

Pentecost 22 / October 20, 2024

Mark 10:2

“Children, how difficult it is to enter the kingdom of God!”

How Hard to enter the Kingdom of God?

How hard is it to enter the kingdom of God? Not as hard as some places. There are places where only certain and select people can enter. Is the kingdom of God such a place? There are places where only the rich and the famous are allowed entry. Places where only the richest and the most famous are allowed to enter. I heard a story about a posh club in England that was so select that it refused entrance to Mick Jagger. One of the most famous musicians in the world was dismissed with a derisive comment, “Get that dinosaur out of here!” Lodges and fraternal organizations have standards that a person must meet before being considered for membership. If a person doesn’t meet the mark, he is denied entry. What must we do to enter the kingdom of God and how difficult is it to gain entry?

Prior to our text a man came to Jesus and asked, *“Good Teacher, what must I do to enter eternal life?”* He presumed naturally that there was something he must and could do, to enter eternal life. In this world we have to do in order to receive. You must have gotten at least a billion dollars to be granted entrance to the billionaire’s club. Sometimes that’s not enough. When it was discovered that financier J. P. Morgan died with a net worth of only one billion dollars, a rival industrialist with more billions scoffed, “He wasn’t even a rich man.” You must have written a best-selling novel to become a member of the literary society. It’s only natural we would expect we must do something to enter the kingdom of God and have eternal life. That’s human nature and the way of the world.

Jesus went along with the young man, saying, *“You know the commandments.”* He knew the commandments and, in his opinion, he had kept them from his youth. Nevertheless, it seemed something was still lacking, so he sought Jesus’ counsel. Jesus said, *“You lack one thing: go, sell all you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.”* Sadly, the man chose to turn away from Jesus, *“sorrowful, for he had great possessions.”* His attachment to his wealth was greater than his love for God and his desire for eternal life. Jesus called, but he refused and so doing excluded himself from the kingdom of God and eternal life. What must we do to enter the kingdom of God? The answer is simple. Follow Jesus!

On the one hand, the kingdom of God is an exclusive place. In Revelation chapter 22 it says, *“Nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb’s book of life.”* Entrance into the kingdom of God is exclusive in that it is restricted to those who follow Jesus, whose names are written in His book of Life. On the other hand, it is all inclusive, in that Jesus offers Himself for all to receive. He desires to write the name of every human soul in His book, for He shed His blood for the forgiveness of all. He calls all people to faith in Him through the gospel. He promises His faithfulness through baptism into His death and resurrection to all who believe. Jesus said, *“Whoever believes and is baptized shall be saved.”* All who follow Him in faith have entrance to the kingdom of God and have eternal life.

What’s so hard about that? What was so hard about following Jesus that caused this young man so eager to inherit eternal life, to turn away? His attachment to his wealth was the problem. Wealth was his god and when Jesus challenged him to follow Him as His God and Saviour, he turned away. Jesus said, *“How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God.”* The disciples were amazed that the wealthy should face such obstacles. Generally, they had all the advantages. But it isn’t a rich person’s problem. The obstacle is not just wealth, its anything and everything that is more important than God and following Jesus in faith.

When the disciples express their amazement, Jesus extends his words to encompass all people, saying, *“Children, how difficult it is to enter the kingdom of God.”* What is so hard about following Jesus? Following Jesus means to see Him as our God and only Saviour. It means becoming children in that we trust Him in simple faith, take His words to heart even when don’t understand and believe. How can the water of baptism, the bread and wine of communion accomplish such great things as to bestow forgiveness and nourish to eternal life? We don’t have to understand how, we simply take God’s word for it and believe it. Following Jesus means resisting the impulse to think there are things we must do and can do to earn and deserve our salvation. *“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God...We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.”* Salvation, eternal life, entrance into the kingdom of God, are gifts God gives solely out of the kindness of His gracious heart. Offered freely to all. Given richly and in great abundance to those who believe.

It's hard to enter the kingdom of God, in part because it seems too simple. It is simple, *"believe on the Lord Jesus and you will be saved."* It's simple, but it's not easy. Jesus warned the disciples and all who would follow Him in faith that there will be persecutions, hardships, spiritual and physical assaults from the world, the devil and our own sinful nature. He said, *"Whoever would come after me must deny himself daily, take up his cross and follow me."* He said, *"Whoever loves mother and father more than me is not worthy of me."* In this life there is suffering and hardship for everyone, but there will be an extra dose for those who follow Jesus in faith.

Peter said to Jesus, *"See, we have left everything and followed you."* They had left everything. House, father, mother, wife, children and their lively hood. When Jesus called Peter and Andrew, James and John, they were operating a successful fishery. He said, *"Follow me."* Immediately they left their nets and followed Him. When trouble arose among the larger group of disciples and many left because they said Jesus was talking crazy; Jesus asked the twelve if they also wanted to leave. It was hard to follow Jesus and much they didn't understand, but they remained. *"Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life."* He had the words of eternal life.

What do we have to do earn eternal life? Nothing. In fact, we earn eternal punishment if we try to do something. Jesus earned eternal life for every human soul through His perfect obedience and sacrificial death. Unlike the young man who claimed to have kept the law from his youth, Jesus really did keep the law in its fulness, from conception to death, down to the last jot and title. He fulfilled the ceremonial law, to which all Jews circumcised into the covenant of Mount Sinai, were obligated. He fulfilled the moral law, written in commandments of stone and upon the human heart, to which all people are obligated and to which every soul will give account at the judgement seat of God. In our place He fulfilled the law, so that on Him the Father would lay the sin of the whole world. *"God made Him who knew no sin to be sin that in Him we would become the righteousness of God."* Jesus earned eternal life for every human soul. He offers it freely for all to receive through faith in His name and baptism into His death and resurrection. The heavenly Father grants entrance into His kingdom in time and for eternity to all who follow Jesus in faith, trusting Him as their God and Saviour.

"Children how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God!" In fact, on the basis of our own efforts, merits and morality it is impossible. We are all tainted with sin and even our most righteous acts are like filthy rags in comparison with God's perfect righteousness. Nothing unclean or impure and no one tainted with sin can enter

into God's kingdom and dwell in His presence. With humans it is impossible, but with God all things are possible, including and especially, our salvation. In Revelation there is a vision of human souls entering into the kingdom of God, washed clean of sin, wearing robes made white in the righteous blood of the Lamb.

Following Jesus may not be easy, but remember He has already done the hard work of earning our salvation. Remember His promise in our baptism, "*I will never leave or forsake you.*" He abides with us by His Spirit in the word of scripture, in the water of baptism, in the bread and in the wine of holy communion. He walks with us through the fellowship of the church (*where two or three are gathered in my name I am there with them*), so that our faith may endure all the hardships that threaten it and be fulfilled in our entrance into the kingdom of God in His resurrection to eternal life. God grant this to us all. In Jesus' name. Amen