

# God's Kingdom Attitudes

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, I got my Australian citizenship in 2023. The process took years because they had to make sure that I was an upstanding person.

I wasn't a citizen yet. In fact, that's what it usually takes, right, to join any community or society. Whether that's becoming a citizen of a country or if you would like to join a company or a working community.

When you apply for a job, for example, you need to prove that you can be depended on because you have a good reputation, good achievements, good skills.

Now imagine you're applying to enter a country or a company and during the visa application or the interview, you say, there's nothing good in me.

I'm a sinner. I'm a very bad person. You wouldn't be able to enter the country or the company. But in our passage today, we will see that it's the opposite with God.

[ 1 : 15 ] To enter his kingdom, we need to realize our sinfulness and our helplessness and that we can't be depended on. And we will see why.

And the passage begins with a parable in verse 9 to 10. To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else, Jesus told this parable.

Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. So here two characters are introduced and Jesus' original audience would have seen the moral contrast between a Pharisee who's an upstanding citizen, a spiritual leader of Israel, respected by many, and a tax collector, an often corrupt person who worked for the Roman government, hated by the community.

In fact, in all of the Gospels, tax collectors are often paired with sinners and prostitutes. The community looked down on them.

And so the initial assumption is, well, if they both go to the temple to pray, only the Pharisee's prayer would be heard. He's the morally righteous one.

[ 2 : 43 ] And then in verse 11 to 12, the Pharisee stood by himself and prayed, or a better translation would be, the Pharisee stood and prayed about himself.

God, I thank you that I am not like other people, robbers, evildoers, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.

Now again, those who heard this from Jesus would have agreed, yeah? They would have thought the Pharisees are righteous. Everything he prays about here is true.

That's what they did. In contrast, verse 13, But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, God, have mercy on me, a sinner.

Pay attention to the contrast between the prayers. The Pharisee doesn't request anything. He simply thanks God. Well, isn't that a good thing if we are thankful and not demanding?

[ 3 : 59 ] Yes, it is. But why? Why doesn't he request anything? Because he feels self-sufficient. He thinks he's there already.

There's nothing more he needs to do to acquire the kingdom of God. His self-righteousness has done it all. The tax collector, on the other hand, knows that he's helpless.

He doesn't even dare approach God or to look up to heaven. And his request, just one, have mercy on me.

Literally, it doesn't just mean forgive me. Literally, the sentence reads, atone for me. He knows that his sins are so many that he can't be forgiven.

He needs to be atoned for. His sins need to be erased. In Leviticus, during the Day of Atonement, there's a goat that's just thrown away into the wilderness to be forgotten forever.

[ 5 : 11 ] That's what needs to happen. The tax collector sins need to be thrown away because they can't be forgiven. There's too many. And here is the surprise in verse 14.

Jesus says, I tell you that this man, the tax collector, rather than the other one, went home justified before God for all those who exalt themselves will be humbled and those who humble themselves will be exalted.

Now, the word justified here means considered right in God's eyes. Now, the original hearers would have been shocked to know that God would consider the sinful tax collector right.

Upstanding. But not the morally righteous Pharisee. What? How? Can someone so sinful be made righteous just by begging for mercy?

And can someone so morally upright be rejected by God? Surely that doesn't make sense. That doesn't seem right. That doesn't seem fair.

[ 6 : 30 ] In fact, a few years ago when I was leading a Bible study at another church, there was a guy who came and asked this question. Can a murderer be admitted to God's kingdom just because he begs for mercy?

While someone morally upright, like, for example, the Dalai Lama, be rejected just because, just because he doesn't believe in Jesus. That doesn't seem fair.

So we read on. There's another story. Verse 15 to 17. People were also bringing babies to Jesus for him to place his hands on them.

When the disciples saw this, they rebuked them. But Jesus called the children to him and said, Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them. For the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.

Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it. And so in this story, people are bringing babies to Jesus.

[ 7 : 43 ] But the disciples rebuke those people. And because back then, children were considered unimportant in the society's eyes. And so to bring babies, to bring children to a great teacher like Jesus would have been a disrespect.

And I think that's still true in many cultures today. You know, growing up in Indonesia, I remember every time there was an important guest, my parents would always hide us in the bedroom.

We were hidden away. We were not important. But Jesus welcomes the children because the kingdom of God belongs to people to such as these.

To people who are like children. What does that mean? Verse 17 is important. Anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.

That's what children do, isn't it? They receive. They don't have the capacity to work for anything. And so they receive things. They receive food, clothes, help, ice cream, without trying to repay.

[ 9 : 01 ] As we grow up, we have learned to feel uncomfortable when receiving because receiving humbles us. It makes us realize that, oh man, I can't achieve that thing or work for it myself and therefore I have to ask and receive.

That's uncomfortable. But children don't care about receiving because they know they can't get anything for themselves. And so they are dependent on the big people to give them things.

And here we see a small hint as to why the tax collector is justified but the Pharisee is not. The tax collector knows that he's completely helpless.

like a little child trying to reach the top shelf. Can't do it. He's a sinner. He can't save himself.

His sins are just too many. He's dependent on the mercy of God and so he asks and he receives like a little child.

[ 10 : 09 ] The Pharisee, on the other hand, thinks his righteousness can save him. He's not dependent on God. He's self-sufficient and so he doesn't ask and he doesn't receive.

Instead of receiving the kingdom of God, the Pharisee thinks he can earn it. He can work for it and he can build a stairway to heaven with his self-righteousness.

And so God lets him. God doesn't give him the kingdom. But the problem remains. Surely a murderer, Ricky, a murderer can't just receive a citizenship of the kingdom of God just by begging.

And surely someone morally upright deserves to have the citizenship of the kingdom of God. Why don't they? We are so trained to think like that because in this world, that's how it works.

we have to achieve things. We have to apply for things. We have to win people's trust and love. And so why don't they deserve to have the citizenship of the kingdom of God?

[ 11 : 29 ] The government of Australia thinks that I'm morally upright enough to be admitted as a citizen. Why can't I be admitted into the kingdom of God with my moral righteousness as well?

And so we read on to the third story. Verse 18. A certain ruler asked him, good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?

Now here's another ruler. And like the Pharisee, he wants to build a stairway to heaven. He is asking Jesus, what must I do to inherit or merit or to achieve eternal life?

How can I be upright enough to merit the kingdom of God? Verse 19. Why do you call me good? Jesus answered. No one is good except God alone. Now here, Jesus doesn't affirm or deny that he's good. He merely points out that no human being is good enough.

[ 12 : 33 ] Only God is good. Now we know that Jesus is God and therefore he's good. But that's beside the point. Jesus' point is no one, no human being is good enough to inherit eternal life.

Only God is good. Only God is good enough to meet his own standard of what's good. No human can meet that standard.

So don't even try. But if you still insist on trying to build a stairway to heaven, then here is what you need to do. Verse 20. You know the commandments.

You shall not commit adultery. You shall not murder. You shall not steal. You shall not give false testimony. Honor your father and mother. Jesus lists the commandments. If you want to build a stairway to heaven, do them all.

Now we know the Ten Commandments, right? Which have two categories. The vertical commandments that pertain to one's relationship with God, like there shall be no other God but the Lord.

[ 13 : 39 ] Don't use the Lord's name in vain. And then there are the horizontal commandments that pertain to one's relationship with others. Now these Ten Commandments can be summarized by the two great commandments.

Love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your mind and all your strength, vertical, and love your neighbor as yourself, horizontal.

Now Jesus only mentions the horizontal commandments probably because in the Gospel of Luke the horizontal is the fruit or the expression of the vertical.

That's why in another place in the Gospel of Luke Jesus says, if you do these things to these people you do them to me. But if this ruler wants to build a stairway to heaven he'll need to do them all.

And here's how the ruler answers in verse 21. All this I have kept since I was a boy he said. I've done them all.

[ 14 : 46 ] There's nothing more to do, nothing more to learn. I have built the stairway to heaven. Can I get up there now? So Jesus says, prove it, verse 22.

When Jesus heard this he said to him, you still like one thing? Sell everything you have and give to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come follow me. Prove it, Jesus says.

You have said you've done them all. You have loved God with all your heart and you have loved your neighbor as yourself. Prove it. Sell everything. Give to the poor as an expression of your horizontal love.

You have said that you love your neighbor as yourself. Sell everything and give it to them. And then follow me as an expression of your vertical love towards God. If you love God with all your heart, surely God, the treasure in heaven, is enough for you.

You don't need all this. Sell it. Verse 23. When he heard this, he became very sad because he was very wealthy.

[ 15 : 56 ] He can't do it. Turns out, he hasn't loved God with all his heart and his mind and his strength or loved his neighbor as himself.

The stairway to heaven is an illusion. And so Jesus says this in verse 24 and 25. Jesus looked at him and said, how hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God.

Indeed, 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. It's impossible for a camel to enter the eye of a needle.

If you don't believe me, you can try. Can't do it. But the rich trying to enter the kingdom is even harder. Why?

Because both the Pharisee and the rich ruler depend on themselves, on their status, on their wealth, on their self-righteousness to get into the kingdom.

[ 17 : 03 ] And it's impossible to enter the kingdom of God using those means. Impossible. This is how impossible it is.

Imagine if the ruler said yes to Jesus' command. Yes, Lord. Now, he didn't love his money anymore. He wanted to love God and others.

He sold everything and gave it all to the poor. What would happen? He would think, I did this. I follow the command.

I succeeded. Thank you, God. Thank you that I'm not like those other rich people who depended on their wealth and hoarded material treasure on earth. and then he would not feel the need to follow Jesus because he would feel that he could save himself using his obedience.

He is self-sufficient now. He doesn't need God. He became the Pharisee in the first story. Impossible, isn't it?

[ 18 : 07 ] 16th century theologian John Calvin says, the human heart is a factory of idols. We destroy one idol, in this case wealth, and we produce another one, in this case self-righteousness.

this is why if we try to strive for the kingdom in ourselves, we fail miserably. Can't do it.

Impossible. We can't build a stairway to heaven. In fact, the last time human beings tried to build a stairway to heaven was the Tower of Babel.

And it was done not out of obedience but out of pride. It's impossible to enter the kingdom using anything from ourselves. Our moral uprightness, our wealth, our status, impossible.

So, verse 26 to 27. Those who heard this asked, who then can be saved? It's impossible, Jesus.

[ 19 : 21 ] Jesus replied, yes, but what is impossible with man is possible with God. It's impossible for humans to build a stairway to heaven to enter the kingdom.

But God has made it possible. How? We could not get up and so God came down in the person of Jesus.

And he did it all. He lived a perfect life, loving God with all his heart and all his mind and all his strength, because he is the beloved son of God.

And he loved his neighbor as himself. He loved even his enemies perfectly. He did it all.

He's the only one who has done it all. And then he died for our sins. And this answers our previous question about the Pharisee and the tax collector.

[ 20 : 20 ] God's moral Can someone so morally upright be rejected by God? Yes. Because his moral uprightness is not enough to meet God's standard. God is too high.

We can't jump that high. To love God with all ourselves? To love our neighbor as ourselves?

That's impossible. Even the most morally upright person can't do it. But can someone so sinful be made righteous just by begging for mercy?

Yes. And in fact, that's the condition. You have to be sinful to be able to be saved.

In Jesus, because Jesus has died, he has paid the punishment and so we are saved. The tax collector prays, have mercy on me, atone for me.

[ 21 : 23 ] And isn't that what Jesus has done? Jesus built the stairway to heaven. He came down here and he built the stairway to heaven.

And in fact, he is the stairway to heaven. And he gives it to us if we follow him. Because if we follow him, we are united in Jesus, the stairway to heaven.

And that's why after Jesus' death and resurrection, when the people in Acts 2 ask the same question, what must we do?

The answer is repent and be baptized. That's all we need. to repent, to recognize that we are sinners and we can't save ourselves.

And baptism is the thing that symbolizes our union with Christ the stairway to heaven. Friends, the kingdom of God is received, not achieved, because it has been achieved by Jesus alone.

[ 22 : 38 ] and that's such great news, isn't it? Next slide. So what about us?

Oh, sorry, go back. Yep. Are we striving, are we still striving to enter the kingdom of God using our own righteousness? Or do we recognize our helplessness and beg God for mercy?

Do we think, oh, I'm a good person? People say that I'm a good person. When I go to heaven, when I die, I'll go to heaven, because I'm a good person. Do we ever think, thank you, God, thank you, that I'm not like those sinners who support the LGBTQ agenda and abortion?

I'm better than them. Thank you. thank you, God, that I'm not like those addicts and gamblers.

Thank you that I'm better than them. Or do we recognize that we too, every one of us, is a sinner, falling short of God's perfect glory, and that every day we ought to live a life of repentance and

continually pray, have mercy on me, God, for I am a sinner, and without your grace in Jesus, I am nothing.

Are we assured that we enter the kingdom simply because of Jesus and Jesus alone? there's a theologian who lived in the 11th century called Ansem, and he said this when he consoled dying people.

[ 24 : 36 ] While life still remains in you, in Jesus' death alone plays your whole trust. If you die now and you meet God and God judges you and says, you're a sinner, say, yes I am, but I interpose the death of Jesus between my sins and you.

And if God says, you deserve condemnation, say, yes I do, but I offer the merits and holiness of Jesus for those which I should have, but I don't.

We receive the kingdom, not strive after it. And second, because we don't rely on ourselves or on anything that we have, we can use everything we have for the kingdom.

We don't need to sell everything like the ruler. What Jesus asked of him does not apply to all Christians. We don't need to sell everything, but we do need to use everything for the kingdom as a response to God's mercy.

That means if God puts it in our heart to use our money for the kingdom, we say, yes, Lord. Or time for the kingdom, we say, yes, Lord. If God puts it in our heart to use an empty bedroom in our house to sponsor an orphan, we say, yes, Lord.

[ 26 : 11 ] If God puts it in our heart to use our profession as a missionary overseas, we say, yes, Lord, even if that means potential danger. Seventy more Christians in the past week have been found beheaded in Congo.

God might want us to go to dangerous places like that. And we say, yes, Lord. Because we don't put our hope in any of these things.

We put all our hope in Jesus, who has lived and died for us. And so we use them all for the sake of the kingdom. We don't need to give them away or sell them.

We use them all for the kingdom. And if that sounds scary, yes, it is. But listen to how the story ends in verse 28 to 30.

Peter said to him, we have left all we had to follow you. truly I tell you, Jesus said to them, no one who has left home or wife or brothers or sisters or parents or children for the sake of the kingdom of God will fail to receive many times as much in this age and in the age to come eternal life.

[ 27 : 32 ] Jesus affirms, yes, you have followed me. And again, you will receive. There's that word again, receive. Eternal life in the age to come, in the new creation.

We don't have to strive for it. We will receive it. And here on this earth, we will receive a family, a bigger one, a church. And those who have abandoned all hope in what they have shall receive a lot more through the loving community of the church where people give and receive love and be loved, comfort and be comforted.

And that's great news. So let's pray now. Thank you, Lord, for the reminder that we are sinners, all of us, and we can't achieve the kingdom of eternal life.

But Jesus has come down here to achieve it for us. He has done it all. We thank you for that. And so we receive the kingdom from him.

Help us through your spirit to live life worthy of our calling, not to merit the kingdom, but to express our thanks to you.

[ 28 : 54 ] In Jesus' name alone we pray. Amen. Amen.