

# How to receive The Kingdom

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[0:00] with you. Please turn to Mark chapter 10. Mark chapter 10, and we're going to begin at verse 13.

Mark chapter 10, beginning at verse 13. Now hear the word of the Lord.

And they were bringing children to him. This is, sorry, the context is Jesus is the context. They're bringing children to him, Jesus, 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 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, well, why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone. You know the commandments. Don't murder. Don't commit adultery. Don't steal.

Don't 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. Sell all that you have and give it to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven.

[1:53] And come and 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, 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 an eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God. And they were exceedingly astonished and said to him, then who can be saved? And 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. And Jesus said, truly I say to you, there is no one who is left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands for my sake or the gospel, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands with possessions and in the age to come eternal life. But many who are first will be last and the last first. Well, may God bless his word to our heart. Have your Bibles, please open them again to Mark 10. And reading was from 13 through to 31.

Disciples have to learn more than one thing. And as a follower of Christ, you often have to learn the same thing over and over again. We never seem to get it first time. And even when we do get it first time, the idea of it having to be repeated is necessary. I want to ask two questions this morning.

And if you want, you can think about these two questions without even listening to what I'm going to say next. Here's the first question. What is the one thing that if you could have it, the one thing if you could have it right now, and it could be given to you right now, right at this very moment, that would make you follow Jesus Christ exactly the way Jesus wants you to follow him?

Here's the next question. What is the one thing if you lost it, if it was taken from you right now, or taken from you this very night, that if you lost it, you wouldn't want to wake up tomorrow, you wouldn't want to face tomorrow, you wouldn't want to live tomorrow?

There are a couple of really difficult questions. But they're difficult because eternal life is so valuable. By the end, hopefully we would have answered both. Now, there's several things here that are fairly obvious, but the one thing that is obvious more than anything else is the Christian life doesn't stop. You might stop in your Christian life, but Christianity doesn't stop.

[ 5 : 01 ] Christianity continues. Christ continues to walk the way that he does. He's spoken these words. He knows that we know exactly what he wants from us. He knows exactly what we ought to think. And that's it.

It just, that's every single day, this is what it is. But as Christians, it's possible to stop following Jesus. I don't mean that you stop believing in Jesus. There is a category for believing and not following, isn't there? This is why if you're going to refer to yourself as a Christian out in the world, don't refer to yourself as a believer of Jesus. You know, even the demons believe and shudder, okay? We're on par only with them if we're only believing. That the true Christianity is seen in the following. That is, Simon says. Simon says, walk, you walk. Simon says, read, you read. Well, Jesus says, these are the things that make a true follower. And you'll be able to see whether or not people are following by the fact whether or not they actually follow. Not whether or not they actually believe it, but whether or not they're actually following it. And so that's the lesson that we have to learn over and over again. You can't leave your Christian life behind. You can't come to like a Christian school, do two years in salvation, and then leave and then get on with the rest of your life. It doesn't seem to work like that.

In fact, you can tell immediately if you have a real relationship with Jesus Christ, because he will actually mess up your life a little bit. He will interfere with your life.

He even puts his hand in your pocket and gives money to the poor. Okay, he messes up your diary and says, no, this ought to be your priority instead of that. You can tell when Jesus is real, because that's the type of thing that happens in your life. But here's the best thing about it all.

Jesus can handle my life better than I can handle myself. Secondly, Jesus knows my future, and I don't, and you don't know yours either. And so our lives are much better in his hands than they are in our hands. We think we can handle our life, but life is very difficult to handle, and everything in the world is incredibly difficult to handle. That's why we have regrets. Things not going the way that we thought they were going to go. And then we look back and wish I'd never done that, wish I never said that. Okay, those things happen because we try and take control of the future, and yet we can't take control of it. Well, when we come to this passage, it is about disciples having to learn lessons that they've learned before again, and that is what it is to follow Jesus properly.

[ 7 : 49 ] And there are two simple ways to stay on track with Jesus, and that is dependence, which is really, really difficult, and love. The love is less difficult, but it's impossible to listen to anything that Jesus says without loving him. It's even more impossible to do anything that Jesus says without loving him. In fact, I want to go as far to say that you can actually do what Jesus wants unless you love him. You look at a person who doesn't love Jesus, and you'll see a person who doesn't do what Jesus wants. The two go together. But you look at a person who really loves Jesus, and you'll see in that person a person who is really following Jesus. Love for God is the sort of precondition, it's the very ingredient you need to be able to do anything for Jesus, for God to follow. And dependence is the way in which you're meant to do it. But as I said, dependence is really, really difficult. Because it's really possible for you to replace your trust in God, replace your trust in Jesus, replace your dependence in God, and put it into something else, and place your trust into something else. But only God can fill the space. Only God can be dependable. Everything else isn't dependable. You can depend on your job, you can depend on the house that you live in, you can depend on the world staying the way that it is, and it doesn't seem to be staying the way that it is. The world is changing rapidly, and everyone sees that. You can depend on all these things, but they're not dependable. You can depend on them, but because they're ever-changing, they're not dependable. Only God is dependable, because only God doesn't change. And so this morning, if you're not a believer, what do you trust in? What is the thing that you're banking on for your life to go the way you want it to go? You know, it could be, well, if I get this education, I get that qualification, then I can get this job. Says who? I mean, that's a lot of wishful and hopeful thinking, but you can't guarantee it. It's good to have dreams and ambitions, and it's good to, even as an old Christian, to say, yeah, I want to do this. But what are you depending on? What are you trusting in?

If you're a Christian, have you ever replaced your trust in God with something else? And I want to answer, yeah, I think you do. I think we all do, and I think we do it on and off in different occasions, at different times, and for different reasons. We all get to that point where we stop trusting in God, stop depending on God, and we've actually put it into something else, and it's really quite easy to see. And so the reason why I ask the question, what are you trusting in or what have you replaced your trust in to both unbelievers and to believers here this morning, is because the only way to get

into the kingdom of God, Jesus says, is the same way a child gets in.

A child has nothing to bring to God. In fact, a child has nothing other than who they are as a little person. They have probably no money unless it's been given to them, but generally, even that has to be given to them. So in and of themselves, they have nothing. And Jesus says that as you come to me, you're to come to me like a little child. You're to come completely dependent on me. However, when you get old, this seems to disappear. As a child, you don't seem to have any problem with being dependent. In fact, you turn up at Munchkins and you will not see the children having to learn what it is to be dependent. They just don't, they just do it. And yet, as we get older, we seem to have put occasionally into children, well, we've got to, they're going to be independent soon. Nobody is ever an independent. A child simply goes from depending on their parents to depending on something else when they leave home. The idea is to train everybody to be a dependent on God. Okay? Parents are to imitate to their children what it is to depend on God, so that hopefully, by the grace of God, the children do the same. But because we tend to think that we can make a better job of our life than what God can, we take hold of that dependence, we throw it at the window, and we want our independence, we want our freedom, we want to do it our way. And so it's not surprising to see many Christians, when things don't go the way you expect them to, to then, right, go their independent way. You know, God's making a mess of my life. God is, God has not promised what he said he would, and in comes independent living. Yes, I believe, but I'm not following. Okay?

Yeah, you're a believer, but you're not following. The definition of a true believer is a follower. Okay? You can believe and not follow, and therefore not belong. And so when you get to the rich young ruler here, and the disciples, you would expect there to be a big comparison. In other words, be like the disciples and not like the rich young ruler. But what Jesus does is he takes the rich ruler and the disciples, and he basically says, you're both the same. You have both replaced your trust in God with something else. Now, even though it's obvious to see with the rich ruler that he's trusting in his wealth, he's trusting in his riches, it's less obvious to see that the disciples are doing the same. You're thinking, well, the disciples gave everything up. How can they be trusting in something else? Well, as you'll see, they're trusting in the fact that they've given everything up. Okay, they're not trusting in God. They're trusting in the fact they've given everything up for God. God. It's a bit like the man, remember, which we learned from the good God, who thanks God that he's not like other men. Okay, and he's the one that goes home unjustified. Even though he gives God the complete thanks for not being like other men, for not being like tax collectors and sinners, he's the one who goes home not justified. Why? Because he's trusting in the fact that he can give thanks to God for not being like other men rather than trusting in God. There's a big difference between the two. How many people have you met? I've got relations who say, well, God will not let me into his heaven because I thank God for giving me a good life. And if I thank God for giving me a good life, then sure. No, thanking God for giving you a good life isn't the condition of eternal life.

[ 14 : 22 ] Dependence is. Dependence is. Be like a child. And so the rich young ruler and the disciples are the same. They're not comparisons. They're actually the same. And yet we find it very hard to understand.

So I want to begin with dependence then. Why does Jesus begin with dependence in verses 13 through to 16? Well, he says, you don't earn the kingdom, you receive it. It's given to you by God. Now, children in the day of Jesus had no rights. They had no status. They were completely dependent on people older than them, on people taking care of them, I guess, like children today. Children need a lot of protection. And children need a lot of protection because they are dependent. They are naturally dependent.

They're not independent. They're naturally dependent. But how does a child become dependent? Well, as we said before, they just are. And this puts children in a completely vulnerable position because their vulnerable position now has to be protected by the person that they're depending on. And if the person isn't doing their job, then children become neglected. And so when Jesus says here that you're to receive the kingdom of God like a child, he completely understands the dynamic of just how vulnerable children are and how dependable or how much they need to depend on others for everything that they have. And so what Jesus is saying by using a child to receive the kingdom is basically that God isn't going to neglect you. God sent his son to seek and to save the lost, and you're depending on someone who will not neglect you. And yet have you, this morning,

replace your trust in God because you actually believe he's neglecting you?

You know, have you began slowly in your heart to start trusting in other things because you believe that God is somehow letting you down? That somehow God is not quite coming through for you?

[16:37] And so that while you say, yeah, I depend on God, I depend on God, because you have this underlying feeling that God just doesn't seem to be doing what you think he ought to be doing. You've now begin to shift your dependence into other areas. So, you know, Jesus says, give up everything that you have and come and follow me. And suddenly the worries start creeping in and go, well, is that really true? You know, I have these worries, you know, I'll lose my job, I'll lose the house that I live in, use the cars that I have, and everything goes. And so I, as a pastor, I have those type of worries, but is my security in what I get supported by? Is it in the house that I live? Is it in the position that I have? Or is it in God? And the moment I start doubting God in the same way you do, I then start, right, well, let's save some money. Let's get a pension. Let's get a bank account, right? And that subtle shift. And so I'm no longer being like a dependent child because I'm fearing neglect. I got to take care of myself because I'm fearing nobody else is going to.

And so this morning you sat there having replaced your trust in God with something else because you feel that God is going to neglect you. Or you feel that God has neglected you. And that is a mistaken view. God could never neglect you. He came, he sent his son to seek and to save you. There's no neglect there whatsoever. So Jesus wants you to receive the kingdom like a child, which means don't be independent, don't grow up, don't try and do it your own way, but simply trust in him.

Everything Jesus says, everything that Jesus has done, I know it's going to be really difficult for you to do it, but that's exactly what Jesus wants you to do. Children, unlike the rich young ruler, don't have anything to hold on to. They don't have any riches. They don't, they just have nothing.

They come to Jesus with nothing, but they are kept safe in the kingdom because the kingdom is for such as them. So have you replaced your trust in God with something else? I'm asking you.

It may not be in the entirety of your life, but it may be in pockets of your life, which is now hindering you from following Jesus the very way Jesus wants you to follow him. And listen, following Jesus is really, really difficult. He didn't say it was going to be a walk in the park. He actually said it was going to be difficult, but it's possible because we do it in Jesus. So can you learn to live again dependently on God? Can you learn that lesson again? You've learned it before and here you are again having to learn it again. And here's the convincer. When you do it, he doesn't let you down.

[19:39] When you do it, he doesn't neglect you. When you do it his way, it works his way. The double-minded man in James 1 is the man who doesn't get his prayers answered, remember, because he is double-minded.

He wants the best of both worlds and ends up with the worst of both because of his double-mindedness. So there's a real danger there. The man convinces himself that God's not for him, but then he convinces himself because God's not for him because he's right, because he's double-minded. He's shifting between two positions. So how do I become dependent? How do I do that? Well, there is only one way, and this brings us to our second point, and that is learning to love God. One of my biggest regrets, or not necessarily regret, but one of the biggest questions that I have in my life, is whether or not I can love God with my own love. You ever thought about that?

Just imagine what it would be like for a moment to love God with your own love, and yet Jesus tells us quite clearly, or it does in 1 John, that we can actually do that. God first has to love us, and then that love produces in us a love for him. Naturally, it's just not in me to do it, so naturally to love God is really difficult. I must reflect entirely upon the fact that God loves me in order for me to be able to love him back. And so we get back to worship, we get back to seeing Jesus and God for who he is. Now, the question of the rich young ruler is this, what can I do to inherit eternal life? Now, he does say to Jesus, good teacher, and Jesus says, why do you call me good? No one's good but God alone. But the question is, what can I do to inherit eternal life? And Jesus looks at him and says, well, you know the commandments. And then look where Jesus starts, verse 19. This is the most shocking bit of the whole passage. Jesus says, verse 18, you know the commandments. Verse 19, you know the commandments. Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not bear false witness, do not draw, sorry, do not defraud, honor your father and mother. And the rich young ruler says, yes, teacher, I've kept all of these. What's the problem? You can see it, right? The commandments don't start there. The commandments never start with behavior. The commandments never start with something to do, immorality. What is the first commandment? Love

God. So Jesus purposely takes this man to all the actions of Christianity, all the do's and the don'ts, and the rich young ruler goes, do you know what? I've kept all of them. But Jesus knows that the commandments don't start there. He knows that the commandments start with loving God. And this is the one thing that the rich young ruler lacks, and Jesus knows it. And so he says to the rich young ruler, looking at him, verse 21, loved him and said to him, you lack one thing. What is it? Well, we can tell by the fact that Jesus doesn't start the first commandment, the idea that he's lacking is love for God. Sell all that you have and give to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven and come and follow me.

And he doesn't do it. And why doesn't he do it? Because he loves something else more.

See, he can't depend on God because he loves something else more. The simple commandment to receive the kingdom like a child in complete dependence cannot be done because this man is loving something else more than God. We're to love the Lord our God with our heart, our mind, our soul, our strength. We're to love God completely. We're to have no other idols. And yet this man cannot depend on God because he does not love God. Jesus says that the only way you can actually keep my commandments is by loving me. If you love me, he says, you will keep my commandments. It's a precondition to be able to do what Jesus says. It's, let me go, it's impossible to do what God says unless you love him. It's impossible to do what God says unless he has loved you first, but he's done that. And as you reflect on God's love for you, what begins to happen in your heart is you begin to love God more. But only by reflecting on God's love for you does that love for God increase in your own heart. And as you reflect more and more, you love God more and more, and it becomes really easy then to get rid of these secondary loves because you love God first.

[ 24 : 34 ] You know the principle of the expulsive power of a new affection, to put it in sort of a story. My brother Nathan, who's not a Christian, he believes, he probably still believes, but he's not a follower of Christ. He had plenty of girlfriends. He was just, you know, you can imagine what it was like growing up in a house of seven boys. And I was the eldest. Nathan was the next one down. People would say the more handsome one. I would, of course, disagree. So would the other brothers. But he always had plenty of girlfriends. And one day he said something that's so biblically true, he didn't even realize how true it was. He had just finished with one girlfriend, and he'd got a brand new one. And he said to the rest of his brothers, as we were just sat there talking, his brothers do, as well as the fighting and everything else that went on, there's nothing like a new one to get you over the old one.

And he's absolutely right. The only way an affection gets displaced from your heart is if a new, stronger, and better affection overtakes it. That's the only way the old ones become weak and they disappear.

He was right, even though he doesn't follow. Absolutely right. He understands how it works. And so the only way you can depend on God is if you love God to such a degree, if God is the, just the pinnacle of affection in your heart, that all others are just cast out.

The new affection, which is stronger and better and more wonderful, gets rid of the old affections, which were good in their way, perhaps, but not as good as this new one.

See, we all understand deep down that we can have a love for one thing, one minute, only to be replaced by a love for something else, another minute. And the new love always gets rid of the old love.

[ 26 : 38 ] Always. And so what Jesus is saying here is you lack one thing, love for God. The one thing that can get rid of every lesser affection in your life, love for God. So most people, just like the rich young ruler, find it very, very hard to depend on God, not because they're greedy. The rich young ruler is not greedy. He just doesn't want to lose anything. In fact, think of how many decisions you've made in your life, not because you're greedy, but actually because you don't want to lose what you have.

The rich young ruler doesn't want more, he just doesn't want less. And so he doesn't depend on God because he doesn't want less than what he has. It's loss aversion.

Everybody makes decisions so that they can end up losing less or not lose at all. And for him to actually do what Jesus says would be for him to admit that everything that he has worked for, everything that he has trusted in, everything that he has built up means nothing.

In fact, I've told you this before, but one of my theological teachers, Justin Moat, his mother was lying on her deathbed and he was a vicar in the Church of England. Well, he's still his qualified vicar in the Church of England. He sat by her deathbed and he says, will you not turn to God?

Will you not repent and believe? And she said to him, for me to do that now, being the age that I am, would be for me to admit that I've lived my whole life for a lie and trusted in the wrong things. [ 28 : 23 ] And I'm just not willing to do that. That's exactly what this rich young ruler is doing. He doesn't want to lose what he has. He doesn't want to admit that everything that he's worked for doesn't actually mean anything when it comes to eternal life. Now, the disciples, on the other hand, think that because they've given everything up, then everything's good. I've given everything up. I don't own anything, Jesus. I'm doing exactly what you want, so surely I get it. He just says, listen, it doesn't even work that way.

It's not about what you've given up or what you keep. It's about who you're loving the most. Christ. And it is possible to live the Christian life where you sort of hold God into a form of captivity, where you say, well, I've given this up for you, God. What are you going to do for me?

You know, I've put in a few extra prayers this week, God. Now, are you going to give me a few extra answers? And that's exactly what the disciples are doing here. They think, right, life should go better for me now, God, because I've done all this for you. The thing is, if you're doing it to get something in return, the question is, who are you really doing it for?

See, Jesus can see through these things very, very easy. It takes us a really long time. Who are you serving? Are you serving God or are you serving yourself? If you're doing to get, then you're serving yourself.

Well, the only way to depend on God is to love him. And love works both ways. First, you need to recognize that God has loved you. And then by recognizing that God loves you, that love is produced in you. In other words, if you're sat here this morning thinking, you know what, I don't love God. In fact, I'm actually finding it really difficult to love God.

[ 30 : 24 ] Well, there is an answer to that. There is a solution to loving God more, and that is focus a whole lot more on his love for you. And then we go read 1 John, which is all about love for God in many ways and what true Christianity is. But it states very, very clearly that if you want to grow in your love for God, you have to grow in your understanding of God's love for you. And so if you're sat here this morning thinking, I have no desire to love God, I don't want to love God, I don't want to give anything up, I'm quite happy the way that I am, even though I know it's not right. And you think, oh, I don't have the desire. If you want to get the desire, then you have to go and reflect for a good long amount of time on God's love for you. And when you start doing that, something starts to bubble in your heart, something starts to change in your mind. And it's those weaker affections are displaced by the newer, stronger affection, God's love for you. And then, and only then, will you be able to depend on God.

Only then will you be able to depend on God. Jesus is effectively saying that, look, I'm not the only way to life, but there is no other way. It's not that I am the only way to life. That is true, Jesus is the only way to life. But it's more important to understand that there's not any other way. Understand it from both angles. And so the ongoing lesson for the disciples is this, it is equally wrong to trust in what you have given up as it is to trust in what you have.

You don't put your trust in what you do for God, you put your trust in what God has done for you. That's how you enter the kingdom. You put your trust, not in what you can bring, and what you can give up, or what you can do for him, but what he has done for you. That's how you love him. That's how you depend on him. And so the questions. What is the one thing, if you lost it this very night, would not make you want to face tomorrow? Whatever answer you came up with, that's your God. Whatever answer you came up with, that's your God.

If I lost my job, I wouldn't want to face tomorrow. Well, then your job is your God. God. People visiting me, then people visiting you is your job. God. What is the one thing, if you lost it, you wouldn't want to face tomorrow? Not having a boyfriend, not having a girlfriend, not having a husband, not having a wife. Well, that's your God. That's your highest affection.

That is the one thing that you're living for. And it's not Jesus. Jesus. And so here we are as Christians sat here this morning thinking, do you know, all this time, I thought I loved God and followed him. And now it's just been shown to me that there's something else that has my heart other than him. And I didn't know it all this time. But now you do.

[ 33 : 36 ] And so what are you going to do about it? So what is the one thing, if you could have, would make you follow Jesus with no problems whatsoever? Well, the answer is the one thing that you need. God's love for you and your love for him. Because that is the only way, that is the only way you can put one step in front of the other to follow him in exactly the way he wants you to.

God's love for you and your love for him. That is how we enter the kingdom.  
And that is how we follow as disciples, loving God and depending on him alone. Amen.