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WHAT IT MEANS 'TO ENTER' THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Someone recently made the claim that there is a difference between "ENTERING" into the kingdom of God and "INHERITING" the kingdom of God. Is there really a difference between these two statements or do they mean the same thing?

Let's look at the account of the young man who came to Christ, to see how Jesus Christ used these words "enter" and "inherit". This account of the rich young ruler coming to Christ is recorded in the first three gospels: in Matthew 19:16-29; in Mark 10:17-31 and in Luke 18:18-30. All three accounts clearly refer to the same incident.

The three texts are too long to print out here, so please check them in your own Bible, as we cover these verses.

Consider the following points:

1) THE CONTEXT: In all three accounts the subject being talked about is very clearly "ETERNAL LIFE"... that is the opening question and that is what each account concludes with.

2) Matthew 19:16 tells us that the young ruler asked ... how may I "HAVE" eternal life ...; BUT Mark 10:17 and Luke 18:18 both tell us that he asked ... how may I "INHERIT" eternal life.

So which account is right... Matthew or the other 2 accounts? Did the man actually ask about "HAVING" or about "INHERITING" eternal life? Is there a difference in these two words as far as God is concerned, since different writers were inspired to use different Greek words for what the man actually said in Aramaic?

The Greek words used are as follows:

- in Matthew 19:16 "have" is the Greek word "echo";
- in Mark 10:17 "inherit" is the Greek word "kleronomeo";
- in Luke 18:18 "inherit" is the Greek word "kleronomeo".

3) In response to the man's question, Jesus Christ talked about "ENTERING" into life in Matthew 19:17. Now was Jesus Christ being evasive here, or did He equate "having" eternal life and "inheriting" eternal life with "entering" life?

4) Is there in fact a difference between "HAVING", "INHERITING" and "ENTERING" eternal life ... the subject being discussed in these passages?

Since "HAVING" and "INHERITING" eternal life are clearly synonymous; and "INHERITING" clearly takes place when we "ENTER" into eternal life, the three words must all refer to the same thing.

5) At the end of each section Christ is recorded as talking about eternal life again... BUT:

- Matthew 19:29 says He said..."INHERIT" eternal life; whereas

- Mark 10:30 & Luke 18:30 say He said... "RECEIVE" eternal life.

Thus what did Christ actually say? Did He say "receive" or did He say "inherit" eternal life? They are obviously different Greek words. But is there in fact a difference between "inheriting" and "receiving"? Actually Christ spoke in Aramaic and the gospel-writers understood "inheriting" and "receiving" to be the same thing. Therefore they felt free to translate this into Greek with either one of these words.

For the record, the Greek words used are as follows:

- in Matthew 19:29 "inherit" is the Greek word "kleronomeo";

- in Mark 10:30 "receive" is the Greek word "lambano";

- in Luke 18:30 "receive" is the Greek word "apolambano".

6) Matthew 19:23 tells us Christ said: how hardly shall a rich man enter the kingdom of..."HEAVEN"; but Mark 10:23 and Luke 18:24 both state that Christ said: how hardly shall a rich man enter the kingdom of..."GOD".

Therefore what did Christ actually SAY here ... "kingdom of heaven" or "kingdom of God"? Does this mean or does it not mean that with God these two terms are INTERCHANGEABLE, just like other words are interchangeable (e.g. have, enter, receive or inherit eternal life)?

7) Matthew is the only writer to use both terms in this episode... in Matthew 19:23 he records Christ as saying "kingdom of heaven" and in Matthew 19:24 he records Christ as saying "kingdom of God". So does this not reinforce that with God these two terms are interchangeable?

8) Neither Jesus Christ nor the rich young man was speaking in Greek. They were speaking in Aramaic. For anyone who is fluent in two or more languages these minor differences in the Greek-language Gospel accounts should be very easy to understand:

-What the man asked in Aramaic could be rendered equally correctly into Greek as "having" or as "inheriting" eternal life.

-What Christ stated at the end of each account in Aramaic could be rendered equally correctly into Greek as "inheriting" or as "receiving" eternal life.

-What Christ stated in Aramaic in reference to rich men and their future could be rendered equally correctly into Greek as "the kingdom of heaven" or as "the kingdom of God", as far as the actual meaning is concerned.

That is why the different writers were inspired to use different Greek words for the same original Aramaic conversation.

Do any of us actually think that GOD is so very concerned about supposed differences between "having" or "inheriting" or "entering" or "receiving" eternal life, when He inspired different writers to use different Greek words for the same original conversation? If we make a careful study of how the Greek words "echo", "kleronomeo", "lambano" and "apolambano" are used in these three accounts, then we can see that they are clearly used as being interchangeable.

9) In Matthew 19:17 Christ talked about "ENTERING" life to answer the question about "HAVING" or "INHERITING" eternal life. A few verses on Jesus Christ talked about "ENTERING" THE KINGDOM OF GOD or THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN" in regard to rich men.

Is there any indication ANYWHERE in these verses that Christ suddenly, and for no apparent reason, changed the subject from talking about eternal life to talking about something else?

- The rich man had asked about eternal life.
- He rejected the way to eternal life that Christ offered him.
- THEN Christ used the expression "kingdom of God" in an obvious reference to this rich man.
- THEN the apostles asked about their reward and Christ again mentioned eternal life, obviously still on the same subject.

10) The apostles clearly identified Christ's reference to "entering the kingdom of God" in Matthew 19:24 with "being saved" in the next verse.

We should be able to see that the apostles felt that "entering the kingdom of God" had to do with "being saved". A person is only "saved" at the time of the resurrection or (if alive at the second coming of Christ) when one is changed into an immortal spirit being.

Can anyone "enter" the kingdom of God and yet be "NOT YET saved"? Or can anyone "inherit" the kingdom of God and yet be "NOT YET saved"? No, that is not possible.

2 Timothy 2:14 clearly speaks about this kind of argument, in wanting to make some kind of distinction between "entering" the kingdom of God and "inheriting" the kingdom of God.

Of these things put [them] in remembrance, charging [them] before the Lord THAT THEY STRIVE NOT ABOUT WORDS TO NO PROFIT, [but] to the subverting of the hearers. (2 Timothy 2:14)

11) In 1 Corinthians 15:50 we have the clear statement that physical, mortal people "...CANNOT INHERIT the kingdom of God". The word for "inherit" is the same Greek word we have already met in Matthew 19. It is "kleronomeo". Therefore it also means that physical people cannot "enter, have, or receive" the kingdom of God.

Now since in Matthew 19, Mark 10 and Luke 18 the different words clearly refer to the same thing (i.e. "have", "receive" and "enter" the kingdom), that must also be the case in 1 Corinthians 15:50. It is equally true to say that flesh and blood cannot:

- "have the kingdom of God"
- "receive the kingdom of God"
- "enter the kingdom of God".

12) This Greek word for "inherit" is "kleronomeo", and it is a compound word formed from the two words:

- KLEROS, meaning "a lot" or "a share" or "a portion";

- NEMOMAI, meaning "to possess", from the noun NOMOS meaning "law".

In plain English this word means: TO POSSESS BY LAW A LOT OR A SHARE. This is the same as "having" or "receiving" by law a share; and when one "enters" into the kingdom of God, it is then that one has "received a lot, a portion or a share".

The meaning of this Greek word for "inherit" does not differ from the meaning conveyed by the words "having", "receiving" and "entering". The gospel-writers used these terms interchangeably.

So we have examined how these different words are used in parallel accounts, to refer to exactly the same original conversation. Therefore they are clearly used as interchangeable in the context of eternal life. We have not examined the content of the conversation itself to any extent. When that is done, it is also readily apparent that Jesus Christ was speaking in plain terms which His listeners readily understood. The question was about how to inherit eternal life. In response the different gospel-writers use the terms "inheriting", "having", "entering" and "receiving" life. Christ's answer to the question was clear and precise ... there were no subtle innuendos that might mislead His audience.

This was in fact an absolutely VITAL question, central to God's supreme ultimate purpose for mankind (how to receive eternal life), and there is NO WAY that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, would have answered this in an evasive manner, which requires a thorough understanding of philosophy and psychology to understand correctly! It is a pointed question with a straightforward answer.

It is clear that "entering eternal life" means the same thing as "inheriting eternal life". And this is based on the words of Jesus Christ Himself!

THEREFORE it should also be clear that "ENTERING THE KINGDOM OF GOD" means exactly the same thing as "INHERITING THE KINGDOM OF GOD". If we don't enter into life until we inherit it, how can we possibly enter into the kingdom of God before inheriting it? In all three accounts entering into the kingdom of God is firmly tied to entering into (or inheriting or receiving or having) eternal life.

As the old song goes ...

you can't have one ...

you can't have none ...

you can't have one without the other!

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