

## **“LIKE A LITTLE CHILD”**

Mark 10:13-31

Key Verse: 10:15

*“I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.”*

In today's passage, a young man comes to Jesus to ask about how to inherit eternal life. It was unusual that this young man was serious about eternal life instead of videogame, car or girlfriend. Eternal life means much more than a long life. Without the assurance of eternal life, this man could not be truly happy. How about you? Do you have the assurance of eternal life? This morning, let us learn how we can have the assurance of eternal life.

### **I. THE KINGDOM OF GOD BELONGS TO SUCH AS THESE (13-16)**

Look at verse 13. *People brought little children to Jesus for his blessing, but the disciples rebuked them.* Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem to suffer and die as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Many things must have been on his mind. But he spent his time to take care of his sheep as he made the trip toward the city. He taught the word of God to the people who came to him (10:1). He had a Bible study session with the Pharisees teaching them the spiritual meaning of marriage and divorce. His daily schedule was busy as ever. As he was teaching his disciples in a house, some people brought little children to Jesus for his blessing. As a parent, I can understand why these people brought their children to Jesus. Parents want God's blessings for their children. But the disciples rebuked the parents. Perhaps they thought that the parents were interfering with Jesus' important work. We also know that in Jesus' time, women and children were marginalized (6:44). How did Jesus respond?

Look at verses 14-15. *When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.”* Jesus had been disappointed by the Pharisees who came to him to ask a question about divorce, not because they wanted to learn the truth but to test him (10:2). He was now indignant because his disciples did not welcome the little children. Jesus wanted his disciples to be different from the Pharisees. He really wanted his disciples to have a learning mind like a little child. Jesus wants us to be like a little child. What does it mean to be like a little child? What are some of the noble characteristics of a little child that Jesus wants us to have? A child simply trusts his parents. He feels safe in the arms of his father even in a stormy night. A child is obedient to her parents. She simply follows her parents' word even when she does not fully understand the reason. A child has a great learning mind. He often asks questions to learn. A child is also pure and innocent. She is not pretentious or self-righteous like the Pharisees.

In our sinful generation, many people despise these child-like characteristics. They refused to simply trust God and obey his word. They have no learning minds. Even

some children in our society have lost their innocence and act like childish adults. But Jesus teaches us that we must be like innocent little children. We must trust and obey God like little children in order to enter the kingdom of God.

## II. WHAT MUST I DO TO INHERIT ETERNAL LIFE? (17-22)

Look at verses 17. *As Jesus started on his way, a man ran up to him and fell on his knees before him. "Good teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"* Who was this man? According to Matthew (19:20), he was a young man. Luke (18:18) tells us that he was a ruler and very rich. Let us call him the rich young man. He was young, but already had everything. He had great wealth and a high social status. To achieve all these in his early age, this man must have worked hard. He probably stayed up many nights to stay ahead of others in a competitive world. He even tried to be morally perfect (20). Finally, he achieved honor and attained great wealth. Many people envied his life. So he should have been very happy. But he was not. Something bothered him. He did not have peace in his mind. He was restless all the time, partly because he had to maintain his success and wealth, but mainly because he did not have God in his life. He was troubled because he wasn't sure if he would go to heaven when he died.

This rich young man came to Jesus and asked, "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" This young man had a life problem. And all his money could not provide a solution to his life problem. What did Jesus say to him?

Look at verse 18. *"Why do you call me good?" Jesus answered. "No one is good--except God alone.* Jesus told him that his concept of goodness was based on his moralistic ideas. The man thought he was pretty good, but he had to do some more "good" things to inherit eternal life. But Jesus told him that only God is good. Only God could save him. Salvation comes from God. Only God is the solution to his life problem. Jesus helped him to rely on God, who alone can give eternal life. The man was seeking eternal life in the wrong place. Jesus told him to seek God. He also taught the young man to find out who Jesus is. He called Jesus "Good teacher." He did not personally know Jesus. He did not know that Jesus is God Incarnate. He did not know that Jesus gives eternal life!

Look at verse 19. *You know the commandments: "Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, do not defraud, honor your father and mother."* Why did Jesus quote from the fifth through the ninth commandment (Ex 20:12-16)? These commandments are concerned with our relationship with our neighbors. It suggests that the rich young man lived a very selfish and self-centered life. How did the young man answer? *"Teacher," he declared, "all these I have kept since I was a boy."* Wow! How could he say this? He was sure that he had kept all the commandments since he was a boy. And yet, he did not know God, and he did not have the assurance of eternal life. Outwardly, he looked very religious. But he was deeply troubled that he had no assurance of eternal life, because he did not personally know God. This is the problem St. Paul had. Paul was a devout Pharisee. He kept all nine commandments, but he got stuck with the 10<sup>th</sup> that says, "Do not covet." He was troubled that the more he tried not to covet, the more he did. No one knew about it, but he knew that God knew it. So he cried out, "What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue

me from this body of death?” (Ro 7:24) Martin Luther had the same problem. He climbed the stone steps on his bloody knees in his devotion, but he had no assurance of eternal life. This rich young man did not understand the heart of God. He did not know the reason why God gave the commandments. As a result, he kept them superficially, for his own benefits. He studied the law of God to climb up the ladder of success. But he did not meet God personally. He did not love his neighbors from his heart.

How did Jesus help this young man? Verse 21 says that *Jesus looked at him and loved him*. Jesus loved the young man. Jesus recognized his earnestness and sincerity. His heart went out to this successful, but deeply troubled young man. Look at verse 21b. *“One thing you lack,” he said. “Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”* We can learn several things from this verse.

**First, “Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor.”** Does this mean we have to be penniless to receive eternal life? No. But we should not let money stand between God and us. Jesus told the rich young man to change his value system which was based on materialism. Jesus told him to depend on God, not on his great wealth. Jesus knew his problem very deeply. This young man lived a selfish life. He was not a blessing to others. In order to become a successful, wealthy ruler, he lived very selfishly. He did everything in order to satisfy his selfish ambition.

Many people in this world consider selfishness as normal human behavior. People even say that a little bit of selfishness is healthy. But we learn from the Bible that selfishness is a sin before God. God did not create us to live a selfish life. He created us in his own image to serve him and our neighbors, and to be a source of blessing to many people. When this young man insisted on his selfish way of life, he was able to succeed in the world, but he was not happy. Selfishness caused his soul to agonize, because he did not have peace with God. Most of all, he did not have the assurance of eternal life.

**Second, “and you will have treasure in heaven.”** Another problem of this man was a life security problem. He tried to solve his life security problem by accumulating great wealth. He had many savings accounts, stocks, bonds, and mutual funds. He also brought many insurance policies. He had an excellent security system for his mansion and his shiny chariots, complete with electronic surveillance. But he still did not feel secure. When the interest rate went up and stock prices plunged, his heart began to pound. When the interest rate went down and the value of his 401k accounts declined, he began to worry about his future security. He was like the rich fool in Jesus’ parable (Lk 12:13-24). Because he had no God, he had no true security, for God is our refuge and fortress (Ps 91:2). The man only had perishable things of this world as his security. So he felt very insecure when he realized that those things could melt away any time. His earthly treasure did not give him a sense of security. He really needed to find true security in God. The Christian life can be compared to a treasure hunt (Mt 13:44-46). Christian are those who sell all their earthly possessions to buy treasures in heaven.

**Third, “Then come, follow me.”** To Jesus, this man’s problem was that he was following his selfish desires of the world. Jesus wanted him to follow the Savior instead. So he invited him to become one of his disciples and to live a life of faith. Jesus gave him

a new life direction--to follow the Lord. It was a voice of God calling him to the truth and eternal life. This was it. This was the only way he could have the assurance of eternal life. It was a God-given opportunity for him to make a decisive decision to commit his life to Jesus, like Levi the tax collector had done.

What did the rich young man do? Verse 22 says that the man's face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth. The man had no courage to make a decision of faith. His response showed that he cared more about his wealth than eternal life. He calculated in his mind how much money he had to give up in order to follow Jesus. He decided against accepting Jesus' invitation. He said, "Thanks, but no thanks." He did not receive the kingdom of God like a little child.

Some people believe that they must be selfish in order to survive in this materialistic world. But selfishness is a cause, not a solution, to life problems. We learn here that we must have a biblically-based principle of how to use money and how to control our selfish desires. Money is useful. But it is not worth giving up the opportunity to follow Jesus and to have eternal life. There were many wealthy people aboard the ocean liner called "Titanic." One man had much money, jewelry and financial securities in his big safe. But the only thing he grabbed was three oranges as the ship began to sink. When life is on the line, what good is money, jewelry or securities? How foolish is it to abandon God because of money? But many people in the material-oriented world do make such terrible mistake as the one the rich young man made. 1 Timothy 6:10 says, *"For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs."*

As someone who grew up in poverty and who teaches economics for living, I know very well how money is useful and how many people desire to have more money. So I thank God for helping me to repent my sin of selfishness and learn to live a life of blessing to others with the help of God's word. Still it is not easy to overcome my selfish nature. One of my prayers is based on Proverbs 30:8b-9 which says, *Give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread. Otherwise, I may have too much and disown you and say, 'Who is the Lord?' Or I may become poor and steal, and so dishonor the name of my God.* May God help us to learn to live a self-content life in God who provides everything we need for us! May God help us to love God more than money!

### III. THE CHRISTIAN REWARD (23-31)

Jesus was very sorry that the young man went away. So he said to his disciples. "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!" (23) The disciples were amazed at his words (24a). Why? It was because they themselves wanted to be rich like the young ruler. *But Jesus said again, "Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God"* (24b, 25). At his words, the disciples were even more amazed and said to each other, "Who then can be saved?" It seemed to them that salvation was impossible because they all had the same desire of the rich young man.

What did Jesus say to the disciples? Look at verse 27. *Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God."* It is true that man's love of money and his selfish nature are almost impossible to overcome. When we are poor, we think we will be happy if only we had enough money for food and shelter. But when we already have those things, we want more things in life, such as nicer cars or more advanced electronic gadgets. We always want more. There is no end. Those who have a million dollars want more millions. But God can change a selfish man. He can change us to become men and women of God who care more about God and his salvation work than money. All things are possible with God.

Look at verse 28. *Peter said to him, "We have left everything to follow you!"* Peter used to be a fisherman. He had left his fishing job to follow Jesus. Now he was poorer than he was before. How did Jesus encourage him? Look at verses 29-30. *"I tell you the truth," Jesus replied, "no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age (homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields--and with them, persecutions) and in the age to come, eternal life."* Jesus teaches us that living a life of faith is not a losing business. In the end, we will be the winners.

Then what are the rewards of God for those who sacrifice much in order to follow Jesus?

**First, God himself is our reward.** The true happiness of a man comes to him when he accepts God as his reward. God does not reward us with gold watches or savings bonds. He gives us himself as our reward. After obeying God's calling, Abram felt that God did not bless him, for he had no son to inherit his estate. He felt a sense of loss. But God appeared to him, and said, "Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward" (Ge 15:1). God is the true security and reward for God's children.

**Second, God rewards us with persecutions.** Persecutions as reward? What an outrageous idea! But persecutions help us to learn to trust and obey God. When we struggle to overcome persecutions and hardships by faith, we can grow strong in our Christian character. Sometimes God's ways are too deep to understand.

**Third, God rewards us with eternal life.** This is the point. If we live for Christ sacrificially, this is our ultimate reward: eternal life. Wait! But you cannot eat or drink eternal life, someone may say to us. What is our answer to that? Our life is most precious. We will not exchange our physical lives even for the whole world! (8:36) How much more precious eternal life is to us!

In this passage, we learn that material wealth cannot guarantee our future security in this world. It cannot give us eternal life in the kingdom of God. Only God can give us true security and eternal life. May God help each one of us to have the assurance of eternal life by committing our life to Jesus! May God help us to learn to trust in God and obey him like a little child!