is what's on his mind: Isaiah 60:1. The heading in my Bible says, "The Future Glory of Israel." And that's right.

"Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon you. For behold, darkness shall cover the earth, thick darkness the peoples. But the Lord will arise upon you, and his glory will be seen upon you, and nation shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising. Lift up your eyes all around, and see. They are all gathered together; they come to you. Your sons shall come from afar, your daughters shall be carried on the hip, and then you shall see and be radiant. Your heart shall thrill and exult because the abundance of the sea shall be turned to you. The wealth of the nations shall come to you. A multitude of camels shall cover you, young camels of Midian and Ephah, all those from Sheba shall come. They shall bring gold and frankincense, and shall bring good news, the praises of the Lord. All the flocks of Kedar shall be gathered to you. The rams of Nebaioth shall minister to you. They shall come up with acceptance on my altar, and I will beautify my beautiful house."

Skip down to verse 10. "Foreigners shall build up your walls, and their king shall minister to you; for in my wrath I struck you, but in my favor I've had mercy on you. Your gates shall be open continually; day and night they won't be shut, that people may bring to you the wealth of the nations, with

their kings led in procession. For the nation and kingdom that will not serve you shall perish; those nations shall be utterly laid waste. The glory of Lebanon shall come to you, the cypress, the plane, the pine to beautify the place of my sanctuary, and I will make the place of my feet glorious. The sons of those who afflicted you shall come bending low to you, and all who despise you shall bow down at your feet; they shall call you the City of the Lord, the Zion of the Holy One of Israel.

"Whereas you've been forsaken and hated, with no one passing through, I will make you majestic forever, a joy from age to age. You shall suck the milk of nations, you shall nurse at the breasts of kings; and you shall know that I the Lord am your Savior and your Redeemer, the Mighty one of Jacob. Instead of bronze, I'll bring gold, and instead of iron, I'll bring silver; instead of wood, bronze, instead of stones, iron. I'll make your overseers peace and your taskmasters' righteousness.

"Violence shall no more be heard in your land, devastation or destruction within your borders; you shall call your walls Salvation and your gates Praise. The sun shall be no more your light by day, nor for brightness shall the moon give you light,



but the Lord will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory. Your sun shall no more go down, nor your moon withdraw itself; for the Lord will be your everlasting light, and your days of mourning shall be ended. Your people shall all be righteous; they shall possess the land forever, the branch of my planting, the work of my hands, that I may be glorified. The least one shall become a clan, and the smallest one a mighty nation. I am the Lord; in its time I will hasten it."

Notice two times, there, verse 19, verse 20, "the Lord will be your everlasting light." Again, that's the word *olam*. No more fossil fuels, no need for alternative fuels, for green energy. The everlasting light of God is the power and the energy of the millennial kingdom. That's what the man sought, that's what he wanted assurance about, that he'd be participating in this kingdom, in this life and this age and the age to come.

Now turn over, with that in your head, turn over now to Jeremiah 32, We're just going to go consecutively through a couple of these prophets. In Jeremiah 32:37-40, it says in verse 37, "Behold, I will gather them from all the countries to which I drove them in my anger and my wrath and in great indignation.

I'll bring them back to this place, and I will make them dwell in safety. And they shall be my people, and I will be their God. I'll give them one heart and one way, that they may fear me forever, for their own good and the good of their children after them. I'll make with them," here's the word *olam*, "an everlasting covenant, that I will not turn away from doing good to them. And I'll put the fear of me in their hearts, that they may not turn from me."

What is that everlasting covenant? Back up to chapter 31:31: "Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the Lord. For this is the covenant I'll make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer shall each one teach his neighbor, and each his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."

Now go back to chapter 32 and verse 40. This everlasting covenant, we understand, is a covenant of forgiveness. It's something truly new. It's not like the old covenant God made with Israel through Moses. This is a covenant that speaks of regeneration, of internal knowledge of the truth, and it's a knowledge that reconciles a forgiven people with their God and then produces a life-long, lasting, eternal relationship with God.

All right, chapter 32:40: "I'll make with them an everlasting covenant, that I will not turn away from doing good to them. And I'll put the fear of me in their hearts, that they may not turn from me. I will rejoice in doing them good, and I will plant them in this land in faithfulness with all my heart and all my soul. For thus says the Lord: Just as I have brought all this great disaster upon this people, so I will bring upon them all the good that I promise them." Interesting to see that this new covenant is holistic in nature; it addresses the fullness of man and humanity in his composite being. It is both physical and spiritual. It is a material and an immaterial reality. Verse 42, how did God bring all this great disaster upon this people? Was it spiritual only? No. Was it not

physical, too? Clearly, in the same way, God will fulfill promises of total salvation in the kingdom in an everlasting covenant of everlasting life.

One more passage to look at, Ezekiel 37, Ezekiel 37:21. Says there in Ezekiel 37, this is the end of the dry bones prophecy, which is a very vivid picture of spiritual regeneration for the nation of Israel. In Ezekiel 37:21: "Say to them, Thus says the Lord God: Behold, I will take the people of Israel from the nations among which they've gone, and will gather them from all around, and bring them into their own land, and I will make them one nation in the land on the mountains of Israel." Could it be more specific?

"And one king shall be king over them, and they shall no longer be two nations, no longer divided into two kingdoms. They shall not defile themselves anymore with their idols and their detestable things, or with any of their transgressions. But I will save them from all the backslidings in which they've sinned, and I will cleanse them; and they shall be my people, and I will be their God. My servant David shall be king over them, and they shall all have one shepherd. They shall walk in

my rules and be careful to obey my statutes. They shall dwell in the land that I gave to my servant, Jacob, where your fathers lived. They and their children and their children's children shall dwell there forever. And David, my servant, shall be their prince forever.

"I will make a covenant of peace with them. It shall be," here it is again, "an everlasting covenant with them. I'll set them in their land and multiply them, and I will set my sanctuary in their midst forever. My dwelling place shall be with them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And then the nations will know that I am the Lord who sanctifies Israel, when my sanctuary is in their midst forevermore." That last word: *olam*. Again, "everlasting covenants," verse 26; "everlasting sanctuary in their midst," verse 26, verse 28. And Ezekiel describes that temple vividly and even measures it in chapters 40 to 48.

All right, now go ahead and return to Luke 18:18; and as you're getting back to our text, let me answer the question that some of you are asking, or maybe should be asking: Why did we just read all those passages? Because I want you to see that

this man, this rich young ruler, along with many of the Jews in Jesus' day, they had a better and a fuller and a more robust understanding of the concept of eternal life than most people today, and I would say even many evangelicals today. It is really important for us to recognize that so that we don't underestimate the sincerity of this man, his understanding, and the serious nature of his question. When he asked, "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?", he wants to know, "How do I live in such a way right now so that I can know that I'll have eternal life in the future?"

Darrell Bock says, "He's asking Jesus, 'How can I be sure I'll be saved in the final resurrection?'" He's seeking certainty about the future of his soul. Is that not a good question to ask? Seeking certainty about the future of his soul, and he doesn't have it. He wants assurance about eternal life, and he lacks it.

So if your heart is unsettled, if your soul is disquieted, if you find yourself ill at ease, lacking peace, your mind troubled, don't let another day go by. But find the answer to this most essential question about the current state of your

soul and the future of your soul as well because you can have eternal life today. You can have full assurance of eternal life for the rest of your life until you enter into your eternal inheritance in God's kingdom.