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Session 2 - Luke 18 Part 2

Bible Passages

Luke 18:15-43

Brief Notes

These four episodes present some striking contrasts. In the first two there are some children, deemed of such little account that the disciples don't want Jesus bothered by them, and a rich ruler, a man of some importance with it seems a very upright life; but the kingdom we learn belongs to those like the children, rather than the ruler - he goes away sad, whilst the children are called to Jesus. In the second two we read of the Twelve, the inner circle of Jesus' disciples, and a blind beggar; but the Twelve don't see, and the beggar is enabled to see. A theme throughout is how we receive eternal life / enter the Kingdom.

18:15-17 The Little Children

It may be familiar, but it is good to remember Jesus' readiness to call little children to himself (and we might add, those that society today considers of little account). We can still slip into the disciples' error of presuming Jesus is most interested in those our world considers most significant. The kingdom of God belongs – not to children, quite – but to “such as these”, those who will receive God's grace “like a little child” – ie pleading no merit but accepting grace.

18:18-30 The Rich Ruler

The attitude of the ruler is sharply different from that of a child: “what must I do?” he asks, and Jesus aims to show him and us that there is nothing we can do – it is “impossible with men” (v.27). Jesus’ reply to his initial question is aimed to make him consider the implications of his polite address, both for who Jesus is (no less than God) and for himself (not good, so in no position to inherit eternal life). The ruler is confident of his own righteousness (cf the Pharisee in 18:9ff), but the idolatry of his heart is exposed by Jesus’ demand in v.22. Jesus is not so much laying down what we must all do, as making clear what we cannot do. It is not simply very difficult for camels to squeeze through the eye of a needle, it is impossible – that is the point. But what we cannot do, God can.

Eternal life is a gift of grace, and this grace we lay hold of as we leave all to follow Jesus (we do have to give all *up*, even though we are not all called to give all *away*), but v.30 shows that no sacrifice we make puts God in our debt, as though eternal life is something we could deserve or earn (as Peter seems to imply), for whatever we lose in following Christ he will repay many times over in this life.

18:31-34 The Twelve

Even more this incident shows the inappropriateness of Peter wanting to point to his sacrifice – this gift of eternal life is bought at a much higher price, only through the death of Jesus. This is not the first time Jesus has spelt out to the disciples what awaits him in Jerusalem, but they are blind and cannot yet understand what he is going to Jerusalem to do.

18:35-43 The Blind Beggar

The blind disciples are contrasted with this blind beggar, who does see – “Son of David!” he cries, recognizing that he is the long promised Messiah. His persistent crying out is reminiscent of the widow in 18:1-8, and his asking for mercy is reminiscent of the Tax Collector in 18:9-14. He does not ask Jesus what he must do, like the rich ruler, rather Jesus asks him “What do you want me to do for you?”. He is a model of childlike faith that looks only for grace. He sees and gladly follows Jesus (again in contrast to the rich ruler).

This story pulls some threads together – do we see who Jesus really is (in contrast to the ruler and the disciples)? Do we see ourselves as we truly are, desperately in need of grace? Do we prize what Jesus has come to bring?

Discussion Questions

It might depend on your group, but since the stories here are all familiar enough, one way to begin could be getting people to think about how they hang together. Can people think of a title to give the passage as a whole, or are there themes or ideas that run through the passage?

From vv.15-17

- Why do you think the disciples rebuked the people who were bringing their babies to Jesus?
 - Are there kinds of people we might be tempted to think are less worthy of Jesus attention?
- What does Jesus mean when he says “the kingdom of God belongs to such as these”?
- How must we receive the kingdom?

From vv.18-30

- How is the rich ruler quite unlike “a little child”?
- Why do you think Jesus replies as he does in v.19?
 - What is the implication for who Jesus is? For what the ruler is?
 - How is it clear that the man had grasped neither implication?
- Why does Jesus make tell him he must sell everything and give to the poor?
 - Is that a requirement for inheriting eternal life?
 - Can we be untroubled by what Jesus says then?
- How hard is it to enter the kingdom of God? [NB – the answer is NOT “very hard”! The point we’re to grasp is surely that it’s “*impossible* with men”.]
- Jesus’ words in vv.29,30 give the answer to the original question back in v.18.
 - How does Jesus show that it is all of grace, that we have not put God in our debt such that eternal life is something we deserve?
 - There is challenge too, though. What does it mean for us to leave all for the kingdom of God?

From vv.31-34

- Why do you think Luke places this prediction of Jesus’ death here?
 - How does it clarify v.27? – ie how is it “possible with God” that anyone be saved?
 - How does it offer a further response to the attitude of Peter in v.28?

From vv.35-43

- How is this blind beggar a contrast to both the rich ruler and the disciples?
- What does he see?
- How does he exemplify child-like faith?

It may be a familiar truth, but spelling it out afresh is good and vital for us all. So...

- How, in summary, would you answer the question in v.18 from this passage?

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