

# Luke 18 (Part 2) • No one is good except God alone

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Luke chapter 18. We're picking it up at verse 18. And it says,

*“And a ruler asked him, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” <sup>19</sup> And Jesus said to him, “Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone. <sup>20</sup> You know the commandments: ‘Do not commit adultery, Do not murder, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Honor your father and mother.’” <sup>21</sup> And he said, “All these I have kept from my youth.” <sup>22</sup> 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.” <sup>23</sup> But when he heard these things, he became very sad, for he was extremely rich.”*

I'd like you to stop there, if you would please, and pray with me.

Heavenly Father, open our hearts to the ministry of Your Holy spirit and Your Word as you speak to us today about what's really important and how easy it is, Lord God, just like this young man who came to You on that day, how easy it is for us to become confused and to misunderstand the things that Your Word has to say, and how we need you to help bring clarity. We ask You to do that today. We ask it in Jesus' name, amen.

I have told you guys many times over the last many years that within the Mosaic covenant of the Old Testament, God never included any promises for eternal life if people kept the Law. I've told you that again and again.

In fact, I went back and listened to one of my old messages in Isaiah, which was done like, I don't know, back in 2006, and I was harping on that same thing. Despite the fact that God never promised in the Old Testament that if you keep the Law, you'll go to heaven, over a period of time, people began to believe that.

Jews began to embrace that very idea that if they kept the Law, they could obtain heaven based on their obedience. And this passage is just one example of Jesus confronting that belief. And what we have here is, as it says in verse 18, a ruler, we know that he was also a very young man. And as far as him being a

ruler, we're not really sure what that meant. He could have been a synagogue ruler. He could have been a civil Jewish official.

We're not really sure, but he had some position, and we know he obviously had wealth, and we're told that he asked Jesus, a question. And this is very important. I want you to pay attention to the language of this question because it tells you a great deal about what this man believed and you know that when anybody ever asks you a question about God or a Bible or whatever, listen to the question. Because you can tell what they believe by their question. They may be asking you, what should I believe? But their question tells you what they already believe. Okay.

What does this guy say? He says, good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life? And there are two standout things in this question to Jesus that tells us what this man already believes. The first thing is good teacher. You'll see, you'll notice he says, or I'm sorry, that's not the first one I wanted to tell you. The first one was, he says what must I do? We'll talk about the good teacher in a moment. He says, what must I do? What must I do? That tells you a lot because it assumes, the question assumes, there is something I can do to obtain eternal life, right? And that's a very important part of what we see in this man.

And then the second thing is how he refers to Jesus. "*Good Teacher.*" And we don't really need to go any further than that to understand what this man believed about human beings. He believed that men could be good enough, good enough. He says, good teacher," and that is exactly why Jesus responded the way He did, and He's going to address that issue. But the belief of this young man that I can not only be good, but I can be good enough. This is a very popular belief.

People still believe it today because it puts us in a favorable light, right? And who doesn't want to be put into a favorable light? I sure do. He asks this question, and He says, what do I need to do to be good enough? I believe that I can be good. And we know that because he calls Jesus good, not even knowing that he is God. He calls him "*Good Teacher.*" Notice he doesn't call him Lord or anything like that. He says, "*Good Teacher.*" He just sees him as a teacher. But he says, Since I'm calling you "*Good Teacher*" that tells you I believe people can be good.

And here's the problem with that. We're not talking about goodness in relation to other men because what this young man is asking Jesus is, what do I need to do to have eternal life? That puts it this conversation into a whole new realm. We're not talking about goodness between men. We're talking about goodness,

from man to God. What do I need to do to be able to obtain eternal life? And that's why Jesus expresses what He says in the very next verse. Look at verse 9 with me. Note: this is verse 18.

*"....Jesus said to him. Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone."*

And I want you to focus on the last part of that statement. "No one is good except God alone." No one is good except God alone. Let me just let that sink in for a little bit. No one is good except God alone. We hear that in the Bible and honestly, we don't really completely believe it. Nobody is good except God alone. Now don't throw anything at me. I didn't say it. Jesus did. No one is good, He said, except God and He alone is good.

Let's investigate what He's saying here for a little bit. Because this is a statement that man has grappled with for a long, long time. And in what is perhaps the oldest book of the Bible, the book of Job, as far as when it was actually written, we have an interesting question. Let me put this up on the screen for you from Job chapter 25, verse 4.

**Job 25:4 (ESV)**

*How then can man be in the right before God? How can he who is born of woman be pure?*

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And there it is. That's the question you guys, that's the question of a lifetime. That's the question that every human being should grapple with and frankly, in fact, I'll say it's the biggest and most important question that you'll ever ask. How can I be right before God? How can I be right with God? And believe me when I say people have answered it in many ways over the years. Many groups have come along and attempted to answer that very question.

Now, the Jews eventually, came to a place of answering that question by saying you can be right before God by keeping the Law. You have to keep the Law and then you can be right before God. And technically speaking, they were right from the standpoint that if you could keep the Law, you could be right before God. If you could keep it perfectly. Because anyone who could do that would be right before God.

But where they went wrong was believing that that sort of a thing was actually attainable. That's where they messed up. You see, God tried to tell them over and over again throughout the Scriptures that it wasn't possible to perfectly keep the Law, but they weren't listening. Let me show you one of the passages from Isaiah where he mentioned this.

**Isaiah 64:6 (ESV)**

*We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment. We all fade like a leaf and our iniquities like the wind take us away.*

*We have all become like one who is unclean, (meaning unacceptable) and all our righteous deeds (That means the best things that you and I can do) are like a polluted garment. We all fade like a leaf and our iniquities like the wind take us away.*

And this is one of many passages in the Old Testament where God, through the prophetic writers, declared the fact that the best possible righteousness that we can produce is not good enough. As Isaiah says here, it's alongside God. It's like a polluted garment. This whole idea becomes developed further in the New Testament with passages such as this one from James chapter two.

**James 2:10 (ESV)**

*For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it.*

*For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it.*

And this is the part that people don't understand. They'll say I can keep the Law. No, wait a minute. You don't understand. You've got to keep every single bit of it. If you fail in one single area of the law, you failed at all of it. And that's the point, you know. And then we have to ask ourselves well, then what is the conclusion about what we're saying here? Well Paul gives us the conclusion in the Book of Romans. So beautifully, as he says in Romans 3:20,

**Romans 3:20 (ESV)**

*For by works of the law, no human being will be justified in his sight. Since through the law, we become the law comes knowledge of sin.*

*For by works of the law, no human being will be justified in his sight. Since through the law, we become the law comes knowledge of sin.*

This entire conversation brings us to the same conclusion that Jesus gave to this young man. No one is good except God alone. No one is good. No one is good except God alone. Unfortunately, that was a conclusion that most of the Jews, and I've noticed a lot of people today, simply aren't willing to entertain. You can say it all day long. And frankly, if this young man who was talking to Jesus was even listening to what Jesus said in that statement, he would have realized he already had his answer, and it was useless to go on and carry on the conversation any further.

Because Jesus had just got done saying, no one is good except God alone, and what He was saying is, there's nothing you can do. There's nothing you can do. There's nothing you can do to obtain eternal life. Remember, that was the young man's question. What must I do to gain eternal life? And Jesus comes back, and He says, you do know that there's no one good except God, right? That's the answer to the question. There's nothing you can do because you're not good and you can't be good enough, you see.

But the man wasn't listening, and so, the conversation had to go on further and Jesus was willing to engage him further even though he didn't understand the first thing that Jesus had said. So, what does Jesus go on to do? Look at verse 20. He goes on to engage him on the legalistic path that this man is already on. He says,

*“Well, you know the commandments, do not commit adultery, do not murder, do not steal, don't bear false witness, honor your father and mother.”*

He starts reciting these commandments, and He's basically, He's basically telling him, well, this is what you believe, right? And essentially, again, technically, if you could keep the Law, you could earn your way to heaven. Problem is, you can't. Nobody can. Because if you fail in even one area, you failed at all of it, James says. Right?

He starts reciting the commandments, and he's telling this man, and opening up his understanding to what he should have known all along from studying the Hebrew Scriptures, because as a young Jewish man, he would have known the Scriptures.

And he should have known, he should have known from learning all those years that the Law is a reflection of God's holiness. And as such, it makes us aware of

the fact that God is holy and we are not. And if a man were to earn his own way to heaven, this is what he would have to do. And he would have to do it perfectly. And the next statement that this young man says in response to these commandments is probably the most telling thing that comes out of his mouth.

Look with me in verse 21 in your Bible. You've got to love this man. *"And he said, all these I've kept from my youth."* This young man actually believed that he had kept all these commandments from his youth. He really believed it. And this is where the Jews were during the time when Jesus walked the earth. They were in that place of believing that they could do this. And this young man just, can you imagine being face to face with God in human flesh and saying, I've kept the Law.

And Jesus could have said at that moment, no, you haven't, sort of a thing. And the ground opens up and swallows him where he stands and he goes, all right, onto the next thing, or whatever, but we find out from another Gospel account that it says, *"Jesus looked at the men and loved him."* Isn't that amazing? You just get done saying something that is so boldly arrogant to the God of all creation, as if to say, He gives you His law, which is this reflection of His perfection and His holiness and His righteousness and you look Him in the eye and you go, I've done that.

And I'm surprised the man lived to say another word. Now, we know from Matthew's account of this conversation that Jesus actually cited one other commandment when He was telling this man, here's what you need to do. Let me put it up on the screen for you. Matthew 19:19, the second part of that verse, it says,

**Mathew 19:19b (ESV)**

*You shall love your neighbors yourself.*

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That one got thrown in in Matthew's account. And in Matthew, the young man gave the very same response. Check this out,

**Mathew 19:20 (ESV)**

*The young man said to him, "All these I have kept. What do I still lack?"*

*The young man said to him, "All these I have kept. (And yet he was aware of a lack in his life. So, he said) What do I still lack?"*

And that's, see that's the problem with trying to earn your way to heaven by keeping rules. You never really know if you got there. He believed in his heart that he had kept all of the commands of God, and he still didn't have an assurance. He still wasn't sure he was going to make it, and so he had to ask, what do I need to do? I've done all that. What do I still lack? See that's where legalism gets you. Nowhere.

It gets you to absolutely no place of assurance, ever, because you're never sure if you did I do it or did I do it all the way? Did I do it the way you wanted me to do it? And so on, and so on. Now, the reason I showed you the commandment that is recorded in Matthew about loving your neighbor as yourself is because in the next seconds that Jesus converses with this young man, He so masterfully shows him that he has not kept the commandments. And He proves it to him by challenging him to keep a commandment right then right there. Check this out. Verse 22 in your Bible. Look with me there.

*“When Jesus heard this, (what did he hear? He heard the young man basically saying, I've done all this.) He said to him, one thing you still lack. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor and you'll have treasure in heaven and come follow me. But when he heard these things, he became very sad. (And then we're told why) for he was extremely rich.”*

What is Jesus doing here? He's basically challenging him to put up or shut up in a crude sort of a way. He's basically he just said to the man, okay, here's the commandments dah, dah dah.... Oh, and love your neighbor as yourself. And the man said, I've done all that. Okay, then do this. And what he does in the next few seconds is He challenges him to love his neighbor as himself. Because you see, if you really truly loved your neighbor as yourself, it wouldn't be any big deal at all to take everything you've got and sell it and give the money to the poor because you love your neighbor the same as you love yourself, right?

No big deal! But the man was like, I can't do that. He didn't say those words, but you know what's going on. He went away very sad, and we have to ask ourselves the question, why was he sad? You know, honestly, we don't know for sure. We hope that he was broken by the reality of what Jesus had just shown him. We hope that he was sad because he had just been confronted with the purity of God's commands and the realization that he didn't measure up to them. We hope that's why he was sad. But we don't know. But that's why the Law was given.

We saw it earlier in Romans when the apostle Paul wrote this, let me put this back up on the screen. Romans 3:20,

### **Romans 3:20 (ESV)**

*For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.*

*For by works of the law, no human being will be justified in his sight. (Look at the last part) Since through the law comes knowledge of sin.*

In other words, as the NIV says, “*through the law, we become conscious of sin.*”

That's why we hope he was sad by being confronted by the purity of the Law and his inability to attain to it, because that's what the Law was given for. It was to make you and I aware of the fact, I can't do this. That's why God gave the Law. He gave this standard that was far beyond what any of us could possibly attain to in order to make us realize, I can't do this. I'm not, I'm not only not good, I'm not good enough to reach or to attain to the standard of God's righteousness.

And that's what the Law is meant to cause in all of us to happen. So, getting back to the question that was posed by the young man in the first place, what must we do to inherit eternal life? Let's keep reading in the passage just for a second. Verse 24, look with me in your Bible.

*“Jesus, seeing that he had become sad, said, “How difficult it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God! <sup>25</sup> 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.”*

And as soon as He said that it was just like, Oh, I'm sure in a lot of people's hearts and minds, by the way, the Greek word here for needle is the typical one used for a needle that you would sew garments with. All right? So, Jesus is basically using an exaggerated illustration to make the point that heaven is a virtual impossibility for us, and that's the reason why the people responded the way they did. Look at verse 26.

*“Those who heard it said then who can be saved?”*

Stop there, please. Just for a moment. Give me your attention. This is very important. You guys remember that I told you that it was a very common belief for the Jews at that time, that if a person had wealth, it meant that they were under the Lord's blessing. Do you remember me saying that? So the Jews were under that idea. If you have money, you are obviously a blessed by God person.



And now here's Jesus contradicting that belief by basically saying that wealth is an impediment to salvation, to the point where He has to use this exaggerated illustration that it's easier for a camel to get through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of heaven. And the Jews are thinking, good grief! If those who have God's blessing find it difficult to get to heaven as difficult as a camel going through the eye of a needle, how hard is it for those who are not under His blessing, which would be all the rest of us, I suppose, because none of us think we're rich.

How is it then they're like then who can be saved? If those who are blessed by God, it's that hard, who can be saved? And then I love Jesus' response. Look at verse 27. Very important.

(But he said) *"Jesus replied, 'What is impossible with man is possible with God.'"*

If that isn't highlighted or underlined in your Bible, it ought to be because what Jesus is basically saying there is, God's grace is sufficient. God's grace is sufficient. What's impossible for you, is possible with God. Because you see, Jesus is not saying that wealthy people can't be saved. And you've got to be careful not to believe that because the Bible is full of wealthy people that were very godly. Abraham was filthy rich, and so was his son, Isaac, and so was his grandson, Jacob.

And there were a lot of other really wealthy people who were very godly individuals. King David, who wrote a good part of the book of Psalms, was a very godly man. The Lord himself said, a man after his own heart, and he was very wealthy. So obviously we're not saying that a wealthy person can't be saved. But think about those men, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David, and many of the other people in the Bible. What's the difference? What made the difference with those men? Well, the key was they put their trust in God and not in their riches. Did you hear me? They put their trust in God and not in their riches.

And it was that trust. It was that faith that made the impossible possible. Guys it is always faith that makes the impossible possible. I've talked to a lot of people over the years who have expressed to me what they believe to be the impossibility of their salvation. I've actually had people say to me, I don't believe that God could ever love me or forgive me. And when I start to ask them questions, why, they'll say it usually comes, it's not because they have a lot of money because I don't think any of them ever did, but it was a matter of their own sin.

And they would say things like. Pastor, if you knew what I've done in my life, or if you know the sins that I've committed, I just don't believe there's ever a place that God could forgive me, and love me, and embrace me, or whatever, because my life has just been such a train wreck. But the answer for those people who say that is the same answer that needs to be given to that rich young man that came and talked to Jesus here in Luke 18. And that is this. No one is good except God alone.

If anybody ever says to you, I don't think there's any way that God could ever love me or forgive me just say this. You do know that no one is good except God, right? That's what Jesus said to the young man, and it applies very much to anybody who thinks that somehow, it's my effort that's going to make the difference. And you've got to say, wait just a second. Hold the phone. You do know you're not good, right? And you do know you're not good enough, right? So what are you doing making it all about your effort, or the life that you've lived?

Nobody is good except God alone. But knowing that you were not good enough, and by the way, that's another thing I love to say to people. You do know that when you were born, God knew that you weren't good enough even then. When I was born, God knew that I wasn't good enough to be saved, but knowing that, He still made a way for us to be saved. That's the crazy thing. He knew we weren't good enough. He knew there was no way for us to be saved on our own merit or our own effort so, He made a way and we're all going, what is the way? John 14:6. I love this. Jesus said,

**John 14:6 (ESV)**

*Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."*

*Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. (And) No one (No one) comes to the Father except through me."*

That's the only way. You want to know the way to be saved? Look no further than Jesus. Stop looking to yourself. Stop looking at your sins. Stop looking at your own personal effort and start looking to Him who is the way. For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believed in Him and received what He did on the cross when He died for our sins. And He said that they would be completely forgiven of everything they've ever done, and receive eternal life. You see, the impossibility of our own effort to save us is one of the reasons why Paul wrote what he did in Ephesians chapter 2. Let me show you this,

**Ephesians 2:8-9 (ESV)**

*...by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.*

*...by grace you have been saved through faith. (And he makes a very clear point of it by saying) And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.*

I always love to quote this passage around Christmas time. Because this is the time when we give and receive gifts to one another, and we do it because Christmas is all about gift giving, and it's all about the greatest gift we've been given, and mankind has ever been given in the person of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, born of a virgin, that He might be grow up and die for us on a cross. Best gift I've ever gotten hands down.

But you know what's interesting, and it's a reminder every Christmas, that every single package under the tree that has my name on it, I didn't pay a red cent for those things. I didn't pay it, and you know what? After I open them up, nobody's going to ask me to pay for them. That's what makes them a gift. If we can put that passage back up on the screen for just a moment,

**Ephesians 2:8-9 (ESV)**

*...by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.*

I want to remind you the fact that Paul said that your salvation is the gift of God. If you had to pay one red cent for your salvation, it is not a gift. But he said it's a gift not of you but of Him. Wow! You know that was the message the rich young ruler needed to hear. What must I do to inherit eternal life? You don't understand young man. You asked the wrong question. You don't come to God and say what must I do? You come to God and say, thank you for what you did.

Thank you, Lord for what you did when you gave your life on the cross. I accept it, I receive it. Can you imagine one of your Christmas presents sitting under the tree unwrapped, and it just stays that way? Can you imagine that? I mean, I can't. I mean, I love getting gifts, I'm just going to be honest with you. And you know what? I'm 62 years old and I think I get just as excited as I did when I was 2 years old, or 6 or 8 or 12 or whatever.

And when we're all done, I always think the same thing. Is that it? Aren't we horrible? And don't think you don't do it either because I know you do, but I love getting, giving, and receiving gifts, but I can't imagine what it would be like to leave one unopened, and how cool is it when you're like, everybody you think you're all done and then somebody goes, oh, there's another gift under the tree. We missed this one.

It's to Paul and I'm like, oh. That's the outside thing, and on the inside, I'm going Yes! Yes! And I love that thing! Open that gift up! Do you know that it's possible to take the gift of eternal life and leave it wrapped and unopened? And what a tragedy that is. God gave the greatest gift that you will ever give, and some people leave it unwrapped because they're either trying to do it on their own, they're trying to be good enough.

I've just got to be a good Christian, and they've got their teeth gritted and they're trying hard to be good. You're going to give yourself an aneurysm, let me tell you right now. Trust God to do a work in you. Trust the Lord. Trust Him for the whole shooting match. He sent His Son to die for you on the cross. Accept it. Believe it. It's a gift.

It's a gift. How do we know salvation can't be earned? Because it's a gift. Says it right there in the Word. It's a gift. Gifts aren't purchased by the receiver. They're purchased by the giver. And He bought that gift with His own blood. Here's the big question of the year, of your lifetime. Have you opened that package? Have you opened that package and unwrapped it? And have you received it? Have you received it? Thank You, Lord. I accept that.