

Follow Me!

Text | Mark 10:17-27

Reading | Matthew 8:5-22

Congregation,

In New Zealand today there is a lot of confusion over the word “Christian” and how a person becomes a Christian.

Many people describe themselves as “Christian” – but what does that really mean?

And how does someone become a Christian? What do you need to know? What do you need to do?

The Bible describes a Christian as a follower of Jesus. Jesus calls everyone to follow him. Today as we look at this story we want to see what this means: What does Jesus expect of disciples?

Mark describes how a rich man came to see Jesus.

Matthew tells us that he was young, and Luke tells us that he was a ruler; so he was a rich young ruler, a person from the top level of Jewish society, from the nobility – he had wealth and social standing.

What’s more he was interested in spiritual matters – very interested! He saw Jesus and he ran to him – no one did that in that climate – it was too hot to exert yourself like that!

But he was so keen to see Jesus and talk with him that he ran up to him and fell on his knees before him.

This fellow was earnest, sincere, and eager!

No doubt the disciples would have been pleased to see a person like this become a follower of Jesus.

What’s more he asked a very good question: “What must I do to inherit eternal life?”

You can hardly get a better question than this, because it showed he was concerned about what was really important, about what lay beyond this life, about his eternal future.

If he had asked this question of some in the wider church today they would have him signed up as a Christian in no time at all! Here, it seems, was a man ripe for conversion.

But Jesus did not think so; and we do well to reflect carefully on what Jesus said to this young man.

Consider this for your own life. Consider this as you present the faith to others. For Jesus is demanding, which is the first this we want to consider.

The first demand Jesus made on this man was that he recognise the character of God.

Jesus questioned him about the way he addressed him. “Why do you call me good? No one is good – except God alone.”

Jesus confronted him with the character of God because he wanted to go on and talk about the law of God. You cannot understand the demands of God’s law and the nature of sin unless you see it as an offense against the person of God – against his holiness, perfection, goodness and glory.

Our first concern as Christians and evangelists ought to be the character of God.

The Shorter Catechism brings that out well in its opening question: “What is the chief end of man? To glorify God and enjoy him forever”.

The primary focus of evangelism is not the need of man but rather the glory of God.

Secondly, Jesus demanded that he keep the law.

“You know the commandments: Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, do not defraud, honour your father and mother.” (Verse 19)

The young man responded by saying that he had kept all of these since he was a youth.

Here we need to understand the Jewish way of thinking. They thought they could get to heaven on the basis of what they did, by keeping the law of God. This young man thought he was doing really well!

Many of you might respond to Jesus in the same way. You might also say; I’ve tried to live a good life; I’m an upright citizen, a faithful husband, a devoted mother, a fair employer, a hardworking employee.

Many today believe that at the end of time God will weigh up the good and the bad and if the scale tips for the good then they will be okay – they will make it to heaven.

Jesus looked at this young man and loved him. But he knew that no one will make it to heaven on the basis of their efforts and good works. This is because no one can achieve the perfection the law of God demands. Jesus proved that to this young man as he gave him his third demand.

“Go, sell everything you have and give it to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven.” (verse 21)

Jesus’ command touched this man at his most sensitive spot – his wallet – “because he had great wealth”. This was the issue: Was he prepared to put Jesus above his money?

Jesus wanted to show him the real meaning and intent and depth of God’s commandments, as he had done in the Sermon on the Mount.

He could have quoted the first commandment: “You shall have no other gods before me.” That command asked him to put God before his money.

He could have quoted the tenth commandment: “You shall not covet.” That is, don’t set your heart on material things, don’t be obsessed with these things, and don’t make them the focus of your life. In asking him to sell all he had Jesus was explaining what the law called him to do.

Jesus did not say this to everyone; he knew that money was this man’s particular problem, so he focused on that. This isn’t a universal command to everyone (This was the mistake of the monastic movement in the Middle Ages which called everyone to a life of poverty).

Different people have different problems. Perhaps there is something else keeping you from inheriting eternal life: Perhaps it’s your job, or sport, or a relationship, or being successful, or a life of pleasure and entertainment, or your study? It could be any one of these or something else.

What Jesus wants of us is a total obedience to Him; a complete submission, so that nothing stands between Jesus and you. We see this in the final demand Jesus makes.

“Then come, follow me.”

To follow Jesus is to live totally and solely and completely for Him; to be “sold out” on Jesus; to focus your whole life on him; to love him with your heart, soul, strength and mind!

One of the errors being taught in the church today is that you can accept Jesus as Saviour without accepting him as Lord. That is quite contrary to the Bible. To follow Jesus is to follow Him as Saviour and as Lord; you cannot separate those two – they must go together.

Are you following Jesus as Lord?
Is He King over all you do?
Do you put him first in everything?
Is he ruling over every part of your life?
Are you totally devoted to him?

The rich young ruler faced these questions, searched his heart, and then turned away. This was too much for him!

And Jesus let him go – with infinite sadness – but he was not prepared to lower the entrance standard into the kingdom.

No one should underestimate the difficulty of becoming a follower of Jesus and entering the kingdom.

So let's now consider:

How to Enter The Kingdom

Jesus said to his disciples, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God." (verse 23).

We read that the disciples were amazed. (v24). Because in Jewish thinking those who were rich were blessed by God – they were enjoying God's favour and were already in the Kingdom!

The Jews also thought that rich people could use their wealth to do lots of good deeds which would build up a good credit rating with God.

But Jesus said, "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." (Verse 25).

Jesus put this in extreme terms picturing the largest animal in Palestine going through the smallest opening – it was clearly impossible!

But it is not only hard for the wealthy, but for everyone. Jesus put this generally, "How hard it is to enter the kingdom of God." (Verse 24)

This prompts a question from the disciples, and from us: "Who then can be saved?"

Jesus responds by telling them that "with man this is impossible, but not with God; All things are possible with God."

It is impossible for us because none of us can live up to the perfect standard of God's law – but it is possible for God for he has provided a way for us to be saved.

God has made it possible to enter the kingdom by sending His One and Only Son into this world to be the substitute for sin. Jesus took on himself the sin of all who believe in him and he died in their place. God can forgive us on the basis of what Jesus has done and so accept us into the kingdom.

It is possible to enter the kingdom because God is all powerful. Through his Holy Spirit he can change people hearts, minds and lives.

Every person in this world must believe this, accepting God's forgiveness as a free gift and then resolving to follow Jesus as Lord.

This rich young man met Jesus.

He asked him a good question about how to gain eternal life.

But he could not accept the answer – he could not cope with the demands of the kingdom. It was impossible for him to give up the things he treasured.

Will you accept the demands of the Kingdom of God?

Are you prepared to give up the things you treasure on earth?

Will you follow Jesus remembering that what is impossible for man has been made possible by God?

Amen.