

How to Get into Heaven

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- [0 : 0 0] Thanks, Emma. I'm just going to pray for us again as we come and look at God's word. Father, we ask that you would test our hearts now as we come to your word.
- We ask that you would show us what we are really like, that we would have no deception about ourselves and our hearts before you as we read what you have to say. Please show us more of Jesus and who he is, that we may understand him more and trust him better.
- Amen. As we start, I'd like us to think about a question, think about a question about yourself. And that question is, is what would you need in life to feel secure?
- Take a moment and think about it. What would you need in life to feel secure? I don't know what you thought of, but I guess there's lots of things that we would tend to think that we need to feel secure.
- For instance, a job. And maybe you're a student in your last year of university and you think, the thing I really need next year to be secure is work. I really need work. That's the thing I need to be able to get the money, to pay the bills and to live the life I want.
- [1 : 1 9] Maybe it would be housing. Housing can often be a source of great insecurity for us. Where am I going to live? Is it going to be a nice place to live or is it going to be kind of a horrible, dingy, cold flat?
- Maybe it was just money. Money is what I need to be secure, to be able to look after myself and to take care of myself. An answer I reckon that none of us probably gave was guns.
- I used the word firearms at the last service, but someone said that sounded like fire alarms. So anyway, 100,000 Californians bought a gun during COVID.
- Half of them were first-time buyers. So if you're an American, perhaps you feel you need a gun to be secure. Security is a really, really basic human need.
- We all want to be able to look after ourselves, to know that we are going to be safe. And the question we're going to be thinking about this morning is, where does Jesus come into that and why? I think, for instance, we can often feel like we're perfectly secure without Jesus.
- [2 : 2 3] Take, for instance, if you don't believe in God at all, well, there's no one there to look after you. What do you need God for? You're like people like the orphans abandoned at the beginning of a Dickens novel.
- No parents. No one in the world to look after them. Just subject to the whims and temptations of those around them. Perhaps if we are Christian, well, I remember a time when I was, a couple of years back when I was working, working as a doctor, just due to the way that my shift patterns worked out.
- I wasn't able to make it to church for an entire, I think it was an entire month without going. And there was no massive, kind of catastrophic moral collapse. The world didn't fall apart because I didn't go to church.

But it'd be quite easy in that sort of situation to think, well, what do I really need God for? What difference does he make day to day to my life? Well, what does God have to say to that?

What does he have to say to human security? We're in the middle of a section in Luke's Gospel about how to gain eternal security. Starting in chapter 17, Jesus has been teaching us about the kingdom of God.

[3 : 35] And earlier in Luke, he's taught us about the kingdom of God as a perfect world. A world with no sickness. A world with no death. A world with God in perfect, eternal security and peace.

And in chapter 17, he tells us a bit more about what this kingdom is like. What it's, when it's going to come. The kingdom of God is not something that's going to happen necessarily here and now.

It's primarily something that's going to happen off in the future. And it's going to be sudden. It's going to be unexpected. And it's going to be divisive.

People aren't going to expect. It's going to happen. Jesus is going to return one day and bring about his kingdom. And that is going to be completely unexpected. The world will just be going on as normal. Much like normal, day-to-day life.

And then Jesus will return and bring about his kingdom. The perfect world that we want to be part of. And the second, the second really shocking thing actually about Jesus' kingdom is that not everybody is going to be in it.

[4 : 44] Not everyone is going to be in it. There's going to be two groups of people. There's going to be the group of people who are in Jesus' kingdom. And there's going to be the group of people who are out of it. Some people are going to miss out on this perfect world that Jesus has to offer.

are instead going to face judgment and destruction from God. So the key question, the really, I hope you think it's a really, really important question that Jesus turns to answer now, is how do people enter the kingdom of God?

How do people get eternal life? I hope it's clear that that's not a kind of irrelevant question. It's a question of huge, huge importance for each and every one of us. And Jesus starts to give us his answer.

So we're going to look at verses 15 to 17 first off. And that's children only. Jesus tells us that only children are going to get into the kingdom of God.

Let's look at the story again. So people were also bringing babies to Jesus for him to place his hands on them. When the disciples saw this, they rebuked them. But Jesus called the children to him and said, Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them.

[6 : 00] For the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. You can kind of picture a scene, also we come to the disciples' despair. You know, maybe kind of babies, baby after baby after baby, crying and vomiting and everyone else gets really awkward.

It's like being on the plane when the baby's crying and everyone wants it to stop. And Jesus says, No, let them come to me. Because the kingdom of God belongs to people like this.

Such as these. That's what the word such as means is this. As such as these means like these. Of course, children can be part of God's kingdom. That is a wonderful truth. That children can hear the good news about Jesus and enter the kingdom.

But he means such as these. People like children will be the ones who enter God's kingdom. And the question is, what does it mean to be like a child?

I think there's some options we can immediately rule out. It kind of rules out being short. At least I hope it rules out that only short people are going to get into the kingdom of heaven. It would be bad news for me. I think we can also rule out innocence.

[7 : 02] Anyone who knows children, who's worked with children, I think you know that children aren't innocent. This caused me to reflect on some of the events of my own childhood. And my lack of innocence. I definitely still remember hitting Polly Wilson with a cricket bat and running off into the treehouse.

Children are not innocent. I think that can't be what Jesus means. What it means to be a child is it means to be completely dependent.

Completely and utterly dependent on God. And trusting him for all of your needs. Imagine a toddler. A toddler never says, I'll just go down to the shops just to go and buy some milk.

Or, Dad, can I pay for my clothes? Or the school child never asks to drive himself to school. Or the baby never wakes up in the middle of the night and says, you know, I'm just going to give Mum and Dad a break this time. I'm just going to change my own nappy.

It just doesn't happen. Children are completely dependent and completely needy. Then look again at the shock in verse 17. Truly, I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.

[8 : 14] People who won't be like these needy, dependent, vulnerable children will never enter the kingdom of God. There's a big red, no entry sign, never. No reprisals.

There's no second chances for those who will not enter the kingdom of God like a child. I think then we ask the question, well, what does that look like in practice?

What does it look like in practice to enter the kingdom of God like a child? Well, in verses 18 to 30, we're going to meet a test case of someone who wants to enter the kingdom of God, who wants to gain eternal security.

And we're just going to see how they get on. To see whether they can enter the kingdom of God like a child. So we meet in this certain ruler in verse 18. Perhaps he's there.

He's seen what Jesus has just said. And this certain ruler asked Jesus, Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?

[9 : 15] And I'm just going to read verses 19 to 21 again. I want you to have a think to yourself, how good a chance I reckon this guy's got, genuinely, of getting into the kingdom. So have a think.

19. Why do you call me good? Jesus answered. No one is good except God alone. You know the commandments. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not murder.

You shall not steal. You shall not give false testimony. Honor your father and mother. All these I have kept since I was a boy, he said.

I think it looks pretty good for this guy. I think it looks really good. First of all, he actually wants eternal life. This isn't a guy who's just not interested. He wants to go to heaven. He wants to get eternal security.

And he wants to enter God's kingdom. He wants something of what Jesus has to offer. Secondly, this man is a good man. A man of honesty and integrity.

[10 : 17] He's never been unfaithful to his wife. He's never murdered. He's never stolen. He's never taken anything that didn't belong to him. No matter how small or how petty. He has never lied.

He has never said a word that was not true. That didn't give justice to the situation as it was. And he's always obeyed his parents.

Jesus doesn't question his conclusion in verse 21. All these I have kept. So he wants to get eternal life. He's good. And then finally, and I think this is one which is trickiest for us to get our heads around.

He's also rich. This man is rich. Because when we think rich, we think bad, right? We think kind of like financial crises and exploiting the poor and so on and so forth.

But when they thought rich, they didn't think bad. They thought blessed. Blessed by God. If you were rich, that meant God had looked on you with favor. You had done the right things.

[11 : 15] And he had responded by giving you material blessing. And surely when it comes to getting into the kingdom of heaven, this man is our, you know, he's the A-star student.

He's like a student with three A-stars. He's trying to do maths at university. They've got an A-star on maths, an A-star on further maths, an A-star on physics. And they think, I want to go and do maths somewhere. I want to apply to London Metropolitan University. I need a C, a C, and an E.

Like, there's just no way they wouldn't get in. The university is just going to give me an unconditional offer straight on. They should be grateful, actually, that someone that's clever has applied to do this course at their university.

Or it's like watching Usain Bolt line up at the beginning of a 100-meters qualifying race in the Olympics. You know, six foot five, stacked with muscle, Olympic world record holder.

There's no way that he's not going to get through this race easily. And it's the same with this man, this ruler. Surely Jesus would love to have him as part of the kingdom.

[12 : 13] Like, think of all the good he could do. Think how great he'd be on the CU exec. Like, all the great events he'd put on. All of the friends he'd be able to make. All of the people he'd be able to tell about Jesus. He'd make a great part of God's kingdom.

So Jesus offers our top students a very, very simple test. Verse 22, look at it with me. When Jesus heard this, he said to him, You still lack one thing.

Sell everything you have and give to the poor. And you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me. It's very simple.

Just go home. Kind of put together a list of everything you have. Sell it. Give all of that money away. And come and follow me.

I mean, how would you feel if Jesus asked you to do that? Just to go home right now. If I was to ask you to go home right now. Sell the little possessions. Put it all on eBay. Get the money as quickly as in any way that you could.

[13 : 23] I mean, just come back here. Come back to St. Silas. Just in the shoes and the jeans and the shirt that you're wearing now. And the coats. It's Glasgow. It's cold. I didn't want you to go about that. Maybe you can keep it. Just imagine doing that.

Imagine how that would feel. And how do you think he's going to get on? Because the test is very simple, isn't it? The test is either me or it's your money.

There's no in between. He can't keep his money and have Jesus. It's Jesus or your money. Everything he has. Or Jesus. And the shock is that with this test.

Is that this rich, moral, good, upstanding man. Is going to hell. Someone who actually looks really just like you and me.

Scarily like you and me actually. I think here in the west end of Glasgow. People say that they are good. And we are definitely by global standards wealthy. We think we are well off. And we are good people.

[14 : 24] People who look secure and confident to the outside world. And why is this man going to hell? He's going to hell because he refuses to enter the kingdom of God like a child.

And Jesus wants us to learn from his mistakes. So that we can learn and enter the kingdom of God like children. So I just want us to see two things about what stops this man from getting in.

Just to expand on what it means for us to enter the kingdom of God as children. And his first problem. His first problem is that he thinks that he is good. But he is not.

He thinks that he is good. But he is not. We can see his self-confidence there in verse 21. All of these I have kept since I was a boy. All of the commands Jesus told him.

But I wonder if you notice. There were some commands that Jesus left out. There were some commands that Jesus didn't say. Maybe time to engage your brains a bit. Have a think to yourself.

[15 : 28] What are the commands that Jesus doesn't mention? You're given five of them. What are the other ones that he doesn't say? I'll give you ten seconds. I hope none of you cheated.

Because they actually are all up there just behind me. I mean the screen is up for the event. So that actually stops most of you from seeing them. Unless you're kind of sat in this row here. In which case the answer is all up in front of you.

But what are the commands that he left out? Well number one. The command number one that Jesus left out. You shall have no other gods before me.

When God gives the ten commandments to Israel. He says I am the Lord your God. Who brought you out of Egypt. You shall have no other gods before me. I am to be your only God. Number two. No idols.

No graven images. Nothing which represents God in physical form. And number three. Don't take the Lord's name in vain. Number four. Keep the Sabbath. And number ten. Don't covet.

[16 : 35] So when we take a look at these commands. Let's start to think. How does the guy's goodness look now? How does the ruler's goodness look now? That we know all of the commands that are there. Because he's got God himself standing in front of him.

Jesus standing in front of him saying. Put me first. Make me your only God. And what does the man do? Well he has this choice between money and Jesus.

And he picks money. He turns away. He rejects Jesus' offer of eternal life. And he picks his money. This is a man who has not put God first.

He has broken commandment number one. Definitely. And he's also breaking I think commandment number two. He has an idol. He has his money. He has this thing that he looks to for security.

So Jesus' question is very clever. It completely exposes his heart. He becomes confident. Thinking he's kept the commands. And Jesus shows him. Well no.

[17 : 32] You haven't. You've broken the most important one of all. You shall have no other gods before me. It's a bit like going to an exam isn't it?

So turning up for an exam. And you've prepared really really hard. You've worked hard. You've revised everything you need. You think you need to revise. And turning over the exam paper. And it's almost completely the wrong curriculum.

The question you were not expecting at all. The question worth the most number of marks is there. And you realize you've got no idea how to answer it. And that kind of happened to me in my history with ECSE.

We did the First World War. We all thought we didn't really need to know anything about the Treaty of Versailles. And it turns out we were all wrong. So everyone got B's. I guess we can blame our history teacher. But it's that sort of shock.

He thought he was good. But he's not. And so that's part one of what it means. Not to try and enter the kingdom of God like a child. It's to come and enter the kingdom of God.

[18 : 31] Thinking you can be good and get in. Because it just won't happen. There's no free passes on the door for people who think that they're good. Or think that they've done the right thing. People who are confident in their goodness before God will never ever enter the kingdom of heaven.

And that's the same for all of us. And there's a second related reason to this, which I think is interesting. Is that this man can't enter the kingdom of heaven. Because he wouldn't put his total trust in Jesus.

Because of his money. And because of his wealth. His money was the thing that was getting in the way. And stopping him from getting into the kingdom of heaven. And we look again at Jesus' offer in verse 22.

Sell everything you have. Give to the poor. And you will have treasure in heaven. And then come and follow me. This is an amazing offer. This is the deal of a lifetime.

This man has been made by Jesus. And this guy, you know, he's extremely rich. And he must know a good business deal when he sees one. And here's Jesus offering him eternal life and treasure in heaven.

[19 : 42] Treasure that's never going to rot. That's never going to get stolen. Never going to fade away. Eternal wealth enriches with Jesus. And he just looks at it. And turns his back on it.

He turns away. It's like someone saying. Do you remember offering us a way out of lockdown? So we can all go to the pub again. So we can all see our friends again.

Everyone can start playing sports again. We can meet up with friends and family in an unrestricted way. And life will go back to normal. You'll be able to go back to university lectures in person. To see whoever you wanted to see.

Someone offering that to you. And you say, well, no thanks actually. I'd rather just stay at home and watch television. And, you know, go on Netflix. That sort of thing. I'm actually quite happy not going out at school.

It's an amazing offer. And he turns away from it. And the thing that is stopping him from doing that is his wealth. It stops him from completely trusting Jesus.

[20 : 36] That's why Jesus says what he says in verse 25. Look down with me at it. Verse 24 and 25. Jesus looked at him and said, How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God.

Indeed, 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 heaven. His money isn't just a bit of a barrier.

It is the barrier. He cannot be rich or think of himself as rich and enter God's kingdom. It's so difficult. Jesus says, Like the camel going through the eye of a needle. I can't, you know, it's impossible to read that with any imagination and not think, How could I get a camel through the eye of a needle?

You know, 500 kilograms of muscle and bone and sinew and organs and to get them through a hole that's about that big. Could it be possible? In Jesus' day, I guess there would have been lots of knives and maybe some stones to, like, grind it down into some sort of pulp.

It's pretty horrible. But that misses the point, anyway. It completely misses the point. A camel cannot go. There is no way for a camel to go through the eye of a needle. It is absolutely impossible.

[21 : 48] And why is it impossible for people with wealth to enter the kingdom of God? I think we need to understand that wealth means more than just kind of financial wealth and money now.

It's an entire attitude. In Luke, the poor are the people who know that they are dependent and needy upon God. Who know that this world is not as it should be.

Who know that they are oppressed by sin. And who cry out to God for deliverance. Cry out to him for help. But the rich, well, they have received their comfort now.

This world is all that they live for. All the good things of this world is all that they care about. And they say, well, I don't need God. I'm okay by myself, actually. Thank you very much.

I love this world and what I have here. And following Jesus, well, that would just mean giving up too much stuff. So I'm just confident with what I have now. I think that's probably an aspect of what makes evangelism in somewhere like Glasgow difficult.

[22 : 51] Because people are rich. People have life now. They get to have what they want. And when you try to offer people God, well, what are they missing, really?

Their life's probably just as good as yours, if not better. So wealth represents an entire attitude of self-sufficiency, of trusting in your own resources and your own self now.

Whereas to be poor, well, that's to know that you really need something. So that's the second reason. I think his money stops him from putting his trust in Jesus. His heart is in completely the wrong place.

And then look at the conclusion then, in verse 26. When they see what happens to this man, then those who heard this asked, who then can be saved?

As they see the exposure of this man's idolatry, of his desire not to put God first, they ask, well, who then can be saved? And this means, if not him, then who?

[23 : 55] If not this rich, good, upstanding man, who would be our first bet to enter the kingdom of heaven and was going to get in, if he can't get in, then who can get in?

Surely it's impossible. The heart attitude that Jesus asks for, complete and total and utter commitment to Jesus, well, this man doesn't have it. How could we possibly have a commitment like that that would sell all of our possessions and go and follow Jesus like this man?

If the straight A star student can't get in, well, who can get in? If Usain Bolt can't win that race, well, who is going to win it? They understand the conclusion of Jesus in verse 27.

This is impossible with man. It is impossible for any of us by ourselves to get into the kingdom of God. And it's when you come up against Jesus and you come up against his total demand for commitment that you start to realize that that is true.

You start to realize that he demands all of us, all of the time. That is who he is, that he is God. We have to put God first. But when you do that, then you start to realize, I really can't do that.

[25 : 09] I really can't. There's these bits of me that I just want to hold back and to hold on to what I have that stop me from trusting Jesus. And you look at your heart and you think, there is no way if that is a total commitment that is required that I can enter God's kingdom.

And I think that's what Luke wants us to understand. He wants us to understand that we share by ourselves this rich man's problem. We share the problem of putting other things before God.

We share the problem that we haven't kept the commands. And so we are by ourselves in the same desperate, desperate, desperate situation of not being part of the kingdom of God.

And so when we realize that our hearts are so far away from the Lord by ourselves, that is meant to push us towards God, to depend on him completely, to want to follow him completely, to ask him for forgiveness and to come to him like children, realizing that we are poor and destitute and have nothing, that we are naturally outside of the kingdom and the person we need totally is Jesus.

And unless Jesus is all that you have, unless he is the one we are completely committed to, we can't get in. And to have that sort of attitude towards Jesus, we need a miracle from God that would make us dependent upon him.

[26 : 35] Jesus' invitation here is to trust him completely, to leave what we have behind, to leave our goodness behind, to leave our attachment to this world's possessions and security behind, and to trust him like a child.

And this is as true for us now if you are already a Christian as it was when you first started to become a Christian. We don't grow up as Christians in that sense. We don't become adults. We don't become people who can look after ourselves.

We are still people who are needy and dependent and need Jesus for absolutely everything. I think it's possible for us to look at ourselves and to think, well, you know, I'm quite good at this now, actually.

I'm quite good at this Christian living thing. I'm quite good at reading my Bible. I think I've got my prayer life sorted. That's completely the wrong attitude. We need to keep on living dependently as believers.

I think that starts with what we think of ourselves and our goodness. I think this is one of the most basic things. Do we think we are good or not? Is every day for us a day where we cry out to God and think, my heart is not as it should be.

[27 : 43] I'm just like this ruler. My heart is so attached to the world. And that should push us to pray the prayer that the tax collector prayed last week.

He looked up to heaven and beat his breast and said, God, have mercy on me, a sinner. That sort of prayer has to be almost part of the daily part of the life of a Christian who wants to enter the kingdom of God like a child because we realise that we are not good.

And so we give up at that way to try and get into the kingdom of heaven by being good and trust on Jesus and his mercy. And I think there's a second realm of application of this which refers to the idols that Jesus points out in the heart of this man.

And I think following Jesus is going to mean for us showing the idols, the things in our lives that are not God, that in comparison to him they are nothing, that Jesus and his priorities come absolutely first in everything that we do.

I think one way to start with that would be our money actually. That's where Jesus goes here. It is money that is peculiarly deceiving. So here's one idea.

[28 : 56] Perhaps go home and print off last month's bank statement if you don't have them already printed off or take a look at it and go through it with a highlighter and say well what did I need for rent last month?

What did I need for my bills? What did I need for food? What did I need for clothes? What were my essentials? What did I need for last month? And then what's left over? What do I have left after that?

And to think well how could I use that for the good of the kingdom of God? How could I show my money that it is absolutely nothing to me and that Jesus is all that I have? How could I use that for the kingdom?

How could I use it to help tell non-Christians about Jesus? How could I invest that in the gospel? There's lots of ways to do that. There's more joy in that than in any holiday or investments or meal outs.

And if you're here and you're not currently believing and trusting in Jesus well I encourage you to find out is Jesus worth trusting like this? Is Jesus worth completely depending upon like this?

[30 : 00] And we come along to the life course starting next Monday evening on Zoom you can find the details in the notice sheet and to see this Jesus who this Jesus is what he did and what it means to follow him to find out whether he is worth trusting in this complete and total and childlike way.

Because there's only two destinations there's only heaven and there's only hell and your attitude to Jesus is what is going to make the difference between those two things. And why would we do this?

What would be the motivation for us to live like this? Well look at verses 27 to 29. Jesus replied what is impossible with man is possible with God.

Peter said to him we have left all we had to follow you. Truly I tell you Jesus said to them no one who has left home or wife or brothers or sisters or parents or children for the sake of the kingdom of God will fail to receive many times as much in this age and in the age to come eternal life.

Jesus he means it. He means it if you turn away from what you had before like Peter did and trust him completely he will give you everything that you need.

[31 : 20] Absolutely everything. He is the good God who takes care of all of our needs. People who leave family gain a new family. People who give up treasure now will gain treasure in heaven and in the age to come eternal life and Jesus makes what is impossible with men possible with God.

Jesus will enable the change of hearts that the rich young ruler was enabled to do by himself for people who throw themselves on his mercy and trust in him and seek to live his way.

Trusting in Jesus means you won't lose out. It is absolutely certain. don't think that we're good don't think that our money will make us secure trust the Lord Jesus and give it all to him.

Let me pray. Father God thank you that only dependent children can enter your kingdom. Please help us when we are weak to put our trust completely in you to recognise our bankruptcy and our poverty before you and to trust you to give it all to you so that you can give us everything that we need.

In Jesus name. Amen. Amen.