

Luke 18:15-30 – What must I do to inherit eternal life?

1. The dilemma of the human condition – Good or bad, naughty or nice?

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We've witnessed both incredible acts of creativity, and yet also, appalling acts of criminality
And as we reflect on what it means to be human,
We reflection on the dilemma of the human condition – are we good or bad? Naughty or nice?
Are humans essentially good or are humans essentially rotten to the core?

And so, when this rich ruler comes to Jesus, there is the question behind the question.
For the rich ruler comes to Jesus with the question –“What must I do to inherit eternal life?”
But the question behind the question is – “How good am I?”
- “Am I good enough to make the grade with God?”

And I think that's a question that we often ask of ourselves:

“When I meet my maker,
when my life is being weighed on the cosmic scales of justice,
Am I going to be acquitted or am I going to be found guilty?”
“Am I inherently good, or am I bad to the bone?”
“Or what am I? I hope I make it across the line?”

2. The wrong estimation of self: The rich ruler (vv. 18-23)

Well, let's briefly read, of when the rich ruler comes to Jesus. << read vv. 18-20>>

The rich ruler comes to Jesus with a seemingly earnest question.

- "What must I do to inherit eternal life?"

Now, I think we can jump too easily to the pointy end of the question,
without appreciating the surrounding background.

The facts are: i) This man is rich, v. 23 – "extremely rich", this guy belongs in the BRW top 50.

ii) That this man is a ruler, specifically not a religious leader, not a Pharisee,
but an upstanding member of the Jewish community.

iii) That when this rich ruler asks this question,
he stands as one of God's own people,
a Jew, someone on the inside, on the right track,
I mean, God has already blessed him with wealth.

iv) And so this question is a kind of sealing the deal kind of question.
It's the kind of, "I expect to pass Go and Collect \$200".
He wants Jesus to give him the "100% certified tick of approval".

- The rich ruler's assessment: "All these I have kept from my youth" (v. 21)

Even more, when it comes to God,

v. 21 – He's kept the 10 commandments, well, at least all the ones Jesus asks of him.

And I'm sure as Jesus is listing off the commandments,

The rich ruler is mentally ticking them off.

"Yep, haven't been unfaithful.

Yep, haven't topped anyone. No hitman for hire. Yep, good on the 5 finger discount.

And even, on the false witness, I'm no liar. Oh, and big tick from the parental units.

The richer ruler's assessment of himself is well – I'm awesome.

- Jesus' verdict: "One thing you still lack" (v. 22)

Everything is going according to the Rich Ruler's plan.

Found the wisest, most profound teacher in the area, get the thumbs up from them,

And hey presto, my ticket to heaven is guaranteed.

But hold the phone, Jesus delivers a huge showstopper in v. 22, with 5 words. << vv. 21-22>>

"One thing you still lack". One thing that unhinges all his plans.

One thing that brings all his spiritual certainty crashing down around him.

Rather than a certificate of approval from Jesus, the rich ruler get a big “F” Fail.
Because the rich ruler can not give up his wealth,
Oh, and by the way, notice that Jesus skipped the 2nd commandment in his list,
“You shall have no other gods before me”.

The one small thing means everything.
The problem is not that the ruler is exceedingly rich.
The problem is that when he’s pushed on his priorities,
when he has to choose between God and riches,
he chose his wealth, rather than following Jesus.

The one small thing means everything.

<< Appl’n – The difference between what we can live with, and what we can’t live without.
- I got the question that all parents dread – “Can I have a mobile phone?”
- Living without the internet & mobile technology - nomophobia>>

Jesus bursts the bubble for the rich ruler,
By showing the difference between what he can live with,
And what he can’t live without.

You see, he can live with the obeying the 10 commandments, being an upright person, etc.
But he can’t live without his wealth.

The rich ruler comes to Jesus, with the wrong estimation of himself.
The rich ruler’s certainty comes crashing down around him.
He leaves Jesus ‘sad’ at the prospect of leaving his wealth behind.
But notice also Jesus is saddened by the rich ruler not being able to give up his wealth.

3. The question of self-sacrifice: The disciples (vv. 24-30)

Now,

If you think of all the prime candidates for the A-reserve seat in heaven, this guy is up there.

And if this rich ruler, this prime spiritual specimen doesn't make the grade,

Then there's a very important question that follows. v. 26. << read v. 26-27 >>

- Turning Point: "Then who can be saved?" (v. 26)

I'm sure, at this point, Jesus close followers, the disciples, are thinking,

"What on earth are you talking about, Jesus?"

"What is possible for God, and not possible for man?" "Huh?"

Jesus explains further in v. 31-33. << read v. 31-33 >>

Let's pause for a moment and line up the facts.

- i) The rich ruler, the prime example of someone who should get the golden ticket, fails
- ii) Jesus states – what is impossible for man is possible for God.
- iii) Jesus explains – God's plan is for me to be mocked, flogged, killed, and then to rise.

The impossibility of man entering heaven, becomes possible because of God's plan.

God's plan is to offer up his own Son, in our place, so that we can enter heaven.

4. The right estimation of self: The little children (vv. 15-17)

So what is the paradigm for relating to God? How should we stand before Our maker?

The answer comes from the smallest, littlest, most powerless characters in this episode.<vv. 15-17>

- Disciples assessment: Rebuke the children-bearers (v. 15)

Here, the disciples are trying to do the right thing.

The disciples are acting like the security protection detail for their A-list celebrity.

Here, the disciples are trying to protect Jesus, because he's got important matters to attend.

Surely, there's someone he might need to heal, there's a crowd to teach,

There's a hostile opposition that he needs to confront,

So, little children just be on your way.

- Jesus' verdict: "Let the children come to me"

But Jesus does the opposite. Jesus wants the children to come to him.

Jesus emphasises the point by saying it in the positive and the negative –

"let them come, don't stop them"

For Jesus knows that the priority listing in God's kingdom is the opposite to this world.

These helpless little ones, are the honoured guests in God's kingdom,

And the rich ruler, well, he's not even on the invitation list.

And Jesus is clearly making the point –

unless you come to God like a child, in simple dependent trust

unless you follow Jesus like a child, with nothing to contribute yourself,

then your name won't even be on the invitation list.

These little children show us the way. **Simple dependent trust in Jesus.**

5. What does Jesus think of us?

Well, I want to finish with an important question.

The question is not about humanity out there, but rather, the 'in here' kind of question.

And the question is not – what do you think of yourselves? How would you rate you?

The far more important question is this – what does Jesus think of you?

What does Jesus think of you? In your heart of hearts, in your true identity,

Does Jesus think of you, like the rich ruler,

as someone who is unwilling to shift from his wealth?

As someone unwilling to shift from the one thing you cannot give up?

Will Jesus be saddened that you have gained the whole world in material possessions,

And yet you have forfeited your soul for eternity?

Or does Jesus think of you, like the disciples,

As someone who willingly gave up their own to follow him?

Does Jesus greet you those words of comfort – you will receive eternal life?

You see, ultimately, Jesus is the one who freely and willingly gave up his own life,

Jesus willingly went to the cross and died

To restore our broken relationship with God.

And therefore Jesus demands our total allegiance, our total loyalty, our total obedience.

Jesus demands that we come to him, as a little child – in total dependence on him.

And so really, does Jesus see you, as one of his little children?

Let's pray.