

Wheelersburg Baptist Church 12/13/92
Matthew 18:1-5 "Lessons from a Child"

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Intro:

Q: How many people here tonight were saved before the age of 10? Of 18?
Statistics show that most Christians were born again in the early developmental years of life. That's not to say that people can't be saved as adults, certainly not.

Q: What's so special about children?
Tonight, it will be our privilege to see 2 children follow the Lord's command by being baptized. How exciting!

But first, let's probe God's Word. What is it that's peculiar about children?
Ps 8:2 "Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings hast thou ordained strength..."

Q: What lessons can we learn from a child?

A: You'll find the answer by turning to Jesus' words in Matthew 18:1-4.

The Setting:

V 1 "At the same time came the disciples unto Jesus."

What time? What's been happening in Jesus' life?

Jesus has announced that He is going to be betrayed and killed (17:22). What sad news! The Messiah would be crucified.

How did the disciples respond? Yes, they were "sorry" (17:23). But soon they became preoccupied with something else. Guess what?

Matthew's account doesn't tell us. But the parallel gospel accounts fill in the gaps. Mark says that as the disciples traveled, they started disputing among themselves along the way (9:33-38). About what? They were arguing about who was the greatest in the Kingdom! After all, Peter, James, and John just returned from the privileged trip to the Mount of Transfiguration. Jesus detected their rivalry, and challenged them.

Then they blurted out...

V 1 "Who is the greatest in the Kingdom of heaven?"

Now that's an amazing question! Given the fact He just told them He was going to die, here they are thinking about themselves. It sets the stage for Matthew 18.

Matthew 18 falls into 2 parts. In the first part, Jesus talks about Greatness. In the second part, He teaches about Forgiveness.

Here's the question: "Who is the greatest in the Kingdom?"

Q: How did Jesus respond to the question?

Proposition: In Matthew 18:1-5, Jesus gave the disciples a 3-part response to their question about greatness.

I. Jesus' Action (2)

II. Jesus' Answer (3)

III. Jesus' Application (4-5)

Watch what Jesus did first.

I. Jesus' Action (2)

V 2 "And Jesus called a little child unto Him, and set him in the midst..."

That's an intriguing action. The disciples are arguing about greatness. And Jesus sets a child in their midst.

Notice it was a "little child." That doesn't refer to stature (small), but age (young). The word indicates a very young child. In fact, though this is speculation, the child may have been Peter's, since 17:25 indicates they were at his house.

Q: What's the point? Why the child?

Q: What's true of children?

Children have something adults need. We can learn a lesson from children.

Mt 11:25 "Jesus said... I thank Thee...because Thou hast hidden these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes."

Q: What's true of children?

1. Young children, are not concerned about Social Status.

I said YOUNG children. As children grow older, they become just like adults and become very preoccupied with what people think. But small children don't get hung up with "image" and "status" and "prestige."

Illust: When I was in the 1st grade, I was invited to 2 birthday parties, on the same day I think. One was a fancy rollerskating party, and the well-to-do parents had rented out the whole rink. The other was at the boy's house, a run down residence. For the party table, they took an old beat up door and laid it across some chairs, as I recall. I guess I noticed something was different about the 2 parties, but you know what? I think the kids had a good time at both.

Young children aren't hung up on status like we adults are.

2. Young children are eager to learn.

YOUNG children again. They love to learn. They're full of questions. They don't pretend to be "know-it-alls"!

3. Young children have a great Capacity to Trust.

They're not skeptical. Unlike adults who have a complicated view of life, a child has a pretty simplistic outlook on life. They trust. No problem is too big.

Illust: S.S. class praying for Plum Kitty's tail to grow back!

So children are not concerned about Social status. They're eager to learn. They have a great Capacity to Trust.

Now plug those observations into the story. The disciples asked Jesus a question, "Who is the Greatest in the Kingdom?" How does He respond? With a profound Action. He sets before them a child, someone who's not influenced by Social status, someone who's eager to learn, and someone who has a great capacity to trust.

Then He responded with something else. First an Action, then...

II. Jesus' Answer (3)

V 3 "Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted..."

Stop there.

Q: What is the Kingdom? "The Rule of God." One day that Rule will be a physical, literal, earthly Kingdom--the Millennial Kingdom (Rev 20). That will happen when the King returns! But in this present age, the age between the 2 comings of Christ, the rule of Christ is "incognito." Does Jesus rule over a Kingdom right now? Yes. Where? In the hearts of His people, in the lives of His followers.

Lk 17:21 "Behold the Kingdom of God is in the midst of you."

Q: How did Jesus say you enter the Kingdom?

A: Notice 2 requirements in v 3.

1. Be converted. (lit. "turn")

The word means "to change." If we're going to enter the Kingdom, we need to experience a lifechange. We need to stop looking at things the way the world does. And then...

2. Become as little children.

What does that mean? Is Jesus holding up the child to promote childishness? No. Here's the idea. A true follower of Christ, a true participant in the Kingdom of God, is a person who views himself as a child does. He makes a decision to stop being preoccupied with seeking social status. He learns to Trust Jesus Christ.

Jesus' point is this. If we're ever going to participate in God's kingdom, if we're ever going to enjoy the benefits of heaven, we need the humility of a child.

Mt 5:3 "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom..."

Truly great people are Humble people. Pride is thinking ourselves more important than we really are. It was pride that led man to sin at the beginning (Gen 3:5). But listen. If we are going to be accepted in God's eyes, we must accept the truth about ourselves--we are sinners, we are unacceptable in God's sight, we are helpless to save ourselves. All our good deeds are as filthy rags.

Illust:

Tran: Jesus's Response included one more thing about greatness. His Action, Answer,

III. Jesus' Application (4-5)

Vv 4-5 "Whosoever..."

Now we're back to the original issue the disciples raised in v 1.

Q: How does a person become GREAT in the Kingdom?

A: Jesus gives 2 practical prerequisites to greatness...

1. Whosoever shall humble himself as this little child (4).

There's that word again--HUMBLE himself. To be great in God's eyes, we must be humble. Humble like a little child. Recognizing our spiritual bankruptcy. The second practical prerequisite to greatness...

2. Whosoever shall receive a child receives Me (5).

Notice the connection. If a person receives a child, he's actually receiving Christ Himself. What's that mean?

See: Mt 19:13-14 "Do not hinder...let the little children come..."

What's the point? How do you treat people who can do nothing for you? Especially, how do you treat children? Do you have time for them? Or are they a nuisance to you?

If you only love people that add to your status, if you only scratch the backs of people who can in return scratch yours, you're no different than the Wallstreet tycoon. You don't understand what Grace is all about.

Illust:

Conclusion:

Q: Who's the greatest in the Kingdom?

A: According to Jesus' Action, Answer, and Application, those who have taken the lesson from a child.

We can all learn a lesson from a child tonight.

V 3 "Except ye be converted and become as little children, you shall not enter..."

O friend, tonight it will be our privilege to witness the testimony of 2 young children who have done just that. They've admitted the truth about themselves--they are sinners. They placed the confidence of their lives in Jesus Christ, for the forgiveness of sins.

V 3 tells us who the Kingdom belongs to.

Let me be very specific. V 3 tells us which people will go to heaven.

1. Those who have been converted.
2. Those who have become as little children.

Friend, the people who are genuinely saved are the people who've experienced a turning, a lifechange, and who have like children, learned to trust in Another. Those are the prerequisites we must meet if we're going to go to God's heaven. We must repent of our sins, and we must believe in Jesus Christ.

Q: Have you done that?

If you died this night, are you certain you would spend eternity with God? If you're not certain, would you like to be. You can be saved tonight. Take a lesson from a child.