

Upside Down Kingdom

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning, everyone. My name is Alistair. I have the privilege of being the assistant pastor here at Brunfield and the privilege of opening up that passage for us in Matthew. But before we get to that, let's just quickly pray together. Let's pray.

Father, in the words of Psalm 19, we pray that my words would be a blessing to you and that you would help the meditations of our heart be glorifying to you.

In Jesus' name, amen. I wonder this morning how many of you remember reading the Mr. Men or Little Miss books.

I'm seeing a few hands, a few nods. Or maybe you remember reading them as a child or reading them to a child. So these books are in nearly every doctor's surgery or dentist surgery waiting room up and down the UK.

There's one particular character I'd like to draw your attention to this morning. Do any of you remember Mr. Topsy-Turvy? I'm getting nods. Okay, that's good. That's good.

[1 : 05] So Mr. Topsy-Turvy is a bit of a funny character, isn't he? So everything about him is either upside down, inside out, or back to front. He wears his socks on his hands.

He sits down when he's told to stand up. He stands up when he's told to sit down. His left is his right and his right is his left. Even speaks in a topsy-turvy way.

So when he's selling his house, he doesn't say house for sale. He says sale for house. Everything about this man is topsy-turvy. Even his house, his doors, his curtains, his windows, everything is upside down.

Mr. Topsy-Turvy lives in a topsy-turvy world. And children love to read his stories because his whole life is just so bizarre that it's funny.

But I wonder if when you listen to the reading of Matthew 19 this morning, you notice something that was upside down. I wonder if you realize that Jesus was speaking about something which seems a little bit topsy-turvy.

[2 : 12] In this section, we see Jesus having two conversations. And in both cases, he is teaching people about an upside-down kingdom.

In verse 30, Jesus says that many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first. So in this whole conversation, Jesus is teaching about an upside-down kingdom.

And he's telling his people, his disciples, that they are to be Mr. Topsy-Turvies in the world. So as followers of Jesus this morning, we are to be distinct, radically different from those around us, because as Christians, we are living for an upside-down kingdom.

So we get to listen in to this conversation that would change a life forever, and a conversation that will change our outlook on life, both in the here and now, and in the yet to come.

So it's about an upside-down kingdom. Jesus tells the rich man to sell, give, and follow. And he tells his disciples to leave and receive.

[3 : 20] So the first thing that Jesus says about this upside-down kingdom to the rich young man is sell, give, and follow. In verses 16 to 22, sell, give, and follow.

So a rich young man comes to Jesus and asks him in verse 16, Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?

So this man is acknowledging Jesus as a good teacher, and the question that he asks is a question that many people are asking today. What must I do to get eternal life?

But he isn't asking how he can live forever. He isn't on the search for the fountain of youth so that he'll never grow old or die. But the eternal life that he is speaking about is the eternal life that is promised to those who are the people of God.

An eternity, a life that continues after death in the presence of God, as opposed to eternal damnation and separation from God. So this man knows about the truth about the existence of heaven and hell, and the seriousness of it, because he comes and asks Jesus this very important question.

[4 : 35] But do you see the problem with his question? This rich young man thinks that his deeds, or that his religious acts, are enough to get him into heaven.

He thinks that religious performance will make him right in God's eyes. And Jesus responds in verse 17, look with me.

He says, there is only one who is good. Now this does not mean that Jesus isn't good, or that he has no authority to say what is good or not, but Jesus is challenging this young man's superficial assumption that he is good enough, or that he can never work enough to get into heaven.

And Jesus continues and says that only God is good. If you want to enter life, keep the commandments. So Jesus says that God has already revealed and defined to the world what good is when he gave the Ten Commandments, when he gave the Old Testament law.

But Jesus isn't saying that following the Ten Commandments will make a person right with God.

Living by a set of rules won't save you, but having faith and trust in Jesus Christ will.

[5 : 53] So this young man asks which commandments he needs to follow, and Jesus lists some of them in verse 18. You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, honour your father and mother, and love your neighbour as yourself.

And what does the young man say in verse 20? Oh, I've kept all of these, so what else do I lack? Now this reveals two things about this young man.

The first is that he is very, very proud. He thinks that he's perfect, that he's got it all sorted. And the second is that he has a superficial and shallow view of what God is asking of someone in the Ten Commandments.

See, the Old Testament law wasn't given as a way to work your way up to God. And that's how this man was living. That's the way of religion. That leads to doubting and a lack of assurance.

But the law was given so that people could see how far short of God's perfect standard we all fall, which then leads to faith and dependence on him, which then in the Old Testament results in following the law.

[7 : 09] We cannot work our way to God because he is perfect, we are not. He is holy and we are not. A person is saved by faith in Jesus, not by works.

This man is like one of Madame Toussaint's wax figures. So if you go to one of these museums, you'll see figures made out of wax that look exactly like the person.

I've been told they're almost identical, but the truth is that they are fake. They're just figures, nothing more. They have no brain. They have no life. They have no heart.

They are wax. They look the part, but they're fake. And this young man is the same. He looks the part on the outside. He has all the right trimmings.

He can say and do the right things. But on the inside, his heart is in the wrong place. He isn't trusting in God for eternal life, but he is trusting in his own religious performance.

[8 : 09] And then Jesus delivers a truth that will flaw this man. Something that will make his whole idea of self-perfection crumble before his eyes as he lays bare, as he realizes his sinful state before a holy God.

Jesus says, if you want to be perfect, meaning that you want to be made right with God, if you want to live the life that you were created for and be truly obedient to God, then you need to go sell, give and follow.

Now at this point, you can imagine the gasp from Lord Sugar's office. And many other businessmen and people for that matter, people who build their life around money, will realize that this whole conversation will make their world crumble.

Jesus is telling a very rich man to sell, give and follow, which will lead to him having treasure in heaven. What an upside down kingdom this is.

This young man focused so much on his performance and on his prosperity that he had no desire to submit to Jesus. Performance and prosperity will not get you into heaven.

[9 : 36] Keeping religious rules and being a good person will not get you into heaven. What will? Acknowledging your sinfulness and wrongdoing against a good and holy God.

Repenting of them, turning from them, believing in, submitting to and following Jesus Christ. That is the only way to heaven. This young man is focusing on his performance and he's not willing to give up his wealth to follow Jesus.

He was trying to find his satisfaction in religious performance. And so he walks away sad. How devastating is it that this man, that his money, that his material wealth was more important to him than his eternal state before a good and holy and just God.

He saw the cost. He didn't like it. And he walked away. Does this mean that Jesus is telling us to go and sell and give everything that we own?

No. You can breathe. It's fine. Jesus is not telling this young man that his wealth is wrong. But Jesus is warning him that his money and his possessions are his idols.

[10:59] If he doesn't let go of the thing that is stopping him from coming to God, then he will never have eternal life. Jesus calls people to come and follow him.

And once we do that, our desire should be to serve him and to live obediently and out of a devotion to him in every area of our life, including our money.

So whether you're rich or whether you're poor, whether you came to church this morning in a Bentley or on a bike, God is asking for your heart.

That is what this young man in Matthew chapter 19 wasn't giving to God. He wasn't giving his heart. Are you here this morning and you're trying to work your way into God's good books?

Trying to look the part on the outside, but you know deep down that your heart is being pulled away by wealth or other distractions. That is wrong, Jesus says.

[12:05] You will never be good enough. You can never work enough. You can never have enough money for God to be pleased with you. In this upside down kingdom, the only way to be made right with God, to have eternal life, is to surrender to and follow Jesus.

Will you do that this morning? Or maybe you are a Christian, but you're so focused and caught up in money. You can have money as an idol, whether you're rich or whether you're poor.

Where your heart is, there also your treasure will be. What is more important to you? The comfort in this world for the few years that we have here?

Or eternal peace and communion with the God who created and who loves you? Practically speaking, do our bank balances and our possessions reflect the things that we worship?

Now this doesn't mean that we shouldn't have nice things, but if we're working overtime to get that second home, or if we're working overtime to get that second car, or that bigger TV, or that new phone upgrade that's just come out, we need to ask ourselves, what and who is our money serving?

[13:31] What and who are we doing? God's kingdom, or are we worshipping ourselves? Now some of us might need to search our hearts and motives and see where we stand, and it could mean that we need to go sell, give, and follow.

Is Jesus telling you this morning to do that? If he is, let me encourage you that the reward is far greater than the sacrifice. The reward makes the sacrifice non-existent.

And that is the second thing that we see in this passage that Jesus says about this upside-down kingdom to his disciples, he says, leave and receive in verses 23 to 30.

Leave and receive. So in the culture of first century Israel, people often believed that if someone was rich, that that was an obvious sign that God was blessing them, and that they were almost automatically into heaven, that that was their get into heaven card.

And so what Jesus says in verse 23 shocks his disciples, and is counter-cultural. He says in verse 23, truly I tell you, it is hard for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of heaven.

[14:54] And then he gives an illustration to drive the point home, because no camel can fit through the eye of a needle. Jesus is turning their whole worldview upside down, and letting them see that God's eternal perspective is far, far different from our earthly perspective.

The disciples are astonished and ask in verse 25, well, who can be saved? Surely this man's wealth is an indication that God is pleased with him.

If the rich, those who seem to be under God's blessings, aren't saved, then who can be? In verse 26, Jesus brings light to this whole situation and says, with man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.

salvation, eternal life, perfection, all of these words in the passage are pointing to the same thing, and eternity spent in the presence of God, being forgiven of our rebellion, and rejection of him, and

having a right relationship with God.

Jesus says, with man this is impossible. Salvation, both for the rich and for the poor, cannot be achieved by human efforts. We cannot save ourselves.

[16:14] We cannot work our way to God. We can never do enough or give enough to be made right with God. People cannot save themselves. Salvation is only possible with God.

Now, do you see how different this makes Christianity from all other beliefs? Other religions are built on works and deeds and good actions.

Other beliefs tell you that the way that you have to work your way up to some kind of God. But Christianity is an absolutely different message because God came down.

Salvation is an act of God. God opens people's hearts. God draws people to himself. We are solely saved because of him and by his grace.

And the great news is that God is the God who specializes in the impossible. God set the plan into motion to rescue humanity from our sin and rebellion against him from the beginning of time by sending his son, Jesus Christ, to pay the punishment that we deserve on the cross and to be raised to life so that we know it is true.

[17:29] Salvation, being made right with God, is only possible through Jesus. There is no other way. And Peter speaks up in verse 27 and wants to know what this teaching means for him and the disciples.

He says, we have left everything to follow you. What then will there be for us? So the disciples weren't just sitting around one day doing nothing and Jesus comes up to them and says, hey, do you want to come hang out with me for a little while?

No, in Matthew chapter 4, you can look this up later, Jesus was walking by the Sea of Galilee when he saw two fishermen, Peter and his brother Andrew.

And Jesus didn't walk up to them and give them five reasons to follow him. He didn't sit them down and ask them about their strengths and their weaknesses. He didn't. He just simply said, come and follow me and I will make you fishers of men.

These men left absolutely everything to follow Jesus. They left behind family, jobs, the comfort of their own home.

[18:37] They sacrificed so much and Peter wants to know what their reward will be. And Jesus tells them some marvelous truths in verses 28 to 30.

Jesus says, truly I tell you, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on 12 thrones, judging the 12 tribes of Israel.

And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life.

But many who are first will be last and many who are last will be first. So Jesus says, in the new creation, when he returns to judge and rule the world and be with his people forever, that's when the reward will come.

Jesus here is talking about a future time, a time when every eye will see him coming and every knee will bow and he will reign. That's when his followers will be rewarded.

[19:51] But look at verse 29 again. Is this a fair reward for their sacrifice, that they will receive a hundred times? Absolutely not.

The reward far outweighs the sacrifice. Jesus is saying, Peter, you have missed the point. The reward that you will get for following me is not to be found in this world.

It is not in the here and now. But the reward is far beyond your imagination, far beyond what you can ever grasp. And you will have an eternity to enjoy it in my presence.

Mind-blowing. And in the first century, when people left the traditions of their families and the teaching of Jewish religious leaders to follow Jesus, it often meant a radical break from their families.

And that was very difficult for them. And the same still happens today in many cultures, in many religions, and in many countries. But Jesus isn't saying that we need to leave our families and forget about our responsibilities.

[21:01] What Jesus is saying is that his followers, that we should have a radical change of priorities in our lives. The world tells you to look out for yourself, strive to be number one.

But Jesus says in verse 30, many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first. Jesus says that as the world sees it, those who exalt themselves now will be brought low in the life

to come.

And those who humble themselves now and follow Jesus will be exalted in the life to come. You could be on the Forbes richest list in 2019, but if you're not right with God and you do not believe in Jesus, then you will be humbled in the end and you will not have eternal life.

Do you see how upside down this kingdom is? This whole section is an illustration of what Jesus is teaching. This young man was rich during his life, but when the end would come, he would receive no blessings, no reward, because he would not sell, give, and follow Jesus.

But the disciples who were willing to sacrifice and leave everything, they would receive the greatest reward that they could ever imagine in the kingdom of God. So let me ask you a question.

[22 : 34] Let me ask all of us a question. How upside down is your life? This passage is first and foremost about our response to Jesus and whether we're willing to follow him.

It is about salvation, eternal life, and our priorities. Are you following Jesus? Are you following Jesus? not the same or not? But this passage also has big implications on all areas of our life and not least our money.

Our money is a gift given to us by God and as Christians, we should want to use it for him. Are we living the same sacrificial life that the disciples were?

Are we living as if we are last? Now this challenge challenges us how we use our money and it is a big challenge for every single one of us in this room.

It has been a big challenge to me this week. What is the first thing we do with our paycheck? Do we go on that shopping spree that we've been looking forward to for ages or do we use our funds for God and do we plan how we give?

[23 : 51] When we give to the church do we think okay I'm going to pray about this I'm going to plan how to give or do we just give what we have left at the end of the month when everything else is gone? This is all about identifying where your heart is.

And we can tell ourselves that money isn't an idol for us but practically living but are we practically living like we are last and God is first. Our bank balances and our lives don't lie about the state of our heart.

This week alone I've seen three different churches all in need of financial support. Money to keep their building up to scratch.

Money to buy a building. Money to hire someone to do gospel work in a scheme. so that people can hear the good news of Jesus Christ and get this eternal life that we're thinking about.

Investing in eternity investing in this upside down kingdom is far greater than storing up treasures here on earth that will fail and that will be gone. The radical lifestyle that Jesus is calling us to in this passage affects every area of our life.

[25 : 06] we cannot serve both God and money. But we do need money because we do have needs but so often our money serves our own desires and wishes rather than just our needs.

But our money isn't there to serve us but all of our money should be serving God. So how are you using your finances?

How are we using our finances to serve God? Jesus doesn't tell us to move out of our homes to sell our cars and give it all away but I wonder if we need the reminder that our money is ultimately not our own.

That we should invest it in eternity that we should use it for God's glory. But we need to check our hearts because Jesus isn't preaching a prosperity gospel here whereby you give in order to get or you sow a seed in order to reap financial gain.

If we walk away from this passage with that in mind then we've completely missed the point. Jesus says that if we sell, give and follow him our reward will be in heaven. But our financial sacrifice here and now will bless God's people will bless God's church and it will mean that we have Jesus as a priority in our lives and we will be living obediently and sacrificially for him.

[26 : 33] This has worked out very well in my own life when I studied at the Faith Mission Bible Colleges a few years ago. Sabina and I were newly married both studying full time. We had no money coming in and I had no idea how I would pay my tuition fees.

Started out Bible College not knowing if I was going to make it to the end but thankfully God put it on someone's heart to put an anonymous donation into college for me that paid all of my fees.

Through someone else's sacrifice I was able to complete my studies. That person sacrificially gave to God's kingdom and we were blessed as a result.

That changed my life. God this is an upside down kingdom. Jesus flips our whole world upside down and tells us that our priorities need to be eternity in God not earth and ourselves. So if you're living for the here and now building your own kingdom focusing entirely on yourself and giving no thought to God in his kingdom then Jesus is telling you go sell give and follow.

[27 : 44] But if you're a Christian who is sacrificially serving and giving someone who has God and his kingdom at heart someone who has been giving up and continues to give up for God's kingdom then Jesus says you will be rewarded far beyond your imagination when he returns.

As we draw to a close I want us to walk away this morning knowing that it is far better far far better to live for eternity to live for this upside down kingdom than it is to live for a world that will not satisfy us and that in the end will leave us cut off and separated from God.

This is the upside down kingdom that we live for. Many who are first in this life will be last in the life to come and many who are last in this life will be first in the life to come.

Let's pray together. Loving God and Heavenly Father would you reveal to us where our heart is not in the right place?

Would you challenge us this morning if we need to sell give and follow? Would you encourage us because we have left and we will receive?

[29 : 23] But Lord we ask all of this not for our own fame for our own glory. We ask this for your fame and your glory only. Would you help us in the name of your Son Jesus Christ.

Amen.