

The Story of Jesus

Part 26: Is God Happy with Me? [Thumbnail: Stop Trying So Hard.]

Mark 10:13-31 - [watch online](#)

Summary: It's impossible to earn God's love.

Main Ideas:

[00:47] We usually gauge God's happiness with us on how well we think our lives are going.

[02:26] What we have and what happens to us isn't a measure of God's approval of us.

[04:50] The Kingdom of God doesn't look or work like we expect.

[06:16] We don't have to impress or flatter God.

[08:14] The Kingdom of God is not about earning. It's about accepting and receiving.

[10:19] We can follow the rules and still not be following Jesus.

[11:39] Instead of signifying God's acceptance, wealth is actually a hindrance to entering the Kingdom of God.

[15:12] God's acceptance doesn't depend on us.

[16:24] We are accepted because we are already loved. Not because we have earned it.

[18:46] The Kingdom of God belongs to those who accept Jesus' unearned, underserved, and unending love.

Invitation:

[16:36] Read Titus 3:4-7

[17:09] Ask, "In what way(s) am I trying to impress or flatter God?"

[18:01] Stop trying so hard and choose to accept Jesus' free gift of love.

Discussion Questions:

1. Why do you think we usually gauge God's happiness with us based on our life's circumstances?
 - Have you felt or experienced this before?
2. Read Titus 3:4-7. What words or thoughts stand out to you?
3. We don't need to flatter or impress God. How could this idea influence our relationships and interactions with others?
4. What are some practical ways we can stop trying so hard and simply accept God's love?
5. How can your group pray with you this week?

Transcript:

WE: If there is a God, is he happy with you? How would you even know?

Well, and this has been true for almost all of human history...

We usually gauge God's happiness with us on how well we think our lives are going.

If things are going well... we must be doing it right, God must be blessing us b/c he's so happy with us

And if things are going bad... it's either b/c we've messed up or b/c we haven't been paying attention to God enough

So we think of ways to make God happier with us so we can get things to turn around.

We see this in every religion...

- Make sure the deities are happy so make sacrifices to the gods
- Say the right chants/prayers/songs to appease the deity.
- Go to the holy place and do the right ritual to get back on the deity's good side.

Two problems... 1st. It's not logical. That wouldn't be a very great deity if they could be manipulated so easily

And 2nd... it does more harm than good...

When bad times come... we think it's somehow our fault... adds guilt to the already hard time

Or it makes us say, "What did I do to deserve this? God doesn't care about me. He didn't hold up his end of this deal!"

- "I've been good, I've followed your rules, I've gone to church, I've been a good person... why did you let me lose my job, grandma, get sick, etc.?"
- And we end up angry at God

But Jesus turned this whole idea on its head... and he showed us something very important for understanding God and our place in the world...

What we have and what happens to us isn't a measure of God's approval of us.

I'll show you...

GOD: Mark 10:13-16 Blessing children common thing for a visiting teacher/holy man to do

- Maybe a little superstitious...

And the disciples think... Jesus is too important; he doesn't have time for this kid stuff.

- He's got a kingdom to build
- We've got work to do and we're going to rule with him and he still hasn't told us exactly what that looks like...
- So go away and leave Jesus to do his important Jesus things with his important guys.

Jesus sees this gets mad. (We see Jesus' anger most when people try to keep other people away from him)

And he yells at the guys... "What do you think you're doing? The kingdom I'm bringing is FOR these people..."

In fact... My Kingdom belongs to people like these children and if you ever want to enter it you are going to have to be like these kids."

So... First, KoG isn't about going to heaven when we die...

KoG- Was thought of as the Age to Come... when God would end this age of evil/hurt/pain/"might makes right"

- And would reign and bring true justice and peace and freedom for Israel
- All the evil doers will be punished,

- The righteous dead would rise
- And the world would be remade as it was in the beginning

And those that God accepted and was pleased with would enjoy that new life forever.

Something all Jews were waiting for... hoping they made the cut for...

And Jesus starts his whole ministry by saying the KoG is finally here... it's already happening... I'm bringing it... you can experience now AND forever!

- You can experience God reigning in your hearts and lives now.
- Experiencing God's love, peace, joy, power in your life now and forever.

But the problem was, this kingdom didn't look like or work like they expected.

The Kingdom of God doesn't look or work like we expect.

- Its value system is completely opposite of what the rest of the world values.

And Jesus tells the disciples... the KoG belongs to people just like these children you are pushing away

Why? Not b/c kids are innocent/cute/dumb...

But b/c in that culture they had no status/power/authority... lowest on the social order.

- They brought nothing to the table... they couldn't contribute.
- They weren't trying to earn their seat next to Jesus or their place in the kingdom.
- They weren't trying to impress or flatter Jesus with their attempts to be nice
- They hadn't done anything to earn it or deserve it.
- They just came to be blessed by Jesus.

And Jesus says... "That is what I'm looking for. You want to enter the KoG? Stop thinking you're important or can earn your spot somehow... Be like the children."

- People who are willing to give up trying to earn God's approval,
- Who stop trying to impress/flatter God with their goodness, cleverness, and importance.
- But are willing to simply accept his love and his kingdom as a child accepts a gift.

We don't have to impress or flatter God.

Danny's Xmas gift...

Why did we give him that gift?

- He earned it? Obeyed us all the time? He told us what awesome, holy, and righteous parents we are?
- No, we gave it to him b/c we had the ability (knew he couldn't get it for himself) and we love him and wanted to make him happy.

And he was overwhelmed with the gift and gratitude... b/c he knew it was purely a gift.

- He didn't have to earn or work hard to deserve it.
- He didn't try to pay us back, didn't try to be good so he didn't lose it

- He just opened it, built it, and is still playing with it and enjoying it.

That's how we receive the KoG as a child.

But we adults have such a hard time getting our minds around this idea... as we see in the next scene...

V. 17 Eternal life = KoG/Age to Come

And after what we just said about the KoG... what is wrong with this guy's question?

What must I DO to inherit eternal life? **The KoG is not about earning. It's about accepting and receiving.**

So Jesus pushes it a bit...

V. 18 Jesus: So you're asking what you have to do to be good enough to inherit eternal life?

- You just called me good.
- What standard of good are we using? Yours?
- God is the only real standard of good... so let's make sure we are getting our terms right.
- Are you good enough compared to this standard?

And Jesus then repeats to him the usual/basic standard for "Good" among the Jews.

V. 19-20 The man... "I've done all the things that make someone a good person. I've done all the things I can to make sure I deserve a spot in the KoG. I've earned God's blessing."

And Jesus sees this guy's heart and he sincerely wants to make God happy.

But also sees his thinking is still stuck in the old way of having to impress/flatter God to earn his acceptance...

So he's going to invite him to trade in all his work for something so much better...

V. 21-22 Wait?! Did Jesus just give this guy something to DO to earn God's acceptance?

No. What Jesus just did was invite this man to accept the KoG as a child.

To give up trying to earn, to give up his dependence on anything but Jesus.

Jesus actually invited this guy to follow him... same words he used when he called Peter, Matthew, the other disciples to follow him and become his disciple...

Jesus says, "You've followed the rules... but I've got something better for you... come follow me."

We can follow the rules and still not be following Jesus.

Jesus says... Sell all your stuff so you can come be one of my main followers.

- Rely on me... depend on me, not yourself, your goodness, or your stuff.
- And it was too much for the man.

Why? B/c like almost everyone in that culture, he believed wealth (and the good life it gave) was a sign of God's approval.

- You must be doing everything right for God to bless you like this
- The better your life the more God must be pleased with you.

This wealthy man couldn't wrap his mind around the idea that he hadn't earned his spot in the KoG

He couldn't let go of his stuff and his reliance on himself... he couldn't lower himself to the status of a child...

It's a sad picture for us.... And completely mindblowing for the disciples

V. 23-26 The disciples are astounded b/c Jesus has completely flipped everything they had been taught about wealth.

Instead of signifying God's acceptance, wealth is actually a hindrance to entering the KoG.

Why? B/c you start thinking you've earned God's approval, you've made it, you're one of the in ones.

- Forget that we really don't have anything to offer God or a way to impress him.
- And there's no room to simply accept God's love like a child accepting a xmas gift.

And Jesus' warning is something we have to take seriously... we can't explain it away as hyperbole or metaphor.

If in West... Compared to the rest of human history and much of the rest of the world... WE are the richest people ever...

So are we all in trouble? Is it impossible for us to experience the KoG?

If we cling to our security, put our trust in our wealth, if we refuse to simply enter the KoG like a child... then yes.

It will be impossible for us to enjoy the KoG... It will be impossible for us to reach it...

But there is hope... b/c it is never impossible for God to reach us...

V. 27 In the human realm it is impossible for those who are so used to earning/ deserving / buying / self-reliance to enter the KoG.

But God does the impossible.

He makes it possible for us to change our thoughts and hearts. He can give us new hearts when we are willing.

He makes it possible for us to give up trying to earn/deserve/self reliance

He makes it possible for us to even give up our wealth/comforts if that is what is needed.

He allows us to give it all up and enter into and accept the KoG as a trusting/thankful child.

And this gets Peter doing some thinking...

V. 28-31 Peter: "Heck yeah Jesus! We totally gave stuff up! So we get to be in, right...?"

And Jesus says... "Yes, everything you gave up you will get back in this life and the next...

- You may lose your house but you will have houses opened to you as you live in my new community
- You may lose your family... but you will find a new family closer than a blood family... a family based on and revolving around me. A family you will never lose for eternity.

But with all of this you will also find persecution... it won't all be perfect...

- And when things are bad you still have my love... it's not a sign that I'm angry, etc.

So stop evaluating things from the rest of humanity's eyes...

Many of those the world celebrates... who have wealth, ability, prestige, honor, seem to have earned God's favor... will actually be the least.

And many of those who everyone knows can't contribute anything... will be the greatest.

Listen: God's acceptance doesn't depend on us.

We can't earn God's acceptance. We can't impress or flatter our way to God's love.

To enter and enjoy the KoG we have stop trying to earn it... stop trying to prove we deserve it

And just accept the free gift it is...

This is what makes following Jesus so different from any other religious system ever created.

Every other religion for the history of humanity has been humans trying to reach the deity.

- Trying to better themselves in some way to deserve the favor of the deity/universe
- Or trying to impress/flatter the deity with their good/sacrificial deeds

Jesus is God who came to us. Who pursued us.

Who said, I love you b/c you're mine. I accept you b/c you're my child.

- Stop running. Stop working. Stop trying so hard.
- I don't care about any of that.
- Let me embrace you and show you who I really am.
- Trust that I love you.

And if you can do that simple thing... you will experience the life you were created for... now and forever.

We are accepted b/c we are already loved. Not b/c we have earned it.

YOU: So how do we get to that place... maybe for the first time or maybe we need a reminder...

Read: **Titus 3:4-7**

- What words stand out? What is this saying about God's love for you?

Ask: In what way(s) am I trying to impress or flatter God?

- How are you trying to earn his favor?
- What pressure are you putting on yourself?

Do you need to sell everything and follow Jesus? Maybe. Maybe not.

- If it worries you that maybe you do... at least explore that and why you feel that.

But maybe it's something else that needs to go...

- Pride,
- The idea that you're a good person so God owes you,
- Your position/reputation/title

Whatever it is that keeps you from seeing yourself as just a child of God

In the best, healthy relationships, the flattery stops... and you simply accept that you are loved and enjoy the relationship.

So stop trying so hard and choose to accept Jesus' free gift of love.

And then... enjoy it.

WE: Look it's not that we're so evil we can never be good enough people to earn God's acceptance...

- The truth is "good" isn't even the criteria... and never was.

God loves his children. He proved it by coming and dying to rescue us from sin and death... he proved it by rising again to give us new life now and forever.

The KoG is here now... and to experience it now and forever all that is needed is to trust our Heavenly Father and accept it like the amazing, unearned, undeserved gift it is. And then enjoy it forever.

The KoG belongs to those who accept Jesus' unearned, underserved, and unending love.

And he's offering it to you today... right now. Will you accept?