



**Luke 18:15-17, 18-30**

**“What Is Your Idol? What Is Your Fear?”**

October 12, 2014  
(18<sup>th</sup> Sunday After Pentecost)

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**“Following Christ From City Center!”**

LUKE 18:15-17, 18-30

"WHAT IS YOUR IDOL? WHAT IS YOUR FEAR?"

Inclusion: Two Stories Traveled Together

**1) 18:15-17 CHILDREN AND THE KINGDOM: DISCIPLES GET IT WRONG.** High Infant Mortality

// Mk. 10:13-16, Mt. 19:13-15, G.T. 22, Tobit 1:1, 17

15 a Now they were bringing *even infants* to him that he might touch them; **PARENTS WANT BLESSING/HEALING**

*Brephe*, Touch 9:48, 6:19, 8:44, 5:13, 7:14

b and when the disciples *saw it*, they rebuked them (continually). **Trivial, Brokers, *Epitima* = Censure**

**Faith = Humility = Submission To God (James 4:6-10, 1 Pt. 5:6-10)**

16 c But Jesus *called them* to him, saying, ***the children*, No Anger In Luke, Jesus Interrupts Their *Rebuking***

"Let the **children** come to me,

and do not hinder them;

for to such belongs **the kingdom of God**.

**Against Cultural Views, All Ages Have Free Access To Jesus**

***Such* = powerless no-counts! Kingdom of God (2x), Example: Positive**

**Not Earn Or Pay, Radically Dependent/Trust, Children Are Receivers**

**End Of Unit Inclusion // v.29, Authority Formula: Knows God's Mind**

17\* d Truly, I say to you,  
whoever does not receive **the kingdom of God** like a child  
shall not enter it."

**13:24, Become Little, Example: Negative**

**Span = Bottom (dependent child) To Top Of The Social Ladder (rich ruler)**

## 2) 18:18-30 WHO'S SERIOUS ABOUT ETERNAL LIFE? A RECOGNITION STORY (v. 23).

He Hears v.17! No Change Of Setting //Mk. 10:17-22, Mt. 19:16-30

Ruler					
Dialog 1		<b>a) vv.18-20 Then And Now: Eternal Life.</b>		<b>RICH MAN WANTS ASSURANCE OF ETERNAL LIFE</b>	
18	1	And a <i>certain ruler</i> asked him, "Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit <b>eternal life</b> ?"		Civil Magistrate (1:59, 23:13, 35m 24:20), <i>Negative Title</i> 8:41, Only Luke Has <i>ruler</i> , Flattery Expected In Return, //10:25 <i>Someone Like Me? What Puts Me Among God's People At The End?</i>	
19	2	And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. (1-4)		Expects A Return Compliment! Ps. Sol. 14:10 "Are you sure you want to apply this absolute term to me?" No Rivals, Images, Name, Day. Irony? Deflect Praise To God	
20		You know the commandments: 'Do not commit adultery, (7-) Do not kill, (6-) Do not steal, (8-) Do not bear false witness, (9-) Honor your <b>father and mother</b> ' (5+)		16:29, 31, Response To Question, 10:26 Table II, Honor Marriage, Life, Property, Truth, Parents Family Loyalty (frame), Property (center) 4 (-)/ 1 (+), 5 Of 10 Commandments, Mk Has 6/ Community No. 10 On Coveting Is Not Listed Jesus Upholds Family, Outward Focus, Dt. 5:16-20, 30:15-20 <i>Honor Implies Financial Assistance</i>	
Ruler					
Dialog 2		<b>b) vv.21-22 Call To Leave All And Follow Jesus.</b>		<b>Call For Conversion</b>	
21	1	And he said, "All these I have observed from my youth."		Jesus Is Great At Spiritual Diagnosis, Divine Insights My Resume! Self-Confident, Good, Jewish Boy! To Gain Treasure He Desires, He Must Give Up Treasure He Has	
22	2	And when Jesus <u>heard</u> it, he said to him, 'One thing you <i>still</i> lack. Sell <i>all</i> that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come <b>FOLLOW ME.</b> "		Enter Kingdom Now! Renunciation Of Attachments Command 10! Whatever The Block! God-Given Insight/ Idol 4 Quick Commands, Direct Action, Kill What Is Killing You, Your Idol 5:11, 27-28; 16:9-13, 14:26, 33, Treat Them As Family, 12:33 Limited Goods Society: For You To Have More, I Have Less Climax: Call To New Life, 5:1-11, 27-28, Reward/Personal Invitation Offer Exclusive Loyalty To Jesus On His Way To Jerusalem	
Ruler					
Dialog 3		<b>c) vv.23-25 Impossibility Offered.</b>		<b>No Dependence, Story Could End Here? Idolatry Seen</b>	
23	1	But when he <u>heard</u> this he became (extremely) sad, for he was very rich./		Heard (3x), Sadness Does Not Always Mean Repentance Wealth = His True God //8:14 (Thorns) Now He Knows, "I am an idolater!"	
24	2a	Jesus <i>looking at him</i> said, "How hard it is/ for those who have riches/ to enter <b>the kingdom of God</b> !//		Not In His Absence To Disciples As In Mark 10:23, To Him 2, 3-Line Stanzas, <i>New World</i> , General Observation Lament + Aphorism, Present Tense = Enter Now	
25	b	<u>For</u> it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle/ than for a rich man/ to enter <b>the kingdom of God</b> ."//		Hyperbole Kingdom of God (3x), Impossibility, Mk. 10:24 Omitted Theopylact 11 <sup>th</sup> Century, Myth Of Low Gate: Biggest/Smallest	
Crowd					
Dialog 4		<b>d) v.26 New Question.</b>		<b>Hope For Anyone? Only With God! // 18:18 "Eternal Life"</b>	
26		Those who <u>heard</u> it said, "Then who can <b>be saved</b> ?"		SHOCKED CROWD: CAN ANYONE BE SAVED? vv.18, 26, 30, Riches Mean Blessing?	
		<b>c') v.27 Impossibility Answered: Only With God's Grace.</b>		<b>None Can Save Himself</b>	
27		But he said, "What is impossible with men is possible with God."/		Not Just The Rich But All Peoples 1:37, Philo <i>Moses</i> 1.174 Salvation Is God's Action, Only God Can Give Grace, Change Hearts	
Peter					
Dialog 5		<b>b') v.28 Those Who Have Left All And Followed Jesus.</b>		<b>Disciples Get It Right!</b>	
28		And Peter said, "Lo, we have left <i>our things</i> and <b>FOLLOWED YOU.</b> Lk. adds <i>homes</i> , 14:33, Exclusive Attachment To Jesus Self-Absorbed Like Others? What Is Our Treasure In Heaven?		5:11, 28, 14:25-33, Reflection On Detachment PETER WANT ASSURANCE OF REWARDS FOR SACRIFICE	
		<b>a') vv.29-30 Now And Then: Eternal Life (It's worth it!).</b>		<b>Hymn, "I Surrender All"</b>	
29*	2'	And he said to them, "Truly, I say to you, there is no man who has left house or <b>wife</b> or brothers or <b>parents</b> or <b>children</b> , for the sake of <b>the kingdom of God</b> , who will not receive manifold more in this time, and in the age to come <b>eternal life</b> ."		//v.20, 5 Items, Not An Argument For Polygamy But New Community 1 Cor. 9:4-6, We Surrender All; Receive Back What God Returns v.20c // 8:21 Lk. adds <i>kingdom of God</i> here, Changes Because Of Following (Now, <i>Already</i> ) Some Now: New Family, Mk. 10:31 Omitted (Then, <i>Not Yet</i> ) Greatest Reward Later: God/ Eternal Life!	
30	1'				

### A Brief Treatment Of Luke 18:18-30

Luke intends the story of the children (18:15-17) and the rich ruler (18:18-30) to be read as a pair as indicated by the inclusions *children* (v.16a // v.29a) and *kingdom of God* (v.16b // v.29b). That both end with pronouncements, *Truly, I say to you* (v.17a // v.29b) also links them. Luke omits Mark's travel report (10:17a), so the ruler is now present to hear, "Let the children come to me, do not hinder them; for to such belongs the kingdom of God." He doesn't run up and kneel as in Mark. Thus, his question, "Good teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" is a response to Jesus' statement. The purpose of the pairing is for a person of low status (child) to be contrasted with a person of high status (rich ruler) with the dependence and receptivity of the former a model for the latter. Having marked the boundaries of low and high honor, everyone else is included on the scale, a technique known as *merismus*, as when *Alpha and Omega* indicates the whole alphabet. Jesus upends the world's status games. The same blurring of originally distinct stories (Mk. 10:17-22, 23-27, 28-31) is seen in v.26 where Luke substitutes *Those who heard it said* for Mark's *And Jesus looked around and said to his disciples* (10:23). Mark has three scenes, each with a clear beginning and end. Luke edits them to flow into one another as an interrelated event.

The surface structure is a 7:1 concentric pattern (a-b-c-**d**-c'-b'-a') with *eternal life* (v.18 // v.30) and *father and mother* (v.20) // *parents* (v.29) as inclusions and v.26 as the center. The first layer from the center (c//c') say that what is impossible for humans (vv.23-25) is possible for God (v.27). The next outer layer (b. vv.21-22 // b' v.28) deals with the disposal of goods and contains the phrases *follow me* // *followed you*. The unit opens (1. vv.18-20) with a question and five commandments; it closes (1' vv.29-30) with an authoritative, "Truly, I say to you," and five categories (house, wife, brothers, parents, children) which deal with family and property. The new reality goes by several names: *receive the kingdom of God* (v.17), *inherit eternal life* (v.18), *follow me* (vv.22, 28), *be saved* (v.26), *enter the kingdom of God* ([2x] vv. 24-25). The kingdom is not an achievement but a gift to be received now and an inheritance to look forward to; it's both *now* and *not yet*. It is the means of God saving and restoring us. There's a new world to enter, and it's discovered in following Jesus; the future is on preview in him. The mystery of God's reign is too big for any one image, so multiples are necessary. A second structuring tool is five mini-dialogs (1. vv.18-20, 2. vv.21-22, 3. vv.23-25, 4. vv.26-27, 5. vv.28-30), the first three with the ruler, the fourth with *Those who heard*, the fifth with Peter and others. The genre is a *failed call story* in five parts: 1) Request (v.18), 2) Teacher gives hard assignment (vv.19-20, 21-22a) 3) Command to follow (vv.22b), 4) Departure with negative emotions (v.23), 5) Further teaching on discipleship (vv.24-30). It's also a *quest story* leading to a *recognition scene* where a character learns something new about himself.

Luke's editing of his Markan source (10:17-31) is extensive. He removes the travel report (v.17a), omits direct addresses (vv. 20b *Teacher*, 24b *Children*), edits the commands from six to five and rearranges them to emphasize family and property, reduces emotional reactions (vv.21, 22, 24, 26a) and redundant phrasing (vv.24, 27a, b). He omits Mark's closing (v.31). In the final catalog he omits *sisters*, adds *wife*, omits *lands* and combines *mother or father* in *parents*. The presence of the disciples (vv.23a, 24a) is minimized, and the *hundredfold* (v.30) becomes the more general *manifold*. The reference to *persecutions* (v.30) is removed. Luke's hand is evident as he takes three distinct Markan units and sculpts them into a unified presentation. The issues are detachment from family and property in order to be attached to Jesus as a follower with effects now, and in the age to come. The self needs a single center; anything else (family, land, money, status) is idolatry and bondage. We surrender all to God; God then gives back what he wishes. Jesus is fascinating and worthy of trust, but will not be added to our resume. The rich ruler walked away with insight, "I am not a good Jew; I worship money. Jesus nailed me."

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## WHAT IS YOUR IDOL? WHAT IS YOUR FEAR?

*“One thing you still lack....”*

Jesus knows what it is, whoever you are!

L U K E 1 8 : 2 2

**O**seola McCarty, 87, did one thing all her life- laundry; for decades she washed for bankers and merchants in Hattiesburg, Mississippi at 50 cents a load. When she finally laid down her washboard, she asked her banker how much she had.

“A quarter of a million.”

It astounded her, "I had more than I could use, and I can't carry any away from here, so I thought it best to give it to some child. The soft-spoken, never-married laundry lady gave \$150,000 to the University of Southern Mississippi to help African-Americans attend college. It was *holy money*, money on which the tithe had already been paid!

When the story broke, Osceola was interviewed by Barbara Walters. Though she'd never traveled far from home, McCarty visited the White House where President Clinton awarded her the Presidential Citizenship Award.

McCarty attended Friendship Baptist, read her Bible every morning and prayed on her knees every evening. Discounting the publicity, she's simply grateful for the chance to help others gain what she lost; in the sixth grade Osceola was pulled out of school to care for an ill family member and help her mother with laundry.

"It's more blessed to give than to receive," she told reporters, and when asked why she didn't use the money on herself, she said, "I've tried it."<sup>1</sup>

Hidden on the humble side of Hattiesburg was a disciple quietly prepared for an act of kingdom generosity, and her life raises a question. What does it mean to be rich? Who is truly blessed? We all live in a world of consumerism and the pressures constant acquisition, but in Osceola and others *the grip of the green* is broken. They

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<sup>1</sup> Edited from PreachingToday.com search under Luke 18:18-30.

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don't use Jesus and worship mammon; they use money and follow Jesus. They've already entered the new reality of God's rule and are its agents and provocateurs; They are everywhere if we have eyes to see the new kind of human beings who lives in this world by the power of the next.

I am a rich man, rich in education, in health and heritage, in opportunity and meaning, rich in marriage, rich in travel and culture, in all resources for the good life, so when Jesus warns, "How hard it will be for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God," he's not only talking about people of high net worth; he's warning me! It's a challenge for Pastor Phil to remain within its force field of love for the one God of Israel whose face is shown to us in Jesus' astounding life. Does everything I have and am and am not belong to this God? Can it be asked for and surrendered without lots of whining and negotiation for better terms? Do I see the tithe of ten percent as a destination, or only as a starting point for beginners in God's school of generosity?<sup>2</sup> Am I trying to add Jesus to our culture's increasingly inflated definition of the good life, or is Jesus himself the good life? William Boyce once wrote a letter:

"Dear Lord, I've been re-reading the record of the rich man. It set me thinking. No matter how much wealth, he could not ride in a car, turn on a light, buy penicillin, watch TV, type a letter, fly in an airplane or talk on a phone. If he was rich, then what am I?"<sup>3</sup>

In Luke's creative retelling of a story found in Mark,<sup>4</sup> the rich man was among the hearers who heard Jesus say, "Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it." It was a sharp *in-or-out* boundary statement, and it's radical nature caught the attention of a bystander who stood near the apex of the social pyramid, at least locally. For him to accept Jesus' insight would mean sudden downward mobility, as he would soon discover. In that world children were of low status, and- as children are everywhere- dependent on others for

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<sup>2</sup> On the debate over tithing, see David Croteau, ed., *Perspectives On Tithing: 4 Views* (Nashville, TN: B&H, 2011).

<sup>3</sup> Edited from PreachingToday.com search under Luke 18:18-30.

<sup>4</sup> 10:17-31. On Luke's editing, see page 4 of this manuscript (*A Brief Treatment...*) and Charles Talbert, *Luke* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2002), 202-204. I find it helpful to do a line by line comparison using Burton Throckmorton, *Gospel Parallels* (New York, NY: Thomas Nelson, 1979) for insights into Luke's agenda.

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everything. Needy and dependent means you are eager to receive whatever others give, be it a smile, hug, or a popsicle. Children are not self-sufficient, and while they can be stubborn, they're rarely proud because- unlike some adults- they simply don't have the resources to defend their honor. Now what God has to offer is himself as ruler or king, and with that restored relationship comes new life for all who receive him with the dependency of a child, which is just a fancy way of saying *humility*. Our friend was curious how a disturbing new idea applied to his slice of the world, so he approached Jesus with flattery and a question, "Good Teacher, what must someone like me do to inherit eternal life?" expecting Jesus' reply to contain due deference, something like *Noble Ruler* perhaps. It's how people normally addressed him. It was a divine appointment driven by the ruler's curiosity about Jesus' teaching, and so it was an opening for Jesus to engage in a battle of wits and upend his world.

Jesus was often interrupted. The Holy Spirit moved his entourage from village to village taking the power of God's restorative love to people, and the same Holy Spirit brought people to him like opposite poles of a magnet pulling towards each other. He went, and they came. Jesus specialized in turning interruptions into opportunities because he assumed God sent them. He was open to anyone, and that's how it's meant to be when we walk through the day in cadence with the Spirit. We show up for life, and along the way we're alerted to what God's doing on the other side of the relational equation. People are sent into our path and we into theirs. God wants to give them something through us, and sometimes the reverse. The particulars of divine providence are the only way I know to explain Jesus' life and make sense of my own. I have duties to do, and then I have encounters that happen.

As fellow Jews, Jesus and our unnamed friend shared a number of assumptions about the world and God's relation to it. First, that history is divided into two big parts, *this present age* characterized by sin, death, and evil, by inward and outward moral struggle- which is the only world we've ever known. But then- when God decisively intervenes- *the age to come* or *kingdom of God*, characterized by no sin or evil, no moral struggle, and eternal life with God in a new creation, which is- by the way- this one fully restored with us sporting industrial strength resurrection bodies.<sup>5</sup> We're not going permanently somewhere else; we're coming back here. Our friend is not asking how to get to heaven as an immortal soul after death; his is not the question of modern individualism, "How do *I* get saved?" It's a corporate understanding because as a Jew he knows God has always had *a people*. Salvation is

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<sup>5</sup> Galatians 1:3-5 is a good example of the *two age* schema of Jewish and Christian apocalyptic thought; also Luke 18:30 with its "in this time, and in the age to come...."

a *we*, not merely a *me* experience, so his question means, “How can I be included among God’s people in the new age after judgment? A second shared assumption is that our actions matter and that life- while sprinkled with joy and delight- is a morally serious affair with real consequences. Without a right relationship with this God, nothing matters.

That this man came with such intensity is a demonstration the Spirit was at work. He came to the right man with the right question, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit life in the coming kingdom with God’s faithful people?” I like such questions; mainly I hear, “What’s for supper Wednesday night?”

In the brief encounter our friend reveals two things that need correction. He assumes he’s fairly advanced in the pursuit of God- which he is not, and that if he can only get an answer to the *what must I do* question that’s missing from his resume, he will have eternal life now as part of a secure portfolio- which he cannot. He was naive and self-inflated. He would soon leave deflated with some ugly new information about himself. Jesus peels him like an onion. He did it with love and divine insight; it took only a few exchanges to lay the man bare naked before God. Getting down to business was never a problem with Jesus- as it is with us, and it is frankly one of the benefits of the spiritual gift of the word of knowledge or wisdom. The Holy Spirit puts you on the right trail. In Jesus love and truth are one pure thing. His love is not indulgence, and his truth is not mean, and we get both, the best and worst brought to light. As the Spirit draws us towards the Lord, we gain new self-knowledge, which means spiritual growth always involves repentance: *Yes* to him, *No* to our habitual ways of thinking. It’s a powerful combination. Not *if you change, I will love you*, but *since I love you, change for good is possible*.

Jesus’ initial reply builds on the man’s address and is highly confrontive. “Why do you call me good? No one is good but One, and that’s God!” This sharp reply has frankly given preachers and theologians a fit. It may be a push-back against trading pious flattery. It may be a test, “Are you really prepared for the consequences of calling me good in the absolute sense that applies to God because that will mean doing what I say?”<sup>6</sup> Jesus is not saying he is not good as some have worried. The intent of the sharp answer is to direct the man away from himself and his plan for self-salvation to the God who alone is supremely good and whose demand is displayed in the Ten Commandments.

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<sup>6</sup> The choice of Dr. Kenneth Bailey, *Through Peasant Eyes: More Lucan Parables* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1980), Chapter 10, “The Camel and the Needle,” 162.



Jesus' shift of focus is subtle; it's a move from *What can I do?* to *Who is God?* This is a shift many in our self-focused days have a hard time making. They come to church looking for a formula or technique, something *they can do to fix their lives*, but they are not as eager to deal with the good and holy God who is not into techniques or quick fixes but into truth and love as deposited in the Jesus we are called to follow. It's why I always pray before a pastoral interview. I'm not a counselor, good as that may be; I'm pastor, and for us all questions are finally God questions. If the man is serious, Jesus directs him to the God who has the right to examine his heart and make demands, "You know the commandments."<sup>7</sup>

But when he lists them, Jesus does something interesting. The first four about God's unique status, God's invisibility, a holy name to be guarded and a holy day to be kept are not quoted but assumed in the reference, "No one is good but One: God." The vertical axis is assumed. Then come commands seven, six, eight, and nine, each a prohibition: no adultery, no killing, stealing or false witness. This leaves number 5- a positive duty- for last, "Honor your father and mother." These are five horizontal commands- forms of loving the neighbor- that Jesus highlights because in just a moment he will test the man on commandment 10, the one prohibiting coveting, which is always wanting more. Jesus know his issue and frankly sets him up for the only challenge that matters, and that is, What does he worship? What stands in the way of him becoming a disciple?

To us the man's answer seems impossible, but in that world it was not uncommon for people to have kept such laws as a whole since they took on the yoke of the law at *bar mitzvah*, "Teacher, all these I have observed *from my youth*."<sup>8</sup> This does not mean our friend does not have a sin problem in his interior life. Yes, of course he has anger, lust, the temptation to steal and defraud, occasions to bend the truth for advantage and resent parental obligations. These were all inward, but in outward behavior he has been obedient and circumspect- no small moral accomplishment. Jesus did not challenge but accepted his self-evaluation. He had wealth, and- so far as behavior was concerned- a clear conscience. A good and privileged man by anyone's accounting, and for many of his day riches would be a

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<sup>7</sup> On Jesus' use of the commandments in this dialog, see Patrick D. Miller, *The Ten Commandments* (Louisville, KY: WJK, 2009), 408-410. On Luke's reduction of Mark's six commandments to five and the meaning of the rearrangement, see *Bailey, Through Peasant Eyes*, 159-160.

<sup>8</sup> See Paul's frank testimony in *Philippians 3:6-9*.

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sure sign of divine approval. A man to be admired, a man who had it all. So why is he quizzing an unemployed traveling rabbi if he already has it all together? Because it did not- and cannot- satisfy. His balance sheet and personal resume were loaded with capital, but he knew there was more; he even named it correctly as *life in the kingdom of God*. His was a nagging lack, a restlessness, a sure indicator the Holy Spirit is at work. As long as people are hungry, even if they can't name the hunger, there's hope, and our job as disciples is to clarify their yearnings and point them to Jesus. Erwin Lutzer wrote, "Thirst must be quenched! If our desires are not met by God, we will quickly find something else to alleviate our thirst."<sup>9</sup>

This is what addictions are about and why our culture is so swamped: work, money, drugs, sex, hobbies, entertainment, travel, sports, money, whatever we use to fill the empty cavern within. People turn to all these to tame and quiet and deaden and silence the primal desire for God, a deep hunger for connection. So pay attention to your desires and the questions you keep hidden; they are a place the Holy Spirit is stirring you. Desire is deeper than thought, as thought is deeper than behavior. And it was this deep and holy desire- distorted as it was by naivete and a heavy dose of self-confident moralism, that led him to ask Jesus, "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" How close he is to the light! He has come to the right man with the right question and is about to receive the right answer. It is his turning point.

Jesus is serious about answering such questions, and if you ask, answers will come. Did he not dare us? "Ask, and you shall receive."<sup>10</sup> The channels of communication and divine revelation are many; God has all sorts of subtle and overt ways to get our attention, but they all lead back to Scripture- God's Word written, and to the Lord Jesus- God's Living Word and only authorized agent, which is what the language of him being *the Son* is all about.<sup>11</sup> If you seek, he will mess with you and disturb you and expose you and rearrange your life from the heart out to the farthest edges. Jesus is loving, but he is not safe. There is no *sweet Jesus*; that is the sentimental substitute of Southern folk religion for the fierce and fearless love that

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<sup>9</sup> Martin Manser, compiler, *The Westminster Collection of Christian Quotations* (Louisville, KY: WJK, 2001), 69.

<sup>10</sup> Matthew 5:7ff.

<sup>11</sup> Two good books on guidance are Gordon Smith, *The Voice of Jesus* (Downer's Grove, ILL: IVP, 2003); Dallas Willard, *Hearing God: Developing a Conversational Relationship with God* (Downer's Grove, ILL: IVP, 1999).

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flowed from this man. Tender? Yes. Kind? Yes. But sweet and cute? I don't think so. Beware of anything that trivializes Jesus; it's a form of mockery and misrepresentation, something the devil specializes in.

Untangling someone to be free for God is hard work. This is the *unlearning*, that precedes following. God sees we are all tied down- like Gulliver by the Lilliputians- in the thousand strings of innumerable lesser loyalties. What would it mean to have Jesus look you eye-to-eye, then deliver a true word customized for your situation, a personal prophetic word? Not for other people, not for everyone in general, but you in all your specificity and individuality, the one thing that would make a permanent difference in your life, God's own diagnosis and invitation. It would be devastating, because then the choice would be clear. No more vagueness, no more fuzziness. Max Lucado was right, "If there are a thousand steps between us and God, he takes all but one. He leaves the final one for us. The choice is ours."<sup>12</sup>

The word Jesus gave him would take time to carry out. First, a diagnosis, "One thing you still lack." His ears perked up, and he thought, "Only one? That should be easy." Then come two action verbs that blew up his world, "*Sell* all that you have, and *distribute* it to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven..." all in preparation for the final two commands which are the goal, "...and *come, follow* me." "You know the law and the good life; now come into relationship with me, but first I have to strip you down because we travel light with just-in-time delivery from heaven's warehouses." What our friend needs is not one more good work but a new life through a new relationship. Greek novelist Nikos Kazantzakis wrote of his struggle to say *No* to self and *Yes* to Christ: "God is a fire and you must walk on it... dance on it. At that moment the fire will become cool water. But until you reach that point, what a struggle, my Lord, what an agony."<sup>13</sup>

In our friend's heart and mind, a battle raged. For others it could be something else. For him it was two things: 1) his assets and the security they afforded; 2) his moral reputation and the status it gave. The hold money and religion had on him was habitual, perhaps ingrained from his family, so strong we might label it a *demonic stronghold*, a lying structure of thought energized and managed by evil. Jesus turned on the lights in a dark corner of his soul. The kingdom of God in Jesus and its riches, or the kingdom of the self and its securities, which will it be? Who was telling him

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<sup>12</sup> Edited, PreachingToday.com search under Luke 18:18-30.

<sup>13</sup> Idem.

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the truth: Jesus or his broker? Jesus or his religious resume? David Neff writes:

"Jesus taught that money is one of the spiritual powers we fight- not simply green paper or copper-nickel sandwiches. Money is not some *thing*; it is *someone*. And as someone, it tricks us into thinking we master it, when inevitably it masters us."<sup>14</sup>

How long they faced each other we do not know. When the Spirit said speak, Jesus spoke, and when nothing more came, he stopped.<sup>15</sup> Not another word passed between them. Would he take the healing medicine Jesus offered? This much is clear: Jesus will not be added to anyone's resume, will not be used for our agendas, will not be a decoration on the good life otherwise defined, is not a source of quick techniques for happy living, and alone has the right to exclusive loyalty. He is the tiny needle's eye through which we must pass. Either Jesus gets what he asks for- which is the whole of us, or we do not get him. He demands surrender; "Come and follow me" is the only way he has to give us what we crave.

There is for all of us, I suspect, a private area where we keep our stash of little, household gods. It's the last thing you think about before going to sleep at night and the first thing on your mind next morning. It's an emotional center of gravity. It is where you run in times of anxiety, stress and loss. It provides quick comfort. It can be as concrete as a flush bank account or as mental as a fantasy world. For some it's an addiction to alcohol, to porn, to pills prescribed and prohibited, to food, to TV, whatever. For some it's a house, a place, a club, a sport, a family name, a title, a degree or rank, a social position, beauty or fame or a legacy of past success. It is the psychological umbilical cord you would most dread to have severed. You cannot imagine yourself without this one, central thing, an old friend who always comes through. But it is not God. It's the little idol you worship and make sacrifices to. It is the thing that blocks your being a whole-hearted disciple.

When Pompeii was excavated, the body of a woman was found entombed by the ashes of Vesuvius. Her feet were toward the city gate, but her face was turned backward toward something that lay just beyond her outreached hands. The prize for which her fingers reached was a bag of pearls. Maybe she dropped them; perhaps they were dropped by another. Though death was hard at her heels, and life

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<sup>14</sup> Albert Wells, editor, *Inspiring Quotations* (Nashville, TN: Nelson, 1988), 135).

<sup>15</sup> John 5:19, 30.

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**Luke 18:15-17, 18-30 ..... 13**

beckoning beyond the city gates, she could not shake off the spell of the pearls. She turned to pick them up, and death was her reward. But it was not the eruption of Vesuvius that made her love pearls more than life. It only froze her in an attitude of greed which was there all along."<sup>16</sup>

Is that how hell will be? Will those who repeatedly rejected God's grace and the call to follow Jesus be forever frozen in the posture of their besetting sin, the one thing they counted more important than God? Will the drunk always be reaching for the bottle, unable to lift it to the lips? Will the immoral be frozen forever naked in some embarrassing pose with no relief? Will dabblers in the occult sit expectantly before silent Ouija boards? Will the slothful be unable to move in eternal laziness? Will the greedy sit upon gold with nowhere to spend it? Will the TV junkie be forever stuck on a commercial, hitting a button on the remote forever? It is not a good thing to be left with nothing but your sins. Hell is an eternal freak show of human wreckage, a monument to misused freedom. We become like what we worship, and everyday we are being shaped towards one destiny or the other.

Our friend the rich ruler had the secret of his heart exposed. He came thinking he was a good man who needed a little tweaking; he left knowing otherwise, and that too is grace. Verse 23, "But when he heard this he became extremely sad, for he was very rich." Delos Miles writes:

"Jesus did not tone down his message for the sake of adding a promising man to the kingdom... no false pretenses, no basement bargains. He did not conceal the cross or disguise the cost.... Christ lost this man, but he did not lose his gospel. And what shall it profit a church if it gain all the rich people in the community, and lose its message."<sup>17</sup>

This story was often retold in the early church; we know because it's preserved in three of the four Gospels.<sup>18</sup> Remember that most of what Jesus said and did was never written down; we have only a small slice, but what was preserved is more than enough to meet the Savior and have our hearts sifted. So far I've learned

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<sup>16</sup> "Greed," *Leadership*, Fall 1989, 51.

<sup>17</sup> *How Jesus Won Persons* (Nashville, TN: Broadman, 1982, 104).

<sup>18</sup> Mark 10:17-31, Matthew 19:16-30, Luke 18:18-30.

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**Luke 18:15-17, 18-30 ..... 14**

- \* that money is a spiritual power that may corrupt our hearts. It may also be used to advance the kingdom of God and care for the poor;
- \* that just because the Holy Spirit draws someone does not mean they will say Yes. Jesus respects the right to say No. Hell, in other words, is not so much a monument to God's wrath as a permanent monument to the respect God has for our decisions to reject his help;
- \* that the most merciful and terrible thing Christ can do for us is to show us the depths of the darkness of our own hearts;
- \* that it is possible to have much outward morality and religion and no inward faith. This man was a great local synagogue member: morally upright, tither, asker of good questions. But he was not yet a disciple, which is what we are out to create: *people who together follow Jesus Christ with abandon.*

If we're honest, we have to admit Jesus regularly criticized wealth and its capacity to be a rival god; *mammon* he called it.<sup>19</sup> His attitude seems to be that money is like manure, "Stack it up and it stinks; spread it around and it makes things grow, including the givers."<sup>20</sup> How easily we forget Jesus understood business; for most of his life he worked in construction as a skilled tradesman; his parables are full of business metaphors.<sup>21</sup> Luke tells us his movement was bankrolled by a number of wealthy women.<sup>22</sup> Jesus was not anti-money; he did not glorify poverty. Yet he saw wealth as one of the primary distractions of life and issued warnings about its dark spiritual power to keep us away from God.

Our friend missed what he said he wanted- new life in the kingdom. Jesus does not save us by addition but by subtraction; he displaces rival centers of loyalty. It was the right question to the right man with the right answer but the wrong emotional

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<sup>19</sup> For a good treatment, see Ben Witherington III, *Jesus and Money: A Guide for Time of Financial Crisis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2010).

<sup>20</sup> Wells, *Inspiring*, 135.

<sup>21</sup> For a fresh treatment, see John C. Knapp, *How the Church Fails Business people (and what can be done about it)*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012).

<sup>22</sup> 8:1-3.

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and volitional response.<sup>23</sup> He walked back into the darkness of a self-managed life, and Jesus looked at his bewildered disciples, "How hard it will be for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God." They were stunned. Like most Jews, they saw riches and keeping the law as automatic signs of God's blessing, and if not this man, was there hope for anyone to be saved? Jesus then repeated himself with a vivid image, "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." The biggest animal, the smallest opening, a clear impossibility. After watching what happened to his converts over time, John Wesley wrote: "When a man becomes a Christian, he becomes industrious, trustworthy, and prosperous. Now, if that man, when he gets all he can and saves all he can, does not give all he can, I have more hope for Judas Iscariot than for that man."<sup>24</sup>

Beginning with the tithe (giving 10 percent to God through the church) is one way to guard against the spiritual tyranny of money and greed. Beyond that there's giving offerings as led. Ambrose, the 4<sup>th</sup> century Roman bishop warned his people, "If you do not give the tenth to God, He will take the nine." Augustine added, "Tithes ought to be paid, whatever your occupation. He who has given to us the whole has thought it meet to ask a tenth. It is not for His benefit, but for ours."<sup>25</sup> We need to give to maintain priorities and as preventive medicine against the love of money which so corrupts our culture. But in the case of this man, it was not enough. He was already a tither, and Christ asked for it all as a severe remedy for a terminal disease of attachment to the riches that owned him. His was an advanced case and required a radical procedure not required of all. All must give; all should aim at the tithe and beyond; and some, because of excessive attachment, require a radical separation.

We do not earn our way into the kingdom by good deeds or buy our way with money. It's the grace of God that saves us, the grace of God that reveals our inner attitudes, the grace of God that loosens our trust in earthly securities, the grace of God that frees us to follow Jesus as lifelong students. Salvation, as Jesus said, is simply not a human possibility, verse 27: "With men it is impossible, but not with God; for all things are possible with God."

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<sup>23</sup> The genre of 18:18-25, 26-30 is known as a *failed called story*, and is also found in Greco-Roman sources outside the New Testament; for an analysis, see Sharon Down, *Mark* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2000), 104-109.

<sup>24</sup> Wells, *Inspiring*, 190.

<sup>25</sup> Idem.

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Every parent with more than one child has had this experience. You're correcting one, and as soon as you finish, the other pipes up, "Aren't I being good?" Peter blurts out as spokesman for the rest, "Lo, *we* have left everything and followed you." Implying, "Aren't we good disciples?"

Peter and the others were shaken by what Jesus said. Peter sacrificed much: parked his boat, pushed the *Pause* button on his fishing business and income, left wife and family for weeks at a time. If that's not commitment, it'll do till commitment comes along. Jesus tells Peter it's still a good deal. Even if you lose what you value, if your family turns away from you because of your new loyalty, God has power to more than make up for the loss through the new fellowship of disciples, and in some cultures the church is literally an alternative family, particularly with Muslim and Hindu converts who are often counted as dead after conversion, so never underestimate the family spirit of care that all people- but especially new Christians- need from their church family.<sup>26</sup>

So may God our Father, by the ruthless searching of the Holy Spirit, expose our inward idols, that we may separate ourselves from them by the power of his grace and follow Jesus Christ in this adventure to freedom that finally leads to heaven, and beyond that into the fullness of God's kingdom. Oh- and as an afterthought- a couplet from St. Bernard of Clairvaux, who wrote, "Theirs is an endless road, a helpless maze, who seek for goods before they seek for God."<sup>27</sup> Seek God first. Don't let money and the stuff and status it buys be your deity, the one thing you'd be most loathe to let go of, because one day you will, involuntarily!

I wonder what happened to the man who came in such hope and then felt such sadness. One thing is sure. He walked away from the greatest invitation ever extended with insight, "I'm not a good Jew; I worship money and my moral resume as my little non-gods. Jesus exposed me in just a few words, and now I go back to my old life." Isn't that a good thing? To know I am not who I think I am. To at least have that much truth? What did it do to him? Did he come back later or did he continue to honor the God he brought in his back pocket. One day we will know. One day it will be clear about us all. God is at war with our idols because God is in love with us. Which will it be?

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<sup>26</sup> For a thorough critique of the effects of individualism on the church as a family, see Joseph H. Hellerman, *When the Church Was a Family* (Nashville, TN: B & H, 2009).

<sup>27</sup> Manser, *The Westminster Collection*, 281.

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**A. The Genre And Structure Of Ancient Religious/Philosophical Call Stories: Two Dominant Models**

Summons And Response Model (Greco-Roman, 5 <sup>th</sup> - 2 <sup>nd</sup> Century B.C.)						Attraction Model
7 Possible Parts	1 Kgs. 19:19-21	Socrates Xenophon	Mk. 1:16-18	Mk. 1:19-20	Mk. 2:13-14	Mk. 10:17-22
1) Travel	v.19a	1	1:16a	1:19a	2:13-14a	10:17a
2) Initiative	Elijah	2 Socrates	Jesus	Jesus	Jesus	Rich Man
3) Sees Names Given Occupation	v.19b v.19b v.19b	x	1:16b 1:16c 1:16d	1:19b 1:19b 1:19c	2:14b 2:14b 2:14c	x
4) Parents	v.20	x	x	v.20b	x	x
5) Dialog	v.19c-20a v.20b-21a	3 (Easy) 4 (Hard)	x	x	x	10:17c-19 10:20-21
6) Call Promise	v.19c	5a 5b	1:17a 1:17b	1:20a (Implied in <i>called</i> )	2:14d x	10:21b 10:21a
7) Cost Obey/Disobey	vv.19c-21a v.21b	6	1:18a 1:18b	1:20b 1:20c	2:14e 2:14f	10:22b 10:22a

**B. The Genre Of Ancient *Unsuccessful* Call Stories: 5 Standard Parts (Dowd: 106)**

- 1 “Someone wanted to study philosophy under him (Diogenes the Cynic). Attraction  
2 Diogenes gave him a fish to carry Challenge To Character, Unconventional Behavior  
3 and commanded him to follow him. Call To Follow  
2’ But the man threw it away out of shame and departed. Failure Of Obedience Test  
1’ Sometime later Diogenes met him and laughed and said, Tragedy: Failure By Trivial Thing  
“Our friendship was broken by a fish.” (*Lives Of The Eminent Philosophers*, 6.36)
- 1 “The Cynic Diogenes castigated Alexander the Great for concupiscence (lust) in this regard:  
2 “If you wish to become good and upright,  
throw aside the rag (i.e. crown) you have on your head  
3 and come to me.  
2’ But you certainly cannot,  
1’ for you are held fast by the thighs of Hephaestion” (James Edwards, *Mark*, 314, n. 37).

The Five Parts Of A Failed Call Story	Mark 10:17-31	Diogenes Laertius, <i>Lives</i> 6.36
1. Person makes request	v.17	No. 1 above
2. Teacher gives difficult assignment, defies convention. Obedience?	v.21a	No. 2 above
3. Command to follow (i.e. enroll as an apprentice, student)	v.21b	No. 3 above
4. Person departs with negative emotional response.	v.22	No. 4 above
5. Further teaching on costs and rewards of discipleship.	vv.23-31	No. 5 above

<b>Mark 10:17-31</b> .....	<b>18</b>
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