

Luke Study 11 - Salvation Blockers

18:9-19:10

Introduction

Jesus is almost at the end of his journey to Jerusalem. He is travelling there 'to be taken up to heaven' (9:41), but not before he has died an awful, humiliating death (9:22, 44; 18:31-33). Why is Jesus going to Jerusalem to die this way? To save people. As he says at the end of one of today's readings, 'The Son of Man came to seek and save the lost' (19:9).

But as we have already seen, not everyone finds this salvation easy to accept. They experience 'salvation blockers' that stop them - or try to stop them - receiving salvation. Why is this? And what are these blockers? And most importantly, how can people get round them? That's what this next section of *Luke* is all about. It outlines three 'salvation blockers' - self-righteousness, peer-pressure, and money-love - but also how Jesus can overcome all of them.

Read Luke 18:9-14

1. How does the Pharisee think of himself and pray?
2. How does the tax collector think of himself and pray?
3. Of the two of them, who does Jesus say 'went home justified'? Why?
4. Where might we see this sort of 'salvation blocker' in modern life? In our own life?

The Pharisee clearly thinks of himself as someone acceptable to God (after all, Jesus tells this parable to 'some who were confident of their own righteousness,' who the Pharisee obviously represents). He is a good man in himself (he both fasts and gives generously). And he is good in comparison to others: he's not like robbers, evil doers, adulterers, or tax collectors. Because of all this, when he comes to pray, he doesn't feel the need to ask God for anything, just thank God for making him such a great guy.

The tax collector on the other hand thinks of himself as someone totally unacceptable to God. Not even able to look up when he prays, he simply beats his chest and asks God for mercy.

But who goes home right before God? The tax collector. Why? For just as Jesus has said before (14:11), only the humble will be exalted (18:14). That is, compared to God, no one is righteous, and so only those who know that fact - and know to ask forgiveness as a result - can be right before God. The first 'salvation blocker' Jesus deals with here is self-righteousness. And the antidote is knowing that no one deserves righteousness, and so everyone needs mercy.

But just because we all *need* mercy, does God *want to give it*? That's another salvation blocker for some, and so another set of stories answers the question.

Read Luke 18:15-17

5. How do the disciples treat the children and their parents?
6. How does Jesus treat the children?
7. What is it about children that makes Jesus say 'for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these?'

Read Luke 18:35-43

8. How do the leaders of the crowd treat the blind man?
9. How does Jesus treat the blind man?

Read Luke 19:1-10

10. How do 'all the people' react to Zacchaeus' new friendship with Jesus?
11. How does Jesus treat Zacchaeus?
12. What do all three stories - about the children, the blind man, and Zacchaeus - have in common? What do they tell us about what can stop people coming to Jesus, and how Jesus overcomes that?
13. Where might we see this sort of 'salvation blocker' in modern life? In our own life?

A second salvation blocker in this part of *Luke* is other people: people who think that someone is too small, too annoying, or too sinful for Jesus to want to have anything to do with them. But Jesus says, 'I do want to have something to do with them! Bring the children to me; bring the blind man to me; let me be your guest, Zacchaeus.' And the same is true for us. There will always be people who tell others that they are too small, too annoying, or too sinful for Jesus. But Jesus says: no, he wants to save people, whatever their situation. That is, not only do we *need* salvation, but Jesus *wants* to give it to us.

But can we receive it? Given our attachment to sin, can we actually let go of it to accept God's salvation? That's a question one more story answers.

Read Luke 18:18-30

14. What does the ruler want? (v.18)
15. What does Jesus tell him? (vv.19-22)
16. How does the ruler react? Why? (v.23)
17. Where might we see this sort of 'salvation blocker' in modern life? In our own life?
18. What does this prompt everyone around the ruler to ask? (v.26)
19. What does Jesus tell them? (vv.27-30)

A certain ruler asks Jesus what he must do to receive eternal life. Jesus tells him that he must give everything he owns to the poor. This makes the ruler very sad, because he is very rich. Jesus has uncovered what the ruler loves most - money - and asked him to give it up to follow him. This is the ruler's salvation blocker, and Jesus says it makes it very hard for those affected by it to be saved (v.24). But that doesn't mean salvation - even for the rich, who have so much invested in this world - is impossible. God can make it possible. And the disciples are the proof: unlike the ruler, they have been willing to give up everything to follow Jesus, and will be saved as a result. Though it is impossible in our own power, it is possible in God's power to let go of the things that would stop us from following Jesus and to be saved. We *need* to be saved, but God *wants* us to be saved, and *can make it happen*.