

CHAPTER 18

Overview of Luke 18

In chapter 18, Luke continues his narrative of Jesus' journey toward Jerusalem. He will use key words from the parables in the previous chapter to introduce new topics in this one. The first theme will be one on the importance of persistent prayer, and how prayer is related to faith and love. The proper attitude associated with genuine brokenness is presented in a parable comparing the prayers of a Pharisee to the prayer of a tax collector. The Pharisee will demonstrate great love for himself, but he will show no love for the tax collector. We see also in this chapter Jesus' love of children and how He compares their simple faith to how His disciples ought to believe. Included in this chapter is Jesus' encounter with the rich young ruler. The chapter concludes with Jesus traveling through Jericho on His way to Jerusalem and heals a man from his blindness. The blind man becomes a follower of Jesus.

1 Now He was telling them a parable to show that at all times they ought to pray and not to lose heart,

What to look for in Luke 18

1. As you read each paragraph ask, "What is God teaching me about love?"
2. Look for Jesus' teaching on prayer and how persistent prayer for others is a sign of love.
3. Observe the difference in the attitudes between the prayers of a Pharisee and those of a tax collector. One loves himself, the other loathes himself.
4. See how Jesus demonstrates love even for infants.
5. A rich young ruler will attempt to justify himself before Jesus in quest of eternal life. Look for how Jesus exposes the ruler's love for things rather than for others.
6. Find the foreshadowing of the cross, and begin to grasp what love will be expressed there.
7. Look for the love that Jesus shows a blind man as He passes through Jericho on His way to Jerusalem.

18:1 The reader would do well to remember that the chapter divisions are arbitrary and were not separated by Luke himself. Therefore, in interpreting verses 1-8, one must realize that the teaching on prayer and faith here is a continuation of the previous discussion on the second coming. This is made obvious in verse 8, "...when the Son of Man comes...." In this paragraph, Jesus is warning His followers that, even though His return is certain, there may be a lengthy delay. Remember, too, that at this point in their training, the disciples did not realize that there would one Messiah, two comings. They are unable to differentiate the two comings at this point and, like the Pharisees, are expecting Jesus to set up a kingdom on earth. That there will be a delay in Jesus' return does not become evident to the apostles until well into the development of the early church.

Throughout his gospel, Luke refers many times to the importance of prayer. (Prayer, in various forms and contexts, appears 26 times in the gospel. The apostle Paul was adamant about the importance of

2 saying, “In a certain city there was a judge who did not fear God and did not respect man.

3 “There was a widow in that city, and she kept coming to him, saying, ‘Give me legal protection from my opponent.’

4 “For a while he was unwilling; but afterward he said to himself, ‘Even though I do not fear God nor respect man,

5 yet because this widow bothers me, I will give her legal protection, otherwise by continually coming she will wear me out.’ ”

6 And the Lord said, “Hear what the unrighteous judge said;

7 now, will not God bring about justice for His elect who cry to Him day and night, and will He delay long over them?

8 “I tell you that He will bring about justice for them quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?”

prayer, and Luke was a close companion of the apostle. The theme of prayer will come up many more times in the Book of Acts as well.) Here, Luke is bringing the importance of prayer to the forefront of Jesus’ teaching on the end times. The summary of the teaching is presented as an introduction to the parable: “...at all times they ought to pray and not lose heart.”

18:2-8 The parable that follows is not unlike the theme of the parable found in 11:5-8. It is a theme of persistence in prayer. In this parable, the judge is not a righteous, God-fearing man. (Note the parallel with the unrighteous manager in the previous parable.) He is not one to have compassion on others, nor does he have any inclination to “dispense true justice” or show mercy on widows, something taught frequently in the OT (e.g., Zech. 7:9-10). In fact, not only is this judge not God-fearing, he is not one to respect others and value individual rights. He is a heartless judge, always handing down the harshest of penalties and never giving anyone the benefit of the doubt. Unfortunately, this poor widow gets this unrighteous judge assigned to her case. Widows, by their very circumstances, were vulnerable to con men and scam artists, and having no husband to protect them, could be easily taken advantage of.

The details of the widow’s case are not specified. We can infer, however, that she needs legal protection, such as a restraining order, or an order to cease-and-desist. It could be that someone is trying to take possession of what little she has, or it could be that someone is trying to “buy” her for the purpose of making her a servant because she is in debt. Whatever the situation is, it is dire enough that she is seeking legal protection from an opponent that is out to ruin her.

In terms of the interpretation of the parable and its application to the disciples, the lesson is pretty clear: as followers of Jesus Christ, there will be opposition from the world and from Satan. Followers of Jesus Christ may be as vulnerable as widows when it comes to the way the world will treat them, and always under attack from the primary opponent, the devil. The only way they are going to survive is to go to the judge and ask for protection and justice. For the disciples, this will mean being persistent in prayer.

In the parable, the judge grows weary of the widow’s persistence, and he finally gives in: “I will give her legal protection.” Jesus wants to ensure that the disciples get the point of the parable. Therefore, a paraphrase of verse 6 could read, “Did you get what the unrighteous judge did? He granted the widow her request simply because she was so persistent.” Jesus then follows up the parable with a rhetorical question (i.e., a question that has an obvious answer): “Will

not God bring about justice for His elect...?” In other words, if an unrighteous judge can show favor to the widow, how much more can the Righteous Judge show favor toward His elect who persist?

Special mention needs to be made of the word “elect” in **verse 7**. The Greek word is from *eklektos* meaning “chosen one” and “chosen as a favorite one.” This is the second time Luke has used this term, but this is the only time Luke uses it in reference to followers of Jesus. Matthew uses the same term referring to Jesus’ followers, but note this: the only time Luke and Matthew use this term in regard to Christians is in the context of those going through great persecution in the end times (cf. Matt. 23). The other two times that Luke uses the term is in reference to Jesus Himself, where the Father calls Him “My Chosen One” during the transfiguration (9:35). So, here’s the point. When Jesus gave this parable—which seems on the surface to be a rather insignificant parable—Jesus, the Chosen One, is calling His followers “chosen ones.” Just as Jesus was chosen by the Father to be a light of truth and love to a lost world, so the followers of Jesus Christ are chosen *by Him* to be lights of truth and love to a lost world. And just as Jesus experienced suffering and persecution, so the followers of Jesus Christ are chosen *by Him* to experience suffering and persecution. Therefore, all followers of Jesus Christ are chosen ones; many may experience suffering, hardship, rejection, persecution and even death, but they have been chosen by Him to do so. The beauty—and good news—of being called chosen ones by Jesus is a matter of identity: the follower of Jesus Christ who suffers may identify with the One who suffered for us all. And that is why, in Acts 5, Peter and the apostles, having been imprisoned and flogged by the religious leaders, “...went on their way from the presence of the Council, rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for His name” (5:41). And that is why those who suffer in the end times may rejoice, for “He will bring about justice for them quickly” (v. 8). What gets “the judge’s” attention? Those “...who cry to Him day and night...” In other words, the elect are constantly and persistently bringing before God a cry for justice on earth, not just for themselves, but for others. It is the force behind “Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven” (Matt 6:10).

In terms of immediate application for today, believers must be mindful of the thousands of Christians throughout the world who are under extreme persecution. Christians are being falsely accused, imprisoned, even murdered in the name of another god. Churches, as well as their homes and businesses, are being torched and burned. So, what is the Christian who is *not* one of those being persecuted

to do? He is to pray for those who are, that God's justice will prevail and that the faith of those being persecuted will not fail. Praying for others who suffer persecution, even if their names are not known, is one of the most loving acts a comfortable Christian can do. Thus the critical question in **verse 8**: "When the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?" That is, will those who are being persecuted keep the faith, and will those who are not being persecuted be sacrificially praying by faith for those who are?

Finally, the relationship between prayer and faith needs to be mentioned. No person can be persistent in prayer without having faith. To pray at all takes faith—to pray persistently day in and day out takes enduring faith. But mindless repetition is not what is intended here. What is intended is weeping over those who are persecuted, groaning over the evils of the world, distress over the plight of other Christians, and mourning over those who are spiritually lost. Persistent faith requires persistent emotional involvement. Persistent prayer requires sacrifice of time and energy and emotional resources, all being acts of love for the brethren. Only those who have faith will pray persistently, and only those who pray persistently manifest great faith and love for others. So the lesson is clear: the true follower of Jesus Christ is a person of persistent prayer. Few things in the Christian life require more faith than persistent prayer.

9 And He also told this parable to some people who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and viewed others with contempt:

10 "Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector.

11 "The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself: 'God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector.

12 'I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.'

13 "But the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, the sinner!'

18:9-14 The following parable is another "while we're on the subject" moment for Luke. (Remember, Luke was never a companion of Jesus, and therefore everything he learned about Jesus' teachings he learned from outside sources. Thus, many of Jesus' parables recorded by Luke are not necessarily chronological. Thus, Luke's tendency to order the parables according to theme.)

The relationship between this parable and the one preceding it is the tax collector's phrase in verse 13: "God, be merciful to me...." Just as the widow sought mercy from the unrighteous judge, so, too, do sinners seek mercy from God, the Righteous Judge. But let's look at the beginning of the parable.

In **verse 9**, it is a bit odd that Luke did not identify specifically the "people who trusted in themselves that they were righteous." Of course, one may assume that Jesus was referring only to the Pharisees, but the religious leaders are almost always identified by Luke. Therefore, it is quite possible that Luke is referring also to religious Jews who are not Pharisees, who pride themselves on keeping the Sabbath and following the traditions of the elders. One must not get lulled into the assumption that the only bad guys opposing Jesus were Pharisees and scribes. There were probably many, many more

14 “I tell you, this man went to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted.”

upstanding Jews, some with great wealth, who were quite comfortable in their relationship with God by keeping the laws of Moses, and uncomfortable with the parables Jesus was teaching. The text does not actually say this, of course, so it is a matter of conjecture. Nevertheless, when it comes to application, the contrast between the spirit of the Pharisee and the spirit of the tax collector is timeless and excludes no one.

This parable focuses on how one perceives oneself in relation to God. It is a contrast of spiritual self-reflection, as well as a contrast in truthfulness versus self-deception. In the parable, the Pharisee is quite selective in how he compares himself to others. The tax collector compares himself only to God. The Pharisee selectively chooses sins he knows he has not committed, and selectively chooses good works he knows he can control. The tax collector makes no effort to justify himself, and does not attempt to excuse himself by any good deed he may have done. The Pharisee seeks to earn God’s favor by good works. The tax collector seeks to experience God’s mercy by confessing his faults. The Pharisee finds no need for repentance; the tax collector finds no reason to be acceptable to God. The Pharisee sees God only as the God of law and righteousness; the tax collector sees God only as the God of mercy. The Pharisee denies any sin to confess; the tax collector identifies with his personal sins. The Pharisee sees himself as a righteous man and views others “with contempt.” The tax collector sees himself as worthy of contempt, and views himself as a sinner. The Pharisee sees himself as righteous; the tax collector sees himself as unrighteous. The Pharisee sees no need to repent; the tax collector repents by beating his breast.

Therefore it is the tax collector, not the religious Pharisee, who understands what it means to repent. Jesus, therefore, has given a clear illustration of how repentance begins: it begins by acknowledging one’s spiritual depravity and turning to God for mercy. To truly repent, one must first acknowledge one’s *need* to repent; that is, coming face to face with personal sin. Note that the sins of the tax collector are never specified. They do not need to be: his sins, whatever they may have been, make him a sinner.

The problem with self-righteous people is that they, like this Pharisee, may agree theologically that they are sinners, but consider that their sins are not as bad as those who are *real* sinners; that is, sinners who are worse than they. They become selective in the sins they use to separate themselves from worse sinners. The problem is that by being selective about their sins—or social causes—they forget that they, too, are totally depraved from the perspective of a holy God. For example, a Christian may have never taken a drink or ever become drunk, but when it

comes to eating, they are a glutton and have no discipline when it comes to food. A Christian may be a staunch defender of the unborn, but treat those who oppose their view with contempt instead of love. A Christian may be vehemently anti-gay, but forgets that time he or she was once in an unholy sexual relationship. A pastor may pride himself on building a megachurch from scratch, but completely ignore the plight of persecuted Christians throughout the world. A missionary may feel supremely good about what he or she has accomplished in a third world country, but ignore the fact that they have left behind a trail of broken relationships.

The key to putting this parable in perspective is the word “justified” in **verse 14**. “Justified” is the verb form of the noun “righteous” and could be translated “made righteous.” It is a word that will become a cornerstone in the writings of the apostle Paul, as he explains what it means to be “justified by faith” (e.g., Rom 5:1). The clear implication in this parable is that the Pharisee was not justified because he considered himself righteous when in fact he was not. The tax collector was justified because he admitted that he was a sinner, felt awful about that, and flung himself at the mercy of God. The Pharisee did not humble himself, but justified himself. The tax collector humbled himself, and therefore became justified. It is easy to see why the Pharisees did not care for the teachings of Jesus.

Jesus concludes the parable by repeating what he has already taught in 14:11: “Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted.” This parable is a clear illustration of that teaching.

18:15-17 This is the second time Luke mentions children as a part of the crowd who followed Jesus and the disciples (cf. 9:47). Although men are mentioned the most, it is obvious that women and their children were also part of Jesus’ following. (See also 8:1-3.) The tense of the verb “were bringing” means that this was something that was going on throughout Jesus’ ministry. Whereas in 9:47, Jesus takes a young boy to stand beside Him, verse 15 specifically mentions “babies.” Mothers often brought their babies and small children to rabbis for the purpose of having the rabbi bless them. Wouldn’t it be wonderful to know what Jesus said when He touched the babies and blessed them, and how those who were blessed by Him turned out as adults? However, the emphasis of this paragraph is not on babies, but on the disciples—they began rebuking the women for bringing their babies to Jesus! Most likely the disciples’ thinking was that Jesus didn’t have time for children; that He was too busy dealing with Pharisees and teaching the men following Him.

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.

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.

17 “Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it *at all*.”

Jesus' response to the rebuke of the disciples is "Permit the children to come to Me...." Perhaps it's not just children that Jesus is referring to, but anyone who desires to sit at His feet. We already know of this kind of response from Jesus when Mary sat at His feet at the home of Lazarus (10:38-42).

The lesson here is twofold. First, "do not hinder them." In other words, do not become a "stumbling block" to those who want to know more about Jesus, and, for that matter, God Himself. This was exactly what the Pharisees had done: they had devised an elaborate system of laws and traditions that made it difficult for the average Jew to know God, much less to feel in a right relationship with Him. His justice and holiness were emphasized at the expense of His mercy, compassion, love and acceptance of those who repent and desire to worship Him. Church history is full of examples where those in authority have made it difficult for the common worshiper to find God, either by establishing an elaborate liturgical system that sets God off at a distance, or by enacting rules and regulations that emphasize sin rather than grace. "Permit the children to come to Me" is one of the greatest teachings there is on the grace, the love, and the acceptance God the Father has for those who truly seek Him.

The second lesson is found in the phrase, "the kingdom of God belongs to such as these." The kingdom of God belongs to those who seek out and desire to be with Jesus. Jesus is the pathway to God and His kingdom. It may seem like a simple and not very profound phrase, and is easily overlooked by the interpretation that the kingdom of God belongs to those who have child-like faith. While that interpretation is certainly true, the phrase has so much more significance.

The Pharisees taught that the kingdom of God was an actual kingdom, a sovereign realm that would be established on earth by the Messiah. Jesus has already informed the Pharisees and His disciples that the kingdom of God is not an earthly kingdom at all, but a new relationship with God through Jesus that brings redemption and eternal life. The kingdom of God means peace by being in a right relationship with God. It means being in a loving relationship with the Father because He loves His children to come to Him. It means experiencing such divine love that all fear of judgment and condemnation are gone. The kingdom of God, therefore, does not have to be earned; it simply has to be received through faith...yes, simple, innocent, shameless child-like faith. The kingdom of God "belongs to such as these" because the kingdom of God is not a place, it is a relationship: a relationship with God through the love of Jesus Himself. The children that came to Jesus knew little about the established religious way, but they knew

everything about a relationship that showed unconditional love and acceptance.

The last verse, **verse 17**, is far more telling than the casual reader of Scripture can comprehend: the kingdom of God is all about relationships; the relationship with God, the relationship with Jesus Christ, and relationships between one another. The kingdom of God means being held in Jesus' loving arms in full acceptance, full comfort, and full compassion for His children. Could there possibly be anything more satisfying and peaceful? But the problem is this: those who don't understand that the kingdom of God is a relationship and not just a system of truth and Scripture knowledge, *will never enter it*. Biblical truth always points to biblical love, but biblical truth alone does not a relationship make. Truth without love is no truth at all, no matter how many Bible verses are quoted. Truth without love makes for Pharisees. Truth with love makes for the kingdom of God. The children that came to Jesus came without fear, without limitations, without regard for what others might think. They came to Jesus because they knew love when they saw it, and mothers brought their children to Jesus because, unlike the Pharisees, there were no conditions of the law attached. It's those who come to Jesus in a child-like manner that can fully grasp, fully appreciate, and fully accept that God is love, and God's greatest expression of His love is found in the person of Jesus Christ.

18 A ruler questioned Him, saying, "Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?"

19 And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good except God alone.

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.' "

21 And he said, "All these things I have kept from *my* youth."

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

18:18-27 Here we have the tragic story—not a parable—of what is referred to as "the rich young ruler." This incident was important enough in the minds of the disciples to be included in the other synoptic gospels of Matthew and Mark (Matt 19:16-22; Mark 10:17-27). The question asked by the young ruler is identical to the one asked by the scribe in 10:25. In that incident, based on the scribe's response, the answer focused on the Great Commandment. This request focuses on the Ten Commandments themselves. Just like the question posed by the scribe, it is a question based on works: "What must I *do* to *inherit*...?" The sense here is "What must I do to *earn now what I believe is mine to have*?" He does not ask, "What must I believe?" or "Who must I be?" To the ruler's credit, inheriting eternal life is something that is his responsibility, not another's. Also, one mustn't read too much into the ruler's address as "Teacher." The fact that he does not refer to Jesus as "Master" or "Lord" does not indicate that he is unwilling to accept Jesus' uniqueness; "Teacher" would be a very acceptable address to a rabbi. Instead, in order to set Jesus apart from other rabbis and perhaps earn His attention, the ruler addresses Jesus as "*Good* Teacher." Addressing Him

shall have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.”

23 But when he had heard these things, he became very sad, for he was extremely rich.

24 And Jesus looked at him and said, “How hard it is for those who are wealthy to enter the kingdom of God!

as “*Good Teacher*” is picked up on by Jesus Himself: “No one is good except God alone.” Some sources state that rabbis were never addressed as “good” in this manner, as the Greek word for “good” here means absolute goodness, an attribute that could only be ascribed to God Himself. The sense of Jesus’ response is this: “If no one is absolutely good but God, then are you assuming I’m God?” The motive behind the ruler’s addressing Jesus as “good” is only a matter of conjecture, however.

This ruler is probably the ruler of a synagogue. As has been stated previously in this commentary, wealth was a sign of God’s favor. The Talmud taught that the more righteous and “good” you were, the more God blessed you with wealth. The more wealth you had, the more alms you could give to the poor. The more alms you gave, the more inclined you were to “inherit” eternal life; that is, transitioning into “Abraham’s bosom” after death. Jesus will utterly destroy the teaching that giving alms out of one’s wealth is a path to eternal life.

In Luke’s account, five of the six commandments from the “second tablet” are listed. The Ten Commandments were arbitrarily divided by the scribes into two tablets. The first tablet contained the first four commandments, and focused on one’s relationship with God. The second tablet contained the other six commandments and focused on relationship with others; that is, how God’s people were to treat one another. In this account, the tenth commandment regarding covetousness is omitted by Jesus. Here again, why Jesus didn’t include it is purely a matter of conjecture, but one possibility is that the 10th commandment would have been the only commandment the rich young ruler could not have lived up to. One rarely accumulates wealth without also harboring greed and taking advantage of others. The other question is why Jesus focused on the second tablet. This writer believes that Jesus focused on the second tablet because it opens the door to pointing out the ruler’s primary flaw: a failure to love others. More about that as we continue.

The rich young ruler’s response in **verse 21** is a bit shocking, but probably not untrue if taken at face value and according to the way the Jewish leaders taught. He may never have murdered anyone, or committed adultery, or done any of these things the way they are described by a strict, legalistic interpretation of Mosaic law. What Jesus is going to eventually point out is that murder involves more than just killing someone; it may involve hating. Murder can include, for example, the murder of a person’s reputation, or even a wish to do harm. Adultery can be more than sleeping with another man’s wife: even looking at a woman in a lustful manner can be adultery because it is a sign of what is

going on in a man's heart. The Pharisees failed to recognize the issue of the heart, thinking that only committing the act was sin. They were unable to see that the nature of sin is such that acts are only expressions of the heart, that the very nature of mankind is polluted with sin. By limiting the definition of sin to specific acts, they devised a work-around to the corruption of the heart. Ironically, the teachers of the Old Testament scriptures failed to apply to themselves the lesson from Noah: "The wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of the heart was only evil continually" (Gen 6:5). It's at the level of the heart, not the law, that Jesus exposes the weakness of the rich young ruler.

It should be noted that Mark's account includes the observation that Jesus "felt a love" for the young ruler, for, on a superficial level, there seemed to be an honest effort on the ruler's part to live righteously by God's laws rather than man's power. Perhaps there was on the ruler's part a desire to be good and to stay in a right relationship with the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. So it must not be assumed that the ruler is not forthright in his question: he really wants to do what is right to inherit eternal life.

In **verse 22**, however, Jesus exposes a critical flaw in the ruler's heart and identifies the one thing the ruler was unable to see for himself—he loved financial security and wealth more than he loved people. There are two aspects of Jesus' command that require attention. First, Jesus instructs the ruler to part with his possessions. That would be a difficult instruction for the ruler because, according to his theology, his wealth was a sign of God's favor toward him. He would be giving away the very thing God had granted him. In the ruler's belief system, he had gained great wealth *because* he had, in his mind, kept all the commandments. So, he *deserved* what God had given him...he had *earned* God's favor. But the second part of the command is even more telling—he was to dismantle his wealth and distribute it *to the poor*. The irony of this conundrum cannot be overlooked by the Western mind: according to Jewish theology, the poor were poor because God made them poor, and they were poor because they had not kept all the commandments as the ruler had. The poor were poor because they *deserved* to be poor. The poor were poor because they had sinned and fallen out of favor with God. The poor were poor because they were outside the blessings of God. Why, then, should the rich young ruler give that which he deserved to those who deserved nothing? Why should he who had not sinned give all that he had to those who had sinned?

So, there are two issues the rich young ruler is struggling with. First, he is instructed by the One he

called “Good” to give up everything he owns and follow those who own nothing. Second, he is instructed to give everything he owns to those whom he believes don’t deserve it. To follow those who owned nothing would, ironically, put him in the category of the poor! It is too much for the conflicted young ruler to accept, and, in **verse 23**, “when he heard these things, he became very sad, for he was extremely rich.”

One might imagine a dramatic pause between verses 23 and 24. The young ruler is standing there, looking at Jesus, internally conflicted, and trying to come up with a solution in which he can have it both ways: maintain his wealth *and* follow Jesus. Note in **verse 24** that Jesus addressed *him*, not the disciples: “How hard it is for those who are wealthy to enter the kingdom of God!” It is a terrible moment of indecision on the part of the young ruler. Jesus is clearly pointing out to the ruler what he already knows: he loves his financial security, his luxuries and conveniences, his social status and his prestige, and his erroneous belief system more than he loves others, especially the poor, and more than he loves the opportunity to become a disciple of Jesus Christ. Once again, Jesus’ words are being fleshed out: “You cannot serve God and wealth” (16:13). Matthew adds that when he heard Jesus’ words in verse 22, “he went away grieving....” No doubt, Jesus grieved as well.

Verses 25-27 are addressed directly to the disciples. Some have theorized that Jesus wasn’t referring specifically to a sewing needle, but to a narrow gate leading into Jerusalem. This point has never been proven and is probably not the case. It was not uncommon for Jewish teachers to use hyperbole to make a point, so the disciples would have had no difficulty understanding Jesus’ analogy. Regardless, the main point must not be overlooked: it is very difficult, if not impossible, for the rich to “enter the kingdom of God.” (Not impossible, but difficult.) Just as this was a difficult concept for Jews to grasp, their belief system being what it was, it is just as difficult a concept for the Western mind to grasp. Whereas the Jews considered the rich to be favored by God, the Western mind considers riches to be the result of capitalism, free enterprise and hard work. Regardless of where one’s rationalism comes from, the result is the same: riches, wealth and possessions are an enormous obstacle to discovering the joys of the kingdom of God. Why? Because there is greater joy and spiritual satisfaction in giving to those in need than there is to keeping wealth and possessions to satisfy one’s earthly pleasures. It is in giving and giving that allows one to experience what it means to be a part of the kingdom of God. The more

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 They who heard it said, “Then who can be saved?”

27 But He said, “The things that are impossible with people are possible with God.”

one gives, the more one receives of spiritual blessings. The more one has, the more one is expected to give, for what one has comes from God. To the one who gives all, to him all the kingdom of God is given. This statement may seem threatening to the reader, but how the early church understood Jesus' teachings will help alleviate the stress. For example, the apostle Philip married, had a home and raised a family which included four daughters who were prophetesses; one cannot do that without having a certain lever of possessions. The apostle Paul never instructed new Christians to sell all they had and give to the poor; he only instructed them to give sacrificially. Paul also wrote to Timothy stating that, "If we have food and covering, with these we shall be content" (1 Tim 6:8). It's keeping *more* than we need and accumulating wealth that becomes an obstacle to experiencing the kingdom of God, and it's failing to give *abundantly* to those in need that makes it hard to wiggle through the eye of the needle.

But the point cannot be ignored: possessions and wealth are major obstacles to experiencing the kingdom of God. Period.

The disciples' question in **verse 26**, "Then who can be saved?" is a very logical one based on their Jewish way of thinking. Jesus' statement seems so contrary to what they have been taught and to what they have always believed. In their theology, the rich should have no problem entering the kingdom of God because they have been shown favor by God. It is the poor that are supposed to have the harder time. But Jesus is categorically destroying that belief system. Why? Because it is the wealthy who are failing to love others by withholding their blessings. So the issue is never really money—the issue is loving your neighbor as yourself. The accumulation and withholding of wealth is a symptom of a greater problem: a failure to love others. Thus, Jesus' answer to the disciples: "The things that are impossible with people are possible with God." It is clear then: God can change the heart. God can change a selfish heart into a loving heart. God can transform a greedy heart to a heart full of charity. God, and God alone, can redirect an uncaring and unloving heart to a heart that cares and loves like Jesus.

But that can only happen if one is ready to leave all to follow Jesus. Then, and only then, can they enter into the kingdom of God.

18:28-30 Peter, speaking for all the disciples, seeks validation for his sacrifices by following Jesus. Peter, James and John had a successful fishing business, and they left that financial security to become disciples. To Peter's pleasant surprise, Jesus not only validates the disciples, but all who are willing to leave behind one's previous life "for the sake of the

28 Peter said, “Behold, we have left our own *homes* and followed You.”

29 And He said to them, “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,

30 who will not receive many times as much at this time and in the age to come, eternal life.”

31 Then He took the twelve aside and said to them, “Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and all things which are written through the prophets about the Son of Man will be accomplished.

32 “For He will be handed over to the Gentiles, and will be mocked and mistreated and spit upon,

33 and after they have scourged Him, they will kill Him; and the third day He will rise again.”

34 But the disciples understood none of these things, and *the meaning of* this statement was hidden from them, and they did not comprehend the things that were said.

kingdom of God.” The reader must be reminded that the mention of “wife or brothers or parents or children” must be put in the context of Jewish culture. When the church began, to declare Jesus as Messiah and become a Christian would be seen as betrayal, resulting in ostracism from the family and friends. The point in this passage is that nothing and no one must become an obstacle to following Jesus, even family or peers. Once again, instructions by the apostle Paul to the early church helps us understand these difficult passages. Paul instructs husbands to love their wives as Christ loves the church (Eph. 5:25), not to leave them for the sake of the kingdom of God. He also instructs the church in Corinth: “...the wife should not leave her husband and...the husband should not divorce his wife” (1 Cor. 7:10-11). Teachings to the early Christians help put Jesus’ teachings in perspective because it demonstrates how the apostles interpreted Him and put His instructions into practice.

The point is this: regardless of the circumstances or the culture or the times, there is a price to pay for leaving all and following Jesus. That hasn’t changed in two millennia.

18:31-34 Having completed His journey through Samaria and entering the Jordan Valley, Jesus and the disciples arrive at the foot of the hills leading up to Jerusalem. Next stop: Jericho. The phrase “up to Jerusalem” means literally “up.” They are beginning their journey to Jerusalem in the city of Jericho, which sat about 800 feet below sea level. They will take the 20 mile winding road to Jerusalem which is roughly 3000 feet above sea level, nearly a 4000 foot elevation gain. Just before entering Jericho, where no doubt the crowds were awaiting His arrival, Jesus pulls the twelve aside in order to prepare them for what is going to happen to Him in Jerusalem. **Verse 34** states that the twelve did not “comprehend” what Jesus was telling them because it “was hidden” from them. The word “hidden” is *krypto* meaning “to keep safe, to keep secret.” The English word “cryptography” comes from this word. It is the verb tense, however, that is interesting. The verb is perfect passive which means that someone from an outside source intentionally and continually kept the meaning of Jesus’ words hidden from their understanding. This was no doubt the work of the Holy Spirit. But why would He keep these words hidden? The most likely reason is that the disciples would have tried to prevent the crucifixion from happening, for in their minds, Jesus was about to set up His earthly kingdom and needed to be alive and well to do so.

There is a powerful lesson in this act of keeping the twelve from understanding God’s plan. God often hides His plans from His children because we will

inevitably attempt to change it, especially if we don't like His plan, and even more so if His plans involve our sacrifice and suffering. The flesh attempts to avoid sacrifice; God expects His children to sacrifice. The mindset of the world teaches us to avoid suffering; God calls His children to suffer for His name's sake. Satan will place comfort and pleasures in our path to keep us from fulfilling God's plan for our lives; God instructs His children to be on guard for Satan's schemes to carry out God's plan of salvation for a lost world. Even in the evangelical culture today, suffering and sacrifice have become dirty words; in the kingdom of God, the foundation of the cross is based on suffering and sacrifice.

Jesus has been preparing the disciples for His suffering and His rejection by the elders throughout His journey to Jerusalem (cf. 9:22-27, 44). Here, He warns them again, and goes into even more detail. What will happen to Him has been vividly described in the Old Testament (e.g., Psalm 22; Isaiah 53). Furthermore, not only will He be rejected by the elders, but He will be "handed over to the Gentiles," a new detail foretelling His being turned over to Pilate and the Romans for crucifixion. As foretold by the prophet Isaiah in chapter 53 seven hundred years earlier, He will be "mocked...mistreated...spit upon...and scourged," abuses specific to Roman crucifixion. Then He will be killed. Of course, not only did the twelve want to hear none of that, but they had not begun to understand God's plan of one Messiah, two comings. The twelve will not understand any of this until Jesus clearly opens their minds to the Scriptures after the resurrection (Luke 24:44-47).

In observing all the details of Jesus' words to His disciples concerning His impending rejection and suffering, one must not overlook the incredible love behind the words. Imagine Jesus' thoughts as He begins leading the disciples up the road to Jerusalem. The disciples are anticipating a great welcoming party and joyous celebration, for the King is coming; Jesus is anticipating the cross. The disciples are expecting applause and recognition for having been with the Messiah from the beginning; Jesus is expecting the pain and agony of Roman scourging. The disciples are planning to take their place next to the newly enthroned King of Jerusalem; Jesus is planning on taking His place on a wooden cross by having rusty nails driven through His hands and feet. The apostle John would perhaps reflect on Jesus' love and sacrifice the most: "Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13).

Just as the twelve did not want to face the reality that suffering and sacrifice are part and parcel to following Jesus, so, too, do Christians today

improvise every excuse to avoid suffering and sacrifice for the One who gave Himself in love for our eternal blessings. But suffering and sacrifice have a reward: "...the third day He will rise again." The reward for those who are willing to suffer and sacrifice for Jesus' sake is the promise of entering into His reward—the hope of eternal life. These promises were too much for the disciples to grasp when they first heard the words, but there is no excuse for today's Christian who receives the benefit of the whole story—the death *and* the resurrection. In receiving the reward of eternal life, the cross itself can become a stumbling block to those who deny its necessity. To receive eternal life and the blessings that follow, all roads lead to the cross of Jesus Christ where sins are confessed and repentance becomes an act of worship. To acknowledge sins and repent of them involves suffering the truth about oneself. To live on behalf of the One who saved us from our sins involves constant sacrifice. There is no work-around; only the cross leads to eternal life.

18:35-43 We know from Mark's gospel that the blind man's name is Bartimaeus (Mark 10:46). That his name is remembered suggests that Bartimaeus became a lifelong disciple of Jesus even after the resurrection and into the early days of the church. Beggars often sat along the roadside leading to Jerusalem, as that was a major thoroughfare for pilgrims on their way to Jewish feasts in Jerusalem. What is unique about this incident is that Bartimaeus addresses Jesus of Nazareth as "Son of David." Based on the Messianic passage in Isaiah 11:1-5, this is a clear acknowledgement that Bartimaeus, most likely due to the reports he has heard, believes that Jesus of Nazareth is indeed the Messiah. Bartimaeus is not unlike Simeon who was "looking for the consolation of Israel" in Luke 2:25-32. Incidentally, this is the first and only time Luke records Jesus being addressed as the "Son of David," although he records the words of the angel Gabriel to Mary: "...the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David..." (Luke 1:32).

There is a great irony in Bartimaeus's acknowledging Jesus as the Messiah. A man who is blind can "see" that Jesus is the Messiah, while those who can see, the Pharisees, are blind to the fact that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah. It is a contrast of physical sight versus spiritual sight. The beggar *sees*; those with great wealth and religious knowledge *cannot see*. Physical blindness is often used by the New Testament writers as a metaphor for spiritual blindness.

And just like the disciples who were rebuking mothers from bringing their children to be blessed by Jesus, so, too, do the leaders of the procession attempt

35 As Jesus was approaching Jericho, a blind man was sitting by the road begging.

36 Now hearing a crowd going by, he *began* to inquire what this was.

37 They told him that Jesus of Nazareth was passing by.

38 And he called out, saying, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"

39 Those who led the way were sternly telling him to be quiet; but he kept crying out all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!"

40 And Jesus stopped and commanded that he be brought to Him; and when he came near, He questioned him,

41 "What do you want Me to do for you?" And he said, "Lord, *I want* to regain my sight!"

42 And Jesus said to him, "Receive your sight; your faith has made you well."

43 Immediately he regained his sight and *began* following Him, glorifying God; and

when all the people saw it, they gave praise to God.

to keep Bartimaeus at bay. But, just as the widow in the parable at the beginning of the chapter persistently pursued the judge, Bartimaeus persistently pursues Jesus of Nazareth.

And here lies another wonderful lesson on prayer: in the midst of the noise and confusion, Jesus listens. Jesus always hears those who acknowledge Him as Lord and cry out for mercy, no matter who they are, no matter where they are, no matter what condition they are in.

Note, too, that Jesus asks Bartimaeus, “What do you want Me to do for you?” Bartimaeus could have asked for a lot of things. He could have asked for enough money so that he would no longer have to beg. That is, he could have asked for material things or for anything that could improve his material well being. Instead, he asks, “Lord, I want to regain my sight.” Bartimaeus wants his physical sight to match his spiritual sight. He wants to see Jesus. Little does he realize that he already “sees” more than anyone in the crowd around him, perhaps even the disciples who have never called Jesus “Son of David.”

Out of His great love for Bartimaeus, Jesus speaks: “Receive your sight; your faith has made you well.” That is, your faith in Jesus and who He is has saved him. Once again we hear the words Jesus spoke to the Samaritan leper who was healed, “Your faith has made you well” (17:19), and to the woman who anointed His feet with perfume (7:50).

It is acknowledging Jesus for who He is and for His act of mercy on the cross that saves people from their sins. It is faith in Him—trusting in, relying upon, adhering to—that saves *us* from *our* sins. Whereas most people already have physical sight, the cry for mercy acknowledges our need for spiritual sight. Amidst the crowd and the noise and confusion of the day, Jesus always hears, spiritual sight is given, our souls are healed, and we are saved.

The response of Bartimaeus is the prototype response for all those who receive their spiritual sight: he began following Him on the road to Jerusalem, and glorifying God. Such a change in one’s life is contagious: “...when all the people saw it, they gave praise to God.” So, too, will it be when someone begins following Jesus: praise to God will come forth. And if praise to God does not come from other people, there will be “joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents” (Luke 15:10).

Questions for Your Personal or Group Reflection

1. This chapter begins with teachings on prayer. There are two parables. The first one involves a widow and an unrighteous judge. Can you identify two principles from this parable?
2. The second parable on prayer involves a Pharisee and a tax collector. Identify 3 things each person says that are characteristic of how one should and how one should not come to God in prayer. Having reread these parables, how do the lessons learned here affect your attitude to prayer? Do you spend time with God in prayer? If not, why not? If so, what should your initial thoughts be when you come before God's throne of grace?
3. Reflect on Jesus' statement, "Whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it at all." Is Jesus referring to one's acceptance into heaven, or is Jesus referring to something else? What does it mean to come to Jesus like a child? Have you ever *not* wanted someone to come to Jesus?
4. Review the real-time story of the rich young ruler. What lessons did you learn from his experience? If you stop to realize that most Americans fit into the upper 5th percentile of the world's population in terms of income and wealth, does it cause you to think of what may be holding you back from becoming completely involved in the work of the kingdom of God? Why does Jesus conclude the encounter with the phrase, "The things that are impossible with people are possible with God"?
5. In verse 29, Jesus makes the statement, "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 as much at this time and in the age to come, eternal life." Does this mean that all Christians are to leave loved ones for the sake of the kingdom? If not, why? Do missionaries tend to leave loved ones behind? How about those who are raised in Muslim or Jewish homes and convert to Christianity?
6. Toward the end of the chapter, Jesus informs the disciples that when He arrives in Jerusalem, He will be turned over to the Gentiles and killed. Did the disciples understand Jesus' words? Do *you* understand Jesus' words, and how do they relate to your willingness to suffer and sacrifice for the same of the kingdom?
7. When entering Jericho, Jesus is greeted by a blind man. Why is this incident so ironic? (That is, concerning the fact that the man was physically blind.) In regard to the teachings on prayer in the beginning of the chapter, how do you plan to improve your prayer life concerning those who are spiritually blind?

The Disciplex's Commentary
Fill-in Outline for the Disciple
Luke 18

18:1-8 – The parable of the _____

Point: The key words are _____

18:9-14 – The parable of the _____

Point: God hears the prayers of the _____

18:15-17 – Jesus blesses _____

Point: It's not just a matter of having child-like faith; it's a matter of _____

18:18-27 – Jesus' encounter with the _____

Point: This is one of the great examples where obeying truth does not equate to _____

18:28-30 – Jesus affirms Peter's observation that the disciples have left all to _____

Point: This statement by Jesus refers (e.g.) to missionaries and _____

18:31-34 – Jesus warns the disciples what will happen to Him in Jerusalem: _____

Point: Even a sacrificial follower of Jesus can be blinded by a _____

18:35-43 – In Jericho, Jesus heals a man who is _____

Point: The man was physically blind but could see _____

The Discipler's Commentary

Answer Outline for the Discipler

Luke 18

18:1-8 – The parable of the unrighteous judge (or persistent widow)

- Ensure that the disciple remembers that Luke did not write his gospel with chapter and verse headings. Therefore, there is no real break between the subjects of chapter 17 and 18.
- It is important that the disciple see the relationship between this parable and the main theme of the previous chapter concerning the second coming.
- Does the disciple see the relationship between the parables of the unrighteous steward and the unrighteous judge?
- Can the disciple describe the main theme of the parable (persistence in prayer)?
- The disciple will certainly want to understand the plight of widows in biblical times.

Point: The key words are continually coming

- Can the disciple fill in the blank before being given the answer?
- See if the disciple can figure out what the lesson here is. Start with the phrase, "If the unrighteous judge finally grants the widow's request, how much more can...?"
- Ask the disciple to draw some personal applications concerning this parable.
- Ask the disciple what he or she plans on doing as a result of learning about his parable.

18:9-14 – The parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector

- The disciple will want to be reminded that wealth to a Jew is Jesus' time meant having God's favor, and being poor meant being the recipient of God's judgment.
- Have the disciple go through the parable and draw comparisons between the Pharisee's prayer and the tax collector's. Ask what is wrong with the Pharisee's portrayal of himself.
- Have the disciple reflect on the whole concept of repentance, and how important that is in one's relationship with God.

Point: God hears the prayers of the repentant sinner

- See if the disciple can fill in the blank before giving the answer.
- Explain the word "justified" and its relationship to the word "righteous."
- Ask the disciple which category he or she tends to fit themselves in, Pharisee or sinner.

18:15-17 – Jesus blesses the children

- Ask the disciple why he or she thinks Jesus' disciples were "rebuking" children to come to Him.
- Ask the disciple what is the relationship between the faith of a child and the kind of faith that God wants His children to have.
- See if the disciple can draw the relationship between the children and Jesus' teaching on the kingdom of God. It might help for the disciple to understand the Jewish prevailing beliefs concerning the kingdom of God. What does the disciple believe the kingdom of God is?

Point: It's not just a matter of having child-like faith; it's a matter of relationship

- What is the relationship between child-like faith and relationships?
- What does biblical truth always point to? How is it that a person, even a pastor or elder or deacon, can have lots of faith (truth) and not have love?
- Ask the disciple if he or she can draw the relationship between Jesus' teaching on prayer (above parable) and having child-like faith?

18:18-27 – Jesus' encounter with the rich young ruler

- In teaching this parable, the discipler will want to focus on the fact that the rich young ruler thinks that earning eternal life depends on keeping the Ten Commandments. (There may need to be some explanation of the “two tablets” here.) Note that Jesus places the emphasis on the second of the two tablets; that is, on how one treats others.
- See if the disciple can describe ways many Christians today believe they are going to become a disciple of Jesus. Is it enough just to “accept Jesus” by raising one’s hand or going forward during an invitation at the end of a sermon?
- Ask the disciple why Jesus omitted the tenth commandment regarding coveting.
- Ask the disciple if he or she thinks Jesus was asking too much of the rich young ruler?
- It may be helpful to remind the disciple of the significance of the key words “rich” and “poor” found in the parable. See if the disciple can place himself in the shoes of the ruler in regards to just giving it all to poor people?
- Can the disciple determine what was most valuable to the ruler, and what ruled his heart? See if the disciple can remember the teaching of Luke 16:13.

Point: This is one of the great examples where obeying truth does not equate to love for others

- See if the disciple can fill in the blank on their own.
- Does the disciple see the difference between having truth and manifesting that truth by loving others?
- Ask the disciple if he or she can remember any “bad” Christians. What raised the red flags? Was it what they said about others, or how they acted toward others?
- Now see if the disciple can explain Jesus’ teaching about the eye of the needle.

18:28-30 – Jesus affirms Peter’s observation that the disciples have left all to follow Him

- Can the disciple list the benefits of leaving behind family or financial security for the sake of following Jesus? Who might fit into this category?
- Here again, there may be a difference between being a disciple of Jesus and being a follower.

Point: This statement by Jesus refers (e.g.) to missionaries and persecuted Christians

- If the disciple hasn’t been exposed to the plight of persecuted Christians, this is a good place to do it.

18:31-34 – Jesus warns the disciples what will happen to Him in Jerusalem: Roman crucifixion

- Today’s Bible readers have the benefit of hindsight; that is, we know what happened to Jesus when He went to Jerusalem. Can the disciple recall what Jesus’ disciples believed would happen?
- Why does Luke, inspired by the Holy Spirit, say that “the meaning of this statement was hidden from them”? (v. 34). Why would God hide anything from His children?

Point: Even a sacrificial follower of Jesus can be blinded by a unrealistic expectations

- Ask the disciple what are his or her expectations about becoming a follower of Jesus Christ.

18:35-43 – In Jericho, Jesus heals a man who is physically blind

- Determine if the disciple can see the irony of Bartimaeus, who is physically blind, knowing that Jesus is the “Son of David.”
- See if the disciple can explain the difference between being physically blind and being spiritually blind?

Point: The man was physically blind but could see spiritually

- What makes the change in a person who is spiritual blind, but comes to the point that their spiritual eyesight is clear regarding Jesus?
- What was Bartimaeus’s response to Jesus making him physically able to see?