

# THE RICH YOUNG RULER: THE COST OF ETERNAL LIFE

## LUKE 18:18–30

### *Introduction*

Many people think that eternal life is free, that it costs nothing. This is a false concept. Eternal life does cost. It costs a man everything he is and has. The message of this passage is probably the most demanding message ever preached.

- I. Example 1: the ruler (vv. 18-23).
- II. Example 2: the wealthy (vv. 24-27).
- III. Example 3: the disciples (vv. 28-30).

### **I. *Luke 18:18–23 Eternal Life and Jesus Christ’s Demand for Self-Denial***

The first example is that of the rich young ruler. When the other gospel accounts of this event are compared, the ruler is seen to be young and rich. But it does not matter, not for the purpose Luke is stressing. The cost of eternal life is the *same* for all persons, rich or poor, young or old.

1. The person who seeks eternal life must acknowledge Jesus as God. The ruler called Jesus “Good Teacher.” The word “good” was a word that was ascribed only to God. It was never used in reference to a man. This is critical to see, for it meant that the ruler was calling Jesus “good” in the sense that God would be called “good.” He saw something in Jesus *like God*. It was not just flattery; he esteemed Jesus highly, probably believing or else coming close to believing Jesus’ claim to be the Son of God.

Now note what Jesus did. The man had called Him “good,” a word used only in addressing God. Jesus asked the man, “Why do you call me good? God alone is good. Are you saying I am God?” Jesus is unquestionably claiming to be God. He was saying, “If I am a mere man, a good teacher, then I am not good and do not have the words of eternal life. But if I am God, then you can truly call me good, and I do have the words of eternal life.” The point is this: Jesus told the man how to receive eternal life. He was claiming to be God, the One who could give eternal life to a person.

**John 3:16** *“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”*

**John 6:68** *Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.”*

**John 14:6-7** *Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.”*

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**John 8:24** *“I told you that you would die in your sins; if you do not believe that I am the one I claim to be, you will indeed die in your sins.”*

**Acts 4:12** *“Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.”*

**1 Tim 2:5-6** *For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men — the testimony given in its proper time.*

2. The man must keep the commandments. He had asked, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” In his mind he had to do something, some great work — and he did. He had to trust and love God so much that he would keep God’s commandments. He had to keep the commandments *after* he had accepted Jesus as God.

Jesus said to the man, “I am good, just as God is good; therefore, I am God. Now, once accepting this fact, you must obey the commandments and learn to love your neighbour. First, trust and love God, then trust and love your neighbour.” Note two facts.

- a. The man had to see that Jesus was God, and as God He was to be trusted and loved. Then he had to see that he was to love his neighbour as himself. Jesus was simply covering the two great commandments with the man, and He was going to show the man how desperately short he was. (See Mt. 22: 34-40.)

**Mat 7:21** *“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.”*

**John 14:21** *“Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him.”*

**John 14:23** *Jesus replied, “If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.”*

**John 15:10, 14** *“If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father’s commands and remain in his love. You are my friends if you do what I command.”-*

**Rev 22:14** *“Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city.”*

- b. The man made a phenomenal claim: he had kept all these commandments from his youth up. He, of course, had not kept them, not like he should. He was sincere, but this picture of God was a surface picture. He was not perfect in all his dealings with men and women, not in the eyes of God. In fact, it was just this, the way he looked at men and the desperate needs of the world, that was his problem. He was not *giving* to help the needs of the world like he should. It was this that was keeping him out of heaven.

3. The man must *give up* all he had. This is exactly what Jesus said, “Sell everything you have, and give to the poor.” Was this unreasonable? Did Jesus really mean it? Could such radical action be demanded even by God?

Why not? Why would God *not* demand just this? Especially when the world is full of little children (and men and women) who are starving and diseased, without shelter or clothing, and dying being doomed to hell? And why are they in such a condition when there is enough of everything to go around, and the gospel that can save them is known? Let no one ever say that God does not demand the giving of all after a man has taken care of his own necessities. And let no one ever think that the doom of God will not fall upon the man...

- who shuts his eyes to the massive needs of the world.
- who hoards and banks his money.
- who lets money just sit and sit, doing nothing except causing men to say “My, what a rich man.”

How empty words really are. There is but one question for the man who builds up and keeps: “Who do you think you are, God? Beware of God if you think He does not demand the giving of all you are and have to help the desperate millions of this earth.” Jesus hit the very nerve of the man’s problem: coveting — lusting after money, material goods, possessions, and wealth — instead of longing to help the needy of the world.

Note the glorious promise: give all you have and you shall have treasure in heaven and be allowed to follow Christ. It is *only after* we give all we have (beyond our own true needs) that we are allowed to enter heaven. That is the Word of Christ, His answer to the question, “How do I inherit eternal life?”

The man rejected Jesus — Jesus had asked too much. The man was unwilling to give all he was and had: he was very sad, sorrowful about his decision, but he did reject.

**Luke 9:23** *Then he said to them all: “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.”*

**Mat 6:20** *“But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal.”*

**Luke 12:33** *“Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will not be exhausted, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys.”*

**Luke 14:33** *“In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple.”*

**Phil 3:8** *What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ.*

**1 Tim 6:17-19** *Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.*

**Rev 3:18** *I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see.*

## II. **Luke 18:24–27 Wealth, Salvation and the Needy**

The second example is that of wealthy persons. Jesus made three striking points.

1. It is extremely difficult, almost impossible, for a rich person to enter heaven. It is as difficult as a camel's going through the eye of a needle. Why? Because the rich man has kept his wealth, hoarded and stored it up. He has not served God by *loving his neighbour as himself*. The rich man has used his talents to make money so that he could buy the *latest styles and be called rich* by other men. He failed to use his talents to make money to meet the desperate needs of children (and men and women). The world desperately needs food, shelter, clothes, medicine, and above all, the gospel. It is no wonder a rich man will not enter heaven when most of the world is in such desperate need. Why would God accept a man who has wealth when that man would not take the time to seek and reach out to the child who was starving and dying both physically and spiritually?

Attempts are sometimes made to lessen the cost of the Lord's demands.

- ⇒ Some say that what Christ means is this: a man *must be willing* to give his wealth, not actually give it. This is tragic, for there is *no meaning in willingness* — no act, no true decision, no work, no evidence, no proof, no demonstration. Willingness is nothing more than a word. It is empty without action to back it up. A man who is truly willing does something. Conversely, a man is *not really willing* if he does not do something.
- ⇒ Others try to explain away the impossibility of a camel's going through the eye of a needle. There have been various interpretations of camel and needle in an attempt to soften the words of Jesus. They say that a sewing needle is not what is meant. For example, some have said that the "needle" was a small gate in the wall surrounding Jerusalem, a small gate which sat right beside the large gate. It is thought that the large gate was closed at night to protect the city from marauders and enemies, and the small gate was used by the travelling public. The small gate is said to have been called "the Needle's Eye" because it was so small that it was difficult for even a single person to pass through.

Others have said that the Greek word Christ used was kamilos (a ship's rope or cable) not kamelos (camel). Note: the only difference between the two words is that the letter i is an e in the word for camel (kamelos).

Again, this view misses the whole point. Jesus is saying this: a man who does not give all his wealth (beyond his true necessities) to meet the needs of the world shall find it no easier entering heaven than a camel does going through the eye of a needle.

**Thought 1.** Let none of us miss heaven or cause another to miss heaven by trying to lessen the demand of Christ. Any honest man — if he were responsible for overseeing the children of the world — would condemn another person who had the money but who let a child die of starvation or exposure.

**Thought 2.** It is time for us to be honest and let the Saviour of the world speak with the force with which He spoke. The world is desperate. Children and their mothers and fathers are dying from the agonizing pain of hunger and disease, and the terrorizing elements of nature. They are dying without ever having heard of the eternal salvation that is in Christ. The rich, who have the talents to earn more than they need, must use their talents to earn more to save the children and adults of the world who are in such a desperate plight. Jesus said no rich man shall enter heaven who does not give all he has.

**Mat 6:21** *“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”*

**Mat 19:21** *Jesus answered, “If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”*

**Mat 22:39** *“And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’”*

**2 Cor 8:9** *For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.*

**Eph 4:28** *He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need.*

**Psa 52:7** *“Here now is the man who did not make God his stronghold but trusted in his great wealth and grew strong by destroying others!”*

**Prov 11:28** *Whoever trusts in his riches will fall, but the righteous will thrive like a green leaf.*

2. The misconception about wealth. The disciples were shocked, thoroughly dismayed. Jesus was saying something diametrically opposed to what they and everyone else had always thought. They had always been taught (as have succeeding generations, even the church):

⇒ that prosperity (wealth, comfort, and things) is God's blessing.

⇒ that a person receives because God is blessing him.

=> that prosperity is the reward of righteousness and obedience.

=> that God blesses a person with the things of this earth if he is righteous and obedient.

However, Jesus was saying the very opposite: that a prosperous person will most likely never enter heaven; that prosperity poses such a dangerous threat to a person that his eternal doom is almost assured. The disciples knew that God would never put a person in such a precarious, dangerous position. They knew that Jesus was attacking the world's most cherished and ardent belief: be good (righteous) and you will be blessed by God (and the thought of blessing is always of material blessing. See Eph. 1:3)

They were shocked, thoroughly dismayed: Who then can be saved? The vast majority of people were threatening their own eternal destiny. They were dooming themselves. Since prosperity is not the reward (sign) for righteousness and the rich are barred from heaven, that means that the poor, too, are barred; for they are spending most of their time in dreaming about and seeking prosperity.

**Mark 4:19** *“But the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful.”*

**Luke 12:19-20** *“And I’ll say to myself, ‘You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.’ But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?’”*

**1 Tim 6:9** *People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction.*

**1 Tim 6:17** *Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.*

**Deu 8:13-14** *And when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, then your heart will become proud and you will forget the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.*

**Prov 18:11** *The wealth of the rich is their fortified city; they imagine it an unscalable wall.*

3. The only possibility for wealthy persons to be saved God. Very simply...

- it is impossible for a rich man to save himself.
- the rich man must turn to God and love God and do God's will by loving his neighbour as himself. God alone can save a rich man.
- the decision is up to the rich man. He can turn to be *with God* in eternity, or he can continue to live for himself now and can suffer eternal condemnation.

**Luke 1:37** *“For nothing is impossible with God.”*

**Job 42:2** *“I know that you can do all things; no plan of yours can be thwarted.”*

**1 Tim 6:17-19** *Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.*

**1 Cor 3:11** *For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ.*

### III. **Luke 18:28–30** *Reward for the Disciples*

The third example is that of the disciples. Note two points.

1. The disciples were examples of what Christ meant. They had left all to follow Christ. (See Cross and Discipleship, Lk. 9:23.)
2. The disciples and all other followers of Christ will be richly rewarded. Note three points.
  - a. The reason for the reward is clearly stated. They left all, gave up all for Christ in order to meet the desperate needs of the world, and they gave up the most cherished things on earth: their property and family.
  - b. Their reward in this world was to be much more. The Gospel of Mark makes it clear that Christ was speaking of present reward on earth (Mk. 10:21). No true follower of Christ has ever forsaken persons or things and then been left alone and destitute by Christ. Christ rewards His true follower many fold. Note: the reward is both human and material.
- 1) The human reward is most fulfilling: a real and true fellowship among genuine believers. Christ knows when a follower of His has been turned against by those whom He loves ever so deeply. He knows when to send someone into the life of His followers, when to meet the aching need of His follower for true friendship. He more than abundantly meets the need.

**1 John 1:3** *We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.*

**1 John 1:7** *But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.*

**Acts 2:42** *They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.*

**Mal 3:16** *Then those who feared the Lord talked with each other, and the Lord listened and heard. A scroll of remembrance was written in his presence concerning those who feared the Lord and honoured his name.*

**Psa 119:63** *I am a friend to all who fear you, to all who follow your precepts.*

- 2) The material reward is most assuring: the meeting of necessities and whatever else God wants us to have so that we can help meet the needs of others.

The idea that Christ was conveying is that of perfect care and security. Fear and insecurity cause us to crave and to be greedy for more, and fear and insecurity are most unhealthy and destabilizing. When we forsake all to genuinely follow Christ, He gives us the greatest peace and security possible: Himself and His power to provide our necessities. We never have to worry or be anxious again (See Lk. 16:10-12; Mt. 6:25-34; Lk. 18:30; Mk. 10:30; Eph. 4:28.) There is much more in Christ than in any amount of possessions or worldly companionship and friendship. In Christ the believer has...

- happiness
- joy
- peace
- security
- assurance
- confidence
- satisfaction
- completeness
- fulfilment

**Mat 6:33** *“But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”* (see Mt.6:25-34)

**John 10:10** *“The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.”*

**Phil 4:19** *And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.*

**Exo 23:25** *Worship the Lord your God, and his blessing will be on your food and water. I will take away sickness from among you.*

**Psa 68:19** *Praise be to the Lord, to God our Saviour, who daily bears our burdens.*

**Isa 30:23** *He will also send you rain for the seed you sow in the ground, and the food that comes from the land will be rich and plentiful. In that day your cattle will graze in broad meadows.*

**Joel 2:26** *You will have plenty to eat, until you are full, and you will praise the name of the Lord your God, who has worked wonders for you; never again will my people be shamed.*

**Mal 3:10** *“Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this,” says the Lord Almighty, “and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it.”*

- c. Their reward in the world to come is to be “eternal life” (See *Eternal Life*, Jn. 17:2-3; see Jn. 1:4 and Mt. 19:28. See Rom. 8:16-18.)

**Mark 10:21** *Jesus looked at him and loved him. “One thing you lack,” he said. “Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”*



**John 5:24** *“I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life.”* ■

### JOHN 17: 02—03 ETERNAL LIFE (AINIOS)

*“For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him. Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.”* **John 17:02-03**

Life, real life. It is the very life of God Himself. It is the very energy, force, being, essence, principle and power of life. It has more to do with quality and with what life really is than with duration. To live forever in the present world is not necessarily a good thing. The world and man’s body need changing. That changed life is found only in eternal life. The only being who can be said to be eternal is God. Therefore, life — supreme life — is found only in God. To possess eternal life is to know God. Once a person knows God and Jesus Christ whom He has sent, that person has eternal life — he shall live forever. But more essential, the person has the supreme quality of life, the very life of God Himself.

**John 3:14-15** *“Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.”*

**John 5:24** *“I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life.”*

**John 6:40** *“For my Father’s will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.”*

**John 3:36** *“Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God’s wrath remains on him.”*

**John 11:25-28** *Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?” “Yes, Lord,” she told him, “I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world.” And after she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary aside. “The Teacher is here,” she said, “and is asking for you.”*

**John 12:25** *“The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.”*

**Rom 5:21** *So that, just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

**Gal 6:8** *The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.*

**2 Tim 1:10** *But it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Saviour, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.*

**1 John 3:14** *We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love remains in death.*

**1 Jn 5:11-12** *And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. □*

## LUKE 09:23 CROSS AND DISCIPLESHIP

*Then he said to them all: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me." **Luke 09:23***

People in Jesus' day knew what it meant to "take up" a cross. They saw scores of criminals bear the cross to the place where they were to be executed, and they witnessed scores of crucifixions, some even by the side of the roads that led in and out of the cities.

The cross does not mean merely bearing one's particular hardship in life, such as poor health, abuse, unemployment, invalid parents, an unsaved spouse, a wayward child. The cross is always an instrument of death, not just an object to carry or bear. The Christian is to die mentally and actively. He is to deny himself daily. He is to let the mind of Christ, the mind of humbling himself to the point of death, be in him and fill his thoughts every day (Phil. 2:5-8; 2 Cor. 10:3-5). He is to put his will, his desires, his wants, his ambitions to death. In their stead, he is to follow Jesus and to do His will all day long. Note this is not negative, passive behaviour. It takes positive, active behaviour to will, to deny self, to take up one's cross, to follow Christ. A person has to act, work, get to it, be diligent, consistent, and enduring in order to die to self.

There are several ways the believer dies to self. Romans 6:11-13 spells out the ways as clearly as they can be.

**Rom 6:11-13** *In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought*

*from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness. (see Rom. 6:2-10)*

1. The believer reckons or counts himself crucified with Christ.

**Rom 6:11a** *In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin.*

**Rom 6:6** *For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin.*

**Gal 2:20** *I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*

**Gal 5:24** *Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires.*

2. The believer reckons or counts himself dead to sin, but alive to God.

**Rom 6:11** *In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.*

**1 Pet 4:2** *As a result, he does not live the rest of his earthly life for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God.*

3. The believer does not let sin reign in his body.

**Rom 6:12** *Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires.*

**Col 3:5** *Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry.*

4. The believer does not yield the parts of his body to sin, as instruments of wickedness.

**Rom 6:13a** *Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness.*

**Rom 8:13** *For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.*

5. The believer yields himself to God - as much as those who are alive from the dead are yielded to God.

**Rom 6:13b** *But rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life.*

**Rom 12:1** *Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God — this is your spiritual act of worship.*

**Rom 13:14** *Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature.*

6. The believer yields his body members as instruments of righteousness.

**Rom 6:13c** *And offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness.*

**Gal 5:16** *So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature.*

It should be noted that one's hardship or burden can bring a person to the place where the Lord can deal with him. It is then that the hardship becomes the cross and denial of self that Jesus is talking about. With an act of self-denial, the Christian can then count or reckon himself alive to God (Rom. 6:13). He can then follow Jesus. This is an act which can be described as committing all that one is and has to Christ. It is an act that needs to be repeated every day (see Mt. 10:38). □