

"See Children as Jesus Sees Them"

Matthew 18:1-14; 19:13-15

If I asked you this morning, have you had a spiritual conversation with someone in the last week or two - and that can mean talking about God's Word, or how God is working in your life or sharing the gospel – would you be able to say 'yes, I have'? Now imagine someone said to me 'Well yes I did but it was with children. Does that count?' And if I said, 'No, that doesn't really count' that would be an extremely sad answer from me and you should be quick to reply 'Haven't you read in the Scriptures what Jesus says about children? That He's building His kingdom and that includes them? Absolutely.

This morning as we continue in our Summer Series 'See as Jesus Sees', we want to explore how does Jesus see children, your children, your grandkids and great grandkids? And if He sees them as vital to building up the kingdom – and by the way don't define building the kingdom or building the church as only getting people saved because salvation is a decision we make but growing as disciples is a lifetime process – then so should we. Whether we have children at home, whether ours have all grown up or whether we're in the middle of raising children and need to think of other's children too.

In Matt. 18:1 the disciples ask Jesus 'Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?' Remember, chapter and verse divisions were added to our Bibles to organize them and make them easier to read and find things not until the 1500's. So let's see what just transpired in the disciples' lives here that prompted this [self-centered] question about greatness.

Matthew, Mark and Luke all record this incident all in the same context. Just prior to this Jesus has just asked the 12, 'Who do you say I am?' Peter proclaimed Jesus was the Messiah, which I'm sure he spoke for all the 12. Shortly after this Jesus takes Peter, James and John up a mountain where they alone get a glimpse of Jesus in His glory. Then they go to Capernaum where Peter is asked by a tax-collector, 'Doesn't your Teacher pay the temple tax?' Peter says 'Yes He does'. But then Jesus says to Peter 'Do kings collect taxes from their sons or others?' And Peter says 'From others' to which Jesus responds

'Then the sons are exempt. ²⁷ However, not to give offense to them, go to the sea and cast a hook and take the first fish that comes up, and when you open its mouth you will find a shekel. Take that and give it to them for me and for yourself.'

When we put this all together Jesus is clearly indicating His disciples are different from the rest. The disciples assume that as 'sons' they are privileged and so this question as to who is the greatest flows from all this. How do we know for sure? Because the Greek clearly has a small word that most translations pick up on but some miss in v.1:

'Who then is the greatest in the Kingdom?'

That word then (ara) is an inferential conjunction making a direct link (inferring) to what was just said. Why is this grammatical point so important to you and me? Because, like the disciples, we may think that because we are 'sons of the Father', Jesus' disciples that we may be tempted to think we are better/more important than others.

Jesus doesn't react nor does He answer the question right away but instead calls a child to come to Him and says,

"Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. ⁴ Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. ⁵ And whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.

Before we explore this passage let's go to Ch. 19:13. The reason why I mention this first is because the events in Ch. 19 obviously happen within a short time after the events in Ch. 18. If Jesus uses children as an example of who's great in the kingdom of heaven the disciples didn't get it. Because shortly after this event we read in 19:13,

¹³ Then people brought little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them and pray for them. But the disciples rebuked them.

The very same disciples who were just told by Jesus you have to have childlike qualities to enter the kingdom of heaven! Well if Jesus desires childlike qualities, He obviously desires children to come to Him because He wants us to understand ...

Jesus Needs Children to Build His Kingdom **(19:13-15)**

People were bringing their children to Jesus in order for Him to bless them by laying hands on them and praying for them. To get a blessing from a father or Rabbi or prophet was huge in the biblical world. And when a blessing was given in the Old Testament it always had to do with a future prayer or vision for that person. So the reason why Jesus wanted to build His kingdom with adults and children is because He was looking ahead. And so by directly ministering to children we show

We need to be looking forward (vv.13-14a)

Whether these parents truly believed Jesus was the Messiah or not, they did believe that Jesus could impact their children for good and build them up. As parents we appreciate the people (teachers, coaches, Sunday school/junior church teachers, youth leaders, relatives, friends) who impact our children for good but especially for Christ. Everyone here I'm sure was led to Christ by a number of people sharing the gospel with them and have been shaped in their Christlikeness by many people.

By asking for the children to come Jesus implies their need for Him. No matter how old a child is they all understand they do things that are wrong. This is the basic element of the gospel; that all have sinned and are separated from God. Only Jesus can make us right with God.

But not all children grow up in a home where the gospel is heard so we need to have ministries that encourage people to bring children to hear the gospel. We need to encourage our children and grandchildren to be witnesses themselves to their peers. And we can be witnesses to our kid's and grandkids friends as well through lifestyle and word. As we'll see when we get back to Ch. 18 children are more receptive to the gospel than adults.

The reason why Jesus used a child as an illustration for Godly greatness is because ...

Children remind us how to trust (vv.14b-15)

¹⁴ Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." ¹⁵ When he had placed his hands on them, he went on from there.

The kingdom of heaven belongs to 'such as these'. People who are like children. People who come to Jesus as a child would. Jesus doesn't elaborate here on this because He just spoke about it in Ch. 18. Let's return there. The disciples were discussing and now ask Jesus who's the greatest in the kingdom and Jesus takes a small child and says,

"Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. ⁴ Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. ⁵ And whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.

So here Jesus uses a child to illustrate how to enter His kingdom but also how to make a difference in the kingdom.

We Need to Follow Jesus like Children **(18:1-5)**

The disciples were arguing (Mark & Luke's account) about which one of them was greater than the other, implying that each felt they could contribute more to Jesus' kingdom than others. By rebuking parents for bringing their children to Jesus they wrongly assumed children could not help advance Jesus' cause to set up His kingdom! Ah, Jesus says to Himself, you guys still don't understand My kingdom. Jesus' Kingdom is not entered into nor does it advance through achievement and power. Jesus says trust me like a child trusts,

By not trying to impress Jesus (vv.1-2)

Children had no status, power or privileges and are totally dependent on more mature people who know what they need. They had no agenda. They weren't there to replace the 12 or trying to earn their way into sitting at His right and left hand; they were only there to enjoy Him. Which tells us a lot about Jesus. He was friendly, caring, safe and a joy to be with. Children wanted to be around Jesus. The parents brought them and the parents knew Jesus was safe. The only benefit the children got from being with Jesus was joy. They were simply enjoying Jesus not trying to earn His favour or impress Him with their knowledge or accomplishments.

To '*change and become like children*', means be less concerned about status and power. The word "change" or "turn" means to go in the opposite direction. Jesus is not impressed by our qualifications. He is impressed by our admission of our sinfulness and willingness to believe in who He is by faith. He is impressed by our servant spirit.

The disciples have forgotten Jesus' teaching on how the kingdom works. It's not about how great you are but how humble you're willing to be. It's not about status but about servanthood. Children are less concerned about status and ...

Humbly trust Jesus (vv.3-4)

Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom. The children are simply content to be in His presence. Whereas the disciples want positions in the political kingdom when He

overthrows Rome and the Pharisees. They want something from Jesus when all Jesus wants from us is humble trust.

Children aren't afraid when they know their parents protect them and provide for them. Similarly, Jesus' disciples should show they are content in Jesus because they trust Him to provide and care for them in His time and in His way.

⁴Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. ⁵“Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me,

If you want to be 'great' in My eyes' Jesus was saying, 'You have to change the way you think about making an impact for Me. Enjoy me, learn from me, serve me and forget about status and power and you'll find contentment and fulfilment. And, by the way,

Accept those Jesus brings to us (v.5)

'If I bring a child into the kingdom, and especially if I bring him to your little group of disciples, welcome Him as you would Me. Regardless of their race, intellect, financial status or abilities.' Sometimes we're more concerned with who we think would be good for our church family than thanking God for who He's brought to us. The night before He died while praying in Gethsemane, Jesus said something really practical for all of us to hear:

John 17:6 "I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word. ⁷Now they know that everything you have given me comes from you. ⁸For I gave them the words you gave me and they accepted them. They knew with certainty that I came from you, and they believed that you sent me. ⁹I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours.

Jesus thanked God for this motley crew of misfit disciples. 'You gave them to me. I revealed you to them. I pray for them because they are yours and you gave them to me'. Do we pray for one another? Do we care about one another? Do we only interact with the people we're comfortable with?

Jesus was telling the disciples 'If I want a child or two and make 14 disciples, will you welcome them?' Will you stop being threatened by other disciples and start being content and work with My disciples?

⁵And whoever welcomes a little child like this in my name welcomes me. ⁶“But if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea.

Jesus is using children as an illustration for disciples. "Children like these" refers to those who humble themselves like a child who have come into the kingdom; other disciples who need to be accepted. The disciples did not see the value of the children because they were thinking only of what can they contribute. Jesus says don't judge my children by what you think they have to offer, accept them simply as fellow believers and see how together you are stronger and can accomplish more. They didn't understand this right away because before the chapter is over Peter is wondering how often should I forgive my brother and then shortly after they ask Jesus 'What's in this kingdom business for us since we have left homes and family and children?!'

When we think of Jesus getting upset, we don't think of this passage. He pronounces woes of judgment on those who hinder children "these little ones" from coming to Himself.

To Ignore Children Offends God **(18:6-14)**

⁶ *"but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea."* ⁷ *"Woe to the world for temptations to sin! For it is necessary that temptations come, but woe to the one by whom the temptation comes!"*

The millstone tied around the neck was not just an illustration. The Romans were known to do this on occasion to criminals and rebels. This is how upset Jesus is if we hinder anyone – especially children - from coming to Jesus. He brings back some of the language He used in the Sermon on the Mount about dealing radically with anger and lust so that it doesn't lead to murder or adultery.

By using strong language Jesus challenges us,

To examine ourselves: am I hindering or helping? (vv.7-10)

Is our lifestyle, our words, or lack of words hindering people/children from coming to faith in Jesus? When our faith is real and growing people see that. They want to know why we have joy, contentment and peace in life. But if we sound and act like non-believers we won't attract them to Jesus.

The word for 'despise' is look down upon. Jesus tells a parable of the lost sheep. All 100 are valued equally. Jesus says,

Value everyone as God does (vv.11-14)

... including children. Just as every sheep that belongs to a shepherd is valued so is one lost one worth it. When Jesus says '*God is not willing that any of these little ones should be lost*' is not a guarantee that every child or person will be saved. It is His heart's desire that every one might come to know Him because He loves everyone equally and sent Jesus to die for everyone. But they have to make that decision for themselves.

God has a heart for everyone including children. Jesus says start them as early as possible. When status and self-importance are concepts they don't understand yet. When simple trust and belief comes more readily to them than adults. When their memories are sharp, when we can establish truths in their life early on that are stamped in their minds even if later on they become a lost sheep. And then we pray that God may bring to their minds the things they learned early on in life and bring them to repentance.

That's why we normally have youth groups, kids' clubs, VBS, Sunday School and Junior Church. And support local ministries like Camp IAWAH, And get involved with backpacks, Shoeboxes, and sponsorships with Compassion, World Vision and GFA. Our children need to be involved in some of these where they hear the Word. We need to be open to welcoming other children into our homes and church as well. God has blessed us with many young children here and everybody likes seeing them here, but let's not just look at them being here but get involved in their walk with Jesus.

Right now because of Covid restrictions our opportunities for these ministries are limited but that will be changing soon. Let's be like a child, ready to help our children and others whom God brings our way. Let's thank God for all of us and use our new prayer bookmark to pray for each one by name. I include the children's names as well. May I encourage you to pray for our children and youth by name, using the verses on the back to guide you if you're not sure how to pray for them. If you're not sure where to start in helping our children follow Jesus can you start there?

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If you have any comments or questions about this message please contact us at olivet@rideau.net