

17 And as he was setting out on his journey, a man ran up and knelt before him and asked him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" 18 And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone. 19 You know the commandments: 'Do not murder, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honor your father and mother.' " 20 And he said to him, "Teacher, all these I have kept from my youth." 21 And Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, "You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." 22 Disheartened by the saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions. 23 And Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!" 24 And the disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said to them again, "Children, how difficult it is to enter the kingdom of God! 25 It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God." 26 And they were exceedingly astonished, and said to him, "Then who can be saved?" 27 Jesus looked at them and said, "With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God." 28 Peter began to say to him, "See, we have left everything and followed you." 29 Jesus said, "Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, 30 who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life. 31 But many who are first will be last, and the last first."

Over the past 30 years, I've attended more evangelism trainings than I can remember. And none of them recommend taking the approach it *seems* Jesus is taking in this passage. This encounter is known as the story of the rich, young ruler. Matthew tells us he was young, and Luke tells us he was some sort of ruler. He comes up to Jesus and kneels before Him in a sign of respect. Then, he asks Jesus what he needs to do to inherit eternal life. So far so good. But Jesus responds in a way that seems almost inexplicable if you know the gospel. He brings up the commandments and then tells the guy to sell all of his belongings and give the money to the poor. *That sounds like Jesus is saying we have to earn our salvation by doing good works and taking on a vow of poverty.*

And I can tell you that's definitely not the gospel. So, what's going on? What's Jesus doing here? Well, I skipped over something that is critical to understanding what Jesus is doing here. I mentioned that this story occurs in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. And, in each of those accounts, there's another story that always comes right before the story of the rich young ruler. It's like a preface that lays the groundwork for understanding what follows.

Verses 13-16 ***And they were bringing children to him that he might touch them, and the disciples rebuked them. 14 But when Jesus saw it, he was indignant and said to them, "Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God. 15 Truly, I***

say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.” 16 And he took them in his arms and blessed them, laying his hands on them.

Notice what Jesus says in verse 14: the Kingdom of God belongs to people who are like children. Then, in verse 15, Jesus says you cannot enter the Kingdom of God *unless* you **receive** it like a child. Then, in verse 16, He drives His point home by going to the children, picking them up, and holding them in His arms so that He can bless each of them.

Jesus is plainly giving us the key to entering God’s Kingdom and inheriting eternal life. And what He says gives us our Big Idea for this morning:

Big Idea: Jesus gives the Kingdom of God to those who trust Him in Childlike Faith.

We don’t earn our salvation through our good works. We don’t buy our way into heaven by selling all our earthly possessions and giving them to the poor. We have to receive the Kingdom in childlike faith and dependence on Jesus.

And that’s not just the teaching of this text, it’s the plain Gospel of the entire Bible.

- *Romans 6:23 - “...the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*
- *Ephesians 2:8-9 – 8 For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, 9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast.*

The only way for us to enter enjoy the blessings of God’s Kingdom in this world and for eternity in Heaven is to trust Jesus to do for us what we cannot do for ourselves. And being a child is the perfect picture of that.

Just think about it. Children are small and weak. They don’t contribute to their own well-being...at all. As much as I love my children and miss the years when they were babies, the one thing I can tell you about having babies is that they are constantly in need. They literally can’t do anything for themselves. And, for a while, they don’t even try. As a matter of fact, one of the things children learn to do before they walk or crawl or talk is to reach for their mom and dad. Before they can reach, they look for mom or just cry out until she comes to help. It’s the first thing they do for themselves. Isn’t that interesting? The first thing we do for ourselves is learn how to depend on someone else to do for us what we can’t do for ourselves.

And Jesus says THAT’s the key to entering the Kingdom and enjoying all the blessings Jesus brings. And spiritual maturity looks different than physical/natural maturity. We are supposed to physically and socially mature to the place that we not only become responsible for caring for ourselves, we care for others...but spiritual maturity is slightly different. There’s never supposed to be a time in your journey with Jesus when you are anything but a person of childlike faith. That is Christianity. You have to depend on Jesus to do for and in you and through you what you can’t do for yourself. We need Jesus to pick us up and hold us by His power. We need to be carried into the Kingdom in the arms of Christ.

At the most basic level, childlike faith is simply believing “I Can’t but Jesus Can.” And that’s what He is driving home throughout this passage. That’s the whole point.

Verses 26-27: And they were exceedingly astonished, and said to him, “Then who can be saved?” 27 Jesus looked at them and said, “With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God.”

How can anyone be saved? Jesus says it’s impossible with man. We can’t do it. But God has made the impossible possible. God so loved the world that He gave His Son, Jesus, to live the perfect life we have failed to live and to die the death we deserve to die, taking the punishment for sin at the cross. And Jesus rose again to raise us up to a brand-new kind of life as part of God’s Kingdom.

The way we enjoy the blessings of God is through childlike faith in Jesus.

That’s the point of this entire passage. And that’s the key to understanding what Jesus is doing with the rich, young ruler. Matthew and Luke make it seem like the rich, young ruler was around when Jesus was talking about receiving the Kingdom like a child. And rather than approaching Jesus in childlike faith, he has the audacity to ask what he needs to do. As if there’s something more to it than trusting Jesus.

So, Jesus isn’t contradicting Himself by saying you can earn salvation through your good works. He is exposing his lack of childlike faith and, in the process, teaching us several important characteristics of childlike faith.

1. Childlike Faith Acknowledges Who We Are

17 And as he was setting out on his journey, a man ran up and knelt before him and asked him, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?”

The very first thing this guy asks Jesus reveals a lot about how he sees himself. He asks what he needs to do to inherit eternal life.

Listen to Matthew’s account of this...

Matthew 19:16 And behold, a man came up to him, saying, “Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?”

Notice the focus is on his work, his good deed. He’s like, “Just give me one, good deed...the biggest most difficult deed, and I’ll do it.” His heart is proud and self-reliant. That’s the exact opposite of childlike faith. So, Jesus presses in on his pride.

Mark 10:19 You know the commandments: ‘Do not murder, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honor your father and mother.’ ”

Jesus references the part of the Ten Commandments that revolve around loving our neighbor as ourselves. Why would Jesus do that? The answer is found in Romans 7...

Romans 7:12–13

12 *So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.*

13 *Did that which is good, then, bring death to me? By no means! It was sin, producing death in me through what is good, in order that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure.*

God gave us the commandments so that we would know what was good and right AND so we would know that we haven't perfectly done what is good and right.

I've shared this illustration with you before but let me give it to you again. Imagine you were the world's worst driver but thought you were the world's best driver. How could I possibly get you to understand how bad you are at driving? Besides letting your kids ride with you and tell you...that's how I know I'm the world's worst driver.

But imagine if I put you into a big, empty parking lot with no other cars and no lines, just a big, blank empty parking lot. You would have no way to know how skilled you are as a driver. You might swerve all over the place, but you might not know it if there weren't any lines you have to stay within. But imagine I set up a course that could test your skills...like a maze you had to drive through without crossing any of the lines...that would test your skill and you could see every time you crossed the line.

The lines wouldn't make you a terrible driver, the lines would make you aware that you are a terrible driver.

And that's how it is with the law. We wouldn't know we are sinners if God didn't draw the lines to show us.

- Have you ever taken anything that wasn't yours? Then you've broken the eighth commandment.
- Have you ever said something that wasn't completely true? Then you've broken the ninth commandment.
- Have you ever wanted something that belonged to someone else, and instead of being glad they have it you just wanted it for yourself? Then you've broken the tenth commandment.

I'm 0 for 3, how about you? But how does the guy in our story respond?

Verse 20 - *And he said to him, "Teacher, all these I have kept from my youth."*

Instead of seeing himself as a broken sinner, he says, "Jesus, I'm good. I've done all that...I've been doing those things naturally from birth...it's just the kind of guy I am. Give me more." His pride is keeping him from childlike faith. He thinks he can do it. He thinks he can earn God's approval. **So, he doesn't trust in Jesus because he believes he has every reason to trust in himself.**

Childlike faith acknowledges who we are: broken, small, weak, and sinful. And I want to encourage you this morning in this. Some of you have walked through a season of life where you've

encountered your sin and your weakness and your brokenness in a way that has been excruciatingly difficult to see. Through failure, you've become convinced that you can't do it. You can't make your life what it should be and you definitely can't be good enough to earn God's blessings. Friend, if that's you, don't despair. God is doing something that's bringing you to the first step of childlike faith. He's convincing you that you can't do it.

Let go of pride and self-reliance. Let go of any inclination that you can make yourself right with God. Embrace your smallness so you can be embraced by Christ's strength.

Childlike faith acknowledges who we are.

2. Childlike Faith Values God's Kingdom

21 And Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, "You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." 22 Disheartened by the saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

Jesus keeps pressing in on this guy's heart. Remember, he just claimed to have perfectly fulfilled the laws that require us to love our neighbor as ourselves. But, when Jesus calls him to literally put his money where his mouth is, he walks away. He's disheartened because he has a lot of stuff. He doesn't love his neighbors as much as he loves his stuff. But it's even worse than that. He doesn't love God's kingdom as much as he loves his money.

Notice, Jesus isn't calling him to live forever without treasure. In verse 21, Jesus says he'll have treasure in heaven. At the end of our text, Jesus tells the disciples that no one will ever give up anything for the sake of Jesus without Jesus giving it back a hundred times more through the Kingdom. But the guy doesn't believe Jesus. He doesn't believe the promise of heavenly treasure is as good as the promise of earthly pleasure.

So, he'd rather be rich in this world and miss out on the kingdom than be poor in this world and have all that Jesus offers. He's bought into the lie that the stuff of this world is what matters most and satisfies.

That's why Jesus says what he says after the rich man walks away...

Mark 10:23-25

23 And Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!" 24 And the disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said to them again, "Children, how difficult it is to enter the kingdom of God! 25 It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God." 26 And they were exceedingly astonished, and said to him, "Then who can be saved?" 27 Jesus looked at them and said, "With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God."

There are lots of theories about the camel going through the eye of the needle. About 800 years after Mark was written, a legend emerged saying there was a gate in the city of Jerusalem called the Eye of the Needle. But there is no substantial evidence any such gate ever existed. You want to know what I think? I'm glad you asked. I think it's likely that Jesus was talking about...wait for it...the eye of an actual needle. He's saying it's impossible for a rich person to enter the kingdom of heaven.

What He is saying is that we need a fundamental change of heart to enter the kingdom. We need new desires and new priorities. We need something to happen in our hearts that would see Jesus and His kingdom as so wonderful and desirable and satisfying that if it meant we had to lose everything in this life to have Jesus and His kingdom, we'd gladly make that trade.

When my kids were little, they didn't value anything that was valuable. They'd throw my cell phone. They'd ruin my clothes. They couldn't care less about the size of our house or whether our car had heated seats. When they needed something and were fussy, I'd try to appease them with every toy known to man just to get them to stop crying. You know what would satisfy my babies when they were crying? Mom. They wanted mom. You could put a million dollars beside their mother, and they'd choose mom every time. They valued her more than anything this world had to offer.

And Jesus is saying we need that kind of heart change to enter the Kingdom. And that kind of heart change isn't possible apart from a miraculous work of God's grace.

Just think what it would take for you to sell everything you have to follow Jesus. What would it take for you to go straight home today, put your house and everything in it up for sale? What would it take for you to accept the first cash offer and then turn around and give that cash to the first homeless person you saw? You know what it would take. It would take a miracle. It would take a radical heart change that would make you value Jesus and His Kingdom more than you value all your stuff.

Now, don't make this a work that replaces faith in Jesus. We will struggle until we die with an attachment to the stuff of this world and the value system of this world. Often, childlike faith starts by saying we want to want Jesus and His kingdom more than we want to want this world and all it offers "Jesus, I admit I love what this world values more than I love you and your Kingdom...and I don't want my heart to be like that...". I can't help but wonder what would have happened if that had been the response of this rich, young ruler. If he had seen Jesus as the One who could change his heart...

And that brings me to the final thing we learn about childlike faith.

3. Childlike Faith Embraces Jesus For Who He Is

Let me show you what I mean.

¹⁷ And as he was setting out on his journey, a man ran up and knelt before him and asked him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" ¹⁸ And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone.

The guy calls Jesus “good teacher.” And Jesus doesn’t correct him, but He does press in. He’s like, “I’m interested to know why you called me good. Only God is good. So, what do you think?” Notice what the young man says when he addresses Jesus again.

20 And he said to him, “Teacher, all these I have kept from my youth.”

Do you see what he did? He dropped the “good.” He’s willing to see Jesus as a teacher but he isn’t willing to see Jesus as God. And that’s critical in this text because who is it that makes entering the kingdom possible for rich people?

Verse 27 - Jesus looked at them and said, “With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God.”

Let me connect the dots for you. Jesus is God. He’s the one who makes possible what is otherwise impossible.

And childlike faith believes that about Jesus. So, childlike faith stops trusting in itself and stops treasuring the stuff of this world and reaches out to Jesus, depending on Him as God. The One and Only God who can do for us what we cannot do for ourselves. Childlike faith believes Jesus makes the impossible possible.

- He makes it possible for us to be forgiven of our sins and restored to God as our Father.
- He makes it possible for us to inherit heaven itself and everything that belongs to God.
- He makes it possible for us to have a life of joy and peace even in hardship and suffering.
- He makes it possible for us to live in a way that fulfills God’s commands and swims against the cultural current.
- He makes it possible for us to one day become just like Him and live forever in God’s Kingdom.

And that brings us all the way back to the very beginning and our big idea: **Jesus gives the Kingdom of God to those who trust Him in Childlike Faith.**

So, are you trusting in Jesus in childlike faith?