

What Must I Do to Inherit Eternal Life? (Part 1)

Luke: All Things New



Series Goal

That Mercy Hill Church would be made new as we follow the One who is making all things new!



Sermon Text

Luke 18:18-34



Big Idea

Jesus doesn't want this rich ruler's money. He wants his heart. And He wants his heart because He wants what's best. Those idols we set upon the throne of our hearts will ultimately undo us in the end. Jesus knows it. But we often don't. So He is ruthless in His call for surrender. It's a severe mercy, a caustic kindness. He will stop at nothing until He becomes our everything.

God is, as the old theologians weren't afraid to say, a jealous God. Indeed, God has said as much Himself (Ex 20:5). His jealousy is one of His attributes. It's one of His many perfections. It's an aspect of His glory. God is not jealous for our hearts, for our affection, because He is needy or insecure. Quite the opposite really. He is jealous for us because He loves us and He knows that if something other than Himself is sitting upon the throne of our hearts it will be that very thing that elicits our demise. When we spiral off from Him, we spiral off away from the realm of life towards the realm of death. In other words then: God wants our hearts for Himself because He wants what's best for us . . . for you!

(1) Reframing the Discussion (vv. 18-21)

In v. 19, if you look closely, Jesus is not saying that He is not God, He is simply saying that only God is good. He is pushing back on the mistaken notion this ruler has that any mere man in and of himself can be good in some fundamental way. He is not so much here saying that He Himself is not good as much as He is saying that men in themselves can never be.

In v. 20, as with the pushback above, there is an undercurrent, an undertow we could say, intended by Jesus to draw the man down deeper beneath the surface of things into the realm of the heart. The law, the commandments, as you may well remember, were never intended to be a mere external set of rules by which we justify ourselves or not. No! They were intended rather to lead us to Christ for mercy and forgiveness and the gift of His righteousness. They were intended to expose not our own moral excellence but our own depravity.

(2) Reaching the Heart (vv. 22-23)

Jesus is here cutting to the chase. He is reaching through the surface now and touching this man's heart. He is exposing with this single command, this "one thing," that everything in this brother is off—that God does not have his heart, but money does. And, therefore, whatever else he's doing or not doing on the surface of things is not being done rightly because it not being done in genuine love for God, nor for others for that matter. Here we come to face what Martin Luther observed so many centuries ago in his Larger Catechism. He outlines there the Ten Commandments and discusses in detail the connection between them all. In particular, he shows how the first commandment ("You shall have no other gods before me" [Ex 20:3]) is really the lynchpin, the hinge, the gateway into all the others. If you get it right, all the others come with it. If you get it wrong, all the others go awry as well.

Jesus' goal isn't to leave this man empty-handed. His goal is to give this man more of Himself. Jesus never asks us to give up anything without also promising to give us more of Himself. He scars us to save us. He breaks us to build us. He wounds us to heal us. He looks and He loves.

Reflection Questions

- What does it mean to you that God is a jealous God? Does this idea trouble you? Why should it actually encourage you in some ways?
- Because this man was "extremely rich" he became "very sad" at the thought of giving it up. How have you experienced this with your own idolatrous attachments? How has what you've loved more than God become the source not of your joy (as you expected) but of your sorrow, anxiety, and pain?
- Neil Richardson says: "[God is] not only more demanding than people [care] to think, but also more generous than they [dare] to hope." How have you experienced this to be true?

