

The Seeker: A Study Through Luke
 Part 18b: Are You a Child?
 October 22, 2017 - Eli Boragine

INTRODUCTION

- For the past while at CCC, Pastor Jeff has been taking us through the Gospel of Luke in our Bibles, and we're going to continue in that story this morning. So if you've got a Bible, you can turn to Luke 18:15, and that's where we'll be starting. If you don't have a Bible or didn't bring one, feel free to use one that's in the pocket of one of the seats in front of you.

I. WHY JESUS LOVES CHILDREN

- READ 18:15-17

- So here's the scene, right? First, we've got Jesus, our hometown hero turned international sensation. He's been going on teaching tours, gaining followers, sparking controversies. Jesus of Nazareth is all anybody can talk about. And when we left Jesus last week, He was speaking to a large group of people, teaching on vast spiritual principles and realities. He's been speaking in riddles and parables, answering questions that nobody could possibly know, asking questions that nobody can possibly answer. And important people are present! Pharisees, teachers of the law, lawyers, scribes—everybody is tuned in as Jesus talks about the coming Kingdom of God, turning social absolutes on their head, and really just blowing everybody's minds in general...
 - And in the middle of this, during a water break or maybe even during the teaching itself, somebody has the gall/nerve/audacity to bring children before Him! Infants/babies! Grubby little snot machines, some incapable of speech, some incapable of even understanding anything that's going on—and these people (presumably parents) want Jesus to touch their kids so that they might be blessed.
- And Jesus' disciples are horrified.
 - Do we have any baby people in here? Not people who are babies but just people who really like babies? Weirdos... Some of you guys just have that baby bug where you like babies and babies like you. Whatever. I don't get it. I like babies from a distance. I like to make faces at them in church when I'm sitting behind them, but that's about it. Cuz whenever I hold them, whenever we make physical contact, they just burst into tears. I dunno. It's my spiritual gift. — Let me tell you—in the ANE there were very few “baby people”. Caring for babies was a woman's job, a woman's priority, and therefore not really that important. Children weren't important. Second rate citizens. In fact, in this world you didn't even count as a Roman citizen until you were 15.
- And so when people begin to bring their *babies* to *Jesus*, asking Him to *touch* them, His disciples flip out. They start to rebuke these people: “What are you doing! Get out of here! Do

you know who this is? This is Jesus! The Great Teacher, the Great Prophet! He might even be the Son of God, and we're not actually really sure about that one but still! You have no business here! Get out! Get out!

- But Jesus takes control of the situation and, as always, uses that moment to rearrange the perspective of the entire room.
 - "Let the little children come to me, and do not forbid them; for the kingdom of God is made up of people just like them. Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it."
 - What? ... and so presumably they let the little children come to him while they all just sat there scratching their heads, watching his cheek get snottier and his tunic get dirtier. It's a funny thing to imagine Jesus as Creator of the universe getting spit up on. — But here's the thing, you guys. I have seen this verse plastered on so many walls in church nurseries—"Awww Jesus loves little children, He wants them to come to Him! That's so sweet! We should love children too!" And yeah, that's fine, but you must know this verse is not addressed to children. It's addressed to adults. This is about you. It's about me. So what is Jesus talking about here? What are we supposed to do with this? Because when you read it as addressed to you, this becomes pretty serious, right? Unless you enter the kingdom of God as a child, you won't get in. What does that mean?
- When I was in Kindergarten, I had the coolest teacher. Her name was Mrs Ingham. And Mrs Ingham loved us, and I remember just digging everything about Kindergarten. It was great. But every once in a while, Mrs Ingham would leave the room to go to the bathroom or run a quick errand, and every time that happened, somebody would come to visit our room. He was small, and he didn't have legs, but he managed to always appear halfway up the door frame from just behind the wall. He was dressed like superhero and, of course, he was hilarious, and would always leave right before Mrs Ingham came back in the room. His name was Zero the Hero, and he was a pop up cone puppet. — And you guys, I'm here to tell you, I loved Zero the Hero. Loved him. And he was just as real to me as the other kids in my school. You could not have convinced me that he didn't "exist" because he was right there, talking to me!
 - Now that I'm older, of course, I know that he was a puppet that Mrs Ingham was holding behind the wall. I'm smarter than that, you see.
- But as a child, man, I believed it all. With my whole heart I just soaked it all in. It was ridiculous. I didn't care.
- And that's the thing about children, isn't it?—their willingness to literally believe anything... The capacity that children have for belief in the fantastic and miraculous is without parallel, even to a fault! Kids are gullible. Rash. Reckless in their belief. They trust easily—even too easily, right? It's why we have to tell kids that if a stranger offers to give you a ride, *don't get in their car*. That seems like commonsense to an adult, but to a child... "Well they said they

know my parents and they talked to them on the phone. I guess I can trust them.” Their trust is so innocent, so thorough, so completely whole-hearted, they’ll believe anything!

- And that’s why I think Jesus loves children so much, why He welcomes them. Not because they’re easy prey, not because they’re gullible or easy to convince or dumb, but because the *genuineness* of their faith is so absolute. They’re *humble*. He doesn’t have to convince them. He doesn’t have to wade through their cultural baggage or intellectual hangups. He showed them that miracles are real. And they believed Him. He asked for help to feed a crowd of 5000, and a little boy offered Jesus his sack lunch without a thought to its gross insufficiencies. They are so unembarrassed, unabashed, unburdened by the many worries that we bring to the table when we begin to talk about faith. Even when it sounds ridiculous! They don’t care. They’re all in.
- And so I think this is what Jesus is talking about when He says that the Kingdom of Heaven is made up only of those who are willing to receive it as a child. God’s Kingdom consists of people who can believe what Jesus says without suspicion or conditions. Those who can whole-heartedly trust without shame in the miraculous. Those who can suspend disbelief just enough that they forget that it’s impossible to be raised from the dead or walk in the realm of spirits or walk on water for that matter. But Jesus is looking for this kind of faith, a whole-hearted, all-in, no reservations childlike mindset. Are you a child? Because like literally everything else that Jesus talks about, it doesn’t begin in the physical realm, it begins in your heart—it doesn’t actually matter how old you are. So I’ll ask again: are you a child?
 - And be careful how you answer that question. When God is listening, talk isn’t cheap. He always tests your words with your actions. Much like Jesus does in v. 22 of this chapter. If you follow along, I’m gonna keep reading our story...

II. THE ONE THING YOU LACK

READ v. 18-25

- So after this whole child debacle, one heroic man breaks the awkwardness by asking Jesus another question. And here he’s described as a “certain ruler”. And I love this guy.
 - One of the things that we’ve seen over and over again in the Gospel of Luke so far is that rich and important religious people are often coming to Jesus and asking Him questions, but their questions are antagonistic. In other words, they’re not real questions. They’re just trying to trick Jesus or trap Him with His words, or they’re trying to prove something about Him that will dislodge His popularity.
- But this guy is different. His question is a little self-interested, right? “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” But it’s honest. He’s not just being a jerk, he actually wants to know. Unlike the other questioners we’ve met in our story so far, this one is sincere—he actually believes that Jesus can give him the answer he’s looking for. And there’s an urgency in his question, he

has to know. What does he have to do to inherit eternal life, to be a part of the kingdom of heaven? He wants it, he desires it, he's hungry for it.

- And Jesus says, "OK, awesome. Glad to hear it. Good question. But you know the law as well as anybody, don't you? What does it say? What are the requirements? Don't commit adultery, don't murder, don't steal, don't lie, honor your parents." And you'll recognize these, right? This is kind of Jewish short hand for the Ten Commandments, which really would have been short hand for the entire Old Testament Jewish Law.
- And the guy says, "Yeah, yeah, I know those, Jesus. I get it. I've heard it before. And I've done it all, Jesus. I've followed what the Law says. From my youth I've practiced all these things and kept them over and above all my peers."
 - And in my mind, I can kinda hear this guy just trying really hard to not be disappointed with Jesus' answer. Right, because this guy has just risked his neck/reputation to publicly ask Jesus a theological question, and a personal one at that, one that he desperately needed answered, not for a political a reason but out of a deep existential ache... And here's Jesus, the great Teacher/Prophet, giving him the same pat answer that literally any other Jewish rabbi could have given him. "How do I inherit eternal life?" "Follow the Law." It's disappointing. Isn't there something more? Like many of us, this guy has become a professional at following the rules, if what he says is true. He prays every morning and every night, reads the Scriptures with diligence, he never curses or goes to movies with sexually explicit content, doesn't drink or smoke or chew and doesn't go with girls that do.
 - But there's still an emptiness in him, this gnawing feeling that he's missing something, that there's something he's not doing. What is it? ... If even Jesus can't tell him what it is, maybe he'll never know...
- But Jesus isn't done with him yet. Because he hears what this guy is saying, but more than that, He hears what his heart is saying—he hears the ache in his heart, the yearning for something more. He gets what this guy is after, what he really wants, or at least what he says he wants.
 - "Young man," Jesus says, "You still lack one thing." — And in my mind I can kinda see this guy's ears perk up, and his heart beats a little faster. What is it? What's he gonna say? — "Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me."
- And as fast as his hopes had risen, they come crashing back down around his feet. "I can't do that." You see, what Luke reveals about this man at this point is that he was extremely wealthy. A rich young ruler. What Jesus was asking from him was to turn his entire life upside-down. To sell everything he had, give all to the poor, and follow Him? like a bum? like a commoner? This is a severe/humbling calling. And he's promised a different kind of treasure in heaven, but he's about as enthusiastic about it as we are if we're honest. If he were to do exactly what Jesus says here, no longer would this guy be the rich young ruler, he would just

be a... young guy. No riches, and certainly not ruling over anything. And so he goes away sad, having received the answer he was looking for but not the answer he wanted...

- And Jesus' heart breaks for this guy too, doesn't it? The text says that He also became sorrowful because of this guy's response. "How difficult it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God! It's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle." This guy had so much wealth in this world, so much material treasure—he had too much to lose for the kingdom of heaven. Even with the prospect of eternal riches, he couldn't bear to part with what he had now. The cost was too high.

III. WHO THEN CAN BE SAVED?

- Now a lot of people get hung up on this story. Because at first glance, what does it look like Jesus is doing? — Adding one more thing to this guy's checklist of things to do! It looks like He's setting up a formula for salvation! Follow the Law and everything in it, and then sell everything you have and give to the poor. And then you can go to heaven!
- But we know that isn't true because we know from the rest of the New Testament that that's not you get into heaven at all—And so we just chalk this up to one of the weird things that Jesus says—He's probably just exaggerating to make a point that we shouldn't have a bunch of material wealth. That sounds good. Hopefully the next thing Jesus says isn't quite so crazy.
- But if we leave it there, you guys, if I dismiss you with an announcement about a church garage sale and a pat moralism from "You Can't Take It With You", we're gonna miss out. Jesus isn't promoting a works-salvation model here, and he's not condemning material wealth either—he's not even condemning this man's material wealth. What He's done here is put his finger on the one area of this man's life that he isn't willing to surrender, the one area of his life that he isn't willing to give up for the sake of the kingdom of heaven.
- In essence he's asking this rich young man, "You're interested in the Kingdom of God, very good. But where are you at? Are your material riches holding you back from following me or trusting me completely? Are you all in? Because you can't keep your wealth as a backup just in case I let you down or this doesn't work out. I need you to be 100% here, no conditions/suspensions/reservations. Just whole-hearted faith—I need you to trust me. Like a child. If you're really looking for eternal life, then that's what I need from you. *This* is the one thing you lack. A childlike faith. Will you do this one thing?" And when he heard this, he became very sorrowful because he was very rich. He couldn't do it. And here's the thing, you guys: this story is not about money. This guy's wealth is beside the point, it's circumstantial—the bottom line is that he didn't have the faith to do what the Lord was calling him to. He didn't have that childlike faith that characterizes those who belong to the Kingdom of God. And *that faith* is what Jesus was looking for.

- Now let me ask you a question: If you were to have this conversation with Jesus, what area of your life would He put his finger on? I'll give you a hint: it's the thing in your life that you don't want to give up.
 - Because maybe Jesus isn't asking you to sell all you have and distribute it to the poor. That's great! Keep your wealth, enjoy it and be generous with it as a gift from the Lord! But what if He did? Because that's the point—not whether or not the Lord would ask you that, but your willingness to give it up, your childlike faith... What if Jesus asked you to sell all of your belongings and give the proceedings to the poor. Your home, your toys, your car, Nana's chinaware, the whole deal. Would that be a problem? Because if it is, it means you don't believe Jesus. It means that you don't actually believe Him when He says that it's more important to store up for yourselves treasure in heaven, where moth and rust can't destroy and thieves can't break in and steal. Your heart is still with your stuff. You're not all in. You're not a child.
 - Or maybe you're not rich, but you're proud. If you were to have this conversation with Jesus, what would that look like? "One thing you lack: Go, apologize to your sister, confess to your spouse, forgive your father, and you'll have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." Would that be a problem for you? Because if it is then that means your pride/image/self-importance isn't surrendered to Jesus. It means you don't actually believe Him when He says that there is no greater love than that you lay your life down for another. Your heart is still concerned with self. You're putting conditions on your discipleship with the Lord. You're not a child.
 - And maybe you're not proud or wealthy, but you have aspirations, dreams, plans for a bright future! What might happen if the Lord approached you and said, "One thing you lack. Set aside those plans, scrap the blueprints, take it off the bucket list. Then come and follow me." Would that be a problem? Because if it then it means that you don't actually believe the Lord when He says that His ways are higher than your ways and His thoughts are higher than your thoughts. You've got reservations about God's future for you—you still think that you can do it better! You're not a child!
 - What is it this morning that you would have a hard time giving up to Jesus if He asked you? Comfortability? your job? your family? What is it? Because that is the very thing He wants you to surrender to Him. Do you have the faith for it? Or is it too ridiculous for you?

- What this young man failed to understand, and what we so often miss in all of this, is that when Jesus asks us to give something up for the sake of the kingdom of God, it's because what He has to offer us *in the Kingdom of God*, is so much better than the earthly riches we're clinging to. **That's why Jesus says in v. 29... READ v. 29, 30**
- And that seems so obvious to us here, right? We see this guy walk away from Jesus, walk away from eternal life, walk away from the Kingdom of God because he can't get past his own wealth, and we think, "Ah! If only he knew what he was passing on! He wouldn't have

given his riches a second look!” But when Jesus confronts us, suddenly we’re backpedaling. “Jesus, you wouldn’t want me to give *that* up to you, would you?”

- He does! And I’ll tell you what, when we approach Jesus in childlike faith with a whole-hearted surrender to His will, no conditions/suspensions/reservations, He takes what we give Him and blesses it beyond what we could have possibly imagined. But we have to be willing. We have to have faith. We have to become like children.

COMMUNION

- It seems fitting to me that this morning we’re going to celebrate communion together. [Invite ushers to pass out elements] Communion is such a sweet thing that we get to practice because in it we do two things.
 - The first and most immediately obvious thing that we do is we recognize the childlike faith and surrender of Jesus Christ on the cross. Disregarding all earthly comforts, disregarding His pride, disregarding all worldly aspirations, He gave all of Himself to the calling that the Father had placed on His life. No conditions/reservations, nothing that He held on to. Dying the death that His accusers deserved was not too ridiculous for Him... Jesus was a child. And we remember/celebrate the faith that led Him to the cross when we take the bread and the cup.
 - But the second thing we do when we take communion is we confess together what Paul says in **Galatians 2:20**, that “I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.” If you are a follower of Jesus this morning, when you take communion, you are *identifying yourself with Jesus*—you are confessing that your flesh, your cares, your worries, your hopes and aspirations, your job, your spouse, your kids, your wealth—all that you are—all of that has been crucified with Christ. It’s been given to Him, surrendered to Him. And *everything/everything* that you do is no longer dictated by the *desires* of the *flesh*, but is done in childlike faith by the power and for the One who has loved you and given Himself up for you. — And the beauty in that crucifixion with Jesus, the beauty of that surrender, is that when you truly give your life and everything in it to the Lord, you receive a glorious resurrection in return! As we can so clearly and confidently see in the story of this young man, what is *gained* in surrendering to Jesus is so much better than what we could possibly maintain by clutching our lives close to our chest.
 - And Jesus said, “Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the Kingdom of God. Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does receive the Kingdom of God as a child will certainly enter in.” — How good it is to be a child!

CONCLUSION / INVITATION TO SALVATION

- If you're here this morning and you've never surrendered a thing to Jesus, if you've never placed your faith in God, if you've been trying to do all of life on your own... first of all, "Welcome". On behalf of the leaders at CCC and all the people behind me, I'm glad you're here this morning. But if I did just describe you, then you have a unique opportunity today, an opportunity do what we've been talking about, an opportunity to surrender your life and everything you've been telling yourself that you can control—and put it in the hands of a God who actually can control it, and give you something worthwhile and significant and meaningful in return: an abundance of riches that are eternal and set aside for you in heaven... This morning you have an opportunity to put your faith in Jesus Christ. — If you're not super sure what that looks like, I'm here to tell you that it doesn't necessarily *look like* anything because it begins in your heart—it's an attitude. But if you do want to do that today, if you have a desire to give your life to Jesus, I'd like to invite you to pray with me and say these words along with me in your heart:
 - God, I have been trying to live my life my way. I've held all of my life so closely to my chest, trying to control it, trying to do things my way. But today, Lord, I renounce that prideful spirit. Today I have decided to give my life and everything in it to you, and I ask that you would use it in whatever way you want. I'm so glad today, Lord, and I can celebrate who you are, because today I can stand before you with confidence because when I surrender my life to you, the things that I do with it have eternal value. And not only that, but the riches that I have in you are so much greater than anything that I could receive or manufacture in this world. I love you, Jesus, and I'm so thankful to be your child. Amen.
 - If you prayed that, don't leave today without talking to somebody. Come talk to me, Daniel, anybody on this stage, or the person you're sitting next to. Also grab a book from the back called First Steps. If you prayed that prayer, you've taken a step in your relationship with God, and this book will help you to understand what it looks like to continue in this journey.