**WHO CAN ENTER THE KINGDOM OF GOD?**

November 8, 2015

Luke 18:15-30

Key Verse 18:17 "Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it."

In today's passage we meet someone who is an ideal disciple candidate. He believes that God is the Creator God. We don't have to teach him the Bible since he knows the Bible well. All he needs is a little discipleship training to become a disciple of Jesus Christ. But he left without eternal life. In fact, Jesus drove him away by making it impossible for him to follow. Did Jesus fail? No. The fact is that the rich ruler was trying to do the impossible. He was seeking on his own terms to be saved and it cannot happen. It is impossible. No one can enter the kingdom of God on his own. In the past, we have seen people like him: They were very excited at the conferences to hear the messages, and decided to give their lives to Jesus Christ, and then after the conferences, they were gone. We were left wondering how we failed, and whether our approach was wrong. This passage shows that no matter what strategy we use, it is impossible for peole to be saved without God. The question here is not about faith. It is not about lack of Bible knowledge. Jesus does not mention faith. He does not challenge him to believe anything. No matter what one may believe, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he humbly confesses his sinfulness and submits completely to the sovereign lordship of Jesus Christ. Salvation is not just about what you believe concerning God and his work; it is about acknowledging that you can do nothing to earn salvation; it is about being willing to let go anything in this world that is temporal and passing if Jesus asks.

**First**, receive the kingdom of God like a little child (15-17). Look at verse 15. People were bringing babies to Jesus to have him touch them. When the disciples saw this, they rebuked them. From a parent’s perspective, they saw their kids as precious, adorable and sweet. But from the viewpoint of disciples, children might have been seen as annoying, loud, and burdensome. So, to the disciples, the children were wasting Jesus’ time. How did Jesus respond to the little children? Look at verses 16-17. 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. I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.” Jesus wasn’t too important or too busy for these little kids. Rather than pushing them away, he invited them in.

Furthermore Jesus tells us that the kingdom of God belongs to those who take on child-like attitudes. What attitudes does he mean when he says that the kingdom of God belongs to such as these? Jesus refers to a child’s pure heart, humbleness, and continuous growing and learning mind. Most importantly, Jesus wants each of us to have a child-like dependence on our Heavenly Father. A child does not worry about how to pay rent next month. He trusts his father or mother. A child believes in Santa Claus if his mother tells him so. The kingdom of God surely belongs to such as these. Dr. John Rice was an evangelist in America during the mid 20th century. According to his research, about half of those who became Christians did so by age 15. He himself accepted Christ at the age 9. There is a new movement of raising a new generation from the 4/14 window to transform the world. It is to evangelize 1.2 billion children from age 4 to age 14 and mobilize them to transform the world. As Jesus welcomed little children, we should welcome little children and help them grow to be future leaders.

Verse 17 tells us that to enter the kingdom of God, we must first receive Jesus like a little child. With child-like faith, we must accept and believe the message of the gospel. The Bible is full of Jesus’ teachings and promises. Not all of them are easy to obey. But when we do, we reveal that our relationship with Jesus is real and that our faith is real. Jesus says, “But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.” To do so requires faith that Jesus will provide for us when we make sacrifices for him in school, in our professional career or socially with our friends. Now we are preparing 2015 Christmas worship service on December 13. It is right in the middle of final exams for some students. But when we trust in God like a little child and participate in the work of God, God will surely bless us.

**Second**, how to enter the kingdom of God (18-25). This part illustrates the case of a man who would not receive the kingdom of God like a little child. Look at verse 18. “A certain ruler asked him, ‘Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?’” Obviously, this man had a serious life problem; he was not sure whether or not he had eternal life. What kind of person was he? He was a ruler. He was rich. Matthew 19:20 says that he was young. Suffice it to say that the success of this man was the envy of many ambitious young men and especially of many young girls. Rather than calling him the rich ruler all the time, let's call him Bill.

Bill was indeed a man of standing already, though he was young. Until then, he did his best to be better off. He had competed with and defeated others. He had fought and won, overcoming himself until he had attained success, honor and great wealth. So he should have been very happy. However, his success and wealth, which should have been his source of happiness did not soothe his soul; they only made his soul dry. He did not feel the life of God in him. To put it another way, he wanted a relationship with God that would produce in him rest from the struggle of legalism, hope, peace, joy, and contentment. What was missing in his heart was calm, confidence. He was restless. He was anxious. He was unfulfilled. So he asked Jesus, “Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?”

Look at verse 19. “‘Why do you call me good?’ Jesus answered. ‘No one is good—except God alone.’” Jesus immediately perceived that this man did not have God in his heart. So his concept of good was based on human relativism. So Jesus drew his attention to God as the solution to his problem. His problem was his self-centeredness. The ruler thought he was good or could make himself good. He was under the delusion that he could inherit the kingdom on the principle of doing. He never thought of himself as a sinner. So in order to help him realize that he is a sinner, Jesus quoted from the fifth commandment to the ninth commandment. These commandments concern love of one’s neighbor. “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.’” How did he answer? Look at verse 21. “‘All these I have kept since I was a boy,’ he said.” On the outside, superficially as far as people could see, he had done his best to keep the Law. Obviously there were times he didn't honor his parents. Obviously there were times in his life that he had taken something that was not his or he had told a lie and obviously he had lusted in his heart and therefore was an adulterer at heart. But from his viewpoint, he had created the illusion that he was a law keeper. So instead of the Law doing its work of revealing his sin, he had twisted the Law into a means by which he had established his own righteousness. This is a problem. The second problem was that he still believed that salvation was by his own efforts, that by keeping the Law he could earn salvation. That the Law not only did not reveal his sin, but confirmed his righteousness and therefore the Law was the way to eternal life. And that is why, he says, "What must I do?"

When Jesus heard his answer, he wanted to perform major surgery on the spot. Still, Jesus tempered his words. Look at verse 22. “When Jesus heard this, he said to him, ‘You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.’” This is similar to what Jesus said in 14:33, "In the same way, those of you who do not give up everything you have cannot be my disciples." Jesus is asking him to give up everything. Are you willing to do that? Jesus doesn't ask everybody to do that. But he asks everybody to be willing to do that. Sell all you possess. This would be the family estate. He was in doubt in possession of the great wealth of the family. It says that he was extremely rich in verse 23. And to liquidate that and give all his money to the poor would be not only to alienate himself from all his riches, but it would be to alienate himself from all his family---his wife, his children, his parents, siblings. He would forsake everything---home, property, money, family and he would certainly lose his place in the synagogue following after Jesus. He would be excommunicated from the synagogue. Everything was at stake.

Jesus is saying, "You must see yourself as a sinner, unable to earn salvation. You just see the Lord Jesus Christ as the absolute and all-consuming priority of your life, even if it costs you everything." Jesus told him, "If you are willing to do that, you will have treasure in heaven." Look at verse 23. "When he heard this, he became very sad." He was sad when he got there, and now he is sadder. He didn't give it much thought. He didn't want to go away and meditate on it. He didn't ask for further clarification. It was crystal clear. He was very sad. It was not the sorrow of godly repentance. It was a sorrow unto death. Deadly sorrow. He really wanted God in his life. He wanted Jesus to lead him to God. He wanted peace and joy and happiness, security, hope, heaven. But he wanted it in addition to, not in the place of---all his priorities. His priority was really himself. The priority was fix me, make me feel better about life, make me feel better about my future, make me feel better about the life after death. His priority was not eternal life, his priority was not really the kingdom of God, his priority was his riches, his position, his power, his money. And he couldn't abandon it. He had no power to let go of it. He wanted eternal life to some degree, but not to the degree that he would forfeit everything, sell all to purchase the treasure in heaven. Very sad, but unwilling to confess his sin, unwilling to confess his utter inability to please God, unwilling to submit to the absolute authority of Jesus Christ, unwilling to exchange all his priorities. He would not, to put it in the words of Jesus in Luke 9:24, "For whoever wants to save their life will lost it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it."

Look at verse 24-25. “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 a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.’” In the Jewish society, the more wealth you had, the more they perceived that God had blessed you, and therefore the higher ranking citizen you were in the kingdom of God. If a rich person like Bill cannot enter the kingdom of God, who then can be saved? It was a shocking statement.

Look at verse 27. Jesus replied, “What is impossible with men is possible with God.” No one has the power in himself to forsake his pride, his selfish desire, no human has that power. No human has the power to forsake his sin. No one can be saved on his own effort. Certainly a sinner can feel bad, sad, depressed; we say, "I wish I had a connection with God. I wish God would come into my life and fix me and make things better. I wish God could give me a better life, a better wife, and a better family, and a better this or better that, remove my depression and make me happy and not fear death." But we cannot on our own power change ourselves. But here is the key. "What is impossible with men is possible with God." Only God can change the heart. Bill should not have left, but instead should have said, "Lord, I am a sinner. I cannot save myself by my own effort. Have mercy on me."

Look at verse 28. "Peter said to him, 'We have left all we had to follow you!" Peter is saying, "In contrast to Bill, we have forsaken all to follow you. What's in it for us? Was it worth it?" Jesus didn't rebuke Peter. That was an honest and justified question. In fact, he gives him a wonderful, marvelous answer in verse 29-30. “I tell you the truth,” Jesus said to them, “no one who has left home or wife or brothers 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.” Jesus is saying, "I know you have, Peter. You have done that. You have done what is impossible because God worked in your heart." When you come to Christ, you leave it all behind, all the priorities are changed and you love him with all your heart, soul, mind and strength and you want Christ to such a degree that you would let go of anything and everything. But Jesus assures us, "If you have left that, you will receive many times as much at this time and in the age to come, eternal life."

Theoretically, there are three ways to enter the kingdom of God: First, if you die as a child before you have a sense of accountability of your sins, you will be gathered safely into the arms of Jesus just as he welcomed the little children in this passage. The second theoretical way to enter the kingdom of God is to live a perfect life. From the moment you have a sense of right and wrong until the moment you die, never have an evil thought; never tell a lie, or commit one sin of thought or deed. If you don't qualify for the first two, there is only one way. Place your faith and trust in Jesus Christ and his finished work on the cross for your salvation.