

International Sunday School Lesson
Study Notes
May 22, 2016

Lesson Text: Luke 18:15-27; Mark 10:16
Lesson Title: Childlike Faith

Introduction

In our previous lesson from Luke 18:9-14, we looked at the story of the Pharisee and the publican (tax collector) praying in the temple. In that story, Jesus spoke about a man who was personally confident of his righteous standing before God, but who left his time of prayer not declared right with God. The tax collector, who recognized he had no claim on God because of his good works and deeds, cried out to God for mercy. When all was said and done, Jesus said the tax collector “...*went down to his house justified,*” (Luke 18:14). “Justified” means Jesus declared the repentant tax collector “right with God, forgiven, accepted, and pardoned.”

In the story of the Pharisee and publican, Jesus pictured one man who thought his status and deeds commended him to God and gave him right of entry into God's kingdom, and one man who denied his status or deeds gave him any claim over God. Jesus used this story as the example of spiritual pride verses humility in reference to man's righteousness before God.

The parable of the Pharisee and publican is followed by a story of parents bringing children to Jesus and asking Him to touch them and bless them. This story is followed by the story of a certain young ruler who was morally, socially, and financially prominent, coming to Jesus with a question, “What shall I do to inherit eternal life?” Why has Luke placed the story of Jesus blessing the children between the story of the Pharisee and the publican and the young ruler? He is showing you what a true disciple of Jesus looks like. He is showing you the heart and attitude of one who is truly seeking God's kingdom.

When you read the stories of the Pharisee and the certain young ruler you can easily conclude these individuals were making faith in Christ more difficult than necessary. Sometimes we have the ability for making the simple truths of Scripture difficult. Faith can be simple, as we will see in the story of the little children being brought to Christ. Faith can be difficult, as we will see in the story of the certain young ruler as he converses with Jesus.

The Simplicity of Childlike Faith (Luke 18:15-17)

Verse 15

“And they brought unto him also infants, that he would touch them: but when his disciples saw it, they rebuked them.”

“They” refers to the parents of the “infants” or little children. The word “infants” refers to nursing babies, from birth to around two years of age. “Brought” means they continued bringing the little children over an extended period of time. The word suggests this was not a one-time occurrence. It would be logical for the parents of these little ones, who were trying to raise their children and live according to the law of God, to bring them to Jesus for a blessing. Jewish history records parents bringing their children to the rabbi or priest for a touch or a blessing. The parents are hoping Jesus will do the same.

What is important is Jesus does not rebuke the parents for following a Jewish tradition, although He does in other cases. Jesus seems to care deeply for the “infants” and is anxious to minister to them. He also knows this is a great opportunity to reveal what is in the hearts of children, His disciples, and those listening to His words.

When “his disciples saw” the parents bringing their children to Jesus, “they rebuked them.” The word “rebuke” means they issued a “strong rebuke” or “forbid” the parents. You can somewhat understand the rationale of the disciples. They are thinking Jesus has more important things to do than bless children all day. The problem here is the “disciples” sound like the Pharisees, which had no allowance for children in their religious world. Theology and righteousness were adult subjects where children were not welcome. So the disciples strongly protested the actions of the parents.

Verse 16

“But Jesus called them unto him, and said, Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God.”

Jesus responded quickly to the actions of His disciples. First, He “called” the parents to keep bringing the children. He “called them unto him” means He summoned the parents to continue bringing the children in spite of what His disciples had said. “Called” is a word of authority. Jesus’ word always has authority over what men think or say. Second, Mark says, “*But when Jesus saw it, he was much displeased...*” (Mark 10:14). Preventing innocent little children from coming to Him angered our Lord. He was overflowing with righteous anger. The Pharisees and the disciples were completely out of touch with our Lord’s heart. Third, Jesus said to the Pharisees and His disciples, “Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not...” or, “Allow them to come to Me, and do not hinder them.”

Jesus uses the word “children” when He responds to the actions of His disciples. “Children” is from a different Greek word than “infant.” “Children” means those beyond nursing years. Jesus extends the truth of what he is teaching beyond just the newborn and nursing age children. He forbids anyone from ever hindering “children” of any age from coming to Him. Why? Because “...for of such is the kingdom of God.”

“For of such is the kingdom of God” means the attitude and innocence of these little children demonstrate what it takes to be a part of God’s kingdom. The “kingdom of God” belongs to innocent humble people who have no merits of their own. Little children have no status or position in life whereby to claim access into God’s kingdom. Children are not those who do, they are those who are done for. You do not enter God’s kingdom based on what you do.

“Of such” means “those like these children.” Those who have no standing, no merits or deeds of their own, they are welcome to come to God’s kingdom through Jesus Christ. Jesus is using the “children” as a model for the way you enter into God’s kingdom because the Pharisees and the certain young ruler thought it was about who they were and what they had done.

The “kingdom of God” is where God rules. God will only rule in the heart of those who have come to Christ by simple faith and trust. Meaning their motives, ambitions, and desires are pure. Jesus invites those to Himself, who cannot merit anything, to gain the kingdom. Jesus said, “*Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven*” (Matthew 18:4).

Verse 17

“Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child shall in no wise enter therein.”

“Verily” means truly. “Whosoever” means Pharisees, publicans, disciples, parents, children, or anyone born in this world. “Receive” means “accept” or “take.” The Lord states the “kingdom of God” belongs to “Whosoever” comes lowly and humbly to the Lord. If you come any other way except “as a little child,” you will “in no wise enter therein.”

The Difficulty of Childlike Faith (Luke 18:18-27)

The coming of “a certain ruler” and his question to Jesus, “Good Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life” is not something that just happened. It is a vital part of everything Jesus was teaching. The story of the Pharisee and the publican as well as the story of the children and the kingdom of God prepares us for this powerful encounter between Jesus and the young ruler. It shows us the difficulty of possessing childlike faith.

Verse 18

“And a certain ruler asked him, saying, Good Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?”

Luke tells us this man was a “ruler.” “Ruler” is the Greek word *archon* {ar-kone} which meant he was possibly a member of the Sanhedrin. The Sanhedrin was considered the Supreme Court in Judaism. Mark leaves the personal identity of this man anonymous so each of us can identify with him.

Mark tells us the young man came “*running*” and “*kneeled*” before Jesus (Mark 10:17). By “*kneeling*” he would have exposed himself to the ridicule of his peers who were always watching Jesus. His coming and question are legitimate. On the surface he seems to have humility. In fact, his humility is unparalleled by any other Jew in Scripture. He seems to possess a childlike faith.

The question from the young ruler reveals much about his purpose in coming to Jesus and his perception of Jesus. He asked, “Good Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” He called our Lord, “Good Master” or, “Good Teacher.” No one else in the gospels addressed our Lord with these words. New Testament Rabbi’s refused to call each other “Good Teacher.” However, they did require their students to address them as “Good Teacher.” The words “Good Master” or “Good Teacher” to a Rabbi were words reserved for God alone.

When this young man said, “Good Master,” he had a discernment of the character and nature of Jesus that no one else demonstrated short of Simon Peter and the inner circle of the disciples. By addressing Jesus as “Good Master,” the young ruler is saying, “Jesus, I respect You. I think You are the kind of person who deserves to be asked a serious question like this.”

The young ruler wants to know what he needs to “do” to have “eternal life,” or the kind of life that lasts forever. He obviously believes there is a God and there is life beyond the grave. He seems to be asking the million dollar question. It would be great to have a total stranger walk up to you and ask, “What shall I do to inherit eternal life?” It seems there is no way this young man will miss eternal life. He is kneeling before Jesus. He is humble. He is seeking. He seems to be willing. But the little word “do” is casting a shadow over this entire scene. Jesus addresses the “do” in his answer.

Verse 19-20

“And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? none is good, save one, that is, God. Thou knowest the commandments, Do not commit adultery, Do

not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Honour thy father and thy mother.”

Jesus answered the young man immediately with His own question, “Why callest thou me good? none is good, save one, that is, God.” Why would He answer the young man that way? What He is saying is, “Why do you call Me good when you know that no one is good except God alone, unless you intend by calling Me ‘good’ to connect Me with God? Are you saying or prepared to say I am from God?” This is the implication of what the young man just said. If he acknowledged Jesus was from God and truly believed that, then he should be eager to do whatever Jesus tells him to do.

The next thing Jesus says is, “Thou knowest the commandments...” and He mentions five of them. The commandments Jesus gives him are from the second half of the Ten Commandments, the half that has to do with human relationships.

Verse 21

“And he said, All these have I kept from my youth up.”

With clarity of voice and honesty of heart the young man answered, “All these have I kept from my youth up.” What has Jesus just drawn out of the man? He has shown him, and us, an evaluation of his life. The young ruler believes himself to be a good person; he is a commandment keeper; he is the kind of person who is worthy to inherit eternal life in his own eyes and the eyes of many others. This is a man who is confident in his own moral character to cause him to stand before God and inherit eternal life.

The young ruler was simply confessing what he had not done and the kind of man he was. The ironic thing here is if this young ruler had actually obeyed the law of God, the law should have given him eternal life. But it had not.

Verse 22

“Now when Jesus heard these things, he said unto him, Yet lackest thou one thing: sell all that thou hast, and distribute unto the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, follow me.”

Our Lord answers this young man with a reply that has raised as many questions as it has provided answers. Part of the difficulty of our understanding Jesus’ answer is that we just read over it without stopping and listening to what Jesus is saying. Jesus’ answer has often been interpreted as a passage that says rich people cannot go to heaven. But that is not the heart of this text. The heart of the text is the comparison between the

commandments in verse 20 and the *imperatives* in verse 22. Jesus tells the young ruler to “sell all, distribute unto the poor, and come, follow me.”

Like the young ruler, most of us can handle these first two imperatives, at least to some degree. This young man did not lack charity. He, like most of us, was able to “do” the social things that cause us to appear to love the Lord and our fellow man. But when it came to the third imperative, “come, follow me,” he was missing something essential. The “one thing” this man “lacked” was his inability to deal with the stuff of life that would enable him to “come, follow Jesus.”

The “one thing” this man “lacked” and every person lacks who will not know eternal life is disobedience to the last of these imperatives. Jesus is showing this young man that in his heart he is an idolater. He worships his stuff. He worships his property and possessions. Jesus has just issued his own evaluation of the young man and it is not good.

Verse 23

“And when he heard this, he was very sorrowful: for he was very rich.”

“Sorrowful” means “grieved.” When is the last time you heard someone grieve because they “was very rich?” This young man has been confronted with the truth that he cannot inherit eternal life by the stuff he has. You see, the little children had nothing to bring. They had no possessions or merits. Jesus said, “...for of such is the kingdom of God” (verse 16).

The young ruler stands in contrast to everything Jesus taught about eternal life. The ruler loves his belongings and cannot let go of it. So the things he loves the most are going to plunge him into a Christless eternity.

Verse 24-25

“And when Jesus saw that he was very sorrowful, he said, How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God! For it is easier for a camel to go through a needle’s eye, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.”

With sadness, Jesus looks at this young man and says, “How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God!” Is Jesus saying rich people cannot be saved? No. He is saying it is much easier to trust in what you have and what you do compared to trusting Christ and what He has done for you.

In fact, “it is easier for a camel to go through a needle’s eye, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.” Jesus is not talking about a small gate in the city of Jerusalem when He says, “a needle’s eye.” He is talking literally

about a “needle’s eye” that is almost impossible to thread. He is saying it is impossible to enter God’s kingdom and be saved apart from childlike faith and saving grace.

Verse 26

“And they that heard it said, Who then can be saved?”

Those listening to Jesus are shell-shocked. If a man like the young ruler cannot be saved, who can? He is moral. He is charitable. He is seeking. He is kneeling. If he cannot be saved, who can?

Verse 27

“And he said, The things which are impossible with men are possible with God.”

Jesus’ answer is simple and straightforward. It is “impossible” for any man to be saved because of who he is and what he possesses. Sinful man cannot change his own heart. This young ruler did not have the power within himself to lay aside his riches and follow Jesus. Neither do you. Jesus said, “It is impossible.”

The good news is, what is “impossible” with man is “possible with God.” When sinners like the young ruler come to Jesus in the same manner as the little children, things can change. You cannot push camels through needle’s eyes. You cannot train sinners to have childlike faith. It cannot be done! Only the saving grace of God can change the sinful heart of man. No one becomes a Christian by his own will alone. But with “God,” all things are “possible!”

The Intimacy of Childlike Faith (Mark 10:16)

Verse 16

“And he took them up in his arms, put his hands upon them, and blessed them.”

Mark records this beautiful event of intimacy and security concerning the “little children.” Jesus “took them” individually and “put his hands upon them.” These are intimate words. The words “his arms” and “his hands” indicate both “arms” and both “hands” were upon the children. Both hands and arms were embracing them in security and love.

He then “blessed them.” We do not know exactly what this “blessing” was, but the Greek form of the word means it was intense and passionate as He looked

into their faces. He was promising His provision of salvation on their behalf and to care for them then, now, and forever.

God has always “blessed” simple childlike faith!

Conclusion

God wants our trust. God wants our humility. God wants a childlike faith. He wants a childlike faith in our *initial* encounter with Him at salvation. He wants a childlike faith in our *continual* encounter with Him in life.

If you want to see God’s heaven, you must give up everything that dominates your heart and trust Jesus. When you have come as a child and trusted as a child, you will then receive God’s grace to follow Christ. Remember, what is impossible with men, is possible with God!

Amen.