

Entering The Kingdom

Luke 18:15-30

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When Jesus came the first time, which we read about in the Gospel of Luke, He came to establish His kingdom. It's not the kingdom that will literally be on earth, a physical kingdom that will occur at the Second Coming. That will be the fulfillment of the Davidic Covenant where the Messiah would sit on David's throne and be the 1,000-year reign that would go into the eternal state.

But Jesus came to establish a kingdom in the hearts and lives of those who surrender to Him as King. Jesus stood before Pilate and he asked Jesus, "King! Where is Your kingdom?!" And Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews" (John 18:36). Paul, writing to the Romans, said, "The kingdom is not eating or drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (John 14:17).

So Jesus came to establish His spiritual kingdom in the hearts and lives of those who have trusted Him and are following Him and living in the kingdom. And the sermon on the mount shows us how to live in the kingdom. That's where we are given the principles of how to live in the kingdom.

When we look at our text, we will see three questions about the kingdom answered. Number one, "How do we enter into this kingdom?" Jesus came to establish the kingdom of God, and how do we enter this kingdom? Number two, "What are the hindrances from entering into the kingdom?" And number three, "What are the blessings of entering the kingdom of God?"

Let's look first at how to enter the kingdom of God or the kingdom of heaven, which are synonymous, in verses 15-17. "Then they also brought infants to Him that He might touch them; but when the disciples saw it, they rebuked them. But Jesus called them to Him and said, 'Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God.'" There is our theme. "Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it."

"the kingdom of God" or "the kingdom of heaven" or "What must I do to inherit eternal life?"

So no doubt Jesus encountered these parents who brought their children to Him. Verse 15, "They also brought infants to Him that He might touch them." The rabbis would put hands on them and pronounce a blessing on them.

The word "infants" here is what we would use the word "infants" or "babies" for. So they were all under the age of one or they were small infants. They weren't toddlers, adolescents or teens; they were small infants. And they wanted Him to touch them and no doubt pronounce a blessing on them.

"But when His disciples saw it, they rebuked them." This is one of the stories where I would say to Jesus, "Where did You get these guys?!" When Jesus was going to go through Samaria, but the Samaritans didn't want Jesus to pass through, the disciples said, "Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?" Roasted Samaritans! What were they thinking?! Then Jesus said to them, "You do not know what manner of spirit you are of. For the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives but to save them" (Luke 9:54-55).

When the Syrophoenician mother came to Jesus and said that her daughter was grievously tormented with an unclean spirit and asked Jesus to cast it out, the disciples said, "Send her away!" (Matthew 15:22-23). We don't know why, but perhaps the disciples thought Jesus was too busy and the kids were insignificant.

Other than the Christian and Hebrew culture, in the Greco-Roman culture, they did not like children; they despised them. They viewed children as a weight and a nuisance. In the Roman world after a baby was born, the father would come up to the baby and if he picked the baby up, the baby was kept. If he turned and walked away, the baby was discarded and thrown away or sold as a slave.

It's not a lot different today when we abort children in the womb. We just discard them or reject them.

In Christianity, as it was in the Hebrew culture, children are a gift from God. The Bible says in Psalm 127:3, "Children are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb is a reward." And we as parents should want to bring our children to Jesus that He might touch them. If you're a parent, you want to bring your children to Jesus through prayer. Pray, pray, pray! I want to exhort parents and grandparents.

And what a blessing to be a grandparent! My wife and I are expecting our 11th grandchild. How exciting is that! If I had known how fun grandkids were, I would have had them first. They're awesome!

Pray for your kids and grandkids. It's so very important. Like verse 15, I want to exhort you to bring your child in prayer to the Lord. And also live a consistent life; don't be practicing hypocrisy or duplicity, which will destroy your child's spiritually. Live consistently before your children in the home.

So they were bringing their children before Jesus, but the disciples rebuked them for doing so. They might have thought Jesus was too busy for their children. But Jesus said to them, in verse 16, "Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God."

I forgot to mention that all of our text today is also covered in Matthew 19 and Mark 10. So all the synoptic Gospels record our text. And if you combine them with Mark, it says that Jesus was "greatly displeased" (Mark 10:14), which means He was upset with His disciples, that they would hinder the children. So in verse 16, Jesus said, "Let the little children come to Me."

And secondly He said, "Do not forbid them..." why? Catch this phrase "...of such is the kingdom of God." He was saying, "Don't keep the children from coming to Me; allow them to come. Don't hinder them."

Let's not do anything that would hinder children from coming to Jesus Christ.

"Of such is the kingdom of God" indicates that when children die, they go to heaven. The Bible isn't black and white, it isn't crystal clear and there are some differences of opinion here. But I believe that when a small infant or a young child dies, they are still under the age of accountability, so they go to be with the Lord. We will see them in heaven.

So if you lost an infant, if you had a miscarriage, if you lost a young child, I believe you will see them again in heaven. People ask, "How old will they be? What will they look like?" I can't answer that for you. It's the fact that you will be reunited.

Remember when David lost a child born to Bathsheba, which was the result of an adulterous relationship, the child died and David said, "I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me" (2 Samuel 12:23)? And the Bible also says, "In heaven their angels always see the face of My Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 18:10).

That's another issue, but what our passage is trying to convey is that children are important and valuable. Jesus takes the time for children. Jesus loves little children.

I grew up in Sunday school as a small boy. I learned the song,

"Jesus loves the little children,

All the children of the world.

Red and yellow, black and white,

All are precious in His sight.

Jesus loves the little children of the world."

So let's take our children to Jesus so He can bless them.

Jesus used this time to teach a lesson, in verse 17. And whenever Jesus uses the words "assuredly," "truly" or "verily," it's an important point He is making. "Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it."

Jesus is using this as a teaching moment. He's saying that in order to come into the kingdom of God, you must become "as a little child"; not become childish. I've narrowed a long list to three characteristics of a child. Children are humble, dependent and trusting. You might add forgiving and loving, as well. The thought is that we come humbly, dependently and trusting.

This is how to enter into the kingdom. You can't enter proud, haughty or self-dependent or self-righteous; you must come broken.

Last time in Luke we looked at the parable of the tax collector and the Pharisee. The Pharisee prayed within himself, "God, I thank You that I am not like other men...as this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes" (Luke 18:11-12). He thought he was a righteous man. But he went home unjustified. And the tax collector just beat upon his breast and wouldn't even look up to heaven. He humbly, dependently and trustingly said, "God, be merciful to me a sinner!" (Luke 18:13). That man went home justified. So we enter the kingdom being humble, dependent and trusting.

Children are so humble. Have you ever let a three-year-old dress themselves? They put on mismatched shoes. One of my girls dressed herself and had on a cowboy boot on one foot and her mom's high heel on the other foot. She had pants on with a dress and a sweater and looked all freaked out. "Sweetheart, you can't go out like that."

"I want to! This is how I want to dress!"

I thought, Oh, no! This is embarrassing!

We had three girls and a boy. There was a huge gap between our oldest daughter, Sarah, and son, Jared. When he was two years old, he was into being a cowboy. He had a cowboy hat, cowboy boots, a vest and guns and holsters. But he had to have cowboy gloves. We didn't have any cowboy gloves, so he used big, orange rubber gloves women wash dishes with. Those were his cowboy gloves!

My daughter was playing volleyball on the high school team, and we went with our son to her games. He would walk in with these big, bright, orange gloves on with his cowboy hat and wave at his big sister. I was so embarrassed! But the cool thing is that kids aren't embarrassed! They don't know they look silly.

So you come humbly, you're not self-conscious.

Children also are utterly dependent on their parents. And they come trusting.

That's how we should come to Jesus. "Nothing in my hand I bring. Simply to Thy cross I cling." In Matthew 18:1-4, the disciples were arguing who was the greatest. "At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, 'Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?' Then Jesus called a little child to Him, set him in the midst of them, and said, 'Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.'" So we want to come humbly and dependently into the kingdom of heaven.

The second question we want to ask about the kingdom is found in verses 18-27 of our text. The question is, "What hinders people from entering the kingdom?" Why don't more people just

go rushing into and living in the kingdom of God?

Starting in verse 18, we have the story of the rich, young ruler. It's also in Matthew 19 and Mark 10. It is one of the saddest stories in the Bible, because he was so close to entering the kingdom, but he loved money more than he loved God, so that kept him from following Jesus Christ.

It says, "Now a certain ruler asked Him, saying, 'Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?' So Jesus said to him, 'Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God. You know the commandments: "Do not commit adultery," "Do not murder," "Do not steal," "Do not bear false witness," "Honor your father and your mother.'" And he said, 'All these things I have kept from my youth.'" I don't think so.

Verses 22-23, "So when Jesus heard these things, He said to him, 'You still lack one thing. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.' But when he heard this, he became very sorrowful, for he was very rich."

What stood out to me this week as I was studying this passage was that he was "very sorrowful" and "very rich" in the same verse. Really? The dude was "very rich," and yet he went away "very sorrowful." In fact he was rich, he was young and he was a ruler. You don't know that unless you read this story in Matthew, Mark and Luke. He also was very religious. But he was empty; he came born out of a sense of need to Jesus. He asked, "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?"

Verses 24-27, "And when Jesus saw that he became very sorrowful, He said, 'How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God! For 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.' And those who heard it said, 'Who then can be saved?'" There is no way a camel can go through the eye of a needle. "But He said, 'The things which are impossible with men are possible with God.'" All things are possible with God.

So they heard Jesus say it was hard for those who were rich. But in their minds, riches were a sign of spiritual blessing. That sounds like a lot of televangelists today. This story would not fit with a lot of preachers today, who try to placate to the rich and famous, or who try to draw them into their church, rather than just preaching the Gospel and true discipleship.

So Jesus told this rich, young ruler that he needed to sell everything he had, give it to the poor and in Mark 10:21-22 it says, "'You will have treasure in heaven, and come, take up the cross and follow Me.' But he was sad at this word, and went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions." What a sad and tragic story this is.

I want to tell you a few things about this guy, in verse 18. He called Jesus "Good Teacher." He thought Jesus was just a good teacher. No doubt he didn't realize that Jesus was God. That's why he asked, "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" He also thought he must perform or do some good deed in order to get to heaven.

Isn't that what most people think? "I have to get baptized," "I have to be confirmed," "I have to go through catechism," "I can't smoke," "I can't chew or hang out with those who do."

I had a Christian friend who got saved and asked me how I was while he was chewing and spitting. I asked him, "What are you chewing on?" as he spit out.

"Tobacco."

"You're a Christian?"

"Yeah, I'm a Christian" spitting.

And we think we've got to stop this or stop that. But once you get saved, your life changes. Lord willing, you stop chewing tobacco.

But that's not what gets you to heaven. What gets you to heaven is not what you don't do; it's what Jesus has done. You don't get to heaven by keeping the Commandments. The rich, young ruler had a false view of the Commandments.

Jesus actually said in verse 19, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God." It's possible that Jesus was implying that "I am God. What you see in Me is that I am God."

Goodness is a relative term. If you ask someone if they're going to heaven, some may say, "Yes; I am a good person."

Then ask them, "How good are you?" because it's relative.

"Well, I'm good."

"How good?"

"Just good! Real good!"

By whose standards? By his own standards. They think, That guy is really bad, so that makes me look pretty good. Based on him, I look really good, so God's going to let me in heaven. Some may say, "I'm a wretched sinner. I'm lost and undone." There are a few people out there who say that. But most of us think we're relatively pretty good. Goodness is relative.

But only God is perfectly good and perfectly holy. The number one, chief attribute of God is that He is perfect: perfectly good, perfectly righteous and perfectly holy. The Bible says, "There is none righteous, no, not one....All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:10, 23). That's something we need to admit. The problem this rich, young ruler had no doubt was that he thought he was good.

I hear people say all the time, "Why do bad things happen to good people?" My question would be, "What are 'bad things' and what are 'good people'?" Who determines what is bad? Joseph said to his brothers, who had sold him as a slave—most of us would call that "bad"—"You meant evil against me; but God meant it for good" (Genesis 50:20).

It's not for us to judge. Sometimes we think, This is really bad! It may be bad, but the Bible says, "All things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose" (Romans 8:28). God can turn things around and use them for our good and for His glory.

So what is a bad thing? I don't know, but God knows. What is a good person? No one is good. No one is righteous. We all deserve judgment. God saves us by His grace and saves us by His mercy.

Jesus said, "Why do you call Me good?" Jesus was actually saying, "I am God and you don't recognize that."

Now notice the Commandments Jesus cites from the Decalogue, in verse 20. He only cites the second tablet of stones, which deals with man's relationship to man. And He doesn't even put them in the proper order. The first is, "Do not commit adultery," which is Commandment number seven.

And by the way, these aren't suggestions; these are the Commandments. And they are for us today. Listen carefully to every one of them. "Do not commit adultery." If you are thinking about that right now, you need to run from that sin. Jesus said, "Do not murder," which is Commandment number six. That doesn't mean you can't have a steak dinner.

I was in the mall one time, and a Hari Krishna guy came up to me. They're really getting sneaky; they put wigs on and dress like normal people. He tried to witness to me. I said, "I'm a Christian; I believe in Jesus." He didn't know what to say, so he just started throwing stuff at me. He asked, "Well, do you eat meat?"

I said, "Yeah."

He said, "Thou shall not kill!" Then he turned and ran away. "Thou shall not kill" is literally "Thou shall not murder." It's talking about homicide. It's okay to step on a cockroach if you need to. Praise God if you want to go to In-N-Out! God has made all things for us to enjoy (1 Timothy 6:17). Go for it.

Then Jesus said, "Do not steal," which is Commandment number eight, in Exodus 20. "Do not bear false witness," which is lying. "Honor your father and your mother."

Now notice what this rich, young ruler said in response. "All these things I have kept from my youth." He sounds like the self-righteous Pharisee, who said, "I give tithes of all that I possess" (Luke 18:12). It also sounds like Saul of Tarsus: "Concerning the righteousness

which is in the law, blameless" (Philippians 3:6). If I were writing my own Bible I would have, "No way, José!" written right there in the margin next to verse 21.

Verse 22, "So when Jesus heard these things, He said to him, 'You still lack one thing. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.'" And Mark 10:21 adds, "Take up your cross."

It's interesting that Jesus did not mention Commandment number one from the Decalogue, which is, "You shall have no other gods before Me." This man's god was his money. He worshipped mammon. And the last Commandment is number ten, which is, "You shall not covet." Try going to Costco and not committing this sin! My wife won't take me to Costco anymore, because I want to buy everything. We don't need it but it's cheap. It's so cool! She has a list and goes in and only buys what's on her list! She won't take me anymore. Pray for me.

"You shall not covet" was the sin that slew David. And what is on the covet list is "your neighbor's wife" and continues with "nor anything that is your neighbor's" (Exodus 20:17). That's pretty powerful. So don't covet.

And Jesus said that "Whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matthew 5:28). And if you have anger in your heart toward anybody, you've already committed murder (Matthew 5:21). God not only looks at the outward action but at the inward attitude of the heart.

In verse 22, Jesus is not saying that anyone who follows Him must sell everything they have, give it to the poor and follow Him. Some televangelists will say, "God wants you to sell everything you have, give the money to me and follow Jesus." How does that work?! The health, wealth and prosperity preachers are the only ones getting rich—off of other people by preaching their false doctrine.

Jesus said what He said to this man, because his issue was money. That may not be your issue. Maybe yours is fame or popularity or some sport or hobby or some other material object or some other relationship. Jesus, like a great physician, puts His finger right on the thing that is ailing this man. His money is keeping him from following Jesus.

So, in verses 23-24, he went away, because "he became very sorrowful, for he was very rich. And when Jesus saw that he became very sorrowful, He said, 'How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God!'" Riches can be a hindrance. The Bible says, "The love of money is a root of all kinds of evil" (1 Timothy 6:10). People trust in their money. They don't trust in God. It's not saying that being rich is a sin. It's saying that your heart must be right with God.

Here's Jesus' lesson in verse 25: "For 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."

I'm sad to say that years ago I used to teach—because I read it in a manners and customs book—that in Jerusalem there were big, main gates where you would enter the city, and inside the city was a small, subgate. So if a camel came to the city and was loaded down with goods after hours, the camel would have to get down on its knees and be unpacked in order to crawl through the smaller subgate. And that subgate was called “the needle’s eye.” It turned out that was not true.

Literally and with hyperbole what Jesus was saying is that it is impossible for man to save himself. And it's very difficult for rich people to receive salvation. So Jesus was talking about a literal camel and a literal needle. If you went down to the zoo with a needle and put it up against a camel for it to jump through the eye, you'd be put in the funny farm. It's interesting that in Dr. Luke's account, he uses a word for “needle” in the Greek that was actually a medical needle, used for sewing someone up. So this was an impossibility.

One of the lessons of this story, which is a story that actually happened and not a parable, is that salvation is of God from beginning to end. Salvation is of the Lord. He said, in verse 27, it is “impossible with men” but is “possible with God.” Praise God! So what men cannot do God can do. God specializes with things thought impossible. He does what no one else can do. So we need to underline that verse: “The things which are impossible with men are possible with God.” And Matthew 19:26 says, “With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”

In Jeremiah 32:17, the prophet said, “Ah, Lord God! Behold, You have made the heavens and the earth by Your great power and outstretched arm. There is nothing too hard for You.” I like that. So if you are praying for somebody who isn't saved and doesn't live in the kingdom, don't be discouraged and don't give up. “With God all things are possible.”

The third and last question is, “What are the blessings and benefits of entering into the kingdom of God?” verses 28-30. “Then Peter said, ‘See, we have left all...’” and in context that would be their fishing businesses, their families, their houses “...and followed You.’ So He said to them...” that is, “the disciples” “...“Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or parents or brothers or wife or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who shall not receive many times more in this present time, and in the age to come eternal life.” Many times when you follow Jesus Christ, it might mean you have to leave home, some family members and comforts in this world.

This is a shorter version than we get in Matthew or Mark. Jesus is answering Peter. He is always the big guy who speaks up. Peter had just seen the rich, young ruler turn and go sorrowfully away. So he said, “Well, we have forsaken all, and we have followed You. What are we going to get, Lord?!” He probably was rubbing his hands together.

Then Jesus reassures him. “If you had to leave your wife, your children or your family, your house and your job, you're going to be blessed in this world.” In another account, Jesus actually said that, “There is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or

mother or wife or children or lands, for My sake and the gospel's, who shall not receive a hundredfold now in this time—houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands” (Mark 10:29-30).

And I believe that Jesus is talking about the family of God. Some of you gave up close ties with your biological family to follow Jesus Christ. Some of you have parents who weren't happy about your commitment to Christ. Some of you have brothers and sisters who have misunderstood. Some of you had friends—we all had friends who weren't Christians, who got upset that we are following Jesus Christ, and we lost them.

When I was a young Christian, I remember a statement by Kenneth Weiss, who said, “I would rather walk a lonely road with Jesus than be without Him in the crowd.” When I was in high school and became a Christian, I lost all my friends. When you're in high school, it's all about being popular and hanging out with the “in crowd.” And when I gave my life to Jesus Christ, I lost all of that. But “I would rather walk a lonely road with Jesus than be without Him in the crowd.”

So Jesus promises that you'll be blessed. You'll be rewarded. If you're a Christian, look around the sanctuary right now; these are your brothers and sisters in Christ. This is your family. We're brothers and sisters in Christ. We care for one another. We love each other. We encourage each other.

And verse 30 ends with “...and in the age to come eternal life.” How sad that this rich man had wealth in one hand and an opportunity for everlasting life in the other hand, but he chose earthly treasure. The Bible says, “What will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?” (Mark 8:36-37). What a fool! To forfeit eternal life, to forfeit heaven for the temporal benefit of earth!

Maybe you're right there today—this close. You believe in Jesus, you want to follow Jesus, but you don't want to give up some besetting habit or sin, you don't want to give up some friendship or you don't want to rock the boat. Maybe you're worried what your wife or husband or friends will say. Don't let anyone or anything get in the way of you following Jesus Christ! There is a heaven to gain and a hell to shun. It's so very, very important.

I like Psalm 73, in which Asaph said, “I was envious of the boastful, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked” (verse 3). He was saying he was plagued, he was suffering, he was going through hardship. But then he said three things: “You hold me by my right hand. You guide me with Your counsel, and afterward...” at the end of his life “[You] receive me to glory” (verses 23-24).

In Psalm 23:1, David said, “Because the Lord is my shepherd, I have everything I need” (TLB) or “I shall not want.” Kenneth Taylor in his Bible, paraphrases “I shall not want” to “I have everything I need.” I like that. And how does the psalm end? Verse 6 says, “I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.”

All this and heaven too!