

Sermon Reading: Luke 18:18-27

A certain ruler asked him, “Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?”

¹⁹ *“Why do you call me good?” Jesus answered. “No one is good—except God alone. ²⁰ You know the commandments: ‘You shall not commit adultery, you shall not murder, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, honor your father and mother.’”*

²¹ *“All these I have kept since I was a boy,” he said.*

²² *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.”*

²³ *When he heard this, he became very sad, because he was very wealthy. ²⁴ Jesus looked at him and said, “How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God! ²⁵ 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.”*

²⁶ *Those who heard this asked, “Who then can be saved?”*

²⁷ *Jesus replied, “What is impossible with man is possible with God.”*

Sermon Theme: God Makes the Impossible Possible

Starting already at childhood we have this drive to be enough. The little toddler wants to be big enough to ride that bike. The bike-riding grade schooler wants to be old enough to get that driver’s license. The car-driving teenager wants to be mature enough so mom and dad trust them to do things on their own with little-to-no supervision. The college-age-twenty-something hopes to be wise enough to make the right life decisions, be successful and accomplish their goals. The middle-aged adult hopes they do what is best enough for their family, their children, for themselves. There’s the constant question and even fear of whether or not you have done enough. Did you do enough to fulfill those hopes and dreams? Did I save up enough for retirement? All too soon there’s the question whether you can do enough to take care of yourself.

The more you look at it, the more it seems, being or having “enough” is either just out of arms-length, or at best, it’s like trying to hold sand in your hand. You might finally grasp it for a little while only to have it slip through your fingers. Now you have to be and do enough of something else.

When we first meet the young ruler in Luke 18 he comes off as a guy who is a little too full of himself. But this man doesn’t come to Jesus to trap or impress him. In the book of Mark we hear this guy runs up to and kneels in front of Jesus. He wants to figure out,

“What am I supposed to do next?” In his own humble opinion, he already accomplished a lot in his life. But there’s still this aching feeling that he had not done enough. He asks, **“Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?”**

Jesus says: **“Why do you call me good? No one is good—except God alone.”** Jesus is not saying he is not God. He wants this man to really think about what he is asking. What makes someone good? Someone praises this person because he is a good hard worker. While someone else sees the exact same person as anything but good because he is never home being a parent or with his family. Being declared “good” cannot be determined by what human beings decide—we don’t all agree on the criteria. God and his perfection is the only standard for good. As Jesus says, there is no one who is good except God alone. It should have been a hint to this man reaching to do enough, but he misses it.

Jesus continues to lead the man along, **“You know the commandments: ‘You shall not commit adultery, you shall not murder, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, honor your father and mother.’”** Jesus wants the man to take an honest look at his life. The man’s response: **“All these I’ve kept since I was a boy.”**

I don’t think this man is being full of himself. When he says he has kept these, he is saying that he has been very careful to do exactly what the letter of the law says. And he probably did! He probably was an upstanding citizen and devout to God’s Law. And don’t we do the same? One might say, “I have not wronged anybody. I’ve done my best to do what’s right with everyone. I don’t do drugs; I haven’t been arrested. I’ve never murdered anyone, cheated, or stole. I’m a good person who follows the laws and stays out of trouble. I care for my family; I would do anything for my kids. I go to church when I can and help out when I am able. I do my best!” But, like the ruler, we feel something missing. There’s still that feeling that we haven’t done enough.

Jesus doesn’t encourage the man. He doesn’t tell the ruler he shouldn’t be so hard on himself. No, he tells him, **“You’re right. You still lack one thing. You still haven’t done enough. Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”**

Jesus gives the man exactly what he wants. But when Jesus lays it at his feet and tells him exactly what he needs to do, instead of relieving him, the ruler is burdened. Instead of uplifting, it crushes. He thought he only had little way to go but Jesus shows him that he wasn’t even close. All of those actions that he had done would never be good enough to have eternal life because of his heart that fails to put God first. His priority problem shows a heart that does not want to fear, love and trust God above all else.

We want to believe that we can have it both ways: saying that God is the top priority in our life but then try and find our fulfillment in something we can or want to do. We are

experts at pointing out where we can succeed when it comes to following God's Law. We don't want to see where we fail. And it's those areas, when pointed out, that force us to see that it's not just *them* who do not have their priorities straight. It's me.

Where do you use your time, you place the most energy, you spend your money? How do you set your schedule or live your life? Maybe it's having certain things—clothes, figurines, tools, collectibles, land. It might be your money and how much you can spend, how much you save in retirement or set aside in your portfolio. It may be the hobby you enjoy and other experiences you want to have. It could be your family and friends and the life you want to live. If Jesus were to ask you to get rid of it in order to follow him, how would you respond? When we love even good things more than following God, you show a heart that does not fear, love, and trust in God above all else.

If I try to find true lasting satisfaction from something I do or can accomplish, it's not going to be possible. You can never fulfill enough of people's expectations or even live up to you own. There will never be enough money or things, you will always want more. All the great life experiences and wonderful times will not stop that feeling that there should be something more. And if I look to myself to fill it up, if I search in other places in this world, you will hear all sorts of promises for a satisfying and fulfilled life. But it's never enough.

Deep down, whether you realize it or not, what you are trying to do is be seen as a good person who does enough in God's sight. But when we honestly look at how we live out our priorities we know how that ruler feels. We want to turn away, sad, even angry, because God's Law crushes my pride showing me that I am not good enough. You feel the weight of expectations on your shoulders because you know that you cannot be enough.

The ruler went home sad because he recognizes the truth. The disciples recognize Jesus' point that he hammers home. They ask in despair, "Who then can be saved?" because they realize with man it is impossible to have eternal life.

Jesus wants the ruler to see the answer to his questions is right in front of this ruler's face. It's not what I can do to have eternal life. It's what this man Jesus does for me. It should not be possible that God loves us who cannot do enough. We do not live up perfectly to the expectations. We too often fall into the very things we promise that we will never do again. But what is impossible with man is possible with God. God loves you so much that he makes you his top priority giving you Jesus. God becoming man, taking on flesh, 100% true God and true man should be impossible. But Jesus does the impossible so that it is possible for him to take your place as your substitute. You know how tempting this life is. You know how enticing and alluring sin can be so that even when you know you shouldn't do it you find yourself slipping into sin. It sounds and

feels impossible to resist! But Jesus does the impossible so that forgiveness is possible for you. Jesus puts his Father's will as his top priority and goes to the cross. And with that perfect life and his innocent death, Jesus does the seemingly impossible: It is finished. The work for eternal life is done. There is nothing more that God will demand from you. Jesus' life, his death, it is enough. Forgiveness is won. Jesus carries away the burden of the law, of not being enough, from you. You are set free from the Law and its demands. This isn't just a possibility; in our risen and ascended Lord it is guaranteed.

God doesn't wait for you to be enough, do enough, to make it yours; he knows that wouldn't happen. So he gives it to you. And he gives it to you in a seemingly impossible way. He takes your dead heart of sin and makes it alive with saving faith. It happens in what looks like an impossible way. It looks like plain old simple water and some words spoken. But it's God's Word. And that Word has power that God promises: "Baptism saves you" (1 Peter 3:21). At that moment eternal life is yours.

"But what about my sin? What about my daily failures? What about this feeling about not being enough?" Jesus assures you: "Because of my perfect life that I wrapped you in at your baptism God only sees my perfection. Because of my death on the cross and the blood I shed for you, your sins have been wiped clean. I declare you to be enough." And he keeps giving it to you. It happens when you hear him speaking through his called servant, "Your sins are forgiven." It happens when he invites you to receive his body and blood given and poured out for you for the forgiveness of your sins. He declares you to be enough.

We can stop trying to fulfill this feeling of being enough because Jesus already did it all for you. Instead of serving myself, instead of doing all these things out of fear of being seen as someone who doesn't do enough, you are set free to serve without demand or expectation. Stop trying to live to be more pleasing to God. God doesn't need your good works; your friends, family, the random stranger does. And God encourages you that the tiniest of gestures done for my friend, my family, that random stranger it's all pleasing in his sight. Because he sees you through the lens of the cross, he only sees Jesus' perfection, and is already well-pleased with you. God makes the impossible possible creating in you a new heart that desires to put God's will first. And we do this because with saving faith we know, believe, and trust that God has done the seemingly impossible in saving us. Amen.