

Faith In the Home

The Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost
Matthew 18:1-20, "Childish Faith."

In Matthew 18, Jesus is asked by His disciples, "Who is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven?" There were children around when Jesus was asked this question and Jesus called one in the midst of the group, and said, "Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, 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."

We can gather from Jesus' response to this question that children are extremely important to Him, and so much so that He wants us to be humble like a child. Certainly, children can exude an innocence at times in the world (something that is quickly stripped away with our culture and the number of broken homes). Children get really excited, and they can bring a sense of wonder when they encounter and learn new things. If we can look at sunset and see the glory of God in the beauty, and be in awe of it, that is a good thing. If we can praise God over the simplest things in life that is good thing.

However, that is not exactly what Jesus is talking about when He said, "Unless you can turn and become like children, you will never enter the Kingdom of Heaven." Children are wonderful. Children are a blessing. Children are...a lot of work! While their needs change overtime and circumstance, children need their parents. The younger they are the more they need them. Not to mention, the longer children are left unsupervised the more trouble they can get into. What happens if a toddler doesn't have someone to care for them? Can that toddler survive? So, it is with us and God. If we do not have God, there is no Kingdom of Heaven for us, not to mention if we don't have God we don't even exist. If we don't have Jesus, we don't have eternal life, forgiveness of sins, new life, meaning, and purpose. Without Jesus there is death, Hell, and judgement. With Jesus there is grace, mercy, love, and the Kingdom Heaven. So, Jesus is basically answering the question, "Who is the greatest?" by telling the disciples, "Quit worrying about how you compare with others and your own glory, and depend on me like a child depends on their parent!"

There is so much to unpack in Matthew 18, but the point all drives back to the fact that Jesus is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven, and He laid His life down for us. He humbled Himself to die on the cross for us. He laid down His life so that He would be raised up again, so that we who believe and depend on Him for all good things will be raised up into His eternal Kingdom one day, too. You free from worrying about how you stack up in every aspect of your life. You have been given grace upon grace in Jesus Christ.

So how do we apply this to our lives:

1. Grace does not free us from the responsibility of our vocations, but it does empower us and free us to be renewed in Christ everyday as we take on our vocations. Grace frees you from the guilt of falling short, because Christ's mercies are new every day. You have a clean slate to love and serve others.
2. God's Law sets up an impossible standard for sinners to live up to. "If your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out." Jesus in Matthew 18, is doubling down on His emphasis on our need for Him. That doesn't mean that we shouldn't try to avoid sinning at all costs, but remember we live by grace. The Law points out our need of a savior. The Law brings our eyes to look upon Jesus.
3. If you are a parent, you know how your own children can be wearisome with their needs. Jesus invites you cast that kind of need upon Him, and unlike us, He is doesn't get tired or annoyed when we depend on Him.
4. Jesus never said, "God helps those who help themselves." He did say, "Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven." The more you depend on Him, the more He will work through you.