

Message Summary

How do we enter the kingdom of God? Earthly kingdoms, such as the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia or the Magic Kingdom, illustrate. A ruler reigns over a given territory. To enter this territory can be costly, but if you have a special connection to the king, that king can certainly enable your entrance to his own territory. The kingdom of God refers to the domain over which God reigns as King. Only the King can provide entrance, and only the King has the means to pay the entrance fee.

Every world religion teaches that one must be good enough to enter the kingdom of God. Jesus addresses His next parable (Lk. 18:9-14) to just such a crowd, “some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous” (v. 9). The story features two men in the Temple, a Pharisee and a tax collector. The Pharisee was a religious man in all respects. He fasted, prayed, and gave from all his income. But he trusted in his own righteousness, and taught others to do the same. His focus in prayer was not on God, but on self and others. The second man, however, was a tax collector, publically renown for the disgraceful sins of embezzlement and fraud. Amidst his desperation, shame, and guilt, he had nothing to offer in prayer except to beg for God’s mercy. While limited people can afford entrance to the Magic Kingdom, and even fewer to the kingdom of Saudi Arabia, none can afford entrance to the kingdom of God. The chasm of our sin is far too wide, and it is wrong and dangerous to assume we can fill it. Only the tax collector left the Temple justified, declared righteous before God by having his sins credited to Christ and Christ’s righteousness credited to him. Those who have received such mercy are called also to extend that gospel of mercy to others (Mt. 18:21-35).

Jesus advances children and infants as examples of such trusting faith (vv. 15-17). The disciples rebuked the crowds for bringing children to Jesus. In their minds, surely Jesus lacked time to devote to little kids with so much “real ministry” before Him. Jesus was diametrically opposed. Not only does He welcome children; He insists that the kingdom of God belongs to those with childlike faith. Children have nothing to bring. They are fully dependent and trusting towards their heavenly Father. Jesus insists that entrance into His kingdom is not a matter of payment or qualification. It is reserved for those who know they have none, and trust their heavenly Father to provide all.

WHY IT MATTERS

Digging Deeper

Why is it easy to trust in ourselves that we are righteous, and treat others with contempt (v. 9)?

What is “justification”? What is the difference between our positional holiness in Christ and the progressive holiness that Christ empowers? Consider especially Rm. 3:19-31; 6:1-23.

What is the connection between Christ’s parable of the Pharisee and Tax Collector (Lk. 18:9-14) and Christ’s welcome to the children (vv. 15-17)? Why does Luke write these together?

NOW WHAT DO WE DO?

Group Discussion & Application

Use the following questions to examine what the sermon and its text mean, to apply the Word to your life, and to guide how you pray. Please note that you don’t have to use all of the questions. These are just options (along with the digging deeper section) to help you frame the family/small group discussion.

1. Do you trust in yourself that you are righteous?
2. Do you treat others with contempt, and look down on them, in view of your own alleged righteousness?

3. Do you pursue good works in order to be noticed by others, feel self-righteous, or qualify yourself for the kingdom of God?
4. Do your prayers reflect dependence on God and a desire for his glory, or a love for self and desire for self-advancement?
5. Do you have childlike faith that fully trusts God and cries for his mercy daily?
6. Do you welcome children the way that Christ welcomes children? What can you do this week to extend Christ's welcome to children around you and our community?

Prayer

- Pray for Our Church:
 - Thank God for exchanging Christ's righteousness and our sin, and for bearing the full penalty of our sin that we can be justified.
 - Pray for the preschool ministry and nursery, that from a young age children would hear the gospel and learn of the Savior who calls them specifically.
- Pray for Our Community:
 - Pray for "Our Heavenly Father," the upcoming class on orphan care. Pray that this group can help clarify the Biblical call and provide practical steps to care for orphans. Pray that our church would be zealous for the good work (Tit. 2:14) of orphan care.
 - Pray that the Lord would bless our children's ministry and outreach to Carver Village. Pray that these ministries would be expressions of Christ's welcome to children in the gospel, and pictures of the childlike faith He commands of us.
- Pray for Our World:
 - Pray for the kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Pray that they would submit and bow before their heavenly King and devote all their allegiance to Him.
 - Pray that the heavenly King might send many workers to this vast harvest field. Pray that the King would use His servants there to bring a great harvest of souls.