

“Looking For Eternal Life”

Luke 18:18-30

An interviewer once asked Donald Trump, "What do you think about death? Don't you worry about dying?" Trump said, "No. I'm fatalistic; I protect myself as well as anybody can. I prepare for things." But as Trump started walking away, he hesitated for a moment. "No," he said finally, "I don't believe in reincarnation, heaven or hell--but we go someplace." Again a pause, "Do you know," he added, "I cannot, for the life of me, figure out where." Like he has for every other human being God has put eternity in Donald Trump's heart. Even though he can't explain it he knows it's there.

Many people in our world are like Mr. Trump except they don't have the billions of dollars he has! He's lost and he doesn't know it. He's lost in sin and doesn't realize it because he's having the time of his life. His money gives him power to have things “his way.”

Whether we want to admit it or not, we like to think we're in control of our lives. But in reality, either sin controls us or the Lord controls us. I know, we'd like to think there's a third way; a middle of the road approach. But there isn't. We're either walking with the Lord or with the evil one! Jesus made it very clear that no one can serve two masters.

In Luke chapter 18 verses 18 to 30 we have the account of a rich man who came to Jesus with a question. This man is described as being very wealthy; but something was missing, something wasn't quite right and he knew it.

As we examine this portion of Scripture we'll see clearly that this man was “Looking for Eternal Life.” So listen carefully as I read **Luke 18:18 to 30**.

When someone is looking for eternal life, he or she must look in the right place. In this text Jesus' interaction with those around Him reveals several critical DIRECTIONS one must look in order to find eternal life.

The First DIRECTION is,

The Upward Look

The parables Jesus gave in the opening verses of chapter 18 are unique to Luke's Gospel. But the verses of our text record an incident found in the other Gospels. By reading the accounts of Matthew and Mark we gain additional insight into this interaction.

Matthew records this was a young man. Luke tells us he was a ruler; most likely of a local synagogue. Mark tells us he came running to Jesus and knelt before him; and each of the Synoptic Gospels tells us he was very rich. So he's often referred to as "the rich, young ruler."

This incident takes place while Jesus was "in the way" or on the road. Remember, He is traveling to Jerusalem for Passover and the way or road is probably crowded with travelers all heading the same direction. Given the position and status of this young man his actions are noteworthy. These details give us a sense of the young ruler's sincerity.

This young man, so blessed in every conceivable way, still had a sense of something lacking in his life. He wanted to know how to secure eternal life. It was the most important question he could ask; and it's the most important question you and I can ask. He was so in earnest that he came running to Jesus (not very dignified for a man of his position), and knelt before Him (a gesture of submission and humility). Something he'd heard about Jesus must've convinced him he could find an answer to his burning question.

Now, when you're kneeling in front of someone and you want to address them, what must you do? You must look up! Ah, the upward look. It's the first direction you and I must look in our quest for eternal life. Like this young ruler you and I will never secure eternal life unless we're willing to look up – above ourselves, our possessions, our status, or whatever – to the face of Jesus.

But there's more to the upward look than lifting our eyes. Our understanding needs to be lifted too; just like this man's. He addressed Jesus as "Good Master." Scholars tell us there's no other recorded instance of anyone ever addressing a rabbi as "good." The very strangeness of his address amplifies his sincerity and leads to further instruction.

Jesus asked him, "*Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone.*" The rabbis had a saying, "There is nothing else that is good but the law." In their understanding, a man's obedience to the law would lead to acceptance with God. This man, at least in his mind, obeyed the law conscientiously yet still sensed a lack of assurance of eternal life.

Jesus came to fulfill the law for us. He's asking the young man whether or not he understands who Jesus really is. This is a critical question in the upward look. So Jesus' question is this; "if you call me good and God alone is good, are you recognizing that I am God in the flesh?" As we'll see, the young man's response gave Jesus the answer to His question.

Notice that though the young ruler addresses Jesus with great respect, his focus was on himself. "By DOING what shall I inherit eternal life?" The "doing" is emphasized in the original text. To be fair, his understanding was like many of his peers. The rabbis taught that eternal life could be secured by one particularly righteous act! He evidently thought that Jesus could tell him what that act was.

Sadly, there are many people today who think they can earn God's approval; by the things they do or the things they don't do. And just like this ruler they must take the upward look; they must be confronted with the claims of Jesus' deity. And in order to do that Jesus turns the young ruler's gaze in another direction.

The Next DIRECTION is,

The Inward Look

Jesus, knowing this young man's life, responds to his question by asking him about the commandments. If indeed one believes it possible to obtain eternal life by "doing" something, that something must be to obey the commandments.

Jesus leads the young ruler quickly through the second table of commandments. I can almost visualize the thoughts of the young man as he ran through that checklist. With little or no hesitation he says "*Master, I've kept all these from my youth. What do I still lack?*"

Here we get a glimpse into the young man's heart. Even in his sincerity something told him keeping the commandments was too easy a way to attain heaven. There must be something greater, something more demanding; so he came to Jesus to inquire about what that was.

The young ruler's answer to Jesus' question was plausible when viewed from a human perspective. In Philippians 3:6 the apostle Paul says he was, "blameless according to the righteousness which was in the law." But once God's righteousness sheds its light on our human condition, our covering is about as sufficient as Adam and Eve's fig leaves!

As Jesus looked on him and listened to his quick response, His heart was moved with compassion. Then Jesus answered the crucial question, “what do I yet lack?” He takes the young man to the tenth commandment, given in the negative, “*thou shalt not covet.*” As He so often did in teaching about His kingdom He reveals the positive aspect of the command. The opposite of covetousness is generosity; it loves your neighbor as you love yourself!

So Jesus said “*here’s what you lack. Sell all you have, distribute it to the poor and you will have treasure in Heaven; then, come, follow me.*”

And the young man turned away with great sorrow; because he was very rich. Despite his best attempts at keeping the commandments, he had violated both the first (no other gods before me) and the tenth commandment. Scripture is clear; those who would gain God’s approval by keeping the law must keep it perfectly. No mere human being has ever been able to do that.

Let’s not make the mistake of concluding Jesus is teaching salvation by works. No, No. If this man would’ve obeyed Jesus’ instruction it would’ve had to come from a changed heart! It would’ve come from his new understanding that Jesus was God in the flesh; and that as God He had the authority to command obedience from those who claim to be His followers.

The young man heard Jesus’ words and turned away sorrowfully. He knew what must be done but couldn’t bring himself to do it. His choice proved that he placed more value on his wealth than on eternal life. Jesus understood this young man’s identity was his wealth. He was unwilling to exchange it for the identity of being a Jesus-follower.

Earlier, Jesus questioned why the young man had called him good. Did he truly see Jesus as God? The answer is obvious by his refusal to surrender to Jesus. If you and I refuse to surrender to Jesus, our Good Master, we too reject Him as God the Son.

Every genuine follower of Jesus must come to a crisis point similar to this rich young man. It may not be your wealth Jesus asks for; maybe you don’t have much. It may be your reputation, or a relationship, your education, a career, or a dream you have for the future. In my own experience it has been relationships, employment, and hobbies. Each of these tests was designed by God to reveal the true desires of my heart.

Jesus wants you and me to take that inward look and see if there is anything we prize more highly than eternal life with Him. If and when we find it, Jesus will ask for it. Acknowledging the difficulty of those choices leads us to the next direction;

The Next DIRECTION is,

The Outward Look

As the young ruler turned sorrowfully away, Jesus turned to His disciples and said “With what difficulty those who have riches enter the kingdom of God. It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.” He was urging them to take the outward look, to observe what had just happened and learn from it.

The disciples are shocked! Wealth to them was a symbol of divine favor, of God’s blessing. So if what Jesus said was true, who then can be saved? The idiom of a camel going through the eye of a needle gives the sense of impossibility. But Jesus pointed them onward, upward, and inward by reminding them that, what was impossible by man’s achievement in his own strength, God would work by His divine grace.

Why did Jesus express this reality in such stark terms? Why is it impossible, or nearly so, for the wealthy to enter the kingdom? Well, first, it’s impossible for anyone to enter God’s kingdom on the basis of their good works. Nor can we have the desire to seek God above all else, apart from His grace. But riches are a special impediment because of two tendencies: they reinforce the false concept of self-sufficiency, and they promote a spirit of independence.

In contrast Jesus said those who enter the kingdom must be poor in spirit; that is, they must have an accurate view of their own spiritual bankruptcy. They must understand they have nothing without God and His mercy. Secondly, Jesus taught that meekness was a key characteristic of those who would enter the kingdom. A spirit of meekness is the opposite of the spirit of independence. Jesus said in Matthew 6:24 “You cannot serve God and riches.”

As the Twelve listened to what Jesus said, Peter asked a question. Jesus used Peter’s question as an opportunity to introduce the final direction we must look as we seek eternal life.

The Final DIRECTION is,

The Onward Look

Matthew’s Gospel records Peter as saying, “*see, we have left everything to follow you; what then will we have?*” Peter was looking ahead toward the promised reward; he was taking the onward look. He, with the others had already left everything behind to follow Jesus.

Jesus' words are comforting words, reassuring words. He said *"Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who will not receive many times more in this time, and in the age to come eternal life."* Ah, here is the answer to the young man's question...eternal life! It strikes me that this entire account is bracketed by the importance of this matter - eternal life.

Again, we are not to conclude that leaving family, possessions, etc. will procure for us the favor of God. No ascetic ever entered the kingdom of God on the merits of his self-denial. Instead it's our willingness to accept Jesus as both Savior and Lord that motivates us to dedicate all to Him. It is our understanding that this life is not all there is to human existence.

In Mark's record of this same conversation Jesus says that these blessings will be accompanied by persecutions. But to those who take the onward look, to those who see the goal of eternal life, persecution is not enough to sway them from their path.

My friend, if you and I are looking for eternal life we can only find it by looking in the DIRECTIONS Jesus outlined in this account. There is first the upward look; "looking to Jesus the author and finisher of our faith..." In Him alone is salvation by grace through faith.

There is also the inward look; am I willing to examine my own heart and motivations. Am I willing to evaluate my life in light of Jesus' call to me? Am I willing to lay everything on the altar so I can be His disciple? Are you willing to consider these questions too?

Have I taken the outward look, acknowledging the impossibility of anyone being saved by self-effort? And finally, do I have the onward look? Am I willing to forgo the temporary pleasures of sin and suffer affliction with the people of God? Do I consider bearing reproach for the sake of Christ of greater value than worldly possessions? Do you?

As you reflect on these questions I ask you "have you found eternal life or are you still looking for it?" If you have eternal life, praise God. If you don't have eternal life you will find it only in Jesus Christ.