

*The Great Sayings in the Gospels*  
*Message 84*  
*If You Would be Great, Become as Little Child*

In order to have the full picture of what we are saying this morning, it will be necessary to weave together two parallel passages, one from Mark 9:33-42 and Matthew 18:1-14. Please turn to both passages and hold them both open as we read.

Mark 9:33-35

- 33 And he came to Capernaum: and being in the house he asked them, What was it that ye disputed among yourselves by the way?
- 34 But they held their peace: for by the way they had disputed among themselves, who should be the greatest.
- 35 And he sat down, and called the twelve, and saith unto them, If any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all, and servant of all. KJV

Matt 18:1-7

- 1 At the same time came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?
- 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.
- 4 Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.
- 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.
- 7 Woe unto the world because of offences! for it must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh! KJV

Mark 9:38-42

- 38 And John answered him, saying, Master, we saw one casting out devils in thy name, and he followeth not us: and we forbid him, because he followeth not us.
- 39 But Jesus said, Forbid him not: for there is no man which shall do a miracle in my name, that can lightly speak evil of me.
- 40 For he that is not against us is on our part.
- 41 For whosoever shall give you a cup of water to drink in my name, because ye belong to Christ, verily I say unto you, he shall not lose his reward.
- 42 And whosoever shall offend one of these little ones that believe in me, it is better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he were cast into the sea. KJV

Matt 18:10-14

- 10 Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven.

- 11 For the Son of man is come to save that which was lost.
- 12 How think ye? if a man have an hundred sheep, and one of them be gone astray, doth he not leave the ninety and nine, and goeth into the mountains, and seeketh that which is gone astray?
- 13 And if so be that he find it, verily I say unto you, he rejoiceth more of that sheep, than of the ninety and nine which went not astray.
- 14 Even so it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish. KJV

A strange omelet of doctrine is contained in these words. The question arose as to who was the greatest one in the kingdom and was answered in a discussion about how one's life and ministry would impact children. Interspersed in the context are a variety of statements on various issues.

It seems that as the disciples were walking with Jesus, they had a private conversation among themselves. This creates the picture that He was up ahead of them on the road and they lagged behind, thinking they were out of earshot (and probably were) discussing who would be the greatest.

When they came to Capernaum and possibly to the house that Jesus kept there, He asked them what they had been talking about but they were too embarrassed to tell Him.

He established a principle to them which He had modeled and would continue to model before them. The one who would be greatest in the kingdom is the one who would make himself servant to all of God's people. He will put himself last instead of struggling to try to be first.

This ideal is the one lived out by Jesus Christ Himself.

Then, calling a child to Him, he had the child sit in the middle of the group and then took the child up in His arms. He ultimately made several profound declarations concerning children and the relationship of Christians to them.

“Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.”

“Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.”

“Whosoever shall receive one of such little children in my name, receiveth me, and whosoever receiveth me, receiveth not me, but him that sent me.”

Right in the middle of this, John interrupted, as if on cue, and said something that sounds to my ear like this, “Master, we did something childish, does that count?” They had seen a man casting out demons in the name of Jesus. Instead of embracing him as a brother and encouraging him, they had told him to stop, “because he followeth not with us.”

After rebuking John for his foolishness, Jesus returned to His subject.

“Every kindness done in the name of Christ is sure to be rewarded.”

“If anyone causes a little one to ‘stumble’ it would be better for him to be dead than to reap the judgment that God will pour out upon him.”

“Bad things are going to happen for sure and some children are going to be caused to stumble, but the world itself is going to suffer judgment for all those things.”

“This matter is so serious that a person would be better off to cut off a body part or pluck out an eye rather than be wicked and cause spiritual damage to children. Such people will be eternally judged in the Lake of Fire.”

“Do not take your responsibility to children lightly. They have angelic representation in heaven and the Father does not desire for any of them to perish.”

To long to be the greatest in God’s Kingdom is to already have failed.

The greatest person in the Kingdom will be the one who is the most humble servant. The ‘First’ (in the eyes of men) will be ‘Last’ (in the eyes of God). One cannot become great in God’s kingdom by trying to be great in God’s kingdom.

Repentance from the desire to be great and the willing humility to be small is necessary even to enter God’s Kingdom. Do you realize that this consigns many to Hell out of hand?

So, let’s talk about what these things mean.

I. **Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.**

The word translated “be converted” here is the simple word for “turn” as when a person turns around to answer someone or to see something. But it is also used to communicate the idea of change.

Acts 2:20

20 The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before that great and notable day of the Lord come: KJV

Jesus was obviously speaking of something different than one changing physical direction.

Yet, there are obvious ways that one ought not to change and be like a child.

1 Cor 14:20

20 Brethren, be not children in understanding: howbeit in malice be ye children, but in understanding be men. KJV

The word “malice” is often translated as “evil” or “wickedness.” That which the disciples were discussing was “malice.”

One cannot desire for himself to be the greatest without desiring that others be lesser than himself. This is a wicked desire.

No doubt the character traits that Jesus had in mind were those that He had mentioned in the Sermon on the Mount, and, no doubt, many times since.

Matt 5:3-9

- 3 **Blessed are the poor in spirit:** for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
- 4 Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.
- 5 **Blessed are the meek:** for they shall inherit the earth.
- 6 Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.
- 7 **Blessed are the merciful:** for they shall obtain mercy.
- 8 **Blessed are the pure in heart:** for they shall see God.
- 9 Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God. KJV

Now, remember, Jesus is talking about children who believe in Him, regenerate children, in that environment, children of believing and godly parents.

Shorthand, Jesus said that if one would enter the kingdom of God in a real way, he must turn from the malice, the evil, the sin, in his soul, repent and take up a life without malice.

I. **“Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.”**

Let me ask you a question. Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? Could there be any answer other than Jesus Christ?

Therefore, the humility of the child that Jesus is talking about would, of necessity, be some reflection of His own humility.

Phil 2:5-8

- 5 Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus:
- 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:
- 8 And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. KJV

Greed, desire for reputation, these were forsaken by Christ. The heart of a servant, the willingness to suffer and be seen as much lower than He really was, these were the things that He

embraced. These must also be the things that He was referencing there with the child on His lap.

I. **Whosoever shall receive one of such little children in my name, receiveth me, and whosever receiveth me, receiveth not me, but him that sent me.”**

Interpretation: If you have any interest in Christ, you better have some real interest in children.

Talk to them. Listen to them. Let them ask you questions. Make it easy for them to do so. Pray for them that they might find Christ, grow in Christ, serve Christ, such as their need might be.

Pray for yourself for wisdom to be an example and an encouragement to them.

I do not believe that the church was ever designed to revolve around children, be led by children, or serve only the interests of children.

But there must be a heart for them in the church and a real desire to see them become godly adults. More on than in a bit.

I. **Every kindness done in the name of Christ is sure to be rewarded.**

No act of spiritual kindness to a child is ever a waste of time.

Nothing can possibly be lost in seeking to do spiritual good for them.

Mark 9

41 For whosoever shall give you a cup of water to drink in my name, because ye belong to Christ, verily I say unto you, he shall not lose his reward.

These words were said particularly concerning the man who was not “with them,” but it applies in so many categories, including this one.

Now, we do not do good to children with our eye on a reward in heaven. We do so because it is right, it is godly, and it is commanded by Jesus Christ.

I. **If anyone causes a little one to ‘stumble’ it would be better for him to be dead than to reap the judgment that God will pour out upon him.**

Now, here is where this message becomes challenging and difficult.

The word ‘stumble’ here is an interesting word. It is the root of our words “scandal” and “scandalize.” The KJV says “offend” and it means it in the sense of causing someone to offend God.

Sadly, we live in a day in which almost everything that children are exposed to in some way entices them to sin against God. They are encouraged to covet what they do not have. Adult,

corrupt, ideas are paraded before their minds even in cartoons. They are exposed to sights and images and language that children should never see or hear. And, almost no one seems to notice.

Then, of course, we have the depraved individuals who seek to prey upon them.

But, Jesus is talking to disciples, to believers, to people who were never exposed to the things that we see. So, what could He possibly be referencing?

I believe that He was warning His 12 and all who would come after them that careless living can have disastrous results.

There is scarcely a one of us who does not have some interaction with children. All of us are observed by youngsters, at church if nowhere else.

What is our impact on them?

Do we teach them that adults care about them and their spiritual welfare?

Do we teach them that right and wrong matter whether we are at church or at home?

Do we teach them that Mom and Dad, Grandma and Grandad, Uncle, Aunt, Cousin and acquaintance are really serious about living for God?

Or, do we teach them that Christianity is largely hypocrisy and of little importance? It is something we do on Sunday morning but it means nothing for the rest of the week?

Or, do they learn worse? Do they learn that foul language is OK because Mom and Dad use it?

Do they learn that screaming and fighting is OK because that is what happens at home?

Do they learn that lying is OK because they see adults to it in front of them?

Do they learn that Bible reading and prayer are important because these things are modeled for them all the time?

Do they learn that sincere godliness is attractive because the people they love live that way?

I. **Bad things are going to happen for sure and some children are going to be caused to stumble, but the world itself is going to suffer judgment for all those things.**

Matt. 18

7 Woe unto the world because of offences! for it must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh!

Have you ever looked at the world and the awful things that are happening and considered if many of those things are Divine retribution for the way that humans have dealt with their children?

“This matter is so serious that a person would be better off to cut off a body part or pluck out an eye rather than be wicked and cause spiritual damage to children. Such people will be eternally judged in the Lake of Fire.”

**I. Finally, do not take children lightly. They have angelic representation in heaven.**

Matt 18:10-14

- 10 Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven.
- 11 For the Son of man is come to save that which was lost.
- 12 How think ye? if a man have an hundred sheep, and one of them be gone astray, doth he not leave the ninety and nine, and goeth into the mountains, and seeketh that which is gone astray?
- 13 And if so be that he find it, verily I say unto you, he rejoiceth more of that sheep, than of the ninety and nine which went not astray.
- 14 Even so it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish. KJV

What does this mean? Well, for one thing it means that if you do spiritual damage to a child there is an angel who is going to tell God specifically what you did. They have advocates in heaven who have continual access to the Father. Any sin committed against a child has instant visibility in the very throne room of God.

Everything and anything done against them is contrary to, a violation of, the Revealed Will of God. That means that it is sin.

**I. Have you sinned against children either by bad example, bad teaching, or unconcern?**

If so, then you have committed a grievous sin and are in line for some serious judgment/discipline from God.

This is a matter far more important than we have ever thought.

We long for a world of spirituality (the true kind), morality, love of and for God.

Who is going to people that world but those who are children today?

We long for spiritual awakening, revival, and renewal, but for whom? For ourselves? Many of us have only a short time left on this planet. Is it not our children and our grandchildren that we long to see blessed with a renewed and revived culture?

When will we see that one of the worst evils is the evil of doing nothing when great need exists?

Is it not time for the church of Jesus Christ, for you and for me, to repent of our sins against those of whom Jesus said, “of such is the kingdom of heaven”?