



“Life’s Greatest Question”  
Luke 18:18-30

**Idea:** The greatest and most important question anyone could ask is how to obtain eternal life.

**Intro:** A pastor was fervently preaching on going to heaven one Sunday evening. He was yelling and pounding the pulpit, and the congregation was amening and hanging on his every word. The pastor asked them, “How many of you would like to go to heaven tonight?” Shouts resounded all around the room, and everyone raised their hands except for a little boy seated in the balcony. He tried again, “How many of you would like to go to heaven?” Again, everyone raised their hands except for the little boy. So, the pastor asked him, “Son, don’t you want to go to heaven?” The little boy replied, “Yeah pastor, someday, but I thought you were gettin’ up a load right now.”

I believe it is safe to say that most everyone wants to go to heaven, but like that little boy, they just do not want to go now. I am reminded of the song Kenny Chesney released back in 2008 entitled “Everyone Wants to Go to Heaven.” That country song is anything but a theological masterpiece, but it conveys many people’s sentiment toward heaven. They know some of what the Bible has to say about it. They have heard about its mansions, streets of gold, and beauty, but they are not ready to let go of what they love and enjoy in this life. So, we must ask what heaven is and if it is worth pursuing.

According to the Apostle Paul, the believer’s *“citizenship is in heaven”* (Phil 3:20), so it is comprised of real people in a real place. He goes on to say, *“...and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself”* (Phil 3:20-21). So, heaven is not just a real people in a real place, it is also with a real Person. Heaven is eternal life with Jesus. The Lord magnifying this truth in His high priestly prayer in John 17:3 says, *“And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.”*

Throughout the Gospel of John, the apostle seems to give *“eternal life”* the prominence that the other writers in the synoptic gospels place on *“kingdom of god.”* The two terms, then, are synonymous, speaking of a people, a place, and a Person. *“Eternal life”* (αἰώνιος ζωὴ) is the very life that God has. It is God’s own kind of life; it is divine life. Therefore, we should be able to see how the adjective “eternal” fits the noun “life,” for God alone exists eternally.

When we talk about heaven, we are talking about eternal life in the kingdom of God. Eternal life is both a present and a future reality for those who have believed on Christ through the gospel (John 17:6-9). However, it is not, and it will not be possessed by everyone. Instead, it will be possessed and experienced only by those who have turned from their sin and found life in Jesus Christ. This is a message that everyone needs to hear and

understand. One day there was a young, rich, and religious man who came to Jesus, asking about this. He asked Jesus life's greatest question. Let's look at it.

Read Luke 18:18-30.

**Inquiry:** The passage that preceded what we just read ended with a jarring declaration. Jesus said, *“Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it”* (Luke 18:17). Encapsulated in this statement is the truth that one's recognition of helplessness coupled with a trusting faith in God is essential to salvation. In contrast, the rich ruler was the opposite of a helpless baby. He was rich, powerful, and affluent. He trusted in those things.

As we read through Luke 18, it seems likely that the man had watched Jesus boldly confront the self-righteous and tenderly bless the little children. He was positively attracted to the Lord as he listened to the teaching on the Kingdom and heard the call to faith. As a result, the rich ruler responded to Jesus. with an impressive question. Now, every person responds to Jesus and the preaching of the gospel. It happens every time the Word of God is taught, and the gospel shared. People will faithfully receive it, or they will treacherously reject it. The rich ruler seems to have been sensitive and open to the gospel. Unlike the Pharisee in Luke 10:15, he was not testing Jesus. He truly wanted to know what to do with what he had heard. His words lead us to believe that while he had meticulously observed the Law, he had found no assurance of eternal life. Therefore, he assumed some additional generous action or great sacrifice would secure his highest good. He was willing to do what was required and pay the price. Afterall, he had the means to do so.

After hearing the question, Jesus engages the man in a gospel conversation. The question was the right thing to ask, and it was the perfect place to begin a spiritual discussion. Many times, the question people ask first when they begin to contemplate eternity is this question: *“What must I do to inherit eternal life.”* This is life's greatest question. Therefore, it is vitally important that we know the correct answer. From this passage, there are five requirements I want you to see in answer to life's greatest question.

Answering it requires you:

**1. Rightly see Jesus.** (vs. 18-19, 27)

The rich ruler refers to Jesus as *“Good Teacher.”* Now, this title does not seem that alarming to us today. We know that Jesus was and is good, but first-century Jews would have never referred to a human being as good. They understood it to be the characteristic of God and reserved exclusively for Him. God's goodness was a persistent motif throughout the Old Testament:

*Oh give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever!* – 1 Chron 16:34

*Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good! Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him!* – Psalm 34:8

God has an exclusive claim on goodness, and no man can make such a claim for himself. So, Jews during Jesus' day did not refer to anyone as good, not even the rabbis. So, when this man calls Him good, Jesus did not deny it. Instead, He used it to lead the man to the logical conclusion of his assumption. If Jesus is truly good, then He is also God. And if He is God, then He is the answer to the man's question. He wants to know if the man himself has come to the point of confessing Jesus as Lord.

Today, if you are seeking the answer to life's greatest question, then it will require you to rightly see Jesus. He is the Good Teacher. He is God. You might feel like a lost cause without any hope in this world. You might feel like you are drowning in your sin, and it seems like no one can pull you to safety. On one level, you are correct. Your sin is killing you. No man or woman can save you, definitely not yourself, but the God-Man can. Jesus told the rich ruler, *“What is impossible with man is possible with God”* (vs. 27).

Answering life's greatest question requires us to rightly see Jesus. He is God the Savior.

## 2. Rightly understand what God requires. (vs. 20-21)

Having pushed the goodness question, Jesus then focused on the insufficient goodness of the rich ruler. He did this by calling him to consider the second half of the Ten Commandments. These laws speak to the social ethics and duties people are to keep. The Lord knew that if the ruler would do some deep reflection here, he would see that he was totally unqualified for the Kingdom he was seeking.

God's standard is holiness. It is perfection. As the perfect and holy God, He is the benchmark by which each person is judged (1 Pet 1:16). Leviticus 20:7 says, "*Consecrate yourselves, therefore, and be holy, for I am the LORD your God.*" Holiness is what humanity was created to reflect as we bear the image and likeness of God (Gen 1:26).

Sadly, sin has broken God's image and replaced God's holiness with sin. Therefore, Paul correctly describes the spiritual condition of each person apart from Christ:

*...None is righteous, no, not one; <sup>11</sup>no one understands; no one seeks for God...<sup>23</sup>for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God...*

– Rom 3:10-11, 23

Today, if you are seeking the answer to life's greatest question, then it will require you to rightly understand what God requires. The rich ruler sincerely believed himself to be good because he professed to have the ability to keep all the commandments. As Jesus will make clear, the man was lacking. He had missed the standard of perfection. Just like the Pharisee in the parable that Jesus had just told, this man's life was being weighed against God's holiness.

Answering life's greatest question requires us to rightly understand what God requires. He is a holy God.

## 3. Rightly know oneself. (vs. 22-23)

I am sure the rich ruler did a quick assessment of his life as Jesus listed those five commandments. He had never committed adultery on his wife, murdered a person, taken something that was not his, wrongfully testified, or dishonored his parents. He probably looked very good and moral to everyone who knew him. His sincerity and confidence, however, were nothing more than moral ignorance.

As you read through the commandments that Jesus listed, do you notice a particular commandment that He left out? Obviously, the first four commandments are missing. These are vertical commandments that deal with how God's people are to live before Him. The last six are horizontal commandments that deal with how God's people are to live with others. Jesus listed commandments 5-9, but He did not list the tenth commandment, which forbids coveting. The man professed to having kept all five of those commandments, but Jesus knew his heart. He saw him for who he was. He was a covetous man, so the Lord went after it.

Read verses 22-23.

The rich man "*became very sad.*" He wanted the eternal life that Jesus offered, but he loved his possessions more than he loved God. His materialism indicated that he did not love his neighbor as he loved himself and therefore was not a keeper of the Law. Simply put, he was not the good man he claimed to be. Like the rich ruler, you and I are not the good people we believe ourselves to be.

Today, if you are seeking the answer to life's greatest question, then it will require you to rightly know oneself. "*None is righteous, no, not one.*"

#### **4. Rightly turn from lesser things.** (vs. 24-26)

Jesus' heart breaks every time a person rejects the free gift of the gospel for the lesser things of the world. We see His compassion for people in His lament. He stated that it is easier for a camel to jump through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to come to Christ. I believe the best way to understand this euphemism is just how it reads. It is meant to illustrate the impossible. So, Jesus is stating categorically that it is impossible for a man or woman who trust in their "riches" to come into the Kingdom of God.

Matthew states that the disciples were "*greatly astonished*" by Jesus' words (Matt 19:25). Mark describes them as being "*amazed*" (Mark 10:24). The disciples are still thinking like the world about many things concerning the Kingdom. They believed the rich to have access and ease to the Kingdom just like they did in everyday life. For them, riches indicated God's pleasure with and affirmation of a person. For this reason, they were astonished and amazed by the idea that rich people have a hard time entering the Kingdom.

The rich ruler loved his possessions more than he loved God. He wanted them more than he wanted eternal life. Jesus' interaction with this man is focused on the man's wealth because that was the thing that possessed his heart. It was his identity, even though he was left wanting something more. The reason he came to Jesus in the first place was to obtain eternal life, which was something his wealth failed to achieve.

Today, if you are seeking the answer to life's greatest question, then it will require that you turn from lesser things. You cannot continue in sin while coming to Jesus. The thing you cling to and refuse to let go of will keep you at a guilty distance from God.

Illust: I have had conversations over the years with people who have heard the gospel and sensed the Lord drawing them to Himself. We have talked through how much Jesus loves them and what He has done for them. They have acknowledged it and shown a desire for it. However, when we began to talk about the need to turn from sin to the Savior, they went away sad. I can vividly remember speaking with a lady once who was in a lesbian relationship and legally married to a lady. She demonstrated a great desire to come to Christ, but she could not bring herself to give up a lesser relationship for the sake of eternal life.

Answering life's greatest question requires us to rightly turn from lesser things.

#### **5. Rightly trust God for the reward.** (vs. 28-30)

Hearing this call to turn from lesser things to Christ, Peter emphasized to the Lord all that the disciples had left for Him. Sometimes people want to throw stones at Peter because he tended to spout off. Here, however, I do not think that is what he is doing. Peter is beginning to understand Jesus' teaching on the Kingdom, and the Lord assures them that no one making this sacrifice will go unrewarded. Jesus' point was that to gain life, you first must lose yours. When a sinner denies himself and forsakes his sin, then he finds the life God created him for and the Kingdom.

There is a reward for God's people both in this life and in eternity (Eph 1:3-14). It is comprised of many things. First and foremost, the reward is Christ Himself. It is a relationship with the God you were created by and for. The reward is also family with the people of God. The reward is freedom from sin. The reward is a royal inheritance. The reward is the presence of God the Spirit.

Today, if you are seeking the answer to life's greatest question, then it will require that you trust God for the reward. He is a good God, and His offer of Himself far outweighs and outpaces anything this world has to offer.

*And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.*

– Heb 11:6

Answering life's greatest question requires us to rightly trust God for the reward.

**Conclusion:** Only one person in all of Luke 18 came to Jesus and went away without a blessing. That sad individual was this rich, young ruler. He refused to deny himself, but he instead trusted in his riches and the lesser things of this world. This story is extremely applicable to us today. You may not see yourself as being rich, but by the world's standards you are. We have so many material things in our lives that compete for preeminence.

How many of you are ready to go to Heaven? I get that you might not want to go today because you want to live out the life God has given you for His glory and the fame of His name. But if today is your day, are you prepared for it? Have you come to a place where you have rightly seen Jesus for who He is, understood God's requirement of holiness, acknowledged your inability to meet that standard, turned from the lesser things of this world, and trusted God for the reward through Jesus Christ? If not, then why not let today be the day of decision for you? Do not allow yourself to come to Jesus only to go away "*very sad.*"