

Be Like a Child to Enter God's Kingdom (4pm)

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[0:00] Well again, can I welcome you again to Abby's baptism. It is great. It really is nice to see so many family and friends here of Simon and Chrissy's. I remember we've got three kids, my wife and I.

Michelle and I have got three kids. And I remember when our youngest was born, it was 5 a.m. in the morning. Michelle's labour pains obviously started before that. And when they started, we rang some very kind friends who came over at an unearthly hour of the morning to look after the eldest two kids.

And I raced Michelle into the hospital with her labour pains getting closer together, which of course meant the baby was about to arrive. When we got to the hospital, I realised I hadn't quite parked between the lines. And so Michelle was about to get out of the door, well, kind of fall out the door, waddle out.

And I said, oh, hang on a second, I'll just let me straighten up. And she just looked at me. And so she could have said, are you insane? It's 4.30 in the morning. There's no one else around in the car park.

Just park the car. But she didn't. She just kind of looked at me. And then she said, I straightened up and I went inside. And half an hour later, our third child was born. And upon reflection, I probably could have had better priorities.

[1:06] But the reason I tell this story is not because of my pedantic parking, but because of what happened when Michelle was delivering our third child. And what happened was, midway through the labour, the midwives actually told her to stop pushing for a moment.

And then they kind of whispered to each other. And when you see that, it's never a good sign, is it? And so I got a little anxious and I went over and asked them what was going on. And they said that the umbilical cord had wrapped rather tightly around Megan's neck.

Now, I know that this has happened before, but it scared me somewhat. And so they were discussing whether or not to try and cut it or just get it off, like pull it off over the head or something or other. And at that point, I remember vividly feeling completely useless.

There's nothing I could do to save my daughter. She hadn't even been born yet. And there was nothing I could do to save her. All I could do was trust these midwives to save her.

Of course, it all worked out in the end. And we are blessed to have a stubborn, I mean, a lovely little daughter. But the point is, I had to trust in another person to save her.

[2:17] And that's similar to the point being made in that Bible reading we had a moment ago. We had to trust in another person, namely Jesus, to save us and to bring us into his heavenly kingdom.

So let me show you how the point's being made through these two true stories that are recorded for us in the Bible. The first story is about some children. And we're up to sentence number 13 on your sheets, the very first one.

It says, people were bringing little children to Jesus to have him bless them, but the disciples rebuked them. Now, parents here are bringing kids to have Jesus bless them. And the disciples say, stop, don't come.

Why? Why? Well, it seems they thought children were not important enough to bother Jesus. Has anyone heard that phrase, children are to be seen but not heard?

Are you familiar with that phrase? We don't use it so much these days. But certainly back in Jesus' day, it was in effect. He lived during the time of the Roman Empire. And back then, children weren't to bother adults, particularly important adults.

[3 : 19] And all historians agree, whether they're church historians or non-church historians, that Jesus was an important person. He was an influential figure. And so maybe that's why. But more than that, if we'd read what happened a bit before this account on the sheets from the book of Mark in the Bible, we would have heard the disciples arguing over who the greatest disciple was.

And so who should get the best seat in God's kingdom and so on. It seems they started to get caught up with thinking that entering God's kingdom was about how great you were. And in their minds, kids weren't that great because, well, let's face it, they hadn't had chance to do anything great.

So who are they to bother Jesus? But notice Jesus gets angry with them for thinking this way. Sentence number 14. When Jesus saw this, he was indignant, angry.

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. It's as though Jesus is saying to them, you might be thinking in terms of greatness, but I tell you what, the kingdom of God actually belongs to these little children.

The ones who you think aren't so great. The ones who just turned away. In fact, he says, if you want to enter the kingdom, then you actually need to be like one of these little children.

[4 : 36] Have a look at number sentence number 15 and 16 on your sheets there. It says, I tell you the truth. Anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.

And he took the children in his arms, put his hands on them and bless them. You see, entering God's kingdom, it's another way of saying, you know, being saved from judgment and receiving eternal life.

You see, the Bible is very clear that we have all ignored God. We've all kind of been like Red, the dog, you know, lived our own way and got muck all over us and so on and so on. We've all ignored God, even though he made the world.

Even if you believe in a big bang, you know, the two particles bang together. Who put them there in the first place? There's got to be a first cause. God made the world and so he owns the world, yet we ignore him, live our own way.

And the Bible says that we'll all have to answer for how we've lived one day. But entering God's kingdom means that we can be saved from the consequences of living our own way. And entering God's kingdom means that we instead can be made right with God in this life and have certainty of heaven in the next life.

[5 : 42] So how do you enter God's kingdom and get all this? Well, Jesus says you need to be like a child. And what does he mean here? I mean, I'm constantly telling my kids to grow up. And here he's saying we need to be like a child.

Does that mean we have to throw tantrums like little children? Oh, we had a cracker one the other day. I know I better not. I better not. Of course, it's not what Jesus is saying. Of course not. Rather, he's saying that we need to receive the kingdom like a child.

That's what sentence number 15 says. And how do children receive something? Well, by simply trusting. Now, in the past, I've tried to illustrate this point about kids simply receiving in trust.

And sometimes I'd hand a child who was nearby the front a piece of paper. And every time they just take it. No questions asked. In other words, they trusted me and simply received it.

The problem was one time they started to chew on the paper and nearly choked. I don't do that anymore. But you get the point, don't you? A child receives by simply trusting.

[6 : 47] And it's not about being great like the disciples thought to enter the God's kingdom. It's not about doing good things to earn your way in. I mean, if you offer a kid a chocolate, they don't then say, oh, hang on a second.

Before I take that chocolate, let me go and clean up my room and do a few good things to earn the chocolate. I've never seen a kid do that. Rather, they just receive it. Trusting. Abby, I understand, is on solids now.

Is that right? Yes, there is. Chrissie and Simon are feeding Abby solids, which is a whole new ballgame. I remember that stage well. And when she opens it, I've seen them feed Abigail.

They've come over for lunch one time. And when Chrissie or Simon picks up the spoon and places it near her mouth, she just opens her mouth and receives it in complete trust.

She might spit it out if she doesn't like it. But you see, that's Jesus' point here. We don't do good things to earn a place in God's kingdom like the disciples thought it was about. Rather, we simply trust in Jesus and receive entry into God's kingdom.

[7 : 55] And to make this point even clearer, Mark then contrasts the children with this man who's the complete opposite to the children. So that brings us to the second story, sentence number 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? Here is a man who wants to know what he must do to enter God's kingdom, or as he puts it, inherit eternal life.

Now, this man is sincere. He's almost desperate. I mean, he runs up to Jesus. He falls on his knees, it says. He's desperate, it seems, to know how to get eternal life. Because he knows he's missing something.

And he's very respectful because he calls Jesus good teacher. Now, instead of answering his questions straight away, Jesus kind of picks up on this idea of being good. And he says in sentence number 18, Why do you call me good?

Jesus answered. No one is good except God alone. Now, society, I know, says that people are all basically good people. But that's not what God sees.

[8 : 56] Oh, sure, people can do good things, really good things from time to time. That's for sure. But no one is perfectly good all the time. I mean, do you ever have to teach children to be naughty?

No, you don't. It comes naturally. I'm sorry. I don't know where Abby's gone. She's gone. She's out. She was looking very cute tonight. As cute as she looks, I'm sorry, Simon.

Then you will always have to teach her to be good and never have to teach her to be naughty. It's the same with all parents. You see, there is no one who is born good and always lives a perfectly good life.

Although this guy here comes pretty close. I mean, have a look at sentence number 19. He says, Jesus says, 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. A teacher. He declared all these. I have kept since I was a boy. And Jesus looked at him and loved him.

[9 : 52] It says, this guy sincerely believes he has kept all these commandments that Jesus just said. And Jesus seems to agree because he doesn't tell him he's wrong. Rather, he looks at him and loves him.

And so here is a really good guy. You kind of think Mother Teresa kind of good. I mean, imagine having this guy as your son. He would always clean up his room when he was asked.

Never talk back. Always say he's pleased and thank yous. He's one really, really good guy. But, but, there's one thing he lacks. Even he knows there is something missing.

That's why he comes up to Jesus in the first place. And Jesus also knows he's missing something as well. So verse number 21, or sentence number 21. Jesus looked at him and loved him. One thing you lack, he said.

Go sell everything you have and give to the poor. And then you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me, he says. You see, this man here lacks something.

[10 : 55] What is it? He lacks trust in Jesus. Trust that will lead him to follow Jesus. Now, Jesus is not saying that everyone must sell their possessions and become monks and things like that.

That's not what he's saying. But he's saying for this man here, his wealth was stopping him from following Jesus. In other words, he trusted more in his wealth than in Jesus.

That's what he followed. He followed his wealth. In the end, wealth was his king, his God. Which meant he actually kind of broke the first commandment, which is to have no other gods. And so Jesus says, give up your fake king and trust in me as your king.

Follow me and not your wealth. But instead, sentence number 22, we read perhaps one of the saddest verses in the Bible, I think. Number 22. At this, the man's face fell.

He went away sad because he had great wealth. You see, this man doesn't trust in Jesus enough to receive Jesus' offer of treasure in heaven. Rather, he chooses to trust in his own earthly wealth, his own earthly treasure.

[12 : 01] And it's not just this man who finds it hard to trust in Jesus over wealth. Jesus says, it's all rich people. See sentence number 23. Number 23. Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, how hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God.

The disciples were amazed at his words. But again, Jesus said, children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God. It is actually easier for a big camel to go through the eye of a small knitting needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God, he says.

Why is it hard for the rich particularly to enter the kingdom of God to gain eternal life? Well, because it's hard for them to trust Jesus over wealth. And it's the same with us. I mean, what would help us sleep better at night?

Knowing we've got a healthy bank balance to pay all our bills and live a good life. Or knowing that Jesus is our king who died for us so that we could have eternal life. What would bring you more comfort?

I know what it is for most people. Your answer will tell you what you truly trust in, you see. And what makes it even harder to trust in Jesus is we're so used to earning our way in life.

[13 : 06] That's what we talk from the day we're born. And this is reflected in the man's question at the start. He says, what must I do? What must I do to inherit eternal life? But the answer is nothing.

For there is nothing we can do to earn eternal life or earn entry into God's kingdom. It's as impossible as trying to get a big camel through the tiny eye of a sewing needle. It's just impossible.

Now, upon hearing this, the disciples are amazed. And so, verse 26. The disciples were even more amazed and said to each other, who then can be saved? You see, the disciples thought that if anyone had a chance to enter God's kingdom, it would be this guy.

I mean, unlike the children in the scene before, this man was rich. He had some greatness about him. And he was also a very, very good man too. And so, in the disciples' eyes, this is exactly the type of guy who should enter God's kingdom and go to heaven.

Someone who was great. I mean, unlike the little children, this man had no problem getting past the disciples. The disciples didn't rebuke this man, did they? In fact, he's the complete opposite to the children.

[14 : 13] But that is the problem. You see, unlike the children, he does not simply trust in Jesus. Instead, he trusted in his own wealth. Unlike the children who do nothing to earn Jesus' offer of, you know, entering into the kingdom, this man wants to do something to earn it.

What must I do, he says. But Jesus is clear. We can do nothing. Even if we're really good like this man was, we'll never be perfectly good like God. So there is nothing we can do to earn our way to heaven.

It was like me hearing that the umbilical cord was wrapped around my daughter's neck. It was frightening, scary. There was absolutely nothing I could do to save her.

Jesus is saying here, there's absolutely nothing we can do to save ourselves, to get ourselves into God's kingdom, into heaven. It's impossible, but not for God. Sentence number 27. Jesus looked at them and said, with man, this is impossible, but not with God.

All things are possible with God. See, God can save us. God can give us entry into his kingdom. And he does it through Jesus. You see, as we heard in the children's talk, Jesus suffers the consequences for all the times we've ignored God and stuffed up in life.

[15 : 24] Jesus takes that punishment upon himself so that we don't have to suffer it. But instead, we can receive free entry into heaven. Our number two child is a girl called Kate.

We're at dinner table and she was playing with her food one night. We asked her to stop it, but she ignored us and then flicked the food so hard that it hit me in the face. She's not happy.

And so she got in trouble. There's a consequence. And the consequence was that she missed out on dessert. But then our eldest child, a son called Tim, said, that's okay. I'll miss out instead.

She can have mine. Now, before you think, what kind of kid does that? Let me tell you, he didn't like the dessert. All right? He was just trying to suck up to get something else.

But the point of the story is he did take Kate's punishment, as it were. He took the consequences so that she could still have her dessert. That's what Jesus has done for us, you see.

[16 : 20] He took the punishment for us giving God the flick when he made the world, when he deserves to be acknowledged. And Jesus did that on the cross so that we don't have to miss out, not on dessert, but don't miss out on eternal life, eternity.

And if we want it, then all we need to do is accept it by trusting, by believing in Jesus. As a child simply receives by trusting a parent, so we receive eternal life by trusting in Jesus.

That's what we saw in the infant baptism tonight. That's why I like infant baptisms, because Abigail can't do anything. There's nothing she can do to earn God's favour.

All she does is trust her parents. Who will then teach her about Jesus. There's nothing we can do to save ourselves without a trust like children in Jesus. And so I guess the question for us tonight is, who are we like?

You know, are we like the children? Or are we like the rich man? Who are we trusting in to save us from the consequences we deserve for living our own way? You know, Jesus or ourselves?

[17 : 26] Who is it? For those of us who have put their trust or faith in Jesus and follow him, then we need to remember it is worth it. And let me finish with these couple of verses. Verse 28, verse number or sentence number 28.

Peter said to him, look, we've left everything to follow you. I tell you the truth, Jesus replied. No one who's 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 the present age, homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields, and with them persecutions and the age to come eternal life.

But many who are first will be last and the last will be first. Jesus is saying here quite simply that sometimes it may mean, following Jesus may mean we miss out on things in life, but it will be worth it in the next.

I know a guy who used to work at McDonald's as a teenager and every Christmas he'd go away to a caravan park with a group of people, a team of people, and they'd run kids programs for the holiday makers who came in.

And during those programs, they'd also talk a bit about Jesus if they were open to that. And he'd do this every Christmas. And the people at McDonald's said to him, look, you're a good worker. We want to make you a manager, but you can't go away every Christmas because that's our busy time of year.

[18 : 44] Well, Jesus was more important to him. And so he kept going away that time of year and he missed out on being promoted as a manager. Now, you might think manager at McDonald's, he's dodged a bullet. But as a teenager, it was a real loss to him.

But Jesus says, don't worry. Don't stress about it because whatever you miss out on in this age, you're going to get a hundredfold in the next. Well, a hundredfold in this present age and eternal life in the next, he says.

It will be worth it. It will be worth it. And so can I finish by asking you the question at the bottom of the page there? Who are we like?

The man or the children who trust? Because it makes an eternity of difference, you see. Why don't I pray for us? Heavenly Father, we do thank you for tonight.

We thank you particularly for the baptism of young Abby. Father, we thank you that it is a reminder that there is nothing we can do to deserve eternal life in heaven.

[19 : 46] All we need to do is be like Abby, who simply trusts her parents. So we need to trust in Jesus. Father, I pray that you would help us to do that now and for the rest of our lives, that we might together enjoy eternity in paradise with you.

We ask in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.