

## The Rich Young Ruler, Part 3

Luke 18:22-25

Well, you can turn in your Bibles to Luke 18, as we continue Jesus' encounter with the rich young ruler. I'd like to introduce the sermon with a question for you to think about, dealing with your sense of assurance. What would you be willing to do? What would you be willing to pay if such a thing could be bought with money, and it cannot? But what would you be willing to give, to be assured fully? Beyond the shadow of any doubt, about your salvation. What would you be willing to do? What would you be willing to give to have full assurance sealed away that you do indeed possess eternal life? Now notice the question is not what would you do to get eternal life, to buy salvation? Obviously buying salvation, that's theologically impossible.

It's biblically reprehensible. The idea salvation is not for sale, it's the gift of God. Salvation is always the gift of God. Ephesians 2:8-9. It's not a matter of money or effort or any human work "So that no one can boast." But the question I'm asking you is about the assurance of your salvation. Would you

be willing to do something? Would you be willing to do anything to gain a full and continuous and ever abiding sense of assurance that you do in fact possess eternal life?

I believe, that one mark of the degradation of sound religion in our time is that professing Christians don't seem all that interested in fighting for assurance. Many professing Christians today seem less than diligent to do what Peter commands in 2 Peter 1:10 to make certain, to be diligent, "To make certain about God's calling" and God's choosing of themselves. In fact, I think quite the opposite seems to be true in our time.

Many Christians, many professing Christians that I meet. They're fully assured that they will go to heaven when they die, that they have eternal life, but outwardly no spiritual fruit can be seen. There's scant evidence that they possess spiritual life or any life, even a pulse. And yet, no doubt in their minds, they're headed to heaven.

Even a bit offended by the question, by the supposition that they may need to examine themselves and find a sense of

assurance. In times when spiritual giants walk the earth, when the word of God was preached powerfully with great personal conviction, when the doctrines of the Bible were articulated and explained to the people of God and were pressed into the consciences of a church going public. And by the way, most of the public in our country at one time were churchgoing people.

People during the time of powerful preaching and clear doctrine and understood theology, they had questions about their salvation. Questions about their assurance developed in their hearts. It was a very, very common pastoral duty and function to apply the balm of the gospel to sensitive consciences. Today, not so much. Growing up in modern American evangelicalism, people have been taught, not to question their salvation.

Not to listen to any nagging concerns about assurance. They've been taught to say I settled that question a long, long time ago. When I prayed the prayer as a child, when I walked the aisle, when I went forward, when I got baptized, when I won Awana awards, or whatever the thing is. Jesus died for my sins, I've been told that from a young age, so of course I'm going to heaven when I die. I'm good to go. No need for you to ask these

questions to trouble me with all your pharisaism. I'm good to go.

They've been told, "Don't ever, ever, ever, ever question your salvation." They've been told to question your salvation, it's to give in to the whispering doubts of the devil that insinuates his doubts into your mind. His slanders into your minds. So push away all doubts, don't listen to any negativity. Don't listen to those Pharisees, are always your fruit inspectors. Hold on to that decision you've made, and hold on to it tightly of when you asked Jesus into your heart that day.

When we study the Gospels, we learned that our times are not so unique as we might think. Easy believeism, spiritual presumption, shallow views about personal sin. External forms of moralism, and an absolute lack and absence of spiritual fruit. The general expectation that I'll go to heaven when I die. Listen, our modern religion has a lot in common with 1st century Judaism. A lot in common.

And what disrupted the complacency of the self-righteousness and the self-satisfied sense of assurance among

1st century Jews was the Ministry of Jesus Christ. He entered into the world, God incarnate, walked into the synagogues, and troubled everybody. He walked into the cities and towns and villages, and he preached the Kingdom of heaven and demanded repentance. And he did mighty acts of healing and power, and, and wonder, miracles that were miracles of mercy and compassion.

God has done miracles in the past you see all through the Old Testament, but they were miracles and supernatural acts of what? Judgment. Jesus comes with equal power, and he shows mercy and compassion and kindness and tenderness and his actions and his words were prophetic and powerful. They called people to repentance. His teaching pressed the consciences of the people and it unsettled them. It disturbed their peace. It did not leave them comfortable. But rather provoked them to ask questions.

He was saying things that no one else was saying. Things like a "tax collector will go down to his house justified from the temple rather than a Pharisee." Luke 18:14. That's shocking news to everybody. He was saying things like the Kingdom of heaven belongs to those who are like children, those who are

like infants, totally unable to do anything. They've got nothing to offer, utterly dependent on others, and unless you're like that. Like an infant, Luke 18:17, you're not getting into the Kingdom.

There was a young man present on this occasion hearing this teaching. And, all of a sudden, his sense of peace is disturbed. In a strong confidence in his religion, he's untroubled, he's self-assured that he'd been doing everything right, that he'd be a shoe in for heaven. He's going to enter into the Kingdom of God. But now, having seen Jesus, having witnessed the divine power evident in his ministry, having heard Jesus' teaching, now he's not so sure about himself.

Look at verse 18, 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 I've 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.' But 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.'" We'll stop there for a second. We started into the text and used a little outline to organize our thoughts. But let me give you a little bit of review.

Our first point in that outline just looked at the ruler and his question. We called this man the rich young ruler because of the composite picture that's painted by all three synoptic writers, Matthew, Mark and Luke. And all three of those writers tell us that the man was rich. Matthew is the one who tells us that he's young, and Luke is the one who tells us that he's a ruler. So we put that together: Rich young ruler.

He's probably the ruler of a local synagogue, which is quite remarkable considering his young age. But this really is the result of using his youth well, using his young energy well,

putting his wealth to good use, not for selfish gain. He was self-controlled. He was a disciplined young man, and he put his wealth to use. Not only to increase the wealth he inherited from his family, but also to use his businesses and his connections and his affiliations and his influence and his money to give alms, to donate to projects, to enrich the community in which he lives. He's been growing up with this Jewish religion, since childhood, if we take his profession at face value in verse 21 that he kept the commandments of Moses since his youth, we understand that that was referring to his bar mitzvah probably around 13 years of age.

He's saying I've kept the law since I've had a responsibility to do so, and he's not claiming sinless perfection here. He's following the law of Moses. And the law of Moses, as we know, contains provisions for dealing with personal sins. So he's saying, "I've done that when I've broken the law, I offer the sacrifices, I, I've followed the law."

Raised as a faithful Jew, he's practiced his religion since he was young. And his life, his external life, has become proof for himself and certainly for many others, that God indeed



blesses the righteous. I mean, look at this guy. He's got a resume like the pre-Christian Paul, circumcised the eighth day, he's of Israel. He's of the, he's a Hebrew of Hebrews. Added to his inherited privilege, he's worked hard. As to the law he's a Pharisee. As to righteousness under the law he's blameless.

This guy is young, he's strong, he's healthy, he's extremely wealthy, and his wealth, he's trying to use well. He's comprehensively prosperous. This guy is the result of health, wealth and prosperity. He's living it. This is his best life now. He's been an exemplary man. Which is why he's been elevated to this position of authority and influence and prominence. Likely he belongs to the Pharisee party, which provided the social, political, religious bona fides that were necessary for him to ascend into this seat in the synagogue. And he's become a synagogue ruler, which is no small feat at his age.

From the outside, he looks to have everything going for him. He's born to a wealthy family. He's got a solid Jewish heritage. He's made wise connections, wise decisions: Religiously, politically. He's been elevated to a place of prominence and influence. He's got public recognition, social

esteem, prominence, future looks very, very bright for him. Lots of promise, good things to come. But he's bothered at this point he's troubled. He's ill at ease.

As a pastor, and all of us as elders, how we wish people today were bothered about their spiritual condition. In fact, I often pray that the spirit would awaken people to this sense of sin and need. It's a difficult world we live in, in some ways, with all the gifts of modernity blessing us with everything that we could need.

If you lack bread in the home, you don't stop, get on your knees and pray. You go to the store and buy some bread. If you're just maybe a little bit bored or trouble, what do? What do people do? Go online, surf the Internet. Fill their mind with things and images and distractions and entertainments. This modern world has all different kinds of food selections and entertainment choices, and I mean things that kings of the past could only dream of.

The common person now has it all over the world. In the middle of tribes, in middle of Africa, they have no running

water, but they've got cell phones and access to the Internet. It's a strange world we live in. That's really a world that's been covered with distraction. And I pray, we as elders pray pretty much every Sunday morning that the Holy Spirit would trouble people's minds, awaken them from this sense of dullness. This opiate of the masses that is the modern world and awaken them to the truth about their spiritual condition.

That people would be convicted of sin and righteousness and coming judgment. And we pray often that people would let go of any false sense of assurance, much of it based on a paper-thin understanding of the Bible and its doctrines, little proof texts of the Scripture cobbled together to insulate themselves and inoculate them against powerful preaching from the word and clear doctrine. And how I wish they'd take the time to examine themselves before God, before it's too late.

And that's what this man is doing, isn't he? That's what he's doing. He comes lacking assurance and look, he's coming to the right person, isn't he? He's coming to the person he should come to. He's asking, "Jesus, good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" Mark tells us in his gospel, Mark's so

picturesque, isn't he? That he ran up to Jesus. He's doing what rulers of his stature didn't do in public. He runs to Jesus and he kneels down before him.

We should see this man is sincere. Is coming to Jesus to seek relief for his soul. He needs to know how do I live in such a way right now, so that I can know I will have eternal life in the future? His sense of assurance has been shaken and he must have it shored up. So what can he do to rectify this.

Pointed out last time, this man understands what he's asking about. He understands he knows this concept of eternal life. It's not primarily about quantity of life living forever, it's about quality of life. And he has all the history and the promises of the prophets in the Old Testament. That he's banking on being a part of a restoration of fulfillment.

He's familiar with Scripture. He knows the meaning of *olam*, the term for eternity, the term for everlasting. He knows what that means, and especially in reference to God's future Kingdom. And so, because he knows it, he wants in. But what if he's missing something? Especially when he considers this stark

contrast between himself and these infants that Jesus is holding in his arms and blessing.

When he considers the contrast between himself, a rich ruler, and a helpless infant with no wealth, no power, no ability, and thus the question, "Good teacher, what doing life eternal shall I inherit?" Let's see, teacher, how do we seal the deal here?

And brings us to the second point in our outline, verse 19, the teacher and his investigation. We noted last time that there are lots of ways we might have engaged this conversation. As evangelicals, we might have gone about this differently. Our Lord goes right to the heart of the issue. We need to realize that every time he's not skirting the issue, he's going directly to the heart and he investigates this man's thinking and he draws it out and he exposes it. And he doesn't do this for his own sake. Jesus knows all men. He knows what's in the hearts of a man.

He does it for the ruler's sake. He does it for the sake of the disciples who are listening in, he does it for our sake,

for whom this is recorded. Verse 19, Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone." Jesus starts with God. Jesus points the man to the goodness of God, verse 19. As we said, the phrasing that Jesus uses here would have been familiar to a synagogue ruler, because it alludes to The Shema very clearly. Deuteronomy 6:4 "Here oh, Israel, the Lord our God is one."

He's using that same kind of terminology here. Why do you call me good? No one is good except the one, God. So he starts, Jesus starts the conversation with God, and he makes sure this conversation is theologically centered. Factor that in to your evangelism, right? We talked about that last time.

Make sure the conversation starts and ends with God, because God is the gospel and the gospel is all about God. That's what Jesus does. And he points the man to an expression of divine goodness. Here's exhibit A in the goodness of God. It's the revealed holy Law of God, verse 20. Jesus says "You know the commandments. There's no one good but God. But you know the commandments, what do you think of those, good?" "Don't

commit adultery, Don't murder, Don't steal, Don't bear false witness on your father and mother."

What's Jesus doing here, is he preaching salvation by works? Is this a contradiction of all other biblical teaching that says salvation is by the grace of God alone through faith alone and the atoning work of God in Christ alone? No, not at all, may it never be. Jesus is trying to expose and ferret out and draw out this man's experience in practicing the law. He's exposing the man's view of the law. He's exposing really his heart attitudes.

And what is revealed here is a man who has no true vital living acquaintance with God, with his goodness, and with the law. What's revealed is a man here, who is still lost in his sins. A man who truly is needing a savior, but he doesn't really know it. He's not only an unregenerate man, he's an unaffected man. Yeah, he's under no true condition at all, unregenerate, unaffected, no conviction.

What's the experience of a regenerate person with the law? What's your experience with the Old and New Testament of God's

word as a believer? What's your experience as you observe the statutes and the wisdom of God's law, the commandments of God, and rejoice to obey them? You have pure joy, don't you? As a Christian in the word of God. You have contentment, and satisfaction, and nourishment from the life of God, which comes in and through the word of God, and by the power of the Holy Spirit in your life applying that word, and that life to you.

That's what Moses said in Deuteronomy 8:3, man lives, "He lives by every word that comes from the mouth of God." That's how he lives. It's life to him. So studying God's law, meditating on God's law, observing and obeying God's law. We're like kids running through a treasure house and opening treasure chest after treasure chest and finding wisdom and knowledge. And we learn the fear of the Lord.

We behold wondrous things in the law. We're like David in Psalm 19, we find "The law of God revives the soul, gives wisdom to the simple, it rejoices the heart, enlightens the eyes, endures forever." The law of the Lord it is, whether to us or not, it is objectively, and it becomes subjectively "Perfect and complete, certain and sure, right and true, and pure and clean,"



as David said in Psalm 19. And as such, the law contains and teaches and conveys the life of God to the believer. It reveals the manifold goodness of the one true and living God, who alone is good and he's the giver of all good.

So if the rich young ruler had been a regenerate believer, his question about assurance would be answered in his love for God's law. You'd see the evidence of a regenerate life. You'd see the evidence of life within him coming out like fountains of living water. If he had loved God, if he had found God's goodness and what God had already revealed, well, he would have had assurance about his future as well.

If we are experiencing the life of God now, we can have every assurance we will participate in the life of God then as well. And the life of God is found in what? Objective truths of the gospel. Our salvation is based on objective realities, historically, historical facts, truths that exist whether we know them or not. But there's a subjective experience of that life of God in the believer that provides ongoing assurance, we truly know him.

By his response in verse 21, we can see that this man is not regenerated, but he's he affected at all. Does he have any sense of conviction? Is the ruler having any experience of the conviction of sin? Does he sense his spiritual neediness because he knows that he fails to measure up to the law? Does he sense his own, this an old word, but it's a really good word, his naughtiness? Does he sense his depravity? Which is provoked by the law.

Remember the Apostle Paul's testimony of his own experience in this? In Roman 7:7-8? He says, "If it had not been for the law, I would have not known sin." What does he mean by that? "Well, I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, "You shall not covet, but sin seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness." I think many of you kids in here can understand my testimony in this, when I was a kid, and I would walk by and walk down the street, walk down a sidewalk, and I'd see a fence, and there's just a fence there.

And I just walk past it thinking, well, it's just probably a yard or whatever, and I keep walking. But if I came across a

fence that said "No trespassing" come on kids, what does that do in your heart? What are they hiding from me, right? And so you want to climb that fence and you want to go snooping around. And if you're a good kid in here and you don't know anything of what I'm saying, just talk to your parents and they'll say, well, Pastor used to be a very bad kid, but he's been saved.

When we see the sign, thou shalt not, sin takes occasion to say ohh, but I think you shall. That's what Paul is saying here. Does the rich young ruler have a similar sense? Or does he saying he's doing just fine? Verse 21, where he says, and it comes across rather blithely. He's almost, it's almost like he's bored with this little investigation. He's even a bit impatient, Look, "All these things I've kept from my youth." Look, I'm there, Jesus.

In the other gospels, "What do I still lack?" Let's get to the part that I'm after, really. Proverb says, Proverbs 21:2 "Every way of a man is right in his own eyes, but the Lord weighs the heart." And that is what our Lord is doing here. He's weighing the heart of this rich young ruler, and he is exposing

his lack of personal experience with the divine grace of regeneration, his lack of experience with the conviction of sin.

He senses no need whatsoever, and so he does not know God. Jesus starts by pointing the rich young ruler to God, to the goodness of God, revealed in the perfect law, he exposes his sinfulness, his need for salvation. So what now? Well, now Jesus tests whether the man really meant it when he addressed Jesus in the very beginning. "Good teacher," Is he gonna be a good student? Mark says, "And Jesus looking at him, loved him." And then he proceeds to answer his question, which points the way to salvation, which points the way to assurance.