

The Impossibility of Salvation, Part 1

Scripture: Luke 18:18-27

Code: 42-232

Let's open our Bibles to Luke chapter 18, we come to what is a very important passage in the experience in the life and the teaching of our Lord Jesus. Luke chapter 18 verse 18, and I want to read the text to you all the way down to verse 30 because it really is one unit that we'll examine over the next several weeks. Luke chapter 18 beginning with verse 18.

"And a certain ruler questioned Him saying, 'Good teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?' And Jesus said to him, 'Why do you call Me good? No one is good except God alone. You know the commandments. Do not commit adultery. Do not murder. Do not steal. Do not bear false witness. Honor your father and mother.' And he said, 'All these things I have kept from my youth.' And when Jesus heard this He said to him, 'One thing you still lack. Sell all that you possess and distribute it to the poor and you shall have treasure in heaven. And come, follow Me.' But when he had heard these things, he became very sad for he was extremely rich. And Jesus looked at him and said, 'How hard it is for those who are wealthy to enter the Kingdom of God. 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.' And they who heard it said, 'Then who can be saved?' But He said, 'The things impossible with men are possible with God.' And Peter said, 'Behold, we have left our own homes and followed You.' 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 who shall not receive many times as much at this time and in the age to come eternal life.'"

Now you will notice that this passage begins and ends with eternal life. The question in verse 18 is "What do I do to inherit eternal life?" And the remark at the end of verse 30 is that "Some will receive in the age to come eternal life." And the great compelling question about which this passage speaks is how does one obtain eternal life? How does one obtain eternal life?

That's a basic question all of us need to know how to answer. If we're going to do the work of the Kingdom and evangelize people, then we have to know the answer to how am I to obtain eternal life?

It was many years ago when I was very young in the ministry, this worship center had just been opened up, I was on a cross-country flight and I was sitting in the seat while the plane stopped and took on some more passengers. And a young man got on the plane and sat next to me. We weren't in the air very long until he noticed I was reading my Bible and he interrupted me in a gracious way and said, "Sir, I just wonder since you have a Bible if you could answer a question for me?" And I said

sure. And he said, "Could you tell me how I could have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ?"

Wow. I said, "I think I know the answer to that question." It's pretty rare that somebody is that far along in progress in understanding the gospel to ask such a pertinent question. Well I went on to explain to him what he needed to believe, about the cross and the work of the Lord Jesus Christ and then I suggested to him that maybe we could pray together and he could ask the Lord to graciously save him. And we prayed together. And within a month I baptized him right here. He was interestingly enough flying to California, go to work for a man who was a member of our church. Well God had, seemed to me, orchestrated all of that and a month later he was baptized and within a couple of months after that, I lost track of him and never have seen him since except one fleeting conversation which indicated his utter disinterest in anything to do with Christ.

I had thought that I had met the perfect seeker. I had thought that I had met the perfect prospect. I had thought that all the work had already been done, all I needed to do was just fill in a few little things at the end that were necessary for him to believe and this would be one of the easiest evangelistic opportunities I had ever experienced. And I had also thought that I pretty well understood what it was like to answer that question and how best to craft the accurate answer that would truly bring him to salvation.

But I was wrong. And it was one of those really profound life lessons that I learned. There are people like that all around us. There are people like that all around Grace Church. There are people like that poking at the edges of the Kingdom of God wondering how to inherit eternal life. We need to understand how to answer that question and we need to know how to answer it the correct way. And for that, we turn to the greatest evangelist of all evangelists, the Lord Jesus Christ, and we learn from Him how do you deal with somebody who comes to that point where they're asking that question? No one was more aware of the potential for superficiality than Jesus. It seems that if you study the gospel carefully, He made a consistent habit of making it difficult to enter the Kingdom. There's just nothing of easy believism in His evangelism. He seems to be more anxious to put up barriers than to pull barriers down. And so I say, no one was more aware of the potentiality for superficiality than Jesus was. No one was more aware of false discipleship, superficial faith, temporary conversion, rocky soil, weedy soil where there's a little bit of indication of interest, but no fruit and very soon the supposed life dies away. That's what this particular encounter with Jesus is all about. It is all about addressing superficial faith.

The question here is not about faith. Here is a man who believed in God, who believed in the revelation of God, who believed to some degree that Jesus was the messenger from God and that perhaps Jesus was actually the way to God. That's why he asks Him the question. The issue here is not about faith, the issue here is about repentance and submission. It's not about what is true regarding God, it's about a true understanding of one's own heart. Jesus doesn't say anything to this man about faith. He doesn't tell him to believe. He doesn't tell him what to believe. He doesn't give

him facts to believe. That would be faith disconnected from the appropriate and necessary heart attitude which is a heart of penitence and a heart of submission. Faith to be legitimate faith must be connected to that kind of heart attitude so that salvation comes to those who not only have a right assessment about God and God's work, but a right assessment about their own condition and their own hearts.

If you condense the story and look for its central meaning, it is simply this. No matter what one may believe, no one enters the Kingdom unless he humbly confesses his sinfulness and submits completely to the sovereign lordship of Jesus Christ. This is really an illustration of what Jesus taught in Luke 9:23 to 25 when He said, "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself." That is to deny there is anything good in himself. "Let him take up his cross," which means he's willing to die which is the ultimate disdain for all earthly possessions and relationships, including even your own life. "And let him...in those terms...follow Me." This is what Jesus was talking about in Luke 14 when He said, "You need to hate your father, your mother, your sister, your brother and even your own life." Before you come to Me you have to be willing to give up all your possessions. You have to count the cost like a man who builds a tower or a man who goes to war.

Our Lord has been saying this all along. This doesn't introduce anything new to us. Salvation is not just about what you believe concerning God and His work, it is about what you believe concerning your own heart. It is about yielding up pride and possessions. It is about hatred for your own life. It is about recognizing that you have before God achieved nothing that is of merit or value or worth in terms of salvation and that you hold on to nothing in this world that is temporal and passing but be willing to let go of all of it if that's what a sovereign Lord asks.

Salvation comes to those who have a recognition of sin and a recognition of sovereignty. That's the message here with a lot of other very important elements added to it. Our Lord gave this young man the right answer. It might not appear on the surface to be the right answer but it is the right answer because the issue with the young man was that which must precede a true and saving faith, and that is an accurate assessment of one's own condition and standing before God. The bottom line, he had to choose himself or Christ. He had to choose between self-righteous pride and possessions and total abandonment to God.

Our Lord gave him a test. Our Lord's words were a test. And he failed the test. No matter what points of doctrine he and Jesus may have agreed on about the nature of God, about the God of the Old Testament, there was no discussion of those points. There was no discussion of faith, as I said, there's no discussion of grace. There's no discussion about the means of salvation by way of substitution. There's no discussion about justification because all of that is superfluous if there is not a proper assessment of one's own heart and a willingness to abandon personal pride and worldly possessions. That is to say, a willingness to see oneself as sinful and a willingness to submit to the sovereign lordship of God and Christ over the soul.

The test really reveals what a person loves. If you love self more than Christ, you can't be His disciple. If you love possessions more than Christ, you can't be His disciple. Eternal life is only for those who love the Lord their God with all their heart, soul, mind and strength, far more than self and far more than worldly possessions.

Now the expression eternal life is used about fifty times in the Bible. But we want to understand it, as familiar as we are with it, not in our own concept but in the concept of the rich young ruler who asked the question. So the compelling question at the beginning of our discussion is, what did he mean by eternal life? When he comes to Jesus and says, "What shall I do to inherit eternal life, what was he talking about?" Was he talking about simply living forever? Was he talking about a duration of life? Was he saying I don't ever want to die? I have a fear of death, I just want to keep on living like this forever, was that what he was saying? Clearly that is not the case. He understood eternal life the ways Jews understood eternal life. When Jesus said, for example, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believes in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life." When John says that in John 3:16, he assumes that the Jews knew what eternal life meant. What does it mean to inherit eternal life? Is it just life as we know it, that lasts forever? That doesn't sound too good. In fact, that sounds pretty bad.

That's really not what he was talking about. He wasn't talking about a duration of life. He understood eternal life the way the Jews understood eternal life. And they understood it as a kind of life, a quality of life. A better way to say it would be, "I want to inherit that kind of life that lasts forever." You know, this young man is at a point where we would like to get the people we witness to. Isn't it? Isn't this where we want to get everybody if we could? Wouldn't you think the ideal scenario is for somebody to say, "What do I do to inherit that kind of life that lasts forever? And inherent in that in the Jewish thinking was the kind of life that lasts forever is the kind of life that is characteristic of God. It is the kind of life that God possesses. I want God's life. Boy, that is just ideal. In today's evangelistic vernacular, this guy looks like the perfect seeker. He's way down the line from where most people are that we meet. We don't have to explain to this young man that God exists. We don't have to prove to him the existence of God. We don't have to affirm to him the character of God. That all is already a given. He already believes there is a God. He believes that that God is the God revealed in Scripture. We don't have to prove to him that Scripture is true and accurate. He would believe that as well. We don't have to warn him about future judgments so that he knows what he needs to avoid. He understands that because of the context from which he comes. We don't have to explain to him about heaven, about future blessing. He's got all of that already in his bank of beliefs. He's ready. He just needs to raise his hand, sign the card, or walk the aisle before there is an aisle. Just point me and shoot me is what he's saying. He's the perfect evangelistic example, the hottest prospect in Jesus' ministry by any modern definition. All we ever hear about today in the modern evangelistic world is that we're looking for seekers and we want to minister to seekers and we want to meet seekers. We even define non-believers who come to church as seekers.

Well here's a seeker. Here's a seeker that we would assume by the contemporary standards as the perfect, ideal seeker, but it just turns out that he is a sham seeker. He is a superficial seeker. He is a false seeker. He is an illegitimate seeker, he is a false seeker, he is an illegitimate seeker and classically he is an illustration of the fact that no man truly seeks after God. So you've got to be very careful when you think you've identified a seeker...very, very careful.

It would seem that there's no way this young man could miss eternal life...there's no way. First of all, he's ready and secondly, he's talking to Jesus who knows exactly how to answer every question. No way Jesus would lose this prospect. No way Jesus wouldn't get closure here and nail him down. But he left without eternal life. How did it happen? How could it have happened? What was missing? Why didn't Jesus take him from where he was to a quick decision, quick prayer? Why didn't Jesus do what you're supposed to do, at least that's what we're being told today, find acceptable language and acceptable terms to move this hot prospect into salvation?

But Jesus did the opposite...absolutely the opposite. Instead of finding terms acceptable to him, Jesus introduced terms absolutely unacceptable to him. Instead of lowering any remaining barriers that might appear, He raised barriers that heretofore had not appeared. Instead of making it easy for him to believe and be saved, he made it impossible for him to be saved, so much so that people listening to the conversation said, "Who could be saved?" And by Jesus even personal admission, "It is impossible for men..."

So here you have a man, it turns out, who is trying to do the impossible...trying to do the impossible. He's a seeker, seeking on his own terms to be saved and it can't happen. It's impossible. That's a very important message today. Beware of the seeker. No man truly seeks after God so somebody who appears to be seeking God is very likely seeking God on his own terms. And if you add the component of the fact of felt need, which is how evangelism seems to go today, people looking to meet felt needs because people are seeking to have their needs...their felt needs met, you have an even more illegitimate seeker. At least this seeker is seeking on the basis of some theological premises. And even he is not a legitimate seeker. And Jesus doesn't move him to a quick decision, quick prayer. Jesus puts up barriers that are necessary barriers.

Jesus, I suppose by some people's measure, would have failed Evangelism 101. Come on, if you lose this guy, you have really got an inadequate approach. I can understand losing somebody who doesn't believe in God, doesn't believe in the Bible, doesn't believe in the cross, doesn't believe in the resurrection. But this guy? And to make it worse, Jesus didn't preach grace, He preached Law. Wow. Doesn't mention faith, but He does affirm obedience. He preaches Law and obedience, rather than faith and grace. He didn't challenge the man to believe anything. He didn't give him facts to believe.

So, do our ideas of evangelism indict Jesus? Is He wrong? By today's standards He would be measured wrong, in all honesty. But we can't do that. Jesus then indicts our contemporary evangelistic strategies. He judges them. He rules on them in this account. Jesus judges our decisions, our statistics, our aisle walking, our gimmicks, our prefabricated presentations, our pitches, our marketing strategy, our emotional manipulation, our intimidation. Jesus judges all that cacophony of easy believism and simplistic appeals. Jesus judges us every time we told someone with an inadequate understanding of sin and sovereignty to invite Jesus into their hearts, accept Him as their personal Savior, believe the facts of the gospel and that's all they needed to do. Jesus judges that. The aftermath of this kind of evangelism, it's so common today, is appalling failure seen in the lives of millions of people who profess faith in Christ with no consequent impact on them at all, either in their thoughts or beliefs or behavior. Who knows how many millions of people are deluded into believing that they're Christians when in fact they are not. They truly went away unredeemed but didn't know it. This man goes away unredeemed and knows it.

Now before we look at the details, just a couple of things to understand. All three synoptic gospels have this story...Matthew, Mark, Luke....Matthew 19, Mark 10, Luke 18, same story. When you put all three together, you've got the composite record of what occurred, so we'll be referring to the other accounts to fill in the story. It is in the context that began in chapter 17 verse 20 which is a context of the Kingdom. And throughout this section, the discussion of our Lord is about the Kingdom. To whom does the Kingdom belong and who is in the Kingdom? It's about salvation. So this fits in to the discussion about the kind of people that get into the Kingdom, namely those that are childlike. The discussion of the Pharisee and the tax collector, the tax collector goes home justified because he confesses his sinfulness, because he submits himself to God. The Pharisee goes back down from the temple unjustified because he does not recognize his sin because he is self-righteous. It's really all about the kind of people that are in the Kingdom, the kind of people that are not in the Kingdom, the kind that are entering the Kingdom, the kind that are barred from the Kingdom, that's the theme of this general section.

A third sort of preliminary thought is this is not a parable, this is a real account. This is a true account of an actual person who came to Jesus. Like the incident of the parents bringing their children was a genuine account, this one occurs perhaps close to the account of the children because they are back to back in all three gospels, but one of the other writers, Mark, tells us that Jesus was on a journey, so probably at a different occasion, perhaps soon after Jesus and the parents.

So what happened? What happened? A man came to Jesus wanting to know how to inherit eternal life. Well let's look at him and let's look at the human side. First of all, where we have to start. Let's take the man at face value. If you want to obtain eternal life, what has to be there? From the human side, what has to be there? Well, first of all, and this is what we see in the man, you have to know what you want...you have to know what you want. Go to verse 18. "A certain ruler questioned Him saying, 'Good teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?'" What does that tell you? That tells you

he knew he didn't have it, okay? Fair enough? He knew he didn't have it, did not have eternal life. He was very aware of it and it deeply bothered him.

Now Matthew tells us he was young. Matthew 19:20 says he was young. That would...I don't know...24 to 25 to 40 young by their standards. Luke tells us also here he was a ruler, *arche...arche*, likely the ruler of a synagogue. That same term is used in Matthew 9:18 to refer to that. So here is a guy who is young and he is really influential. You might think that it was his money that made him influential, that might play a role in it because he was very, very rich, extremely rich, verse 23 says. But the only way you could ever be the ruler in a synagogue would be if you were THE most spiritually, morally and religiously impressive man in the synagogue. And that was often in many cases, often connected to your wealth because if you could give you could purchase more from God. There was that belief that the more money you gave, the more blessing you purchased from God. So being rich and being blessed by God were sort of synonymous, so they saw the man as moral, spiritual, religious, blessed by God, that's why he was wealthy, and he had achieved prestige, prominence, power, authority, respect and he was elevated to be the ruler in the synagogue in a very legalistic society which would only put a person in that position who in the eyes of everybody had attained a higher level of spirituality than they.

Devout religious Jew...rich, young, prominent, influential, moral, respected, all that, in the culture of his day he had absolutely everything. But in the middle of all this religion and all this morality and all this spirituality and all this affirmation that he must have received and all this respect, he had a huge hole in his heart. Matthew in telling us the story starts with, "Behold," an exclamation word, a word of startled wonder because it is really amazing that one so well off in so many categories would come to Jesus and take the position this young man did of publicly exposing the hole in his life. People who reached this level of achievement spiritually and civilly and socially and religiously aren't usually likely to be so open as to confess what they're missing. But he didn't have eternal life and he knew it. And again I say, it wasn't that he wanted life that lasts forever, he wanted the kind of life that God possesses. He wanted the life of God. To put it another way, he wanted a relationship with God that would produce in him rest from the struggle of legalism, hope, peace, joy, contentment, tranquility. What was missing in his heart was calm, confidence. He was restless. He was anxious. He was unfulfilled. He was where we would like to get sinners, right? We preach to make them restless. We preach to make them agitated. We talk about what people are missing and we want them to feel the absence of it. Well he was there. He was there.

Precisely what eternal life is explained to us by the words of Jesus in John 17:3, listen to what He said. "And this is eternal life, that they may know Thee, the only true God and Jesus Christ whom Thou has sent." What is eternal life? Knowing God, the knowledge of God. That's eternal life. Or, John also writes again in 1 John chapter 5 verse 20, "We know that the Son of God has come, has given us understanding in order that we might know Him who is true and we are in Him who is true, to know Him who is true, to be in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ, this is the true God and

eternal life." Eternal life cannot be separated from God and Christ. It is to know God. It is to possess the life of God, the deep intimate knowledge of God. It is the life that God possesses in the heart of man so that man and God have fellowship. It is fellowship with God. It is when the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts, to use Paul's language in Romans 5. It is when the light of the knowledge of God shining in the face of Jesus Christ shines in us, 2 Corinthians 4. It is the peace of God that passes all understanding, Philippians 4. It is the joy unspeakable and full of glory of 1 Peter 1. This is the life of God in us so that we have intimate fellowship with God and enjoy peace and blessing and hope and confidence and assurance and tranquility and satisfaction. That's what was missing. *Aionios*, eternal, is a word that refers in the end to deity...to God. I want the life that is not temporal. I want the life that is not earthly. I want the life that is not characteristic of humanity. I want the life that is characteristic of God.

John uses *zoe*, the word for that kind of life, 34 times and it always means the life that belongs to God, the life that makes one spiritually alive, that brings us in to true communion with God. It is unaffected by death, so it does go on forever, but it is a quality of life. He didn't have it and he knew it. He didn't know it and he knew he didn't know God. He didn't know God in any intimate way. He knew about God but he didn't know God and he knew he didn't because none of the peace and joy and rest and comfort and quiet and settled confidence and fulfillment and satisfaction and joy were there. And that was so disappointing to a legalist, so profoundly disappointing to a legalist. And this is a young man who is far more honest than the Pharisees. The Pharisee that we read about in verses 9 to 14 goes into the temple, struts his stuff, parades his supposed spirituality and thanks God that he's not like other sinful people. This is a man who wasn't honest enough to admit that he didn't know God either. The Pharisees were so good at hypocrisy, they convinced themselves. They lived with the illusion that they had eternal life. This young man didn't, he knew he didn't have it. He knew he didn't have it.

But he wanted it. And this is where coming to Christ begins. You've got to know you don't have what you need and you want it. And as I said, sometimes you work a long time to get somebody to this point, he's there. That leads to a second characteristic, to obtain eternal life you must know what you want, and secondly, you must know deeply the need. It can't be superficial, it's got to be profound, it's got to be the kind of thing that gnaws and nags and eats and distresses and disturbs so that you are willing to display your lack publicly all embarrassment, all self-protection flies away and you feel this need deeply. He's not asking this for theological reasons. He doesn't use a plural pronoun as if he's asking a question that everybody might like to know the answer to...what shall we do to inherit eternal life? This man is very honest, it is very personal and he is very confused. In fact, in Matthew 19:20 he says, "What am I lacking?" And he's looking at his life and he's saying, "I've done a spiritual inventory, I...I think I'm as good as I can get, I can't figure out anything else, I can't figure another step of goodness. I can't find another category of spirituality that I haven't entered. I...I don't know what else to do morally. I don't know what else to do religiously, ceremonially, what is wrong here?"

The world is full of people like this who are caught up in religion, even caught up in false forms of Christianity, who have gone through everything, done the whole review of all their participation in these matters and come to the conclusion that they don't have the life of God, they don't know God at all. There's this huge hole in their life. And they can't figure out what's missing. And he was sure it was just one thing and he also thought that Jesus probably knew what that one thing was. What's missing? This is the cry of an unsatisfied, unfulfilled man. And we would like to get people to that point where they cry out in their dissatisfaction, where they lose all their social inhibitions and they're willing to expose their lack...even when everybody assumes that they couldn't possibly have anything missing. This is a man in turmoil. This is a man deeply disturbed. This is not a superficial issue with him. This is the governing issue in his heart. All his religion, all his wealth, all his prestige, all his morality hadn't given him confidence, peace, joy, settled hope, he had none of that. He is restless in his soul. He feels this deep... You talk about felt need, this guy's got a felt need and it's...it's a real felt need, it's not just that he needs his marriage fixed up a little bit, he needs to feel more successful or feel better about himself or elevate his self-esteem, etc., etc. This guy feels the absence of God in his life. Living an outwardly, exemplary life, avoiding outward sins, like Paul, blameless before the Law, moral, religious. But it's not enough. So he knew what he wanted and he felt it deeply.

Thirdly, he sought it diligently...he sought it diligently. You wouldn't quite get all of that in verse 18, "A certain ruler questioned him," that doesn't tell you a lot. But if you add Mark 10:17 it says, "He came running." That helps. Running? And then it says in Mark 10:17 that he knelt. Now Jesus is talking to a crowd and here comes the local synagogue ruler and he's not coming in some cool, detached way, trying to protect his reputation. He comes running full speed, tears through the crowd, comes to Jesus, hits his knees before Jesus. "Lord, what...or good teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" All the masks are off. This is honest stuff. He's not protecting his reputation or people's expectations of him. I like that. No wonder the other writers say, "Jesus loved him." Never says that about Jesus' attitude about Pharisees. There was something sad about him that elicited love from Jesus. His diligent seeking. He rushed to Jesus. He's enthusiastic about spiritual life, enthusiastic about knowing God.

All these things are right up to this point. I can't imagine a better prospect from the human view. He had been prepared by his environment for this. Wow, what an opportunity. He kneels which is the posture of worship, which ascribes to Jesus such profound respect from a man who knew what respect was.

How do you obtain eternal life? Well from the human side you'd say this guy did everything he could do. He knew what he needed. He felt the need deeply. He sought diligently. And number four, he came to the right source. That's pretty important. I think there are people in the world know they don't have eternal life who want eternal life, feel it deeply, who seek it diligently and end up in the wrong place, right? Go to the wrong church. Join the wrong religion. Read the wrong stuff. Listen to the

wrong teacher. But he came to the right one. He came to the one who is eternal life, 1 John 5:20, this is the true God and eternal life. Who? His Son Jesus Christ. He came to the one who is life and who alone gives life. No doubt he had heard about the power of the Lord Jesus and he knew, at least he believed, that Jesus had the life that he wanted. I don't know that he knew Jesus was God. I don't know that he believed Jesus was the Son of God. But he certainly believed Jesus possessed the kind of life that is eternal that he did not possess. And there's a good indication of that. You notice what he calls him, "Good teacher." As far as I know, and I've tried to search it out, there is no where in all the record of Jewish literature where anybody ever called a rabbi "good teacher." Teacher, yes. Good teacher, no. There's no record that any rabbi was ever so addressed. God was good and that was reserved for God.

By saying to Jesus "good *didaskala*," good teacher, he puts Him above all the rest of the teachers. And he associates him with God. Did he believe he was God? It doesn't say that. Did he believe that he knew God, that he had a message from God? That he understood how to know God? I think so. And that's why the good is there. That's *agathos*, good in essence, good in nature, good inwardly, good. He knew that Jesus had what he didn't have. He also knew that the things that he was missing in his life included holiness, goodness. Every sinner knows that, every honest one. The Pharisees wouldn't admit it. And he really won't, but he knew in his heart that there was a level of goodness that he didn't experience. He came to the one who was good, really good. And he knew that goodness belonged to God. So he connects Jesus with God. So what can we assume he believes? He believes in god. He believes in the God of the Bible. He believes that God is the source of eternal life. He believes...he believes that Jesus is perhaps the way to that eternal life for him.

Does he know everything about Jesus? No. Certainly not what we know on this side of the cross and the resurrection. First John 5:11, "And this is the record that God has given to us, eternal life and this life is in His Son." In a somewhat primitive sense, he understood that this life might be made available to him through this person, Jesus. Wow, you can take him at that point and say, "Wow, you just need to take a little step here and recognize that not only is Jesus from God, not only does Jesus know God and so therefore does he share the goodness of God because he shares the life of God, but He is God. And you can move into the deity of Christ and lock him up for the Kingdom.

Everything seems so right here. He knew what he wanted. He felt his need deeply. He sought eagerly. He came to the right source. And then one other issue, number five, he asked the right question. He didn't say, "How...can You...can you help me with my loneliness? I'm having trouble with my self-image." He didn't say that. "I have a lot of depression. Can You deliver me from my alcoholism and drug addictions? Could You help me be more religious? Could You help me be more moral?" No, he said, "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" That is the right question. The word inherit means to take possession of. It's there, I think it's available but I don't know how to take possession of it." Wow was he ready. So ready. Then we would expect anybody to say, "Believe, and here's a couple of things you need to believe...you're there, my friend, you're there."

Now the question is a good question. Some people have said, "Well he said what shall I do...and that's illegitimate." Well of course that reflects the way he thinks religiously. It's up to now been what he did and he just can't figure out what other thing he needs to do because he's in a system of self-righteous works and legalism. Of course he's saying what shall I do, it's revelatory of the whole approach of his religion. He's saying it in a contributory way. He understands that he has to do something. That's the kind of religion he has grown up with. There's nothing really wrong with the question, it's the question of his heart. And he could be redirected. You could say, "Well you don't do anything, my friend, you don't do anything. You've got to forget about the do part, you just accept the gift," that would be a pretty good approach, wouldn't it? That would be one that would get you a decent grade in evangelism 101. But...and thinking of John 6, isn't it verse 28 where they ask Jesus, "What shall we do that we might work the works of God?" And Jesus said, "This is the work of God, that you believe on Him who He has sent." Faith is necessary and on that occasion when the question was asked, Jesus talked about faith. Here when the question is asked, Jesus doesn't say anything about faith at all. Does that mean there's no place for faith. No, there's a place for faith and we find that in John 6:28 when the context demanded it, Jesus spoke in response to the issue and there the issue was believing in Him. Here this young man is ready. He's prepared to believe in Him as the source that can take him to the life of God.

But there's something before that that has to be dealt with. The facts to be believed will at this juncture be disconnected from the necessary heart attitude. Our omniscient Lord knew that he had a fatal flaw in his heart from which his faith would be damningly disconnected and deceptive. And so Jesus does not respond to him the way we would. Jesus says this, verse 19, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good but God alone."

He's not denying His deity. He's not saying...Don't call Me good because it belongs only to God and I'm not God. That's not what He's saying. What He's saying is very clear. He affirmed His deity particularly, of course, all through His life and ministry, especially as unfolded by the gospel of John. He affirmed His deity again and again. What He is saying is, "Why do you call Me good when you know that no one is good except God alone, unless you intend by calling Me good to connect Me with God?" That's what He's saying. I'm going to have to force you to the implications of your address, is what He's saying. You call Me good? Rabbis aren't called good, yet you call Me good. Are you saying I'm from God? Are you prepared to say that I am from God? This is the implication of what you have just said. And if you come acknowledging that I am from God and you truly believe that, then you will be, I'm sure won't you, very eager to do whatever I tell you? Fair enough? Is the...is not that a reasonable implication if I'm God? Why are you asking Me this information about eternal life and calling Me God...or calling Me good if you don't see that I'm connected to God?

And then He says staggering thing. "You know the commandments. You know the commandments." And Matthew 19:17 adds that He also said, "If you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments."

Now that gets an F in Evangelism 101 right there. What? Isn't He supposed to preach faith and grace? What is He doing preaching the Law? He says, "You know what God has already said. I don't need to give you any new information from God. You know the commandments and you know they have come from God and you know that if you want to enter into life on the terms that you understand, on the terms of your religion, on the terms of self-righteousness and works and legalism, that you must keep the commandments."

Now Jesus knows that He's going to have to deal, listen, with the Law before he can ever deal with grace. Jesus knows, so important, that there must be the work of the Law before the work of grace. Paul said, "The Law killed me." And this man needs to be killed by the Law before there can be any discussion about grace and faith.

Up to here you have a human seeker. As it turns out, every component looks legitimate. Every component is necessary, but he is void of any real work of God. And so, even the best seeker on his own under the best influences with the most heartfelt needs, the most diligent search, coming to the right source and asking the right question is not enough. We would throw grace at him so fast he wouldn't know what hit him. And Jesus throws the Law at him because that's absolutely necessary because self must die. And then Jesus throws sovereignty at him and self must die again there as to its self-righteousness and its personal indulgence.

That's a shift in this whole story and when you come to verse 20 you start to see the divine side. Up to now it's the human side. He looks like a great seeker, the ideal seeker. It's not a real seeker at all. No man on his own really seeks after God, no matter how good it looks on the surface. But what will expose that...what will expose that is the Law and the sovereignty of Christ. And we'll see that next time.

Lord, you have instructed us again so richly from Your Word. We thank You. We want to honor our Savior and let Him indict us in our evangelistic means and let Him sit in judgment on our woeful approach to the eternal souls of men and women. May we learn from the Savior how necessary the Law is to condemn, how necessary it is to proclaim sovereign Lordship over the sinner whether to see whether the sinner will feel the weight of the Law and acknowledge his own sinfulness and feel the weight of lordship and acknowledge the Savior's sovereignty. And then comes a faith that saves. Lord, You've made Your Word so clear to us. We want to be faithful evangelists in proclaiming it. Give us opportunity even this week to apply what we've learned. We thank You for doing this work in our hearts so that we understand our sinfulness and we understand Your sovereignty. Gladly we acknowledge our sin and the salvation You bring, gladly we acknowledge that You are our sovereign Lord and we would give up anything that You would ask because we love You supremely. Do Your work through us in hearts as You give us opportunity. We pray in the Savior's name. Amen.

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