

The Haves and the Have Nots

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[0 : 0 0] Well, I hope you're not thinking of emigrating overseas anytime soon.! But if you were, you would know that you have to meet certain entrance criteria depending on the country you're going to.

Typically, they're looking for professional skills in engineering, in medicine, in business, etc. But of course the main thing is you'd need a certain amount of money.

Money is a thing. And depending on the desirability of the country, the money scales dramatically on what they ask. For example, I don't think Zimbabwe requires too much.

But if you want residency in Monaco, you're going to need close to 30 million rand in your bank account. The main thing is you need to prove you have something to bring to the table.

That you're worth something. That you've earned your right to be there. And of course we all know the more you have to offer, the sooner you get to the front of the immigration queue.

[1 : 0 0] However, when it comes to the gospel and to Christianity, it's completely different. And it's absolutely vital to understand that God actually works in the exact opposite way to the world works.

It's only those who don't have anything to contribute or to offer that get to receive both entrance and reward in God's kingdom. We get these things so easily mixed up in our heads.

And we believe that we have to have something to contribute. But that's not how grace works. And that's what our stories are about today. Jesus teaches us that those who enter the kingdom of heaven are not those who have, but those who don't.

In fact, this whole section in Matthew can be summed up with Jesus' words in verse 30. Many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first.

Which is why when it comes to spiritual matters, we need to learn to become like children. Little children at that. And so our first point is being last, but first.

[2 : 1 0] Being last, but first. That's why the first story is about Jesus accepting little children. Because it makes the point so well, there is nothing that you have or nothing that you can contribute to earn acceptance into God's kingdom.

Verse 14, Jesus said, Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them. For the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.

Now the disciples are trying to block the children's access to Jesus. They're looking for people that will be worth their master's time. Jesus is building a movement after all.

He's building a political movement, a kingdom. And you need financial backers if you're going to be doing that. You need people with power and money to make things happen.

You don't need children. But in God's kingdom, you need people who are like children. And so Jesus rebukes his disciples. They've got it completely backwards.

[3 : 16] That's because Jesus wants people who come to him just like little children. Children, as we all know, are vulnerable, helpless, and needy.

They need someone else to provide them what they need for life. They can't do it by themselves. And so to be like a child is to be humble and to be dependent.

It's about humility and dependence. Jesus wants people who are marked with the same attitude as that of a small child. He wants people who are humble enough to know they are totally dependent on God for every aspect of their salvation.

Which is why it's so difficult for so many to come to Jesus. Because so many people live their life in the same way. How they stay saved and ultimately how they rise again to new life at the resurrection. None of those things are we able to do by ourselves.

It always requires the power of God to carry us through the whole process of salvation. He wants people who are humble enough to know they are totally dependent on God for every aspect of their salvation.

[4 : 22] Which is why it's so difficult for so many to come to Jesus. Because so many people live their life in proud independence from God.

But just think for a second, for a few minutes, how far do you think a child will get, how far will a child get in life if they keep saying no to their parents loving offer of food and clothing and shelter.

Now everyone who's had kids knows they go through that, is it the terrible twos? When do they say no all the time? Okay, well there you go. So, but imagine you're trying to offer them food, clothing and shelter and they say no, no, no.

The thing is they won't live in their proud defiant independence for long. For one, they're going to get a smack, depending on the family. And secondly, they're not going to get what they need for growth and life.

When I was working at U-Turn, I saw this all the time. The number one thing that got in people's way, at U-Turn I was helping drug addicts come off the street and get their lives back together.

[5 : 36] The number one thing that got in their way of escaping the hell of addiction was their pride. And they would tell me that. I didn't make that up. They didn't want to admit they needed help.

But once they did, once they said, you know, I really can't do this by myself. I need help. Everything began to change in their lives for the better. And so, if you've not yet come to God yourself, if you don't yet see your need for his help, it may be that your pride and your defiance and your independence is getting in the way.

And what you need to do is admit your need of salvation. And the promise of God is he'll open the gates of paradise. Throw open the gates of paradise to you. God is always willing to accept those who come to him on his terms.

In fact, that's the only way God accepts people. If we come to him, like Jesus explains here, as a little child, totally dependent on his provision for everything in our salvation.

And it's important to do it this way, to come to God as he wants. Because if you don't, in your proud independence, you stand to lose everything, even if it means you think you've got everything now.

[6 : 55] Which is what the next story is about, about the rich young ruler. And so we've looked at being last, but being first in God's kingdom. But here's someone who thinks he's first, but he's going to come last.

And so our next point is about being first, but coming last. And so the rich young ruler comes to Jesus. He's got everything. He's got ability.

He's got power. He's got influence. He's got money. But despite all of that, he knows that he's missing something.

He yearns for eternal life, and asks Jesus what he must do to get it. But there's a disconnect between what he thinks, how he thinks he's going to get salvation, and how Jesus offers salvation.

He mistakenly thinks there's something good he can do, or something good that he must do, that can earn him his place in God's kingdom. So the first problem is he thinks he can be good enough, or that he can do good enough things to get eternal salvation.

[8 : 02] When he first speaks to Jesus, he says this. Verse 16.

Just then, a man came up to Jesus and asked, Teacher, what good things must I do to get eternal life? What good thing must I do to get eternal life?

Jesus knows the answer, of course. He knows that doing good is not going to cut it. But Jesus asked this rich young man a series of questions, and they're designed to test the rich young ruler.

They're designed to test just how far can his ability and his riches take him in getting entry into eternal life. The next thing he tries to do is he tries to bargain with Jesus about which laws he must keep.

So Jesus says, his response, Verse 17, Why do you ask me about what is good? Jesus replied, There's only one who is good. He's talking about God. He's already putting this whole question of doing good out of reach.

[9 : 09] But then he goes on to test the rich young man. If you want to enter life, keep the commandments. And here's the answer, verse 18, Which ones? he inquires.

Now, he's a Jewish person. He knows he's got to keep all of the commandments of God. But he's already trying to whittle them down. He's trying to say, Which ones really count? But in the way that God works, they all count.

And they all count all of the time. But he's trying to bargain his way down. Which ones? He's meant to keep them all.

Next, he says, Well, no, but he can keep certain commandments. Jesus names them for him. In verse 18, Which ones must I keep? Okay, Jesus says, Okay, well, let's just try these on for size.

You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not give false testimony. Honor your father and mother. And love your neighbor as yourself. These are part of the Ten Commandments.

[10 : 13] But they're on the side of the commandment tablet that has to do with dealing with people. He thinks, no. He says, verse 20, All these I have kept. He says.

But of course, he doesn't take into account the heart attitude that Jesus uncovers in the Sermon on the Mount. You can keep them outwardly.

But you can't keep them inwardly. And of course, he fails to keep the most important commandment. The first commandment.

To love God above all other things. In verse 21, Jesus answers, Says to him, In answer to his question, All these I have kept.

Jesus answered, If you want to be perfect, Go. Sell your possessions. And give to the poor. And you will have treasure in heaven.

[11 : 11] Then, Come follow me. Oh. Let's just be honest. Jesus is asking the man a lot here.

Sell everything you've got. Give to the poor. And then you will have treasure in heaven. It's too much for the man to bear.

He turns around. And he walks away. He can't take it. It's a step too far. Jesus drives the point home about what this man is lacking.

In verse 24, He says, 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.

But I wonder, What would you do if Jesus told you to do that? Empty your bank account today. Sell everything you own.

[12 : 15] We would all hesitate, wouldn't we? Even though it would be the bargain of a lifetime. Remember what the young man is asking about. What must I do to inherit eternal life?

By the way, that's not life in heaven. It's life at the resurrection. It's the life that the whole Old Testament and the Gospel promises All those who follow and trust in God.

It literally is everlasting life. Without getting old, of course. Being young and enjoying all the blessings that God has got to offer. In fact, Jesus talks about, Sell everything you have, And you will have treasure in heaven.

You don't just get eternal life if you follow Jesus. You get actual treasures to enjoy as well. It literally is the bargain of a lifetime. And yet, we would all still hesitate.

And that's the point that Jesus wants us to get. Salvation, by our efforts, is not possible. In verse 25, The disciples are astonished.

[13 : 30] They can't believe that Jesus has sent this man away. Or rather, that Jesus didn't send him away. He left, he turned and went away. Verse 25, When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished and asked, But who then can be saved?

Who then can be saved? Who then can be saved? Who then can be saved? Jesus looked at them and said, With man, this is impossible.

But with God, this is not possible. But with God, all things are possible.

And so the rich young man with his self-assurance, In his law-keeping abilities, And his self-sufficiency in his riches, Is the opposite kind of person that will find entry into the kingdom of heaven.

The reason these things don't work in the kingdom, Is that it places far too much trust in our own ability to be saved. It's in fact our way of saving ourselves.

[14 : 45] What must I do in order to be saved? Well, there's nothing you can do in order to be saved. God will do everything in order for you to be saved. Only he can save.

Our power and ability cannot do what we think they can do. Where God says, Where it says in Matthew 26, With man this is impossible, With God all things are possible.

The Greek behind that word is power. It's the dynamite word. Dunamis. With man, this is, There is no power with man to be saved.

But with God there is all power. All the power for salvation rests on God's side. Zero power to be saved rests on man's side. And God delights in overthrowing the human pride in our own ability, By saving us in a way that shows us that not only is it that God alone can save, But that we are totally unable to do anything to save ourselves.

This is at the heart of the teaching here. Why the first are last and the last first. Because with man being saved, It's impossible but totally possible with God.

[15 : 59] Man is not powerful enough to contribute to salvation. But God is. And in fact, the entire storyline of scripture shows this. Every time God acts to save, He goes out of His way to show that only He has the power to do what we cannot do.

If you go all the way back to the Old Testament, In the story with Abraham and Sarah. Abraham is the, Genesis chapter 12 is the real start of the gospel actually. Where God promises to bless him.

Guess what Abraham has to do to get that blessing? He just has to follow God. Come with me, I'm going to take you on a journey, And I'm going to give you a new land. The land of Canaan. But not only that, He promises Abraham and Sarah a son.

Because when God makes a promise, It's for generations to come. It's for us and our children and our families. Abraham and Sarah are way past childbearing years.

It's physically impossible for them to contribute to their side of the equation, For them to become the people of God. I think Abraham is close to 100.

[17 : 06] Sarah is in her 90s. And when she hears that they're going to have a child in Genesis chapter 18, Sarah laughs at God. But God says something very similar to what Jesus has just said here.

He says, Is there anything impossible for God to do? Is there nothing? There's no power that God doesn't have that He can't make things happen. God has all the power to make exactly what He wants to happen for the people.

But we don't have any power. That's the start of the Gospel. That kind of thing continues throughout the whole Old Testament. Take the story in Exodus for example.

The Jews have grown up to a huge nation, but they're slaves in Egypt. They're not strong enough to save themselves.

We like to think that the underdog wins in these kinds of scenarios. We watch movies, and all the movies are about how the underdog overthrows the superpower in real life.

[18 : 09] The superpower wins, and the slaves never get free. They just get killed. It's impossible for slaves to free themselves from the power of Pharaoh in the store of Exodus.

So God's answer? Now, I'll do it. He sends a small child in a wicker basket down the Nile, and that changes everything.

If you fast forward to the Gospel, and how Jesus brings salvation, we'll see that Jesus' death and His resurrection is the culmination of this kind of saving.

Where God does all the work for us, paying the price that we can't pay, so that we don't have to, and frees us from the debt our sins demand.

So friends, if you find yourself trying to bargain with God about which laws you should keep to be good, or how good you need to be, you need to know that all of that is going to fall short of what God requires.

[19 : 15] It's never going to be enough. God is the only one who's good. Even your good works, the Bible says, are nothing but filthy rags in my sight. In fact, Romans 3.23 says this, For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

We just cannot do it in and of ourselves. But the Gospel doesn't leave us there. It doesn't leave us without hope. It tells us that we can't save ourselves, but it doesn't say that there's no salvation.

The hope is that God is the one who does the saving. The next verse in Romans says this, All are justified freely by His grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.

Salvation is freely given in the Gospel. And that is such a blessing to know that we don't actually have to work for our salvation. Because you've got to ask yourself, how much work do I need to do?

Is it ever going to be enough? Am I ever going to be good enough? Am I ever going to give away enough of my money? What a relief to simply trust in God's salvation and not in your own ability to be perfect.

[20 : 32] If you find yourself on the rich side of the equation of life, And just by the way, there's no hard and fast rule as to where that is.

In fact, you could argue it's pretty much all of us at church, depending on who you compare yourself to. But don't think your riches give you special privilege with God or with His people.

In fact, riches are more of a hindrance than you think. John Piper, the noted preacher from America, says this thing that scares him most is making money from his books and his talks and his online work.

He gives it all away for free. All the royalties he gives away. He doesn't take it because he himself has said, I'm too scared to get rich. I'm too scared of what it will do to me.

I have a colleague that runs a very middle class church up the line towards Cape Town.

[21 : 41] And in 30 years of ministry, he says that the number one sin he battles with, with his people in his church, Not a very rich church, not a poor church, just middle class South African.

The number one sin he battles with is their love of money. One way to combat this is to practice giving your money away.

Now that doesn't mean all of it. Jesus isn't telling us all to sell everything. Jesus is making a point with this rich young man. But what we need to do is let our money flow easily through our fingers, and give to the poor, and give to God's work, God's kingdom work.

That's because what we do with our money is a litmus test for our trust in God's power and promises. Jesus and the rich man shows not just how ineffectual having money is in order to be saved, but how damaging it is to be saved.

The rich man, the rich man's riches cost him eternal treasures. And so he's first, but he's going to be last.

[22 : 53] Be careful that that doesn't catch you out in your life. The rich man's riches cost him eternal treasures.

He'd rather keep a little bit now. He thinks he's got a lot. But compared to eternal treasure, eternal treasure, it's nothing.

And so the last point is we've got future eternal rewards to look forward to if we give up everything and follow Jesus.

Just look at what Jesus promises to those who trust him with their lives and with their stuff. Verse 28. Jesus says to them, Now, Jesus is specifically talking to the apostles here.

They've asked, We've given up everything. Are we going to get anything or what's going to happen? What's going to happen? No. At the renewal of all things.

[24 : 12] And what I said, it's not about going to heaven. This is new heavens and new earth language. When the whole world is renewed, the apostles are going to sit on the twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

It's a huge elevation for them. They are lost in Jesus' lifetime. They are going to be first above all the other great men of the Old Testament.

And judge the twelve tribes of Israel. I think that includes the church. I think it's indicating that it's the whole church age. They lost. Do you know that nearly all of the disciples were killed, martyred before their time?

John, the apostle, was the only one who grew to old age. They were all lost in terms of money, in terms of prestige, in terms of achievement in this world. But God was working through them.

And they get this eternal crown. And then they're lifted up to this high place of judgment on thrones, ruling over God's people.

[25 : 22] And then verse 29, he talks about the rest of us. And everyone else 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, talking about at the time of the renewal of all things, new heavens and the new earth, and will inherit eternal life.

Now one of the mistakes we make, is we over-spiritualize these treasures. And we think it's all about just having a deep personal intimate relationship with Jesus. Because many people I've spoken to have said, oh, all they want to do is just sit and look at Jesus' face all day long.

That's a long time. Eternity is a long time to sit and stare at someone's face. Just so that you picture that. And so we mustn't over-spiritualize what Jesus is saying here. He's saying, if you leave stuff behind in this world, if you do it for me, if you do it with the right motives, you're going to gain a hundred times as much in the world to come.

Actual stuff. We're talking about mounds and mounds of stuff that we're going to get at the resurrection. Quite what that is, I don't know.

But it's going to be stuff that we can enjoy and use and going to make up for what we lost here. If we are still unsure, so friends, if you're still unsure if these things are true, what you need to do is look to Jesus' resurrection.

[27 : 05] That's the ultimate promise. I'm going to die, but I'm going to come back to life again. That's proof that he can do whatever he said he's going to do. And so, what's required from us to enter into salvation and to get rewards is nothing from our side, but simply to trust in the words that we have to do.

And so, what's required from us to enter into salvation and to get rewards is nothing from our side, but simply to trust in the words that Jesus says.

It's to do what the small child does with their parents. I promise my boy, I promise my girl, I'm going to get you this. We're going to have that. We're going to do it. Now, yes, in our broken world, sometimes those promises aren't fulfilled.

But if you've got a good parent and they've got their resources that they need, you're going to get what they promise. And in God, we have a good, good father.

We've got someone with eternal resources at his right hand. And so, we can trust him for these promises. But if you're still unsure, let me close by reading from the prophet Isaiah, who foresaw all that was promised in the gospel.

[28 : 17] And he's got this invitation to you. It's from Isaiah chapter 55. Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters. And you who have no money, come, buy and eat.

Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. Why spend money on what is not bread and your labor on what does not satisfy?

Listen, listen to me and eat what is good. And you will delight in the richest of food. Give ear, come to me, listen, trust that you may live.

And you will find you happy with you.