

Mark 10:13–31

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[0:00] Mark chapter 10, verses 13-31. And they were bringing children to him that he might touch them.

! And the disciples rebuked them. But when Jesus saw it, he was indignant and said to them, Let the children come to me. Do not hinder them.

For to such belongs the kingdom of God. Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child, shall not enter it. And he took them in his arms and blessed them, laying his hands on them.

And as he was setting out on his journey, a man ran up and knelt before him. And asked him, Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?

And Jesus said to him, Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone. You know the commandments. Do not murder. Do not commit adultery.

[1:01] Do not steal. Do not bear false witness. Do not defraud. Honor your father and mother.

And he said to him, Teacher, all these I have kept from my youth.

And Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said to him, You lack one thing. Go. Sell all that you have and give to the poor.

And you will have treasure in heaven. And come, follow me. Disheartened by the saying, he went away sorrowful. For he had great possessions.

And Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God. And the disciples were amazed at his words.

But Jesus said to them again, Children, how difficult it is to enter the kingdom of God. It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.

[2:04] And they were exceedingly astonished and said to him, Then who can be saved? Jesus looked at them and said, With man it is impossible, but not with God.

For all things are possible with God. Peter began to say to him, See, we have left everything and followed you. Jesus said, Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands for my sake and for the gospel.

Who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time. Houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands with persecutions.

And in the age to come, eternal life. But many who are first will be last. And the last first. This is the word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God. You may be seated. Some of you may be aware that when it came time for grad school, Lisa and I left the Chicago area and moved to New England.

[3:17] We had never lived in New England before. We found ourselves in the city of Boston and ran into what was a New England accent.

A strong verbal cue that sounded different than the Chicago area in which we had grown up. It was at that time that I heard a joke.

I'm going to give it a run, even though you know I'm not a really good joke teller. The joke of an affluent couple with an infant in the rear car seat driving north from Boston into Maine to explore the beauty of the fall colors.

They wanted to see Acadia National Park. They got lost along the way. On this winding road, they see a manor. That's an indigenous New Englander, a lobsterman, sitting on his front porch.

And they roll up alongside him in what might have been their Range Rover or their Tesla new vehicle.

[4:32] Maybe even a Tahoe Premier with dual exhaust. And they roll down the window and they call up to the manor on the platform, the old codger. And they basically call out the question, Can

you tell us how to get to Acadia National Park from here?

The old manor said, sure. Well, now, just go straight here along this road. And then you'll, no, no. I'll tell you what. Turn around. Go back to the pass. And, no, no, that won't help. After a moment of quiet, he finally called back to the affluent couple with the child in the back seat and said, Well, I guess you can't get there from here.

And that was the joke. You can't get there from here. Welcome to a similar moment in Mark's Gospel.

Last week, we saw a question to Jesus about how you get out of a marriage. This week, you're going to see Jesus provide an answer on how you get to heaven from here.

[5:50] And just a spoiler alert. Only divine mercy. With the initiating, saving power of God.

How are you and I able to get home from here? The point is made in two strikingly different ways. As you heard the scripture read this morning, there are really two stories that are sitting side by side, aren't there? Hope you have a Bible or the Word of God on your phone where you can take a look at it.

Two different ways of answering that same question. How do we get to heaven from here? These are visual aids to the disciples' education.

There's a stark difference that exists, isn't there, between a young child and a young man who has it all. But those are the two angles of the text.

[6:55] And standing side by side, they kind of concretize the main idea on how you get to heaven from here.

First, without becoming like a child, and by that Jesus will mean depending on God completely, you can't get to heaven from here.

Second, without renouncing all self-reliance, and I mean all. I mean I surrender all. You can't get to heaven from here.

So, take a look. Verses 13 to 16. How do we get to heaven? How do we enter the kingdom of God? How do we get a down payment on it in the land of the living before all the living die and see him face to face? 13 to 16, the header over it, simply this, by becoming like a child.

[8:05] Verse 13, And they were bringing children to him, that he might touch them, and the disciples rebuked them. But when Jesus saw it, he was indignant and said to them, Let the little children come to me.

Do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God. Notice, there's a positive and a negative sitting side by side, which provides the electric voltage of, for such is the kingdom. Let the little children come positively. Do not forbid them negatively, because for such belong the kingdom of God. Becoming like a child.

So, now let's ask, what is it about a child that Jesus would have us identify with? What does he want from you? In what way are you and I to become like a child?

Is it in that infants are adorable? Does God somehow look upon your characteristics and go, oh, isn't she sweet?

[9:14] Well, let me just be clear, as one who raised five children and now has 12 grandchildren, not all children are adorable.

Let's be just straight up on that. They're not all adorable. Some come on out looking like Winston Churchill at age 80.

That's just the way it is. It's rare when you hold an infant and go, this child is beautiful. Is it that somehow God foresees that you have innate potential?

Did he somehow in eternity past foresee his mind into the future, and when it glanced down upon you, he said, now that one has got the stuff of giftedness about them.

One day, when asked to choose, they will choose me. There's some innateness to their potential. No, it's not your potential.

[10:30] He didn't look on you in that way. You didn't possess it. You know, my dad was a basketball coach, 93 now, still vertical.

He used to say there was one word he would take out of the dictionary had he the opportunity to do so. It was the word potential.

You either are or you aren't. If not that we're adorable, if not that he saw some innate potential, could it be that he just looked at a child in regard to their innocence?

Well, if you've ever had children or been around one for any length of time, no. No, it's not innocence.

In fact, even David in the scripture says, I'm conceived in my sin. The children don't learn to disobey authorities and parents and God simply by some kind of external factors.

[11:34] No, it's an internal disposition wherein from the moment we are born into this world, we are not innocent but guilty.

It just takes a while for it to emerge. It's not that we're adorable. It's not that we have innate potential. It's not that we're innocent. It's not related to your upbringing.

That if you're just like a little child whose parents are in the front seat and behind the wheel and trying to guide you to Acadia National Park where you see the full fall colors of heaven's glory one day, as great as your parents may or may not have been, with all of their hopes for you, all their aspirations for you, all of their bringing you along, nurturing you in the faith, it's still, still not your upbringing.

It's none of these things that he would have us identify with. So what is it that he would have us identify with? Well, he would have us identify with the fact that they are absolutely dependent on him.

A child, an infant in a rear car seat is absolutely dependent on the parent to get them in, to take them out, to feed them, to change them, to clothe them, to raise them.

[13:04] It's the helplessness of a child. It's the incapable nature of a child.

It's their utter dependence on another to not only give them life, but then to sustain their life.

Those are some hard truths. How do you get in? You have to become like a child. You have to consider yourself to be absolutely, completely dependent on a divine act of mercy to bring me, to regenerate me, to what they would talk about in the old day, to make us born again, to give me a second birth.

You know, there was a preacher in England who journeyed across the ocean about seven times to this country in the 18th century by the name of George Whitefield.

He preached in abundance of 18,000 sermons. But they go back and they look at him and it wasn't more than five sermons, 3,000 of the 18,000 that he is preaching on, you must be born again.

[14:26] You must have a second birth. He actually writes a sermon called The Necessity of the Second Birth. And what was birthed under his ministry when he was telling people, like I'm telling you, that you are absolutely helpless to get there from here without an act of divine mercy intervening, calling, coming, arranging, regenerating, justifying, all of this.

salvation coming from God. That is the characteristic of childlike faith. And so let me ask you, how are you about receiving?

That's the word there, isn't it? Truly I say to you, verse 13, 15, whoever does not receive the kingdom like a child. How good are you?

I know some of you are like, oh, I'm a good gift giver. How are you when it comes to receiving gifts? Some people feel unworthy to receive gifts.

And I'm talking as small as, you know, a cup of coffee after church, let alone something like eternal life. Oh, no.

[15:54] Have you ever said this to someone? Oh, no. You shouldn't have done that for me. I'm on unworthiness. Some of us are unwilling to receive gifts.

No, I can't possibly take that from you. Believe me, I'll pick one up for myself. See, I don't want to owe anybody anything. I want to be a self-made man.

And I'll worship my creator. We're not unworthy. We're just unwilling. Pride. We don't take things from other people. Well, I should say it differently.

We don't receive things from other people. Unworthiness. Unworthiness. Unworthiness.

Unwillingness. Some people are just unaccustomed to it. Like, it just blows me away. And so we view all of our relational gift-giving with one another in a very transactional way.

Are you like this? Oh, wow. They had us over for dinner, so we must have them. Oh, wow. She gave me this. I have to remember to give her that.

[17:03] We're so unaccustomed to it. It isn't that we say, oh, no, you shouldn't have done that for me. Or, oh, no, I can't possibly take that from you.

It's, well, then, at least let me do this for you. And when it comes to God and eternal life, you just need to know now, you've got no gift you can give him.

And a transactional level. So don't try. Friday, I was officiating a memorial service for a family friend. And it was a triumphant service. I don't want you to get the wrong idea because I changed the inflection of my voice there. This was an 84-year-old godly woman, and we were celebrating the saving power of God in her life.

And as pastors do, I did. I took the family of four daughters, and some of them with spouses, and their children, which were then the grandchildren of the one we were memorializing.

[18:15] And then there were 25 great-grandchildren, and we all stood in a room outside the auditorium for the service, and we had some directions on how we were going to enter, and we prayed.

And I had a bunch of these little lifesavers in my pocket. I picked them up, and I had a handful of them, and for some reason, I just said, I've got these lifesavers.

If anyone feels like you would like one before we go in, just come and just grab one. Not an adult in the room moved, but about eight or nine little children had no hesitation at all.

In fact, more children now crowding around me looking for lifesavers than lifesavers I had to give out. You see, what is it about the child? The adults.

Not worthy of that. I'm unwilling to take that. Believe me, I got my own breath mints, pastor. I'm not accustomed to that. If I take his breath mint, I'm going to have to do something for him later.

[19:27] But the child? Eager, unashamed, hand out. May I receive the gift. That's what it takes to get into heaven.

Now, of the other three, I think unworthiness is the characteristic that, for some, puts you closest to the kingdom.

I actually understand it, but I'm not worthy of that. I know who I am, you say to yourself. I know my history. I know where I've been.

I know where I've done. There's no way even the most righteous acts about me are going to warrant an ability for God to love me. But the scriptures actually differ from you on this.

How deep, how deep, how deep, how deep the Father's love for us. That he would take a wretch like me and make me his treasure.

[20:36] If you've ever felt the unworthiness, I've always been encouraged by this poem by a guy by the name of George Herbert. He writes, Love bade me welcome, yet my soul drew back, guilty of dust and sin.

But quick-eyed love observing me grow slack from my first entrance in drew nearer to me sweetly questioning if I lacked anything.

A guest I answered worthy to be here. Love said, you shall be he. I? The unkind? Ungrateful?

Ah, my dear, I cannot look on thee. Love took me by the hand and smiling did reply, who made the eyes but I?

Truth, Lord, but I have marred them. Let my shame go where it doth deserve. And know you not, says love, who bore the blame?

[21:48] My dear, then I will serve. You must sit down, says love, and taste my meat. And so I did. Sit and eat.

That's right where we find ourselves this morning, isn't it? With the Lord's table yet before us?

Unworthy, yet love. Says come, open your hand, receive by faith the finished work of Christ, and be his child.

Be born again. Let the little children come. Do not forbid them. For such belong the kingdom of heaven.

God, can I just say one more thing on this infancy thing before I turn the corner? It's just struck me this week. When Luke is writing about this passage, same kind of passage, but his own language, he doesn't use the phrase little children at first.

He uses the word that would refer to infants. infants. And in chapter 1 of Luke, he actually uses that same word for infant to refer to one who was still in the womb.

[23:11] Now, what does this mean? What does it take to get into heaven? It takes God to give you birth and then to sustain your life.

Oh, may there be some today who begin to think, God, is this true? Can it happen for me? And if so, what do I do?

I would say what you need to do is just do like an infant does. Start crying out. That's what a baby does. Helpless unless someone else comes to their aid.

This is why when Whitefield was preaching and what became the awakening, the great awakening, was he was preaching to people who were in the land of the living but realized that spiritually they'd been dead.

And now they're suddenly hearing that they had to be born again and they begin to cry out, God, help me. It's the same thing that happened in Mark chapter 1 when, I think it was a leper cries out, son of David.

[24 : 26] if you're willing, you can make me clean. And Jesus says, I am willing, be clean. And he says the same thing to you. He's willing, stands ready.

Oh, that we would be like children then and come. Well, let me move because there are two contrasting pictures in the text. What does it take to get there from here?

Becoming like a child? But put differently, when you begin to look at this, the young man who had everything, he has to renounce self-reliance.

Notice the way the question is put to Jesus there in verse 17 and following. Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?

See, the activity of doing is upon us. Achievement. What do I need to get done here to get there?

[25 : 38] Jesus, of course, says, well, you've got to keep the law. Sounds like you're talking about what good you've got to do. You sound like you're a pretty good guy, actually.

You even know the law and the commandments and you're trying to do it from your, you're giving it your best run, is what the guy says. I've given it my best run from when I was a little kid till now.

Jesus, of course, is going to question this very, very dramatically. The entrance into the kingdom is not given on account of your goodness. Now, the fact that these are both in play in both of these passages is striking.

Look again at verse 15 with the child. Unless he receives the kingdom of God like a child, he shall not enter it. But then, verse 23, how difficult for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God. Verse 24, it's difficult to enter the kingdom of God. Both these contrasting stories are dealing with the same point. How do I get in? And what he says to one is, you've got to become like a child, completely dependent.

[26 : 46] But for those of you who are older now, who have a hard time relating to children, who might even not like children, you're like, I've been behind the wheel for long enough now to make my way through the world.

Yeah, you? He says, well, you've got to be, you've got to relinquish all your own self-reliance.

You've got no chance of driving your way in through the gate at Acadia National Park.

You're not going to see the gate of the fall colors in heaven on the basis of what you're doing. See, this is the whole drama of this story with this man.

Now, notice what Jesus says to him in verse 20. He looks at him, he loves him, and he says the one thing he's got to do, you've got to go sell everything you've got and give to the poor and follow me. Now, it's not a complete renunciation of everything to the vow of poverty to get into heaven. Even if he had sold everything and followed Jesus, it wouldn't have been on the basis of him entering into an impoverished state.

[27 : 51] I mean, the other places in the Bible would be equally clear that you can have all the money and you can give it away to other people, but if you don't have love, you're gaining nothing. You're not gaining by even your goodness of that kind of thing.

Let me put it simply, you're not going to buy your way in. What he's trying to say is he's putting his finger on the one thing that keeps the man from it.

His wealth made it difficult. Well, what is it about wealth? Self-reliance. Think about it. It's just as clear as can be.

The rich man needs to transfer the portfolio of his trust into an account that is entirely what you would call a trust fund, a faith fund that God can do something impossible because with me it's impossible.

Can you see the contrast? A child, what does it take to get in? Just open your hand and receive it. from those of us who got our hands full, what's it take to get in?

[29 : 10] Just empty your hands of all your reliance for it. Your morality, he says to this man, won't get you across the threshold of heaven.

Your wealth will not even tempt the keeper of the gate of heaven to jar it open for you. Your education does not give you access through the wrought iron gates to even see the quadrangles of

heaven that are beyond.

Your paternal, your maternal bloodlines will not secure you through the gate even if they go in before you. It is absolutely critical that every adult with anything that we would call upon for ourselves to bring to him to be able to say I'm relinquishing it all.

I've got no trust in this. You can't get me there from here. In other words, nothing but a divine act of initiating mercy.

Nothing but God deciding to come and enter into your life through the full satisfaction of his son by faith can get you here. He's not sitting up there in eternity past going oh you're going to get faith one day so I'm going to give you faith.

[30:41] No, he's first going to regenerate your soul. He has to actually plant a seed in your heart that takes it from being dead to alive so that being alive you can respond in faith actively.

So this is why we plead then with God for salvation. This is why we preach for salvation for how will they believe if the word actually isn't open to them.

This is why we pray for the salvation of others like Jairus in this very gospel who came to Jesus with one that needed him and said Lord you can help my 12 year old daughter.

See we're pleading with him for ourselves. We're preaching so that people actually understand and are awakened. I can't do it. I need someone else. I need a righteousness that's external that comes to me not a righteousness that somehow internally I navigate.

I can't you you got to have Jesus behind the wheel of your life. So then may we preach.

[32:00] May we pray. May we pray on behalf of others your loved ones that don't know Jesus. Lord open their eyes. Can't do a thing.

More may your spirit blow. Lord may the church become like Israel at the time of Exodus who they cried out for rescue up to God and God heard their groaning and God remembered his covenant and God saw God said and God knew their condition.

We've got to become like the tax collector in Luke 18. Two men go up into church the Pharisee praying oh I'm glad I'm not like these other people. I've got a lot of things I've been doing and tithing and the other and the tax collector who had absolutely nothing to give to God beats his breast and says oh God be merciful to me a sinner.

That's what he actually says. And Jesus turns to his followers and says I hope you got the story here. Which one of these guys went home justified? Which one did God actually involve himself in their life?

Which one had life? Which one will live with him in eternal life? It's not the Pharisee. It's the tax collector. It's the one who basically again surrenders all, all, all reliance on what you may have that you think would make you acceptable to gain the fast pass.

[33:38] No lines waited in heaven. What happens for those who do? Becoming like a child?

Relinquishing self-reliance? The last three verses you can read it this afternoon. For those who do, they will receive a hundredfold now in this life homes, friends, and family.

In other words, it's not all downside. Empty your hand and guess what you ended up with? You got family all over the world. You got more houses than the ones you could have bought with your own trust fund.

You've got all of this and he says and persecutions, with persecutions. So you get a lot now. You don't have to just wait on it. You come forward and receive Christ by faith.

You get a lot now. You don't just have to wait on it. But it does say there at the very end and you will also come to get eternal life. Jesus, behind the wheel of your life, you kicking back now like in a big stretch limo saying, I don't know how I got in this seat, the long black car, but Jesus don't bring me home.

[35:02] How'd you get there from here? Well, you can't get there from here. Oh, yes, you can. Be like a child.

Surrender all. Take my faith that what's before me is a finished work and when received is all I need in my hands for heaven.

God our heavenly father. It's a striking truth. You might call it a hard truth to come to grips with the fact that we need to consider ourselves to be helpless and without anything in our hand to bring. men. But as this truth falls upon us, we look up and see Jesus who has accomplished all and may our lives then embrace him and be lived for him.

[illegible]