

Title: Become as Little Children
Text: Matthew 18: 1-6
Date: September 4, 2011
Place: SGBC, New Jersey

Matthew 18: 1: At the same time came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?

Mark says the disciples disputed about this in the way. Luke observes when they came to the house where the Lord was, they were silent. But the Lord knew their thoughts. Christ drew them nearer and they asked him what he already knew they were disputing about. **Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?**

Matthew 18: 2: And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them, 3: And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.

Except ye be converted—turned—from this pride, from this ambition of seeking a place of preeminence, from vain views of honour, wealth, and riches...Weren't they already converted? Yes. But we are being converted by his grace.

And become as little children: humble as a little child, modest, not seeking to be greater than another—*Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.*

Matthew 18: 4: Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

I. CARNAL GROWTH IS IN MANY WAYS THE REVERSE OF SPIRITUAL GROWTH

Remember when your children were *little* children. Do you remember when you were a little child. We asked. We believed, trusted. We were dependent and loved it to be so. I have been thinking lately about when I was a little child in my dad's house.

But as children grow, something changes—the sin that is there by birth—becomes more apparent. The asking takes a different spirit—we began to “question” the one in authority—there is a difference between asking and questioning. I remember how I begin to put more confidence in my own understanding than my dad. He used to tell me, “You’re getting to big for your britches.”; “You’re hormones are raging.” Our rebellion is sin saying of the Authority—“I will not have this man reign over me!”

My hand was still open for the freebies, but I wanted to be independent of my dad. Do you remember that? The more we grow in sin the more we think we deserve God's favors but we want them apart from God.

Eventually, we move out, we stop asking. Our confidence is in ourselves. We depend on ourselves.

That is the natural order of growth, but it is also what happens between a sinner and God the Father as we grow in sin.

II. REVERSE THAT ORDER AND WE HAVE SPIRITUAL GROWTH IN THE HEART.

Christ finds his elect child completely separated in his own mind and in his sin dead flesh: moved out, not asking God for anything, all confidence in ourselves, not depending on God at all.

When God begins his work of grace in the heart—gives life, faith—converted, like a new born babe. Do you remember when the only thing you knew was Christ—a little child, a babe in Christ.

- Have mercy on me the sinner?
- Remember me when you come into your kingdom?
- Lord, if you will, you can make me whole?
- Whereas I was blind now I see?
- Yes Lord, I am a dog, but even the dogs get a crumb from their Master's table.

Do you remember that?

But the flesh is still with us—dead, a full grown smart-elleck dead man. In that new man we believe on him, but we still far too often question—far too often our asking, is really questioning God. We believe him, but we still put far too much confidence in our own understanding. We far too often find ourselves trying to be independent of God and yet holding our hands out for the freebies.

But true growth—to truly become men in understanding, is to become children in malice. To rise to the greatness of grace, is to be continually growing down to littleness, to simplicity, to the trustfulness of a little child. We do the more we see that there is no good thing in our flesh.

Don't look to our righteousnesses or our gifts or we will think we deserve to be accounted the greatest—humbling ourselves is becoming more and more dependent as a little child upon Christ, to follow him by faith as a little child follows his father.

III. WHEN WE FIND OURSELVES TAKING FAULT WITH ANOTHER, WE DO WELL TO SEE OURSELVES BEFORE GOD

That employee, or secretary, or co-worker who we think is not serving the boss as they ought—we ought to consider that we are not serving God nearly as we ought.

When that son or daughter is trying to usurp the authority of God: trying to tell you how to fulfill the responsibility God has put in your hands, telling you how you could better rule your own house, speaking out in defiance against you.

It is humbling to behold ourselves—these proud, hormone-raging teenagers we still are before God our Father. “That's not me? Do you deserve a higher seat than that?”

When we see the short comings in those we love, if we can but see our own unfaithfulness before God, rather than lift us up in pride, it greatly humbles us before God. What is my problem when I have a problem with others around me? I need to be converted. What is my problem when I so proud that I think I deserve a better place than another worm? I need to become as a little child

Illustration: Not getting a reply on email. Talking with a friend this week about sending emails out to other friends, sometimes we don't get a reply. My friend pointed out: what makes us get offended by that is because we think, “How dare you don't respond to this one who is the greatest!”

His disciples asked, “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” The Lord answered, “Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.”

It helps us to remember the pit where God found us: the Pit was an open sewer. Abomination—not the barf bag, what goes in it; not the toilet bowl, what goes in it. All our righteousnesses are as menstrual clothes—filthy rags: that’s God’s Word to me and to you.

IV. WHO IS THE GREATEST IN THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN?

The one who humbled himself so low as to be made what he hated—Christ Jesus. Christ was declaring this in that illustration when he washed the disciple’s feet.

Took off his garment—

Philippians 2: 6: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: 7: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men:

He lowered himself to Peter’s feet and washed his feet—

Philippians 2: 8: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

Galatians 3: 13: Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed *is* every one that hangeth on a tree:

2 Corinthians 5: 21: For he hath made him *to be* sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

Christ who knew no sin—despised the shame of sin.

Hebrews 12: 2: Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of *our* faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.

He made himself of no reputation—as far as one can go.

Philippians 2: 3: *Let* nothing *be done* through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves.

Christ esteemed the glory of his Father better than himself. Christ esteemed the salvation of his elect better than himself. How much so? He was made a curse for both! “Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him” (Philippians 2: 9.) Christ highly exalted God when took the lowest place for God and his brethren.

Be sure to get this: To esteem other better than ourselves is to highly exalt Christ. It is to give Christ the preeminence. Christ highly exalted God and his brethren by making himself the absolute least. By that he declared the glory of God’s righteousness, washed his people of our sins—completely

Philippians 2: 9: Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him and given him a name which is above every name: 10: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of *things* in heaven, and *things* in earth, and *things* under the earth; 11: And *that* every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ *is* Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

When we exalt ourselves over one of Christ's little children—one for whom Christ died—we attempt to exalt ourselves above Christ. We do the exact opposite—of what Christ did when he made himself least and highly exalted God. When we look down upon our brethren, or exalt ourselves by criticizing our brethren, or think we deserve a higher place than our brethren—we do that against Christ. That is what Christ told his disciples.

Matthew 18: 5: And whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me. 6: But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and *that* he were drowned in the depth of the sea.

If we truly want Christ to have the preeminence, we will prefer our brethren above ourselves. Because my brethren are so one with Christ by what he has done, that receiving them, Christ says, you receive me. And exalting ourselves over him we might as well be exalting ourselves over Christ. What did Peter say to us on Thursday night?

1 Peter 5: 5:...all *of you* be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. 6: Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time: 7: Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you.

Christ humbled himself—when he was the least—he cried out—the Son of man cast all his care upon the Father. He was heard. In due time, when he had satisfied justice, purged our sin, “wherefore God hath also highly exalted him”.

Illustration: As I was preparing this message, Friday, I heard Will scream. In the backyard, he was running along looking back at Emma and ran into the pole that holds the bird feeder: big knot on his forehead, tears streaming down his face. I went to him at the sound of his cry. He cast himself upon me and I cared for him.

Now our Savior says, to his disciples, “Humble yourself under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time, casting all your care on him, for he careth for you!”

AMEN!