

GETTING “IN” (6): HELP FOR THE UNDERPRIVILEGED

(Luke 18:24-30)

October 9, 2016

Read Lu 18:24-30 – A customer brought her car back to her Kia dealership complaining of rattling noises. The tech was asked what the problem was. “It’s no big deal. Just a case of CTIP.” “CTIP?” “*Customer thinks it’s a Porsche.*” According to Jesus, rich people have a similar misconception.

I daresay that if I said “underprivileged” this morning, visions of low-income housing projects, soup kitchens and ghettos would come to mind. And that would be true. But from God’s perspective, you’ll never guess who are the most underprivileged of all? *Rich* people, that’s who. Divine perspective so often differs from our limited human perspective. Humanly speaking, wealthy people have all the advantages. But to Jesus, they are operating with one hand tied behind their back. Three points illustrate this.

I. The Poverty of Riches (24-25)

The rich, young ruler has just chosen riches over relationship with God. But ²⁴Jesus, seeing that he had become sad, said, “How difficult it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God! ²⁵For 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.” Now a quick sidenote: Note that in v. 18 the rich ruler was seeking “*eternal life*”. In v. 25 Jesus speaks of that in terms of entering “*the kingdom of God.*” And in v. 26 the disciples talk about it in terms of “*being saved.*” That means eternal life, the kingdom of God and salvation are all referring to the same thing – life forever in Jesus’ presence in heaven.

Now, v. 25 has been much abused – trying to make Jesus say that it is *hard*, but not *impossible*, for rich people to enter the kingdom. For example, some have suggested the word “camel” is similar to the word for a rope or cord, but that makes little sense, for even a rope could not go thru the eye of a needle.

A more common suggestion has been that the “eye of the needle” referred to a small portal used by pedestrians in walled cities that a camel might squeeze thru if its load were removed and it crawled thru on its knees. But there is *no evidence that such a gate existed* or was called “eye of the needle.” It’s a 15th century myth. A loaded camel would naturally have been allowed in thru the normal gate. Further Dr. Luke uses a term that specifically means a surgeon’s needle. Thus, it is best to take this as *hyperbole* -- an exaggerated statement to

make a point, something Jesus often did. The impossibility of a camel going thru a surgeon's needle illustrates how hard it is for a rich person to be saved.

As he sadly watches the rich ruler turn away Jesus is saying: ***“You think wealth is a privilege? Let me tell you, wealthy people are the most underprivileged people on the planet. Faith comes harder for them than for anyone.”*** That is counterintuitive, isn't it? Never would have guessed that. But wealth impoverishes people in at least 2 ways. Let me illustrate. Bryan Chapell is a fine young theologian who until recently was chancellor of Covenant Seminary in St. Louis. He had an African student named Lawrence who commented in a sermon on heaven: ***“I've seen the great wealth there is in the US -- the fine homes and cars and clothes. I've listened to many sermons in churches here too. But I've yet to hear one sermon about heaven. Because everyone has so much in this country, no one preaches about heaven. People here don't seem to need it. In my country, most people have very little, so we preach on heaven all the time. We know how much we need it.”*** That, Beloved is the poverty of riches. When you don't desire heaven bc of what you have here, you are poor, indeed. ***You are sacrificing an eternity of then for a few years of now.*** And the more you have, the more this is likely to happen.

Randy Alcorn says it's like the laws of physics. The greater the mass of a solar body, the greater its pull. That's why astronauts on the moon weighed about 1/6 their earth weight and thus could jump and skip with ease. Less pull. That's why Alan Shepard could hit a golf ball 1,000 yards on the moon. Less mass = less attraction! But when the mass is heavily concentrated, like in a fading star, a ***black hole*** forms, ***not even light can escape***. Everything gets sucked in. Alcorn says too much wealth is ***“like a black hole, a gargantuan cosmic vacuum cleaner that sucks us in.”*** Our stuff pulls us like a magnet.

That's what happened to the rich young ruler. ***23 But when he heard these things, he became very sad, for he was extremely rich.*** The word “sad” would be better translated “deeply grieved.” He was grieved at the thought of losing his money and turned away. Jesus uses exactly the same word in ***Mt 26:38*** when He says while praying in Gethsemane: ***“My soul is very sorrowful [deeply grieved], even to death.”*** Why? He knew he was about to experience the ultimate dislocation, the ultimate disorientation. He was about to lose the joy of his life, the core of his identity. ***He was going to lose his Father.*** Jesus was losing his spiritual center. When Jesus called this young man to give up his money, the man grieved, because ***money was for him what the Father was for Jesus.*** It was the center of his identity. To lose his money would have been

to lose himself. So the first way riches impoverish us is by convincing us it is more important to us than a relationship with God. We lose sight of eternity.

But wealth also impoverishes by making us think we can **buy** our way in. That was what the 1st century Palestinians thought. It's possible the rich young ruler continued to think that. It was at the heart of the Pharisees teaching. They taught physical prosperity was a sign of God's blessing; they taught that almsgiving was the surest way to earn heaven. And who could give more alms than a rich person. They were fixated on this idea. Don't think so? Look at the response of the disciples when he said it would be easier for a camel to go thru a needle than a rich person to be saved. **26 Those who heard it said, "Then who can be saved?"** If rich people aren't in, then who is? They'd been taught all their lives rich people had all the advantage. And now Jesus is saying they are underprivileged? They couldn't believe it. They thought wealth and almsgiving was a sign of God's blessing – and indication that one was in!

The rabbi's teaching is summarized in a quote from the Jewish book of Tobit: ***"It is better to give alms than to lay up gold: for alms deliver from death, and shall purge away sin. Those that exercise alms and righteousness shall be filled with life."*** That's why Jesus got the reaction He did. He's just announced that those they thought over privileged were actually underprivileged. They thought sure wealth meant blessing.

And things haven't changed much, have they? John D. Rockefeller once said riches were ***"a gift from heaven signifying, 'This is My beloved son, in whom I am well pleased.'"*** The arrogance of that statement is topped by Warren Buffet who announced a few years ago (2006) that he would donate 85% of his \$44 billion fortune to five charitable foundations. And then he commented, ***"There is more than one way to go to heaven, but this is a great way."*** That's a lot of error in one short sentence. First there is **not** more than one way to heaven. And second – you can't buy your way in tho people continue to try. Thank God for people who build churches, add hospital wings, fund charities and "give back." Those are wonderful gestures -- but **they won't buy heaven**. That's the poverty of riches. ***They can't buy happiness and they cannot buy heaven, but they deceive people into thinking they can.***

Tragically deceived. Jesus told the church at Laodicea in Rev 3:16-17, and anyone depending on riches: ***"16 So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth. 17 For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked."*** Grossly handicapped by plenty. Impoverished by riches.

But there's good news. It doesn't have to stay that way. The poverty of riches can be reversed. After Jesus spoke of how hard it is for the rich to be saved: ²⁶Those who heard it said, "Then who can be saved?" ²⁷ But he said, "What is impossible with man is possible with God." Simple point! It's not money you need to get you in – thank goodness. It's not money you need; it's God. A camel can't go thru the eye of a surgical needle and neither money nor good works can save you. But what man can't do, God can. And that's good news because that means the answer to the question, "Then who can be saved?" is "*Anyone can. Anyone. But our faith must be in God not ourselves.*"

Theologian Edmund Clowney says the key verse in the Bible is in **Jonah 2:9** when Jonah prays from the belly of the fish, "**Salvation belongs to the LORD!**" And we now know His salvation comes thru faith in His Son who died to pay the penalty for our sins. *What we can't buy or earn, we can receive by faith.* But that's the only way. Eph 2:8-9, "**For by grace you have been saved thru faith, and that is not your own doing, it is the gift of God – gift of God; not a result of works, so that no one may boast.**" An office printer was sluggish one day so the manager called for repairs. The technician said it needed cleaning, but that was \$100 and suggested the manager might like to read the manual and do it himself. Surprised, the manager asked, "*Does your boss know you are turning away business.*" The tech replied, "*Actually, it was his idea. We make a lot more money on repairs when we let people try to fix things themselves first.*" Do you get the point, Beloved? If you are trying to fix yourself, you are trying the impossible. But -- "**What is impossible with man is possible with God.**" When you're done trying, He's waiting.

II. The Riches of Poverty

Here's the paradox. True riches, riches of eternal worth, come when we empty ourselves, give it all to Him only to find that **He gives back infinitely more than we give up!** The rich, young ruler didn't go away richer; he went away way poorer than he could have been. That's Jesus' message to Peter when Peter comments in v 28, "**See, we [emphatic] have left our homes and followed you.**" Peter is seeking reassurance. We know because Matt 19:27 tells us Peter went on to ask, "**What then will we have?**" He's just seen the rich ruler reject Jesus when Jesus asked him for everything. Then He's heard Jesus undercut everything he ever thought about rich people. They're not over privileged; they're handicapped. But now Peter wants to know, "*Exactly where does that leave us because we have left all to follow you. So where does that leave us?*" Good question. And Jesus gives a beautiful answer. It

shows the *riches of poverty*. “**You left all, became poor for my sake. And you will pay a heavy price to follow me. Persecution and adversity are in your future. But listen to what you get. Listen to what you get now, and what you get then! It is way worth it to follow me.**”

A. Now -- 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 more in this time.” Jesus is saying, “**Whatever you have left to follow me, you’ll get back a thousand times.**” Let’s suppose it’s the closest of human relationships. You’ve come to Christ, but in the process you’ve been disowned by your parents. Ever your family has deserted. You’re all alone.

But – no, **you’re not alone!** You lost father and mother? Guess what you gained. **Jn 1:12**, “**But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.**” You’ve got a new Father and His name is God. You say, “**I thought God was everyone’s Father.**” That’s a lie the Devil has convinced many people of, but it’s not in the Bible. Only those who have left all to follow Him can claim God as Father. But now, as a believer, you have the best Father anyone could ever imagine. Family deserted? You have a whole new family. You’re part of the *family* of God.

Lose a brother? Not on your life. **Rom 8:29** says of Christ: “**he might be the firstborn among many brothers [and sisters]**”. **Heb 2:11**: “**For he who sanctifies (Jesus) and those who are sanctified all have one source (the Father). That is why he (Jesus) is not ashamed to call them brothers, 12)** saying, “**I will tell of your name to my brothers; in the midst of the congregation I will sing your praise.**” You got the greatest Father ever and you have the greatest brother ever – one who will sing your praise. Wow! And you have a multitude of other brothers and sisters. **Eph 2:19**: “**So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God.**”

Think what we have in Christ. It’s priceless. We have peace with God – **Now!** We have forgiveness from sin – **now!** We have release from guilt – **Now!** We have millions of new brothers and sisters in the family of God – **Now!** We got angels to watch over us – **Now!** We got promises galore that don’t apply to unbelievers -- **Now**. We got a Father who has, according to **Eph 1:3**, “**blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.**” Whatever this life may throw at us, we have peace, comfort, blessing and hope right

now. In Christ, we're into something **bigger than we ever bargained for**. And we have one more thing that we overlook or take for granted all the time.

A lady was teaching her 5-year-olds in SS. They were learning about the Temple, and she explained that when Solomon finished building it, the presence of God filled the temple. All the kid's eyes lit up like Christmas trees. However she soon discovered why. They thought that huge building was filled with the p-r-e-s-e-n-t-s of God, rather than the presence! Like us, they were more excited about God's blessings than His presence in their lives. But there is nothing more precious than that. **"I will never leave you nor forsake you."** As Jesus promised He sent the Comforter, the HS, who has taken up residence in every believer and we have that **now!** We have priceless gifts right now that we consistently undervalue. Nothing we could ever give up compares to what we get back even now.

B. Then – Then there's the last phrase of Jesus' promise of reward in v. 30 – **"and in the age to come eternal life."** The ultimate reward – eternity with Christ. The term "eternal life" means more than longevity. It means to be in the physical presence of Jesus forever, in a continuous state of **perfection**. No sin, no sorrow, no suffering, no regret, no death, no sickness, no crying. Nothing but productive service for our King utilizing our special gifts day after day after perfect day. **Is there anything here you wouldn't give up for that if you really believed it?** But it is true, Beloved. It is true. Jesus said so. This is the great hope of every believer. **This is the riches of poverty.** The riches there will make poverty here totally and completely forgettable, no matter how difficult it may be to endure at the moment. You will never regret giving up everything for Christ. Never! He will fill your life – now – and then!

Conc – My friend, Kent Hughes, had a writer, and occasional pastor, in his church in Wheaton named Joseph Bayly. Among other things Bayly wrote *View From a Hearse* which detailed how he dealt with the early deaths of 3 of his 7 children. Kent said that Bayly during the last sermon he preached emphasized the importance of living now in light of then. He said, **"Lord, burn eternity into our eyeballs!"** That's what we all need, isn't it? That's what the rich, young ruler needed. How different his life would have been had eternity been burned into his eyeballs. How differently his pile of money would have looked. **And how differently his existence now would look had eternity been burned into his eyeballs instead of \$\$\$.** Let's pray.