

## **“Called to be Like Children”**

**Luke 18: 15-17**

### **WEBSITE VERSION**

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**Text: Luke 18:15-17 (NIV) <sup>15</sup> People were also bringing babies to Jesus to have him touch them. When the disciples saw this, they rebuked them. <sup>16</sup> But Jesus called the children to him and said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. <sup>17</sup> I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it."**

In unexpected ways, this is a very curious passage. It tells us that the disciples “rebuked” the people who were bringing their children to Jesus to be blessed. Doesn’t that seem strange? Surely, they knew that it was common for parents to bring young children to any respected Rabbi for a blessing. So...what were the disciples thinking? That Jesus only came to teach about heavy theological matters and that children did not interest him? Puzzling.

Then, in effect, Jesus rebuked the disciples for rebuking the people who were bringing the children to him! In the New Living Translation, we read:

**Luke 18:15 (NLT) <sup>15</sup> One day some parents brought their little children to Jesus so he could touch and bless them. But when the disciples saw this, they scolded the parents for bothering him!**

In effect, Jesus is saying “Listen up disciples! You are missing a very important moment here! Actually you really need to look closely at these children! This is *how you’re supposed to be* in my Father’s family...in His kingdom! Like children! And you’re missing the lesson!” Are *we*? Would we have rebuked Jesus for bothering with the children? Or would we have rejoiced that he loved children and that the perfect object lesson had been provided...that namely we are called when we belong to Christ...to be children of the Heavenly Father? Good questions...I think. First, let us pray.

Let’s review...the disciples thought that the parents who brought their children were bothering Jesus. So...they scolded them! My goodness. Once again, we see how badly the followers of Jesus misunderstood what he was all about and what his priorities really were and are. But I must tell you, I am more and more impressed with exactly how long-suffering and patient God the Holy Spirit is with us Christians because so often...*we* are missing the point. Do we understand that when we were saved it was not just so Heaven would be secure for us...but so we would be changed starting right here and now into people who are like Jesus himself!? If you’re not growing as a Christian your problem might be that you do not see yourself properly. You may not see yourself as Paul put it:

**2 Corinthians 3:18 (NIV) And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory....**

So often we are not even sure what it is that we are trying to become! In fact, instead of seeing ourselves as Kingdom children humble and happy and Christ-centered...we become more not less...but more...self-centered and instead of being "Childlike" Christians we become even more "Childish" Christians. Absorbed with ourselves instead of being absorbed with Christ. Too many Christians are childish instead childlike. Too many Christians go thru life with touchy feelings and pride of self instead of living as humble children accepting what God sends our way. Let me tell you a story. A true story.

The date is July 19, 1727. The location is Berthelsdorf, Germany. A group of about three hundred Christians with various theological views have come together with one thing in common. They have all been persecuted in other settings and places. One man has created a sort of village where they can all live in harmony. It is called "Herhutt" meaning "The Lord's Watch." The people are called Moravians and their leader is a remarkable man named Nicolas Ludwig von Zinzendorf and he is actually from a royal family. In fact, he is a "Count" who has abandoned his privileged status to be a Pastor to these folks. He secures land and he brings them all together in a happy little Christian community where they can be safe and live in love and harmony. But they are not happy or harmonious for very long.

Problems arise...as they always do among Christians. They begin to squabble and take offense and fail to treat each other respectfully. They begin to believe the Kingdom of God is all about themselves and what *they* want. They do that terrible thing that Christians often do. They forget that they are called to be "childlike" and they become "childish!" They begin to look and act like the very people described by Paul when he wrote to the Christians at Corinth! Those Corinthian Christians had degenerated into childish Christians...not childlike Christians! So, Paul said to them:

**1 Corinthians 1:10-12 (NIV) <sup>10</sup> I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought. <sup>11</sup> My brothers, some from Chloe's household have informed me that there are quarrels among you. <sup>12</sup> What I mean is this: One of you says, "I follow Paul"; another, "I follow Apollos"; another, "I follow Cephas"; still another, "I follow Christ."**

So, here is our friend with the long name von Zinzendorf and he's asking himself how three hundred followers of Christ could be such big babies! But rather than give up, von Zinzendorf gathers them all together and organizes prayer groups. He sets them in threes and fours and slowly...steadily...he instructs them in humility. He slowly and steadily calls them into the Word of God where they really begin to learn that the Christian faith...the true walk with Christ is not about being first but last...not about being important but being faithful...not about celebrity but humility...not about being proud but humble...not about being childish but childlike. And healing begins to settle in.

Church historians tell this true story about our friend with the long name. But what is not as well known is that God had placed a very clear and unusual calling upon von Zinzendorf. Coming out of a pietist Lutheran background, he was dramatically born again *at the age of six!* In fact, as a child he would write letters to Jesus praising him and offering prayer to him and he would literally throw his letters to Jesus from the upper windows in the castle in which he lived! A little boy somehow thinking that his letter was more likely to reach Jesus on high when thrown from the heights! A little boy converted as a child who years later taught squabbling Christians the importance of childlike faith. A little boy whose faith remained childlike even when he was an old man. What is there about childlike faith...not childish faith...but childlike faith...that von Zinzendorf would say to us at Cornerstone today? Let's consider what took place so long ago on a warm afternoon in ancient Israel.

But first...I want to go down an important side street with you for a couple of minutes. Then we'll come back to Jesus and the children. We have often used that word beginning with "H" in this pulpit. "Hermeneutics." You'll never get enough letters to use it in Scrabble. But we must use it in our study of the Bible. "Hermeneutics" ... the science of interpreting a written text as to its meaning...intended by the original writer to the original reader. So, for example, our Declaration of Independence says in its opening portion:

**“He has refused his assent to laws, the most wholesome and necessary for the public good.”**

What in the world did that mean? That statement would be meaningless unless the reader knew that the writer was speaking of King George the Third of England...that King George was the “he” in question. To know that, you have to read the previous paragraph. One must work around and behind the statement sometimes in order to grasp it. The same is true with Scripture. The context is critical.

But one of the things we tend to do with the Word of God is to pull things out of their context and try to apply them in some isolated fashion. That's because we have broken up the Biblical text into chapters and in our Bibles...we have even created little headings. So, for example, in the NIV we read the words over today's text: “The Little Children and Jesus.” That's very nice but it is nowhere in the actual text. What it tends to do is separate out what precedes it in the flow of the text. In fact, in this instance it creates a hermeneutical pothole. Why? Because if we take that passage in isolation we could easily miss the point of what this event was all about. In other words, what came before and after the passage matters greatly. If we just read the portion about the people bringing children to Jesus, we might conclude this event is there to teach us about how much Jesus loves children. And he does. But there is much more to it.

Matthew and Mark connect this passage to teachings on family and divorce. That would suggest that the Holy Spirit was speaking to us about family life. But it is more than even that. When the Holy Spirit worked thru Luke, he combined it with a different preceding passage. The one about the two men who prayed...one with pride and one with humility. Now, some people think the Biblical portions are just sort of thrown together. I do not. I think we must see the Holy Spirit as entirely sovereign over the ways things are sequenced. This also suggests that various texts can have several applications.

OK. Consider then... what precedes this incident with the children in the Gospel of Luke:

**Luke 18:9-14 (NIV) <sup>9</sup> To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else, Jesus told this parable: <sup>10</sup> "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. <sup>11</sup> The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men--robbers, evildoers, adulterers--or even like this tax collector. <sup>12</sup> I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.' <sup>13</sup> "But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.' <sup>14</sup> "I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."**

So, Jesus has just been teaching about the one essential that must be present in the man or woman of God! Jesus has just been teaching about the one essential that people born of the Holy Spirit must have. Jesus has just been teaching about the one essential that absolutely must be there in order for a person to be saved! And that one essential is not intelligence! That one essential is not power. That one essential is not prestige! The one essential is not any of the things that the world finds so important and so very valuable! The one essential that must be present is not even good works like fasting and giving! The one essential is that one aspect...that one characteristic...that one trait most conspicuously absent in our modern world of celebrities and ego centered stars...that one essential is **HUMILITY!** How often do you hear anyone these days speak with great admiration for the man or woman is truly humble? Hardly ever!

Here is a game-changing truth that modern man avoids the like the plague: God brings down the proud but exalts the humble! Humility is actually related to the word "humiliate." Imagine that? "Humiliate" is a word rooted in Latin meaning "degraded" ...or brought down. But that is a problem. Because in our sin natures, we naturally recoil from being humiliated. No one likes that. But Jesus said we must seek to humble ourselves in a type of self-humiliation. That is, we must bring ourselves down. He is saying that the key to the childlike life is self-humiliation or humbling of self quite deliberately. How do we do that? Jesus tells us in Luke 14:

**Luke 14:7-11 (NIV) <sup>7</sup> When he noticed how the guests picked the places of honor at the table, he told them this parable: <sup>8</sup> "When someone invites you to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor, for a person more distinguished than you may have been invited. <sup>9</sup> If so, the host who invited both of you will come and say to you, 'Give this man your seat.' Then, humiliated, you will have to take the least important place. <sup>10</sup> But when you are invited, take the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he will say to you, 'Friend, move up to a better place.' Then you will be honored in the presence of all your fellow guests. <sup>11</sup> For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."**

Jesus just said "Rather than be humiliated, preclude that painful event by humiliating yourself...humbling yourself. When someone else does it to you, it is humiliating. When you do it to yourself, it is humbling." So...one of the great truths about the true

Christian faith is that following Christ means embracing his humility. That is why Paul says:

**Philippians 2:8 (NIV) <sup>8</sup> And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death-- even death on a cross!**

Once again we see that a proper understanding of true Christianity is not a party invitation to live the good life here and now...but a terrifying call to die to self! Humility means turning over your life in a childlike way to God and following Jesus on into the kingdom of God! Being called to be children of God means taking the lowest place and waiting for God to move you up. This is profoundly difficult in our age of celebrities and fame and ego. Personally, I totally cringe every time I hear the phrase “Celebrity Preacher” .... How repulsive is it when preachers exalt themselves? Totally! The only celebrity in the church...is Jesus! We are called to Christlike humility and that means we are called to be childlike.

But to tell the truth...children are not always so very delightful either...are they? It is interesting that in today's passage it says the people were bringing “babies” to Jesus [Grk. “brephos”] ...not young children. So the model that Jesus is giving us is not the two year old throwing a tantrum or the three year old trying to go his own way....but of literally dependent babies. Just as babies are called to look to parents for food and safety and to trust their parents in everything...we are called to be like babies totally trusting our Heavenly Father in everything. And we start out that way but sometimes we get off the track. At what point do babies become brats we might ask?

Let me lighten up a little and tell you a great story. We've been blessed this summer in that for a week we had all of our kids and grandkids together with us and each other. There was swimming and baseball and a short trip up north. It was great. One day our granddaughter Madison was outside with me and she saw a chipmunk run under the deck. She was quite taken with the moment and so I said “Oh that's Mr. Chipmunk...he can talk you know?” And I developed this whole yarn about Mr. Chipmunk and five year old Madison was wide-eyed and totally absorbed. So...a little while later I took my cell phone and went outside when she was inside and I phoned her with my Mr. Chipmunk voice! She loved it and thought it was so very cool! Mr. Chipmunk even promised to leave her a treat in the freezer...some ice cream. She bought the whole thing.

Why? Because she is five and she still trusts adults...at least she trusts me! But you know...even at her age she said to Kristi her mother “Mommy...that Mr. Chipmunk guy sounds alot like Peepa!” ☺ Now, of course we want her to mature to the point where she will reject unrealistic things and no longer trust anyone who speaks the unbelievable. But you see....that's it isn't it? At what point do we stop believing God for the unbelievable? At what point do we no longer give to God our childlike faith? Someone will say “Well, the question is silly because there is no analogy here. God would not ever tell us such a preposterous thing as a chipmunk can talk and leave treats in the freezer!” But think about that. Think about the incredible and unlikely and unrealistic things that God has said to us because we belong to Christ! Talking chipmunks and ice cream in the freezer are not nearly as unlikely as the promise of resurrection and paradise! How about the promise of living forever in a place with no sin and fellowshiping with the One who made Heaven and Earth? How about the Word of God showing us blind men healed and loose women delivered and hateful men made gentle

and a childlike Jesus going to the Cross? Madison will become too smart to believe Peepa in a childlike way. But will I become too smart to believe God in a childlike way?

Chipmunks do not talk and leave ice cream treats. But God heals and raises the dead. Will I live in childlike faith awaiting those things? They are real and the unredeemed say such faith is childish. But they are wrong. It is childlike in the Kingdom of God. But childlike faith should be apparent in Christ-centered childlike behavior as we grown in Christ.

Do not misunderstand. I am not saying that faith in the promises of God is about as silly as believing in talking chipmunks. What I am saying is this: an intelligent child will outgrow their willingness to believe the unbelievable. They will get too smart to believe father or grandfather if the child is told something incredulous. But the Christian faith is a gift from God whereby the Holy Spirit convinces us that what we are being told is yes incredible and unlikely...but true! Paul explains why we believe as children when he says:

**Ephesians 2:8 (NIV) <sup>8</sup> For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith-- and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God--**

Our very childlike faith is a gift from God! God sent it our way by His Divine will! And He then wills that we be childlike trusting him in all things. Growing in maturity and more and more secure accepting what He allows into our lives! He wants us to be like believing children climbing the stairs of the Castle all the way to the top...writing out our prayers and tossing them towards Heaven believing with childlike faith and attitude that they will be heard. And they *will* be heard! For the more childlike we are with God...the more trusting and the more we honor His Lordship...the more we will experience the peace of God. And when we get off track, we would do well to go and be among children...babies actually in the care of their parents...dependent and needy and contemplate what we see. For Jesus said:

**“Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.”**

Let us pray.

**Was Jesus touchy? They said he had a demon! His only concern was for the HOLY SPIRIT!  
Ways to pursue childlike walk instead of a childish faith .... David....Daniel....Paul**