

**The Blessings Of Heaven And Earth  
(Mark 10:28-31 August 4, 2019)**



In 1984 I became a Christian.

One of the first people I told was my brother.

He stood in my room begging me not to let the weirdos brainwash me – to de-convert. He was very fearful of what might happen to me.

Soon after I went for a walk with my mother. She knew something was up because I never walked with her.

I had no clue about how to share the good news of Jesus – so after about 30 minutes of walking I just asked – so what do you think happens to us when we die?

She stopped walking. I saw a look of fear on her face – she was thinking – that is a religious question – Craig is an atheist – who has got to her boy?

After a minute or two of walking in silence she said – do you really want to know?

Yeah I did.

She said karma and reincarnation seemed right. Do good and you get a blessing in the next life.

She then said so what do you believe?

So glad you asked.

I told her I had become a Christian.

That made her really worried.

What did that mean? Was I going to drop out of medical school? Would I join a commune? Did they want my money? Would they tell me not to keep seeing her?

She knew enough of the Bible to realise becoming a Christian was meant to cost and she didn't know what that meant for me.

So we sat on a rock by the beach on the Gold Coast and I answered her questions.

Yes – becoming a Christian would cost – but I was sure the gain was so worth it.

I knew I was not making a mistake – I was gaining everything.

This morning, you will see two of the most significant rites of the Christian faith.

**Baptism** – which declares our union with Christ.

And **membership** – which declares our union with Christ's people.

For those being baptised and those becoming members and for any family and friends who might wonder what this all means – I want to briefly speak on a passage that reminds us all what it means to join Christ and His people.

This morning this is what we are going to see is that:



Following Jesus means giving up our kingdom to gain His kingdom

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To see what this means, the passage I want to look at is Mark 10:28-31.

Please turn with me to Mark 10:28.

Here we find our first point.



Following Jesus means

We give up our kingdom

### **Following Jesus means**

#### **We give up our kingdom**

A year and a half after I became a Christian – my mother’s worst fears that she initially held nearly came to pass.

A couple I had been introduced to turned up at my home and told me – if I was a real Christian, I had to literally give up everything.

They asked me how many shirts I owned. I didn’t know. They said if I had two shirts when anyone in the world had one – I would be breaking the law of God. I needed to sell everything – my car, my possessions – everything.

They took me to passage after passage.

It all looked pretty convincing.

I was mentally working out how I could get to work without my old Datsun Sunny.

And one of the places they took me to convince me they were right was to Mark 10 verse 28:

Peter began to tell [Jesus], “Look, we have left everything and followed you.”

They spelled it out – we have to be like the disciples and *leave everything*.

The only thing that saved me is that by this time I had learned to read every verse in its context.

So let's give a little context to this verse.

This passage is found in a section where Jesus is talking about what many call the upside down kingdom.

If we go back to the start of chapter 9, we have the episode of the transfiguration where Jesus talked about the coming of the kingdom of God in power.

Those words kingdom and power – brought visions to the disciples of King David and his armies who never lost a battle and ruled the known world.

Add in Jesus' miracles and there was a heightened anticipation that the Messiah – the King like David might have arrived. That the kingdom might be just around the corner.

And then came the inevitable question – so what is in this kingdom for me?

That leads us to Mark 9:33–34:

They came to Capernaum. When he was in the house, he asked them, "What were you arguing about on the way?" But they were silent [of course they were] because on the way they had been arguing with one another about who was the greatest.

A number of years ago Dave D'Amour told me about a lesson he taught in *Kids For Christ* where he put all the boys in one group and asked them to each think about which boy in the group was the greatest.

You will not be surprised to learn that – every – single – boy – humbly nominated himself as the greatest. That is just the way we are.

Unfortunately it is not just little boys.

I am told that one of the ugliest times in political parties is straight after winning an election.

Then comes the fight for who gets cabinet and sub-cabinet positions. Who gets what office and what power?

I supported you – I scratched your back – now it is my time.

This drive and desire to be great and recognized as great is there in all of us.

In 1715 King Louis XIV of France, the Sun King, died after a reign of 72 years. He was an incredibly proud and arrogant man.

When his death was approaching, he planned his own funeral to make sure his greatness was recognised. The King instructed Jean-Baptiste Massillon, his personal Court Chaplain, that upon his death he was to lie in state in a golden coffin at Notre Dame cathedral in Paris. He further instructed that at his funeral service the entire cathedral was to be completely dark, except it was to be dimly lit by only one candle positioned above the coffin so that all would be awed by the late king's presence.

His greatness would be seen even in death.

When Louis died, Massillon did exactly as the King had instructed. But as he began his funeral oration, he slowly reached down, snuffed out the candle, and from the darkness proclaimed to all:

“Only God is great.”

### **Only God is great!**

That is a lesson the Twelve and all of us have to learn.

The Twelve are clearly thinking they had the inside track to positions of greatness in this coming kingdom.

Jesus squashes all of that.

Sitting down, he called the Twelve and said to them, “If anyone wants to be first, he must be last and servant of all.”

They had to be thinking – what kind of kingdom is this?



Jesus didn't come to build a worldly kingdom of power. He came to build an upside down kingdom – a kingdom for the least.



A kingdom where the first are last – but then the last are first.

Jesus goes on and says – Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it. Mark 10:15.

You get into the kingdom by being weak and unimportant – childlike.

Then a rich young ruler turns up and asks how he can get into the kingdom.

Jesus tells him – You lack one thing: Go, sell all you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me. Mark 10:21.

That was one hurdle too many so he went away from Jesus – grieving.

Jesus said to the disciples – Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God. Mark 10:24–25.

It was sounding like the couple telling me to sell everything might have a point.

But then I began to think about Peter's statement – Look we have left *everything* and followed you.

The idea is – look Jesus – the rich young ruler did not give up everything to follow you – but we did.

But had they? What did leaving everything mean?

Yes, each one of the Twelve had left behind their profession and their families and spent years following Jesus.

No small sacrifice.

They had joined an outcast preacher and become marginalized and despised.

I'm sure travelling from village to village often living rough was no picnic.

And seeing most of those they ministered to say – you know I love the miracles – but this Son of God stuff – that is a bridge too far must have been discouraging.

But they had made the choice to follow Jesus – to give up everything and follow Him.

But again, just what did this mean?

In Mark 8:34–37 Jesus had uttered some very important words:

Calling the crowd along with his disciples, he said to them, "If anyone wants to follow after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life because of me and the gospel will save it. For what does it benefit someone to gain the whole world and yet lose his life? What can anyone give in exchange for his life?"

Following Him means leaving your old life – crucifying it. Every part of that has to go.

Before I became a Christian – my life goals were really simple.

I wanted – the gold, the glory and the girl.

I wanted money and everything that could buy.

I wanted people to know my name and think I was a somebody.

I wanted a hot wife with a good heart.

I didn't think I was asking for too much – and I thought I had the ability and gifts to work hard and get my best life now.

Then I became a Christian and I felt all of these goals ebb away.

Money no longer held a grip on me.

I couldn't care less if the world knew me – what mattered was that my name was in the Lamb's book of life.

And if a godly girl came my way fine – if not I would serve God single.

I must have seemed so different that a close friend asked me – what happened to you – where is the driven, goal oriented, worldly you?

Thanks for asking – but that me died.

Baptism signifies the death of the old us. The death of our kingdom.

The old self that lived for me that wanted to be great – it died.

The new self – the one that came out of the water – wants to declare – only God is great.

I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. Galatians 2:20.

The disciples had done what Jesus calls all of us to do.

But what did this mean? It meant leaving of our desires – the old kingdom we fought for – and that meant getting rid of some parts of our old life – yes – but not always everything.

In Chapter 1 of this gospel of Mark, Peter had a house – and tradition suggests he kept it and nothing in the gospel suggests otherwise.

In Chapter 3 and 4 Peter has a fishing boat – and John 21 lets us know he still had it after Jesus died.

He hadn't literally sold everything. But he had done was put Jesus' kingdom ahead of his own.

Leaving everything meant leaving everything of his old life – the priorities that once ruled him.

For the rich young ruler that was money and possessions – so Jesus asked him to sell them.

For Peter – at least, it meant leaving his family, his profession, his old life to follow Jesus – to become a fisher of men.

I think the cost is different for each of us – but the willingness to do whatever it takes to seek first His kingdom has to be there.

That willingness to fully count the cost was not there for the rich young ruler – it was for the disciples.

Following Jesus means giving up our kingdoms. Our lives become about His glory not ours.

It might mean giving up many or all possessions or it might mean a change in professions or it might mean serving overseas – if they are where our heart is.

It will mean dealing with whatever anchors us to our old kingdoms and stops us being devoted to Christ and seeking first His kingdom and showing the world by the way we live that:

Only God is great.

We certainly have to be willing to sacrifice everything if that is what the cost is – even our lives – but for most of us it means putting the kingdom first, giving cheerfully and living well within our means.

Ultimately this is a heart issue – whose kingdom am I seeking?

Jesus then acknowledges that the disciples had given up their kingdoms – and Jesus lets them know what their reward is. It is:



Following Jesus means

We give up our kingdom  
To then gain His kingdom

**To then gain His kingdom**

Verses 29-30:

“Truly I tell you,” Jesus said, “there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for my sake and for the sake of the gospel, who will not receive a hundred times more, now at this time—houses, brothers and sisters, mothers and children, and fields, with persecutions—and eternal life in the age to come.

Notice that gaining Jesus’ kingdom has facets both now and in eternity.

In this life we leave house and brothers and sisters and mother and father and children and fields? We give up our kingdoms.

Sometime it is a forced leaving. Becoming a Christian can bring a sword in a family – they say choose us or Jesus – and if forced you must choose Jesus.

Sometimes it is a real physical leaving.

Peter left them to follow Jesus.

Missionaries leave them today.

It costs.

Many have pointed out that Jesus does *not* say – leave your wife or husband – for the sake of the gospel.

Right before this in verse 7 he says marriage makes you one flesh and nothing and no one can separate husband and wife.

I think one of the great weaknesses of the great missionary movement is that some of my heroes – said – for the sake of Jesus and for the sake of the gospel – I am leaving house and brothers and sisters and mother and father and children and fields – **and wife.**

Many left their wife at home which at times caused immense problems.

Peter took his wife with him – 1 Corinthians 9 tells us that.

Also I think the children here are children old enough to look after themselves – I don't think it means leaving little ones – but I digress that is another hobby horse sermon for another day.

But – the real point here is that when you give up these things for the sake of Jesus – when you give up your kingdom – you get Jesus' kingdom.

What does that mean?

Crucially, Jesus doesn't say something like:

You will receive a hundred times more, now at this time—ownership of hundreds of houses, riches, vast land and authority.

He doesn't say – you will be kings. Benny Hinn is not right in how he uses this verse.

We know this because slipped in at the end is persecutions. Persecutions is a reminder that the blessings in this life are not worldly blessings – the kind of kingdom we once dreamed of.

No one in this world thinks persecutions is a blessing.

No one says – what I want is gold, glory, girls and persecution.

No the blessings are far more spiritual in nature.

Jesus says – what you get is:

Houses, brothers and sisters, mothers and children, and fields, with persecutions – and you get a hundred times return – and not just in heaven – now at this time.

What does this mean?

Notice Jesus omits father – because I think we are to realise that God Himself is the head of our spiritual family – and there is only one true Father.

But what we do get is a huge new family.

When you come to Christ – you get us.

Every Sunday many, many thousands of Australians do something which most people view as very unusual – they go to church.

I will never forget the first time I attended a church after becoming a Christian. It was very nearly my last time.

I had finally decided to follow Jesus and awhile later the men who had shared Jesus with me invited me to my first real church service.

I was out of my depth.

Everyone seemed to know what was going on – but me.

Everything about it was – I don't know what other word to use – weird.

The service began and we stood shoulder to shoulder and sang songs that I had never heard before.

If there is no beer and no sport, Aussie men are not great communal song singers at the best of times – especially ones like me who are near tone deaf.

I really did not appreciate standing so close to someone and having to pretend to sing.

Then after several stand, sit, stand, sits – which I did not understand – we listened as the person at the front said let's pray – but I didn't pray, he spoke to God on our behalf as if He was standing right there.

Then came a very long speech based – and frankly I didn't really grasp too much of it.

Then I realised there was what seemed a big bath tub installed where we watched a man and a woman be fully immersed under water – publicly.

First baptism I had seen. I found it very, very weird.

We then we were encouraged to come down the front of the church and take a tiny bit of bread and a tiny thimble sized cup of cordial. I had communion before – but not like this.

I remember looking at my Lilliputian meal thinking a few thoughts – wow – this is not what I expected *and* I gave up my Sunday – my very precious ‘me’ day – to do this.

But then came the bit where I really, really felt uncomfortable.

The guy at the front said we would finish our time together by singing one last song. But he told us all to all hold hands.

No way! Not going to happen!

Even today I barely hold hands with my wife – it’s just not my thing. Maybe it’s why we aren’t a hand-holdy kind of church.

But the person who brought me – a guy – grabs one hand and next thing I know the person next to me – another guy – grabs my other hand and before I know it we are swaying back and forth singing:

We are the family of God  
Yes we are the family of God  
And He's brought us together  
To be one in Him  
That we might bring light to the world

I had never felt so uncomfortable. I remember thinking – I like Jesus – but this church stuff is just too weird.

I was giving the please let’s leave signals to my friend – when the strange guy who had dared hold my hand so inappropriately introduced himself.

When he found that I was a new Christian – he said – welcome to the family.

But I already had a family.

If this was my new family – I want a divorce.

But then I looked around – people were happy – enjoying each other’s company. They actually seemed to like each other and care.

My friend said – they are a bit strange – but I think they’ll grow on us.

I did go back to church and I’ve been in church ever since – it was the best thing that ever happened to me.

It was great.

I now have *another* family – a strange, inappropriate, weird family – but one I deeply love.

Brothers, sisters, kids.

Mi casa su casa. My house is your house. And my field is your field.

And yours is mine.

I have met in people's houses – they have met in mine.

We helped each other, we cried on each other.

When one hurt we all hurt.

When one rejoiced we all rejoice.

Being united to Christ means we are united to Christ's people – **all** of them.

Different races, backgrounds, upbringings, education, social standing.

People I would never have got to know – I grew to love.

Mark 3:31–35:

Jesus' mother and his brothers came, and standing outside, they sent word to him and called him. A crowd was sitting around him and told him, "Look, your mother, your brothers, and your sisters are outside asking for you." He replied to them, "Who are my mother and my brothers?" Looking at those sitting in a circle around him, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! **Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.**"

Yes – you give up your kingdom – your home and at times your family.

But you get hundreds of homes and families.

Today we will induct new members. We welcome them into the family – our family.

They have been warned and are still willing to join us.

We bind ourselves together.

These new members get a whole bunch of strange but awesome brothers, sisters, mothers and children.

They will have homes and fields the world over.

Wherever I travel around the world and go to church – they are family. I am welcomed in – they say brother you are family.

Married or single – if you are in a church – you are an aunty or uncle a hundred times over.

In a real sense there are no single people in the church – we are all one big family.

I have been in homes all over the world.

And we try and open our home to others.

Fields here means property, food, sustenance.

We support the brothers and sisters who need it.

The unexpected addition to this list of blessings is – persecutions.

If you and I were going to make a list of blessings from God in this life – persecutions would probably not be on the list.

But it is a blessing. James 1 says that persecutions, trials, suffering are one of the good and perfect gifts that come down from the Father.

They remove the dross. They make us long for eternity. They make us godlier and more like Christ.

The church rallies to help persecuted saints.

The church grows in the midst of persecutions.

They persecuted Jesus – if we inherit His kingdom we inherit His persecutions.

And then we come to the great blessing – when this life is done – following Jesus means you gain eternal life in the age to come.

Heaven.

You give up your life, your kingdom and gain the kingdom of heaven.

As Jim Elliot so wonderfully put it:

He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.

In the past few years I have attended more funerals than I would like to have.

Some were Christian, some were not.

The difference was so stark.

Last year I attended the funeral of a man I knew for half a decade. He was not a Christian. He had several wives, several defacto wives. He died a very wealthy man.

At the funeral, people struggled to find anything good to say about his life. The theme was – yes he made a lot of mistakes – yes he struggled and made painful mistakes – but hey – he made a lot of money.

It was clear that there was a lot of pain and regret in his life and the funeral did not have any message of hope after death.

Other funerals were so different. Men and women who loved Jesus. Most died with very little. But what an impact. Person after person standing to say how their lives, their faith was impacted by this brother or sister.

And the dominant theme was joy and the certain blessing of life in the age to come.

Verse 31:

But many who are first will be last, and the last first.

This is not the kind of greatness we understand.

The world says coming last makes only makes you the greatest loser.

Servants are clearly inferior to those they serve. Last place is last.

But here is a divine truth. Jesus who is God – did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped – but emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant and humbling Himself to the point of death, even death on a cross.

And in this He showed His true greatness – and the day will come when God the Father will show how great this act truly was and Jesus will be highly exalted and He will receive the name above every name and every knee in heaven and on earth will bow before Him and every tongue will confess that He is Lord.

By becoming low – Jesus became great.

And now He wants His disciples and us to know – that if we want true greatness – then we must **choose** to humble ourselves as He did.

If you want to be great in the kingdom of this world – don't follow Jesus.

If you want to be great in the kingdom of Jesus – now and eternally – choose to lay down your kingdom for His.

You might look like a loser in the eyes of the world. Not much money, no Wikipedia entry, no trappings of power.

But in eyes of heaven – you are at the head of the line because you shaped your life to declare – only God is great.

And what you get is a family now – us. Warts and all. Strengths and imperfections.

And one day you receive eternal life.

If you are visiting today and you found this service as strange as I did – I ask you to consider what lies behind it.

We believe this world is temporary and this life is not all there is.

We believe the only way to enter the kingdom to come is through Jesus who died in our place to make us worthy of heaven.

His death for our sin.

It is all gain.

In the meantime until we die – there is gain – we have awesome blessings – we have life abundant now – a new family, hope, joy – and then comes eternal gain – life eternal in the age to come.

Thirty-five years ago I sat on a rock at the beach telling these things to my mother.

She realized the cost but wanted the gain. Her life was forever changed that day.

I'd love to share more with you.

I'd love to tell you how you can gain life eternal. It is the greatest blessing both now and forever.

## **The Blessings Of Heaven And Earth (Mark 10:28-31 August 4, 2019)**

**Main Point: Following Jesus means giving up our kingdom to gain His kingdom.**

### **General Questions:**

1. What is Jesus' kingdom like in this life?
2. What is Jesus' kingdom like in the life to come?
3. What does it mean to follow Jesus?
4. What is it that the disciples left behind to follow Jesus?
5. What is it that most of us seek out to build our kingdom?
6. Why did Jesus come to build an upside-down kingdom?
7. How do you enter Jesus' kingdom?
8. How is joining the church a blessing?
9. How is persecution a blessing?

### **Application Questions:**

1. Are there any areas you need to sacrifice to follow Jesus?
2. How can you make new Christians feel more welcome in the church?
3. How can you learn to long more for eternity?
4. What are the greatest blessings for you of being in the church?
5. What are you longing for in the kingdom to come?