

How To Go To Heaven

“Children are the future of this church.” Have you ever heard anybody say that? Or, “We need a great nursery and Jr. Church so that we can attract young families to this church.” Or how about, “AWANA is important because people are looking for a quality program for their children and AWANA will help build up the congregation.”

I believe, sometimes unwittingly, that we look at children as second class citizens of God’s kingdom. We’re very concerned about our own children in our own families but, kids in general don’t always have the place of preeminence. Sometimes we even look at them as a means to an end in ministry.

Jesus had a different view of children than we might have. He didn’t say, “They’re the church of the future.” Or, “Children are the way to get to parents.” Quite the contrary, He said, “...of such is the kingdom of God.”

Turn with me to Luke 18 pg 1015

The last time we were in Luke we looked at the parable in Luke 18 of the Pharisee and the tax collector. That was the story of two men. One a despised sinner and the other a respected spiritual leader.

In that parable Jesus pointed out that pride blinds people to their need of forgiveness. He closed by laying out a fundamental spiritual principle: *...everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.*

One of the qualities of a great teacher is the ability to perceive teachable moments and to effectively use them. Jesus was ever the master teacher.

As He concludes this parable, which shows how pride is an obstacle to finding God, He sees a golden opportunity to elaborate.

This morning I’d like us to see three important Biblical truths which will make the difference between heaven and hell for everyone who understands them.

I. We Have Nothing to Bring To God For Our Salvation **Read vs 15**

We just finished up a great missions conference. Our theme was “Children Matter to God.”

Children do matter to God. God calls believers His dear children. He calls Himself our Heavenly Father. Those terms weren't just pulled out of a hat.

God purposefully used them because they express the depth of intimacy in our relationship with Him.

Children matter to God. But here in Luke 18 they didn't matter so much to Jesus' disciples. What's going on?

It was a Jewish custom for mothers to bring their children to some distinguished Rabbi on their first birthday so that he might bless them. The disciples had a different agenda, though.

The disciples had probably taken on themselves the self-appointed task of "filtering" those who were allowed to "get through" to Jesus. There were just too many people to let everyone approach Him.

When a powerful or influential person wanted access to Jesus, I think the disciples were quick to usher him in. When someone who was very sick approached Jesus, the disciples might have allowed them to get through because of the miracles which Jesus performed.

Remember, several times in the Gospels we get a look at the disciples which isn't too flattering. In just a few chapters from now we'll see them arguing about who would be the greatest in the kingdom.

Right up until the cross they were convinced that Jesus would set up a physical Messianic kingdom and that they would be big shots in the government.

When babies were brought to Jesus, to be blessed, it seemed like an unnecessary and an unprofitable bother to the Master, and so the disciples took it upon themselves to send the parents and children away, giving them the impression that they shouldn't "bother" Jesus in this way.

They hindered the children from coming to Jesus because they weren't significant enough, because they had nothing to offer. They were "takers," not "givers." They were a liability, not an asset, to the cause of the kingdom.

Here were people bringing their beloved babies for a blessing and the disciples "rebuked them." That's pretty harsh, isn't it?

You know how when you stumble and fail in some area of life it makes you feel a little bit better when someone else stumbles too? I guess we just take comfort in knowing that we're not the only one.

In a crass sort of way the disciples are an encouragement to me. Sometimes I look at my attitudes or actions and I think, "Ed where in the world did that come from. You've been studying the Bible for 31 years now. How could you be so unspiritual?"

Then I'm reminded of some of the things the disciples said and did, and I take heart. These guys walked the roads of Israel with Jesus for three years. They saw the miracles, they heard the teaching first hand, they even had the chance to ask Jesus questions.

All that and they still blew it at times. All that and at times they just didn't get it. Well, here's one place where they really didn't get it.

But, Jesus takes this opportunity to illustrate a cardinal truth of God's economy. Children matter to God because "of such is the kingdom of God."

Read vs 16-17

First of all notice what this whole thing is about. Jesus tells us in no uncertain terms. It's about entering the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God isn't something we earn. The only way to enter it is to receive it. And we're to receive it as a little child.

What are some characteristics of little children?

They are utterly dependant. They have no achievements to boast about. They have no status in society. They don't own anything. They really have no legal rights.

I believe that Jesus was using the coming of the children to Him to be blessed as an illustration of the way in which every one of us has to come to Him for a blessing. The blessing He's talking about is entrance into the kingdom. Eternal life. Heaven instead of hell.

If we want to go to heaven, we can't come in our own strength, we can't come through our own understanding, our own wisdom, our own good works.

We can only come to Jesus Christ in our helpless state, looking to Him and to His grace alone. We come out of our weakness and helpless state, not out of our own righteousness and strengths.

The thing which Jesus commends in children is their helplessness, not their goodness or their innocence. Helplessness has got to be what characterizes every person who comes into the Kingdom; they come as those who are helpless and undeserving, entering into His blessings because of God's goodness and grace, not due to their own goodness. Here is the child-like quality that has to characterize everyone who'd enter into His kingdom.

I. We Have Nothing to Bring To God For Our Salvation, but...

II. Religion Always Wants To Do Something To Earn Eternal Life

Read vs 18

This account is recorded for us by Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Putting all their accounts together we come up with the title "Rich Young Ruler."

The word translated "ruler" is Greek *archon*, "generally, one who has administrative authority, 'leader, official.'" It is used of various Jewish leaders, including those in charge of a synagogue and members of the Jewish Sanhedrin.

Since Matthew 19 tells us he's a young man, it's my guess that inherited his wealth.

And so we have an earnest young man, very wealthy, and probably because of his wealth and earnestness about spiritual matters, a person entrusted with leadership in the synagogue, a ruler, a respected person in the community.

Mark explains that when he came to Jesus he fell on his knees before him.

Warren Weirsbie writes: "The rich young ruler may be the only man in the gospels who came to the feet of Jesus and went away in worse condition than when he came."

The Bible clearly says that Jesus Christ is the only way to heaven.

The NT says: *He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.* (John 3:18)

Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved. (Acts 4:12)

According to God's Word the one way to heaven, the one way of forgiveness, is faith in Jesus Christ.

We have all sinned and radically missed the mark of God's perfection. We are all under the holy condemnation of God. That's why Jesus had to go to the cross. To be our substitute. To die in our place, so the judgment of God could fall on him instead of us.

To come to God trusting in your own works, no matter how moral and upright is to say to God, "I don't need the death of your Son. I'm trusting in my own goodness instead."

That's what this young ruler was about. *...what shall I do to inherit eternal life?*

The hardest thing for a human being to understand is the concept of grace. From day one we're taught the principle of works.

When your a kid your parents punish you for being bad and reward you for being good. You go to first grade and you get red marks all over your paper for wrong answers and a smiley face sticker for the right answers.

You get older and go to work and what happens? You want the promotion? You want the raise? Work hard and you'll earn it.

Everything in life teaches us that we earn rewards by doing a good job. So it's no wonder that this young man wants to know what *he* should do to inherit eternal life.

I have to tell you, over the years I have probably read more bizarre interpretations of these verses than almost any other passage from the Bible. Dr. Dick Seymor calls this "The Camping Ground of the Cults" because so many cult groups try to use this passage to justify their teachings.

The Bible says that heaven is *by grace...through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. (Ephesians 2:8-9)*

The bible is clear but humans struggle with grace so they completely misunderstand what Jesus teaches here.

Religion Always Wants To Do Something To Earn Eternal Life...

That's the question this guy asks. What can I do?

Now listen carefully to Jesus answer. **read vs19**

As He so often did, Jesus responds to a question with a question. He says, "Only God is good so why do you call me good?"

Some people see that as Jesus denying that He was truly God in the flesh. I see it as just the opposite. He was saying to this fellow, "do you really understand who your speaking with? Do you really understand the implications of your words? Do you really believe that I'm the 'Good Teacher?'"

We're going to find out that the young man didn't understand who Jesus was.

The deity of Jesus Christ is what we call one of the fundamentals of the faith. You take away the deity of Christ and you no longer have Biblical Christianity.

Jesus Christ had to be the virgin born Son of God or we'd have no hope for eternity. Only the God-Man could bridge the gap between heaven and earth.

Jesus died both a natural and a supernatural death at the cross.

As a man He died like we all die. He was the Man dieing for all men. That's the natural death.

But He died a supernatural death too. He said, "*No one takes (my life) from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again.*" (John 10:18)

As the infinite One he could make an infinite sacrifice.

The rich young ruler didn't really have any idea who he was talking to. So he had wrong view of Jesus but, he also had a shallow idea of true goodness.

Verse 20

What was the specific purpose of the 10 Commandments? Obviously they reveal the heart and standard of God.

Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin.
(Romans 3:19)

Did you catch that? God's law is like a divine mirror. We look at the commandments of God and if we're honest, what do we see? What we see is our own failures.

Every mouth is stopped. No one who truly looks at their life in light of God's law brags about how good they are. All the world is guilty before the law of God.

There's not a person in this room who hasn't had a lustful thought, become unjustly angry, stolen something, lied, or always honored mom and dad. That's the point of the law.

It's God's holy mirror. You can walk around all day with a dirty face and not know it. But when you look into the mirror you can't escape the truth. The mirror doesn't lie.

Now let me ask you something. Suppose you we're ready to run out the door and you look in the mirror and see you had dirt on your face. Would you wash your face with the mirror? Of course not!

The commandments of God were never intended to be the soap, only the mirror.

The young man's answer is very telling: **Read vs 21**

Zane Hodges calls this, "The most self-righteous boast to be found anywhere in the New Testament." Here's religion in all its glory. Religion is totally external. The young man made the same mistake that so many other people tend to make. He didn't have the slightest idea what kind of "goodness" God required.

To him God's laws were all outward actions. Of course he hadn't committed adultery. Of course he hadn't murdered anyone.

But the Bible says those laws don't just apply to actions. They apply to heart attitudes too. And in his heart he had disobeyed.

Beyond that, he hadn't really kept all the commandments. There's no way that he always told the truth, even as a child. There's no way he always honored his mother and father.

I. We Have Nothing to Bring To God For Salvation

II. Religion Always Wants To Do Something To Earn Eternal Life

Therefore:

III. Unless We Understand Our Own Sinfulness We Will Never Receive God's Forgiveness

Read vs 22

Wow. What's that all about? Sell all that you have and give to the poor then you'll be right with God?

If salvation is by grace through faith and not of ourselves, why does Jesus tell him to do something? It almost sounds like Jesus is giving the guy a good work order.

Listen to how Romans 11:6 in the NT puts it: *And if by grace, then it is no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace. But if it is of works, it is no longer grace; otherwise work is no longer work.*

There's absolutely nothing that we can do to make ourselves worthy of God's forgiveness. Grace means favor from God that we don't deserve. In fact, it means favor given when punishment is due.

When we work for something, we get it because we earned it. We deserve it. It's owed to us. That's works, not grace.

Grace and works are mutually exclusive. Like Romans 11:6 says if you mix in a little bit of works, you don't have grace any more.

The gospel message isn't "turn from your sins and come to Jesus," as if you could make yourself deserving. The gospel message is "Just as I am without one plea, but that thy blood was shed for me!"

At this point commentators and pastors have done all kinds of exegetical gymnastics to try and explain how Jesus could be telling this young man that he had to do a work, when salvation is not of works.

They really get tongue-tied when they try to say that he would have had to give away all his money to be saved because he was holding onto greed and covetousness, but we can all keep our money.

I believe that most commentators have missed the whole point of Jesus' words here. There was nothing the guy could give up to make himself acceptable before a holy God.

Jesus was simply saying this: "So you think you've keep the commandments, huh? Well how about this one. Love God with all your heart, soul, and might.

His love for money outweighed his love for God.

Part two of that command: Do you truly love your neighbor as your self.

Jesus said in another place that those are the two foundational commandments. All the law and the prophets is built on that foundation.

Charles Ryrie writes: "In this case possessions took top priority in this man's life, and since he was unwilling to give them to others, he proved beyond any doubt that he did not love his neighbor as he loved himself. How many others of the 613 commands in the Mosaic Law had he failed to keep or violated secretly we do not know. But clearly he had broken at least these."

Jesus' point wasn't to give the young ruler a religious work to do. He wasn't saying, "You have to help God out in your salvation."

See, this was to slam him in the face with the mirror so he couldn't weasel out of the Law's condemnation. Jesus wanted to stop his mouth so he'd realize his guilt before God.

Mark 10:21 says; *Then Jesus, looking at him, loved him*

Jesus didn't want to beat him up. He wanted to speak the truth in love so the young man could see his own sinfulness and find forgiveness from God.

He wanted him to come and receive the Kingdom of God as a little child; utterly dependant, nothing to offer, completely at God's mercy.

Unless We Understand Our Own Sinfulness We Will Never Receive God's Forgiveness

Unfortunately, that's not what happened in this case... **Verse 23**

His refusal to acknowledge that in reality he hadn't kept the Law showed that he placed the god of money before the true and living God.

So, unwilling to acknowledge Jesus as God and unwilling to admit his sinfulness, he went away sorrowful. He didn't get the answer to the longing he felt in his heart.

Read 24-25

Jesus applies this lesson to His disciples: It's difficult for anyone who trusts in riches to enter God's kingdom. And the more riches we have, the more tempted we are to trust them.

Wealthy people are usually self-sufficient people. They think they have what they need, and that makes it real hard for them to come humbly before God with child-like faith.

A camel was the largest animal in Palestine in those days. Some Bible students think the "eye of a needle" referred a gate in the wall of Jerusalem which would be hard for a camel to get through.

If it did then Jesus wouldn't have used the word "impossible" like He's going to in verse 27.

This was a Jewish proverb. The word translated "needle" means originally the point of a spear and then it came to mean a surgeon's needle.

Read vs 26

The Jews thought that rich people were especially blessed by God, which is why they were shocked at Jesus' statement. That's why they said, "Who then can be saved? What hope is there for the rest of us?"

Read vs 27

This confrontation with the rich young ruler was an incredible teaching opportunity for Jesus, and an incredible learning opportunity for us.

What Jesus taught here is something that is utterly impossible for human beings, and only possible with God.

And here it is: God gives eternal life outside of human's efforts. It is all what He has done, and nothing that we can do. It's all based on the finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross.

Listen to these simple, straightforward words from the lips of the Lord Jesus. They're found in John 6:47. Jesus said, *Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life.*

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III. Unless We Understand Our Own Sinfulness We Will Never Receive God's Forgiveness

But once we understand we've broken God's laws, we'll understand we need a Savior.

Have you come to the Savior with simple, child-like faith? *...whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it.*