

Sermon on Luke 18:9-19:10 prepared by Jonathan Shradar

Luke 18:9-19:10

The Kingdom is built on humble, dependent surrender.

Every one of us, in all generations, is familiar with the three little pigs. Those that built homes and faced danger. Building with straw, wood, and brick. Under siege from the big bad wolf.

Many layers to this tale, and it has been retold in myriad ways through history. Allusions to opportunity, availability of resources, and even encounters with violence as normative in life. But the story leaves us as kids pandering what to build with.

Not only a dwelling but a life...

Matthew 7:24–27 “Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. [25] And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. [26] And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. [27] And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it.” (ESV)

We build on the rock! With brick that will last.

In the preaching of the kingdom - its arrival, people are increasingly asking how to get into the kingdom. Essentially asking, ‘how is it built?’

We have here a big section of Scripture. Parable, interactions, healing, and salvation all surrounding an ominous prediction of death.

Very memorable bits of the Bible that all go together.

The Kingdom is built on humble, dependent surrender.

In our text, there are three “I tell you” statements from Jesus. As the way of the kingdom. We will take these in turn and see immediate examples of it, and what brings it all to life for us.

Remember where we are in the story: Journey to Jerusalem; teaching on how to use resources, how to expect the kingdom coming in full and how followers of Jesus are to wait. Don't trust in your stuff - don't look back - cry out for justice.

The Way of the Kingdom is Humble

Luke 18:9 “He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt:” (ESV)

Right off the bat we know where this is going. In the kingdom, it is not your own righteousness that you trust.

Jesus tells the parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector.

We generally dislike Pharisees. It's not cool when someone calls you a Pharisee. But in the first century these Jews were the model - who you aspired to be like in piety and performance.

“The Jews of Palestine in the first century did not think of the Pharisees as hypocrites or religious show-offs. The Pharisees were the most respected religious group in Jesus' day.”

Of course, we get the disdain for a tax collector. Say “tax” and some of us break out in an anxious sweat! Worst still, there are sell-outs that collect from their own people for Rome. Instruments of the occupation.

Both come into the temple to pray.

Pharisee - standing by himself for all to see and hear - “God I thank you, that I am not like other men - extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast and give tithes...”

“I am good!” Is his refrain. Now, it’s good to be just, faithful, obedient to the law... but it’s the wrong place of assurance. And it is all ruined when mixed with contempt for others.

The Tax Collector on the other hand, stands far off, and wouldn’t lift his eyes to heaven. “God, be merciful to me, a sinner!”

The way of conceit and the way of contrition (humility).

We understand the impulse here. To live right. To recognize the law of God and live by it. To have a moral life. But viewing the law as the way of righteousness comes up short because it is always just out of reach. We might negotiate with it or manipulate it to our benefit and so we don’t have to keep it but we can’t fully live it. This is what the Pharisee has wrong about his standing before God.

Paul, to a church attempting to earn salvation by the law... **Galatians 3:10–11** “For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, “Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them.” [11] Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for “The righteous shall live by faith.” (ESV)

The law can’t produce in us the perfection it requires.

Galatians 3:23–24 “Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed. [24] So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith.” (ESV)

One man trusts in his own righteousness, keeping of the law, the other knows full well he is a sinner. The law is meant to humble us, that we would cry out for mercy.

Luke 18:14 “I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.” (ESV)

Justified. Made right before God.

Jesus shows clearly the difference between these two men: God loves and accepts the person who humbly looks for mercy, while he rejects those who exalt themselves.

“Two men went to pray; or rather say,
One went to brag, the other to pray;
One stands up close, and treads on high,
Where th’ other dare not send his eye.
One nearer to the altar trod,
The other to the altar’s God.”

The crowd has been missing the point of Jesus’ teaching and he sets it before them again. It is for us too.

“What Jesus said about the Pharisee was designed to shock us so that we would look at our own lives. If the best and most religious people of Jesus’ day were not pleasing to God, then everyone is in trouble. In other words, the point of the story is that the Pharisee is just like us.” TS ... and we are meant to be the Tax Collector.

The way is humble. Honest. Vulnerable and in need.

Repent of the little tallies of comparison that you keep. Give up trusting in yourself.

Yes, you have amazing potential, even proven success, you live a moral life, you think things with the right perspective. But you can’t match the perfection required. Kingdom citizens know this and humbly ask for mercy.

“The good news of the gospel and this parable is that God is merciful to those who admit they are sinners, to those who are contrite in heart. We do not have to pretend we are righteous; we can admit that we have struggles and sin. This is the way to forgiveness and, paradoxically, to righteousness.” TS

Follow Jesus with humility. The way of the kingdom is humble.

The Way of the Kingdom is Dependent.

People are responding, they are coming around Jesus and wanting blessing. Bringing even infants to Jesus.

Disciples rebuke them because surely Jesus has bigger fish to fry! Children then, as is increasingly the case in our society, have no rights, are treated like property... “The rabbi doesn’t have time for kids!”

Always judge your leaders by who they don’t have time for!

Jesus stops it. Don’t hinder the children from coming he says. “For to such belongs the kingdom of God.”

Luke 18:17 “Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.” (ESV)

We have done a lot with this verse throughout the history of the church.

Rightfully we see that the kingdom is not earned but received (like children).

But we have come up with an endless list of what it means to have “childlike faith.”

“Having faith like a child means we should have confidence in the promises of Christ and faith even in situations where we cannot see.”

“A humble, unpretentious faith could rightly be called a “childlike faith.”

“Childlike faith is often described as a faith that does not doubt, question, or seek explanations; it just believes.”

“becoming like a little child means that we maintain the wonderful and beautiful characteristics and qualities of children that life in this sinful world tends to beat out of us. Like what? Like tenderness of conscience. Openness about emotions and feelings. Creativity and imagination. Wonder and awe. Joy. Eternal hope. Playfulness and humor. Trust. Easy forgiveness. Undying love. Boundless exuberance and energy. Always thinking the best about life and other people. Being willing to learn and grow.”

Happy, playful, carefree! I suppose these are all fine ways of viewing our response to the kingdom.

But these are infants.

I was listening to a conversation about viability this week as the California Assembly debated proposition 1. A constitutional amendment on abortion. CA law now permits abortion up to viability... the ability to live outside the womb.

The age is increasingly younger! But no one can live long without care.

Infants are utterly dependent on parents or caregivers for food, protection, shelter, and nurturing. Completely dependent.

In the text, this is flowing from not trusting in self-righteousness to something deeper still - dependence on someone else. For salvation. For life.

Dependence is easy when we feel weak, but it's the way of the kingdom even when we feel like we can handle things and have it all together.

When we recognize we bring only our need, we see all of the resource to meet that need comes from Christ. And in the kingdom, you don't depend on him for entry then work your way through it. You depend on him for the beginning and the end, for your justification and sanctification.

2 Peter 1:3 "His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence," (ESV)

While we read this and can make childlikeness something to perform... Instead, all who experience the power of the kingdom must become like children by recognizing that they are dependent on God for everything, that there is nothing they could do to qualify for his forgiveness.

Eduard Schweizer, Professor of New Testament at the University of Zurich, wrote: "But this is the reason they are blessed—just because they [the little children] have nothing to show for themselves. They cannot count on any

achievements of their own—their hands are empty like those of a beggar. Jesus enlarges the promise to include everyone. With an authority such as only God can claim, he promises the Kingdom to those whose faith resembles the empty hand of a beggar. Such faith is possible because they have no achievements of their own nor any conceptions of God which can intrude between them and God.”

We wrestle with this, because unlike the infants, we ponder worthiness. We want to earn it. It’s why the questions come to Jesus. It’s why an endless number of books have been written and sermons have been preached on being good enough.

As David Gooding explains: “A little child takes its food, its parents’ love and protection, because they are given, without beginning to think of whether it deserves them or whether it is important enough to merit such attention. So must we all receive God’s kingdom and enter into it (see 18:17).”

Like the sinner crying for mercy we receive it knowing we don’t deserve it. And that is the mind-blowing reality of the gospel, this is the fabric of the kingdom. Dependence on another for all that we need.

Increasingly as I interact with partners or think about who can’t be leaders in the church the question that comes up, more than competence, or experience, is reliability. Are they reliable?

Jesus is reliable. He is our help, he can be depended on, when no one else can.

Hebrews 13:5–6 “Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.” [6] So we can confidently say, “The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?” (ESV)

We need that reminder today.

Truly, I say to you, receive the kingdom like children.

Repent of independence - of seeing Jesus as part of the mix alongside your perfect theology, your attendance record, or your capability.

Live dependent on Jesus. On His Spirit to get you through, to carry you all the way home.

Humility. Dependence.

The Way of the Kingdom is Surrender.

Next comes the interaction with the rich ruler. The piggy with the brick house?!

He calls Jesus good... only God is good! A brief confirmation of who he is!

Wanting still to know the way in - to eternal life. He asks "How do I get the promise of the kingdom?"

Jesus, like a good rabbi, says, 'you know the commandments... then he lists five of them. The ruler says he has done all of these from his youth... He has kept the law. Isn't that enough?

Luke 18:22 "When Jesus heard this, he said to him, "One thing you still lack. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." (ESV)

This is huge!

I can't help but hear Jesus' warning about waiting for his return.

Luke 17:31 "On that day, let the one who is on the housetop, with his goods in the house, not come down to take them away, and likewise let the one who is in the field not turn back." (ESV)

Rather than a future reliance on wealth and possessions, Jesus is calling on the ruler to sacrifice it now. In the present.

Now, this is not a command for all. But, if you think you could never do it, it might be for you!

The rich ruler has what he put his hope in. Wealth. Resource. Comfort. But maybe it wasn't quite what he has hoped. Does his question betray a dissatisfaction with his satisfaction?!

Jesus tells him that real treasure is available. It is within reach. Just kill your trusting in self-righteousness and contempt for others by giving it all away to those you had contempt for!

Become poor to bless the poor, then you will find what you are looking for and you can follow Jesus.

What a proposition!

Luke 18:23 “But when he heard these things, he became very sad, for he was extremely rich.” (ESV)

One pastor used to say that this man was saved, he was just sad about giving up what he loved. But elsewhere Jesus tells parables of people joyfully giving up everything for what they recognize as treasure.

Luke 18:24 “Jesus, seeing that he had become sad, said, “How difficult it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!” (ESV)

The question that makes the ruler sad is “is it worth it?” Do you see value in the kingdom... in eternal life with Jesus? Certainly, it is worth all that we have.

Jesus calls him to surrender it all. He calls us to surrender too, as the way of the kingdom.

Do you see the value?

This shapes most of our lives. We all have the exact same amount of time...yet we have very different priorities so we use that time vastly differently. The same when it comes to the kingdom, to a life surrendered to Jesus.

Tim Keller used a helpful analogy. Think of me offering you a gift for \$500. You pay, you get the prize. You need to know what it is! If I say it is the pen I used to write this sermon... nah!

But if I say it is a brand new Porsche. Well then it's worth it. And even if you didn't have the cash you would say give me the day and you would go and sell your stuff to buy what is more valuable.

This is the proposition of the kingdom. Whatever we have is never more valuable.

Jesus is of infinite worth. He invites us to treasure him. So much so that everything else is surrendered to him. And when we see the value, unlike the rich ruler, we say "take it all!"

We instinctually prefer religion that asks for little. Just a Sunday here or there. Some vaguely held beliefs. Nostalgia for old songs and smells.

Life in the kingdom asks for all of who you are. Costly, sacrificial. Surrender.

This next-level surrender makes even Jesus' followers nervous. If the righteous Pharisee can't get in; if the wealthy can't make it, "Then who can be saved?"

"What is impossible with man is possible with God."

Peter trying to assure himself... says "we left our homes and followed you!" And Jesus gives his third "truly" statement.

Luke 18:29–30 "And he said to them, "Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, [30] who will not receive many times more in this time, and in the age to come eternal life." (ESV)

The kingdom is more valuable.

We are the family values crowd so we greatly value the family! But what are we willing to surrender for the sake of the kingdom?

I am not a salesman. I can tell you of the surpassing worth of Jesus but I am not sure you will be convinced without a work of the Holy Spirit.

So we repent of holding lesser things so tightly. Ask the Spirit to reveal the value of Jesus to you. That he would be your treasure.

Live surrendered.

“Take my life and let it be consecrated to Thee
Take my moments and my days, let them flow in ceaseless praise
Take my hands and let them move at the impulse of Thy love
Take my feet and let them be swift and beautiful for Thee
Take my voice and let me sing always, only for my King
Take my lips and let them be filled with messages from Thee
Take my silver and my gold, not a might would I withhold
Take my intellect and use every power as You choose
Here am I, all of me, take my life, it's all for Thee”

The way of the Kingdom is humble, dependent, surrender.

Luke moves right to the practical outworking of these truths.

A Blind man crying out to Jesus for mercy. They tried to silence hi but he cried out all the more. “Your faith has made you well.” And he gave praise to God.

Humble.

Then the wee-little man! Zacchaeus the real-life tax collector. Small stature + childlike! Dependent. Climbs up the sycamore tree to see Jesus and Jesus invites himself over.

Without prompting, Zacchaeus surrenders, gives up his wealth to the poor and makes reparations to those he defrauded.

Luke 19:9 “And Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham. (ESV)

Examples of humility, dependence, and surrender.

That being the case - why not say “the way INTO the kingdom” is these things...

The Kingdom is not built by our humility, dependence, and surrender, though it is lived out in this way by us.

It's Jesus' humility, dependence, and surrender that brings us into the kingdom.

Luke 18:31–33 “And taking the twelve, he said to them, “See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written about the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished. [32] For he will be delivered over to the Gentiles and will be mocked and shamefully treated and spit upon. [33] And after flogging him, they will kill him, and on the third day he will rise.” (ESV)

In humility, he will be mocked and shamed.

In dependence, he submits to the will of the Father to satisfy the wrath against sin.

In surrender he gives up his body, his blood to declare salvation finished on the cross.

To prove that “the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”

The kingdom is at hand. It is built upon material stronger than straw, wood, or brick. It is built upon the body and blood of Jesus.

Will your sin humble you to cry out for mercy?

Will you depend fully on Christ's grace for life and eternity?

Will you see Jesus as that of surpassing worth and surrender everything else?

He did all of this for you. You were worth it to him. And now we live secure in his hands. Humble, dependent, surrendered.

Let's go on building. With that which withstands the blows of the big bad wolf. With that which keeps us for all of eternity and calls us free.

Today salvation has come to this house!