

How Can We "Become As Little Children"?

"Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 18:3)

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Man is generally not interested in becoming as a little child, but he is obsessed with making himself great in the eyes of the world. Long before Christ ancient rulers were obsessed with making themselves great, even to the point of announcing they were gods. Ancient Egyptian rulers sought for greatness in death as they built the amazing pyramids as their majestic tombs. In discussing modern sports we often hear dialogue over who was the greatest boxer, or the greatest Olympian, or the greatest football star. Many awards are presented each year to those considered to be the greatest in their profession, be it teacher, public servant or movie star. It is not surprising the disciples curiously asked Jesus, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" (Matthew 18:1).

The Lord did not need to contemplate characteristics of greatness in His kingdom, for He knew exactly the elements to spiritual excellence. His response was immediate. Seeing a perfect illustration of greatness standing nearby Jesus consequently summoned a child to stand in front of the crowd (v. 2). When the child was in place and all eyes were sufficiently focused, He simply said, "Verily I say unto you, 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 greatest in the kingdom of heaven" (v.3-4). What man would have thought that greatness was to be found in the characteristics of little children? We would agree that children are cute and adorable, but not hailed as mighty. Neither the ancient world nor the present generation present awards, medals or wreaths of victory to little kids.

The view of heaven is historically on a different level than that of this world. Through the prophet Isaiah the Lord said:

For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts (Isaiah 55:8-9).

The Pharisees (a religious sect of the Jews) mistakenly believed that greatness was achieved by being famous and popular with the masses. Jesus exposed their erroneous beliefs in Matthew 23:5-7:

But all their works they do for to be seen of men: they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments, and love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues, and greetings in the markets, and to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi.

He went on to explain that we must not be called Rabbi, nor father, nor master (Matthew 23:8-10). As usual man was wrong and the Lord is right (Romans 3:4). He concluded those thoughts by stating, "But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant" (Matthew 23:11). That was not

what the Pharisees thought, nor is it the way the world thinks, but being a servant is true greatness in God's eyes.

It would not have surprised the audience if He had said religious scholarship, benevolent generosity, eloquent public prayers, amazing oratory or memorization of the scriptures are marks of spiritual greatness for this is precisely how men tend to measure such a thing. Men have invented titles to signify what they think is a measure of greatness: i.e. "reverend," "doctor," "professor," "father," or "pastor." The apostles never used such titles (they knew better). However, in man-made religious circles we continually hear these titles tossed about: i.e., Dr. Jones, Reverend Wright, Pastor Phillips and so on. Such titles are not found in the Holy Scriptures. The standards set by men will always fail. The Bible says, "There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death" (Proverbs 14:12). The Lord has never authorized such titles, because He has a very different standard for greatness. Men determine greatness one way, while the Lord thinks entirely along different lines.

Jesus requires that His disciples become like a child in humility. According to the Lord, greatness in His kingdom is accomplished through the humility that characterizes little children. Without a humble heart a person can never enter the kingdom of God. Remember Jesus said, "...Verily I say unto you, except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 18:3).

Children are not interested in making a big name for themselves in the eyes of the world. Have you noticed that a little child never invents fancy titles to put before his name to impress the public? Such innocent humility does not see that as important. The heart that is truly humble is not interested in receiving accolades from his peers. A Christian must follow the example of the humble child and also of Jesus and His disciples and seek a place of humble service here upon God's footstool (Matthew 20:28; Philippians 1:1; 2:5-8; James 1:1; Jude 1).

Additionally, a little child will share what he has with others, such as his food. A heart infected with pride will refuse regardless of how desperate the need may be. Jesus spoke of a man named Lazarus who was weak, in poor health and starving in the street. He died because a certain rich man would not give him the crumbs that fell from his table (Luke 16:19-22). A little humble child would never have been so cruel and heartless. Dear reader we must listen as Jesus says, "I was a hungered, and ye gave me meat: thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in" (Matthew 25:35). In these things, let us be humble as little children.

Another character of the humble heart of a little child is that they will not hold grudges or harbor bitterness, but will rather forgive and let bygones be bygones. Grown-ups, filled with pride will sometimes hold grudges for many, many years--perhaps their entire lives. They will go to their grave harboring bitterness toward others. The Bible says, "Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamor, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice" (Ephesians 4:31). If we aim to get to heaven, we must remove these dark and destructive elements from our minds immediately, lest judgment day befall us.

A little child is not prejudiced; skin color is not a matter of significance to him. He treats everyone the same. Pride says, "I'll move before I live next door to those not of my race," or "My child will

never marry out of his race, I can't love a grandchild that is not the same skin color as me." Not one person in this world has a choice of the color his skin. By the goodness of God we were born as we are. No one has a choice of his nationality. Only the ignorant would think otherwise. Therefore, let you and I be humble and deeply thankful that we have a life and a place in this world. Prejudice minds have caused so much pain simply over the color of someone's skin. Humility can bring healing and peace. A better world comes through eliminating prejudice. God is no respecter of persons and neither should we be (Acts 10:34-35).

The little child has no concern for the style of vehicle used for his transportation. If he is ridding down the street in a shiny new limousine or if he is in a dilapidated twenty-year-old van that has wobbly wheels; one is not desired over the other. Expensive automobiles are not necessarily sinful, but they are certainly not a concern to a little child. The sinful pride of adults, however, desires to be elite and elevated above others. Even if you could drive a better car, wear a "noble" title, have greater knowledge than others; what benefit would it be one hundred years from now? What would it mean in the long run? Absolutely nothing! A hundred years from now no one will care what kind of car you drove, title you wore or diploma you acquired. All men need to be more humble--it spells greatness in the eyes of the Lord.

Pride seeks for a position of prominence and prestige. The mother of two disciples came to ask Jesus for places of importance for her two sons. The record says, "Then came to him the mother of Zebedee's children with her sons worshipping him, and desiring a certain thing of him. And he said unto her, What wilt thou? She saith unto him, Grant that these my two sons may sit, the one on thy right hand, and the other on the left, in thy kingdom" (Matthew 20:20-21). In hearing the request of this mother, the other disciples became angry: "And when the ten heard it, they were moved with indignation against the two brethren" (Matthew 20: 24). Man's attempt to be great before his peers genders hard feelings, not peace and love. Those seeking power and prominence over their peers are not warmly welcomed, not even by the Lord. As a matter of fact God resists the proud (James 4:6). Servants of the Lord must endeavor to maintain child-like humility.

A Christian must become like a little child in placing his trust in our heavenly Creator. "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart: and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all they ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths" (Proverbs 3:5-6). A little child who is in the arms of his father can scarcely be frightened. If he has any feelings of fear, he just hugs his daddy's neck just a little more snug. He knows that his father will take care of any danger that may come his way. The Psalmist said, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me: thy rod and thy staff they comfort me" (Psalm 23:4). The child of God should fear no evil for his heavenly protector is on hand at all times. Too often we worry, wring our hands, pace the floor, toss in our beds at night because we fail to trust in the Lord to help us. The Lord teaches us to rely upon his help.

The Lord has made His children the following promises: "Let your conversation be without covetousness: and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me" (Hebrews 13:5-6). In other words, do not trust in money or any worldly thing, God will take care of you. Also, He has said, "For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers, but the face of the Lord is against them that

do evil" (1 Peter 3:12). The last words of Matthew's inspired account says, "...and lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world, Amen" (Matthew 28:20).

These words are truly meant to comfort every Christian. Why any child of God would worry and fret over the cares of this world is certainly a puzzle? God has promised, that if we will seek first His kingdom and His righteousness he would supply the necessities of life (Matthew 6:25-34). If you will investigate His Biblical record (Old and New Testament) you will find that He knows how to supply all of your needs (Philippians 4:19).