

Becoming a Believer and Entering the Kingdom of God

Luke 18:15-30

*Luke 18:15-30: Then they also brought infants to Him that He might touch them; but when the disciples saw it, they rebuked them. **16** But Jesus called them to Him and said, "Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God. **17** Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it." **18** Now a certain ruler asked Him, saying, "Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" **19** So Jesus said to him, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God. **20** You know the commandments: 'Do not commit adultery,' 'Do not murder,' 'Do not steal,' 'Do not bear false witness,' 'Honor your father and your mother.'" **21** And he said, "All these things I have kept from my youth." **22** So when Jesus heard these things, He said to him, "You still lack one thing. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me." **23** But when he heard this, he became very sorrowful, for he was very rich. **24** And when Jesus saw that he became very sorrowful, He said, "How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God! **25** For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." **26** And those who heard it said, "Who then can be saved?" **27** But He said, "The things which are impossible with men are possible with God." **28** Then Peter said, "See, we have left all and followed You." **29** So He said to them, "Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or parents or brothers or wife or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, **30** who shall not receive many times more in this present time, and in the age to come eternal life."*

Background Notes

In this section of Luke 18 the Lord made two statements that have caused confusion, and even some bad interpretations. The first statement is in verse 25: "*For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God.*" In the commentaries, you'll find a number of interpretations for the "eye of a needle" - including a sewing needle, or a narrow mountain path between large rocks, or a small door within a city gate that a camel could pass through only if all the camel bags and merchant wares it was carrying were removed, the camel got down low and was pushed and shoved through the small gate within the large gate.

That last interpretation sounds good, and it makes for some great practical applications, but it's probably not what the Lord had in mind. The Greek word used here is a sewing needle, and it might even refer to a surgeon's sewing needle that Dr. Luke would have been familiar with. The idea of a camel going through the eye of a sewing needle was a proverbial expression describing a very difficult, if not impossible, task.

The other statement that needs some explanation is the mention of “wife” in verse 29 where Jesus said, *“Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or parents or brothers or wife or children, for the sake of the Kingdom of God, who shall not receive many times more in this present time, and in the age to come eternal life.”* A few years ago I was at a Bible study where we were looking at the parallel account in Mark, where the word “wife” is not mentioned. A Christian brother said, “I’m sure glad it doesn’t say leave your wife!” He was a little shaken when he was shown that the account in Luke *does* include the word “wife”! But no problem - the Lord did not mean to divorce or to forsake your wife! That would certainly contradict the teaching of the rest of Scripture. Ephesians 5:25, for example, says, *“Husbands, love your wives just as Christ also loved the Church and gave Himself for her.”*

What the Lord had in mind here is our **priorities**. The Lord must be Number One in our lives, and that may involve giving up the comforts of home – in fact, it may involve giving up marriage altogether. And if you are married, it may involve extended periods of time away from home, as in the case of the disciples who were traveling with our Lord at the time He gave this exhortation.

Doctrinal Points

1. Becoming a believer involves becoming like a little child.

In that culture, it was typical to bring young children to a rabbi for his blessing. When parents began bringing babies to the Lord for His blessing, the disciples tried to prevent this time-consuming practice, because they thought the Lord was too busy. But the Lord said, “Let the little children come to me and do not forbid them for of such is the Kingdom of God”(v16). By the way, this verse supports the doctrine that babies who die go to Heaven. They are part of the elect company of believers and part of the Kingdom of God. What else could the Lord have meant by this statement?

This statement certainly demonstrates the Lord’s love for children, and a practical application here is that working with young children as Christian service is a good and very important ministry.

The Lord used this occasion with the children to say, *“Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the Kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it.”* In what ways must we become like little children? In humility, in dependability, and in faith. Did you ever notice that young children will believe everything adults tell them? They are not skeptics. And they come to you knowing that they need your help. They are humble and dependent. Our three-year old grandson is always telling us about the things he’ll do when he gets bigger. He realizes that right now he needs our help and instruction, and he’s not too proud to ask us for our help! In the same way, becoming a believer and entering the Kingdom of God involves child-like humility, dependence and faith. Becoming a believer involves becoming like a little child.

2. Becoming a believer involves becoming like a poor person.

Verses 18-30 give us the account of the rich young ruler. This account is also found in Matthew 19 and Mark 10. In Matthew's Gospel we learn that this man was young. Here in Luke's account, we learn that he was a ruler. He was probably an official in the synagogue, but perhaps a member of the Sanhedrin, the ruling body of the Jews. In any case, this young man had everything going for him. He was a ruler, so he had power. He had money; he was rich. And he was young, with his entire life ahead of him, so he had time to enjoy his wealth and power.

Not only that, he was a good man. He told the Lord that he had kept all the Law's commandments that deal with how we should treat our fellow men. He said that he passed the test – and this was probably true. He was a model citizen. He probably contributed out of his wealth to help the poor and needy. But the Lord said to him, *"You still lack one thing. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me"* (v22).

The Lord was not teaching here that a person can earn salvation by good works or by giving money to the poor. **No!** In Ephesians 2:8-9, for example, the Bible makes it very clear that no one can earn salvation by good works. And Titus 3:5 says, *"Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us."*

The Lord was not teaching here that salvation can be achieved by good works. Rather, He was testing this man on how well he had kept the very first commandment – *"Thou shall have no other gods before me."* The rich young man failed this test. In fact, he failed to recognize that Jesus was God! Certainly that is the point of what the Lord said to him in verse 19: *"Why do you call me good? No one is good but One, that is, God."* In other words, Jesus was asking, Are you willing to recognize that I am God?

The man was very sad because he was extremely rich. Money was his "god." Aren't you glad that you're not rich (or would you like to be tested in that area?!)? The man chose his riches rather than God, just as a lot of people choose today. And Jesus said that it's hard for people who have a lot of money to enter the Kingdom, or to be saved. Why? Because money equals power, and clout, and security, and independence. Who needs God when you have money? Again, be glad that you are not rich.

But - praise the Lord! - some rich people will be saved, because things that are impossible with man are possible with God (v27). But any rich people who do enter the Kingdom must not depend on their money in any way for salvation. They must acknowledge their need and their dependence on the Lord for salvation. They must be born again, as the Lord said that unless a person is born again, he cannot see or enter the Kingdom of God (John 3:3). Becoming a believer involves becoming like a poor person.

Practical Application

Enjoy the abundant life - both now and forevermore!

In John 10:10 the Lord Jesus said, *"I have come that they might have life, and might have it more abundantly."* Who's the "they" in that verse? In the context, the "they" are the Lord's sheep. They not only have eternal life - they can have it *abundantly!* The Lord's sheep can enjoy life to the fullest!

That is essentially what the Lord promised here in Luke 18:29-30, in response to Peter's comment about leaving all for the sake of Christ: *"There is no one who has left house or parents or brothers or wife or children, for the sake of the Kingdom of God, who shall not receive many times more in this present time, and in the age to come eternal life."* Those believers who have devoted themselves to the Lord will have a greater capacity to experience and enjoy their new life in Christ, both in Christian fellowship and spiritual blessings now in this life, and in the enjoyment and appreciation of the blessings of heaven forever!

Every believer receives eternal life, but every believer does not experience and enjoy the abundant life *now*. Sadly, they will lose out in heaven as well. It's often been said (and you've probably heard me say it!): "In heaven, everyone's cup of joy will be full - *but there are different sizes of cups!*" ***The size of your cup is determined by your priorities now.*** So let's get our priorities straight and enjoy the abundant life, both now and forevermore!