

Luke 18B

- We're picking up again in Chapter 18, so let's review where we let off
 - We had studied through the first 14 verses of the chapter
 - Two parables
 - Widow and the Unrighteous Judge
 - Encouragement to pray and not lose heart
 - Because the Father will bring justice to His elect
 - But the disciples must be prepared to accept that the entire world will not receive the Messiah
 - Rather Jesus' own rejection is but a forerunner for the disciple's own persecution
 - And for the persecution of the church throughout the ages
 - Second parable on the tax collector and Pharisee
 - True faith is based on repentance and a turning toward God for mercy
 - In contrast to the world's false religion of worshipping a God made in our own image
 - A god that favors us because we are deserving of his favor, having earned it through good works
 - This is a false religion, one that leads to hell
 - Already in these opening verses of chapter 18, a pattern has begun to emerge in Luke's narrative
 - There is a recurring topic addressed in these opening verses
 - And it's going to repeat throughout the rest of the chapter
 - And this recurring topic is the nature of faith and its power to bring men into the kingdom

[Luke 18:15](#) ¶ And they were bringing even their babies to Him so that He would touch them, but when the disciples saw it, they *began* rebuking them.

[Luke 18:16](#) But Jesus called for them, saying, “Permit the children to come to Me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.

[Luke 18:17](#) “Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it *at all*.”

- This is an interesting scene, and at first it seems somewhat disconnected from the rest of the chapter
 - It follows the story of the Pharisee and tax collector
 - And it precedes a story of a man asking Jesus how to inherit eternal life
 - But even in those references, you can begin to see the patten again that I mentioned
 - The connecting theme here is the nature of true faith and it’s power to save
 - So what do we learn about faith from these verses and the ones that surround them?
- First, let’s look at the scene Luke describes here
 - First, the scene Luke describes in very brief, but knowing a little about Jewish culture and human nature can help us fill in the gaps
 - From Luke’s text we know that Jesus was in the midst of crowds as He traveled
 - And these crowds were adoring, at least at this point
 - So people were bringing their infants to Jesus to have Him pray over them and lay hands on them
 - The word for babies is *brephos*, which means infants or newborns
 - So Luke emphasizes that these are children who are very young – far too young to understand who Jesus was or what He might do for them

- And this was a tradition in the Jewish culture as it still is today
 - People bring their babies to famous people – the Pope, presidents, Elvis, you name it
 - But here the situation is a little different in that the point of bringing the babies was for a spiritual blessing
 - People often brought their children before rabbis for a blessing
- We can see this more clearly by looking at Matthew’s gospel
 - In Matthew’s gospel it would seem that Jesus addressed this issue of children more than once during His ministry
 - Because there are two separate places where Matthews records similar statements by Jesus
 - In chapter 18 and again in chap 19 of Matt we find Jesus talking about children coming to him
 - For example, in Chap 19 Jesus says

[Matt. 19:13](#) ¶ Then *some* children were brought to Him so that He might lay His hands on them and pray; and the disciples rebuked them.

[Matt. 19:14](#) But Jesus said, “Let the children alone, and do not hinder them from coming to Me; for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.

- From Matthew’s account, we learn the purpose of why the parents wanted to bring their babies to Jesus
 - They wanted Jesus to pray over the children and lay hands on them
 - They wanted a spiritual blessing for their child
- And when you look at the disciples’ reaction, you have to wonder what was bothering them
 - We’re told they rebuked the crowd
 - They were telling the crowd that it was wrong to bring their children to Jesus to ask for a blessing
 - Perhaps they thought this kind of courtesy was beneath Jesus

- Or perhaps they felt that it was a pointless exercise
 - After all, the disciples knew the children weren't old enough to understand who Jesus was
 - They couldn't possibly know what it meant that Jesus was the Messiah
 - How could they possibly benefit from approaching Jesus
- It's as though they viewed the whole exercise as superstition and unworthy of Jesus' time
- So the disciples chastise the crowd and try to dissuade them from approaching Jesus in this way
- To which Jesus responds that they should permit the children to come to Him
 - Don't hinder them
 - The word for hinder is koluo, which means forbid
 - It comes from a Greek root which means to punish
 - So Jesus is saying that there should be no prohibition from children seeking Him
 - Based on these verses by themselves, we might conclude that Jesus was merely speaking about the practice of asking for a blessing for children
 - But we have a couple of ways to know that there is something much more foundational on Jesus' mind when He makes this statement
 - First, it simply makes no sense to think that Jesus was teaching in the literal sense of bringing children to him physically
 - Jesus is only going to be on the earth for a few more weeks at this point
 - What value is there in this teaching if it merely refers to allowing children to come sit on Jesus lap while He walks the earth
 - It would barely even warrant a mention in the Gospel if that's all it meant

- No, it must have a more lasting purpose, one that still applies today
- Which leads us to our second piece of evidence found in the second of Matthew's descriptions of Jesus welcoming children found in Chap 18
 - Turn to Matt chapter 18 and read with me the entire discourse Matt records around this moment

[Matt. 18:2](#) And He called a child to Himself and set him before them,
[Matt. 18:3](#) and said, "Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.

[Matt. 18:4](#) "Whoever then humbles himself as this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

[Matt. 18:5](#) "And whoever receives one such child in My name receives Me;

- The context of Matthew reveals a great deal more of Jesus' motives as He tells the disciples not to hinder the children
 - But that those who receive the kingdom must do so as they do
 - First, verses 3-4 place the entire discourse that follows squarely in the context of salvation and the nature of saving faith
 - Verse 3 talks of a conversion and of entering the kingdom of God
 - Verse 4 talks about humbling ones self (as in repentance) and again entering the kingdom of heaven
 - So clearly Jesus is using the children to make a clear statement about the nature of salvation and the kind of faith that leads to salvation
 - This isn't merely a conversation about bringing children to Jesus for the purpose of being blessed
 - Then in verse 5 Jesus moves the conversation to the issue of receiving children in His name
 - And since the overall topic of the discourse is focused on salvation, the only reasonable interpretation of Jesus comments in verse 5 is this
 - Whoever accepts a child's confession of faith and receives that child into the brotherhood of the church has received Christ Himself

- In that we have received the work of Christ in the heart of that child
 - The child's sincere confession of Christ is to be accepted on its face without preconditions or prejudgments and without any other test
 - And when we accept a child's genuine confession, we are receiving Christ in that moment, because it is proof that God is at work in that Child's heart
- Consider the rest of Jesus' statements in verses 10-14 of Matt

[Matt. 18:10](#) ¶ "See that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that their angels in heaven continually see the face of My Father who is in heaven.

[Matt. 18:11](#) ["For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost.]

[Matt. 18:12](#) ¶ "What do you think? If any man has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go and search for the one that is straying?

[Matt. 18:13](#) "If it turns out that he finds it, truly I say to you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine which have not gone astray.

[Matt. 18:14](#) "So it is not *the* will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones perish.

- Jesus teaches the famous parable of the lost sheep and it's notable that Matt places this parable in the middle of Jesus' teaching on allowing children to come to Him
 - He compares the child to one of the lost sheep of His fold
 - And in the parable we have the classic picture of God searching for his lost sheep
 - There are 100 sheep in God's fold, but only 99 are currently safe and found
 - One is missing
 - And the shepherd searches until the one that's missing is found and He brings it home
 - And without taking time to teach the depths of this parables, for tonight it's sufficient for us to take note that this lost sheep is considered to be one of God's fold even before its found

- While it is yet lost, God still sees it as one of His
- And it remains lost only as long as it takes for the shepherd to retrieve it
- Once found, it's brought home to complete the number of God's fold, a number which was predetermined by God from the foundations of the world (according to Ephesians 1)
- And take note of verse 14
 - It is not the will of the Father that even one of His fold will perish
 - Meaning, it was never in doubt that this lost sheep would one day be found
- God would never be content to have only 99 of His sheep
 - The sheep wasn't a goat that turning into a sheep
 - It was always a sheep, it was merely lost for a time
- And Jesus compares the lost sheep to a child and says that even it will not perish
- So by what we learn in Matthew, we see that Jesus is talking about something much more important than merely a religious ritual of blessing infants
 - He's teaching that God's elect will include children, including very young children
 - And therefore the disciples must not hinder them
- In fact, consider what Jesus' comments mean in light of Luke's overall narrative in Chapter 18
 - We said already Luke is portraying a series of events in this chapter to explain the nature of saving faith
 - In verse 7 of chap 18, Jesus makes reference to God bringing justice for His elect, meaning for His chosen children
 - And then in verse 8, Jesus ends his first topic by adding that haunting comment will the Son of Man find faith on the earth when He returns?

- So right away, Jesus begins making references to God's faithfulness toward His elect
- And to the fact that faith itself will be in short supply upon earth at His return
- So now Luke records this incredible new detail concerning the nature of saving faith
 - Saving faith can come upon even children
 - That the faith that saves men, may enter into the heart of even small children
 - Therefore, when that faith is displayed in them, do not forbid them from being received as believers
 - For when we receive them, we are acknowledging that their acceptance of Christ is evidence of the work of God in them to draw them to Jesus
 - Therefore, when we receive them, we receive Jesus
 - What an incredible revelation
 - This is so different from the Jewish culture and mindset of the day
 - Children were first circumcised
 - Then they studied the Torah, the Prophets and Sayings to understand the foundations of the faith
 - They memorized large tracts of scripture
 - They performed the rituals of the faith and observed the festivals and feasts
 - In early teens boys were expected to demonstrate their readiness to enter into the assembling of Israel
 - And they began practicing the sacrifices required under the Law
 - In other words, the Jewish culture had come to see acceptance into the assembly of Israel as a condition for acceptance by God Himself

- And therefore they would have had a difficult time accepting that a small child could be acknowledged as a rightful member of the kingdom merely on the basis of a desire to be received
- But that's exactly how it happens
- Though there is more we can say about this revelation, we'll hold it for a time while we consider the next series of verses
 - Because Jesus Himself comes back to this point as He continues to develop on the theme of saving faith

[Luke 18:18](#) ¶ A ruler questioned Him, saying, "Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?"

[Luke 18:19](#) And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good except God alone.

[Luke 18:20](#) "You know the commandments, 'DO NOT COMMIT ADULTERY, DO NOT MURDER, DO NOT STEAL, DO NOT BEAR FALSE WITNESS, HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER.'"

[Luke 18:21](#) And he said, "All these things I have kept from *my* youth."

[Luke 18:22](#) When Jesus heard *this*, He said to him, "One thing you still lack; sell all that you possess and distribute it to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me."

[Luke 18:23](#) But when he had heard these things, he became very sad, for he was extremely rich.

- This is a classic exchange, probably one you've heard many times before
 - In contrast to the innocence of children, a rich ruler
 - The word for ruler in Greek could mean an official of some kind, a magistrate or prince
 - Clearly, a man of authority and wealth
 - And when He approaches Jesus here, his intentions seem sincere
 - He sincerely seems to want to do what's required to be in the kingdom when it arrives
 - And Jesus seems to be the one with all the answers

- So the ruler poses the question, what do I need to do to get into the kingdom
- So here again, we're in a discussion of salvation and the nature of saving faith
- Jesus' first words to the man at first seem to be off the point a little
 - Jesus asks the man why he is willing to describe Jesus as "good"
 - Then He reminds the man that only God Himself can be accurately described as good
 - What a profound statement
 - Think about what's wrapped up in that simple comment
 - Jesus has stated three things in that one sentence
 - First, Jesus is reminding us that the definition of good is not based on a range but on a point
 - God isn't a sliding scale or a comparison between relative standards
 - Rather it's a single standard that is unforgiving
 - You are either good or you are not
 - You can't be mostly good or a little good
 - Like a little pregnant
 - You are or you are not
 - The second thing Jesus said is that when it comes to qualifying for heaven, the standard for what it is required to be good is established by God
 - If being good is an all or nothing proposition and not a sliding scale, then the only standard we should be about for measuring goodness is the one that God uses
 - To use any other standard for determining whether we are good is merely an exercise in fooling ourselves

- Only God's standard for what is or isn't good should matter to us – if our concern in getting into the kingdom
 - Finally, the third thing Jesus taught was the only God can meet His standard of good
 - Only God is good in the true sense of the word
 - No man can reach the standard required for God to declare us good and therefore enter His kingdom
- So when the ruler called Jesus good, he was declaring Jesus to be God, though of course he didn't realize the true meaning of his own words
 - And Jesus' response gave the ruler the fundamental answer to his question, though again, he didn't appreciate it
- Then Jesus moved on to answer the man's question more directly
 - Jesus cites the 5th through 9th commandments
 - These are the commandments that relate to man's relationship with other men, with one notable exception
 - That exception is the 10th commandment, which deals with coveting
 - Of course, the earlier commandments are also missing from Jesus' list, including the first commandment to not have any god's before the Lord
- To this the man gives his bold answer
 - He says he has kept them since his youth
 - Obviously, it's extremely unlikely that this man has kept even these five commandments perfectly as he claims,
 - But nevertheless, Jesus humors him for the moment and doesn't argue the point
 - He simply lowers the boom in response
 - Jesus says you still lack one thing...just one more thing
 - Give up your wealth and worship me

- In that phrase Jesus adds the tenth and first commandments
 - In giving up wealth, Jesus is demanding that the man repent of his preference for material wealth over heavenly wealth
 - Are you tempted to think that this is an unreasonable demand?
 - Well, remember that all the disciples left everything behind to follow Jesus
 - This is the pattern of those who believe in Jesus and want to follow Him
 - And that's the other commandment captured in Jesus statement
 - He asks the man to follow him, to worship him
 - This is the essence of the first commandment
 - Follow God and not the world
 - Put Him first in your heart and don't ask him to compete with other things that you find attractive and comforting in this world
- Then Luke records that Jesus' response left the ruler very sad, because he had great wealth
 - The other Gospels record that this man left Jesus at this point in his sadness
 - Why did he leave?
 - Because he wasn't willing to do what was required to follow Jesus
 - He couldn't turn his back on the world and leave it behind
 - His attraction to the world and to it's wealth was so great, that not even a sincere interest in reaching heaven was enough to pull him away
 - But maybe the more interesting question is why did he go away sad?
 - He could have left angry in disagreement with Jesus' terms

- Or he could have left confused or pondering Jesus point
- Or he could have simply lost interest and left
- But he leaves sad, very sad even
 - The only conclusion we can make is that somewhere inside the conviction of Jesus' words had left its mark on the man's heart
 - He knew Jesus was right
 - But that fact alone wasn't enough to bring him around to a faith that would prompt him into action
 - He felt conviction and perhaps even a repentance of sorts, but not a repentance leading to salvation
- So this man's encounter with Jesus came as a result of his search for the formula that would grant him salvation, entrance to the kingdom
 - But he came with the wrong supposition
 - He assumed that reaching the kingdom came on the basis of works
 - And in His opening statement, Jesus says that the standard for reaching God is so unapproachable, that only God Himself meets it
 - But if you're interesting in going down that road, it won't take to find somewhere you're lacking
 - And when Jesus points out the deficiency, the only result is sadness, for the man lacked the power to turn away from the sin that condemned him
- And now the final two verse for today, where we put the entire days' teaching together

[Luke 18:24](#) And Jesus looked at him and said, "How hard it is for those who are wealthy to enter the kingdom of God!

[Luke 18:25](#) "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."

[Luke 18:26](#) They who heard it said, "Then who can be saved?"

[Luke 18:27](#) But He said, “The things that are impossible with people are possible with God.”

- As this pathetic man walks away from Jesus and to the assurance of damnation, Jesus remarks to the disciples how hard it is for those who are wealthy to enter the kingdom
 - In fact, it is easier for a camel to go through a needle...
 - In other words, it’s impossible
 - There is no trick or secret to this statement
 - Jesus means it the way it reads
 - Can a camel walk through the eye of a needle? No
 - Similarly, a rich man cannot go into the kingdom
 - How can this be? After, we expect to find men like Abraham, David and Solomon in the kingdom, and all three were very rich men – God made them rich
 - Remember the context of Luke’s chapter – speaking of the nature of saving faith
 - And consider the earlier discussions in the chapter
 - Jesus saying that those who humble themselves will see the kingdom
 - Those who recognize they have nothing to offer God rather than those who assume that have everything going their way
- Then consider what Jesus means by rich
 - You see the ruler wasn’t just rich in the sense of his worldly wealth
 - He was rich in the sense that he had already obtained everything he needed to meet God’s test for the kingdom
 - Remember his statement in verse 21 – I had kept all these since my youth

- Compare it to the statement of the Pharisee in verse 11 & 12 – he had everything too
 - They were both rich in the sense of verse 25
 - It was impossible for these rich men to inherit eternal life, because they were banking on the wrong things
 - They misjudged God’s standard of goodness
 - They never realized that their spiritual wealth amounted to filthy rags before God
 - So they hadn’t humbled themselves like the tax collector or the children
 - In fact, children have nothing to offer God and they never assume that they have earned anything before God
 - In contrast, these men felt they had earned God’s favor
- The point of this chapter is reinforced even further with the disciples’ question in verse 26
 - Then who can be saved Jesus? What does it take to please God then?
 - If this man who has keep the law since his youth could never expect to be granted entrance to the kingdom, what hope is there for anyone?
 - Can anyone possibly meet God’s test of perfection? Who could be good enough to enter?
 - Do you see how even the disciples had not yet grasped the nature of saving faith?
- And then Jesus gives the answer that ties everything together
 - What’s impossible for people is possible for God
 - Again, Jesus says two profound things in that statement
 - Jesus declares saving faith to be an impossible act for men
 - Men cannot in their own power come to salvation
 - This fact was best illustrated in the rich man’s response to Christ’s call

- When you consider how Jesus called the disciples, he used much the same words
- But the disciples followed when this ruler didn't
- And the difference was their wealth
- But not the wealth of their earthly fortune
- But their spiritual wealth
- Remember, blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven
 - But until a man has been brought to a recognition that there are poor in spiritual terms
 - In debt to God and without a hope of their own making
 - Only then will they turn to God with a humble heart and seek His mercy
 - And until that moment, they will walk away in sadness like that ruler did – incapable of ever changing their own heart
- And then Jesus gives us hope, for He says that all things are possible with God
 - While we cannot hope to act to save ourselves, God is capable of saving us
 - By reaching into our hearts and giving us a new spirit, He enables us to respond to the Gospel and to believe
 - And by God's power, we come as children, with nothing to offer and with complete trust and dependence upon God
 - And through faith, God credits us with His Son's righteousness
 - And this impossible conversion made possible by God happens for his lost sheep on an appointed day according to His will
 - And it can happen for a child
 - In this way, Christ will build His church, one heart at a time