

Entering the Kingdom

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[0 : 00] Our gracious Father, thank you so much for your word, the Bible. Thank you that you speak to us through it, that it is your word, and therefore it is authoritative for us, but also still relevant for us today.

And so, Father, we pray that you would give us minds to understand your word, but more than that, hearts that would seek to live in life. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, in 2009, December 2009, there was an article posted online at weeklynews.com, who claims that it's a reliable website. And the article was entitled, 12 Steps to Get to Heaven. On the next slide is a picture of the article, so you know I'm not making it up. And what had happened is a number of religious leaders had got together and they put together this plan, this 12-step plan that would counteract all the sins of your past and guarantee you to get into heaven.

If you followed these 12 steps, you were certain of eternal life. Do you want to know what these 12 steps are? Someone this morning just went, yes. He didn't, but I'm going to tell you anyway. I'll tell you this first four anyway. So on the next slide are the first four. One, pray often. Two, cherish all God's creatures. And so they suggested becoming vegetarian so that you could avoid eating or killing any creatures.

[1 : 25] Clean up your thoughts and speech. Wear religious symbols. And they suggested wearing lots of jewelry, religious jewelry and clothing. And so this morning I had all my robes on and I thought I was set.

And on it goes. But they say if you do these 12 steps, In other words, if you are good enough, you can counteract your past sins and guarantee your future life in heaven.

Eternal life. Now I wonder what you think about that. More importantly, Did someone say rubbish? True. More importantly, I wonder what God thinks about that.

Well today we'll find out because as we come back to Matthew's gospel, Matthew's account of Jesus' life, That's the theme in these two scenes. And we've got two scenes back to back, One of children, One of a rich man.

And the theme is really how to enter the kingdom, How to have eternal life. And we can see it in verse 14, Where Jesus says the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these, Such as these people get into the kingdom.

[2 : 25] Or verse 16, The man says, What good thing must I do to get eternal life? So that's the theme for today. So we're at point one in your outlines of verse 13 in your Bibles.

Then people brought little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them and pray for them. But the disciples rebuked them. Jesus said, Let the little children come to me though, And do not hinder them, For the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.

When he had placed his hands on them, He went on from there. And so this first scene we come to involves children. And here the parents were bringing some of their children to Jesus to bless them and pray for them.

And yet the disciples tell the parents, Stop. It's kind of like the culture of the day was, Children are to be seen and not heard. Do you know that phrase?

When I was younger, My grandparents said it to me and my brother several times. Children are to be seen and not heard. You may have even used the phrase yourself. Nowadays, of course, We seem to have swung completely the other direction.

[3 : 35] Now it's children are to be heard and obeyed. Have you noticed that? I don't want that for dinner, mum. I want something else. Oh, okay. Yes, dear. We'll go and get something. Either extreme, of course, is unhelpful.

But in Jesus' day, it was the first extreme. Children are to be seen and not heard. And so in keeping with their culture, The disciples rebuke or stop the parents. But Jesus turns the culture upside down, doesn't he?

And he says, Let the children come to me. Why? Well, firstly, presumably, they are important to him. For in verse 15, He does place his hands on them to bless them and pray for them.

But secondly, notice in verse 14, He says, Let the children come to me for or because the kingdom belongs to such as these. Now what does Jesus mean when he says such as these?

Is he saying that all children get into the kingdom, no matter who they are, and tough luck adults? Is that what he's saying? Well, no. I think we need to remember what has happened a chapter earlier, what we saw two weeks ago, in fact.

[4 : 40] So in your Bibles, just turn back one page, just one page, and if you haven't opened a Bible yet, now's a good time to. Turn back a page to page 984 to chapter 18, and hear what Jesus says again about little children.

Chapter 18, verse 3. Chapter 18, verse 3, page 984. And Jesus said, Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. In other words, the kingdom belongs to such as these. It refers to those who change to be like children.

Those who enter the kingdom and inherit it are those who are like children, he says. How? Well, is it, you know, being innocent and cute like kids are?

No, because children are not always innocent and cute, especially in the middle of the night when they wake you up and say, I've lost my sock. In fact, one couple I heard said that before children, they would turn to each other and say, Good night, dear.

[5 : 54] Good night, dear. Have a lovely sleep. Oh, you too. And then after kids, they would turn to each other and simply say, Good luck. So how are we to be like kids to enter the kingdom, to inherit the kingdom?

Well, as we saw a couple of weeks ago, as we saw in chapter 18, it's taking the lowly position, that is, being dependent like children are dependent. Children depend on and trust in their parents for life, and so we are to depend on and trust in Jesus for eternal life, entry into the kingdom.

Of course, this is upside down to the way the world thinks, or even those religious leaders I mentioned at the start. They all say that to enter anything, whether a club or a hall of fame, the workforce or even heaven, you have to earn it.

You have to be good enough, whether following 12 steps or getting a good degree at school, doing well at work to get the promotion and so on. But the problem is, when it comes to eternal life, we can never be good enough, which brings us to point two in your outline of verse number 16 in your Bibles.

So back at chapter 19, verse 16. Here we come to the next scene, to the man. Just then, a man came up to Jesus and asked, Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?

[7 : 23] You see, he's thinking the way the world thinks. What must I do to earn eternal life? And notice in verse 16 that Jesus starts with the words, just then.

No sooner has he mentioned the children and depending on and trusting in him that we get this contrast with the man who depends on and trusts in himself, you see, wants to know what he has to do.

There's this contrast, you see. Now to be fair, it's understandable for this man to think like this and it's certainly understandable for people today to think like this because we grow up in a world where we are taught that if we want anything in life, we must work for it, aren't we?

When we grow up, we are taught to be good. Parents, as parents, I've said it, I say, good boy or good girl, well done, you've worked hard on that and so on.

Now working hard and being good are, well, good things but when it comes to the kingdom again, eternal life, the problem is we can never make ourselves good like God.

[8 : 27] We can never make ourselves perfect in other words. No matter how hard we try, we'll never be as good as God or perfect like him. And this is what Jesus tries to show the man now in verse 17.

He says, why do you ask me about what is good? Jesus replied, there is only one who is good. See what Jesus is doing?

He's going, just think about this for a second, buddy. It's great that you want eternal life but is there anyone who's good enough? There's actually only one who is good and that's God.

And so already Jesus is trying to show the man that no matter how hard he tries, he just won't be perfect again. Only God is. And so Jesus continues in verse 17, he says, if you want to enter life, keep the commandments.

Which ones? He inquired. Well, Jesus replied, you shall love, sorry, you shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, honour your father and mother and love your neighbour as yourself.

[9 : 28] All these I have kept, the young man said. What do I still lack? Jesus starts off saying here that if you want to be good enough to enter the kingdom, to have eternal life, then you have to obey the commandments.

And in verse 18, Jesus lists some of the commandments to do with loving one another, which is mainly the second half of the Ten Commandments, which we heard in our first reading. And remarkably, did you notice, verse 20, the man has kept all of them, the ones he's listed anyway, since he was young.

This is a good man, isn't it? This is the type of marriage material you'd want for your daughter or niece or granddaughter. This is the type of person you would have thought should go to heaven. And yet, even he knows something's still lacking. Do you notice that? He asked in verse 20, what do I still lack? And that's the thing with relying on being good, ourselves, relying on ourselves in our own good works.

You never actually know if you've done enough. You never actually know if you're good enough. In other words, you never have assurance or guarantee.

[10 : 41] You might think you're good enough or done enough to get into heaven, but you're never quite sure. And that's how this man feels. And so he wants to be certain of having eternal life, of being in the kingdom.

And that's why he's come to Jesus in the first place. Now, Jesus has already given him a clue about that. And he gives him another one here. Do you see, which commands did Jesus miss out?

It was all the first commands, wasn't it, about God being God. You know, you shall have no other gods but for me. Don't take the name of God in vain and so on. And I wonder if Jesus deliberately missed the commands about God being God because that's what was missing in this man's life.

You see, who is this man's God? It's wealth, isn't it? Have a look at verse 21 to 22. Jesus answered, if you want to be perfect, go sell your possessions and give to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven.

Then come, follow me. And when the young man heard this, he went away sad. Why? Well, because he had great wealth and he wasn't willing to give it up. So here Jesus tells the man to sell everything, not because this is how we all enter the kingdom, but to show this particular man that even he wasn't good enough.

[12 : 00] He'd broken the very first commandment. He had another God besides God. It was his wealth. Remember, that's how the man started in verse 16 by asking what good thing he must do and Jesus tells him to sell everything to show him that he's not good enough, that he's broken the first commandment and that what he really needs to do is to stop depending on his wealth and start depending on God like the children.

Like children, if he wants to enter the kingdom, he must give up trusting and depending on wealth and instead trust in or follow Jesus. And yet sadly, he chooses to walk away from Jesus and away from eternal life.

And his actions prompt Jesus to give us a warning in verse 23. Do you see verse 23? Then Jesus said to his disciples, Truly I tell you, it is hard for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of heaven.

Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God. Verse 23, Jesus says, hard for the rich to enter and then in verse 24, he basically says it's impossible.

It's actually easier for a massive camel to get through the eye of a small needle. On the next slide, I saw this cartoon. It says, yet another attempt to get a camel through the eye of a needle. Got a camel in a slingshot up a hill.

[13 : 18] They've greased him down. They've got camels on roller skates. They've got a suction cap on the other side to suck him through. But the point is, it's impossible. Just like it's impossible

for the rich to enter by their own efforts.

Now as we'll see, this is actually true for everyone. It is impossible for everyone to earn our way to heaven. So why does Jesus single out the rich people here?

Well, because wealth is such an easy thing to trust in instead of Jesus. Isn't it? Let me ask you, what would you prefer? A big bank balance or a small bank balance?

I know which one I prefer. Why? Well, because we feel safer with a big bank balance, don't we? But as soon as we start to feel that, we've started to trust in our bank balance rather than in God, you see.

That's very easy to do, isn't it? And so that's why Jesus singles out the dangers of wealth. It's very easy to trust and depend on wealth instead of Christ.

[14:22] But for these disciples, wealth was very impressive. I heard a story once about a man who was at a church men's event when a phone rang. The man answered the phone and accidentally hit speaker so the rest of the group could hear the conversation.

And on the other line was a lady who said, Oh, hi, dear. I'm just at the shops and I found some really lovely shoes I'd like to buy. They're a bit expensive. They're \$500. But do you mind if I go ahead and buy them?

And the man kind of paused and went, No. Oh, that's so nice of you, dear. By the way, I've also seen a lounge that would look lovely in our downstairs area. It's a tad on the expensive side.

I think it's \$50,000. But do you mind if I go and buy that? And the man said, No. Oh, that's so great. I'll see you later. Bye, dear. And the man said, Bye. And hung up the phone. Now at that, he realized that everyone else had been listening in.

Shocked and impressed at the same time that he had such wealth. And so the man then said, Oh, does anyone know whose phone this is? But wealth does impress us, doesn't it?

[15:31] And it did for the disciples. For the disciples, it was a sign that you're blessed by God.

And so here again, he was this guy, great marriage potential for your daughter or granddaughter or niece. He's good and wealthy.

And yet, he's still not good enough, perfect, like God, to enter the kingdom. And so the disciples asked, Well, who then is? See verse 25?

When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished and asked, Who then can be saved? Jesus looked at them and said, With man or with people, this is impossible.

But with God, all things are possible. Here we come to the point that Jesus was trying to teach the man all along. It's impossible to earn his way into the kingdom and life eternal.

He must instead trust in God for whom nothing is impossible. You see, no one can earn their way into heaven by following a 12-step program because no one is completely good or perfect like God.

[16:37] So it's impossible for everyone to earn our way into life eternal. But it's not impossible for God. God can get us in. And God does that through Jesus.

For God gave Jesus to pay for all the times that we have not been good. Jesus is the one who takes the punishment for our sins, you see. Jesus is the one who suffers eternal death at the cross so that we don't have to.

So instead of trying to earn our way into the kingdom like this man, we are to depend on and trust in Jesus like the children, you see. That's why we've got these two scenes side by side.

And can I say, I think Christians still misunderstand this. I've met Christians who have gone to church for years and they still think entering the kingdom, having eternal life, going to heaven, means you have to do good things.

But I think they've got the horse and the cart around the wrong way. So on the next slide is an olden day horse and cart. The horse is trusting in Jesus. That comes first.

[17:41] That's what gets us into the kingdom. That's what gets us life eternal. Then afterwards, in response to Jesus, we are to do good.

Like the horse driving the cart, so our trust in Jesus and his gift of life eternal drives or motivates us to do good works in response.

But we've got to get them around the right way, don't we? People still think getting into the kingdom involves doing the cart stuff, but we can never be good enough. It's trusting in Jesus.

There's only one step to being certain of life eternal. And as I said, that's trusting in Jesus as your saviour and king. Trusting that Jesus really did die to save you from your sins and get you into kingdom.

Trusting that Jesus really did rise again as your king, your Lord. And so the question for us at this point is, have we put our trust in Jesus? Do we trust him as our own saviour and king?

[18:44] And for us who have, then two things. First, do we realise how incredibly freeing that is? That our eternal salvation, our entry into heaven does not depend on how good we are.

That's a relief for me. Because I don't know about you, but I still mess up. And when I do, I do not need to fear that I've lost my salvation or wonder what good thing I need to do to make up for my bad thing.

Because it does not depend on what I do, but on what Jesus has already done. I remember shaking hands with a man at the door of church one day, not this church, another church.

And at the end, he sort of, after, you know, good morning, good morning, he said, gee, Andrew, I hope I end up up there and not down there. And I said, well, don't you know?

He said, oh, I try and live a good life. See, he was basing it all on good works and he had no assurance, no comfort. I said, do you trust in Jesus?

[19:48] And he said, yes. I said, well, you're guaranteed up there. Got to get the horse and the cart around the right way, don't we? And if we do, it's really freeing, really comforting. We still ought to do good works in response, but we don't get a sin to heaven.

That's the first thing we need to remember. The second thing we need to remember is that it's actually worth trusting in Jesus as our king. You see, if we trust in Jesus as our king, it means we are to follow him and serve him above all else, above wealth, like this man was supposed to, above family, above career.

We can have those things as well, but they cannot be our God, our number one priority, the thing we serve above all else. Otherwise, Jesus is no longer our king.

We're not actually trusting in him as our king. But if Jesus is our king, then this may sometimes mean we miss out on things in this life, I'm afraid to say. For example, we miss out on Sunday morning sleep-ins because we come to church.

Christ and his church are a higher priority than our comfort or family. Or it means we miss out on some money because Christ and his work are a higher priority and he tells us to be generous to those in need.

[21:00] Or it means we miss out on some rest because he tells us to serve one another. For a person at 5pm church, they took a lower paying job recently so that they would have more time to serve at church.

For them, following Jesus as their king meant they suffered a loss in pay. For another friend of mine, I think I might have mentioned before, she gave up a promotion at work because it meant so much travelling and it took her away from church and Bible study and she could feel it affecting her own walk with Christ.

So she gave back the promotion, gave back the pay rise. Or, another friend of mine who became a Christian then was convicted that he should give up medicine to do Christian work. And when he did this, his father refused to talk to him for two years.

In God's kindness, the father actually ended up becoming a Christian. But for my friend, following Jesus as his king, as his number one priority, meant suffering the loss of relationship with his own father, which he lamented and mourned over for two years.

or even just take this past week. I don't know if you've heard about this, but the CEO of Cooper's Beer to mark the 200th year anniversary of the Bible Society said that they were going to put out a special brand of light beer to commemorate the Bible Society.

[22:18] He produced 10,000 cans like on the next slide. So there it is, Cooper's Beer. And on the next slide is a picture of a can which talks about the Bible Society, the longest living charity in Australia.

And they'd even put a Bible verse on the carton. So on the next slide you can see the Bible verse from John's Gospel. And the idea was to start conversations about world issues and Jesus.

And when the Bible Society showed one video, things blew up. So on the next slide is a picture of the video. There's three men talking about gay marriage.

One is a Christian on the far right. He's an MP. The one on the left is also an MP, but he's gay. And it was a very, it was very friendly and they just put forward their both ideas and agreed to disagree. But anti-Christian pub owners in Sydney and Melbourne this past week took to social media vowing to no longer purchase Cooper's Beer. One pub even showed a video online pouring or a beer down

the drain.

[23 : 20] And the point of the story is not to promote beer, but to point out that Tim Cooper started suffering loss because he was a Christian and wanted to promote Christian values. But this is what it may sometimes mean to trust in Jesus as our Saviour and King, to follow Him above all else.

And I wonder if we sometimes trust in Jesus as Saviour, but forget to follow Him as our number one priority, our King. We need to remember that it's worth following Him as our King.

This is the question Peter asked. Have a look at verse 27. Peter answered him, We have left everything to follow you as our King. What then will there be for us? Is it worth it? He says. Or Jesus said to them, Truly I tell you, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on His glorious throne, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or fields for My sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life.

For many who are first will be last and many who are last will be first. See, Peter wants to know if it's worth following Jesus and Jesus says, Hands down, it is.

[24 : 34] At first, those who follow Him will rule and judge with Him. And we may be persecuted or downtrodden in this world, but in the world to come, at the renewal of all things, we will sit on thrones with Christ, ruling over creation as we were made to do.

And what's more, not only will we rule and judge with Christ, we'll receive a hundredfold whatever we've suffered loss in this life. And that makes following Jesus actually a really good investment. I mean, which bank would give you a return a hundredfold? Now, that's not a hundred percent. You invest one dollar, a hundred percent is one dollar back. A hundredfold is ten thousand percent return.

Following Jesus is a pretty good investment, isn't it? And more than that, we have life of 90 to 100 years on this earth and it comes with some ups and lots of downs. But God gives us life eternal, infinity years, with only ups.

You see, Jesus is saying, following Him may feel like we're coming last in the world's race for money, career and stuff, but in the kingdom to come, we who are last will be first. We receive thrones, a ten thousand percent return, and life eternal with only ups.

[25 : 49] Sadly, the CEO of Cooper's, Tim Cooper, forgot that. And when they were persecuted for being associated with the Bible Society, they withdrew their support and now are no longer going to produce the cans.

What's more, they then pledged money for gay marriage lobby. They weren't willing to suffer loss for the sake of Christ. But for those others I mentioned, the one who gave back the promotion, the one who gave up medicine, the one who gave up the high pay, they didn't forget that following Jesus was worth it.

And they continue to follow Him to this day. May we too be willing to suffer loss for the sake of Christ, knowing that the life to come will more than make up for it. For many who are last now will be first then.

Let's pray. Gracious Father, we thank you that entering your kingdom and receiving eternal life does not depend on us but in Christ alone.

Help us, once receiving eternal life, once receiving membership into your family, once being a Christian, to then keep living for Jesus as our King.

[26 : 59] Even being willing to suffer loss for it. For we know that the life to come will more than make up for it. We ask these things in His name. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.