

Truly SEEKING Christ's Eternal Kingdom

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[0 : 0 0] Well, we're going to turn to the Word of God now, and we're going to read together in the New Testament in Luke's Gospel, chapter 18. We've been looking at these chapters 17 and 18 and 19, and a little section where the Lord Jesus, prior to his entry to Jerusalem, prior to going to the cross, is teaching his followers very clearly about what saving faith really means, and asking this question, are you really preparing for eternity?

And we saw last time what the coming of the kingdom of the Lord means in that second half of chapter 17. You might like to go back and read that shortly during the offering, but we're going to continue on at chapter 18 and verse 1, where Jesus told them a parable to the effect that they must always pray and not lose heart.

He said in a certain place there was a judge who neither feared God nor respected man. And there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, give me justice against my adversary.

For a while he refused, but afterward he said to himself, though I neither fear God nor respect man, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will give her justice so that she won't beat me down by her continual coming.

And the Lord said, hear what the unrighteous judge says. And will not God give justice to his elect who cry out to him day and night, though he delay long over them?

[1 : 4 3] I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth? He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and treated others with contempt.

Two men went into the temple to pray. One a Pharisee and the other a tax collector, a collaborator with the Roman occupying forces.

And the Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus, God, I thank you that I'm not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector.

I fast twice a week. I give tithes of all that I get. But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, God, be merciful to me, a sinner.

I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.

[3 : 0 3] Amen. And may God bless to us his word. Well, please do take your Bibles and turn with me to the passage we read together in Luke chapter 18.

Where, as I said, the subject that Jesus is dealing with is eternity and whether we're preparing for eternity and what real Christian faith means.

And here he is showing us that real Christian faith means truly seeking, truly seeking Christ's eternal kingdom.

Now, last time, you may recall, I quoted to you something from Jerry Lee Lewis. And just in case you're confused, I don't think Jerry Lee Lewis is a particularly great theologian.

Jerry Lee Lewis was generally regarded as the first wild man of rock and roll. But here is a conversation that he had with Elvis Presley, another great rock and roller.

- [4 : 06] Remember, he asked Elvis this question, Elvis, if you die, do you think you're going to heaven or hell? And Jerry Lee Lewis said that Elvis did not like that question at all.
- And he says of himself, you know, you worry. When you breathe your last, where are you going to go? Well, that is a vital question, isn't it?
- And it's not just wild men of rock and roll that ask it. Although, isn't it surprising that even they do ask that question? Can you be saved? And can you know that you will be saved, that you will be prepared for eternity?
- Prepared, that is, for the coming of the Lord Jesus as Lord over all creation. That is what Jesus speaks about so clearly and so solemnly in the latter part of chapter 17 of Luke's gospel.
- Look at verse 30 there. He's talking about the day when the Son of Man is revealed. And that is a day that Jesus says you must be prepared for because that is a day that is going to be encountered by every single human being.
- [5 : 22] He says it will be seen unmistakably by every eye, just like the lightning filling up the whole sky from east to west. And remember, he showed us that that day is going to be a great surprise for the world.
- It's going to be a great shock to many. And it's going to be sudden and swift. There will be no time when that day comes for seeking peace with God.
- Because that day will be the day of great separation. That's how Jesus ends, isn't it, there? One will be taken.
- Another will be swept away in the flood, in the fire of God's coming judgment. One will be swept away out of the picture for eternity. While others are left to rejoice in the king's return and in the glorious kingdom of life.
- And that separation, remember Jesus said, will be absolute. Even within families, within communities, within friendships.
- [6 : 27] Within marriages. And so the consequences of that day will be serious above all other things conceivable in our minds.
- And so Jesus is saying, are you prepared? And are you preparing for that day, for eternity? Can you be prepared?
- And therefore saved through the judgment of that day. And can you know that you will be saved? That you will be prepared for eternity? Well, the Bible's answer to those two questions is yes and yes.
- Look back to chapter 17, verse 19. Remember what Jesus said to the leper, the one leper who came back after he'd been healed. When he came back to acknowledge Jesus, to worship at Jesus' feet.
- He received then far, far more from Christ the Savior, didn't he? He'd already been healed of his leprosy along with all the others. But now, now Jesus says something extraordinary to him.
- [7 : 30] Do you see, your faith has, our version doesn't help us here. It says literally, your faith has saved you. Read through these chapters. Jesus is talking again and again about salvation, about being saved.
- It's the same word there as it is in chapter 18, verse 26. Where he asks the question, who then can be saved? Or in chapter 19, verse 10, where he says, the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.
- And your faith, he says, has saved you. To this man who has come and recognized who Jesus is and fallen at his feet and worshipped him.

But you see, the faith that saves you is far more, isn't it? Than just a kind of vague belief that Jesus is the answer to all of your problems in life.

Because all the other ten lepers had that same feeling. They all came to Jesus. Just as many talked about the kingdom of God to Jesus. But as we saw last time in Jesus' words at the end of chapter 17, many did not see, many did not perceive what his kingdom was really all about.

[8 : 45] And so they were not preparing for the day when he would be revealed publicly to the whole world as the Lord, as the judge of all the earth. So the faith that prepares for eternity, the faith that really saves on that day, is the faith that really sees now the truth about Jesus.

Even when it doesn't look like his kingdom is a glorious kingdom of power and might. It's a faith that really does heed God's warnings.

As the people of Noah's day did not. As the people in Lot's day did not. But real faith heeds those warnings because it truly understands what salvation really means when Jesus is talking about it.

And that's why it's willing, as verse 33 of chapter 17 says, it's willing to lose out in this life. In other words, it's willing to lose everything, if necessary, in order to keep life eternally on the day of Jesus.

It sees what salvation is really all about. Because it's not just a matter of seeing the truth and understanding it in your head about Christ's kingdom.

[10 : 02] It's a matter of doing the truth because you see it. It's about hearing my words and doing them. That's how Jesus put it back in Luke chapter 6 when he was talking about that story.

Remember the wise man building his house upon the rock. It's the one who hears my word and does them, acts upon them. That will build their life upon the rock that won't be swept away in that great day of coming judgment.

Jesus is always talking in that way, isn't he? Blessed are those who hear the word of God and do it, he says in Luke 11, 28. And keep on doing it because that is real saving faith.

That is what real faith is. Real faith truly sees the kingdom of God in Christ and therefore it truly seeks that kingdom above all other things in life.

True Christian faith really perceives the meaning of God's eternal kingdom and so it relentlessly pursues the mercy of God's eternal kingdom in Christ.

[11 : 05] It sees the meaning and so it pursues his mercy. And that's what Jesus is going on to talk about here in chapter 18, verses 1 to 14.

The words that come immediately after his laying out what his coming in glory will be like. So first of all, look at verses 1 to 8 where Jesus is emphasizing that real faith, real faith that prepares for the coming glory of Christ is persistent faith.

It perseveres. It doesn't give up. Even in the face of perplexity. Even in the face of suffering. Even when it seems that God isn't answering the very prayers that he himself commands us to pray.

Let's read it again. He said, In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor respected man. There was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, Give me justice against my adversary.

And for a while he refused. But afterwards he said to himself, Though I neither fear God nor respect man, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will give her justice.

[12 : 17] So that she will not beat me down by her continual coming. And the Lord said, Hear what the unrighteous judge says. And will not God give justice to his elect who cry to him day and night?

Although he delay long over them. I think that's a better way of reading that there really all as one sentence. I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, Will he find faith on earth?

For the ungodly, for the faithless, Jesus' words about his coming in glory are a real warning, aren't they? A warning of looming disaster. Because it will mean the destruction of all the enemies of Christ.

But by contrast, you see, for those of faith, Who in this world often will be scorned, Often will be ill-treated for their faith in Christ.

And feel very weak and feel very vulnerable. For them, what Jesus is, is a wonderful word of comfort. Because it will mean for them, Deliverance from all enemies at long last.

[13 : 31] All evil will at last be punished. All wrongs will at last be put right. And there will be real justice. That's what real justice is, isn't it?

All wrongs being put right. So often, what we call justice in this world, What passes for justice is really only half justice. So if a murderer kills somebody, And then is caught and is punished, It's only half justice, isn't it?

The wrong has not been put right. The dead person is not brought back to life. The life is not recovered. It's not full justice. We long for the day of full justice, Full restoration.

We long for absolute and full, complete justice. For every wrong in this sad world, To be put completely and utterly right. And among Luke's readers would have been many, Many vulnerable, suffering Christians, Persecuted, longing for relief, Crying out, How long, O Lord?

How long until we're delivered from all of our enemies? That's the cry of the faithful of God all through history. You read it so often in the Bible. And there'll be many Christians in the world today, This very day, Meeting like we're meeting, And crying out to God in those terms, Weren't there?

[14 : 54] How long, O Lord? Until we're delivered from the oppressor. I don't know if you did see that report, About persecution in the world. And in some parts, The level of persecution against Christians, Is rightly classed as genocide.

Christian populations decimated, Literally, In some parts of the Middle East. Look what happened in Sri Lanka, Just a few weeks ago.

And so on. That's very different for us, In the relative freedom, And the ease in which we live. Sometimes we can talk about being persecuted as Christians.

We have no right to use that term, I don't think. Cold-shouldered, yes. Things getting a little harder, yes. Being opposed, yes. But not that.

And yet we often find ourselves crying out in the same way, Don't we? How long, O Lord? How long till you bring an end to the relentless struggles, That I have in life? Because we all have to struggle, don't we?

[15 : 54] In living in a world that is under the curse. A fallen world. A world of sin. A world of aging. A world of decay. A world of death. We have to work.

By the sweat of our brow. And yes, there's much to fulfill. But there's also a great deal to stress, isn't there? And we say, How long, O Lord? And we cry the same cry, don't we, About the struggles of our own sinfulness.

How long, O Lord? Till at last this struggle is no more. And how long until my adversary, the evil one, Is no more, And can't stir up within me The very things that I seek to suppress by your grace and your mercy, And makes me Sin And condemn myself.

How long until we know that deliverance from a still suffering world, And from our still sinful bodies? That's the cry of every real Christian, isn't it? Paul tells us, the apostle, We are saved in hope.

And in that great chapter in Romans 8, Often called by people the victory chapter, You read it, It's a chapter full of spirit-filled Christians, Groaning, says Paul, Longing For the release That is not yet, But is to come On the day of our Lord Jesus Christ, When these bodies at last Will no longer groan, When the whole creation will no longer groan, But will be liberated In the great redemption Of all God's people.

[17 : 30] And when we live in a world under the curse, When we live with struggles, With battles, With groaning, We can feel like giving up, can't we? Because we start to think, Well, God doesn't seem to be answering my prayers.

God tells us to pray, Thy kingdom come. And we say it so often here In our version of the Lord's praise, Thy kingdom come. The reign of Jesus. Curse ended. Death defeated.

And he doesn't seem to answer. Or it seems, It seems, doesn't it, That the Lord is very, very slow To hear and to answer our prayers. Do you feel that?

I don't think it can be only me That feels that. But I do feel that. The Lord is so slow To answer these prayers.

But the apostle Peter says to us, No, you're wrong. It's not so. Do you remember? In 2 Peter chapter 3, God is not slow To fulfill his promise. It's like God is patient towards you.

[18 : 40] Because he doesn't want people to perish. He wants them to repent. He wants them to have faith. He wants them to be prepared For that day of his coming. Because when he does come, That's the end.

It's too late then For mercy. It's a swift judgment. It's a final judgment. But God is patient, says Peter. God is merciful.

He's not slack. He will answer. And he will come To bring deliverance. To bring absolute justice. So don't give up.

Real faith is persistent. Real faith perseveres. And friends, That is exactly just what Jesus is saying here By way of this vivid parable. He's saying even if a wicked, unjust judge Gives justice To this widow's patient cry, How much more will God?

He gives answer And he gives justice to this widow For all the wrong reasons. Because verse 5, you see, He's saying in Glasgow speak, That old woman's day in Maheden.

[19 : 52] So I'll give her this To make her go away. And how much more, says Jesus, Will God, who is not an unjust judge But is a loving father, How much more will he give justice To his elect, To his precious people Chosen in Christ Before the foundation of the world?

How much more Will your father answer your prayers? Just like back in Luke chapter 11, Do you remember when he says, You are wicked fathers, You are evil fathers, And you know how to give good gifts To your children.

How much more Your perfect father in heaven? And it may seem, Verse 7 is true, isn't it? It may seem That he delays long.

But remember what Peter says, No, he's not slow. He will answer. He'll answer speedily. He will answer just as fast As his vast and patient mercy Will allow him to answer.

It's a word of great comfort, isn't it? It's a great encouragement Not to give up, Not to lose heart, Not to lose faith In the promise of our God.

[21 : 04] Keep praying, says Jesus, Keep praying, Thy kingdom come. That's what real faith does. Prayer is just the audible form Of our faith.

And to keep praying Just means to keep trusting Jesus, Doesn't it? Real faith is persistent. It perseveres to the end Because it keeps looking to God.

Jesus says it very plainly, Those who endure to the end Will be saved. And we can endure to the end Because he promises He will not let us down.

He will give justice. But, as the apostle reminds us In Hebrews chapter 10, We need endurance So that when we have done The will of God We may receive what's promised From God whom we trust.

You see, real faith Is all about trusting. Trusting in his coming deliverance Not trusting in our past decisions About God, for example.

[22 : 14] Keeping trusting God's promise. And that's a challenge in it. Look at verse 8. Jesus says, Will he find that kind of real faith When he comes?

We need to persevere in faith To the end. But this is such a comfort To spur us to faith and prayer Because Jesus promises He will give justice to his elect.

We don't need to fear. We can trust The word of our Lord Jesus Christ. We can have rock solid assurance Of that coming salvation. Even in the darkest days.

But real faith is persistent. It perseveres to the end Because it trusts The Lord Jesus does not lie to us. And he will never let us down.

And of that we can be Completely assured. But on the other hand You see, we need to be careful Don't we? Because assurance Is very different From arrogance As far as faith is concerned.

[23 : 21] There's a great difference Between the assurance Of persistent prayer That arises from righteous faith And the arrogance Of presumptuous prayer That comes from Self-righteous unbelief.

The sort of thing that says Well, I know I'm saved Because I went forward At a meeting once. I know I'm saved Because I professed faith And was baptized. So it doesn't really matter What I do Or whether I'm faithful God must be faithful to me.

No, no, no Says Jesus. That's exactly why Jesus signs a warning Then in verses 9 to 14 Against exactly That kind of arrogance You see To those who trusted In themselves That they're righteous.

And it's a stark reminder To everybody That real faith Can never ever Harbor that kind of pride. Let's read these verses again.

He also told this parable To some who trusted In themselves That they were righteous And treated others With content. Two men went to the temple To pray One a Pharisee Religious man The other a tax collector Collaborator with the enemy.

[24 : 29] And the Pharisee Standing by himself Prayed thus God I thank you I'm not like other men Extortioners Unjust Adulterers Or even like this tax collector I fast twice a week I give tithes Of all that I get But the tax collector Standing afar off Wouldn't even lift up His eyes to heaven Beat his breast Saying God Be merciful to me A sinner And I tell you Says Jesus This is the man Who went to his house Justified Rather than the other For everyone Who exalts himself Will be humbled And the one Who humbles himself Will be exalted What's Jesus Telling us here?

The real faith Which alone Can prepare us For the coming of Christ Is not just Persistent faith It's always Penitent faith Humbly penitent Even as it persists Right to the end See when we When we cry out To God for justice Even when others Have wronged us badly We cry out to God But it tends to make us Feel doesn't it As though we're in the right As though As though we somehow Are superior To the other person And the thing is You see Often that might be the case If you're not a thief If you've never robbed anybody And somebody else Is a thief And they've robbed you And maybe robbed you Repeatedly Then the truth is You very probably Are a better person Than that person The trouble is To be a better person To be a more righteous man Than him Might not be saying Very much at all Mightn't it And that way of thinking Can so easily blind us

To something that's Far far more important And that is God's measure of goodness Not our measure of goodness And we're blind To that vital matter Well then we're In very great danger Because the sinner Who's in the greatest danger Is the one Who doesn't repent Because he doesn't think He needs to repent And that's what This parable drives home to us You see Two men Go to pray Well many people pray Many people pray Persistently But the thing is It's not just The motion of prayer It's the message Of your prayer That really reveals The truth of your heart To God And this Pharisee No doubt Was a very good man Verse 11 He was not an extortioner He was not unjust He was not adulterer And above all He was not A thieving Dishonest tax collector Robbing God's people On behalf of an occupying power Like this man Who he saw alongside him Praying to God as well And very probably

He looked at this man And had been fleeced By this man Many times before And had all sorts Of reasons to resent him And it's very difficult Isn't it If you come into church And you look along the pew And you see somebody Who has deeply wronged you Many times And there you are Both together Singing from the same hymn book How does it feel?

Or you see somebody Who you know Has got a very dirty Background in his life And has done all kinds Of wrong things And here he is Along with you Saying the same prayers In the same church It's not actually Very easy is it?

[27 : 52] And this Pharisee Judged himself You see By looking along At his fellow worshipper And then understandably Perhaps Looking down on him And so of course He was going to Come out well And he trusted in himself That he was not An adulterer And an extortioner Or a tax collector He was far more righteous Than this chap Along the pew But the tax collector Verse 13 You see He stood afar off He stood at a distance From everything Like the lepers Back in chapter 17 He couldn't look up Why?

Well because He saw himself Not by the standard Of other people But he saw himself According to God's standard And he knew very well Where that left him Verse 13 Beating his breast Which is a very vivid Vivid way of saying I've got nothing To plead I've got nothing To my credit I've got nothing To claim I don't deserve A place in your kingdom Do I?

And God says No you don't And he says I've only got my sin And my sin Will condemn me So Lord My only hope Is that you Could be merciful To someone like me And look at what Jesus says In verse 14 This was the one Who went home Justified That is assured Of the vindication Of God Before the whole world On that great day Of judgment Not The other man Both of the men Were sinners And indeed Very likely This man Was a far worse Sinner than the Pharisee In moral terms But Though one of these Men was proud And trusted in himself And the other Was penitent And threw himself Completely On the mercy Of God And so Says Jesus He was the only One of these two men Who could be saved

Both of them Needed forgiveness But there was only One of those men Who was capable Of receiving forgiveness Because he knew He needed it And he cried out To God for it And you see Proud hearts And proud hands Cannot take hold Of God's forgiveness Even if they're Very theologically Educated hearts And hands Even if they're Very theologically Correct And sound Hearts and hands Perhaps the kind Of hearts and hands That can wax Eloquent All about the Doctrines Of God's grace No, no Only Penitent hearts And penitent hands However much They know Or understand Can actually Receive The grace And mercy Of God And so Jesus says Again As he says Repeatedly Through Luke's Gospel At the end Of verse 14 Do you see Everyone who Exalts himself Will be humbled Will be brought Down Or to use the Language of Chapter 17 Will be taken

Away Will be destroyed Swept away Out Of the kingdom Of God's blessing Separated forever From the presence Of the king And from the Perfection of his Kingdom of life But do you see The one who Humbles himself And only that One He will be Exalted on that Day when the Son of man Is revealed Real faith The faith that Prepares for the Coming of the Lord Jesus Is persistent Faith but it's Always Always Truly penitent Faith Never Pride faith Faith whose Persistent Prayer is God Be merciful To me A sinner Like the Lepers Jesus Master Have mercy On me True Christian faith Relentlessly Pursues The mercy

[31 : 59] Of God's Eternal kingdom In Christ So friends Look at Look at Verse 8 There again In Jesus Question When the Son of man Comes Will he Find Faith This kind Of real Christian faith In the world Will he Find it In this Church In the People in This room This morning Faith that Sees That is That perceives Just how Great the Issues Really are Just what Salvation in Christ Really is Escape from That eternal Separation from Christ and from Life itself And therefore Faith that Seeks that Pursues Relentlessly That salvation The only way That it can Be found In faith that Is truly Tenitent That's humbled By the weight Of sin And yet Is heartened By the Wonderful mercy Of God In Christ Faith that's

Persistent Longing Longing for His appearing Praying Thy kingdom Come Even as we Proclaim that Mercy of his Kingdom to The whole world The mercy of the One that desires That none Should perish But should rather Repent And find life In him Are we Prepared Ourselves And are we Preparing others For the Coming glory Of the Lord Jesus It's important Isn't it That we Challenge Ourselves That we Ask ourselves These questions As those Who profess Christ As a Christian Church That professes To be a Gospel Church Are we Teaching this Real Christian faith So easy Isn't it For all I think About Christian Faith to be Focused on The present So we Begin to Think that Great faith And people With great Faith Is the Faith that's Rewarded Now

With things That God Seems to Give now But Jesus Says Jesus says Great faith Is faith That perseveres Even when We don't Seem to Get the Answers That we Want Now In answer To the Prayers That God Tells us To pray It's faith That endures To the End It's faith That is Focused Completely On the Coming of The Lord Jesus Are we Teaching that Real Christian Faith In our Meetings In our Small groups In our Study one to One In our Sharing the Gospel With other People Real Christian Faith And are We Modeling that Real Christian Faith To one Another And to The Whole World According to Jesus You see Great Faith Is faith Faith that Will make Us humble Faith that Makes us Very Conscious Of our Own Sins Not Not

Assured At all Of our Righteousness Before God Except By his Grace and Mercy alone And nothing Else What would Be the Signs Do you Think Of a Church Full of Great Faith According To Jesus Of Christians Full of Great Faith Well There'd Be great Humility Wouldn't There Not Great Pride Couldn't Possibly Be a Church Or a Christian Full of Pride In their Theological Knowledge Or Proud Of Their Church Practice Or Proud Of Their Christian Pedigree Or Heritage Or Any Of These Other Things Could It A Church Full Of Great Humility A Church Full Of People Who Love Above All Things The Mercy Of God Because They Know It It Is Only By The Mercy And Grace Of God That They Stand And Therefore A Church Full Of People Who So Love And Cherish God's Mercy They Love And Cherish Showing That Mercy To Others And

Value Others Every Other In The Church Because They Know That The Only Reason They Stand Is For The Same Reason That We Stand For The Sheer Mercy Of A Loving God And Of A Savior Who Gave His Own Blood That We Rebels Should Become His So Is That Our Christian Life Yours And Mine That Our Church Is That What Others Who Know Us And See Us Will See Of Us And Think Of Us And Believe Of Us People Full Of Humility Not Pride A People Full Of Mercy Not Harshness Towards Sin And A People Longing Above All For The Day Of The Lord Jesus Not Longing For The Prizes The Goals The Praise Of This World Will The Son Of Man Find Faith Like That Here If

[37 : 04] He Were To Come This Day Well May It Be So Let's Pray Together Almighty And Merciful God By Whose Gift Alone It Comes That Thy People Do Unto The True And Laudable Service Grant We Beseech Thee That We May So Faithfully Serve Thee In This Life That We Fail Not To Attain Thy Heavenly Promises Through Jesus Christ Our Lord Amen