The Kingdom of God

Key verse Mark 10:27 Jesus looked at them and said, “With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God.”

One day one man wake up and find that he has eternal life. He has everything he needs or wants to have. If he just presses a button, a wonderful meal is prepared on the table. He can enjoy the newest TV show and movies for free. His dress room is full of designer clothes. He will never get old but more beautiful and gorgeous every day. Does it sound good? Don’t you want this? Can you find something strange? Yes, right. He is living eternally alone. If you can have eternal life but should live alone, still do you want to choose it?

Today, we will encounter one young man who wanted to inherit eternal life desperately. I desire that we may have a chance to think about eternal life and the Kingdom of God seriously through this passage.

1. Having eternal life VS Entering the kingdom of God

Jesus loved children and welcomed them. He said, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.” Jesus blessed them and was going to start on his way. At that moment, a young man ran up to Jesus and fell on his knees. He asked, “Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” In Matthew gospel, he said, “Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?” From his question, we can see that he was very religious and passionate to keep the laws. Even though he was young and rich, he wanted to have eternal life. When I was a boy, I noticed a very interesting common thing in different religions. Every religion was seeking eternal life. Especially, in many Asian religions, people believe that they can become an immortal being such as Buddha or Taoist hermit with a super power. We can understand people’s desire for eternal life.

This young man was similar. He wanted to have eternal life. He thought he can gain eternal life with good things. Jews believed that they could have eternal life by keeping God’s commandments. But the young man could not be sure of having eternal life. It was because he himself knew that he could not keep the laws perfectly. When he saw Jesus, he felt that Jesus is the teacher who can give him one point lesson for getting eternal life.

How did Jesus respond to his question? Look at verses 18 and 19. “"Why do you call me good?" Jesus answered. "No one is good--except God alone. You know the commandments: 'Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, do not defraud, honor your father and mother.'"” In Matthew gospel, before mentioning the above commandments Jesus said to him, “If you want to enter life, obey the commandments.” Here we can clearly see that eternal life is closely related to obeying the commandments. Especially, Jesus mentioned the 6 commandments in the Ten Commandments. All these are related to relationship with others. In Matthew gospel, Jesus also added the command to love a neighbor as oneself. One day, an expert in the law asked Jesus, “Teacher, which is the greatest commandments in the Law?” Jesus replied, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.” This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: “Love your neighbor as yourself.’ And the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”

Do you want to live eternal life? Love your God with your whole being! Love your neighbor as yourself! Those who obey the commandments will enter life. But we have to know that getting or having eternal life is different from entering life or entering the kingdom of God. Jesus did not say that he will have eternal life. He uses a similar but different term. After the young man left sad, Jesus lamented over him. “How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!”

The phrase “Entering the kingdom of God” actually explains a lot about eternal life. What is eternal life? Just living forever? We can live forever in the hell! I think that the reason why Jesus told him the six commandments above is that his view of salvation is very selfish. Even though our faith is very personal, God’s master plan of salvation is very collective. God saved the Israelite with a great vision for them to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. Peter rediscovered the same hope of God for the gentiles. We will live in the kingdom of God with our brothers and sisters. We will never obtain eternal life but it will be given to us. God called us to love one another in Jesus Christ.

I can find myself from this young man. I do believe in Jesus and I am sure of my salvation. I don’t seek eternal life because it is given to me through Jesus. But I found that I was trying to be found more righteous than others. I wanted more credit and recognition from God. I wanted my Father God to love me more and reward me more. But a few days ago, I suddenly thought of God’s calling for me. Am I a missionary? Do I sincerely love one soul? Did you love even one man genuinely? I found that I was so indifferent to people. I was even indifferent to my Bible students and St. George coworkers. I did not obey God’s commandments at all. How about you? Do you obey God’s commandments to love your neighbor as yourself? Don’t you have or judge your family or coworkers? Or aren’t you so indifferent to people’s lives around you? Do you think that eternal life is just living forever or to have eternal fellowship with God and his children?

1. Entering the Kingdom of God.

I do believe that here there is no one born in Canada. You entered Canada at some point in the past. You had to collect the documents, pay fees and apply visa. By mercy of Canada’ government, you were allowed to enter Canada and you are here now! Wow! If you don’t have a proper visa, you can’t enter a foreign country. Entering the kingdom of God is the same. We need God’s permission. If God closes the door of his kingdom, we can’t enter. God commanded Noah to make an ark. The door of the ark was open but God himself shut the door when the flood came and people could not enter. God is the sovereign LORD who allows people to enter his kingdom.

Jesus told the young man, “One thing you lack. Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.” Wow, it sounds too radical and extreme. To have eternal life, should we sell our possessions and give to the poor? Actually Jesus teaches us one more secret to enter the kingdom of God. It is to love God and trust Him.

This young man was very rich. Jesus told him to give his wealth to the poor. Jesus promised that the young man will have treasure in heaven. Of course, he believed in God and his desire for eternal life was also serious. But he loved money and trusted money more than God. He wanted to have eternal life but failed to trust and love God who is the builder of the kingdom of God where he could enjoy eternal life. If he wants eternal life, he must trust God. Eternal life without God is like a ring case without a diamond ring. What kind of a woman will like that?

In history, actually many rich young men abandoned their privilege and lived a sacrificial life for Jesus and the gospel. Many UofT medical doctors and graduate came to Korea to preach the gospel and his kingdom. They were like a man who found treasure hidden in a field and purchased the field with everything he had.

We so love to compromise in understanding Jesus’ command to this man. We say that we don’t need to sell our possessions and give it to the poor. We say that we are saved by faith and we are children of God. We say that we can serve people with what we have and that’s enough. But do we really serve people with what we have? Jesus’s command implies that we should not take it for granted to entering the kingdom of God. If there is something which bothers us to enter the kingdom of God, we should leave it and choose God and his kingdom.

However, the man’s face fell at this. He went away sad. He could not sell his great wealth for the kingdom of God. Jesus wanted to bless him greatly by calling him as a disciple. He longed for eternal life but loved his wealth at the same time. He could not obey Jesus because he had great wealth and loved it. He loved money more than God. The first commandment in the Ten Commandment is “You shall have no other gods before me.” He broke the first commandment by loving money above God. He did not trust God who will prepare treasure for him in heaven. God is the King of God’s kingdom. He wanted to live in God’s kingdom but he could not trust him. We have to know that trusting God is a key to our salvation and eternal life. It is nonsense to want a blessing from God if one does not trust God. God is not visible. How can we prove that we trust invisible God? We can do by obeying his commandments.

We don’t know the man’s story afterwards. But Jesus did not miss this chance to teach a lesson to the disciples. He said to his disciples, “How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!” He emphasized the difficulty of entering the kingdom of God again, saying “Children, how hard 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 man to enter the kingdom of God.” The disciples were very amazed at his words. They said to each other, “Who then can be saved?” This young man was a very exemplary Jewish believer. Also his wealth was considered as a sign of God’s favor on him. The disciples thought that they were inferior to the rich man. They thought that if he can’t enter the kingdom of God, they also can’t.

Look at verse 27. “Jesus looked at them and said, “With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God.” We are living in the era of post-Jesus. We think that entering the kingdom of God is very easy. Clearly Jesus is saying that entering the kingdom of God is hard. With man, entering the kingdom of God is impossible. Before believing in Jesus, we need to see how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God. Even though it is impossible with man, God made it possible by sacrificing Jesus on the cross and raising Him from the dead. When we know how hard it is, we can appreciate God’s gift with praise and thanksgiving.

Peter found that he and the other disciples were different from the rich young man. He said to Jesus, “We have left everything to follow you.” They were great in the sight of God because they made a decision of faith to follow Jesus. For example, Peter was married when Jesus called him. His family was not rich and Peter was the main incomer of the family. If he leaves his home to follow Jesus, who can take care of his family? But Peter left his family to follow Jesus. It was a great decision of faith.

Jesus also acknowledged their decision of faith to follow him. “I tell you the truth, “no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in his present age (homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields – and with them persecutions) and in the age to come, eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last first.” As he said, Jesus blessed their lives so abundantly. They went to the world with the gospel and met countless brothers and sisters in Christ. They will have great reward in God’s kingdom.

I learn personally that eternal life is not obtainable. It is a gift of God. Eternal life for me does not make sense. God called us to build up the church, the body of Christ so that we can love God and love one another. We Christians are not seeking eternal life but Jesus and God’s kingdom. We are already given salvation and eternal life in Jesus. With this life, we should love one another and preach the gospel of Jesus to many people. Let’s patiently wait for the kingdom of God! Let’s pay cost for the kingdom of God.