

How good is good enough?

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[0 : 00] Let's go to the Lord before we hear from his word. Father God, be with your servant, as I'm physically not 100%.

I remember waking up this morning thinking, I can't preach like this. And then dawn on me, what do you mean you can't preach like this? That's how you're going to preach.

And I'm aware, Lord, that there are many of us here who are also physically unwell. We're emotionally drained, just stressed from the burdens of our week, the responsibilities that seem to pile on us endlessly.

I pray that as we come before you, Lord, we will be a heart that is rid of these distractions, a heart that is willing to be receptive towards the instruction of your word, and a heart that's willing to come to you to be molded and shaped in your image.

In Jesus' name, amen. How good is good enough? See, it's the questions that we Asians love to ask.

[1 : 08] From the time we're young, we're taught to aim for excellence. And it's no surprise we start asking ourselves, how hard do I have to study to get an A?

How much do I need to obey my parents to keep them happy? How much do I need to work before I can take a break?

How good of a partner do I need to be to my spouse? See, these questions are not wrong per se, but they introduce a problem when we bring them into our relationship with God too.

Lord, how good is good enough? What's the bare minimum I need to do to win or to keep your favor?

Please turn, if you haven't already, to Luke chapter 18, verse 15 to 30, as Jesus seeks to answer this question.

[2 : 18] In today's passage, Jesus challenges our natural tendency to measure everything by goodness.

And he reveals two keys to assessing the kingdom. You can look in your sermon outline, in your bulletin, that the two keys to the kingdom is childlike faith and radical generosity.

Childlike faith and radical generosity. But unlike other religions, Jesus isn't giving us a checklist. He isn't saying, do these two things, then you can achieve goodness, and you can earn eternal life. Instead, he seems to be setting the bar so high that he wants us to recognize we can't reach it, at least not on our own.

So let's see how Jesus both exposes our limitations, but also points us to the only way we can enter the kingdom. The first key to the kingdom is childlike faith.

[3 : 31] Now previously, Jesus taught that true humility before God surpasses any confidence in personal merit. The Pharisee's self-righteous prayer, looking down on others, and relying on his own achievements, reveals a self-deceived heart.

And in contrast, the humble text collector, aware of his need for God's mercy, embodies the humility that God desires. God rejects the self-righteous Pharisee, but welcomes the self-aware text collector.

So now Luke continues to explore attitudes of the heart that pleases God. And Christians are called to approach God with both a humble plea for mercy and a trusting heart of a child.

So we read in verse, chapter 18, verse 15. People were also bringing babies to Jesus for him to place his hands on them. When the disciples saw this, they rebuked him.

But Jesus called the children to him and said, Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them. For the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.

[4 : 50] So Luke opens here with a scene of people bringing young children. These are children who are likely old enough to understand Jesus. So not infants, but young children.

And here are people bringing children to him. Now just like the Jewish tradition where elders would touch younger ones to bless their children, here people are bringing, they desire Jesus to touch and bless their children too.

But somehow the disciples view this act as inappropriate. And they attempt to rebuke those doing so. They might have simply told the parents to stay back, or even forcefully held them back from Jesus.

Regardless, the disciples seem to believe that Jesus has business that is much more important than attending to children. That children are considered trivial matters.

And the disciples saw themselves as authority figures who get to decide how Jesus should spend his time, whom he should see, which is a particularly ironic act, given the previous section's focus on humility.

[6 : 06] And through their surprise, Jesus tells disciples, let, or in the original language, permit the children to come to me. He further commands them to not hinder the children's approach.

And what Jesus is trying to say is that no one is barred from assessing him. Every individual, including little children and infants, holds significance in his eyes.

Jesus then transforms this event into a lesson about discipleship. He declares that the kingdom of God belongs to people like these children.

Children are worthy candidates for the kingdom. Now this is a shock to a culture like theirs. And of course, to a culture like ours too, that emphasize hierarchical structures.

How is it that Jesus accepts those with the least power? And there's certainly a mindset that we're so not used to because when we're out there living in this world, we dawn on our identities each morning as teachers, lawyers, engineers.

[7 : 19] We're out there to prove, to earn status, to prove that we have a place in this world. But Jesus seems to be saying that all you need to access the kingdom is a childlike faith.

Because surely it is not because of their maturity that the children are welcome. After all, they likely come to Jesus only because their parents brought them and their understanding because of where they are in a human developmental cycle is inherently limited.

Yet Jesus' acceptance of children highlights a crucial factor and that is trust and responsiveness to God's message. And so a childlike faith does not depend on us fully comprehending his teachings. Definitely does not depend on theological trainings or degrees. It doesn't mean that we even fully know what it means to submit, to follow him.

That our posture of surrender and submission might be half-hearted. But ultimately, a childlike faith is trusting and believing in Jesus as the ultimate source of reliance.

[8 : 32] Just as a little child depends on their parents, so do God's children depend on their father. Perhaps that is why Jesus warns in verse 17, Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.

To receive the kingdom of God like a child means depending on him for one's well-being. We can go to passages like Psalm 131 verse 2 where it illustrates our souls as a weaned child resting in its mother's arms.

And so is that the posture of your faith? Are you in every season understanding that regardless of the circumstances, the issues that life seems to throw at you, you can rest in your father's arms as the one who takes care of you, the one who your soul and only dependence.

Without such dependent faith, Jesus says, one cannot enter the kingdom of God or qualify for its abundant blessings. And so in these brief verses, we see Jesus' first, we see Jesus' profound concern for each individual.

Regardless of size or status, and there's many of us today who feel that we don't belong. We feel that we might check the box, come to church, but we don't really know if we have the faith.

[10 : 04] We feel like we've got to do something to secure, to know that we are a child of God. But here Jesus seems to call us to abandon self-reliance, to abandon self-righteousness, because Jesus willingly receives and blesses children, even those of us who feel like we're spiritually homeless and imposters.

Even amidst a demanding ministry, Jesus demonstrates his care for the poor and the marginalized. His ministry extends not only to the powerful, but repeatedly throughout the Gospels, we see him

touching those in need.

And of course, the second thing is that Jesus sets the attitude for those who belong to the kingdom. They are accepted by their Father based on their attitude, not because of their spiritual resume, not because of anything they can master of their own.

And disciples should embody the dependent nature of young children in the relationship with God. We should demonstrate a kind of uncomplicated trust, like a child that runs to his dad and mom right after school.

And it is essential for assessing the blessings of the kingdom of God. So here we have the first key to the kingdom, childlike faith.

[11 : 37] But what's the second key to the kingdom? It is one that's actually very intricately related to this first key, and that is, number two, radical generosity.

And we're going to first look at the threat to radical generosity. The second key to the kingdom is radical generosity. And I don't just mean generosity, but a radical one.

See, in verse 18, Luke describes a conversation between Jesus and a rich ruler. Matthew, in describing the same encounter, notes that this man is not a synagogue ruler, but a young, rich ruler. He's probably someone of social standing, wealthy, and likely possessing some level of civic authority. Yet perhaps because he has already achieved so much, he's left wondering what's next. And so driven by a desire to secure eternal life, he's eager to know if there's anything he can do to guarantee it. So he approaches Jesus, and he addresses him as good teacher, recognizing in Jesus something he lacks.

[12 : 58] Maybe he genuinely sees Jesus as someone truly good, someone who might show him the way to gain what he still doesn't own.

what he still yearns for. Now the ruler then poses a question nearly identical to the one asked by the lawyer, which I'm sure you've looked at a couple weeks ago.

A question that seems innocent, perhaps even pious, reflecting a sincere desire to understand how to be right with God.

what must I do to inherit eternal life? What must I do to inherit eternal life?

The fact of the matter is, if you are here this morning, you've probably asked this question before, or you might still be asking it right now. Essentially, the rich ruler wants to know, how can I be sure I'll be saved on the last day?

[14 : 01] Of course, we extend this to people we know too. How can I be sure my aging parents, how can I be sure my children will be saved on the last day? These are all similar questions of the same nature.

And given that Jesus has just spoken about entering the kingdom, and will soon address spiritual blessings, the ruler desperately wants to know how he can earn salvation.

Notice what Jesus says to him. Why do you call me good? Jesus answered. No one is good except God alone.

He directs the rulerless focus to God. If he truly believes Jesus is good, then he shouldn't treat Jesus as some guru that is offering something invaluable that no other guru does.

Because if he thinks Jesus is good, then he must follow God. To follow the good teacher is to follow the good God and to obey the teachings.

[15 : 08] Jesus then directs the ruler to the law. He focuses on the commands related to people to show that faithfulness is measured by how one treats others.

He says here, you know the commandments. You should not commit adultery. You should not murder. You should not steal. You should not give false testimony.

Honor your father and mother. And in response, the ruler confidently, more confident than any of us here, asserts his adherence to the law.

Accordingly, he has followed it since he was a boy. And now, I don't think this means when he was four years old. It was probably the age of confirmation, of Jewish age, around 12 or 13.

The ruler seems to be suggesting, oh, that's it? if all that is required, I'm in a pretty good place. But Jesus, of course, identifies something that is still lacking.

[16 : 19] He instructs the ruler to sell his possessions and give to the poor. After all, to follow God is to care for the poor generously. Repeatedly, we see even in the Old Testament, laws for the widow, for the poor, for the marginalized.

And so, Jesus says, those who do so will have the treasure in heaven, the blessing of eternal life, a gift of value, both of now and in the life to come.

In other words, the ruler has to place absolute trust in God, very much like the childlike faith we looked at earlier, relying on him through Jesus' teaching rather than on wealth.

And so, the broader stories of the tax collector, the children, and the blind beggar all in Luke all underscores this same humility and dependence.

Following Jesus means committing wholeheartedly to God wherever his path leads without being distracted by worldly achievements. But strangely, the ruler stays silent.

[17 : 32] He is not ready to accept God's terms. Despite seeing Jesus as a good teacher, he is unwilling to shift his ultimate loyalty.

He does not want to leave behind a whole family and wealth for the sake of the kingdom. And so, friends, here is the number one threat to radical generosity.

Money. Money amplifies whatever issues we struggle with. How so? Well, for one, money keeps us incredibly busy.

See, I teach English on the side and sometimes my students misspell busyness and business. But it's a mix-up that actually has some truth to it. Making money demands so much time and energy. It's all consuming. And once you do make money, you become busy spending it. Young people often say, oh, I need to save enough money to buy a home.

[18 : 41] Oh, good luck. Once you get a home, that thing needs repairing, that thing needs upgrading. You'll never have enough. Making money, spending money, managing money, keeping money, all create a whirlwind of busyness.

But another thing about money is that money leads us to become increasingly self-absorbed. all we see is our own needs and how they can be addressed through financial means.

Because there is a very real sense, whatever problem that is in front of you now, if I had just a little bit more money, it would be easier. If I had just a bit more of a backup plan, things would be taken care of.

And so when we get so absorbed in our needs, we become dull to the needs of those around us. In his book, *The Face, A Memoir*, Malaysian author Tash Aul reveals how his family, coming from a background of poverty, moving to Malaysia, often feel pressured to distance themselves from the past.

While they wanted to embrace their heritage, they also sought to avoid the stigma associated with their earlier struggles as immigrants.

[20 : 07] See, we Malaysians experience this tension, don't we? We don't like looking at money and those who are inferior because it reminds us of where we came from.

We don't like to associate with those who have lesser than us because those memories are too close, hits too close to home. See, money often presents itself as the solution to our problems. And the last thing we want to be reminded of, our roots is by associating with the poor. But Paul, does this mean that the wealthy who give generously to the poor get to enter the kingdom right away like Jeff Bezos or Elon Musk, you know, all of them have these huge foundations who support homeless families.

Do these people enter the kingdom because they're doing what Jesus says, contributing to the common good? Not quite.

Because we have to go a little bit deeper than this. see, the issue with money is not just busyness and self-absorption. The real danger, listen carefully, the real danger of wealth is the self-righteousness that gradually takes root within us.

[21 : 38] Let me say that again. The real danger of wealth is the self-righteousness that takes root within us. let's look at the danger of wealth and continue Jesus' conversation with the ruler in verse 23 to 25.

When he heard this, he became very sad because he was very wealthy. 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 God. See, when we first read this, it makes us uncomfortable.

We understand what Jesus means, but we rather he not mean what we know it actually means. Because Jesus is suggesting it's impossible for the rich to enter the kingdom of heaven.

But at the same time, if we're honest, many of us don't really find this text an issue. Let's do an experiment. How many of you think you are rich? Raise your hand.

[22 : 52] You see, no one did. Now maybe you're trying to be very modest, you're too Asian to say that you are rich, but perhaps the real reason is that you genuinely don't think you are rich.

Money warps our perception. Since we're always comparing ourselves to those with a higher social standing, all of us think we're middle class.

It doesn't matter if your household makes 10k a month, middle class. 25k a month, middle class.

50k a month, I guess middle class too. 200k a month, middle class.

All of us are middle class. See, the issue we need to recognize is if we come to this text thinking, ah, my rich cousin needs to hear this.

My neighbor needs to read this. Not me. I'm not rich. I don't need the instructions of this text. Then we have a problem.

[23 : 57] Then you start to tap in the self-righteousness that money breeds in your heart. Maybe the most we'll say is I'm comfortable.

Ah, Asians love that word. I have enough left after I pay my bills. I'm okay. I'm well off. But if I had to guess, I don't think Jesus is talking about a specific income level.

In verse 22, the rich, sometimes translated as those who have wealth, refers more to an attitude towards money. It's not how much you have.

It's how you look at money. The rich, those who trust in and prioritize their material resources, according to Jesus, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of the needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom.

Now, the camel was, of course, the largest animal in Palestine. and it contrasts with the eye of a needle, one of the tiniest objects in a daily life. Now, some people suggest that the eye of the needle refers to a narrow city gate or that the camel could just be a word for rope, but I believe these alternatives only lessen the intensity of Jesus' metaphor.

[25 : 20] Jesus meant to shock his listeners because in that culture, people had assumed that those who had money were blessed. Those who had money received divine favor.

Sometimes Christians were thinking about this too, oh, so-and-so is blessed because he serves in church. He tithes 15%, 20%. People had assumed that the wealthy were first in line for God's blessing, but instead, Jesus turns their expectations upside down.

See, friends, the truth is that the self-reliance wealth introduces is not just a problem of Jesus' day. Throughout history, money has bred self-righteousness.

We think, of course, we deserve it. We earn it. We earn it through honest means. We were efficient in our management of time, calculative in our investments, intentional in our forging of relationships with those who benefit us.

Of course, we deserve wealth. But Jesus challenges this assumption. He shows us how past success can make us believe salvation is just one more achievement within our grasp.

[26 : 50] because guess what? You can do a lot of things with money. Wealth opens doors to opportunities we wouldn't otherwise have. Jesus addresses the danger of money not because it is inherently evil or worse than sins like adultery or murder, but because nothing else reinforces the self-righteousness like money does.

let me say that again. Jesus addresses the danger of money not because money is worse than adultery or murder, but because nothing else reinforces self-reliance like money does.

A man knows when he has yelled at his wife. a woman knows when she has lusted over the security of someone who is not her husband.

But neither will necessarily know when money has taken hold of their heart. Greed blinds itself to its own victim because we can always justify our spending.

We can always rationalize our need for more. No one ever goes to a pastor saying my greatest sin is greed.

[28 : 22] You say I've been unfaithful to my wife for anger issues. I yell at my children. But you'll never say pastor my sin is greed.

greed blinds itself to its victim. When you start to see how money builds self-reliance, you begin to understand why Jesus says it's so hard for the rich to enter the kingdom of God.

them. It's because money makes it incredibly hard for us to repent. Money makes it incredibly hard for us to repent.

If you make money, it shows you're smart about earning it. But that's not what your heart will say. Your heart will simply say, I'm smart. Your heart also won't tell you, I've done better than others financially.

It will just say, I'm better. See, when we associate money with value and worth, we allow money to inflate our sense of importance.

[29 : 39] Just think of the breadwinner in a family who believes they have a louder voice in decisions because they contribute visibly to the family's daily needs. The spouse who makes more.

How often have spousal arguments come to this? Money, who contributes more to the family financially, emotionally? Money whispers to us, you're doing well.

Sure, a few things could be better, some loose ends could be tied up, but you're fine. You're fine as you are. You don't need help.

You certainly don't need a savior. fear. So how then can we escape money's grip? Let's look at the key to generosity in verse 26 to 30.

Those who heard this asked, who then can be safe? Jesus replied, what is impossible with man is possible with God. Peter said to him, we have left all we had to follow you.

[30 : 52] 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.

See, often when people read this passage, they assume Jesus is saying, to follow him, you must sell everything you own. that if you were to access the kingdom, you need to just give away your possessions.

But if that were always the case, then why, just a chapter later in Luke 19, does Jesus meet Zacchaeus, a wealthy tax collector, but he never asked him to give up a thing?

Zacchaeus freely decides to give half of his goods to the poor without any prompting from Christ. Or take John chapter 3 where Jesus meets Nicodemus another wealthy man.

He doesn't mention money to Nicodemus at all. And so it's clear then, not every person who follows Christ is called to sell everything in their own, nor is that what Jesus is implying here.

[32 : 04] Thankfully, some of the disciples present at Jesus' exchange with the ruler ask the question that is on our minds right now. Who then can be saved?

If those who are so blessed are excluded from the kingdom, who can get in? Are you saying that all of us are in trouble, Rabbi?

But notice what Jesus says in response. What is impossible with men is possible with God. Jesus answers both yes and no to the disciples' question.

salvation. Yes, all of you are in trouble. It's impossible for anyone, rich or poor, to save themselves. But no, nothing is impossible with God.

Salvation is fully dependent on God's ability to change the human heart and reorient it towards Him. Now here Peter, perhaps seeking reassurance, states that the disciples have sacrificed everything to follow Jesus.

[33 : 13] Their homes, their family, their security. And Jesus acknowledges it. He tells Peter that all who follow Jesus' call to prioritize God above all else will receive many times as much in return.

That God sees their sacrifice, He will honor them both with a new community in this present age as well as eternal life in the age to come. But the key to radical generosity lies in abandoning our reliance on wealth.

Friends, you must see that you are so lost in your pride, so lost in your self-righteousness, so far down your denial of Christ that no amount of money can compensate for you.

In fact, money will only lead you further away from God. To be radically generous, we must first approach God with empty arms ready to receive Him.

Because as we conclude, if we look at today's text, the truth is childlike faith and radical generosity are two sides of the same coin. Childlike faith calls us to abandon our skepticism, trust in God completely, while radical generosity encourages us to let go of our self-righteousness and rely solely on Christ.

[34 : 46] But how can we do so? Why don't we do so? If you are a follower of Jesus, know that you possess these attributes already to some degree.

There was a definitive moment in your life, though you might not recall the exact date or moment when you realize that only Christ can save you and fulfill you.

Yes, the waves of life crash against you, the demands of your circumstances enforce themselves upon you. You might have lost sight of this profound truth.

To have childlike faith and radical generosity is to look beyond the surface and observe the child and the ruler in this narrative.

Not the children whose parents brought them to Jesus, and certainly not the rich ruler who walked away unsafe. When I say to have childlike faith and radical generosity, we must look at the child and ruler in this narrative.

[35 : 52] I mean, there is a child. There was a child of God who never questioned his father's will, but obeyed him to the point to death of the cross.

There is also a ruler, a rich ruler in this narrative. A ruler who possessed all the possessions and glory in this world, yet chose to relinquish it, to be born in a manger.

And that's Jesus. The kind of childlike faith, that kind of radical generosity that Jesus calls for in this passage, it's not something we can do.

That by our hearts, we'll be so warped, our perceptions will be so warped, so distracted, but Jesus came and done it.

He did it for our own behalf. Now, why did Jesus do this? Was it for his own glory? Was it so his name could be listed in the history books?

[37 : 00] He obeyed his father and he surrendered his wealth because he saw a far greater reward. You.

Brothers and sisters, if you desire to cultivate childlike faith and radical generosity, you must continually be moved by what Jesus accomplished to win you to himself.

Do you think about what Jesus did until it makes you weep? That there's security that he would love me like that? That there's significance that he loves me just like that?

when the gospel begins to sink in, when you see that Jesus did what you couldn't do in your place on the cross, your pride will turn into surrender.

You won't say I only follow Jesus if he does X, Y, and Z for me. Your money will then become money, not your identity. charity. And you'll be able to give it away.

[38 : 12] In fact, you won't just follow the Old Testament guideline of tithing 10% and then pat yourself off the back, wait till next month. You'll also embody the New Testament standard of sacrificial giving where your contributions to the church and to the world genuinely, listen carefully, genuinely cuts into your lifestyle.

That you should feel that you are giving something up. And what that amount is, I'm not going to tell you. But it should cut into where you eat, where you go on vacation, what you buy.

And you'll develop a view towards life that's rooted in the selfless giving of Christ and in his transformative grace. So I pray for all of us.

This morning, we each have these little obstacles in our heart. hearts that stop us from approaching Christ, from approaching the cross. These little voices of self-reliance, of pride.

And I challenge you to abandon it. To receive Christ as your true reliance, your security, your righteousness. Then, you can have money be money.

[39 : 31] And have Christ be your identity. Let's pray. Amen. Father God, we do remember, like Adam and Eve, we saw that the fruit of the tree was good, took it, and ate it.

Lord, so often we see the good things in this world that you created for us to enjoy, the money that you give us to steward, but so often we attribute greater significance to it than we should.

So often we look to money as the solution to our problems. So often we fail to see to be good enough is to rely on you, to abandon any self-righteousness that our intellect or our wealth brings, and to lean on you as our identity and let the gospel move us to radical, selfless, generous giving.

So pray for each one of us, Lord, from this message, that we'll look, take a, just take a look at the way we're managing our resources, at the way we can look to be giving more, and not because you need us, not because the church needs this fund to run well, not because the kingdom of God needs my contribution to advance the gospel in Kuching, to give because we have been given the greatest reward of salvation first.

Pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.