GROUP GUIDE

**Jesus, one on one**

the Kingdom of God 03/19/2023

Luke 17:20-37

MAIN POINT

Today's message will be on Jesus' personal interaction with people (From the gospel of Luke).

One person at a time, One conversation at a time, One act of kindness at a time. Jesus taught us the importance of focusing on the person in front of us. Throughout the gospel of Luke, we see a record of Jesus personal interactions with a variety of people. He demonstrated that impacting others begins by focusing on the person in front of you. Following His example, we learn to focus on one person at a time, engaging in one conversation at a time, demonstrating one act of kindness at a time.

The lesson will focus on:

Jesus taught His disciples on the subjects of the rich entering God’s kingdom and the rewards of following Him.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

What are the first things you usually tell people about yourself?

What does the way we introduce ourselves to others reveal about the way we view ourselves?

At its core, the story of the rich young ruler is about identity. The young man defined himself by his possessions and social standing. But Jesus taught His followers to identify themselves according to their faith in Him.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

Have a volunteer read Luke 18:18-23.

What makes the man’s question in verse 18 strange?

The rich young ruler was telling Jesus that he viewed himself as having been good, moral, and religiously diligent all his life. However, in spite of his best efforts to please God, the man knew that something was missing; he did not have eternal life. He felt this so strongly that he humiliated himself in a desperate attempt to find out the answer.

How does Jesus’ response compare with your general ideas about salvation?

In spite of Jesus’ demands of the man, could eternal life be gained only by selling everything? Why or why not? What is the relationship between selling one’s possessions and following Jesus?

Have you ever had the sense there was always just one more thing to do to get your “spiritual life” right? Why do we have the tendency to feel this way? What does this reveal about our theology?

On the surface, Jesus seemed to be saying the man could earn eternal life by keeping the Commandments. Most of us know that salvation is received only by grace through faith, not by works (Eph. 2:8-9). However, our works are a lot easier to measure and we still have a tendency to try to impress God. Contrary to how it sounds, Jesus wasn’t saying that selling his possessions would earn the man favor with God. He knew this young ruler’s heart. Jesus knew that what stood between this man and a relationship with Him was the priority of his possessions and his personal identity in them. He earnestly wanted the man to commit himself to God totally.

In Mark 10:21, Mark wrote that Jesus loved the man before He commanded the man to take the necessary steps toward following Him. Why is this significant?

Do you believe Jesus loves you even before you follow Him? Do you ever feel He is judging your performance - that He’ll love you more if you do better?

How would you describe people who live consistently in the truth that Jesus’ love for them precedes anything they might do for Him?

When we put the love of God after the command, we wind up bitter and frustrated because of what we have to give up. But Jesus loves us first, and this makes all the difference. The command to sell everything and follow Jesus is not to merit Jesus’ love, but in response to it. Jesus’ command was rooted in His love. In essence He was saying, “You will not experience the full joy of trusting in God until you come to me empty handed, ‘poor in spirit’,” like the little children in Luke 18:15-17.

What might be standing in the way of your following Jesus fully?

Have a volunteer read Luke 18:24-30.

What was Jesus trying to impress on the disciples when He spoke of the “possible” and “impossible?”

Those who have an abundance of material wealth are often blind to their spiritual needs. To place that wealth under the lordship of Christ proves a higher price than many wealthy people are willing to pay. Jesus used the illustration of something that was impossible from a human perspective-a camel going through the eye of a needle-to emphasize this difficulty. To come to Christ, one must recognize his or her personal need and then be willing to trust their life to Christ.

How do Jesus’ words in verses 24-30 impact our understanding of “saved by grace”?

What possible losses did Jesus mention that one might experience by following Him? What are the rewards of choosing Jesus?

read and summarize Luke 18:31-43.

How do the cross and resurrection relate to the kingdom of God? Can you have one without the other? Explain.

Why is the death and resurrection of Jesus the hinge point of Christianity?

The chapter closes with the account of Jesus’ healing a blind man near Jericho in response to his persistent cries for help (18:35-43). The episode shows the man displayed faith in Jesus and culminates with all the people giving glory to God. As Jesus approached Jerusalem, His city of destiny, He came to Jericho. Luke would recount two incidents connected with this city: a miracle story in which Jesus healed a blind man (18:35-43) and a pronouncement story involving a tax collector. The healing of the blind man in verses 35-43 is the last miracle story in Luke’s travel narrative.

How does the account of the blind man help us understand our calling in the “now”?

Jesus opens our eyes to see the reality, centrality, and implications of His cross and resurrection. Seeing Him leads us to faith, and to a continual seeking out of the power of the cross and resurrection for our lives.

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

What do we risk missing spiritually if we don’t surrender our lives to Jesus?

From Luke 18, how has your approach to God been shaped? Which of the individuals in this chapter do you most identify with? What needs to change?

PRAYER

Pray that your group members will have a greater awareness of God’s love and grace in their lives this week, and that in response they will be challenged to give Him the place of utmost priority in their lives.

COMMENTARY

luke 18:18-30

18:18. A Jewish civil administrator interrupted Jesus with a question. The question centers on the divisive point between the two leading groups of Jews, the Pharisees and Sadducees. Sadducees, using only the first five books of the Old Testament, found in these books no reference to resurrection, so they denied that resurrection of the dead was possible. Pharisees, following all three parts of the Jewish canon-Law, Prophets, and Writings-saw definite proof of resurrection in Daniel 12:2 and many other references, particularly in the Psalms and Isaiah. Was this administrator trying to get Jesus to take sides, or was he searching for certain hope in his own life? Luke does not give us his motivation, just the question. This man called Jesus a “good teacher”. This represents a common politeness of speech and recognition to some degree of Jesus’ role as an intelligent, caring teacher.

18:19. Jesus caught the man’s attention by challenging his description of Jesus as good. Only one person can be truly good. That is God. Thus, unknowingly, the administrator had linked Jesus to God. Jesus caught the link and brought it out into the open. He repeated traditional Jewish theology in confessing that God alone is good. In so doing, Jesus did not affirm or deny His own claim to deity. Luke expected his readers, however, to see the link that Jesus made and to affirm the obvious-that Jesus, being good, was also God.

18:20. Jesus turned to the source of authority that all Jews accepted-the Law, the Torah of Moses. He quoted part of the Ten Commandments from Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5.

18:21. The man with the question also had a personal testimony. He had rigorously obeyed all the commandments since youth. We must not quibble with his answer at this point and try to point out that all have sinned. That is not under discussion here. Here the issue is obedience and eternal life. This Jew apparently thought on the criteria of his religion that he deserved eternal life, but internally he felt something missing.

18:22-23. Jesus had the answer. He returned to the theme that He had addressed so often-wealth and dedication. Do you trust possessions more than you trust God? He asked the man. Are you trying to put your trust in both possessions and God at the same time? Can you live without your possessions but cannot live without your God? Sell your possessions and find out (see 6:45; 12:13-21, 33; 16:13). These words cut to the quick. Jesus had found the man’s weak spot. He had great riches and evidently trusted in them to make life meaningful and hopeful. Grief and mourning set in. There was no way he could give up his money, even for God’s kingdom.

18:24. Jesus spoke in the form of lamentation, much as a deep sigh would be used at a funeral to express grief at personal loss. The sad truth is that the rich have a hard time giving up their trust in their possessions. They cannot take the long-term look and realize that one day they will lose control over wealth. Then they will be robbed of eternal treasure, too. No wonder Jesus issued His sad lament: How hard for the rich to enter the kingdom. They have never experienced the need to trust someone or some thing outside their own intelligence and wealth.

18:25. Jesus turned to hyperbole to make a point. He described the utterly impossible. The lure of wealth overpowers the lure of the kingdom, not just in this rich Jewish administrator’s life, but in the lives of virtually all rich people and many who are not quite so rich. Thus, the first step to the kingdom is not to solve the problem of putting a camel through a needle’s eye. The first step is to get rid of the burden of riches so a person has nothing to trust but Jesus.

18:26-27. The audience was amazed. If the blessed rich cannot be saved, they declared, who can? They saw that Jesus had described an impossible situation. God does the impossible was Jesus’ quick answer. Don’t try to figure out the hows and whys. Just let God do it. Trust Him with your life more than you trust your riches. Place your riches in His control. Watch God work the impossible.

18:28-30. Blunt and to the point, Peter piped up, “We left all and followed You. Does that qualify us for the kingdom?” Jesus told Peter not to worry. Those who had given up life’s closest relationships, greatest responsibilities, and strongest commitments to follow Jesus had a reward coming. Luke is imprecise in describing the reward, but he puts it in two stages. In this age, the committed, self-denying follower will receive many times as much as he has given up. Is this strictly parallel to the preceding verse, so that the reward is in terms of family? The family of believers will be more important, more numerous, and more meaningful than a follower’s family of origin. Or is this much more indefinite so that Jesus was calling for faith even as He promised rewards? God has a reward for you, but you do not need to know exactly what that reward is. You just need to trust God. The second part of the disciples’ reward is eternal life, a quality of life beginning here on earth with Jesus as Lord and extending through resurrection to the eternal kingdom.