

Entering the Kingdom

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[0 : 0 0] Dear God, thanks so much for your word, the Bible. Thank you that it is your word to us, and so we should really listen. But more than that, it's still relevant for us today. And so we pray that you would help us to understand it and to live in light of it.

For we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, in December of 2009, there was a news article put on an online media outlet called news.com.

And the entitled article was 12 Steps to Get to Heaven. I've got it on the next slide. Here it is, so you know I'm not lying. 12 Steps to Get to Heaven. What happened was a group of religious leaders got together and they came up with the perfect plan, 12-step plan, to counteract all the past bad stuff you've done, all the bad sins and so on, so that you could be certain of going to heaven.

You want to know what the 12 steps are? No? Too bad, I'm telling you. I'll tell you four of them anyway. On the next slide. First one, he says, pray often. Second one, cherish all God's creatures.

And they also suggest, therefore, becoming vegetarians so that we don't harm any of God's creatures. Clean up your thoughts and speech and wear religious symbols. Wearing lots of religious jewelry and clothing and the like.

[1 : 1 4] And so at the early morning service this morning when I had all my Anglican robes and things on, I was set. I was there. But on it goes in that kind of fashion, 12 steps.

In other words, it's saying, if you are good enough by doing these 12 things, you'll counteract your sinful past and guarantee your future in heaven.

Now, I wonder what you think about that. More importantly, I wonder what God thinks about that. Well, today we find out because today as we come to Matthew's account of Jesus's life, we come to two scenes which are all about entering the kingdom.

Verse 14 is about those who belong to the kingdom, such as these. Verse 16, that the man asked, what must I do to get eternal life? You see, that's the thing for today. How do we enter the kingdom and have eternal life?

So we're at point one in your outlines and verse number 13 in your Bibles. Have a look there. Then people brought little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them and pray for them.

[2 : 1 6] But the disciples rebuked them. Jesus said, let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these. When he had placed his hands on them to bless them and pray for them, he went on from that place.

Here the first scene involves children, which is very appropriate given Lockie's baptism today. And here we have some parents who are bringing their children to Jesus, for Jesus to bless and pray for them.

Yet the disciples tell the parents off. Presumably they think that Jesus is too important to be bothered because in that culture that day, it was the whole children are to be seen and not heard.

And when I was younger, my brother and I were told by my grandparents a couple of times, actually, you are to be seen and not heard. Are you familiar with that expression? You might have even used it once or twice.

Today, of course, it's more like children are to be heard and obeyed. I don't want that for dinner, mum. Okay, dear, we'll get something else. This pendulum swung the other way. Both extremes are unhelpful.

[3 : 23] But in Jesus' day, it was that first extreme, that children would be seen and not heard. And so in keeping with the culture of their day, the disciples stopped the parents. Said, no, you can't come.

Too important, Jesus is. But Jesus turns the culture upside down, doesn't he? He says, let the children come to me. Why? Well, firstly, because they are important to him. I mean, verse 15, he does actually place his hands on them to bless them and pray for them.

Which is why Matt and Leanne are not wasting their time bringing Lockie here today to pray for him. Because Lockie, like all kids, are important to Jesus. But the second reason, the big one really, is verse 14.

Notice Jesus says, let the children come to me for or because the kingdom belongs to such as these. Now, when he says such as these, does he just mean all kids get into the kingdom, into heaven and tough luck adults?

Is that what he's saying? Well, no. I think we need to remember what happened a chapter before, which we looked at two weeks ago here in church, actually. So if you've got your Bibles, just turn back one page, just one page, to chapter 18.

[4 : 36] So look for the big number 18, and then the little number three, chapter 18, verse 3. Have a look at what Jesus said about kids back then. He says, Jesus placed a child among them, and he said, truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. In other words, the kingdom belongs to such as these, refers to those who change to be like children.

Children, they are the ones who enter the kingdom. They are the ones who inherit it. The kingdom belongs to them. But how are we to change to be like children? Are we to become kind of innocent and lovable?

Well, I suggested a couple of weeks ago, kids don't stay innocent and lovable for long, especially if they wake you up in the middle of the night to say that they've lost their sock or something like that. In fact, I heard one couple say, before children, they used to say goodnight like this.

They would turn in bed to their spouse and say, goodnight, dear. The other one would say, oh, goodnight, dear. Have a great sleep. Oh, you too, you too. And then after kids, they just turn to each other and say, good luck.

[5 : 54] So how are we to change to be like kids to enter the kingdom and to inherit the kingdom? Well, verse 4 in chapter 18 says to take the lowly position. That is, to be like a child who is dependent on others.

That's what I said a couple of weeks ago. Just as Lockie depends on and trusts in his parents for life, so we are to trust in and depend on Christ for life.

Eternal, you see. Of course, this is all upside down, the way the world thinks, or even those religious leaders who came up with a 12-step program. They all say to enter anything, whether it's a club or the Hall of Fame or a workforce or even heaven, you have to earn it.

You have to be good enough. You have to do enough to get the job, to get the recognition, to get into the Hall of Fame, to get into heaven. But the problem is, no matter how hard we try, when it comes to heaven, we'll never be perfect.

If God is perfect, heaven is perfect, only perfect people go there, we're never going to be good enough to get to perfection, are we? And this brings us to the second scene, point two in your outline and verse number 16 in your Bible.

[7 : 09] After Jesus and his disciples, sorry, I'm on the wrong page. Don't forget to turn back to the right page. Chapter 19, verse 16. Just then, a man came up to Jesus and asked, Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?

See the man's question? It's completely different to the children, isn't it? He's saying, what must I do to earn eternal life? Whereas the children, they don't do anything.

They depend on others for life. And I think these two scenes are deliberately side by side. In fact, Matthew even starts with words, just then. You know, almost at the same time this first scene has taken place, the next one comes.

Almost to contrast the responses. This man is thinking the world's way, trying to earn his way into the kingdom, trying to earn eternal life, which as I said, is a complete contrast to the people who, like children, depend on Jesus for eternal life.

Now to be fair, it's somewhat understandable for this man to think like this and it's certainly understandable for people today to think like this because after all, we grow up in a world where that's what we're taught.

[8 : 21] If you want a good job, you work hard at school, get good marks, get a good degree and so on. I'll even say to our kids when they do something, well, good boy, good girl.

Now working hard and being good are good things, right? But as I said, when it comes to entering the kingdom of heaven, we can never make ourselves good enough, perfect, to get there.

No matter how hard we try, we'll never be good like God, perfect like God. And this is what Jesus tries to show the man now in verse 17. He says, why do you ask me about what is good?

Jesus replied, there is only one who is good. See what Jesus is saying? Look, there's only one who is truly good. That's God. So why do you think it's about being good if God's the only one who can make the grade?

And so Jesus continues though in the rest of verse 17. He says, if you want to enter life, keep the commandments. Which ones, he inquired? Jesus replied, you shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, honour your father and mother and love your neighbour as yourself.

[9 : 29] All these I have kept, the young man said, what do I still lack? And so Jesus says, look, if you really want to enter life by trying to be good, then you need to keep the commandments.

And he lists some of those ones to do with loving one another. And remarkably, in verse 20, the man says, he's kept them all. He's a good guy, isn't it? He is, someone you want your son to grow up to be or your daughter to marry or something like that.

And yet, even he knows he's still missing something, doesn't he? Do you notice that? Do you see what he says? What do I still lack? And that's the thing with relying on trying to be good.

You actually never know if you've done enough good to get into heaven. You actually never know if you've done enough to get into heaven. You might think you're good enough or done enough, but you can never actually really be sure.

And that's how this man feels. He wants to be sure. That's why he's come to Jesus in the first place. But he knows he still lacks something. And so Jesus is giving him another clue, I think, here, because he lists the commandments about loving one another.

[10 : 41] But he misses all those other commandments that we heard in our first reading about loving God, doesn't he? And I wonder if Jesus deliberately misses those God commands because that's what was missing in this man's life.

God wasn't God. His money, his wealth was. Have a look at verse 21 to 22. Jesus answered, If you want to be perfect, go sell your possessions and give to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven.

Then come follow me. When the young man heard this, he went away sad because he had great wealth. Here Jesus tells the man to sell everything.

Not because this is how you enter the kingdom. It's not as though we have to go and sell all our homes and things like that. But to show this particular man that his God was actually his wealth.

that he had actually broken the first commandment about having no other gods but God. To show this man that he needed to stop depending on his wealth and start depending on Jesus instead like the children.

[11 : 44] Yet sadly, he chose to walk away from Jesus and so away from eternal life. And this prompts Jesus to give us a warning.

Do you see verse 23? Then Jesus said to his disciples, Truly, I tell you, it is hard for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of heaven. Again, I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.

Verse 23, it's hard for rich to enter the kingdom. But verse 24, he's really saying it's impossible getting a big camel through a small eye of a needle.

In fact, on the next slide, I saw this cartoon. It says, yet another attempt to get a camel through the eye of a needle and they've got a camel in a slingshot with roller skates on and they've put grease on the camel and they've got a suction cap waiting to try and get through the eye of a needle.

The point is, it's impossible, isn't it? Just like it's impossible for the rich to enter by their own efforts. Excuse me. Now, we'll see that it's actually impossible for everyone to earn their way into the kingdom.

[12 : 55] So why does Jesus single out the rich here? Well, because wealth is such an easy thing to trust in, isn't it? I mean, what would you prefer?

Actually, Sharon, can you get my bottle of water for a sec? What would you prefer? Would you prefer a big bank balance or a small bank balance? I know what I prefer.

What would you prefer? Now, why do we prefer that? Because a big bank balance brings us comfort. We don't have to worry because we actually end up trusting in our money more than in God.

Do you see how easy it is? Very easy. And so that's why Jesus singles out the wealthy, which really is aimed at all of us in Australia. We're all very wealthy here. It's impossible for everyone to get into the kingdom on our own effort, but particularly rich because it's so easy to follow after wealth as our God instead of depend on Jesus.

And for these disciples, wealth was impressive. I mean, I heard a story of a man who was at church. It was a men's breakfast or something, I think it was, and a phone rang. He answered the phone and on the other line there was a lady who said, or in fact, when he answered the phone he hit the speaker button by mistake.

[14 : 12] Have you ever done that? Anyway, so the whole room could hear this conversation. And the lady on the other end said, oh, hi dear, it's just me. I've just found some lovely shoes while I'm out shopping and I'm wondering if I can buy, they're \$500, it's a bit expensive, but do you mind if I buy them?

And the man kind of paused and went, no. Oh, thank you so much, dear. And while I'm at it I also saw a lounge that would look lovely in our downstairs room. It's actually \$50,000. Do you mind if I get that too?

And the man said, no. Oh, that's so great, thank you so much, I'll see you at home, bye dear, and hung up. And the man put down the phone. He then turned around and realised that everyone was listening in in shock and amazement.

Shock that he would let the wife spend this much money but amazement he had that much money to spend. It was impressive. And so he then turned and said to everyone, oh, whose phone is this? But the point of the story is it still impresses us, doesn't it?

Shocks us and impresses us and it did for the disciples. They thought wealth was a sign of blessing from God. And so here is this guy who is good, he's kept all that loving one another commandments at least, and wealthy.

[15 : 28] Surely he should be able to enter God's kingdom and have eternal life. And yet, even he cannot do it on his own steam, by his own efforts. And so we read in verse 25, when the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished and asked, who then can be saved?

If not this guy of all people, then who then can be saved? Jesus looked at them and said, with man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.

And here we come to the point that Jesus is trying to teach the man all along. It's impossible to earn his way into the kingdom and eternal life. He must instead trust in God for whom all things are possible.

And that's true for us as well. None of us can earn our way into heaven by following a 12-step program or whatever. Because none of us are completely good or perfect like God.

So it's impossible for everyone to earn our way and instead we need to depend on God for whom nothing is impossible. God can get us in. How? Well, God gave Jesus his only son to pay for our sin so that we could be forgiven, so that our slates could be washed clean.

[16 : 46] Jesus is the one who took the punishment for our sins at the cross. So instead of trying to earn our way into the kingdom like this man, we had to depend on and trust in Jesus like the children, you see.

That's why we have these two scenes together. And can I say, Christians still misunderstand this, I think. I've met Christians who've gone to church for many years and they still think entering heaven is all about being good.

You ought to be good to go to heaven. But they've got the horse and the cart around the wrong way, I think. And so on the next slide is a picture of a horse and cart. The horse comes first.

That is trusting in Jesus gets you into God's kingdom, into God's family. And then what comes after is doing good in response to what Jesus has done.

And people keep flipping it around the wrong way. Just as the horse drives the cart, so our trust in Jesus drives us to do good works. That's how it works.

[17 : 48] Yes, Christians are on about doing good, but not to earn our way to heaven. Rather, it's in response to Jesus getting us into heaven already. We need to get the horse and the cart around the right way.

There's only one step to being certain of heaven and eternal life, and that is trusting in Jesus as your saviour and king. Trusting that he really did die for you to save you from your sins.

Trusting that he really did rise again as your lord or king. And so the question for us at this point is, have you put your trust in Jesus? If that's the way to enter the kingdom, says God, in the Bible, have you put your trust in Jesus?

And for us who have, then there's two things. First, do we realise how incredibly freeing that that is? That our eternal salvation, our entry into heaven does not depend on how good we are.

I find that quite a relief, actually, because I'm not good all the time. Ask Michelle. No, don't do that, actually. And I still mess up and when I do, I do not need to fear that I've somehow lost my salvation and wonder how I can get it back, what good things I'm going to do to try and get it back.

[19 : 00] Rather, my salvation, my eternal life is not based on what I do but on what Jesus has already done. We just say sorry, ask for forgiveness, knowing that God will always give it.

I remember meeting a man at the door of church one day, not this church, another church, shaking hands and he said, after the pleasantries, hello, hello, that sort of thing, he said, oh gee Andrew, I really hope I go up there and not down here.

I said, well don't you know? He said, oh no, I think I'll go up there but I'm not really sure. I said, well do you trust in Jesus? He said, yeah. I said, well you can be absolutely sure. You see, this guy still thought about, it was still dependent on his good works and so he wasn't sure.

But trusting in Jesus as the solution, the one step to heaven means we can be sure and it's freeing. We don't have to stress about it all the time. That's the first thing.

The second thing we're to do is we're to remember that following Jesus, trusting in Jesus as our king is worth it. You see, if we trust in Jesus as our king, it means we are to follow him and serve him as our king.

[20 : 05] That is number one, top priority, above all else. That's what it means. Above wealth like this man, above family and career, we can have those things as well but they cannot be our God, our number one priority.

Otherwise, Jesus stops being our king and we no longer trust in him as our king, you see. But if Jesus is our king then that actually may sometimes mean we miss out on things in this life.

For example, we miss out on Sunday morning sleep-ins because Christ and his church are a higher priority than our comfort or family. Or it may mean we miss out on some money because Christ and his work are a higher priority and he tells us to be generous to those in need.

Or it means we miss out on some rest because he tells us to serve one another and love one another. For a person at 5pm church, they took a lower paying job so that they would have more time to serve at church.

For them, following Jesus as their king meant they suffered some money. Another person, a friend of mine who I mentioned to you before I think, gave up her promotion and the higher pay because her promotion involved a lot of travelling.

[21 : 13] She was away from church and Bible study and she felt it was affecting her own Christian walk. So she gave back the promotion and gave back the pay right. I haven't heard of that before. But she suffered loss, you see.

Another friend of mine became a Christian and then was convicted that he should go in and pursue Christian ministry. Now that's not for everyone but it was for him. When he became a Christian and said he was going to pursue Christian ministry, his father refused to talk to him for two years.

In God's kindness, the father actually ended up becoming a Christian but for my friend, following Jesus as king as number one priority meant he suffered loss of relationship for two years and it made him really sad.

Or take just this past week, the CEO of Cooper's Beer, I don't know if you heard about this, but to mark the 200th anniversary of the Bible Society, the CEO of Cooper's Beer said that they produced 10,000 cans of light beer like this on the next slide and on the next slide after this one is the can and it's commemorating 200 years of the Bible Society, the longest living charity organisation in Australia.

And that even on the next slide put a Bible verse on the cartons because the CEO, Tim Cooper, is a Christian and he wanted to celebrate the Bible Society. And the idea was to start some conversations about world issues and Jesus.

[22 : 32] And so the Bible Society showed a video about talking about the current things about gay marriage actually. So on the far right is a Christian MP and on the far left is a gay MP and they just had a very civil discussion, put forward their views, agreed to disagree.

But even though it was very tame, pubs in Melbourne and Sydney then went to social media and said we're no longer stocking Cooper's Beer. In fact, one pub in Sydney put a video online showing them pouring out Cooper's Beer down the drain in response to this.

And so the point of the story is not to promote beer but to point out that Tim Cooper started suffering loss because of his Christian values and connection with the Bible Society.

But this is what it may sometimes mean to trust in Jesus as our Saviour and King. To follow Him above all else. And so Peter wants to know is it worth it?

You see verse 27? Peter answered Jesus, we have left everything to follow you. Is it worth it? What then will there be for us? And look at what Jesus says in verse 28. Jesus said to them, truly I tell you at the renewal of all things when the Son of Man sits on the glorious throne you who have followed me will also sit on 12 thrones judging the 12 tribes of Israel.

[23 : 49] And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life.

But many who are first will be last and many who are last will be first. See, Peter wants to know is it worth following Jesus? Is it worth sometimes missing out on things because He's our first priority?

And Jesus says hands down it's worth it. At first those who follow Him will rule and judge with Him in the Kingdom of Heaven. We may be persecuted or downtrodden in this world.

In the world to come we're going to be ruling with Christ. Ruling over creation as we were made to rule. We may feel like we're coming last in the world's eyes but we'll be first in the Kingdom.

And not only that, we'll also receive a hundredfold whatever we've lost in this life and with it eternal life. And that makes following Jesus actually a really good investment. I mean, I'm not an accountant like Vijay last week but a hundredfold return is not a hundred percent interest rate it's a ten thousand percent interest rate isn't it?

[25 : 04] You invest one dollar and if you get a hundredfold back you get a hundred dollars back, don't you? A hundred percent back is one dollar so a hundred times a hundred, ten thousand, go with me.

It's a lot. I think I'm right. I think I'm right. I asked some accountants. It's a ten thousand percent return. Who in this world would give you that kind of interest rate? What's more, we have what, ninety to a hundred years of life in this world and there are some ups but lots of downs but God gives us life eternal.

That's infinity years with only ups. Good times of work, rest and play. You see, Jesus saying his following him may feel like we're coming last in the world's race for money, career and stuff but in the kingdom to come, we who are last will be first.

We'll be on thrones, receive a ten thousand return and life eternal with only ups. Sadly for the CEO of Cooper's Beer, Tim Cooper, he forgot that and when they were persecuted for being associated with the Bible Society, they withdrew their support, cancelled the production of those beer cans and then pledged money to the gay marriage lobby.

Now, whatever you think about marriage or whatever, that's not the issue, but here is someone who says they're a Christian and yet was forgot that it was worth suffering loss for Christ.

[26 : 22] But for those others I mentioned, the ones who gave back their promotion, the one who gave up medicine, the one who gave up higher pay, they did not forget and to this day they continue to follow Christ above all others.

So may we too be willing to suffer loss for the sake of Jesus knowing that in the life to come it will be more than make up for it. For many who are last now will be first later.

Let's pray. Our gracious Father, we do thank you for this reminder that the way into heaven, the way into your family as Christians is to simply trust in Jesus as our own King and Saviour.

And Father, we pray that, or we thank you for this reminder that following him as our King will be worthwhile. That although we may suffer loss in this life, the life to come will more than make up for it.

So help us persevere, we pray, trusting in Christ and Christ alone. We pray these things in his name. Amen.