

## Luke Chapter 18 – John Karmelich

1. If you recall, my lesson title for the last lesson was how do we know for sure we are a Christian? In this lesson, I follow up that question with, "How does God know we are saved?" To state this concept another way, what can do to know for sure God has forgiven us? Know that most of this chapter is either made up stories or actual stories of people seeking God. The reason the author Luke picked these stories to include here, is together they teach us how we can know for sure we are saved based on our actions.
2. Let me explain this idea another way: Most of us reading this already believe that Jesus is God and He did die for our sins. Therefore we know we're saved because we believe that. What I'd like us to ponder in this lesson has nothing to do with doubting that belief. Instead I'd like us to consider whether or not we're seeking God in line with that belief. If we are saved by faith alone, how do we pray to God based on that faith? How do we seek Him if we do believe in that basic concept of Christianity? In other words, if we are saved, how should we act based on that faith? My point is this chapter gives some wonderful examples of how Jesus does expect us to act based on that belief that He is God and He died for our sins. As my regulars know, it's now time for me to explain the chapter stories to see if it fits my theory. Here goes:
  - a) The first story is a made up one by Jesus, where in the first verse, He explains why He's giving us this parable to begin with: Jesus says the moral of this story is that we should always pray and never give up. The parable itself is about a dishonest courtroom judge who gives a woman what she wants just so she'll stop pestering the judge for justice. The point of the story is that God wants us to stay in contact with Him through prayer so He'll guide us through our lives as He cares about us. God wants to guide us not so we'll stop bothering Him like this courtroom judge, and not to get us "off his back". The issue is our trust that He'll guide us through the difficult situations in life. This story also talks about consistent prayer over an issue, why? Often by praying for something regularly, it helps us to change our perspective about what He desires for us, what we really need and what He wants us to have based on our seeking Him regularly through prayer.
  - b) The second story is also made up. It's about two men who went to God's temple to pray. The first man focused solely on how moral he was. He said things like, I do this and that moral act and I'm not like that dishonest other man who's also praying in this room. That second man didn't try to justify himself, but simply begged God to forgive him for how he has acted. The story ends with the point that the dishonest man was forgiven for his sins while the first man who tried to prove to God how special he was, was not forgiven. So is this story saying we shouldn't try to live an upstanding and moral life? Of course not. It's just teaching us about how we approach God in prayer. The idea is we don't try to justify our actions by stating how good we are. It's about realizing we're never good enough for God no matter how hard we try. He wants us to confess that His way of living is the right way and our way of acting was wrong. It's about telling God through prayer that He's in charge of our lives and we can't prove our worth to Him by our deeds.
    - i) Coming back to my lesson title, the point is we can know God has forgiven us of our sins not by stating our morality, but just by honoring Him as being in charge of every aspect of our lives and realizing our dependence upon Him for guidance.
  - c) Then of all things, we get a story of people bringing babies to Jesus to have Him bless them. To state the obvious, all of us who have children care about them being saved as they can also spend eternity with God. That's why we desire that God bless our children. During this story, Jesus uses this time to teach all of us about how we are to approach God: Like little children who are fully dependant upon their parents for their lives. Of course God wants us to go do what is right, but we trust He's working through us to do what's right.

- i) This little story is the reminder that God expects us to go use our lives to make a difference for Him. At the same time He wants us to depend upon His power in order to make that difference the same way a little child is totally dependant upon his or her parents in order to survive. In short, it's about our understanding of our dependence upon God in order to make a difference for Him.
  - d) Then we have another fairly famous story of a rich Jewish man who asked Jesus what He must do to be saved. After Jesus questions how he's lived his life, Jesus then tells him to sell all of his possessions and follow Him. There are two points to this little story: First is that this man thought he was good enough as he has obeyed God's commandments all of his life. The second is that this man trusted in his wealth more than God. The point here is not that God is against having riches. As I stated in the last lesson, there are a number of people one can point to in the Old Testament that had wealth and are saved. The issue is about loving God more than loving money. The reason Jesus asked this man to sell all that he had and then follow Jesus is that this man enjoyed the things money can buy more than he cared about following God. The issue for us of course is about examining our own lives to see if there is anything we care about more than serving God. I'm not saying none of us can earn a living or have hobbies. I'm just saying that God wants to be in charge of all aspects of our lives including our finances.
    - i) The point as it ties to my lesson theme is simply that we can be sure we're saved if we're willing to let God be in charge of every aspect of our lives, period.
  - e) Then we get the disciples reminding Jesus that they've left everything they own in order to follow Him. Jesus then tells the disciples they will receive far more in this lifetime for that commitment than they've ever lost by letting go of what they've had. I'll explain that better later in the lesson, but the main point is the joy we get to enjoy by our trust in Jesus far outweighs anything and everything we've let go to follow Him.
  - f) At this point Jesus explains to the disciples about how He is to die and rise again. This is told here as the disciples were expecting Jesus to rule over the world then. The reason He tells this story now even though they didn't get it, was to show them and us how our trust in Him works until He comes back to set up that eternal kingdom. Although the disciples didn't get to rule and reign then and there, it shows them and us how trusting in Jesus to guide one's life brings far greater joy to one's life than anything we can do without Him.
  - g) Finally the chapter ends with the story of a blind man being cured by Jesus. This story is not here just to show another miracle by Jesus. It is first of all to indicate that this man is now saved because He trusted in Jesus as God and as one who helps all of us to see who He really is. Second and more importantly, it shows us that based on our trust that Jesus is God and in charge of our lives, we too can see the world as it was meant to be seen:
    - i) The point is once we have our eyes opened to see the world from His perspective then we can know we're saved once we "get it" about Christianity is all about.
3. OK that is a ridiculously long summary of the lesson. My apology, but all of it was needed so we can know for sure we're saved based on how we act toward God in our lives. The point of all of this is that we can know we're saved based on our attitude toward God and how we live out our lives, once we've made that commitment to serve Him. With that commitment made, I do invite you to read the rest of this lesson and hopefully learn or remind yourselves of what God expects of us who've committed our lives to serving Him. Ok, here we go:
4. Verse 1: Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up.
- a) I have to admit, there's nothing that makes my work easier then when the author explains the purpose. The first story of this chapter that hasn't begun yet, begins with Jesus telling us the purpose of that parable: So we should always pray and never give up praying? So if God doesn't answer our prayer the first time, why try again? For starters, it shows our dependence upon Him if we keep on trying by continuance asking for help.

- b) Next, often I've learned through continuous prayer, to change what I ask for based on the fact God hasn't been answering the way I want Him to answer. Remember the purpose of prayer is for us to get His will done, not ours. Altering our prayers gets us to think about what it is we're asking and hopefully get those prayers in line with what He desires of us.
  - c) What this parable is going to teach us is that God wants us to be persistent in our prayer life. Not to get us to beg, but to get us to think about what it is we're asking Him to do. It gets us to focus on the outcomes of God granting our prayers. One of the hardest things I have had to learn over and over again is about accepting His will for my life. When I deal with a difficult situation, what God usually wants first is for us to accept that what we're going through is His will for our lives for the moment. What I've learned to pray for is my acceptance of His will in those situations. Of course I ask God to help me with what's the issue of the moment. However, if things aren't changing, I've learned to come back to the idea of acceptance and then ask for His will to be done through those situations. That is how He loves to work, when we're all out of options and only He can get the glory based on what happens in such situations. With that said, onto the parable itself.
5. Verse 2: He said: "In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared about men.<sup>3</sup> And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, 'Grant me justice against my adversary.'<sup>4</sup> "For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, 'Even though I don't fear God or care about men,<sup>5</sup> yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won't eventually wear me out with her coming!' "
- a) First a little background on civil justice in that culture. When it came to deciding religious matters, there were rabbis around for such things. When it came to financial disputes, the Romans appointed judges. My point is for that crowd to picture a dishonest judge was no stretch of the imagination, as it was common in that culture. In this parable, the judge did his job as he was appointed to do so, even with the fact he didn't care about God or what other people thought of his decisions.
  - b) Anyway in this parable a woman literally pestered this judge constantly for justice. In the Roman and Jewish culture, women had little rights. The specifics of what she wanted of this judge are not stated. The only idea we get is she showed up in front of this judge day after day demanding justice for her cause. Most of us can relate to the concept of helping a person just to get them off our backs. That's the situation being played out here.
  - c) I admit that I love the fact that the judge even says to himself, I don't care if there is a god like the one these Jewish people worship or I don't care what people think of my decisions but if I see this woman one more day I'm going to scream in frustration. Therefore, I will give her what she wants just so she'll go away.
  - d) To state the obvious, the parable has nothing to do with us dealing with dishonest people or say, pestering someone to death. The point is if this man is willing to give this woman what she wants just to get her off his back, then know that God cares more for those of us who are called to serve Him than this judge would ever care about the life of this woman.
6. Verse 6: And the Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says.<sup>7</sup> And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off?"
- a) There is an old Jewish expression that if one had to describe what God is like, most likely the first thing a religious Jewish person would say is "God is a God of justice". If you ask a religious Jewish person about God's grace, they'd immediately realize the person asking the question is a Christian, as a Christian focuses on God's grace versus God's justice. My point is the woman in this made up parable wanted justice in her situation. Because God cares about those who are His, He's willing to bring us justice if we're willing to accept it.
  - b) Time for a quick lecture on what God will and will not grant us based on prayer requests:
    - i) First, if we pray for say, an expensive new house or car, we can't get it by praying for it hard enough. I loathe Christians who say things like God hasn't granted our prayers for things because we haven't prayed for it hard enough.

- ii) In other words God is not a genie in a bottle here to grant our wishes. We're here on earth to get His will done and not vice versa.
  - iii) With that said, we are welcome to pray for anything as we don't know what is His will in any given situation. If one has say a difficult decision to make about where to go in our future, God loves to be in charge of such decisions. I'll often pray over what to do next, ask God to "bless it or block it", and then if need be, make the best decision possible and trust that God is guiding me through that decision.
  - iv) Let me give some examples: Suppose we want to run for a political office. We run and then we lose the election. It may have been God's will to run, but there's often something God wanted us to learn from that process which is why He let us run in the first place. Here's another one: Suppose someone we love is really sick and is not getting better. We pray for them and make sure they're getting medical help. At the same time they're not getting better. I've seen people I've prayed for daily die of cancer and I've also seen God miraculously help others in ways that are far beyond medical explanations. My point is simply that God's in control and we do have to accept His will in all situations and there are things He wants us to learn by prayer no matter how the results turn out.
  - v) As far as justice, God is a God of justice. However I've also learned that the results of justice always occur on His timing. In the 20th century millions were murdered based on the views of a handful of non-God fearing leaders. Eventually those who did such things did die and are now eternally suffering for turning from God. My point is God's justice does occur on His timing. Our job is to seek Him so that we remind ourselves He's in charge and He's guiding our lives through both the good and bad things we have to deal with in our lives.
- c) Speaking of justice, this leads us to the next verse:
7. Verse 8: I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly.
- a) Coming back to my example of 20th century non-God fearing dictators, among the things that the Russian leader Stalin was famous for, was literally starving to death millions who lived in the Ukraine's as Stalin saw them as a threat to his empire. I could just as easily use other examples such as the "killing fields" in Cambodia or even the Jewish Holocaust. My question is if people prayed for justice, and let's logically assume some of those who prayed were Christians how did it come quickly as this verse implies? We have to think about what is "quickly" from God's perspective. The answer is none of these men went to their death in peace as in the end God always wins. As I love to point out, if this life is all that there is, life is very unfair. Even our prayers for justice can feel like they go answered if this life is all that there is. However, if there is an eternity, what is the length of this life in comparison to that eternity? My point is from God's all knowing perspective, prayers for His justice our answered quickly as God is a god of justice as well as a God of grace.
8. Verse 8 (cont.): However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?"
- a) My first question here is why does Jesus transition from talking about us getting justice in our life to taking about when He returns to earth, will he find faith? First understand that the term "Son of Man" goes back to Daniel Chapter 7 as a title of the Messiah. The idea is that the Messiah will be a man. That's why Christians commonly use the idea that Jesus is both fully God and fully man at the same time. What's being asked here is when Jesus is being presented to the Jewish Nation as the long awaited Messiah, will that nation realize who He is? Some people think this verse is about the Second Coming. I disagree. I think it's simply a statement about when Jesus publicly presents Himself as the Messiah as He'll do on "Palm Sunday", coming up in the next chapter. The question Jesus asks is when He presents Himself publicly will people look to Him for forgiveness of sins?
  - b) The point for you and me is simply are we regularly seeking Him for our issues as if we don't have a choice in the matter? That's the type of faith Jesus is looking for in our lives.

9. Verse 9: To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else, Jesus told this parable: <sup>10</sup> "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. <sup>11</sup> The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men--robbers, evildoers, adulterers--or even like this tax collector. <sup>12</sup> I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.'
- a) At this point, Jesus wants to make it really clear how we get in good standing with God as we each have to face Him at our death. The reason this transition takes place is because in the last verse, the issue was about how often and why we should pray to God directly in the first place. That leads to the question of how do we prayerfully approach God? Let me give a classic model of prayer that is good to use in many situations. It is based on the acronym "ACTS" as in the book of Acts. The short version is:
    - i) A is for acknowledgement as in acknowledging who God is.
    - ii) C is for confession.
    - iii) T is for thanksgiving
    - iv) S is for supplication as in asking God what's on our mind.
  - b) I bring that up here only because in this parable we're going to read of two people both of who are praying to God about what they've done in their lives. The point given at the end of the parable is simply that the one who confesses their sins as not pleasing to God is the one who gets right with God as opposed to someone trying prove to God how good they are based on their actions. With that said, let me discuss these verses.
  - c) The first person used in this example is a Pharisee. I've already discussed a lot about who they were in Jewish society. The short version is they were a minority of that population that were devoutly religious in every aspect of their lives. The point here is that if anyone deserved to get into heaven for being a good person, they would win that award. With that said, notice in these verses the Pharisee never confesses any sins he committed. What he's essentially saying is look how good I am, I don't cheat anyone, and I'm a far greater person than this tax collector who's praying in the same room as me.
  - d) My question here is, "Why isn't being moral good enough?" Let's suppose we can't think of any violations of the 10 commandments we've violated lately. Why is that bad? First, it isn't. The issue is not about what's the best way to live our lives. The issue is perfection. If we accept the idea that God is perfect, then God wants us to be perfectly forgiven to be with Him forever in heaven. The point is all of us realize we've made mistakes and had to pay the price for those mistakes. Of course God does forgive. The point here is that this man never asks God for forgiveness. He just states in effect, "I can't think of anything that I've done wrong so I must be acceptable to God the way I am". The mistake is to think He judges us based on how good we are. God judges us based on His standard of perfection. That's why there is such a heavy emphasis in the bible of coming to God based on faith in who He is and not trying to prove our worth to Him.
  - e) So if all of that is true, why confess our sins in the first place? If we believe we're trusting in Jesus for the complete payment of our sins, why confess? It's about acknowledging we have sinned and our need to live the way God wants us to live versus the way we have.
  - f) Believe it or not, all of that leads me perfectly to the next verse:
10. Verse 13: "But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.' <sup>14</sup> "I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."
- a) In Verse 13 we have a tax collector. Such people were hated by the Israelites as they saw them as traitors to their society. What's even worse is such tax collectors would often use strong arm tactics in order to collect whatever they said could be collected in taxes. My point is tax collectors were thought of so lowly, they were usually told to leave "churches" as the religious people in Israel thought of them as beyond God's help.

- b) With that said, remember we're reading a made up parable by Jesus. At this part of the story, the tax collector is "beating his breast". To this day, that is a symbolic way of saying my heart is wicked and I'm confessing my sin. The main point of this entire parable is the person who tries to tell God how good they've been is not confessing their sins, while the one who simply confesses their sins to God is forgiven as such a person is acknowledging God as right in that situation.
  - c) Whenever I read this story, I admit, I think of the story of Martin Luther. This man was so obsessed with confession that he'd often go to the priests to confess any thing he'd think of as a possible sin. There was a famous moment in his life where a priest finally said to him, "Leave me alone until you can find something really worth confessing". At that time, is when Martin Luther learned the famous half verse "The just shall live by faith" which is from Habakkuk 2:4 in the Old Testament and quoted three times in the New Testament.
    - i) It is quoted in Romans 1:17. The book of Romans focuses on who are the "just".
    - ii) It is quoted in Galatians 3:11. That book focuses on how we should live.
    - iii) It is quoted in Hebrews 10:38. That book focuses on how we have faith.
    - iv) In summary, those three books form a trilogy on "how the just shall live by faith".
    - v) My point is simply that those who trust in Jesus do live by faith in what He did for our sins, but still confess sins when we do them as to acknowledge God is right in what He teaches us through His word as how He wants us to live out our lives.
  - d) That little speech leads me back to the last parable. The point is as we pray, God desires we acknowledge Him as God, confess what we've done wrong, be grateful what we have in our lives and then bring our requests to Him. I'm not saying we always have to pray this particular way. I'm just saying it's a good way for us to learn how God wants to deal with us in our lives and the priority of our prayer requests should be seen in light of who He is in the first place. In summary, that's why "ACTS" is a good model for prayer.
  - e) Believe it or not, this whole discussion about prayer and "justified by faith" leads us right into the next story that Luke tells. Here we go:
11. Verse 15: People were also bringing babies to Jesus to have him touch them. When the disciples saw this, they rebuked them. <sup>16</sup> But Jesus called the children to him and said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. <sup>17</sup> I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it."
- a) We get an interruption in Jesus telling parables to teach the crowds about prayer in order to say that some in the crowds were bring babies to Jesus to have Him touch them. In the Jewish culture, it was common to bring babies to be blessed by the local rabbi's. The idea is we want our children to trust God the same way we do, so it was a common act for a rabbi (that word just means teacher) to bless little children.
  - b) Jesus then states a key principal in Verses 16 and 17 when He says, "Let the children come to Me because the kingdom belongs to them. Further, if we don't come to Jesus like a little child, we can't ever enter it." (My paraphrase of those two verses.)
  - c) OK, why is this here and why should we care? First there is the issue of babies who die at an early age and their salvation. There's a great story in 1st Samuel when King David had a baby with Bathsheba due to his affair with her. The short version is God said that baby would die at a young age. David fasted and prayed for the baby's life. When his baby did die, King David then enjoyed life again as he declared he would see that baby again when he got to heaven. (From 2nd Samuel Chapter 12).
  - d) The point of that story is simply that babies are saved. It reminds us as Paul taught in the book of Romans that there is an age of accountability with God. Before one reaches that age, one is saved if one doesn't know any better. It sort of knocks out the argument that one is only saved if one confesses that Jesus is God if babies can and are saved. If God is fair, then He must allow people to be saved who died before they could know better.

- e) Ok, if heaven is full of people who were saved because they died before they got a chance to know right from wrong, then why does Jesus say in these verses that we have to be like little children in order to be saved? The answer is to realize that babies are fully trusting in their parents for every aspect of their lives. That's the attitude Jesus wants us to have with Him. Our trust in Him for every aspect of our lives. It doesn't mean we just sit there and wait for God to do things. It means we pray for His guidance and then trust He is guiding us as we go through our lives.
  - f) Since I'm in the neighborhood, let me also comment about having babies dedicated versus having them baptized. I've always viewed both of those rituals as for baby's parents since the babies have no idea what's going on. Even when the little children are in the spotlight they don't remember the event. While I do believe baptism should be at an age when the person being baptized is old enough to realize what they're doing, at the same time I don't have a problem with infant rituals only because I see them as a sign that the parents want to raise those children to be followers of Christ. To state the obvious, such rituals can't by themselves save our children but if it helps the parents to be more dedicated, go for it.
12. Verse 18: A certain ruler asked him, "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"
- a) This next story is about a wealthy young man who asks Jesus what does he have to do be saved? You would think this is a "home run" question as Jesus would just say something like "just have faith in God and trust Me for your salvation" and you're saved. Instead, we are going to read of Jesus turning this man away from Him. Instead of preaching grace, we're going to read of Jesus preaching the law to this man. It sort of changes one's whole view about how to witness to someone when Jesus Himself discourages this man who we would describe as "seeker friendly" and is interested in being saved. With my tough intro completed, now let me talk about the verse and the story itself.
  - b) This story is told in Matthew, Mark and Luke's Gospel. The verse says he was a "ruler". That word means he was the ruler of a synagogue. That's not the head rabbi, but the man in charge of running the place. Think of him as someone who is chairman of the board of the elders who oversee a church. My point is he was successful by human standards: He was wealthy and had a good reputation that community. We'll also discover in the next few verses that he had kept the law well since he was a child. Yet despite having all that stuff and power, we get the impression he realized something was missing. That's why he came to Jesus here to ask in effect, "Is all of that enough?"
    - i) Let's face it, if someone like that showed up at our church, we'd preach the Gospel to him, tell him about Jesus and tell him just to have faith in what He did and then go have a seat in the pews. My point is this story makes us wonder how we should witness to others given the fact that Jesus will rebuke him in this story as opposed to just saying something like "Believe the Gospel". With that said, let's read on.
13. Verse 19: "Why do you call me good?" Jesus answered. "No one is good--except God alone. <sup>20</sup> You know the commandments: 'Do not commit adultery, do not murder, do not steal, do not give false testimony, honor your father and mother.' " <sup>21</sup> "All these I have kept since I was a boy," he said.
- a) Believe it or not, in order to describe the text, first I need to explain the words "good and teacher" being used together. I've read comments by a number of Christian teachers that say that Jewish teachers of the law would never use those two words together either to describe themselves or other rabbi's. In other words "good" is only used to describe God as we can logically assume most of us bible teachers realize our sinful nature before God.
  - b) Even Jesus Himself picks up on that as in Verse 18, the rich man refers to Jesus as a "good teacher". Jesus understands the nature of that question and turns around and asks him, why do you call me good? Are you saying that I am God? He wants the man to consider what he is asking Jesus in the first place. Jesus then quotes the law to Him, why?

- i) As I stated, you would think Jesus would just say something like, "Just have faith in God and you'll be ok" or "Follow Me and have eternal life". Instead He quotes the second half of the 10 Commandments to this man. So does Jesus want him to be saved or not? Yes, but in order to achieve that goal of salvation, first Jesus and us must have people realize they are sinful before they realize their need for Jesus in the first place. That's the "salvation" road many of us fail to encompass when we tell others about Jesus in the first place.
  - ii) With that said, now notice Verse 21. This man thought about his life so far, and stated in effect, I've keep those commandments since I was a boy. I don't think he is claiming to be perfect. I think he's just stating he's known those commandments since his childhood and done his best to keep them. For most of us if someone like that came to us, we'd immediately hit them up with the Gospel message and not quote the law to them. However, there is a reason for this tactic that Jesus is using here and we can learn a lot about witnessing to others by following the logic here:
14. Verse 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."
- a) Here is the punch line. Jesus tells this man to go sell all he has and then follow Him. So does that mean we have to sell all we have to follow Jesus? Of course not. As I stated in the last lesson there are a number of Old Testament people who I know are saved, who did die with wealth. Abraham, Job and King David come to mind to start. My only point here is simply that a vow of poverty is not necessary for salvation. So if that is true, why did Jesus tell this man to go sell all he has and then follow Jesus? The answer is the first of the 10 Commandments to "Love the Lord Your God". The point is Jesus realized this man loved his wealth and status more than God. For cases like this, it may be necessary for this man to give up all he owned in order to be saved.
  - b) That leads to you and me. Our attitude about fame, wealth and power should be that in effect Jesus owns it all. If we do or have achieved any of those things, then accept it as a gift from God assuming one didn't hurt others (sin) to achieve it. At the same time we have to realize all we own belongs to God in the first place. The difficult aspect of living the Christian life is constantly having to let go of desires to do things our way. I've had to let go of things I'd like to do as I've come to the conclusion for the moment, it's not God's will for me to have those things. That can always change tomorrow, but for now, I have to accept the idea even more that Jesus is in charge of my life and if achieving those things right now is not His will, then I have to accept His will.
  - c) This is the classic "serenity" prayer that says effectively "God, help me to accept the things I cannot change and change the things You want me to change and the wisdom to know the difference". The point is no matter what we're going through in life, if we let God be in charge of every aspect of our lives, we can have far greater peace than if we live based on just acquiring more wealth, power or fame.
  - d) All of that leads me back to Jesus talking to this rich, young "successful" man. Jesus isn't asking him to be poor as a requirement for all of us to do likewise. He's telling him that in order for God to be in charge of every aspect of one's life, we have to let Him be in charge of those things, period. If the enjoyment or desire for anything is keeping us away from fully trusting God with every aspect of our lives, then we have to eliminate the "anything" in order for God to be in control of that part of our lives.
15. Verse 23: When he heard this, he became very sad, because he was a man of great wealth. <sup>24</sup> Jesus looked at him and said, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God! <sup>25</sup> Indeed, 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."
- a) Bottom line: Jesus took this man who was honestly seeking how to be saved, and turned him away as Jesus realized he wasn't ready to give up his "stuff" in order to be saved.



- b) Notice that Jesus doesn't give up on this man that easily. Notice the comments Jesus gives him in Verses 24 and 25 are directed to him as well as to us. What Jesus effectively says is it's very hard for someone wealthy to be saved. He then says it is easier for a camel to go through a sewing needle's eye than for a rich man to be saved. Many bible commentators believe Jesus' reference here was an expression used in that time era. Personally whether or not Jesus made that illustration up or quoted it is not an issue to me. The point of the illustration is to show that being saved based on our power is impossible.
  - c) At this point, let me explain what the parable is not saying: No rich man will be saved. It is also not referring to a small door that a camel could squeeze through. Jesus is trying to illustrate the point of how impossible it is to be saved based on our efforts. What Jesus is trying to teach us is the only way to be saved, is effectively to stop trying. This wealthy man thought he had it all "down". He was successful and did his best to keep God's laws. He also realized all of that isn't enough which is why he sought Jesus on how to be saved in the first place. Instead of Jesus saying, "Just follow me" or have faith in God, Jesus told this man to sell all he had. The issue is not about taking a vow of poverty. The issue is for us to trust Jesus more than trusting in wealth or say fame or power or the government. It is a matter of believing Jesus is in charge of every aspect of our lives.
  - d) With that said, the reason Jesus said it's hard for rich people to be saved, is because people can easily enjoy the comforts of that wealth more than they trust in God. Every now and then I like to quote a former English queen named Mary. She said the letter "m" in the word "many" led her to salvation. In the King James Version of the bible it says that not many (key) word of the rich and noble are saved. (Paraphrase of 1st Corinthians 1:26.)
  - e) My point is I do believe there are rich people in heaven. However I also believe it is hard for people who enjoy the benefits of that wealth to fully and completely trust Jesus for all aspects of their lives as wealth easily becomes a crutch to lean on. It's amazing how God puts me through my own trials to relate to what I teach. At the time of this writing, I'm currently dealing with my own financial struggles and learning to trust God through my own difficult times reminds me of how dependant we are upon Him for our own lives.
  - f) All of this leads me back to my lesson introduction. A way to tell we're saved is based on our trust in Jesus for every aspect of our lives. If we can say we trust Jesus more than we trust in any wealth, power or fame or other desire to have, that's a way to tell we're saved.
  - g) That leads perfectly to the next two verses of this text:
16. Verse 26: Those who heard this asked, "Who then can be saved?" <sup>27</sup> Jesus replied, "What is impossible with men is possible with God."
- a) To understand the question of Verse 26, one has to consider that culture. They believed in salvation based on being a good religious Jew by following God's laws. The Pharisee's are viewed the same way devoutly religious Jews are viewed today in the world. That is one who work as hard as possible to keep God's laws. The question they are asking Jesus is effectively, if we can't be saved by being a devoutly religious Jew or a good "whatever" is who can be saved?
  - b) Jesus then gives a famous and often quoted answer of effectively what's impossible for us to do on our own is possible with a God that can do anything. To summarize a key point from the book of Galatians Chapter 3, Abraham, the father of the Jewish nation was saved because he believed God was real and trusted that God would lead him to his salvation. Abraham lived and died hundreds of years before the Jewish law was ever written down. Jesus point is simply that salvation is based on our trust that He is God and He's in charge of every aspect of our lives. We can't be saved by keeping the law, only by our trust that He's in charge of our lives and guiding us for His glory.
  - c) It amazes me that some from all cultures and all walks of life do get it, while most people miss it, because they want to impress God that their good outweighs their bad. A small percentage deny God's existence, but most fail by trying to prove their worth to Him.

17. Verse 28: Peter said to him, "We have left all we had to follow you!"
- a) At this point in the story, Peter chimes in. Peter's one of those people who when nobody knows what to say next, he just tries to say something relevant to him. Peter effectively says, "Hey, us disciples have left our nets and our fishing boats and are here following you. What about us?" Each of us can probably say something like, "Our family thinks we've jumped off the deep end with this "Jesus stuff", so is it worth it?" That leads us to Jesus' response in the next few verses:
18. Verse 29: "I tell you the truth," Jesus said to them, "no one who has left home or wife or brothers or parents or children for the sake of the kingdom of God <sup>30</sup> will fail to receive many times as much in this age and, in the age to come, eternal life."
- a) The short version here is that Jesus promises we'll gain a lot more than we lose if we're willing to give up whatever is separating us from committing every aspect of our lives to him. If we are shunned by our extended families or friends for trusting that Jesus is in charge of every aspect of our lives, He promises us far greater than whatever it is we've given up in this lifetime.
  - b) To understand, remember that many people throughout the last 2,000 years have had to live under death threats for following Jesus. There have been and are to this day many cultures where one can be killed or at the least shunned for believing that Jesus is God and He's in charge of one's life. Even if we live in a culture where we are free to worship God like He desires we do, we can easily be shunned by family and friends for choosing to live that way.
    - i) My point is its hard to turn against what is popular in society in order to trust in what Jesus is teaching here. However, if one becomes convinced that the bible is the word of God, then Jesus is saying it's worth living based on the idea that Jesus is in charge of every aspect of our lives as the benefits far outweigh the costs.
    - ii) This reminds me of the importance of praying for the persecuted church. We all know by now God wants us to care for others. One way to help other believers is to pray for them, and especially for those who are truly suffering for their faith.
  - c) OK, onto the next issue: How do we benefit more in this lifetime? We can see that if Jesus is correct and heaven is real, we'll eternally benefit, but how do we benefit now?
    - i) Once one discovers God's power working through us, one can experience the love of others far greater than any effort w can make based on our ability to love others. Saved people are now part of an extended family with God's desire to put other's first, we now have greater ability to love more than our family can share with us.
    - ii) My point is what we gain as believes is the Spirit of God living inside of us who gives us the capacity to love and be loved far greater than everything the world has to offer, period. That's how the benefit of being saved is far greater than what we have to give up in order to be saved in the first place.
    - iii) Before I move on, Jesus is not teaching us to hate our blood relatives. If anything, we can care about them more through God's power then we ever could based on our own abilities. All Jesus is saying is that God's power is needed to be saved in the first place. His power is used for us to have far greater love for others and for them to love us in the first place. Through God's power people can be saved and have a much greater life than whatever we can do, based on our own power. On that happy thought, time to move on to Jesus teaching "the cross" itself:
19. Verse 31: 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. <sup>32</sup> He will be handed over to the Gentiles. They will mock him, insult him, spit on him, flog him and kill him. <sup>33</sup> On the third day he will rise again." <sup>34</sup> The disciples did not understand any of this. Its meaning was hidden from them, and they did not know what he was talking about.
- a) Remember the disciples thought Jesus would set up the Messianic kingdom soon.

- b) Even though the disciples didn't understand what Jesus was taking about (Verse 34), it is necessary for Jesus to make this statement here at this time. Let me explain why:
- i) First it shows that Jesus understood the future before it happened. He knew all of the details of how non-Jewish people (Roman soldiers and leaders) will mock him, insult him, make Jesus suffer horrible physical pain and kill him. Jesus also knew that He would rise from the dead on the third day.
  - ii) It's possible for someone to ponder, "Jesus had this tremendous power to heal and help people, but how do we know He is God?" Well, it's one thing to help others, it's another to be resurrected Himself and to be alive again means that something greater than Jesus must have resurrected Him. It supports the idea that He is God based on the fact that something greater than Jesus raised Him from the dead.
  - iii) Next, one has to understand the Jewish expectations of the Messiah. They believe to this day that a Messiah will rule the world from Israel. At that time, they could not accept the idea of a Messiah dying for their sins. There's a view (key word is a, not the) in Judaism that there may be "two Messiah's"; One like King David who'll rule over Israel forever and another like Joseph who had to suffer in order for the Israelites to live peacefully in their land. They can't accept Jesus being both as they don't see the nation of Israel living at peace with its neighbors, let alone the issue that Jesus could be God Himself. That's why Jesus resurrection was necessary in order to have proof that His claims are true. As Paul said, if Jesus didn't rise from the dead, we're all wasting our time preaching Him. (My paraphrase of the key point 1st Corinthians, Chapter 15.)
  - iv) Like I said earlier, if our extended family is convinced we've jumped off the deep end with this "Jesus stuff", it only matters if He has risen from the dead and what He teaches about trusting Him with every aspect of our lives is true.
- c) Coming back to the verses, the reason Jesus states the "future" at this point, is let it sink in that we know we're saved by our trust in Jesus as God and being in charge of every aspect of our lives and if we believe that we're saved. In other words, when the "Messianic age" does begin is God's business. We can know it's going to come, but in the meantime, our job is just to be good witness for Him and to preach that His judgment is coming.
- d) Finally, why was this concept hidden from the disciples? After all if Jesus is God, He can make it possible for them to understand then and there. Yes I can say it's hard to change overnight what one has learned in a lifetime about the Messiah just coming to rule. I also suspect it was necessary to keep it hidden so that the disciples didn't say make an effort to go kidnap Jesus to hide Him from the religious authorities and prevent the cross events. In other words, God kept it hidden from the disciples so they wouldn't make the effort to try to alter history from occurring the way God wanted it to occur in the first place.
- e) Believe it or not, all of that will lead perfectly to the final story of this chapter, about Jesus healing a blind man near the city of Jericho.
20. Verse 35: As Jesus approached Jericho, a blind man was sitting by the roadside begging.<sup>36</sup> When he heard the crowd going by, he asked what was happening.<sup>37</sup> They told him, "Jesus of Nazareth is passing by."<sup>38</sup> He called out, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"<sup>39</sup> Those who led the way rebuked him and told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!"<sup>40</sup> Jesus stopped and ordered the man to be brought to him. When he came near, Jesus asked him,<sup>41</sup> "What do you want me to do for you?" "Lord, I want to see," he replied.<sup>42</sup> Jesus said to him, "Receive your sight; your faith has healed you."<sup>43</sup> Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus, praising God. When all the people saw it, they also praised God.
- a) I know this is a lot of verses at one take, but I wanted us to see the whole story, before I talk about specific aspects of this story. The short version is a blind man refers to Jesus as the coming Messiah ("Son of David") and asks to see based on who He is. Jesus cures him of his blindness and everyone at the scene praises God for the miracle.

- b) This story is also told in Mark and Matthew's Gospel each with different details. In Mark we learn his name. Mark and Matthew also say this man was leaving Jericho, while in Luke's account, Jesus was approaching Jericho. The most likely explanation is at that time there were two cities of Jericho: One was the ancient ruins of a dead city and the other is a rebuilt city nearby. Personally those types of details bore me, but it is important to state only to show that bible "in it's original autographs" is the Word of God, and if one studies it carefully, one can usually explain what appears to be contradictions. I'm also convinced the copies we have today are 98% to 99% of what was originally written. The differences are essentially so trivial they have no affect upon the big picture of what the bible teaches.
  - c) With that statement out of my system, let's get back to the text itself. The key question we should ponder is why is this text here? Why would Luke tell us that Jesus did performed a miracle of giving sight to a blind man after all these other stories that teach us how it is we can know for sure we are one of Jesus' disciples? To answer, let me state again what I said in my introduction: It is first of all to indicate that this man is now saved because He trusted in Jesus as God and as one who helps all of us to see who He really is. Second and more importantly, it shows us that based on our trust that Jesus is God and He's in charge of our lives, we too can see the world as it was meant to be seen.
    - i) In other words, Jesus answered Peter's question earlier about what do we gain by trusting in Jesus? He responded with "far more than anything and everything we have to give up in order to trust Him in the first place." Then the chapter ends on the example of a man seeing what no one around him sees: That Jesus is the long promised Messiah coming to give sight to anyone willing to ask Him for it.
    - ii) So does that mean anyone born blind will immediately have working eyes if they believe in Jesus? Of course not. At the same time once any of us see Jesus for who He really is, we too are no longer blind to how the world really operates and we get to see just as this blind man sees.
  - d) The greatest discovery one makes in life is not that Jesus is God. It is that once we realize that concept, we start to see the world as God sees it: That is a world dying due to the affect of sin. God gives us not only the antidote for that blindness of seeing the world the way it exists, but also the privilege of sharing that antidote with others. People don't get saved based on our skills at presenting the Gospel message. They only get saved by God Himself "opening their eyes" to the truth of who He is. The rich young ruler was seeking salvation but refused to let go of his old life in order to see. The blind beggar was willing to trust Jesus as both the Messiah and one who's in charge of his life, and got saved.
  - e) My point here is that proof of our salvation is if we see the world for what it is: A dying place due to the corrupting aspect of sin in our lives. It is seeing we can't ever be saved by being good enough for God. It is seeing that only by trusting in who Jesus is and what He has done (paid the complete price for our sins) that we can see the world for what it is.
  - f) What this comes down to, is the way we know we are saved is that we believe the Gospel message of salvation and we can see the world for what it is: A place where most people are trying to prove their worth to God or to themselves that they are "something special" based on what they've accomplished or hope to accomplish in their lives. It's only when we fully let go of our lives in terms of trusting Jesus with every aspect of our lives that we can see like this blind man, the world as it really is. On that positive note, let's pray:
21. Heavenly Father, first, thank You that You've let us see the world for what it really is, a place that is corrupted by sin beyond repair. Help us to use the time and the sight you've given us about it so that we can use our lives for Your glory. Through Your power, help us to realize that You can and do want to use us to make a difference for You in this world. Guide us and make it obvious to us what it is You want us to do today as You use us for Your glory. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.