

Inheriting Eternal Life

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[0 : 00] Everybody wants to go to heaven, but nobody wants to die. So sang blues singer Albert King, everybody wants to go to heaven, but nobody wants to die.

! Do you think that's right? Do you think that's true? I do. I think, I would suggest, I would guess all of us sitting here this morning want to go to heaven. And I think everyone in our homes, in our families, in our schools, in our places of work, if I was to walk outside and go down Rosemount Viaduct, they're asking people, do you want to go to heaven? They would say, yes, we want to go.

And so who can go? Who can go? As we continue our series in Matthew this morning and come back to Matthew chapter 19, we're in this narrative block in Matthew. And the question, which kind of acts like the sun around which all of the material orbits, is there in verse 25 of our chapter.

The disciples ask Jesus, who can be saved? Who can go to heaven? Who can have eternal life and enter the kingdom of heaven? Everybody wants to go to heaven. So who can go? Who can be saved?

Well, dear friends, for some of us this morning, if we're new to church, perhaps this is our first time here or only recently heard of the gospel of the Lord Jesus, of what church is all about, we're still trying to find out. I think the answer you might find this morning to be very surprising.

[1 : 49] But I think for those of us who have maybe been in church for years after years, decades, perhaps all our life, what a chapter like this is going to do, what verses like this are going to do is keep us grounded, to keep us anchored to the very heart, the truth of the gospel, which is so kind of counter against the default of our hearts and from which we are so prone to drift.

So who can be saved? Who can inherit eternal life? Well, here's our first point and here's our answer. Only those who are very, very small. Only those who are very small. Verse 13, the children were brought to him that he might lay his hands on them and pray. The disciples rebuked the people, but Jesus said, let the little children come to me and do not hinder them for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven.

And he laid his hands on them and went away. So as we land here, you can picture the scene. Jesus is preaching and teaching and parents and families are gathered and they decide they want to bring children to Jesus. Oh, can children, can they come to Jesus? Well, verse 13, what do the disciples think? The disciples say no? And it's not a kind of polite thing, is it? No, they rebuke them.

Well, why? What are children? Well, they're the least important in this society, aren't they? They have no social standing. They have no important position. They are small, the lowest of the low.

If I can put it this way, they have less standing than a member of the Conservative Party would have at the Labour Party conference, or less standing than a member of the Labour Party would have at the Conservative Party conference, right? People would be asking, right, why are you here? The disciples see these children as being so far away from the kingdom of God. They rebuke those who would bring them to Jesus. But verse 14, Jesus says, they're wrong. They're wrong, right? He says, let the little children come to me. Do not hinder them. Do not stop them. For to such belongs the kingdom of heaven.

[4 : 08] Jesus is saying, you thought they looked like outsiders, but actually here is what an insider to my kingdom looks like. You thought they were not to inherit the kingdom, but here is what an inheritor of my kingdom looks like. And so, of course, the question is, well, what does Jesus mean in all of this? What does he mean? Well, the key word in all of this, I think, is there in verse 14 when he says, for to such. That's the key phrase. For to such or like. Those who enter my kingdom, those who go to heaven, those who inherit eternal life, are like children. So, what are children like? And especially children here. Well, what are they like? They're helpless. They're dependent. They are those who are brought to Jesus, who come to Jesus with nothing to bring, but knowing they need Jesus. That they have empty hands. But verse 15, they know they need Jesus' hands of blessing upon them.

Early in our service, we read from 2 Kings chapter 5. It's a wonderful, wonderful passage, a wonderful story. It's one of my favorites. I have a habit of saying that about, I think, every passage we are coming to, but it really is one of my favorites. Here we have, at the beginning of 2 Kings chapter 5, Naaman, a big, powerful, strong general of the Syrian army. And what does he look like? He looks very far from the kingdom. He's a leper, an outsider in every way possible. And the leprosy is a picture of his sin and his spiritual condition in his heart, a picture of death. He is far from God.

And what does he need? He needs in his heart to become very, very small. And wonderfully, he does. This commander of armies, he listens to a slave girl, listens to a prophet, listens to his servant, and comes low under the waters of baptism in the Jordan. And did you clock how the passage ended?

He comes up from the waters of baptism, and here's what we read. And his flesh was restored like what? Like the flesh of a little child. And he was clean. Why is his flesh described like that of a child? Because it's an outward picture of what's happened in his heart. This proud Syrian general has become humble, humble. This self-reliant man has become dependent, become dependent, listened to the word of God and obeyed it and followed it. This man who had the world at his feet and was big in everyone's eyes became small, humble, and he gained life.

Who can be saved and inherit eternal life? Only those who are very small inside. That is only those who trust Jesus. Only those who come to Jesus with empty hands saying, I need you to do for me what I do not have. Everyone wants to go to heaven. So how do we go? Trust Jesus alone. Become trust Jesus' eyes in our hearts. Now for many of us here this morning, we're thinking, well, this is kind of old hat. For most of us, you're thinking, Ben, even before you started preaching the sermon this morning, if you'd asked me that, I would have had the answer there in my mind on the tip of my tongue, just ready to say it. I know that. But actually, our default in our hearts is so far from this, we can drift. We can drift from this.

[7 : 59] And to prove the point, Jesus now gives the disciples a kind of object lesson in this. Jesus leaves these little children, and who does he bump into next? He bumps into somebody who wants to go to heaven, who's somebody who on the outside has all the credentials, who looks like he's met all the criteria, except what we're going to learn is that he hasn't. And so that brings us to our second point.

Firstly, who inherits eternal life? Those who depend on Jesus, those who come to Christ alone, but who does not inherit eternal life? Those who are proud, those who depend on themselves, those who think they're big enough to earn their way to glory on their own. Verse 16, and behold, a man came up to Jesus saying, teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?

Now, given all that we've heard and thought about these children here, that should, we should already have kind of alarm bells starting to ring in our minds. What's wrong with the question? What does he say? He says, what do I have to do? What good deed must I do?

Is this man coming empty-handed, like these children dependent? No, he's coming full-handed, right? He's thinking his good deeds and rewards can kind of earn him enough points, a bit like your kind of Tesco points or your Sainsbury's points. I just need to buzz it enough and top up my points, and therefore I will get in. So Jesus proceeds to show him, to show us that entry into the kingdom is never a matter of earning it. It's not something that can be bought by us or paid for by us. No, we need another to do it for us. It's not works righteousness. It's always one of receiving what's been done for us. So Jesus begins the kind of skill of a physician, of a doctor, to show this man he's too big, too proud to enter the kingdom. Verse 17, Jesus says to him, why do you ask me about what is good? There is only one who is good. If you would enter life, keep the commandments. So what is Jesus doing here? Well, Jesus is, if you like, showing him that the measuring stick, that the yardstick of God's law, which tells us of God's character and his perfect goodness. And he does this, that he might, if you like, draw this yardstick or this measuring stick, and the man might see that he cannot measure up. And so that he would then cast himself upon Jesus for mercy. Well, does the rich man do that? Let's see, verse 18. Well, the man said to him, which ones? And Jesus says, you shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not bear false witness, honour your father and mother, and you shall love your neighbour as yourself. The young man said, all these I have kept, what do I still lack? Now, as we've just said, the young man here should be thinking, right, the Lord Jesus has mentioned all of these commandments, what has he not mentioned? Where have I failed? But rather, he just says, well, what else is there?

And Jesus here is so clever, like a master doctor ready to expose the wound that needs treatment, says to him, verse 21, if you would be perfect, go sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven, and come and follow me. So where does Jesus expose his heart?

[11 : 36] Well, in the 10th commandment, and then, of course, in the first. He shows that this man is coveting, he's coveting, and of course, by doing that, he's putting God's lowercase g above God, and Jesus is right on that that's where this man needs treatment. But does the rich man fall on his knees for mercy? No. Verse 22, when the young man heard this, when he has his heart exposed under the doctor's light on the surgeon's table, what does he do? When he heard this, he goes away sorrowful.

For he had a great many possessions. Do you see what his problem is? He's coveting. He's wealthy and rich, but he covets his wealth, so he can't give it up to follow Jesus and have treasure in heaven.

It's not so much we're about to learn that he has many possessions, but it's that his possessions have him. Everyone wants to go to heaven, but nobody wants to die. And here is a man who wanted to go to heaven, who wanted eternal life, but now won't, walks away, turns his back upon Jesus because he doesn't want to die. Not speaking of bodily death, but of dying to himself, to his possessions, to his wealth, and emptying it all and saying, Lord Jesus, simply to you do I cling.

Now, dear friends, can we begin to see the sharp end of this? The sharp end of this is that this young man on the outside, he looks like he has it all together. Just compare with what's happened before.

The children have come and the disciples say, keep them away. This man comes. Is there any sight or sound of the disciples trying to rebuke? No, they don't stop him. The children come. They have nothing to bring. Needy. This man comes. He has lots to bring. This man looks top of the class, poster boy, the kind of person who on the outside you'd think you'd want your daughter to marry.

[13 : 50] Moral, upstanding rule keeper. But Jesus exposes his heart and shows that he is too big to fit through the door to the kingdom of heaven. And of course, the utter tragedy of all this is that in holding tight to what he has now, not only will he lose that, but he'll lose eternal life. By holding on now, this man loses everything. Everything. We recently read one of these kids' books called *The Magic Treehouse*. And these kids, Jack and Annie, they go on these adventures and it's, well, it's a magic treehouse, right? In they go to the treehouse and it takes them to wherever it is they're going to go. And I think the last one we read or previous one was they go to the pyramids in Egypt.

Egypt. And they arrive in the pyramids in Egypt and they have this adventure right into the pyramids in Egypt. And off Jack and Annie go and they get to the middle. And what do they find? Well, they find a mummy, right? And yes, the book has all the classic mummy jokes, okay? But they find the mummy there embalmed, wrapped up. What? Surrounded by treasure. Treasure, possessions, wealth, things they wanted to take into eternal life, right? But can't. No, it's all still there. This man is clinging to what he can't keep and he loses eternity along the way. That's why Jesus goes on to say it's only with great difficulty a rich person will enter the kingdom of heaven. And that it's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God. Friends, I think I'm going to argue that Jesus isn't really being kind of hyperbolic there. It's not really hyperbole. Why? Because we cannot save ourselves. As he's about to remind us and is about to see in a minute, we cannot save ourselves. Salvation and heaven and eternal life is so far from us. It is easier to squash a camel through the eye of a needle. But so often, wealth and money and status and riches, they do what? They send us not into a spirit of humble reliance, but they send us into a spirit of pride and of self-dependence and self-reliance. So what is Jesus teaching here? Is Jesus teaching here we all need to be poor in terms of material wealth? No. Is Jesus teaching here that like this man we should go and sell all that we have? No. Is Jesus teaching that rich people can't go to heaven, right? No.

But Jesus does put us on warning here not to trust in our riches, not to trust in our bank accounts, our earnings, our ISAs, our pension funds, to see us safe to heaven. One commentator puts it this way, wealth often lures us into believing that everything can be had for a price.

In most cases, with wealth, it comes with self-reliance, self-importance, self-security. Wealth has a way of ruling one's life, ruling one's time, ruling one's vocation, ruling one's commitment, and ruling one's concerns. And the whole point of the camel and the eye of the needle reinforces the truth that those who are ruled by money cannot be ruled by God. And so it is a warning to us all.

In the little section, or in the rest of 2 Kings chapter 5, and I would encourage you later this afternoon to go back and finish reading the rest of that chapter for yourself, we find out what happens with Naaman and Elisha. And we find out that after Naaman is healed, he offers Elisha money. You'll remember at the start of that chapter, he's brought all this stuff with him from Syria, and he wants to pay Elisha for what's happened. And Elisha says, of course, no, this is a free gift. It's God's grace.

[18 : 05] You can't earn this. Take everything and go back to Syria. And off he goes. But what we find in the rest of that chapter is Elisha's servant, a man who looks like an insider, chases after Naaman and says, actually, and he's lying, Elisha's changed his mind. We'll take your money. We'll take the things that you've brought to give. Gehazi covets. He covets and he chases after Naaman and he gets all the things and he comes back to Elisha. And what does Elisha say? You've lied. You've coveted.

You've exposed what your heart is like. And at the end of that chapter, Gehazi leaves a leper. You see, what you see in 2 Kings chapter 5 is an outsider at the start becoming very small, healed, becoming an insider, showing that he's humbly under God's word, trusting God. But at the end of the chapter, you have Gehazi who looked like an insider, actually an outsider. His heart exposed, a leper, one who has coveted. And so it does stand as a warning to us all. And so what's the disciples' response to all this? What's our response to all this? I wonder if it's similar to that of the disciples. Verse 25.

They are astonished, right? Who can be saved? It's the right question. If the good aren't saved by being good, keeping the law, if the rich aren't saved by being rich, by looking blessed, who can be saved?

Well, that brings us to our third point. Who inherits eternal life? Those who depend on Jesus. Who doesn't? Those who trust themselves depend on themselves. So our third point then, trust Jesus.

Trust Jesus alone and receive eternal life. Who can be saved? Those who trust Jesus alone. And of course, how does that salvation come? Only as a gift from God. Only God can do it.

[20 : 09] Verse 26. Jesus says this. That is salvation, eternal life. With man, this is impossible. But with God, all things are possible. Salvation from start to finish is all a work of God. Humanity cannot save themselves. We cannot save ourselves. Only, only God can do it. I think I shared this quote once before, but I love it and it was applicable. So I thought I'd use it again. The American pastor and theologian missionary Jonathan Edwards once said this, to take on yourself to work out redemption, to work out salvation, is a greater thing than if you had taken upon you to create a world.

What's he saying? He's saying this. It's easier for Elon Musk and SpaceX to say, forget putting people on Mars. What we're going to do is create a ninth planet or a tenth one or wherever Pluto is these days, but it's actually easier for us to create another planet and fill it with life and populate it.

Is it an easier thing to do that than to save ourselves? But with God, it is possible. For man, redemption is impossible, but with God, it is possible.

How? How? Through Jesus humbling himself to death on a cross. You see, the call of this passage is to become small, to become trust Jesus-sized. Humble, small. But here's the thing, friends, that is exactly what Jesus did for us. He became small to win our salvation, but only on an infinitely greater scale. But the one who is infinite, and you don't get bigger than that, became finite, became in utero as he took on human flesh and lived for nine months inside a womb. The one who is seated on heaven's throne and is worthy of all praise and glory and honor was born in a stable. The one who knows all things in becoming a man had to grow in knowledge. The one who is the giver of life itself came to die, to die on a cross and to go to a tomb. With God, it is possible. How? Because the eternal Son of God, the Lord Jesus came to this earth to win our salvation and to save us. And so, dear friends, three applications and we're done. Firstly, to those who want to go to heaven, to those who want to inherit eternal life but aren't trusting Jesus. Dear friend, if you want to go to heaven but aren't trusting Jesus, we see very simply here, you're not going. You're not going. Because if you're not trusting Jesus, it shows that you're trusting yourself or you're trusting something else and putting it above God. Perhaps it's money. Perhaps it's the treasures of this earth. It's material gain.

Dear friends, you cannot take it with you. It will not save you and give you eternal life. You can never do enough. You can never do enough good deeds for heaven. And so, the call is to come to Jesus today with empty hands, with empty hands. Trust him. Humbly, Lord Jesus, I need you. I'm a sinner who needs a savior. And he will reach out just as he did to those children and touch you and bless you and you will have eternal life with him. Isn't that freeing? Isn't it glorious? Isn't it wonderful?

[24 : 08] Right here at the heart of the gospel. Eternal life for those who humbly trust Jesus. Second, perhaps for some of us, we know salvation is in Christ alone. But actually, we're no longer living like that. We've kind of drifted from the truth of it. Well, what do I mean? Well, it could be this.

That perhaps there are idols in our hearts that have started just to pull us away, a little bit like treasure and wealth for this man. Perhaps there are things we're beginning to center our lives upon more than Jesus. And if so, we need to repent and turn back and ask the Lord Jesus that we would keep trusting and treasuring him above all. That he would continue being our first love and our only hope. But also, I wonder if there is another way that sometimes we don't live out like our salvation and hope is in Christ alone. You see, Jesus, in talking about salvation here, he says, with man, salvation entering the kingdom is impossible.

But perhaps we've just started to think, perhaps we've just started to think, well, maybe there are a few things that I've done that might have just helped. And the way to know if you're beginning to operate that way yourself, it is to ask yourself the question, do I see myself as more deserving of salvation than that other person? Than that person in front of me, behind me, sat next to me, across the neighbor, across the road, the person next to me at work? Well, you see, I grew up in a certain denomination. I grew up keeping the Sabbath. Oh, I honored my parents. I never murdered or killed. I never coveted. And surely those things put a bright, nice, shiny light above my head, that God would take notice of me. And it really just gave him a bit of a helping hand that I might be saved. Dear friends, although we may not believe that to be true, sometimes we can begin to live like that's the case. And a passage like this reminds us, no, no. Yes, those things, and yes, the law, as fruits of salvation. Oh, I'm saved by grace alone. And Lord, I love keeping your law. And I love keeping the Sabbath and honoring my parents and living all those, living that way as a way of expression of love to God because he's saved us, trusting on his grace and mercy alone.

But take any part of the law and think by doing it or keeping it, it made us more worthy of salvation, or it makes someone else less worthy of the saving work of Christ. And then we've misunderstood how the kingdom works. And if we find ourself there, we must again come to Christ's words there.

Who can be saved? With man it is impossible, but with God all things are possible. It is a work of God's grace alone. And that should humble us and humble our hearts as we look to share the gospel with those around us. Thirdly then, thirdly, to those who have trusted Jesus, to those who have trusted him alone for salvation, dear friends, from Christ's words here, take heart this morning. I want you to take heart that eternal life, that treasure in heaven truly is yours. You'll see we've noticed that we've not really dealt with the last part of the passage. Jesus says in verse 26, with God all things are possible. Then Peter replies, see, we've left everything to follow you. What then will we have?

[28 : 03] And as we come to Peter's words here, because of how Peter is kind of formed in the last couple of chapters, we're wondering, oh, is Peter about to get a rebuke here? But he doesn't. And Jesus goes on then to give some teaching for what the disciples or the apostles are to expect in glory. But then in verse 29, he goes on to speak about the reality of what it is for all who have followed him.

And he says in verse 29, to all who have left homes and family and brothers and sisters and all these things for him will receive a hundredfold and inherit eternal life. Dear friends, so many of us here, so many of us here have counted the cost to follow Jesus. In putting Christ first, it's strained relationships with families, with parents, with siblings. It's lost us friends. We've missed out on promotion, missed out on opportunities to earn more money, perhaps. Some of us have and are counting a very real cost. Oh, we could have moved there or lived there, but instead we've stayed here in Aberdeen to pour into this church family, to tell people about Jesus. Dear friends, if that's you, and if we follow all of us to some extent, take heart, what does Jesus say right at the end? All who have left will inherit eternal life, will inherit eternal life. You will receive a hundredfold back what you've left.

We've learned, haven't we, in Matthew recently, that the way of Christ's kingdom is the cross before the crown. But here the Lord Jesus reminds us again, but yes, there really is a crown after the cross.

And so dear friends, for those who have trusted the Lord Jesus, put their hope and faith and very life and hope of eternity in him, keep going, keep running, keep trusting Jesus, and you will inherit eternal life. You will go to heaven. For the first will be last, but the last will be first in the kingdom of God.

Amen. Let's pray.