

# Impossible?

Luke 18:18-30

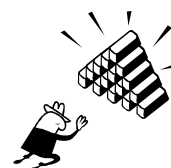


- ? Think about your life, especially your values, desires and goals. Think about things you *have* (or would like to have), and things you *rely on* (trust in or depend on). Name two or three things you consider to be most important, valuable, desirable, and trustworthy (*excluding God*).

## How to Gain Eternal Life (Luke 18:18-23)

- ❑ On one occasion, a certain ruler asked Jesus a question.<sup>1</sup> Read Luke 18:18-25.
- ❑ The man asked, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” (18:18)<sup>2</sup> Jesus directed the man’s attention to God and His will. Then he specified some of the “ten commandments.”<sup>3</sup>
  1. Is Jesus saying the man can earn eternal life by obeying these commandments?<sup>4</sup>
- ❑ The man said he had obeyed all these commands. But Jesus said, “You still lack one thing.”
  2. What is the “one thing” the man lacks? What is his fundamental obstacle, in a *general* sense?<sup>5</sup>

📖 “You cannot serve both God and Money” (Luke 16:13).



3. Besides material wealth, what other kinds of obstacles prevent people from truly serving God?
- ❑ When the ruler heard Jesus’ words, he became very sad, and walked away (Mark 10:22). Obviously, the man was not truly willing to put God first and follow Jesus.

## Impossible with Men (Luke 18:24-26)

- ❑ How did Jesus respond to the ruler’s actions? Read Luke 18:24-26.

<sup>1</sup> This story is also recorded in Matthew 19:16-29 and Mark 10:17-30. All say the man is rich (Matt 19:22; Mark 10:22; Luke 18:23). Matthew says the man is “young” (Matt 19:20, 22). Only Luke says he is a “ruler” (*archōn*). This may mean he is a leader in the synagogue or among the Pharisees, or possibly a civic leader known for being religious.

<sup>2</sup> He addresses Jesus as “good teacher,” but Jesus corrects him. Of course, Jesus is a good teacher, but he “wants the ruler to focus on God and his will so that he will be genuinely responsive to God...Flattering God’s teacher does not bring commendation; response to God does.” (Darrell Bock, *Luke* [Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996], 1477-1478) “Eternal life” refers to the everlasting life of blessing and joy in the presence of God (in the “kingdom of God”).

<sup>3</sup> Jesus mentions five of the “ten commandments”: 7, 6, 8, 9 and 5 (Exod. 20:12-16; Deut 5:16-20). These five commandments concern relationships with others. Obedience to these commands is generally more observable.

<sup>4</sup> No. The Bible clearly teaches that a person cannot earn eternal life (Ephesians 2:8-9). However, while a person cannot *earn* eternal life by doing these things, doing these things is expected of one who receives eternal life.

<sup>5</sup> In particular, the man values, and relies on, his material wealth more than he values, and relies on, God. His wealth takes priority over God. In general, the man has another “god” that displaces the true God.

4. Why is it hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God? What other conditions make it hard for a person to enter the kingdom of God? Why?

- ❑ Jesus went beyond saying it is “hard.” He said it is “impossible!” But his point is this: As it is impossible for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, it is impossible for a person to save himself (that is, gain eternal life based on his own “goodness” or efforts).
- ❑ Wealth was typically seen as a blessing from God. Thus, if it was impossible for a rich man to enter the kingdom, who could enter it? In other words, “Who then could be saved?” (18:26)



### Possible with God (Luke 18:27-30)

- ❑ Jesus replied, “What is impossible with men is possible with God” (18:27). God can break the bondage that material wealth holds on some people, and He can break any other bondage that grips a person’s heart.<sup>6</sup> Only God can truly rescue us, and give us a new heart to serve Him.
- ❑ Peter sought assurance by pointing out the difference between the ruler and the disciples.
  - 📖 “We have left all we had to follow you!” (18:28)<sup>7</sup>
- ❑ Jesus responds by saying that their sacrifice is worth it.<sup>8</sup> Those who give up everything to follow Jesus will receive much reward (18:29-30).<sup>9</sup> They will have treasure in heaven (18:22).
  - 📖 Jesus said, “For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it” (Luke 9:24).

### How to Receive Eternal Life (Luke 18:15-17)

- ❑ Jesus’ meeting with the rich, young ruler was preceded by a meeting with some young children (18:15-17). While the rich, young ruler was a bad example, Jesus presented the young children as a good example. Read Luke 18:15-17.
  - 📖 Jesus said, “the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it” (18:16b-17, NIV)
5. In what way must people receive the kingdom of God “like a little child?”<sup>10</sup>



### Reflection & Application

- Do you want to inherit eternal life? Have you received the gift of eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ? If not, what is the main obstacle in your life? Why is it more important than God?
- As a believer, can you say you have “left everything to follow Jesus?” Could other people say of you, “Jesus is first priority in his/her life”? Identify the things in your life that compete for highest priority. Determine how to put Jesus first, and commit to follow him daily.

<sup>6</sup> Bock, 1487. Zacchaeus is an example of a rich man who was saved by God’s grace (see Luke 19:1-10).

<sup>7</sup> There might be a note of self-congratulation in this statement, but it is generally true (Luke 5:11).

<sup>8</sup> In verse 29, “Jesus is not encouraging his disciples to abandon familial responsibilities (cf. Eph. 5:25; 6:4). But sometimes family members turn against a believer, or there may be times of temporary separation due to Christian ministry” (ESV Study Bible [Wheaton: Crossway Bibles, 2008], 1997).

<sup>9</sup> The reward is not earned by human effort, even self-denial. It is a gift of God received through faith. However, genuine faith is characterized by giving one’s life to Jesus, and following him. See Luke 9:23-25.

<sup>10</sup> A little child is helpless and dependent on his/her parents. While children can be demanding, disagreeable, and rebellious at times, they generally realize their helplessness and need of care, and they trust their parents to take care of them. Many people fail to receive eternal life because they fail to realize their need to depend on the Father (God).