

# Entering the Kingdom

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Date: 16 January 2022

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[ 0 : 00 ] So, some of you may know, I used to live in London, and when I was living in London, I wanted to visit the Gherkin. Does anybody know what the Gherkin is? Come on. The Gherkin is a big building in London. It's one of the biggest buildings, and it's shaped like a Gherkin.

It's like a conical tower. It's very plush and high class, and I was desperate to go inside and see it. And there's this restaurant at the top of the Gherkin, famous restaurant.

You can see the entire 360-degree skyline of London. So, I was really keen, when I was living there, to go over to the Gherkin. I know I had to go and pay money to go in the restaurant.

I was planning to go buy a drink, and those probably cost like £20 just to get a drink there. So, I had my £20 in my pocket and my T-shirt and my jeans, and I rocked up at the front entrance, the bottom floor at the Gherkin.

And before I could even get into main reception, a security guard stood in front of me, and he looked me up and down, and he just went, no.

[ 1 : 03 ] You don't get in. Because I wasn't part of the clientele that such fancy restaurants were hoping to attract, and so I didn't even get into the front. I thought I could get access to this place because I had a bit of money in my pocket, but I didn't make the cut.

And of course, there's many places like that in life, in this world, aren't there? There's many places that are exclusive in terms of their entry. Not everyone can enter. And you might think you have access, but then you'll be turned away.

Why? Well, the most important access that you and I could possibly have is access to the kingdom of God. Access to the future that God has planned for His world.

Access to life, eternal life. And access to the new creation that God tells us that He is planning for this world. That is the one thing, above all other things, that we should want to access.

But the Bible is very clear that not everyone gets in. And that is a truth that we've got to deal with this morning. And it's a truth that Jesus teaches about.

[ 2 : 14 ] And if not everyone gets in, the most important question you could ask is, how do you know you will make the cut? Do you? As you said here this morning, can you be sure that you have access to the kingdom of God?

That you have access to eternal life? Can you be sure that you have access to the future that God has for this world? Well, whether you're sure, or think you're sure, or whether you're not sure, what Jesus has to say in these stories that we're reading, where He is on His way to Jerusalem, and He's taking His disciples, teaching them what it means to be in His kingdom.

These stories and what He teaches are so vital for us to hear today. And so I'd like you to concentrate as we work through them together and find out what Jesus has to teach about entering the kingdom of God.

Now, there's two stories in our passage this morning that are one after the other. And they've been put together deliberately. Jesus is wanting to teach something through both of these stories.

And Mark, inspired by God, has arranged them so that these two stories come together. The first, of course, is about Jesus blessing the children in verse 13 to 16. And the next is His conversation with this rich man who comes to Him.

[ 3 : 29 ] And so, in the first story, we learn about accessing the kingdom of God. Jesus teaches about it. And we learn that, in one sense, entering the kingdom of God is actually the easiest thing in the world.

And that's the good news. Let's have a look at the story from verse 13. People were bringing little children to Jesus in order that He might touch them, but the disciples rebuked them.

When Jesus saw it, He was indignant and said to them, Let the little children come to Me. Don't stop them. Now listen to what He says. Because the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it. And after taking them in His arms, He's laid His hands on them and blessed them.

Okay, so here we have a story of children wanting access to Jesus. Everyone at this stage wants access to Jesus. He's quite a sensation. He's done a lot of powerful signs. And people know that He's at least from God and that He can bless them and He can do good things for them.

[ 4 : 32 ] And so parents are obviously encouraging their children to go up. Because how could He turn away cute little children? Well, the disciples didn't have that problem. They could turn away the children because they saw themselves as Jesus' bouncers at this stage.

Because a lot of people were wanting access to Jesus and the disciples thought, Well, we've got to filter who gets access to the rabbi and who doesn't. You know bouncers outside exclusive nightclubs are big burly people in tight-fitting t-shirts who make sure that you can't get in if you don't fit the required clientele of that club.

Well, that's kind of what the disciples were doing to ensure that only people who ticked the right boxes could get access to Jesus. Which means that they were still assuming that the kingdom works the same as any other human kingdom or organization.

That you have to be a certain person or do certain things or tick certain boxes to get into it. And these children just didn't tick those boxes. Because back in, you've got to understand, in that culture, children weren't considered very valuable.

Children were considered fairly useless and kind of bothered to have around. And there wasn't great value placed on children in that culture. And so they certainly didn't do anything to warrant access to Jesus.

[ 5 : 46 ] But Jesus takes this opportunity to teach us something about entering his kingdom. And he rebukes his disciples quite sternly. And then, he lets the children come to him. And then the very next story we read, something interesting happens.

Someone comes and approaches Jesus who does tick all the disciples' boxes. Who is the kind of person who should have access to Jesus. And then he is denied access to the kingdom and to following Jesus.

And so something interesting is going on here. In both these stories, you see, Jesus is teaching a very important truth about accessing the kingdom of God.

And it's this. It's that access to the kingdom doesn't work like anything else that we're used to. We're used to, you have to be a certain way or person or do certain things to access this place.

Or to access the gherkin, for example. Or to access an exclusive club or whatever. Jesus is teaching his disciples, no, no, no, no, it doesn't work that way. Accessing the kingdom is not something that you earn.

[ 6 : 54 ] It's not something that depends on who you are or what you bring to the table. But rather, it is something that is received like a child. Look at verse 15 again.

Very important verse. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it. It's an absolute requirement that if you want to enter the kingdom, you need to receive it, not earn it.

You need to receive it like a child. Why like a child? Well, children receive things that they haven't earned, don't they? By nature, they don't even question it.

Never has one of my children after supper asked me how much they owe me for supper. Because children are used to receiving shelter and food and clothing because they're part of the family.

Not because they've paid for it or because they've earned it. That's, Jesus says, how the kingdom works. You don't get in by earning it. It's not by merit.

[ 8 : 01 ] Which means, this is good news for anyone and for everyone. Because it means anybody can potentially enter the kingdom of God. No matter who you are, no matter what you've done, no matter what your history is, no matter what shame you have in your past, the kingdom of God is open for anyone to receive because it's not dependent on what you do, or what you can bring, or who you are.

And in that way, access to the kingdom of God is one of the easiest things in the world. But that's not the end of the story. Because in the next story, the one about the rich man that approaches Jesus, we learn that it's also one of the hardest things to access the kingdom.

Because it's not without cost. Let's read the story and see what we learn from verse 17. As he was setting out on a journey, a man ran up, knelt down before him and asked him, Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?

Why do you call me good? Jesus asked him. No one is good except God alone. And 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 your mother. He said to him, Teacher, I have kept all these from my youth. Looking at him, Jesus loved him.

[ 9 : 24 ] And said to him, You lack one thing. Go, sell all you have and give to the poor. And you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me. But he was dismayed by this demand.

And he went away grieving because he had many possessions. So this man, you've probably heard this story before if you're familiar with the Bible.

It's a well-known story. And the thing about this guy who approached Jesus is that, of all people, he was the most likely candidate to enter the kingdom. He kept the kingdom laws.

He did as best he could according to the laws of Moses. He had a good record. Jesus was pleased with him. Looking at him, Jesus loved him.

This guy didn't have any deception or guile. He wasn't lying. He was a genuine good guy. He would have made a great disciple, actually. I imagine the disciples were listening in the conversation, quite excited that they're getting a new person to join their band.

[ 10 : 23 ] Because who would turn this guy away? And he brings some money to the table as well. But it's then that Jesus does something unexpected. And instead of impressed with this guy, welcoming him in, and introducing him to the other disciples, instead of doing that, Jesus focuses on probably the only thing that's going to prevent this guy from being one of his disciples, which is his attachment to his wealth.

And he says, that's why you can't enter the kingdom. Because you're not willing to give that up when I ask you. And he goes away. And he doesn't follow Jesus.

And we don't hear of him again. So what is Jesus doing here? You know, in one breath, he makes it really easy to enter the kingdom.

He says, it's just receiving it like a child. But in the next breath, he makes it really difficult, really difficult, impossible for this guy to enter the kingdom. Why? Why does he do that?

Well, because when we take these two stories together, they teach us such a vital truth about entering the kingdom that we need to hear this morning. And it's a truth that we don't hear much in a comfort-driven world, a world full of comfortable Christianity.

[ 11 : 39 ] And that truth is that entering the kingdom doesn't depend on who we are or what we bring, but it does depend very much on what we're willing to lose. I'll say that again.

It's that important. That's what these two stories teach us. That's the heart of what Jesus is wanting his disciples to learn here. Entering the kingdom doesn't depend on who you are or what you bring, but it does depend very much on what you're willing to lose.

There's a popular notion going around today in our comfort-driven culture that you can be a Christian without cost. Just come to church. Just accept.

Just receive. It's all good. Christianity without cost is not biblical, and it's a wicked deception because the Bible is quite clear that nobody who's truly a member of God's kingdom hasn't lost something in this life to be a member of God's kingdom.

To put it another way and a way that you can remember, only losers can be saved. That's what Jesus is teaching here. Only losers can be saved.

[ 12 : 51 ] Remember what he said back in chapter 8, verse 35. You can turn there. It's up on screen behind me as well. This is such an important thing that Jesus says.

It's something that I think we skip over because it's really uncomfortable, and we don't think about it too much. We just carry on reading. He says this, For whoever wants to save his life will lose it. But whoever loses his life because of me and the gospel will save it. Who will save their life? Those who lose their life.

It couldn't be clearer than that. But what does that mean? What does it mean to lose your life? This is the teaching of Jesus very clearly.

You need to lose to be saved. What does it mean to lose your life? Well, Jesus doesn't explain it in Mark 8. He just leaves his disciples with that idea, and then they're thinking, Well, that's okay.

[13:52] They put that in the back of their mind. And it's here in chapter 10 that he starts to describe to them and explain to them just what he said in chapter 8, what it actually means to lose your life, using this example of this rich man who comes to him.

And what he's explaining is that losing your life means being prepared to lose whatever is necessary to follow Jesus as your King and Savior, as the only one who can save you and the only one who has been assigned by God to rule this world in His new creation.

The reason this man couldn't get access to the kingdom despite keeping the law of the kingdom was that he was unwilling to obey the king when that king made a demand on him.

And you can't be in a kingdom if you ignore the demands of the king. I mean, think of the kingdoms of old, right? If you were in a kingdom and you lived under the rule of a king, if you committed treason against the king, it would be, you would be executed or at least banished from the kingdom. It was the worst crime to commit treason against the one in authority. And so if you committed treason against the king, no matter if you kept all the other laws of the kingdom, you can't be part of the kingdom, right?

[15:18] Well, Jesus is saying, it's the same here to this guy. If you recognize me as king, which you need to do to fall under my protection to be saved, if you recognize me as king, you need to be willing to lose everything for the sake of the kingdom in obedience to the king.

And it turns out this guy couldn't do that. It turns out this guy's law keeping, all his good law keeping, was just an excuse to retain control of his life and his money.

And that's why Jesus focuses on his money because it's the thing that is, it's showing that he is actually unwilling to submit to a king.

And that is the heart of being saved because Jesus is not just the savior. He is Messiah. He is king. He is the one appointed by God to return, to judge all of God's enemies and to establish and rule the new creation that God has always planned for this world.

And this man could not live with Jesus as his king, even though he was really good. And I think that's still the case for many people today who live good lives, who tick the boxes, who are decent members of society, who perhaps come to church religiously, who keep the laws as much as they can.

[16:49] But it turns out, and I've experienced, and I've known people like this who are very religious on the surface, but actually the reason is because they want to keep control of their life.

And if they just tick all the boxes, they can keep on living the way they want to. And that is our instinct. Since the fall, our instinct has been to live the way we want to rather than the way our creator wants us to.

And I think there's, religiosity is often just a veil to cover up that continued independence, continued treason against the one who is appointed the king of God's kingdom.

Make sure you're not one of them. Like this man, very religious, keeping all the laws, good guy, everybody would have liked him.

And yet he wasn't willing to follow the king when the king made a demand on him. Make sure you're not one of those people because people like that, according to Jesus, are not true disciples.

[17:51] And they cannot be true disciples. When he said in Mark 8, he who loses his life will save it. He didn't mean just one hour on Sunday and a few coins in the plate.

He meant life. He said life. He meant losing your life, your entire life, not just a little bit of it, not just an extra obligation that he adds. In other words, what Jesus makes is nothing less than a demand for absolute allegiance on his people.

If you want to fall under his protection, his divine protection from punishment for your sins, if you want to benefit from what he did on the cross to pay for the sins of his people, you need to be one of his people and his people are those who bow the knee to him as king.

It's a demand for absolute allegiance, daily bowing before your king and saying nothing I have is mine. It is all ready for your service, for you to command today.

That is the attitude of a true disciple of Christ. That is actually what it means to really believe that Jesus is the Messiah, that Jesus is the Christ, that Jesus is the king of God's kingdom.

[19:03] You can't just say you believe that and still live with yourself in command of your life if Jesus is truly the king. That's what it means to believe Jesus is the Christ and believing Jesus is the Christ is necessary to enter the kingdom and come under his protection.

But that requires that we are losers. That means that we must be losers. It requires us to lose. To swear allegiance to a king has always in history required that you forsake control of your assets over to this king whose rule you now fall under.

That's what is required. Now, we believe, of course, because the Bible teaches in salvation by grace alone. But don't think salvation by grace means that salvation doesn't require anything from you.

That is a false conclusion to the idea of the fact that God saves people through grace alone. Grace means, let's establish and just clarify what grace means.

Grace means, like we learned with the story of the children, it means that you don't need to bring anything to enter the kingdom. And that's wonderful news for any of us.

[ 20 : 17 ] But grace does not mean that you don't have to lose anything to be in the kingdom. You see the difference? That's what this man had to learn. And we all have something to lose by really following Jesus as our king.

Not necessarily that we have to do the same thing as he asked this man to do and give it all away. In fact, the disciples say this. Look at verse 28. Peter began to tell him, look, we have left everything and followed you.

And he was right. They did. And Jesus agrees with him. But interesting, Peter, we know, kept his house at least. Jesus used it to teach from. Later, it became a church, one of the earliest churches. You can still go to the ruins today in Capernaum. James and his brother kept their fishing boat, we know. Jesus used it for, sometimes for teaching, sometimes for transport.

And they used it for fishing. So, even though these disciples say that they have left everything, it didn't mean they disposed of everything. To leave everything doesn't mean to dispose of everything.

[ 21 : 24 ] But what it does mean is turn what you have over to the kingdom. Your time, your home, your money, your car, the things that used to be yours, the things that you used to use at your discretion, are now in the service of the king that you have sworn allegiance to, the king of God's kingdom.

That is what it means to lose your life. Realize that you are now a steward. If you are a Christian, a follower of Christ, you are now a steward of the king's resources.

The things that you have in your home, the money that you have in your wallet, that is not yours anymore. That belongs to the king of God's kingdom. And you know what? He knows how to use it much better than you do anyway. You are a steward of the king's resources.

What a privilege. And while he's often, as a good king, happy to bless you, to enjoy those resources, remember, always remember, they are not yours.

And when the king needs them for use in his mission and his church, you don't get to keep them for yourself. And when he exposes a need in his church, in his mission fields, and he convicts you by his Holy Spirit of that need, you don't get to keep the king's resources to yourself.

[ 22 : 49 ] That is what he is teaching. And that is a high calling, isn't it? To be a disciple. It's, in one way, the easiest thing to enter the kingdom. In another way, it's so difficult because of what we have to lose.

And given that, who would actually be willing to lose all of that control of everything, ready to use for the king's service at any moment? Who would be willing to do that unless it was worth it?

I mean, let's be practical now. You're not going to give up something that you have control of unless you know that you're going to benefit in some way from that.

And back in the day when people swore allegiance and fealty to a king, they would do that because they know by swearing and giving my life over to this king, I will gain. I will gain his protection.

I will gain his benefits. I will gain the resources of his kingdom. So, yes, it's costly to be a disciple.

[ 23 : 51 ] But, nobody would do that unless it was worth it. And Jesus wants you to know that it's worth it. Look at what he says to his disciples next from verse 29.

Truly, I tell you, Jesus said, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for my sake and for the sake of the gospel who will not receive a hundred times more.

Now, at this time, houses, brothers and sisters, mothers and children in fields with persecutions and eternal life in the age to come. See, Jesus is wanting you to do a calculation.

He is wanting you to do a bit of an investment analysis. Is it worth putting my resources into this investment? Well, he's saying, look at the returns. Some of those returns you get right now. The benefits of being in the king's new community on earth. It's not all plain sailing because the world is still an enemy of this king at the moment. And therefore, he says, there will also be persecutions.

[ 24 : 56 ] But there are great benefits to being in the king's community. How many people throughout history have had their lives saved, their livelihoods saved, their marriages saved through being in the community of God's people and having access to his means of grace that change lives and access to his people who look after each other.

There are great benefits to being in the king's community. But the greatest are still to come. The greatest benefits are still to come because, as I said, as Jesus said in the short term, you also get more suffering, more difficulties following Jesus because the world is against him and the forces of hell are against God's project through the Messiah.

Even though they won't win, ultimately, they will make it really difficult. And so, the greatest benefits are still to come because when Jesus does return and he is alive now and he is preparing to return to this earth in a way that no one will be able to ignore.

And when that kingdom comes on earth and Jesus brings final justice to all of God's enemies and he comes to save his people, then his people will get everything back with interest.

Everything that they lost, they will get back and so much more. That's what the prophet Daniel tells us in the reading we heard earlier. I'll read it again. Daniel 7, verse 27. Listen to what will happen.

[ 26 : 27 ] The kingdom, dominion, and greatness of the kingdoms under all of heaven will be given to the people, the holy ones of the Most High. His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom and all rulers will serve and obey him.

One day, Jesus will rule everything and his people will rule with him. And they will receive everything, all the great things of this world, but a fixed, restored world, a restored creation given to the holy ones, given to the people of the kingdom.

And therefore, it's a wise investment. You know, you always look at the return on investment, the ROI, if you're into finance. You always look at, if I'm going to put my money into this thing, a Bitcoin or the stock or whatever, what is the risk?

What is the return? Right? That's how financiers evaluate an investment. Well, following Jesus, the risk is zero and the return is everything.

It's the wisest investment you could make with your money, with your resources. And so, to close, I need to ask you, is that an investment you are making or you're willing to make?

[ 27 : 44 ] What have you lost to follow Jesus? Ask yourself. If anything. Or are you only interested in comfortable Christianity?

What are you willing to lose to follow the king? Are you a loser for your king? Are you a loser?

Because it's those, the losers, the ones who are losers now in this age, who are willing to lose what they have to follow the king of God's kingdom, who will one day gain all things.

As Jesus says, many who are first will be last and the last will be first. Let's pray. Lord Jesus, you hear us now because you are alive.

You died for the sins of your people and you rose again and you ascended into glory and you are coming back and that is what you have revealed beyond any doubt through history, through your word and we believe it and we pray, Lord, that now we will be willing to be losers in a world that is against you.

Before you return, help us to be willing to lose what we have now for your service so that we will gain it all back with interest and so that you will be glorified through us being willing to do what this rich man, good as he was, wasn't willing to do.

[ 29 : 12 ] We pray, Lord, that you would help us to remember what you have taught us this morning as we go out and as we continue in this year. Help us, Lord, to follow you as our king.

In Jesus' name. Amen.