

The Miracle of Eternal Life

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[0 : 00] Well, hello there, and let me add my welcome as well. Thank you, King Lee, for reading the Bible. I do wish you were here today with me, but I trust that even though we may still be just live streaming, that we will still get out of God's Word what we had originally planned and intended, or God had planned and intended.

Well, if you have your Bibles there, I hope you can keep it open to Luke chapter 18. Actually, we're going to begin at verse 18. A few years ago, one of my daughters and I went on a sausage sizzle crawl.

Some of you who have been my Facebook friends for a while may recall some pictures to that effect. I've not been allowed to post them on the slides today. But we went from one Bunnings store to the next, some Woolies supermarkets as well, aiming to find the perfectly cooked sausage.

Not overcooked or burned, still juicy. Now, sadly, there were not that many fancy flavours. These were, after all, Coles and Woolies sausages.

But it needed to be on the right kind of bread. Not the cardboard-tasting ones, but still fresh. But not too soggy with all the oil from the sausage dripping into it either.

[1 : 23] Now, it's probably too much to ask for a perfect sausage when you're only paying \$2.50. But as you can see, there are numerous factors that go into making that perfect sausage sizzle, isn't there?

Well, today, the ruler in our story is on a similar quest. Not for the perfect sausage, but for a perfect life.

Eternal life, that's it. And he's wondering what it takes to get it. He's wondering what he needs to do to earn it. What must he do to be good enough for eternal life?

Now, each time I read this story and the similar one that is in Matthew, I'm fascinated by the depth of this dialogue. There are just so many layers to it. So many insights which Jesus raises, not just with the ruler, but also with his disciples.

And as the conversation unfolds, the manner in which it does is fascinating. So hopefully, I've whetted your appetite, not for that sausage, but for what we can find in this passage, which we will begin at verse 18, where we read, A certain ruler asked him, Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?

[2 : 39] Why do you call me good? Jesus answered. No one is good except God alone. Now, if we didn't know Jesus and who he was, we might think him a bit rude at this point. I mean, here was this ruler asking a life and death question, and Jesus appears to be picking on his choice of word, good teacher.

Except, of course, Jesus wasn't doing anything of that sort. Because when it comes to the question of eternal life, the idea of who is good enough is actually key to the question.

In some ways, the question the ruler asked could be phrased more like, What good must I do to inherit eternal life? And what Jesus first raises with the ruler lays down a marker in the dialogue.

No one is good enough to receive eternal life, because no one is good except God alone. Now, let that just sink in for a moment.

Again, achieving eternal life isn't about doing good things. Rather, it's about who we are when we stand before God.

[3 : 49] And because each of our characters and our nature are flawed, no amount of good deeds is enough to inherit eternal life. Incidentally, notice that Jesus doesn't correct the ruler for calling him a good teacher.

He simply asks why he's called good, because only God is good. And it's something the ruler should already know, because as we've heard in Psalm 14, as a Jew, the ruler would know that no one is good.

And so if the ruler is right to call Jesus good, then logic tells us that Jesus is actually God. Well, Jesus continues on the next slide by saying, You know the commandments.

You shall not commit adultery. You shall not murder. You shall not steal. You shall not give false witness. Honor your father and mother. All these I have kept since I was a boy, he said.

Well, here Jesus lays down a few measures for being good enough for eternal life. And it appears the ruler has satisfied them by keeping these commandments.

[5 : 00] But more than that, actually, if you think about it, this ruler also had status and honor. And we'll soon find out this was a man of great wealth. And so for most people looking at him, they would think that surely he must be good enough.

And yet, Jesus already knew that he wasn't good enough. But you know, Jesus could have gone straight to the point of what this man lacked.

And yet, he didn't do that, did he? Why was that? Well, he was drawing the ruler and us, you see, into the realization that all our attempts at doing good things in life in order to inherit eternal life is futile.

What must I do is the wrong question to ask. Because no amount of doing is enough to make up for that one lack. And I think the ruler must have known this.

Because, you know, he knows that he's kept all these commandments as a boy. Anyway. And yet, he felt the need to come to Jesus, to ask him. Deep down, I think, he must know that whatever he had, whoever he was, it wasn't enough.

[6 : 17] Now, I wonder if some of you out there today are in the same situation. You sense a lack of peace in your own lives. That feeling that, try as you might, there's still something missing that's not quite enough in life.

Now, it may not necessarily be couched in terms of finding eternal life. But deep down, there's still this nagging doubt about whether you're good enough. You've done so much, you think.

But is it enough? It may not be God's laws that you're trying to live up to. But it could be something like maybe your parents' expectations. Or the standards of society.

Or those of your peers. But the motivation is still the same. What more must I do to feel like I've made it?

But of course, if you think about it, if God exists, and we do know he exists as Christians, then ultimately, his yardstick is the one that's the true measure of what is enough, isn't it?

[7 : 29] Because if he created you, your heart's longings, ultimately, is really a longing to satisfy him as your creator. Even though you may not realize it.

Well, having made the man realize he's still lacking something, even though on the surface he's done all he could, Jesus reveals what he lacks in verse 22, if you look there.

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. Now, when he heard this, he became very sad, because he was very wealthy.

Jesus looked at him and said, How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God. Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.

Now, Jesus isn't saying here, it's impossible just because he's rich to enter. He actually just says, It's hard, not impossible. But rather, it was what his wealth was doing to him that was stopping him from entering.

[8 : 40] It was the fact that riches was taking the place of God in this ruler's life. For you see, despite obeying all of God's law, this man had broken the very first of the Ten Commandments, which was to love the Lord with all his heart.

You see, in his heart of hearts, this man's God was wealth. Money was his master, even though he knew and he believed in God's existence.

It's frightening to think that, isn't it? That you can somehow believe in God and still have another master that bars you from God's kingdom.

Well, the rich man's God was money, but for us, we can worship many other things besides that, can't we? Anything that we put before or ahead of God, those are just as bad.

And yet, I have to say that money poses a unique danger for all of us. That's why Jesus singles it out in Matthew 6 and verse 24 when he says that no one can serve two masters.

[9 : 51] Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and, he singles out, money. And then Paul 2 reiterates that in 1 Timothy 6 by saying, For the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil.

There's something insidious about riches and money, isn't it? And I think it's because it has that unique ability to substitute for God. You see, we're meant to look to God for all our needs.

Material, emotional, relational, everything in life. Food, home, health, good relationships. But we easily think that money could do that for us.

That if we were rich, we would be able to buy all these things. Buy a nice house. Buy in the right suburbs so that you mix around with the right type of people and therefore gain status in society.

Or pay for the best medical help we can get to keep us healthy. Or buy the very best foods to eat to keep us in good health. It's so easy, isn't it?

[10 : 59] To think that money can solve all our problems and keep us happy and satisfy all our needs. And so then it's easy to worship money and to be mastered by it and to make it a substitute for God.

Now I want you to notice how the man reacted. Luke said that he was very sad. If you read Matthew's version, Matthew actually said he went away sad.

That's right. He walked away from God. The very one, Jesus, who had given him, who can give him eternal life. He'd been looking for the answer to eternal life.

And here Jesus was giving him the answer. And yet, instead of acknowledging the answer and accepting it from someone who he even considers the good teacher, he decides to walk away.

He was sad when he found out the answer. How sad that was. But I guess the question is, what about us?

[12 : 09] The answer is here, as plain as can be. If we want eternal life, then we are to follow Christ. Not hard. Leave everything that masters us and follow Him.

That's not hard to understand, is it? It's a very straightforward answer. For the ruler, it meant selling his idols of riches. But what is it for us? What does leaving all to follow Jesus mean for us?

What idols are we still worshipping in our lives? What is that one thing or one area in life that we still withhold from God? Is it a goal or dream that we must pursue at all costs?

Is it a particular job or relationship that controls our life? Is it something in life that we just keep holding on to and we can't move from? We might even be blaming God for it.

It's hard, isn't it? Because to put our faith fully in Jesus isn't just something we say or even sing about. It requires us handing over all that we hold dear to Him and then believing that by placing that trust in Jesus, it will not be misplaced.

[13 : 26] That Jesus knows us, He knows our hearts, and He will shepherd us lovingly and caringly rather than crush or hurt us with it. And we are to keep trusting in that even though at times it may not feel like that.

No wonder then in verse 26, those around who heard this ask, who then can be saved? To which Jesus replied, what is impossible with man is possible with God.

And I think there's a couple of ways to take this. First, those who heard this may have looked at the rich ruler and as I said before, see all that he had and done and thought, if he can't save himself, then who else can?

Or it could be that they heard what Jesus has asked of him and realized just how much Jesus was asking for us all to be giving everything we have and for them then to be thinking, who could possibly do all that?

But either way, what Jesus is saying is true, that it is humanly impossible. As humans, it's impossible for us to save ourselves. Eternal life cannot be attained by human effort because it's not about how much more we could do, but as I said earlier, our failure to fully worship God every day of our lives.

[14 : 52] Why? Because we're not good. As the psalmist says, the fool says in his heart there is no God. And even those of us who know God, I'm sure we've lived from time to time as though there was no God and therefore we didn't have to answer to him and therefore we didn't need to obey him and do what he asked of us.

And yet Jesus promises that even though it's impossible for humans, it's possible with God and only with him. How? Because God is able to save us through faith in his Son.

His gift to us, the gift of salvation, is through faith. But also his gift to us is found in the death and resurrection of his Son.

And so it's to these two things now that we turn in the remaining verses. The gift of faith and the gift of his Son. First, we see the gift of faith given to Peter and the others.

Verse 28, Peter said to him, We have left all we had to follow you. Truly I tell you, Jesus said to them, No one who has left home or wife or brothers or sisters or parents or children for the sake of the kingdom of God will fail to receive many times as much in this age and in the age to come eternal life.

[16 : 07] This faith that Peter had is a gift from God for it's God that opened his heart and mind to see who Jesus is and therefore Peter's willingness to leave all to follow him.

It requires that same child life faith of total dependence that we saw or we see in that very first few verses that we skipped over which I spoke about last week. And it comes very unnaturally to us as humans, doesn't it?

Because as we grow up, you know, children do that instinctively but as we grow up, our desire and what we're taught to do is to be self-sufficient. It's to be independent and not be relying on others.

And that's part of growing up. That's true. You know, we want our children to be taking responsibility, not to just sit there and expect that everything be done for them.

I'm sure your parents told you that as well as you grow up. Clean your own room and bathroom, fix yourself your own breakfast, pack your own lunch for school. We want our children to be growing up so that they become independent.

[17 : 17] But we mustn't then confuse that with what's required of us spiritually, which is that we are to keep relying and being dependent fully on God.

You see, when it comes to our faith and salvation, we never grow out of dependence on Him. Instead, it's the opposite. We want to increase in our faith. With God's help, make Him Lord of all our lives, not just some part of it, not just withhold one or two areas of our lives from Him.

And if all this sounds really costly and sacrificial because we're laying our control of life over to God, then in one sense, humanly speaking, it is. But Jesus is then quick to point out to Peter, isn't it, that actually, if you think about it, it's not a loss but a wonderful blessing.

Not just in this life, as Jesus said, but in the age to come, as well. Jesus had said earlier in verse 22, follow Him 100% and there will be treasure in heaven.

Now the promise to the disciples is that there will not only be eternal life, sorry, that there will not be just material blessing but spiritual blessing. Eternal life, alive with God and communing with Him is the blessing, is the treasure that Jesus is promising.

[18 : 43] Well, second, God gives us not just the gift of faith, that is, for us to believe in Him and Jesus, but He also gives us the gift of His Son.

That's what we are to have or who we are to have faith in. And in, not just in Jesus, but His sacrificial death on the cross for us. That's the gift, the gift of Jesus' death, that reconciles us to God.

And we see the importance of this because Jesus now takes the opportunity again to remind them of His coming death, verse 31. And so Jesus took the twelve aside and told them, we are going up to Jerusalem and everything that is written by the prophets about the Son of Man will be fulfilled.

He will be delivered over to the Gentiles. They will mock Him, insult Him, and spit on Him. They will flog Him and kill Him. And on the third day He will rise again. But the disciples did not understand any of this.

Its meaning was hidden from them and they did not know what He was talking about. Now if you read the Gospel of Luke, this is now the third revelation of Jesus' death. But sadly, the disciples still didn't get it.

[19 : 54] Yes, it's good in a while because it shows, I think, that even their salvation is not conditional on their full understanding of God's work.

Ironically, the fact that they didn't understand gives us great comfort that we don't have to understand in order to be saved. Not that understanding is bad. We should understand if we can.

But it's not dependent on our understanding fully of the theology behind it. We are saved by faith in Jesus. We are not saved by a perfect understanding of the theology of atonement.

And so it further reinforces that our faith and salvation is a gift which is only possible with God. But God then calls for, what He calls for is then for us to give ourselves wholeheartedly to the worship of Him, to following His Son Jesus.

Now friends, I was going to conclude very differently today. Actually, the truth was I was struggling to work out how to conclude. But then we had this snap five-day lockdown that was announced.

[21 : 10] What a gift. I mean, for my servant, not for everyone else. The Premier made his statement and as I read it, it just struck me how differently we must look at life compared to the rest of the world if we are followers of Jesus.

So on the next slide, just listen to what the Premier wrote at the start and at the end. So he started with this, I wouldn't waste words today's hurts.

Victorians know better than anyone just how deeply. But as we've seen here in Australia and around the world, we're facing a new kind of enemy, a virus that is smarter and faster and more infectious.

He then goes on to outline the lockdown, which we all know, so I won't bore you with. And then he concludes right at the end on the next slide. My message to every single Victorian, I know today will be hard, likely tomorrow will be even harder.

But remember, no one else in the world anywhere has achieved what we have. And just as we had the courage and conviction to win this war before, we can do it again.

[22 : 16] Now, you've got to, you know, take, these are words of a politician. I do get it. And I get it that as a mere temporal ruler, his job, Dan Andrews' job, is to keep the economy going and to keep people physically safe.

I get all that. But still, you know, I think sometimes when we read these things, we can get so caught up in the narrative that is being pushed onto us through this kind of statements, can't we?

But the thing I want us to do is to hear and realize just how different our narrative as Christians should be. that as followers of Jesus, we actually have a very different vision of the world.

And in particular, I want you to just take note of his use of the words enemy and war. And then, compare them to the excerpts that I'm about to read from God's own press statement, which is the Bible.

So here's a snippet from 1 Corinthians. But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man.

[23 : 25] Then the end will come when he hands over the kingdom to God, the Father, after he has destroyed all dominion, authority, and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet.

The last enemy to be destroyed is death. Then, in verse 54, Then the saying that is written will come true. Death has been swallowed up in victory.

Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting? The sting of death is sin. And then in Romans chapter 5, verse 10, For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life.

Can you see this, brothers and sisters? Don't lose sight of what the real war is. I'm not trying to play down the pandemic or whatever. And I don't mean to scoff at his words, but this virus, whether it's the original or the UK strain, isn't our real enemy.

In fact, it's part of God's creation. God designed it to work like that, to mutate, to interact with our human immune system and the way it's being transmitted.

- [24 : 46] These are all part of how God's been created this virus to be. It's nothing new. It's been around for aeons. Instead, what does the Bible say? Death is our enemy.
- And we're God's enemy. Not because of the virus, but because of sin, the sting of death. The real war, actually, is between us and God.
- It's our rebellion against Him as Creator. And yet, what does it say in Romans? Thanks be to God, while we were still His enemies, Christ reconciled us to God through His death.
- He made possible what we couldn't do ourselves. That was His gift to us. The gift of faith to overcome overcome our rebellious hearts.
- And that's why today's sermon is titled The Miracle of Eternal Life. Death, including through possibly dying from COVID, has now lost its sting because of that.
- [25 : 49] Christ Jesus has already won the victory. So let's get that narrative right. that is the true narrative of what's really going on in this world.
- Now, it may be that even your struggle may not even be about COVID and that you might be struggling about something totally different. But whatever it is, the way to overcome is still the same.
- Faith in Jesus, God's gift to us for eternal life. not just in this age, but in the age to come. We don't want to be bogged down in really minor and petty four wars in life, do we?
- We don't want to be fearful and distracted by what are really illusionary enemies. The real war is the allegiance for our souls.
- Will we worship God fully or will we worship money or some other thing? And the real victory has already been won in Christ Jesus by his death and resurrection.
- [27 : 06] So as Jesus says, come, follow him and you will have treasure in heaven. Let's pray. Father, thank you for the gift of your son, Jesus.
- Thank you for the gift of faith in him. what is impossible for us you have made possible through Christ. Help us to throw off every idol and every sin so that we may follow him wholeheartedly.
- In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.