

BELONGING TO GOD'S KINGDOM

To belong to God's Kingdom you have to be a Jew, a devout and respectable Jew – one who is schooled in Jewish scriptures and traditions. This perhaps sums up the view of the religious authorities of Jesus' day. Jesus put forward a different set of conditions for belonging to God's Kingdom. Basically, you have to receive it and then you live it.

To *receive* the Kingdom, you must 'turn, shrink and drop'. 'Turn' means repent, turn from sin to God. 'Shrink' means become like a little child, full of humble trust. 'Drop' means don't let anything (like money or possessions) stop you receiving the greater treasure of eternal life.

To *live* the Kingdom, you must follow Jesus into a life of love, service and willingness to suffer for the Gospel.



Beginning of Jesus' public ministry 1:14-15

The right time is come ...and the Kingdom of God is near. Turn away from your sins and believe the Good News!' (1:15)

John the Baptist has been imprisoned, his role as herald of the gospel performed. Jesus takes the stage, proclaiming the coming Kingdom and the urgent need to repent and believe.

Jesus and the children 10:13-16

***'Let the children come to me, and do not stop them, because the Kingdom of God belongs to such as these. I assure you that whoever does not receive the Kingdom of God like a child will never enter it.'* (10: 14-15)**

The qualities of children were not that appreciated in the culture of the day. Why, then, did Jesus put forward children as an example to his followers? The enthusiasm and joy of children, their open, trusting natures and willingness to depend entirely on loving parents - these were the qualities that Jesus wished to see in his followers.



The rich man 10: 17-27

***You need only one thing. Go and sell all you have and give the money to the poor, and you will have riches in heaven; then come and follow me.'* (10:21)**

So close and yet so far... the man had turned to God; he was humble like a child, kneeling before Jesus; only one condition remained: could he let go of his possessions for something greater?



Wealth was traditionally seen as a sign of God's blessing and favour. The man was living a righteous life: he kept the commandments faithfully. Jesus brings a new, complete standard of righteousness -to follow Jesus is to do more than to follow the commandments.

The man's problem is not money; rather it is his *attachment* to money. St Paul wrote that it was not money, but *love* of money, that is the root of all evil. No one can receive the Kingdom whilst remaining attached to things.

Jesus must have been as sorrowful as the rich man walking away. He didn't, however, lower his demand or try to negotiate. He points out the dangers of wealth, using the famous 'camel through the eye of a needle' comparison.

The Great Commandment 12: 28.34

'Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength ... Love your neighbour as you love yourself.' (12:30-31)

To answer the scribe's question, Jesus uses two passages from the Torah to sum up the heart of the law: love. The scribe is impressed with the answer, and Jesus tells him he's not far from God's Kingdom. Two questions might be asked: What is love? Who is my neighbour?

Love is the one thing that cannot hurt your neighbour, St. Paul wrote. The Greek word he used was 'agape' – a love that doesn't depend on feelings of affection or attraction. 'Agape' love simply wants what is best for another person, even if it costs you.

Your neighbour could well be someone considered an outcast – a sinner, tax collector or foreigner. Jesus showed by his example of reaching out to them.

The widow at the treasury 12:41.44

'I tell you that this poor widow put more in the offering box than all the others. For the others put in what they had to spare of their riches; but she, poor as she is, put in all she had- she gave all she had to live on.' (12:43-44)

Widows of Jesus' day could end up on the scrap heap. The Jewish prophets constantly reminded people of the plight of the widow, the orphan and the stranger – simply because these could miss out and end up neglected.

The Temple treasury collected money for the upkeep of the Temple. It is not the *quantity* of the gift but the *quality* of the giving that counts.

The poor widow's act was an example of child-like trust in the goodness of God.



Belonging to the Kingdom: For Christians today

Christians believe that no one is barred from entering the Kingdom. Jesus didn't reserve the Kingdom for Jews alone, but for all – Jew and Gentile, woman and man, slave and free. Christianity is a universal, not national, faith.

How do Christians know this? They look at the conditions Jesus puts for entry into God's Kingdom. Basically, Jesus asks people repent and believe, to become childlike, to put the Kingdom as your first treasure (to 'turn, shrink and drop'). These conditions can be met by *anyone* at *any* time.

So what's stopping everyone being part of God's Kingdom? Answer: human attitudes and behaviour. The Parable of the Sower sums it up. When people's hearts are hard like the path, or shallow like the rocky ground, or torn by worldly concerns, God's message and God's Kingdom cannot live in them.

The passage about the rich man strikes a chord with today's situation. Many people today might think it odd that ancient people made idols of gold figures to worship. Christians today consider that there are idols today more deadly because they're less obvious and visible. To put money, power, success, privilege, comfort, or anything else, as your highest priority is to treat that thing like an idol, something to be worshipped.

Activities

1 Choosing the best ending, answer the following in a sentence each.

'Whoever does not receive the Kingdom of God like a child ...'

- A will be condemned.
- B will never enter it.
- C will need to repent.

Jesus wanted his followers to be

- A childish.
- B childlike.
- C children.

Jesus' first advice to the rich man was about

- A obeying the prophets.
- B regular worship.
- C the commandments.

To be perfect the man was invited to do what?

- B give up his wealth and follow Jesus.
- C keep the commandments.
- D become a Pharisee.

What stopped the man from becoming a disciple?

- A money
- B hardness of heart

- C attachment to money
Jesus said the saving the wealthy will be like
- A harvesting thorns among wheat.
- B a camel passing through the eye of a needle.
- C building a house with no foundations.

A scribe asked Jesus what was the greatest commandment of all. How did Jesus reply?

- A honour your father and mother
- B love God and your neighbour as yourself
- C keep holy the Sabbath

What led Jesus to praise the scribe?

- A the scribe had seen the wisdom of Jesus' answer
- B the scribe had asked a clever question
- C the scribe followed the Torah strictly

Jesus would have differed most with the religious authorities over the meaning of what?

- A God
- B neighbour
- C self

2 A confused follower of Jesus has filled in the questionnaire beside.

Identify each wrong answer and give an example from the Gospel to show why it's wrong.

TO BELONG TO THE KINGDOM ...	Yes	No
Do I have to be born a Jew?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Must I become a Jew?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Must I have lived a good life up to now?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Must I be a person looked up to and respected by others?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Must I be very educated in religious matters?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

3 Read again the account of the Widow at the treasury (12:41-44).

- Where was the treasury?
- Why did Jesus single the widow out for such praise?
- Some would say the widow's act was an act of suicide. Give **two** points against this view.
- Read the account of the Anointing of Jesus (14:3-9). Write down *three* key similarities between this account and the Widow at the Treasury.

