

We're going to take a week off of Daniel

- We'll finish it next week by talking about the final vision he receives
- A vision of the end times
- Pray for me as I try and finish it up this week

But this morning there is another subject I want to study

- I felt lead to do this because I was in the Dominican Republic all week and so many people there hold to this belief
- I think it's also because I am so burdened for the people here who believe this way

What we are talking about today is whether or not you can be saved by being a good person

- Whether or not good deeds will save you

Over the past week I probably had 40-50 opportunities to get into a detailed conversation about the Gospel and how a person can be saved

- I'll tell you...almost every single person in the Dominican Republic believes they are saved by being good
- The priests go so far as to teach that to the people
- Most people believe they are living sin-free lives
- It's one of the most damnable tricks of Satan I've ever encountered

We could even read Romans 3:23 and they would think it didn't apply to them

- **For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God**

One man however took the cake

- He was an older gentleman who had lost an eye...
- He was pulling his chair out to sit by the road to watch people pass by

We spoke to him for a while and he told me he knew he was good and had no sin in his life

- When I asked him how he knew that he said God had told him so Himself
- God brought him to heaven where God the Father, Jesus and Mary all pronounced him to be a good person
- So there you have it...

But as I said earlier this isn't just a Dominican thing

- This is also the curse of the American South
- Right here in the Bible belt

*How many people deep down believe this way?*

- Good people go to heaven
- Bad people go to hell

*And how many people today think in their heart of hearts*

- *I'm probably good enough to go to heaven?*

*How many today find themselves being filled with pride as they do "good things"?*

*How many people look down their noses at others who aren't as "good" as them?*

*How many people think they will stand before God justified based on what they do or who they are*

- *Rather than on what Christ has done and who God is?*

Well in Luke 18 we learn the story of a man who was set straight on all this by none other than Jesus Himself

- Turn there with me to Luke 18, beginning in verse 18

This is the story of the rich young ruler

- Turn there with me in your Bibles please

What the Bible says is that there is no such thing as a good person in the first place

- It says we've all fallen short of the glory of God
- It says the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately sick

What we need are not good works to save us

- What we need is a Savior who saves us

That's why there can be no pride in the church

- There can be no self-righteousness or hypocrisy
- There can only be humility as we talk about what Christ has done for sinners, not what sinners have done for Christ

Listen to God's Word today

- Look to Jesus and trust Him, cling to Him
- **Luke 18:18-30**

Thinking you are good enough to be saved is as big an error as Islam, Buddhism, or Hinduism

- It's as off base as off base as Mormonism or Jehovah's Witness
- Yet some of the ones who believe this way are here today

Thinking you are good enough to deserve salvation is self-righteousness and pride

- So if you sense one ounce of pride in your heart today I plead with you to repent of it
- Humble yourself before the Lord

Pride separates people from God and it destroys churches

- It says you really don't understand who God is and how holy He is
- That you really don't have a proper understanding of yourself either

The young man in our story is about to learn all these things the hard way...

We don't know as much about the rich young ruler as we would like

- Since he is called a **ruler** in verse 18 we know he was a man of prominence and social standing
- In other places the word is translated as official, authority and even judge

To have been so powerful and so wealthy at such a young age may have increased his fame that much more

- I imagine him to be young, wealthy and powerful . . . a mover and shaker

But you don't have to be famous, powerful or wealthy to have his attitude

- You see it on playgrounds as well as in board rooms
- In the American suburbs as well as the South American slums
- In the church as much as the business world

*Do you know what the attitude is?*

- It's an attitude that says in your heart even if you don't say it out loud:
- *Look at me!*
- *Look at what I did!*
- *Do you know who I am?*
- *I should be respected and listened to!*
- *I deserve eternal life!*
- *I am good enough to make it to heaven!*

That's why it makes it all the more interesting to put this story in the overall context of the book of Luke

- Just verses before Jesus spoke to the rich young ruler He had spoken about the little children
- Luke 18:17 says: **Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.**

The rich young ruler is coming as the antithesis of biblical belief, the opposite of it

- Instead of coming with child-like faith, humbly
- He comes arrogantly, telling Jesus what he has done, how good he is

But now before you misunderstand who this young man was

- Don't picture him in your mind as someone who came storming in demanding attention
- That would be too obvious a fault
- The rich young ruler was far better at hiding his sin than that
  
- The rich young ruler was a religious man...
- He had learned to hide his sin beneath the veneer of religiosity

In fact, I think he saw himself as someone who had really arrived spiritually

- A spiritually good person

That's why I think his sin is among the most destructive that can be found

- He hadn't murdered anybody
- He hadn't done any of the big things we like to call sin
  
- But he was hiding a whole bunch of pride, hypocrisy and self-righteousness under a mask of religion
- He was justifying himself

So as this story begins we find him approaching Jesus with a question

- He had actually just finished listening to Jesus speak about eternal life and how you had to come humbly, like a child

That's where we pick up here in verse 18

- Catch the first word in the verse
- **And a ruler asked Him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"**

The word **and** ties these two passages together

- We are supposed to see the one coming on the heels of the other

Even the title he gives to Jesus is a pretty telling detail because this is the only time in Scripture this phrase is used

No Jewish rabbi was ever addressed as **good**

- Today we say all the time, *he is a good man, he was a good man*
- But in Jesus' day that would have been a foreign statement, almost blasphemous
- Only God was called **good**

But the rich young ruler approaches Jesus and asks: **Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"**

I think another key word here is the word **do**

- The rich young ruler wondered what good deed or good work he could **do** to have eternal life

I've thought a lot about his motive in asking Jesus this question

- *Have I been reading him all wrong all this time?*
- *Could he have been a sincere seeker?*
- *Did he just want to know what needed to be done to obtain eternal life?*
  
- *Or did he already think he had it and he just wanted Jesus to confirm it?*

I think as we continue you'll see that it was this last one that was motivating him

What happens next is that Jesus answers the young man's question with a question: **"Why do you call me good?" Jesus answered. No one is good except God alone.**

Jesus, being God, knows the man's heart and his motives and He begins shining light into the darkness by asking him a question: **"Why do you call me good?"**

What He is asking is this: *By saying I am good, are you recognizing that I am God or are you just trying to flatter me?*

- *Do you really know who you are speaking to?*
- *Are you really interested in doing what it takes to have eternal life?*

*Isn't it a daunting thing to recognize that God knows the true condition of our hearts and He knows our motives?*

- We can lie to each other
- We can even lie to ourselves
- But we can't lie to God

Because He loves us He reveals the truth about ourselves to us so we can turn from our sins and turn to Christ

- If God reveals truth to you about yourself don't turn away from it, even if it is painful
- Turn to Him and find healing

When God reveals your sin to you, you only have two options:

- You can humble yourself and confess your sin to God and ask for His forgiveness, which is what I pray you will do today
- Or you can try and justify yourself by making excuses, and try and prove to God and the world that you really are good enough

Sadly so many people miss eternal life because they try and justify themselves

- Instead of repenting of their sins they start speaking about all the good things they do

*Do you understand this fundamental difference?*

- This one truth separates Biblical Christianity from every other religion and cult in the world

But the rich young ruler did not humble himself

- Instead he tried what so many try... God, look at all the things I **do**

So Jesus continues speaking to the rich young ruler's heart

- He gives him a little test to see if he really is good enough on his own

He says: **You know the commandments: 'Do not commit adultery, do not murder, do not steal, do not give false testimony, honor your father and mother.'** "

If you count them, you'll see that Jesus mentions 5 of the 10 commandments

- It's interesting to think about why these 5 and not the other 5 are mentioned
- It's interesting too that He leaves off number 10 about coveting
- But the 5 He does mention all deal with human relationships

The young ruler replies this way in verse 21: **All these I have kept from my youth**

If the Bible had sound effects

- The sound you would hear right now would be like a game-show buzzer when you get the answer wrong
- *Eeeeeennnnkkkk . . . wrong answer . . . next contestant*

But Jesus is too loving and patient with us to do that

However what the rich young ruler demonstrated in his answer was that he didn't understand the purpose of the Law

God gave us His Law as a perfect expression of who He is and how we should live

- But He also knew we would be unable in our fallen, sinful condition to completely obey it

Maybe you think that's cruel

- To ask someone to do something they can't do

But if you're God and you are brilliant and perfect

- You are able to ask things of people to help them see truth

Listen

- God didn't give the law so you would obey it perfectly and be saved
- That would lead to the self-righteousness and pride that we've been addressing all morning

He gave you the Law to show that you **couldn't** keep it

- That you had to have someone keep it for you so their goodness could be applied to your account
- To force you to seek Him and confess your sins to Him

If you want to stay in the context of Luke 18 all you have to do is go back one more story

- Even before the story about the children you have the story about the two men at the wall praying

You know the story

- One comes along and prays about how good he is
- How he thinks he has obeyed the Law:
- *Lord, look at what I've done*
- *I'm so good*
- *I'm so glad I'm not like this sinner here beside me*
  
- *Makes you want to throw-up doesn't it?*

Then the other comes along beside him

- He won't even lift his head up to the sky
- He stands off at a distance and in verse 13 it records him as saying: **God, be merciful to me, a sinner!**

Then Jesus explains everything we are talking about today as He says in verse 14: **I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.**

It's justification by faith right here

- This is Jesus' Gospel
- This is Paul's Gospel
- This is Biblical salvation
- We aren't saved by goodness
- We are saved by confessing our sin, turning from it, and turning to God by faith

Getting back to the rich young ruler, the big point I am making is this:

- When you compare yourself to God's Law you should never say
- *Well God, I've done pretty well, haven't I?*

No, you should only say, God, *what a mess I've made of things!*

- **Be merciful to me, a sinner!**

All of us have sin

- All of us have fallen short

Only One is Perfect, Jesus

- That's why He died on the cross
- He committed no sin
- He obeyed God's Law perfectly
- He could die as a substitute for sinners
- He could pay the price that we couldn't pay

The died for sins at the cross and then rose again from the dead

- All those who turn from sin and turn to Him are saved
- That's how it works
- As simple as that

I've heard people say that God by His grace brings us to a point of decision

- A point of crisis
- We have to decide if we are going to trust in Christ and do things God's way
- Or we are going to back up from that and go back to doing things our way

*Can we humble ourselves and rest in being justified by faith in Christ?*

- *Or will we be filled with pride and add to what Christ has done through self-justification?*

That is why Jesus was testing the rich young ruler's heart

- *Who or what was he really trusting in?*

So verse 22 says: **When Jesus heard this, he said to him, "You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."**

Jesus had been questioning him, trying to get him to see the true condition of his heart

- But all along the rich young man had been justifying himself
- All along he had been looking at his own supposed goodness instead of trusting in Christ and His goodness

But now Jesus lowers the boom

- **Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.**

*So is Jesus saying if you trust in Him you have to sell your house and your car?*

- *You can't go out to eat?*
- *You have to take an oath of poverty?*

That's not what He is saying

- But Jesus knew that wealth was what the rich young ruler was trusting in, not Him
- So the one thing He lacked was Jesus
- He had to stop treasuring money and start treasuring Jesus

Unfortunately that was the one price the rich young ruler couldn't pay

- Verse 23 says: **But when he heard these things, he became very sad, for he was extremely rich. Jesus, seeing that he had become sad, said, "How difficult it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God! <sup>25</sup>For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God."**

*Doesn't your heart break for that man?*

- He was being offered eternal life and forgiveness of sins if he would only let go of the worthless trinkets in his hand and trust in Jesus instead

*So is Jesus saying that no rich person can have eternal life?*

He's not saying that at all

- He's saying that no person **period** can have eternal life if they are trusting in themselves
- It's impossible
- Just like a camel can't go through a needle's eye
- A rich man can't go to heaven on his own, by his riches

Now I've heard some people try and soften this message

- They say that the eye of the needle was a gate in Jerusalem
- For a camel to enter it you had to remove any packs on the camel's back and the camel had to bend down to go through the entrance, the eye . . .

But the Needle's Eye Gate wasn't built until **after** the time of Jesus

- What's more, the Greek word used here is for a literal sewing needle
- Jesus is using hyperbole for effect
- A camel, the largest animal in Palestine, could pass through a needle's eye, the smallest of openings, easier than a rich man could enter the Kingdom

Now catch this next part, this is really great

- The people who were listening to this conversation couldn't believe what they were hearing

Verse 26 has the disciples of Jesus even questioning this teaching: **Those who heard it said, "Then who can be saved?"**

What they are saying is: *If this man, this rich young ruler, this **good** man, can't enter heaven, then who can?*

Verse 27: **But he said, "What is impossible with men is possible with God."**

In other words, no-one can save themselves through themselves

- You can't do anything to save yourself
- You can't be good enough to save yourself

Money, wealth, riches, power, good works, none of it can save you

- Only God can save you by giving you new birth
- He has to change you

You have to come to Him with empty hands, bringing nothing

- Saying to Him humbly
- I deserve nothing, I bring nothing
- **Lord, forgive me, a sinner**

But as the story ends Jesus isn't finished teaching just yet

- He's address the rich young ruler and told him how to find eternal life
- But now he addresses his followers around him

They've heard all this going on and now Peter wants to make a statement

- In verse 28: **Peter said, "See, we have left our homes and followed you."**

It's really a very honest statement

- *What about us Jesus?*
- *What happens if we follow you?*

Verse 29 and following: **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,<sup>30</sup> who will not receive many times more in this time, and in the age to come eternal life."**

*Do you think it's a sacrifice to have to follow Jesus?*

- *To give up things to follow Him?*
- *To make Him first in your life?*

What He is saying is... *what sacrifice?*

- *When you really stop to think about it... what do we give up?*
- *When we let go of self and hang on to Christ alone... don't we gain a whole lot more?*

Look at your own life for just a moment

- Don't think of your family or your friends
- Don't think of other people here today
- Look at yourself

*Why would you ever want to stand before God on your own merits, claiming your own goodness?*

- *When you can stand before God and claim the merits and goodness of Christ on your behalf?*

Please don't allow your pride and self-righteousness to get the better of you...

- Don't try to come up with any more excuses
- Quit justifying yourself to God and to man
- Let go of it and give it to God
- Trust in Him

- Turn from your sins and trust in Jesus Christ

- Trust in Christ alone

*Will you pray with me?*