

## Sermon – Rev. Bruce Stanley. All Saints Waitara. Luke 18

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**III** – As I was preparing this sermon during the week, as I was reading this very passage, my son Jonah came into me with a picture of himself he had drawn. And he said to me: “Dad, is this a good person?” And that’s an interesting question! Of course he meant “Is this a good **drawing** of a person. But he had asked the very question we have to ask again and again in Luke 18. What is a good person?”

**PPT – III** – Is this a good person? – powerpoint pictures of “good” and “bad” people.

As we look at these pictures, we probably can’t help but say one is good and another is bad, and we probably base that on what they’ve done. Are they a “nice” person? Are they generous? Do they help people? But what does it really mean to be “good”? And here’s the tough question – “Are YOU a good person?”

A rich man comes to Jesus and calls Jesus “good teacher”. And Jesus says “WHY do you call **me** good? No-one is good except God alone.” And there’s the definition of “good”. God alone. OF course, Jesus is God. So he is good.

But then Jesus asks this man if **he** thinks he himself is good. Jesus says to him: “Have you kept the commandments? Do not commit adultery, do not murder, do not steal, do not give false testimony. Honour your father and mother.”

The rich young ruler thinks about these 5 commandments. “YES!” He says “Yes I have! Since I was a boy!” So is he a good person? Does he get to go to heaven?

“One more thing” Jesus says. “Sell everything and give to the poor. Then you’ll have treasure in heaven.”

The rich man is **not happy**. Jesus is asking too much. Sell EVERYTHING?! Give it ALL to the poor? He’s a good man. Why should he give away everything he has? He doesn’t steal. He doesn’t murder. But it’s not enough for Jesus. And so the man walks away sad, because he had great wealth. Jesus was asking too much.

**III** – A few weeks I noticed Nicole Kidman and Keith Urban gave \$500,000 to the bushfire relief fund. Are they good people? What if you said to them: “It’s not enough! You have to give more! In fact, you have to give it ALL away! Surely that’s too much to ask?”

“How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God”, Jesus says. “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.” And the disciples reply in a very interesting way – “WHO THEN can be saved?!” they say.

The disciples are actually surprised! Because they think this rich ruler is a good man. He keeps the commandments. And he’s wealthy. And wealth was often seen as a sign of God’s blessing upon a person. If a wealthy, commandment obeying ruler can’t be saved, who can be saved? Who WILL Jesus let into heaven?

Maybe we think something like this would be fairer:

The man says: “What must I do to inherit eternal life?”

Jesus says : “Do you keep the commandments pretty well?”

The man says: “Yes. Well, at least 5 of them.”

And Jesus says: “You’re pretty wealthy. I’ll tell you what – take half of your wealth, and give it to the poor. And I’ll see you in heaven.”

And the man is challenged, but he does it. And he goes away happy because he’s been given something that he can **do**. Give away half.

And perhaps we'd like to think that God says the same to us. Just do what you can! Give up a bit more. Spend a bit less on yourself. Increase your giving by 5%. Spend 2 hours a week more in ministry. Pray for 10 minutes more a day. Read a bit more of your Bible. We like to hear those challenges. We like to hear God say: "Raise the bar a bit. Jump a bit higher, and I'll be happy. We like to hear God say: "Here's what I want you to DO!" That's what we like to hear. "Tell me what to do." But it's not what Jesus says.

Jesus says to this man: You think you're pretty good. You think you keep those commandments. But here's the facts. You are NOT a good person. **No one** is good except God alone. And you might have kept some of those commandments some of the time, but you haven't kept all of the commandments all of the time. So you're not only NOT GOOD, but you're disobedient. And that means you don't **deserve** eternal life. So the only way you're going to **get** eternal life is to have it **given to you as a gift**. And the only way God is going to **give** you eternal life as a gift, is if you trust in him. But, Jesus says, I know you. And I know that you depend on your riches. And I know that you'll never be able to depend on God unless you can give **them** up.

Money is this man's god. Money is his security. Money is what he trusts in. It is unbelievably difficult, Jesus says, for a rich person to enter into heaven. Because money so easily gets in the way of us trusting God. So, like the disciples, we ask: "Who then can be saved?" How generous do I have to be? How much do I have to give? How can I get into heaven?

And what is Jesus' answer? "What is impossible with men is possible with God."

**It is impossible for man to be saved. Impossible. Except if God steps in.**

So let's go on to the next story. A story where God steps in. The story of the blind beggar. From verse 35.

You couldn't get a more different picture. A rich ruler. A blind beggar. A man with everything, a man with nothing. A man in **complete** control. A man with **no** control over his life.

This blind beggar has nothing. He can't even see. He hears a noise, and he has to ask someone what's going on. And he learns that Jesus is walking by. And as soon as he hears that it's Jesus, he calls out to him – "Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me!"

This blind man recognises Jesus straight away – he is the son of David – the Messiah – God's saviour from the line of King David. He's not just some good teacher. He's God's saviour. And the people around him tell him to be quiet. But he shouts out even more! "Son of David, have mercy on me! Son of David, have mercy on me!"

Nothing will stop this man calling out to Jesus. And Jesus stops. He has the man brought to him. And he says: "What do you want **me** to do for **you**?"

Do you see the difference here? The rich ruler came to Jesus and said: "WHAT MUST I DO?"

The blind beggar is brought to Jesus and Jesus says: "WHAT CAN **I** DO FOR **YOU**?"

Straight away, the order of things is right. The creation asks the creator for help. The creator leans down and says: "You asked for my help. You called out to me. How can I help you?"

"Lord I want to see." He says.

And Jesus heals him. The man can see. He gets up and follows Jesus, praising God.

The rich ruler wanted to know what **he could do** to get eternal life. And he walked away sad. Because he couldn't give up what he really trusted in.

But the blind beggar came to Jesus with nothing, and asked Jesus to do something for him. And that is the only way to be saved. To cry out to God: “Have mercy on me!”

Eternal life is not about what WE can do for God. It’s about what GOD can do for US.

And if you’re a committed Christian, this is often a difficult thing to remember. We need to come to God, every day, like the blind beggar – with nothing. We must come to Jesus naked. Not trusting in our own riches. Not trusting in our own goodness. Not trusting in our own righteousness. But trusting completely in him alone. For love, for forgiveness, for grace. That’s what we need to remember today. We need to come to Jesus naked.

Think about all the good things that you’ve done. The ministry. Helping the poor. Generosity. Kindness. Sacrifice. Now, **take all of that away**. Think of the people you’ve helped. The money you’ve given. The family you’ve raised. The ministry you’ve done. The friends you’ve influenced. The job you work hard at. **Take all of that away**. Take everything in your life **away** and sit before God naked. With no possessions. No good works. No education. No job. No friends. No family and no relationships with others. Just you and God. Do you trust him now? Naked and alone, like a beggar, with nothing, do you trust him?

Now, as you come to Jesus naked, do you say to him: “What do you want me to do?” Or do you say to him, “God, have mercy on me.”

It’s very easy for us to respond to this passage in a mediocre way. That’s what we’re good at as people living the Sydney lifestyle. We’re good at being mediocre. We’re good at being a **little more** generous. Good at giving up a **little more** time. Good at sacrificing a **little more** of ourselves. We’re not filthy rich like this rich ruler. And we’re not living in poverty like the beggar. We’re in the middle. And that’s a hard place to be. Because it means we think we can switch off when it comes to this chapter. We can be happy with where we are. Self satisfied. Unworried. Even self-righteous.

We still think, because we’re not filthy rich, we don’t need to hear this challenge. That we don’t need to think about how much we trust in our wealth. Or our friends. Or our family. Or our achievements. Yet we still worry about those things every day. And week after week, we’ll walk away from the sermon asking: “What will I DO for God now?” “What do you want me to do God? How much do you want me to give God? Who do you want me to help God? How would you like me to live God? What ministry should I be involved in God?”

We ask these sorts of questions all the time. To one another. In our prayers. We ask God again and again **what do you want me to do?**

But what we need to do FIRST is to come to him, each day, with nothing. To come to him naked. To not even consider our good works. Our money. Our friends. Our family. Our careers. To simply come to him naked, every day, and say: “God, have mercy on me. Help me to see. Help me to see that I don’t need my wealth. That I need to depend on nothing else except the love of God, the cross of Christ, and the power of the Holy Spirit at work in my life.

If you find yourself living a mediocre Christian life, a middle of the road faith, a comfortable, even self-righteous life, let me suggest that it may be because of this: You’re asking God what **work** he wants **YOU** to do, rather than asking **HIM** to do the **work** in your life.

And if that’s the case, and I suspect it is for all of us at different times in our life, then we need to pray. Please join me:

God, by your Spirit, help me. Change me. Mould me. Shape me. Make me like Jesus. Have mercy on me. Amen.

Song: “Rock of Ages”