

What must you leave behind?

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 09 March 2025

Preacher: Rev Gordon Kennedy

[0 : 00] Let's share our prayer together. Heavenly Father, we humbly bow in your presence.! May your word be our rule, your spirit our teacher,! and your great glory our supreme concern.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. Well, it must be spring right enough. I felt I needed to take my jacket off earlier on.

I'm sure you all know how to trap a monkey. You get a hollow log and you drill a hole, quite a small hole on the top, and you put a banana inside.

And the monkey comes along and he smells the banana and he puts his hand in and he grabs the banana. But then he can't pull it back out. But refusing to let go of the banana, he's trapped with the log until the hunter comes along and simply throws a bag over the top of him and off he goes with a monkey.

So if you have monkeys digging holes in your garden round Craig Lockhart, that's how you trap a monkey. This is the first Sunday in Lent.

[1 : 24] Every week, every day of every week, we fix our hearts on following Jesus. But Lent is one of those seasons which God gives us and he says, you're not just following Jesus.

The cross is before you. And that's where we're going. We're asking about following Jesus all the way.

Not starting off following Jesus and then after a while giving up. Not beginning to follow Jesus and then deciding we don't think he's a good leader and having a vote and taking over as though we could set the direction.

We are following Jesus all the way. Now in some ways, we're like that monkey.

One of the troubles we have in following Jesus is that our hands are full of stuff. Our hands are full of possessions, of our families, our career, our plans, our ideas.

[2 : 42] All of them good things, but we just won't give them up. We won't let go of them. And it makes it hard for us to follow Jesus all the way.

The only way to follow Jesus is with empty hands. Nothing in my hands I bring simply to thy cross I cling.

This is how we follow Jesus all the way. All the way to the cross. All the way into the blessings of eternal life.

The story that we read this morning is a well-known one. And some of them, like Matthew, he's just a man. And some he's a rich man. And some he's a young ruler.

Somebody comes to Jesus and starts off a conversation about eternal life. What must I do to gain eternal life?

[3 : 57] So what is eternal life? Well, Jesus and the man are not talking about life that goes on and on for a long time.

Chronology and duration is not the issue here. The phrase literally is the life of the ages. Or the life of the age.

which might be better rendered in English as the life of the kingdom. What Jesus and this man are talking about and what the Bible writes about everywhere we read the phrase eternal life is the life of God's kingdom.

Life which has been approved by God. Which God smiles upon. The life for which God created us and designed us.

Life according to the commandments of God. Life which, to have a Christmas song, we are made fit for.

[5 : 06] The kingdom life. Life of the kingdom of God. Life which is ruled with God as king. With Jesus as sovereign.

With Jesus as leader. Life where we follow Jesus and live as his people and his servants. Life which submits.

A word which we rail against. Life which submits to the commandments and judgments of God. Life which is lived humbly with our father and our creator.

Yes, this is the life of the age to come. One day, one glorious day, Jesus will come again and the fullness of the kingdom will break upon us and we will be gathered in to that kingdom of God without any shadows or clouds or sorrow or tears.

tears. But that kingdom which is to come has broken into this age. The life of that age has become, overlaps with, the life of this age in the coming of Jesus.

[6 : 30] And as we follow Jesus now, we begin in part to experience the life of that age to come. We get to live eternal life today as we follow Jesus.

This is what Jesus and this man were talking about in Matthew 19. This is what Jesus wants to talk to us about this morning. Once we believe and know that there is a life of God's kingdom which we can enter into now, surely the next question is how do we do that?

How do we begin today to live the life of the kingdom? How do we begin today to experience Jesus as our king and all the blessings that come from that?

Remember the story of Jesus and the woman at the well? He'd gone there in the middle of the day and the woman came out and she was drawing water and they started a discussion about water which wasn't really about water at all.

Jesus said to her everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again but whoever drinks of the water I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become a spring of water welling up and just to make sure it's not about water Jesus said welling up to eternal life.

[8 : 05] Welling up to the life of the age within that person now. And what did the woman say? Sir give me this water.

That's what we should be saying to Jesus today. that's what the man was saying although he got it wrong in the middle but essentially that's what he was asking was for the life of the kingdom now.

Once you know there is living water why would you want to drink anything else? Once you know that living in the kingdom of God is possible why would you choose to live anywhere else?

once you know that the way has been opened for you in the life and death and resurrection of Jesus why would you not go through that way into the life of God's kingdom?

That's what we want but how do we get there? How can we enter this eternal life? The man said to Jesus teacher what good deed must I do?

[9 : 20] to have eternal life? What must I do that is good enough to get me into the kingdom of God? The man is thinking about good deeds things that he must do in order to earn or be counted worthy of the life of God's kingdom saying your prayers reading your Bible giving to the poor coming to church on Sunday we've all got a list of them that we like to take off and Jesus challenges our understanding of good how good is good enough how good is good enough we we all create a measuring line so let's imagine the worst person we can think of who would that be maybe

Hitler Stalin some terrible person who's responsible for the death of millions and millions of people so let's imagine they're at the floor and that's the bottom of the measure who's the best person we can think of right up at the point of the ceiling there mother Teresa somebody like that spent their whole life washing feet and giving to the poor and once we've got our measuring line we all put ourselves somewhere on it oh well we're not as bad as them we're going to be up a wee bit and we creep up and up and up in our own imagination but the question is where's the pass mark how good is good enough is it the top of the ceiling mother Teresa would say no it isn't the pass marks heaven itself the presence of God is the pass mark and Jesus is trying to help us see that we can never get there we will never be good enough and so doing good will not enter us into the kingdom of heaven Jesus said you shall not murder you shall not commit adultery you shall not steal you shall not bear false witness honour your father and mother and love yourself and love your neighbour as yourself and the young man can you imagine saying to Jesus I've done all of that can you really imagine seeing that all that I've done but what's still missing Jesus is saying you can keep all the commandments you like you can even imagine that you've done them but it's not making you good enough nothing will make you good enough there is nothing you can do there is nothing you can hold in your hands and hold out to God and say look that was good enough wasn't it Jesus said to him if you would be perfect go sell what you possess give to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven and come follow me follow

Jesus it's not about good enough it's not about good deeds the purpose of the commandments is to lead us to Jesus the purpose of the commandments is to teach us we can never be good enough and have us rush to Jesus with nothing and say you alone Jesus are our only hope here we're coming to you we need to learn how to follow Jesus with empty hands and humble lines this man has riches he's got his hand in a hole and he's grabbed a bag of possessions of money and things and it's trapping him he is trusting his wealth and his possessions to bless him and God did not create wealth and possessions to bless you

God did not create wealth and possessions to save you to bring you into his kingdom and as long as your hands are filled with it you're trapped this man needs his money he trusts and depends upon his wealth and so he doesn't need Jesus and rather than humbly following Jesus he turns away what is keeping you back from an empty handed following of Jesus and I reckon!

[14 : 43] it's come to your mind right now what that thing is and you need to let it go you need to realise that whatever it is for you it will not bring you to eternal life whatever it is for you it will not save you whatever it is it's keeping you back from following Jesus and you need to let it go let it is not a religious dieting program don't come to me and say you're giving up chocolate for let it give up whatever you're holding on to that is keeping you back from Jesus that's what let it for Jesus does not exclude this man from the kingdom Jesus does not refuse to save this man and bring him home to the father the man chooses to exclude himself the man hears the gospel invitation of

Jesus and turns away make sure you're not doing this make sure that you're not turning away from Jesus once again the disciples are astonished at what Jesus has said so Jesus has to teach his disciples more about what this means now maybe right now you're sitting like the disciples astonished going what is this all about why would Jesus say it's not about doing good it's not about keeping the commandments it's not about trusting your wealth and your money and Jesus said I say to you only with difficulty will a rich person enter the kingdom of heaven 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 and the disciples are astonished who can be saved!

the point of the camel eye of the needle thing is not to go around ancient cities and try and identify a gate that's too small for a camel or a rock formation somewhere on a tree root that's too small for a camel it's a poem it's a metaphor there are things that are impossible to do and you can't get into the kingdom while you're holding on to anything else with humans what is impossible is that we could save ourselves that we could do something and earn salvation that's impossible it is impossible for any human to be as good as God is good only one is good God alone it is impossible for any human to live perfectly under the commandments of God it is impossible for any human to fully submit to the rule and reign of God without rebelling against him it is impossible for any of us to save ourselves it is impossible for any of us to save anyone else it just can't be done with humans it is impossible but thanks be to God all things are possible with him what you cannot do for yourself God and Jesus has done for you this is the good news of the gospel God has come in Jesus Christ to be your savior God has come in Jesus Christ to give you the eternal life that you cannot earn that you do not deserve but you desperately need God has done this only in Christ Jesus and only following Jesus all the way can we enter into the kingdom of God and the blessings of his presence Peter said in reply we've left everything and followed you what will we have don't you love Peter doesn't it break your heart sometimes he gets it right and wrong at the same time over and over again he's not yet thinking the things of God Peter is still thinking that well we've actually done it we've left everything we've followed you so we must earn something from that he thinks that God owes them something even if you're only willing to admit it to yourself search your heart God's Holy Spirit is at work among us this morning let him search your heart and see if there's a seed of this working there that you might think I've been in the church for years I've done this I've done that I've done the next thing and then that we see growth so I deserve something from God no you don't there are too many who still think like this I hear too many people speaking of someone else usually about someone else they're such a good person they've been visiting the poor caring for the sick doing good things in church for years and years and years so

[20 : 45] God should be good to them that's how we think we do think that doing things for God earns favor with God and Jesus needs to uproot that weed from within our hearts and burn it away this is the opposite of the gospel our thinking is wrong in the same way as Peter's was wrong we need to repent of our wrong thinking and believe the gospel God says the only thing to do is leave everything behind have nothing in our hands and follow Jesus Jesus had very seriously warned

Peter earlier when Peter got wrong about the cross get behind me

Satan in these verses just a gentle rebuke you are asking about a reward for your good deeds the blessing of the gospel the greatness of gaining eternal life far surpasses any sacrifice that you might make in following Jesus if that monkey could speak to us do you think the monkey would think it was a good trade I've kept hold of my banana but I've ended up trapped in a zoo does that sound like a good trade I've kept hold of whatever I filled my hands with but I'm not getting into the kingdom of God does that sound like a good trade to you from the point of view of eternal life everything you give up every time you empty your hand is nothing compared to the everything God will fill you with in his presence in his kingdom the kingdom will come we do not doubt this the kingdom will come God's grace will prevail against all opposition the coming of the kingdom is as certain as anything God's grace overturns all our notions of those who are rich succeeding those who are powerful doing what they want to do those who have filled their lives with things having a good life God overturns that God's grace ensures it is only by following Jesus us that we gain eternal life and you are invited today Jesus calls out to you just open your hand let whatever it is that's in your hand fall away it's not worth holding on to compared to the overwhelming blessings of life in the kingdom don't wait for another day don't even wait for another moment open your hand let it go follow

Jesus and he will bring you into God's kingdom let's pray together father we pray for a revolution in our lives this season of length we pray that you would hold the cross of Jesus before us day by day and set a fire within us of longing for Jesus and his cross that we would let anything go to rush after Jesus be gently with us right now show us the things that are holding us back and help us to let them go that we might follow Jesus bless us in this we pray amen we sing together the gospel of your grace my stubborn heart has won happy happy