

The Community of the King. A community with hope Matthew 19:13-30

Leaders need followers

It would be hard to get elected if you had no-one to man the polling booths with your how to vote cards.

Hard for Putin to even think of invading Ukraine if he was all alone

Hard to influence outcomes with an online campaign if no-one signed up or reposted your comments

Leaders need followers, depend on them in our world for their power and influence, to execute their plans and fulfill their promises

And they seek to retain their loyalty, reward their work and support for them – with jobs and privileges

But Jesus is different

What we see in the gospel is that He has followers, but He does not need them, doesn't depend on them to fulfill His plans, in fact they have to depend entirely on him

And yet at the same time the benefits, the blessing, of being His follower exceeds anything any mere human could offer his followers

²⁹ And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields because of my name will receive a hundred times more and will inherit eternal life

Eternal life

All our lives, after a few short years, end in death

We've been reminded of that as a society by Shane Warne's death, and as a church community by Ray Davidson's.

All our lives are lived with the shadow, the consciousness of death, and the presence of grief.

And this life also knows the marring of sin – pain, tears – not just of grief, but of broken promises, of oppression and violence and injustices.

But Jesus promises eternal life

The life of the age to come. Not more of the same life we have experienced here, but life without death and grief

Life characterised by peace – the endless enjoyment of God's bounty, secure, whole, with transformed, deathless bodies

Eternal life – it is a wonderful promise.

To whom does Jesus say He will give this life? Who can depend on Him for this life?

And it is an extraordinary promise when you think about it. There is Jesus, standing there talking to His followers in a body like theirs, a body that dies?

How can He be sure He can deliver on this promise? How can we?

Eternal life

TO whom does Jesus promise this life?

How can we know He can deliver on His promise?

And the most important question for you – as you meditate, perhaps even feel, your mortality:

Do you have a hope of eternal life?

The King who has followers but does not need them

Children welcome

Matthew 19: ¹³ Then little children were brought to Jesus for him to place his hands on them and pray, but the disciples rebuked them. ¹⁴ Jesus said, "Leave the little children alone, and don't try to keep them from coming to me, because the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." ¹⁵ After placing his hands on them, he went on from there.

Parents, then as now, wanted the best for their children, and in a society that believed in God they recognised that Jesus was plainly someone who was close to God, whose prayers and blessing mattered, someone who could help their children survive and thrive

But the disciples, still thinking like the world, don't want Jesus' time and energy taken up with – well – people who didn't really matter, who wouldn't be able to make any contribution to Jesus' cause.

Peasant kids won't create a power base, and they aren't a useful source of material resources for the movement

And they probably thought it was a little beneath Jesus' dignity to be preoccupied with anxious parents and their desires for their children

But by welcoming these children Jesus uses this as an opportunity to reinforce what He has already taught

the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.", belongs to those like little children

Back in chapter 18 Jesus had taught that the requirement for belonging to his community was humility

Matthew 18: ² He called a small child and had him stand among them. ³ "Truly I tell you," he said, "unless you turn and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. ⁴ Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child—this one is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

This was a demand for his disciples to embrace humility for Children were at the bottom of the social pile, without any marks of greatness.

They were powerless, without status, subject to and dependent of their parents.

Even the continuation of their lives was uncertain in the context of a high infant mortality rate.

You couldn't build any kinds of hopes on them and you didn't consult them when making your plans.

But the Lord Jesus said that to enter His kingdom, belong to His people, that is what you have to become like – a little child

You had to know yourself to be without greatness

To be someone who had nothing to offer and who had to depend entirely on Jesus for being in the Kingdom

Matthew 5: ³ "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for the kingdom of heaven is theirs.

The kingdom, as Jesus taught from the outset, is for the poor in spirit, the spiritually bankrupt, people who had run out of resources, had nothing to offer

No one who thinks they are great, Deserving of position and prominence

Who thinks they can bring to the King of the kingdom some service He needs and should recognise and reward

Has any place in the Kingdom

Jesus reinforces that lesson now by welcoming these children

And He is also teaching His followers, us, that if the kingdom is for those like little children, then it includes those who are genuinely little children, with nothing to offer

It can include children because being in the Kingdom depends on Jesus and His grace, not on his followers position, power or achievement

That is great good news

We can share the gospel with our children, and they can enter the Kingdom, come to belong to Jesus' people, while they are young – just by trusting Him, believing what He promises

They don't have to wait until they demonstrate some kind of worthiness, are able to make some kind of contribution, are deemed mature

Great encouragement to parents, and it's a reminder that our instruction of them in the faith is not preparing them for a series of tests they must pass to be worthy, but sharing with them a Saviour who will welcome them in their immaturity and inability, just as – as we are about to see – He welcomes any.

For in the gospel story Jesus reinforces this lesson that the Kingdom of heaven belongs to those who become like little children

Before an encounter that shows us how hard it is to become what all who come to Jesus must become, how hard it is to become like a little child

How Hard it is to become like a little child

¹⁶ *Just then someone came up and asked him, "Teacher, what good must I do to have eternal life?"*

¹⁷ *"Why do you ask me about what is good?" he said to him. "There is only one who is good. If you want to enter into life, keep the commandments."*

¹⁸ *"Which ones?" he asked him.*

*Jesus answered: **Do not murder; do not commit adultery; do not steal; do not bear false witness;** ¹⁹ **honor your father and your mother; and love your neighbor as yourself.***

²⁰ *"I have kept all these," the young man told him. "What do I still lack?"*

²¹ *"If you want to be perfect," Jesus said to him, "go, sell your belongings and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."*

²² *When the young man heard that, he went away grieving, because he had many possessions.*

Now this is the kind of bloke you want to attract, to get on your team. Even the kind of bloke you would want your daughter to marry.

Young – lots of potential for development

Morally upright v. 20 – you'll be able to rely on him

Wealthy v. 22 – a contributor, not a drain

And earnest, so earnest – concerned for the important questions

"Teacher, what good must I do to have eternal life?"

You can be certain the disciples cleared a path through the crowds for him to get to Jesus.

But the outcome of the exchange is disappointing from the recruitment point of view.

He goes away grieving.

What is happening?

His question is a great question - *what good must I do to have eternal life?*"

But it also expresses his self reliance – What must I do. He is looking for the good thing He can do, a feat he can perform, that will earn, merit him, eternal life. He sees Jesus, not as a Saviour, but as a source of guidance, an advisor to direct his own achievement.

And he is quite self confident.

When directed v. 17 to keeping the commandments as the source of life, as it says in Leviticus 18:5,

He says ²⁰ *"I have kept all these," the young man told him. "What do I still lack?"*

¹⁷ *"Why do you ask me about what is good?" he said to him. "There is only one who is good. If you want to enter into life, keep the commandments."*

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Jesus doesn't challenge his self-confidence by directing him to his teaching in the sermon on the mount and the heart righteousness the commands look for, or even pointing out the first three commands, or the tenth, which look for wholehearted love of God.

Doesn't bluntly say – there is nothing you can do.

Instead he shows him he can't do what is needed for eternal life, by telling him what he must do.

If he would be perfect, that is complete, fully qualified,

²¹ *"If you want to be perfect," Jesus said to him, "go, sell your belongings and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."*

²² *When the young man heard that, he went away grieving, because he had many possessions.*

Go, sell, give – and you will have treasure in heaven

He is testing whether He really does think Jesus teaches the good, teaches with the authority of God about what heaven, God, values and rewards

But it is not just go, sell, give.

Jesus is not saying that spectacular generosity, self sacrificial benevolence to the poor, by itself will give eternal life.

That is just the prelude for 'come, follow me'

Jesus is inviting him to become like a little child

TO abandon the status and the security of his wealth, and to depend entirely on Him, on Jesus

To Abandon his self-reliance to rely on Jesus alone to both keep him in this life and give him eternal life.

It is an extraordinary demand. Notice that.

Jesus thinks He is worth all to follow, that following Him will deliver what this man was looking for – eternal life. Who can say that?

And Jesus' command does not come out of a narcissistic love of His own power, or a desire to make things hard for this privileged man.

In Mark it says Jesus

Mark 10:21 "Looking at him, Jesus loved him 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."

He makes this demand out of love

And it is not an arbitrary demand.

It is quite unique in being so specific to this rich man's circumstances

All disciples are called to give up all, their whole life, to follow Jesus

Matthew 16:²⁴ Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone wants to follow after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. ²⁵ For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life because of me will find it.

But Zachaeus, or the wealthy Joseph of Arimathea are not asked to give all their wealth away.

Mary, Martha and Lazarus still had a house they could use for hospitality

Others are left with their wealth and possessions to use them in obedience to Jesus as stewards of what He has given them

In this unique call to sell and give away all, Jesus was highlighting what was stopping this earnest, moral, rich man from following for eternal life.

He was held, held in death, by his possessions, by having his identity, his sense of himself in the world, tied up in them

He feared loss of wealth and with it loss of self, of status, of power

And that exposed where his trust was.

It was in himself – what can I do – in his own capacity and resources

And not in Jesus

What Jesus has exposed is how hard it is for this wealthy, earnest and morally serious man to become like a little child

Is He Unique?

But is he unique in that? Is it hard for him alone to become like a little child?

Jesus does not think so.

²³ *Jesus said to his disciples, "Truly I tell you, it will be hard for a rich person to enter the kingdom of heaven. ²⁴ Again I tell you, 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."*

²⁵ *When the disciples heard this, they were utterly astonished and asked, "Then who can be saved?"*

²⁶ *Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."*

It is hard for the rich to enter the kingdom,

In fact, it is impossible.

That is the point of the illustration

The only way the camel can go through the eye of the needle is by a radical rearrangement of its constituent parts in a mincer, at which point it has ceased to be a camel. Camels can't go through the eyes of needles

Why is it impossible for the rich to enter the kingdom of heaven?

Because they cannot humble themselves to become like little children.

Being rich is being able to depend on yourself, and not have to depend on others.

The rich have their identity tied up with the privilege, position, and power wealth gives – and they don't want to lose themselves, lose their lives – for Jesus' sake

But the disciples are shocked by Jesus' statement

'Then who can be saved?'

From their point of view the rich are the people with resources, with something to offer.

And in their society there was a background belief that the rich were those blessed by God

Still true – the rich are often the talented, those who have got it together personally, the ones who can look after themselves, can bring the most to the table of life

And if it's 'what must I do' – they are the ones best equipped to do

Whether it is being charitable, or living an ordered life, or being able to learn the secret knowledge

If it's impossible for the rich, how can anyone be saved?

Jesus confirms their suspicion

'With people, humanity, it is impossible'

Impossible – not just for the rich, but for everyone

Why is it impossible for all?

It is because left to ourselves, we are all like the rich man

WE are wedded to the 'I do', determined to rely on our own efforts, to keep trusting ourselves – when, because of our sin, there is nothing we can do.

It is hard for anyone to become like a little child.

It has a nice ring to it – humbling yourself to become like a little child, and we dream of innocence and simpler times

But who wants to become dependent, humble?

It is so much better being in control of our own lives, and our identity is invested in being who we want to be

In fact the whole direction of our lives is away from being like a little child

One of the great things about growing up, as teenagers know,

Is Having a say in how your life is lived – its direction, timetable, content

Being listened to, and not always ignored or overruled

Getting your own way

Who wants to go back to being like a little child?

In fact wanting to be in control, independent of God, relying on ourselves, is wired into us from birth.

What was Adam's sin about?

Not trusting and depending on God for good and evil, for what we should and shouldn't do

Our race is committed to the exact opposite of being like a little child

We want to be reckoned like God, able to make our own decisions about right and wrong, to be proud masters of our own fate

To shape our lives and our world the way we want them to be, to locating authority in ourselves

[choosing gender, choosing sexuality – are just our society's more extreme examples of something we are all committed to – our choice]

And despite the mess we make of our own lives and our world, despite the death we bring, we cannot escape that will to love our own wills, to rely on ourselves.

Like the sorrowful rich man, we may sense the goodness of Jesus, sense that eternal life can be found with Him, but of ourselves cannot bring ourselves to give up that self love and self reliance, that rule of our own lives.

We are trapped, ensnared, in loving ourselves and other things

²⁶ *Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."*

Thankfully Jesus says what is impossible for us is possible for God

That entering the Kingdom, receiving eternal life depends on God, not us

On what He does, not what we do

Jesus says God can bring people, even proud people, people ensnared in their wealth and status,

People in love with their independence and self reliance, people like us

Into the kingdom

He doesn't spell out here how God will do that.

The rest of the gospel will show us that, especially its climax where the Lord Jesus brings into life by His death the new covenant where God not only forgives our sins but gives us new hearts

But what we do see here is that entering the kingdom will mean abandoning the 'What must I do'

And heeding Jesus' call to come, follow me

That the way God will do what is impossible for us is bringing us to rely on God's Saviour Jesus, humbling ourselves to depend on Him completely, to depend completely as the gospel story makes clear on the crucified Saviour, the one who dies for our sins

Humbling ourselves to become like little children, who receive with gratitude the life the King gives

Entering the Kingdom, receiving eternal life, will only happen God's way

And that way is following the Lord Jesus

Jesus makes that clear in response to Peter's question

The King worth following

Matthew 19: 27 Then Peter responded to him, "See, we have left everything and followed you. So what will there be for us?"

28 Jesus said to them, "Truly I tell you, in the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. 29 And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields because of my name will receive a hundred times more and will inherit eternal life. 30 But many who are first will be last, and the last first.

Jesus responds vv. 27-28 that because He is no ordinary King it is worth it, in fact the rewards of following the King who does it all is beyond their imagining.

Jesus speaks of Himself as the Son of man sitting on His throne at the time of the renewal of all things

Daniel 7: 13 I continued watching in the night visions,

*and suddenly one like a son of man
was coming with the clouds of heaven.
He approached the Ancient of Days
and was escorted before him.*

*14 He was given dominion
and glory and a kingdom,
so that those of every people,
nation, and language
should serve him.*

*His dominion is an everlasting dominion
that will not pass away,
and his kingdom is one
that will not be destroyed.*

He is saying He is the one spoken of in Daniel 7, the glorious Son of Man who receives, in Daniel's words, an eternal and universal reign

When the new heaven and earth is revealed and sin is judged

That was a reign that would not just be of the Son of Man, but of His people, Israel. Daniel 7 concludes by saying at that time

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.'

Jesus tells His disciples that they will at that time form the foundation of the new Israel, and share in His judging

This is a glorious future, out of all proportion to anything they may have done

An extraordinary transformation, brought about by God, not by their own efforts, a gift given through the Son

And the Lord Jesus says participation in that glorious time, in that glorious reign, is not just for them, but for all

29 And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields because of my name will receive a hundred times more and will inherit eternal life.

Everyone

Everyone who abandons, for the sake of obedience to Jesus, the Lord – everything that gives identity and security in this world

That is what we get from *houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields*

Belonging, resources, security

Our sense of self, from family connection, property, work

All that Jesus' followers leave for Him

Relying on His promise that those who leave all for Him will find those things in Jesus – in following Him, trusting Him and living His way

Find identity, security, belonging – in belonging to the family of Jesus

Every believer finds that identity and security in Christ

And sometimes we have the blessing of belonging to Jesus' family brought home in special ways

Like Being in another country and finding welcome and help amongst Jesus' people

But Jesus promises more

His followers will inherit eternal life, like the Israelites leaving Egypt inherited the promised land

Jesus will make eternal life ours

Following Jesus, says Jesus, is worth it – making us rich beyond the wealth of any person in this life

But Jesus is making extraordinary demands, speaking extraordinary promises

How can Jesus be confident that God will do the impossible through Him?

For He is a Living man, standing before them in a body like theirs

Knowing the truth of what the Psalmist says in Ps. 146:3-4

Psalm 146: ³Do not trust in nobles,
in a son of man, who cannot save.

⁴When his breath leaves him,
he returns to the ground;
on that day his plans die.

That the plans and promises of human leaders perish with them

How can He be sure that God will save people who cannot save themselves through following Him?

How could Jesus be so sure?

Jesus was confident for He knew who HE was, and He knew what HE would do

Matthew 17: ⁵While he was still speaking, suddenly a bright cloud covered them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased. Listen to him!"

He knew He was the beloved Son, sent into the world to save [Matt. 1:21]

Matthew 17: ²²As they were gathering together in Galilee, Jesus told them, "The Son of Man is about to be betrayed into the hands of men. ²³They will kill him, and on the third day he will be raised up." And they were deeply distressed.

And He knew what He had come to do, that He had come to die.

HE has been telling His disciples this

And He Knew His death was purposeful, a ransom for many

Matthew 20: ²⁸just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Jesus spoke as He did because He Knew He was the King who could achieve salvation without our help – through His death

The King who graciously gives the kingdom to the undeserving, to the poor in spirit, to little children

Jesus was confident, but can we be sure He can deliver on His promise of eternal life?

How can we be so sure?

I hope you feel the weirdness of the rich man's encounter with Jesus, of a bloke, flesh and blood like the rest of us, standing there and saying – I can give you eternal life –

Feel the weirdness and be grateful we are on the other side of the cross and resurrection

That is how we know What Jesus said HE would do, HE did

He died in Jerusalem, betrayed into the hands of the religious leaders

And He rose.

That is the witness of His first followers – who saw Him, touched Him, spoke with Him, ate with Him – after He had been crucified

Who testified HE was alive in the body in which He had been killed.

He lives

And that resurrection is God's testimony that Who Jesus says He is, He is

The Son, the glorious Son of Man who receives an eternal kingdom

The living King who can keep His promise,

That death and resurrection is an event, a happening in time, in the history of the world. It's not just words, and it can't be willed away

The crucifixion and resurrection of the Lord Jesus is not an idea we are willing ourselves to believe, but testimony we receive

And receiving that testimony we can be sure

Living with a life death has no power over the Lord Jesus can give eternal life

Reigning in an eternal kingdom, He can give a place in that Kingdom to all whom HE wills

To All will become like little children, and depend on Him and show that

by leaving all to follow Him

Repent of their self reliance, their determination to stay in charge of their own lives, and trust Him and do all that He teaches

Are you sure?

Jesus different King

He doesn't need us, our following doesn't make Him King, increase His power

He is the King who only has followers who can humble themselves to become like little children, who will depend on Him

But He gives to His followers what no-one else can give

Eternal life

Have you received eternal life from the Lord Jesus, received it as His gift?

If no

Relying on yourself won't work

That life is impossible for you to obtain

But where 'what must I do' will only end in disappointment

'Lord save me' will always be heard, for God's word says 'Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved'

Don't let your pride blind you to reality

Don't let your love of being in control of your own life rob you of eternal life

Come, says Jesus, follow me

Trust the living Lord – ask Him for forgiveness and to be made one of His people, for grace to follow.

But if you say yes – I have trusted the Lord Jesus, know now His sure promise of eternal life

Be confident in your Saviour

Live as a little child

Don't get sucked into self reliance and the pride it brings

With looking to your own achievements

Live that life of humility

That trusts and serves cheerfully, knowing you can never lose what Jesus gives

Of gratitude – for receiving an unshakeable kingdom – that can give thanks always and does not grumble

Of hope – that can keep on leaving what is passing away to receive what will never pass away

Hope in the God for whom nothing is impossible

And who has done the impossible for you, given you eternal life

Through the unthinkable – the death of His Son