

What Childlike Faith Really Means

Matthew 18:1-6

Introduction

- Today we are going to continue on this “Chosen” journey, and today we want to talk about our general heart posture when it comes to greatness in the kingdom of God...
 - o And we are going to have some things to relearn here, every single one of us, there may be nothing more counter intuitive about the Christian faith than the discussion of, what makes you great?
 - We naturally think of accomplishment, prestige, status. Am I a leader? Did I leverage my life a certain way? Look at what I sacrificed, look at my morality, look at what I did for you God...
 - And instead, greatness in the kingdom is defined by a childlike humility, an understanding of dependence...the last is first, the low are exalted.
- Illustration: We can end up thinking about greatness in the kingdom, and we think we're crushing it...we're just draining 3-pointer after 3-pointer.
 - o God, look what I am doing for you, sacrificing for you, look at how moral I am...
 - o Just fist pumping...and God is like, “You are shooting at the wrong goal!” I want your heart, your awareness of a need for me to increase. That will lead you to do some things and work for the kingdom, sure, but He only wants the heart...
 - God wants childlike faith, humility, dependence...you know, many times we talk about teaching kids, today we are going to learn from kids...God wants a childlike heart
- Let's dive in, walk through Matthew 18, and we will pull together an application about the childlike heart and the childlike life...
 - o Let's read all the way through this then we will go back and take it apart...

Scripture

18 At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” ² And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them ³ and said, “Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. ⁴ Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. ⁵ “Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, ⁶ but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin,^[a] 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.

18 At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?"

- Matthew is filled with long sermons of Jesus, and this is one of those. And in general, he talks a lot about the way the church is in the world...what the church looks like. How our beliefs put clothes on and act in the world...
- And a key component of the church is how it defines greatness...this is something the disciples were concerned about, it comes up multiple times in the NT...Actually in Mark 9 and Luke 9 we learn that this wasn't just a discussion, it was an argument.
 - o Have you ever had that at home? We're not fighting...we're just discussing. Well, they were discussing to the point of arguing about greatness...
- And here is the thing, this is the part of this we have to take on the chin...like the disciples, we are easily seduced by the world's definition of greatness
 - o What have you achieved, prestige, status among your peers, what do you have, what have you done...
 - Greatness in the world is the distance you put between you and everyone else...
- In general, I think we naturally assume greatness comes from outpacing other people...Illustration: I was reminded this week of Bob Beamon. Lines up at the Summer Olympics in Mexico City, 1968. Favored to win, almost didn't make the final because he scratched twice in the semis...
 - o When it's his turn he lines up, runs down the track, and takes flight...Y'all the man jumped 29 feet, 2.5 inches...he had broken the previous world record by almost 2 feet
 - o Now let me put that in perspective for you...for the last 70 years, the record had fallen in increments of about 6 centimeters at a time, he broken it by 55 centimeters
 - o They didn't have anything there to measure the jump...he outjumped what they had set up
 - o It took another 12 years for someone to break 29 feet...right now the world record in the mile is 3:43, they way that record has historically fallen I think it read it's gonna take at least another 20 years for someone to get down in the 3:30
 - It would be like someone lining up this year, out of nowhere, and running a mile in 3:28, or the 100 meters in 8.8 seconds.
- Now, is that true greatness? Well...yes, I mean...he can fly. In some sense, it is greatness, no doubt. It's a God given ability put on display for the world, no problem.
 - o But here is the thing, many of us see greatness in the kingdom of God this way, can I outjump those around me...

- o Outpacing what everyone else can do to the point of embarrassment, bring out a new measuring stick! That's greatness, you left everyone else in the dust, you proved it...
- The argument about greatness is a comparison deal, and the discussion on prominence is fueled by pride.¹
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- o In the world we fall into this...how many sales, zeros in the bank account, kid's success, and on and on...
 - And what is funny is, The disciples aren't exactly Harvard law graduates!² Even without worldly success...how many quiet times, how much Bible do you know, what have you sacrificed...doing things for Jesus can become about comparison.
- Hey, the question is, "Have we fallen into the trap today of greatness, prestige, and comparison?" And if so, are we willing to be corrected on that?
 - o Illustration: It's a constant battle in my heart...How big is the church now, how many campuses, did y'all have a growth year?
 - I struggle with this concept of comparison and greatness as much as anyone, we need what Jesus says next...

²And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them ³and said, "Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. ⁴Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

- Jesus swings a hammer for a living, grabs this kid...probably Peter's child³...and says, "You have to become like this kid."
 - o Probably some kind of food stuck to his face, hair is a mess...probably some type of wardrobe malfunction. Just smiling with no teeth in the front...looking at Jesus, looking around the room...
 - o How many times in my life am I such a stereotypical worldly man?
 - And Jesus doesn't tolerate the interruption of a child, He creates the interruption with a child...I want to be more like that.
- Now one of the temptations here is to start listing off every way that we are supposed to be like a child, and some of the commentators do this so much that it makes you wonder if they even have kids.
 - o Well kids are thoughtless about themselves, they are so unselfish with each other, they don't care about status...yea right! They are little monsters when it comes to some of this stuff...
 - Have you ever seen them try to line up, everyone wants to be the line leader!

¹ MacArthur

² Mohler

³ EBC, Carson

- They demand so much from you, and totally expect you to give it to them...without much thought of return, so I don't want to romanticize everything with kids here...
- OK, were not called to be childlike in every way, but in a particular way...which comes out in verse 4, humbled like a child
 - o Humility of mind, not childness of thought⁴
 - o Without any real power or wealth, especially not living in a child-centric culture...this was not an era in human history of Disney World and swim meets...
 - Kids know...I need help, that's the point! I don't think, for once, Jesus is saying anything more complicated than this
 - Childlike humility is knowing how much you need God...
- The point is, **childlike faith begins with the awareness of great need**
- They asked who is the greatest, Jesus gives them the only way in...humility, the awareness of need.
 - o My works, insufficient. Morality, accomplishment, power, insufficient...I need Jesus Christ to take me up in His arms. I need to become like a child...
 - We need to realize in the gospel, Jesus chose someone with nothing to give...
- That spot of need is greatness...now I don't know about you, I don't particularly like when God puts me in a spot where the lesson is, you need me...but if we get the lesson, it's worth it
 - o Don't want to be tight financially, don't want to need
 - o Don't want to be sick.
 - o Illustration: Biggest struggle is missionaries, learning a new language you are a total child again...so frustrated they couldn't get the iPhone set up, and it was just helplessness
 - We don't like this stuff, but if what we get is to remember we need God, it's worth it...childlike dependence...
- And then he turns and the last two verses here about what it looks like to carry a humble attitude in life...
- What is God doing to out you in childlike dependence
 - o I don't want to be in that place, but if that's where I have to go in order to humble ourselves, than God do it...

⁵“Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, ⁶but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin,^[a] 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.

- Receive, welcome, accept...Jesus is saying, the way I received you, you should receive others

⁴ EBC, Carson

- o Gospel: Jesus didn't pick you because of merit, accomplishment, He didn't pick you because you were great...
- o We were sinners far from God...and Jesus stepped into humanity for us. You know why you can become like a child? Because Jesus became a child for us. He came to live, die, and resurrect...because we needed Him to do that.
 - The childlike spirit in us says, "I couldn't do it"...Jesus had to and He did. I needed him, and He came for me...
- The mark of having received Jesus is that you would receive others. Jesus didn't look for greatness in you, you don't have to see that in them...
 - o It's not even just about children. Most of us have an antenna. I will receive people into my life that benefit me, my social standing, that I can gain from...and Jesus is asking, "Do you have room in your life for people who aren't that?"
 - o Will you stop and talk to someone who engages you on the street asking for something...actually talk with them. Students, what is your posture toward those kids no one else wants to sit with? Senior in college, what is your attitude toward the freshman?
 - And oh yes...are we receiving the kids? What's our heart toward the orphan, the foster child, the unborn?
- Christians receive them, and we take seriously those who cause stumbling in these little ones...these, the least of these
 - o A millstone around the neck is a graphic deal, it was a form of execution...it would be like saying, don't cause a little one to stumble, the electric chair would be better for you...
- God takes seriously those who cause the faith of the little ones to stumble...You might say, "I would never do that!"
 - o We can do it through gossip, temptation. College campus the partier who is always pushing someone else to go...
 - o Parents provoking our kids to anger, are we causing them to stumble?
 - o Criticism, seduction, coercion...puffing up someone's pride in legalism.
 - It would be better for a millstone to be tied around the neck and thrown into the sea. How could that be better than anything on earth? And yet that's what Jesus says...
- The point is those who have been received well, receive well....show

Demonstrate a childlike heart by receiving children

- God loves kids and he charges the church to receive them. What He did for us we do for others...He didn't pick because of greatness, and what He could achieve by being near to us...
 - o Comparison, rivalry, arguments about greatness...they should be replaced with a childlike heart demonstrated by how we care for people...

- And obviously with our series here, I want to turn this toward physical kids, which is not all this is about, but it is certainly some of what is going on here...
Matthew 19:13 Then children were brought to him that he might lay his hands on them and pray. The disciples rebuked the people, ¹⁴ but Jesus said, “Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven.” ¹⁵ And he laid his hands on them and went away.
- Let me close by talking about a few practical ways we can do this. Receive the kids in your kids’ orbit.
 - o I watch older believers and one common thread around those of you who have done this for a while, you took very seriously the role you could have in your kids friends lives...
 - o At the ball field, through class projects, and conversations around the dinner table. Christianity is increasingly becoming novelty, your family may be the only window they have
- Receive kids by working with them in ministry
 - o Serve the children of this church...They are our collective greatest resource for the kingdom. Some of you wonder what we do in kids ministry, it’s not babysitting, it’s disciple making...
 - o We are sharpening arrows week in and week out to be sent carrying the gospel wherever life takes them....
 - o Let’s talk about availability, gifting...
 - o Talking about raising up a ton of families to serve in adoption and foster care, more kids...more disciples needed
 - o Single folks, this is a call for you to be involved...Illustration: She says, “For the first few years in the field, when I realized for at least the next several years I was going to be single, I grieved the loss of being able to have biological children. God used that, by grace, and through tears, to make me the proudest and most joy filled spiritual mom on the planet the day that I saw my spiritual son baptized in the unreached corners of East Asia. Honestly, I don’t know what it’s like to hold my baby for the first time in my arms after he’s been born. I would imagine it feels like your heart’s about to burst with joy. I’d imagine that because that’s exactly how I felt as this young man came up from the baptismal waters reborn as a child of God. It was a beautiful moment for me. This doctrine of spiritual, eternal children has by far been the most inspiring, joy-giving, biblical doctrine, maybe, of my whole life.”

Conclusion

Receive kids through adoption and foster care

- Again, this isn’t for everybody...but every single person can play a part...Can you hold the rope?

- And that is greatness in the kingdom...not that you out jumped everybody, but stayed humble and God dependent
 - o By the way, this is what is so awesome about the kingdom, it's not that everyone can be great, everyone is supposed to be great
 - o Maybe you aren't a charismatic leader, you are thinking I am going to live, be a Christian, and be gone
 - o There is greatness in that...a living testimony that God is enough, taking these things you hear that are going on in your local church and lifting them up to God, a simple invitation to those in your life that are hurting, "Hey come learn about Jesus. He is awesome."...Receive kids.
 - This is greatness...

*Sermon by Andrew Hopper, lead pastor of Mercy Hill Church in Greensboro, N.C.
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