

The Magnificent Seven

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[0 : 0 0] Please turn back this morning to Luke's Gospel chapter 18 and as it was read earlier on from verse 15 to the end of the chapter. Now it's going to be difficult to get through this passage and we'll just really in many ways make some principle statements about what Jesus is saying here and but what is really great about this passage is how unconventional God is and the great danger we have of making God and Jesus Christ and the Gospel passe, making Him conventional and ordinary and dull in many ways and yet what we find here is that this old gospel that we are associated with has a tremendously shocking newness to it each time we allow ourselves to come under its teaching and each time that Jesus speaks and it's my hope today that the living breath of God is able to speak to all of us and challenge us as certainly I've been greatly challenged by what Jesus does here and how He challenges our human preconceptions and our human thinking at so many different levels.

What is Jesus speaking about here specifically in this passage? Well really he's speaking about the kingdom, he's speaking about the kingdom of God. When he introduces the children onto the scene he says let them come to me for the kingdom belongs, the kingdom of God belongs to such as these and at various point he speaks about the kingdom of God in this passage. Now Jesus speaks here of the kingdom as something that's a reality, a spiritual reality certainly but nonetheless very real. He speaks about knowing God and being blessed by God in verse 30 in the age, in this age and in the age to come so he recognizes that there's an aspect of the kingdom which is today in this age but also as a future aspect in the age to come, there is eternal life but it's something that's very real to Jesus, he knows what he is speaking about and it's very clear, it's not a nebulous concept to him, it's not something that's undefined, it's not something in many ways, there are ways in which we need to develop our understanding of it of course but it is also laid out for us clearly what the kingdom of God is. In this section he makes clear that we are either in the kingdom or out of the kingdom, that we belong to the kingdom or we don't belong to the kingdom. Now you may say today well I'm not really terribly worried about whether I belong to the kingdom of God or not. I think you'll only think that if you've got an extremely small God, a God that hasn't made you, a God that hasn't gifted, a God that hasn't come in the person of Jesus, a God that will not be your judge, a God that is not eternal. So if that is how you think then please be challenged by that thinking because spiritually it's very dangerous, it's a spiritual reality and so maybe if it's something that we are either in or out or belong to or can't belong to, how can I then belong to the kingdom? Well Jesus says something very interesting in verse 17 he says I tell you the truth, anyone who does not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it. How do I belong to the kingdom? How can I be in the kingdom of God? How can I belong in other words to God? Could put another way, how can I be a

Christian? How can I belong and be in this kingdom? The interesting thing is Jesus here perceives of it as a gift to be accepted. He says unless you receive the kingdom of God it's something that we receive, it's something that we accept.

We often think of the kingdom of God as something outside of us, something you know just not internal in any way but here Jesus is at one level he's internalizing it and but not exclusively but he is internalizing it we have to receive as a gift and what does the gospel make clear as the gift that we are to receive? It's Jesus. So Jesus is the kingdom at many levels. There can't be an understanding of the kingdom of God unless we understand and have accepted Jesus. I think there's a lot of talk today in Christian and in theological circles about what the kingdom of God is and what it looks like and how what shape it takes. Well whatever else it looks like, whatever other shape it takes, it is Christ-centered and Christ-shaped and Christ- crucified is the kingdom of God because we receive it, we receive it as a gift and we accept Him into our lives as our Savior and as

our Lord. That is the key.

That is the secret, that is the mystery of the kingdom of God when we receive Jesus Christ we belong to the kingdom when we belong to Christ, when we have come to Christ for life and for forgiveness and that will often mean, that will undoubtedly mean ouch, we'll need to change. When we accept Christ and Him as Lord and God in our hearts it will inevitably mean that we will need to change because not only does Jesus speak about the kingdom of God, He speaks about God as the King and here Jesus is saying lots of different things and He's saying lots of different things as the King of this kingdom and it's so tremendously radical what He says and I think we've made Him very tame and very distant and very unchallenging but I really hope that when we look through this we don't, I don't mess it up and I don't mess up what Jesus is saying because it's there's at least and I'm sure there's more but there's at least a magnificent seven things here that Jesus says about spiritual truth and about what that breaks our conventional thinking about spiritual truth and I hope that we don't, that isn't spoiled just even by the speed with which we will go through this today. I think when it comes to spiritual realities, when it comes to spiritual truth we often think in the first place children can't teach us anything you know children are sweet or nice they help us to have a good time they're annoying whatever else it is we think about children but with regard to [7 : 35] Christian truth children really can't teach us anything. Knowledge is something that we can only grow into especially spiritual knowledge it's for the elite enlightenment is specialised it's only for one or two people and sometimes I feel there's just a fantastic intellectual snobbery in Christian circles where we think somehow that spiritual truth is only to a very small percentage of people who have who can find out these things but Jesus says if we have no childlike faith we have no place in the kingdom. I tell you the truth anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God in verse 17 like a little child will never enter it. No place in the kingdom no childlike faith. He gives this amazing welcome to the children and I think even in the welcome he gives to the children as he wants them to come to him it's the same kind of way he wants us to accept him. He wants us with open arms to accept him as our Lord and Savior as well but more than that he wants us to learn from children and to receive the gift of the kingdom and to receive salvation in the same way that children receive a gift. Have you ever seen children receiving a gift? Have you ever seen that?

Come on think about it. What do they do when they receive a gift? What do they do? Do they take it well and not so sure about this? No no I'll not take it. No no it's far too good. I've never seen a child doing that with a gift. I've never you know sometimes we go into a restaurant and then at the end of it two people offer to pay and there's this ridiculous argument oh no no no surely not me no no you pay no I can't possibly pay and there's all this kind of false humility flying about as people decide who is and who isn't going to pay and no one's going to accept the gift and be obliged to anyone. Well when a child gets a gift they just accept it from someone they love. They accept it wholeheartedly they don't have reservations they don't say oh well I better get them something now they're not like that they just accept the gift as it's been given with trust and with love and with sincerity and their arms are open they love receiving gifts and I'm sure we all go to love giving gifts as well but children love getting gifts and Jesus is reminding us that that simplicity that sincerity that in asking or accepting without a continual doubt and a continual asking of questions that keep us from trusting. He wants us to have in our belief of Jesus in our accepting of Jesus and what does it look like in a grown-up it looks like humility. He wants us humbly to accept Jesus. Children can't teach us anything sometimes how we think Jesus breaks that conventional thinking then also we often think that we can are the ones who define goodness whether consciously or unconsciously. Now the rich ruler here he says good teacher in verse 1918 what must I do to inherit eternal life and then Jesus goes on and says why do you call me good and then he talks about the laws and the rich ruler says well I've kept them since my youth up. The rich ruler clearly has his own definitions of goodness he speaks about Jesus as being good but he doesn't really understand what he is saying. When Jesus says no one is good except God alone he's not saying don't call me good because I'm not good I'm not God. What he is saying is rather to the rich ruler do you know what you're saying when you're calling me good because you're right I am good but the ruler didn't really understand that. I think he was just trying to cut a favour with Jesus by calling him a good ruler or maybe not maybe that's a bit unfair but at least he doesn't truly understand the nature of goodness because he believes that by obeying the laws as Jesus has elucidated them here that he's been good and he's done that and we can very often do the same thing that we can have our own definition of good and a human level that may be fine. We can define goodness and we're happy with that it can be

comparative we compare ourselves with other people it can be goodness that we can achieve so that we can feel good about ourselves but we can define goodness in such a way that allows us to be content with who we are but Jesus makes that astounding statement that flies in the face of all our thinking which is no one is good except God. He is reminding us that in spiritual terms with spiritual truth with God as our maker and as our Lord and as our judge and the one who sees into our hearts that

God is a standard and he is pure goodness and that we do fall short of that standard. He is pure inside and out and in terms of our salvation in terms of our being in the kingdom in terms of our being friends with God that goodness that we have inherently which is fine in the world in which we live but in terms of our relationship with God God says it's not of a standard that is perfect that it needs to be to be in relationship with me. See it's Christ who says don't commit adultery but Christ who says even a lustful look leaves us short of the standard of perfection and we struggle with that intensity of demand. We define goodness then sometimes we can think implicitly or explicitly that our gifts our own gifts by right. The rich man was by definition he was very rich and clearly as Jesus exposes his heart as he goes on in the passage when Jesus asks him to get rid of that wealth because it was what was most important to him. Wasn't saying it was wrong to be rich but he was saying that for this guy for this man the riches were absolutely number one in his life so Jesus said sell everything you have and follow me. The rich man thought that these riches he had were his own by right. In fact many people particularly around well not just around Jesus time even today I suppose in some circles actually felt that the riches were a blessing from God in the sense that it was showing God's specific favour on them and so they had a special place but the rich man felt his riches were his own by right he had a right to them. Now you might not be and I might not be today as rich as this guy was and we might not think these riches could be ours but there is a sense in which often that we can think the gifts that we have been given that make us rich one way or another whether it's intellectual gifts or moral gifts or natural abilities they can they're ours by right and they can make us superior from God and superior to other people and they can put us first or we can put them first before God. The irony is that very often we use the gifts that he gives us to distance ourselves from him and to make us independent so that many people who are rich many people who are tremendously talented and gifted will use that to live completely for themselves and to live to further their own glory and to expand these gifts for their own benefit with no reference to God whatsoever. Because Jesus says specifically to the rich man here he says you know go sell everything you have give to the poor you'll have treasure in heaven then come follow me.

He says I want to be first in your life not my gifts I don't want my gifts to be first in your life I want to be first. You know the church in Laodicea in Revelations 3 17 thought they were tremendously rich tremendously well off tremendously gifted Jesus said spiritually I look at you and you're you're poor you're miserable you're blind and you're naked because they were putting these things in front of Jesus Christ in front of his Lordship and there's a great challenge to us in that because we can want God's gifts as ours by right so that when and I'm there suppose that the challenge for us is sometimes when these are taken away from us we become bitter. What's God doing?

Why is he doing this? It's not fair he's taking away what is mine by right and so we can we can be challenged in our own minds at that time but in the fourth place that we often want an easy gospel we do in our thinking I know I do in my thinking the rich man well he thought he had it sussed out he had plenty of wealth and independence but he'd also obeyed the laws he's kept them since he was youth that was it was quite possible for him to do I think even the disciples in many ways wanted an easy gospel as we'll go on to see it in a little while and we can often ourselves want an easy gospel and we can want things on our own merits and we can want things on our own terms we don't like to be exposed by the Bible's truth or by what Jesus says or by its summary of our lives we don't like the thought of being indebted we like to be on an even par with God we don't like to be challenged about the motives that are in our hearts what right has anyone including God are the Bible to challenge me about my motives and we also don't want to share a gospel with others that is really challenging and it talks about need and it talks about sin and it talks about lostness and it talks about not belonging to the kingdom and needing to come into the kingdom it's all about love isn't it it's all about being accepted yes of course it is but on God's terms it's impossible for us to make the gospel palatable to everyone without moving away from its essence and

[19 : 11] Jesus makes that clear when he's speaking to the rich ruler because and the disciples who are listening because he uses it's of amazing illustration of the camel going through the eye of a needle and they say then it's impossible no one can be saved Jesus is what's impossible with

men is possible with God Jesus says the gospel is impossibly hard and I do believe that Jesus uses humour right through this passage and he's using humour here some people have tried to say well it's not really talking about something impossible it's talking about a camel having to go through the gates at the needle gate in Jerusalem which was a small gate and it would have to go down its knees and have to take a burden off its back and that's the only way you could get through but I don't think that's me saying I think he's using a tremendous humour and kind of ironic in a way of speaking to say no camels don't go through the eyes of needles it's impossible absolutely it's impossibly hard he's saying it with a smile on his face because he knows what's coming next in human terms it's good to come to that conclusion that the gospel is at one level an impossible gospel to share that people naturally aren't going to accept everything about it it is impossibly hard but the beauty is the beauty of the gospel the beauty of our position as Christians is that it's not impossible with God and he's slowly gently pushing us nudging us towards dependence on God in our understanding of the gospel of the kingdom and of sharing that gospel and living that gospel he's drawing us to himself yes he says it is impossible with men but what is impossible with men is possible with God and he's bringing us into that place where we are seeing that while it isn't easy to believe and it is a solemn reminder to us of our need and of our hearts and of our impending death and of what God thinks of us yet we're drawn to him it's not an easy gospel but within that even within the gospel sometimes I think we can think that God owes us God owes us and that comes across from what Peter says in response to Jesus saying we've left everything to follow you sorry Jesus says what's impossible with men is possible with God Peter replies in verse 28 we have left everything everything we have we've left to follow you there's a hint of pride in that is there not oh there's at least a hint of of saying to Jesus well Jesus I think you owe us because really we've left everything in order to follow you there's there is a there's a sniff of pride in what Peter saying I hope I'm not being unfair to him there that he's saying look look what we've given up as disciples Jesus to follow you you know we've done a lot better than the rich guy who's gonna we sad we're not like that we've given up everything to follow you and it's easy for us to think the same way as believers isn't it as

Christians God owes me big time I've given up the life that I wanted to live in order to serve him a kind of big brother syndrome from the prodigal son kind of reluctant service we see commitment and we see service in in negative terms or in the terms that I'm only doing it like because it's like bad medicine it must be good for me I'm only doing it and God owes me so much big time I'm so talented I'm so gifted and I'm giving it all to him isn't that brilliant that God owes us we serve him with our spiritual wallets open as it were saying Philip come on you owe me you owe me so that we serve maybe in the church or we obey God's word and we think every time we're doing it we're building up favor with him and we're putting notches there which make us more acceptable to him and he owes us so that if we can get enough that they'll accept us in the heaven or maybe we don't think quite like in crass terms like that but nonetheless we can't think God owes us now in Jesus response and I hope

I've not been unfair in saying this or I am being I am implying but it does seem to me he's still smiling if he's talking about a camel and a needle earlier on then it's as if he just goes straight into them as he's look like no one who has left home or wife or brothers or parents or children for the sake of the kingdom of God will fail to receive many times as much in this age and in the age to come eternal life he said with a smile you my friends as believers are overwhelmingly rich he said I I will not be in debt to you I will give you far more than you can ever repay I have given you far more it's as if we stand on a desert island gasping for fresh water with a thimbleful of water there and we're saying well I don't know if I can give this up to Jesus because I want it for myself and he wants to take it off us and lift us up and throw us into the ocean around this the desert island say this is all fresh water and it's all for you and it's teeming with life you can give up that thimbleful of water and be thrown into the provision I've made the ocean that I have made for you and so often we're clinging on to these things as it will God owes me so much and yet he said well if you would only see and allow your eyes to be opened to your incomparable wealth and blessing both in this life yes in this life and in the life to come family unity love belonging forgiveness hope answered prayer meaning direction vision guidance provision blessing and so it goes on and on and on what he has provided for us and if we begin to understand that and if we begin to see as as we spend our lives seeking to learn more we will never look for another type of saviour we will never look for another version of the gospel we'll never want to drift away from Christ and hold on to the thimbleful

again because we will see why he provides and we will begin to understand but it all involves a complete reversal of convention it involves us changing our thinking and stopping being lords of what we believe is right spiritually and allowing Jesus to speak and mold our minds and hearts and lives because the problem is and we come to the sixth thing here is that we so often feel and I know this in my own hand that we know better than Jesus and verses 31 to 34

Jesus tells them again that he's going to go up to Jerusalem to die and the third day will rise again and we're told the disciples did not understand any of this meaning was hidden from them they did not know what he was talking about the disciples knew better than Jesus this is the seven reference to the disciples already about his death it's the seventh reference to the fact that he's going to die and each time they're saying no he's not going to die and you Peter emphasized that didn't he say Lord you're not going to die another place he speaks about that their minds were closed and so the truth was hidden from them they thought there was a better way Jesus didn't need to go to the cross the cross was offensive to them and they tried to avoid it they weren't listening to what Jesus was saying they had a better idea and it's easy for us to think there must be a better way especially in the 21st century that we can avoid the cross that we don't need to go back to the cross and yet Galatians speak so clearly about the offense of the cross it is offensive to us naturally to depend on a crucified Savior crucified God but Jesus is making clear that it's good for us to not think that we do know better than him and that the it's the cross or nothing in terms of our understanding of the kingdom and how that kingdom is expressed and the healing and the belonging and the community and the love and the fellowship and the forgiveness that comes in the kingdom it comes through his finished work on the cross what he's achieved there where he is broken down the dividing wall of hostility between ourselves and between ourselves and God it is worked it's an effective means that's why Jesus promotes it so much