**Who Can Enter the Kingdom of God?**

August 9, 2020

Mark 10:13-31

Key Verse 10:15 “Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.”

In this passage there are three different expressions, “enter the kingdom of God,” “inherit eternal life.” “be saved” They are all the same. Today we hear a lot about seekers in churches. We even have a ministry which is seeker driven and seeker friendly. They say that we just need to find out what they are seeking and provide it and that will draw them to salvation. But the truth of the matter is that the world is full of superficial religious people. On the outside, they may appear to be religious, really pursuing the things of God. But they are seeking God on their own terms. Eternal life costs everything, their possessions. Many people want eternal life only as an add-on to what they already possessed. In today’s passage we meet a rich young man who was the ideal seeker. He was so serious about eternal life instead of about having a dream job or a girlfriend. But he failed miserably because he did not receive the kingdom of God like a little child.

Look at verse 13. “People were bringing little children to Jesus to have him touch them, but the disciples rebuked them.” People wanted Jesus to bless their children and so they brought their children to him. But the disciples were highly irritated by these noisy children. They thought that children were bothering Jesus. So they rebuked their parents and said sharply to their kids, “Be quiet, and go away.” But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant (14a). “He said to them, ‘Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these’” (14b). He continued, “I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it” (15). Jesus had previously taken a little child in his arms to illustrate who a truly great man is (9:35-37). Now Jesus uses a little child again to show us who is qualified to enter the kingdom of God.

What then does it mean to receive the kingdom of God like a little child? It obviously does not mean to be childish and demanding and to throw a temper tantrum whenever things do not go the way you want. Rather, the loveliest attribute of children is the fact that they absolutely trust their parents’ love. A child depends on his parents for everything. When he gets hurt, he does not think about which doctor he needs to call; he just wants Mom or Dad. Jesus saw that this is the quality a man needs to enter the kingdom of God. This is the faith that God wants us to have as his children, who will spend eternity with him. When Calvin was young, he followed his parents to Canada. He did not know where he was going. He got on the airplane with his parents and slept in the airplane. When he woke up, he was in Canada. He did not worry about how he was going to survive in a strange land. A child simply trusts in his parents’ love with all his heart without any doubts, fear or calculation. Older we get, we become cynical and suspicious of others’ help, thinking, “What does he want from me in return?” Children do not think about, “What ifs” or all the possible scenarios. Also children do not pretend to know a lot of things. They are honest and humble. They are loving and forgiving and do not harbor their anger too long. If this is you, you belong to the kingdom of God. In the next passage we meet a young man who did not receive the kingdom of God like a little child.

Look at verse 17. As Jesus started on his way, a man ran up to him and fell on his knees before him. ‘Good teacher,’ he asked, ‘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? Matthew 19:20 says that he was young. According to Luke, he was a ruler, and he was rich. Suffice it to say that the success of this man was the envy of many ambitious young men and especially of many young girls who wanted to marry him. He 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 was desperate although he was successful and had great wealth. He was restless all the time, partly because he had to maintain his success and wealth, but mainly because he did not feel the life of God in him. So he asked Jesus, “Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?”

What did Jesus say to him? Jesus did not answer his question directly. Look at verse 18. “Why do you call me good? No one is good--except God alone.” It is important for us to know that God alone is good; all men are good and evil. Jesus said this to draw his attention to God as the solution to his problem. His problem was his self-centeredness. Perhaps the young man thought he was good or could make himself good. He wanted to obtain eternal life with his own effort. But Jesus clearly taught that the kingdom of God must be received as a gift; it cannot be achieved by human effort. It may be entered only by those who know they are helpless, without merit or claim.

This man 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 tenth 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 20. “‘Teacher,’ he declared, ‘all these I have kept since I was a boy.’” Wow! How could he say this? Anyway, to this man’s knowledge, he was sure that he had kept all these commandments. It may be true that he kept them since he was a boy. However, to him, keeping the law was only a matter of outward observance and ritualistic ceremonies. He did not grasp the idea that we have to keep the law positively from our hearts. Note that all these commandments can be summarized as “Love your neighbor as yourself.” The man said basically, “I never in my life did anyone any harm.” That was true. But the real question is, “Did he really love his neighbor as himself?”

How did Jesus help him? When Jesus looked at him, he loved him, because he was sincere. He was so sincere, and was willing to do anything. If Jesus said to him, “Fast 40 days and read the Bible 15 hours a day for 40 days,” he would do it. Look at verse 21. “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.” Jesus knew his problem very deeply, that is, his self-centeredness. Jesus is saying, “If you really love your neighbor, then sell all your property and give it to the poor.” The man went away sad because he had great wealth. When Jesus said, “Go, sell everything you have,” he did not mean that this man could have been saved by selling his possessions and giving it to the poor. There is only one way of salvation--that is, faith in Jesus Christ. But in order to be saved, a man must acknowledge that he is a sinner, falling short of God’s holy requirements. The rich man’s unwillingness to share his possessions showed that he did not love his neighbor as himself. He should have said, “Lord, if that’s what is required, then I am a sinner. I cannot save myself by my own efforts. Have mercy on me.” But he loved his money and refused to come to Jesus simply. His idol was money, possessions, and self. Every time he went to the synagogue or the temple on a Sabbath, it was with hypocrisy because his true God was money. He wanted eternal life but only in addition to what he really worshiped. He had another god, namely, money. If you want anything more than salvation, if you want anything more than eternal life, if you want anything more than Christ, you lose everything. The young man wanted eternal life but he wanted it as an addition, not as a complete substitution for everything else in life. Each person has an obstacle, one thing, to get in the way of entering the kingdom of God. We must get rid of it. It can be money like this young man, or it can be pride, or it can be someone in your heart. We cannot have eternal life together with everything else. We must get rid of one thing which gets in the way.

Jesus tells the young man to sell his possessions and give to the poor – and I think that’s all the guy heard. But Jesus also said, “Then come, follow me.” The real deal – the real core of the issue was in the last three words: “come, follow me.” That’s all Jesus wants – that is the way to eternal life. It is not through external obedience to a set of rules, it is not even through selling all our possessions. One thing he lacked was Jesus. Verse 22 is one of the most disappointing verses in the Bible: “When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth.” He went away sad, because he refused Jesus’ offer to have eternal life by following Him. Instead he chose his wealth, which he knew couldn’t give him eternal life. He went away sad, because he knew that what Jesus said was true, but he couldn’t make that choice, that sacrifice.

Jesus worried about his disciples and said to them, “How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!” What was the disciples’ response? “The disciples were amazed at his words.” The reason for their amazement was that Jesus was turning accepted Jewish standards completely upside down. Jews believed that prosperity was the sign of God’s favor and poverty, God’s curse. So Jesus repeated in verses 24b-25. “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 confused and wondered, “Who then can be saved?” They reasoned that if a rich person couldn’t enter the kingdom of God, then no one else could either.

Jesus looked at them and said in verse 27, “With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God.” The sinner, by his own power and his own will and his money and his religion and his morality, cannot save himself. He cannot enter the kingdom. He cannot inherit eternal life. And he cannot be saved. The sinner has no power in himself to be saved. Jeremiah 13:23 says, “Can an Ethiopian change his skin or a leopard change its spots? Neither can you do good who are accustomed to doing evil.” Man cannot be completely free from his material possessions as long as he lives in this world. Man also cannot save himself with material possessions. But God saves those who believe in him, through his one and only Son. It was true in the Old Testament that riches were a sign of God’s favor. But now riches are a test of a man’s devotedness. Matthew 6:24 says, “No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.” Money can help us do many things. Money will make many things easy. But if, because of money, we abandon God, money becomes the root of all sins. Little children do not worry about money. They do not worry about how they will survive tomorrow. They trust their parents. We need to become like little children. Older we get, it becomes impossible. We cannot do it by our own strength. We need God’s help.

Look at verse 28. Peter said to him, “We have left everything to follow you!” Jesus knew that his disciples had a sense of suffering loss. But he didn’t mind about Peter’s sentiment and gave him the most encouraging word of God. Look at verses 29-30. “‘I tell you the truth,’ Jesus replied, ‘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 this present age (homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields--and with them, persecutions) and in the age to come, eternal life.’” This verse plainly tells us that if we believe, we lose much. But Jesus promises both present and eternal reward to those who forsake all for his sake and the gospel’s. Firstly, God himself is their reward. The true happiness of man comes when he accepts God himself as his own reward and inheritance. God does not give us gold medals or a mansion as rewards. He gives us himself as our reward. After obeying God’s calling to leave his home and his country, Abram felt that God did not bless him, for God did not give him a son to inherit his estate. He felt he lost too much. But God appeared to him and said, “Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward.” Here we learn that God alone is the security and reward of God’s children. Secondly, the present reward is 10,000 percent return, not in money, but in homes--homes of other people where he is given accommodations as a servant of God, in brothers and sisters and mothers and children--Christian friends, in fields--countries of the world which he conquered with the gospel, in persecutions. Through persecutions and hardships, a child of God can learn how to trust and obey God all the more. We learned about two sisters in Delhi UBF in India. They grew up in a Hindu family. They accepted Jesus as their Savior, but when their father tried to marry them to Hindu men, they refused and as a result, were kicked out of their home. But they gained more brothers and sisters all over the world, including us.

May God help us simply trust in God like little children without doubts, fear and calculation so that we may enter the kingdom of God.

Big Idea: No one can enter the kingdom of God on their own