

Childlike Humility and Faith

Matt. 19:13-24

Intro. Once again, we're on the threshold of a season of concentrated ministry to boys and girls. Five of our own young people are away at training right now and our 5 day clubs are scheduled to begin July 11th. Then just 3 weeks later on Aug. 1st, our VBS entitled, *Ocean Commotion* will begin. During that week our grounds, gymnasium, worship center and classrooms will literally be teaming with people of all ages. I hope you're planning to be involved in some way and have already begun to pray that God will bring many friends to hear His Word. We're asking God to bring some into His ark of salvation by trusting the Lord Jesus. Nothing in all the world matters more to God than the people we endeavor to reach! And most precious to Him are the children who haven't yet hardened their hearts or found excuses for not trusting in Him.

As we continue our study of Matthew's Gospel this morning I'd like to have you turn to **Matt.19**. Our focus is **vs. 13-24** where we find two separate stories. The first reports the occasion when **Jesus blessed the children** who were brought to Him. In the second story, we find the encounter between **Jesus and a rich young ruler**. These two stories are recorded side by side in **Mark 10** and **Luke 18** as well as here in **Matt. 19**. To get the whole picture, we'll toggle between these accounts.

1. **Jesus and the Little Children - vs.13-15** - Then little children were brought to Jesus for him to place his hands on them and pray for them. But the disciples rebuked those who brought them. Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." When he had placed his hands on them, he went on from there.

v.13 - On this day in Judea in the third year of Jesus' public ministry, mother's, father's, aunts, uncles, grandparents, and possibly even older brothers and sisters, were bringing children to Jesus. It was take a number and stand in line. **v.13** says the children were brought to Jesus so He might **place his hands on them and pray for them**. **Little children** is the Greek word **paidia** which refers to children ranging from infancy to pre-teen age years. There was faith in this crowd. They had seen or heard what Jesus had done for the sick, the lame and the demon possessed. They believed their children would be blessed if they were brought into contact with Jesus. And friend's listen...this crowd was so right. The most important thing parents can do for their children is to expose them to the saving power of Jesus Christ. Little else will matter when time ends and we stand before God.

Notice how the disciples were irritated and reacted with outrage. They **rebuked** the adults who were bringing the children. Protecting Jesus from what they felt was an annoyance they tried to drive the people away. The disciples acted out of ignorance more than anything else. Under the influence of the prevailing Hellenist culture, children had no status and little worth. So the disciples viewed this intrusion as a complete waste of time. After all, Jesus was tired. He had things to do that were far more important!

Jesus responded by objecting to their interference. **Mk.10:14** says, "**When Jesus saw this, He was indignant.**" Scholars say the **strong emotional response** suggested by the language of **Mk.10:14**, was unusual and uncharacteristic of Jesus. He may have raised his voice when He said... "**Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.**" In other words Jesus said, "*Stop what you're doing...it's wrong! Let them come to Me.*"

To the disciples, children were an annoyance. But to Jesus and the value system of heaven, children were of priceless worth. Like no one else, children possess and exemplify the qualities of those who enter Christ's kingdom.

Just like the children Jesus received and blessed everyone who comes to Him with child-like faith is granted salvation and free access to the Father. No one who comes to Him in dependence and simple trust is ever turned away.

The lesson we should draw from this is clear. **Children, and those who are humble like children, will readily come to Jesus.** We've seen this play out hundreds of times. Our 5 Day Club and VBS records prove that scores of children pray to receive Jesus every summer! We rarely see such success among teenagers or adults! Statistics prove that 85% of saved people trust Christ before they reach 18!

Another lesson is seen in **the attitude of Jesus towards those who hinder children from coming to Him.** Jesus was *deeply disturbed* by anyone who does this. Whether unbelieving parents / relatives / friends / educators / legislators / or even people in the church...Jesus is displeased and angered by those who hinder children from coming to Him.

To correct His disciples, whose prejudices were totally out of line, Jesus pointed to children and said, **"Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these."** Children possess and exemplify the heart attitude necessary to salvation. Their hearts are tender and receptive like the good soil in the parable of the sower. They eagerly receive Christ and His Gospel just like the children in this story. So what is it about children that make them such good candidates for the Gospel? Let me suggest three characteristics:

- **The child's simplicity** – it's that unspoiled simplicity that found enjoyment and pleasure just sitting in the lap of Jesus. It's a simplicity that loves snow cones / face-painting / and listening to a bed time story. I remember how my brothers and I played for hours inside a refrigerator box. We took out the top and bottom of the box. With the three of us inside, we made more parallel creases to the original four corners. If you can imagine this...the box become like the track of a bulldozer or tank. We plowed right over small trees and bushes. Neighbors had to wave us off. But isn't it just like a kid to entertain himself with a box? This juvenile simplicity showed up in the child who recited **Psa. 23:1** this way, *"The Lord is my shepherd and that's all I need"*.
- **The child's humility** - Howard Hendricks says, Children...*"are not impressed with their achievements or their accomplishments. Children can't advance your cause, they cannot enhance your prestige, children don't give things; they need things. They don't do things for you; they need to have things done" for them.* *They haven't yet come to that counter-productive level of pride / ego / and self-importance. The seeds of these things are in them...they just haven't bloomed yet. The child is small, his abilities are limited, and he knows it.*" In the previous chapter Jesus said, **"I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. – Matt. 18:3, 4**
- **The child's trust** - Remember those days when you believed your father knew everything and could lick anyone on the block? He was bigger than life and you trusted him. Children find it natural to put their confidence in those who are bigger, older, and stronger than they are. That familiar scene of the child daring to jump from the pool's edge into the arms of his father or mother, reminds me of a child's willingness to trust Christ alone to save them.

The **simplicity, humility, and willingness to trust in a self- abandoning way,** are the qualities essential to the person who has what it takes to trust Christ and enter God's Kingdom. Several times the Bible repeats the fact that **God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble.**

v.15 - Presents a vivid picture we need to paint on the canvas of our minds. Here we see that Jesus placed His hands on these little children. He received them / He touched them / He embraced them / and He blessed them. He welcomed these children whose minds and hearts were still reachable. Rising above all of our cultural-categories is the God who sees us as children and tenderly loves each one of us. This willingness of Christ to receive little ones portrays God's willingness to receive us.

Yet one of the most alarming trends in our society is the way childhood is being torn from our children. Many converging factors urge children to grow up too fast. Kids who haven't yet reached their teenage years look older / act older / and have attitudes like people much older than they are. We cringe to hear them use filthy language. It's tragic to see such hardness and indifference etched on their young faces. I'll never forget the night in Mountaineers when the lesson was on love. When Nathanael said, "tonight we want to think about God's love for us and how we should love one another"...a tough-looking little girl responded...She said, "*Now there's a word that's over-worked!*"

Some children seem to have no regard for authority and nothing holds interest for them. At ages younger than ever, children are subjected to the pressure to conform and perform to standards set by the media. Even at the elementary level, children are bombarded by the world's definition of success. Because of this abnormal pressure to grow up so quickly, the window of opportunity when children are most receptive to the Gospel is rapidly closing for many. A great urgency is pressed on us to reach them with the Gospel before that window closes. This is a third lesson taught by the first story. In sharp contrast to the humility of the children is the rich young ruler of the second story...

2. Jesus and the rich young ruler - vs.16-22 - Now a man came up to Jesus and asked, "Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?" "Why do you ask me about what is good?" Jesus replied. "There is only One who is good. If you want to enter life, obey the commandments." "Which ones?" the man inquired. Jesus replied, "'Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, honor your father and mother,' and 'love your neighbor as yourself.'" "All these I have kept," the young man said. "What do I still lack?" Jesus answered, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth.

When we toggle between the three Gospel accounts, (**Matt. 19 / Mk. 10, and Lk. 18**) a clear picture of the central character comes into focus.

- he was wealthy and influential
- he was well educated
- he was religious and well versed in the Law
- he was young...most likely in his early twenties
- he was capable and self-confident
- on top of all of these admirable credits, he was morally upright and virtuous

This rich young ruler was an authentic "A type personality." He was probably a first-born...an *achiever* thru and thru. If he lived today he might have driven an Audi or a BMW. He would be seen around town wearing "*power clothing*" with a Kenneth Cole messenger bag in one hand and an I-phone held to the opposite ear. He probably came from an important family who were known as heavy investors at the Jerusalem stock exchange and members of the Judean Country Club. He spoke the language of success and he knew how to be upwardly mobile through the right approach to the right people. Again, when the Scriptures are compared, we see this young man in action...

- **Mk.10:17** says, "**he ran up to Jesus**" - this shows his aggressiveness and eagerness. No grass grew under this fellow. This was no "*stand around and wait for something to happen*" kind of guy!

He had things to do, people to see, and a packed schedule to keep.

- **Mark** also tells us he "**fell on his knees before Jesus.**" – this reveals his refinement and polished social skills. He approached Jesus with a sense of respect.
- **Luke** tells us he called Jesus - "**Good teacher**" - He had mastered the language of success, which essentially consists of flattery. He had taken the Carnegie course on **How to win friends and influence people.**

This rich young man had the world by the tail, but he had a concern that troubled him. He was concerned about **eternal life.** By worldly standards, he had it all. But there was an emptiness in his soul...a void...a missing ingredient...an undefined ache for something more. When he stopped running and achieving...when he was quiet and alone...when he paused to reflect on his future and where his life was headed, he longed for the assurance of eternal life.

We would admire this young man if we knew him. He was a leader and a go-getter. At graduation his peers may have voted him "*most likely to succeed.*" **Mk.10:21** says, "**Jesus looked at him and loved him.**" Jesus had compassion for this young man just as He loved the little children that were brought to Him. Listen, King Jesus is **no respecter of persons** and He is **not willing that one soul perish!** His love for us all is proved by His availability. He said whoever will may come.

But listen more closely to the young man's question. "**what good thing must I do to get eternal life?**" The wording of his question contains a strange mixture of ideas:

- "**what good thing must I do?**" - This question revealed his belief that eternal life was based on **performance and achievement.** Heaven was something this young man thought he could earn by doing good things. He had out-grown the helplessness and sense of dependence found in children. He is now self-sufficient and self-reliant. His focus is on doing. His attitude is... "*Tell me what good thing I must do and I'll get it done.*"

- In Matthew's Gospel he asked "**what good thing must I do to get eternal life?**" But according to Mark and Luke he said, "**what must I do to inherit eternal life?**" An *inheritance* is typically based on some relationship and viewed as a gift. To a large extent, the home Peggy and I enjoy is the result of a generous inheritance Peggy received. (I checked all this out before I married her). So the language of the OT Scriptures taught this young man that eternal life was an inheritance...but life around Jerusalem taught him "*there are no free lunches*" and "*you only get what you earn.*" Somehow in his mind, eternal life transferred from the "gift category" into the category of "things earned." And isn't this the way most people think about heaven and eternal life? When asked if they think they'll go to heaven when they die, they immediately default to the good things they've done and the fact they haven't behaved as poorly as some others. The suicide bomber blows himself up because he believes good done in this life merits heaven. But he's in for a rude awakening.

The attitude of this rich young man is really no different than that of the Pharisee in **Lk.18.** He prayed this way...'**God, I thank you that I am not like other men--robbers, evildoers, adulterers--or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.'**

Jesus then questioned why the young man inquired about doing things that are **good.** He then said "**There is only One who is good.**" And we might add, there is only One who consistently does what is good. Mark and Luke report that he called Jesus **Good Teacher** and that Jesus said, "**No one is good--except God alone.**" When Jesus said that, the young man offered no response, just silence. The fact that he was standing in the presence of One who laid claim to Deity, left him speechless. In this interchange we find the basic issue every human being must face. The God who created and rules the Universe He owns is the One who sets the standard of what is good and what isn't.

What we think is good or righteous is irrelevant. In **I Cor. 4:4** Paul wrote, **My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me.**

Jesus then said, **"If you want to enter life, obey the commandments."** After Jesus recited the 2nd table of the Law which relates to responsibilities in inter-personal relationships, the young man said, **"All these I have kept"..."What do I still lack?"** In saying this, he sounds just like the Pharisee of **Lk.18** who felt his performance was worthy of God's approval. Denying any sense of wrong-doing, he was like many who compare themselves to criminals instead of comparing their performance to the perfections of God. His attitude can be summed up this way:

- he was proud of his righteousness
- he was proud of his religious heritage
- he was confident of his ability to do whatever command Jesus said was necessary
- he was all of this...but he was **completely unlike the children** of the previous story

This wealthy young man had become fully indoctrinated in the world's way of success.

- he was a **get it done guy** who thought in terms of **"what must I do?"**
- he was an **achiever** who found success through personal performance
- his hands and pockets were filled with the tokens and rewards of his accomplishments...but they were too full to come to Christ the way every man must come...with empty hands in simple childlike humility and trust.

Then **Jesus answered, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."** Jesus here issued a custom-made challenge that exposed what this young man lived for and loved most. We might compare it to an electro-cardiogram. In essence Jesus said...

- release what you have in your hands to gain what only God can give you
- place the eternal values above the temporal
- let go of your pride / let go of performance based thinking...receive from Me the one thing you lack
- surrender your self-reliance self-directed life and become My follower

v. 22 says, **When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth. Mk.10:22 - His face fell.** This rich young man made a very costly decision. Unwilling to obey Christ, He went away. He rejected the Savior the children had so eagerly embraced.

Through the process of simply growing up in the world, the window of opportunity had closed for this rich young man. He had lost the simple child-like humility and trust he once had. Worldly teachers had taught him that *simplicity is for simpletons, humility is for losers, and trust is for the naive.* In place of these qualities, life had become complex and demanding as it is for so many of us here this morning. He had become self-confident / self-reliant / and proud. He trusted only himself and the success his performance could earn. His pockets were full. Money, wealth, and position had become his masters. His life-style and his mind-set were completely out of harmony with child-like faith.

When it comes to salvation and the question of who can enter heaven, the rich young ruler demonstrates the downside to growing up and worldly experience. Statistics bear this out. Only a small percentage of those who trust Christ do so after their 18th birthday. All the baggage we accumulate along life's way tends to make us proud and pride is the antithesis of the childlike humility needed to receive what is only available as a free gift.

3. Jesus and the obstacles to kingdom entrance – vs. 23, 24 – Then Jesus said to his disciples, "I tell you the truth, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."

When we read this passage, we shouldn't think that Christ requires us to give away all of our stuff and become poor in order to be saved. Jesus knew this young man through and through just as He knows each of us who have so much. Jesus knew this young man loved his money and the notoriety that came with it. He wouldn't release the stuff in his hands to receive what money can never buy. It's a cheap Gospel that offers salvation that demands nothing. Salvation is declared to be a free gift, but following Christ is costly.

Anyone who thinks they can hang on to their old friendships and affections and add a little Jesus, is mistaken. In **Matt. 16:24, 25** Jesus said, **"If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it.** In **Matt. 6:24** He said, **"No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.**

The rich young ruler and the proud Pharisee of **Lk.18** were cut out of the same cloth. Both men were religious but lost. Both men loved their wealth and position and both counted on their good works to earn them eternal life. But neither man understood that salvation and heaven are the gifts of God's grace. Neither man was conscious of his sinfulness or their desperate need of God's forgiveness. By earthly standards their lives were full...but their souls were empty when measured against eternity. Both men left God's presence without salvation because neither was humble enough to ask for it. In no uncertain terms Jesus said, **"Anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it."** – **Mk. 10:15**