

Jesus and The Little Ones Week 3

Crowd participation: Kids, what is it that all babies do? A: Cry!

I didn't know how much babies cried before I became a dad. Like I knew. But I didn't know-know. Cut to 9 years ago. We're first-time parents. (Show a pic) We'd rush to her crib at all hours of the night. Etc etc etc

Lucy and I eventually coined the phrase "babies don't know" as our way of saying they don't know any better at that age. They can't fall asleep, so they cry. Babies don't know. They just wet their diaper again, they cry about it. Babies don't know. They have all these problems with no solutions. They can't help themselves. Over time you begin to learn things like...

- Some cries mean, "I'm hungry - can someone feed me?"
- Some cries mean, "I'm sleepy - can someone put me down?"
- Some cries mean, "I'm hurting - can someone please console me?"

Keep that in mind because that's gonna be helpful in just a bit. Turn to **Luke 18**

Jesus is in the middle of his ministry, teaching and preaching about this big idea called the Kingdom of God. As we said before, the Kingdom of God - the Kingdom of Heaven and eternal life are all synonyms of this idea - is about the stuff of Heaven breaking into Earth. Jesus' rule, reign, and life entering into history are available to us through faith and following Him. If Jesus had a mission statement, it would be this: to usher in the Kingdom of God into the here and now.

So cut to Luke 18:

Luke 18:15-17

Now they were bringing even infants to him that he might touch them.

The word "infants" is the Greek word *brefos*. Outside of the Bible, this word describes babies still in the womb.

And when the disciples saw it, they rebuked them.

So hold up. Parents are sending their kids to Jesus, presumably to be healed by Him. And the disciples start freaking out.

And what's probably going on is the disciples see the children as a distraction or an interruption to Jesus' ministry. The disciples might have believed that Jesus had more pressing matters to attend to, such as teaching, healing grown-ups, or addressing the needs of adults. They may have thought that the children were inconsequential, they had no power or influence, and their presence was inconsequential to Jesus' mission.

And watch what Jesus does:

16 But Jesus called them to him, saying, "Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God.

He affirms the inherent worth and value of children in God's Kingdom. They're not a nuisance or a distraction. And He doesn't just say, "Allow the children to come to me," but passionately declares, "Let the little children come to me and make sure no one stops them."

And to challenge the norms of that time even more, Jesus says that the kingdom of God belongs to kids like these. The mission statement that Jesus is all about, He says if anyone gets what He's doing, it's the children.

This is wild to think about because it was assumed the Kingdom of God was something to be taken by force at that time. The Kingdom of God would be accomplished through military victory, overthrowing Rome, and wiping out the enemies once and for all. And now Jesus says the people who are part of the Kingdom of God are...little babies? What are we talking about? Is he envisioning little kids dressed up as soldiers? Kind of a cute mental image... a little dark if you think about it too long.

But Jesus is saying the way the Kingdom of God will happen will not be military might and power but through a spiritual renewal of the heart that will trickle down into communities and one day usher in Jesus' rule and reign forever.

Luke 18:17

Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it."

Jesus says, in some way, shape or form, children are meant to be something of an example to all of us. So kids in the room, did you hear that? Most of the time, and rightly so, older folks are examples to you... and in other places the Bible tells us that is right, true and good for you... but Jesus says there's also something you can show the rest of us.

Which is the question I want to see if we can help answer today, "in what ways does Jesus want all of us to be like children? What can the youngest of us in the room teach us about following Jesus?"

Now let me go ahead and pull the curtain back and tell you what makes this challenging: in this passage, Jesus doesn't directly say how we're supposed to be like little children. He just leaves them hanging. I don't know about you, but that gets on my nerves.

So here's what we need to do. This is Bible Study 101. When we get to a passage that isn't clear, we need to allow the clearer parts of Scripture to help interpret the unclear parts of Scripture. If you want to get fancy with it, and I know I do, the early church called this method "Scripture interprets Scripture."

So how are we to be like babies in the Kingdom of Heaven? We've got to look at other Scripture to figure it out. For the sake of time, I've got three for us.

1 - Dependence

In other words children know full well everything they need and want, they can't do on their own. They need someone else to do it. Mom and dad, if you just ask your kid what they want or need, they could

probably list off at least 5 things right away. They know there are things they can't do that they need you to do.

Think back to my illustration at the start. My daughter crying out to me. Why? Because she knew she couldn't do anything on her own. She needed assistance. She needed a power outside of herself if she wanted to be fed, to be bathed, to be put to bed. And her cries were her native tongue. They were her only vocabulary to communicate all of that.

As a baby, she knew her place, "I can't do this, but I know you can. So help me, please."

There is a humility that little child has because they're fully aware of what they can and can't do.

Now using the Scripture interprets Scripture method, does this hold up? Can we find verses that support this? Yeah, we do. Look at Matt 18

Matt 18:3-4

"Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. **4** Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

Ding ding ding. Jesus says to be a child is to humble yourself. To realize you can't do life on your own. You're powerless to do so. And as a result, we let the cry of prayer become our native tongue. "God, I need you. God, I can't do this."

Not just in moments of hardship and suffering - tho we often can feel that utter helplessness in those times. But a humbling to say, "God, I can't do anything apart from you. The body you've given me. The breath in my lungs. It's all a gift from you. You're sustaining me with your power when I go about my day, you watch over me as I stay asleep. You sustain in a million imperceptible ways. I can't do a single thing on my own. God help me."

And the more I lean into my dependence, the more I realize who I am and who I am not. The more I press into humbling myself, the more I see who God is, He is my good heavenly Father.

This flies in the face of the "pull yourself up by your boot-straps" Christianity that says, "God helps those who help themselves." There are some major problems with this. First, if we mean that God intends for us to obey Him as God's children, and God works at times in and through our obedience, then yea, totally. There are verses on that. But if we mean, "God will only help you if you perform enough for him," then that's anti-the way of Jesus. Also, what even are bootstraps?

But to be a citizen of the Kingdom is to realize your neediness. To cry out to Him over and over again.

This leads me to point 2...

2 - Faith

When a kid is dependent on mom and dad for everything, there is this a sense of trust that develops from the kid to the parent. The kid is confident that when they cry, mom and dad will answer. They have faith.

Similarly, when you're a child in the family of God, when you **know** God as a Heavenly Father, there is a confidence that comes from that. There is a faith that results from knowing who you are in the family.

I think about how my kids, on days when Lucy and I attempt to sleep in, eventually 730 rolls around, and we hear their feet thumping on the hardwood floor getting louder and louder to our room. Then the sound stops. The door slowly creaks open, and one of our three kids is smiling really big, saying, "Mom...Dad...can bedtime be over? Or mom...dad....can I watch a show? Mom...dad....can I eat cereal for breakfast?"

What you begin to notice really quick, is your kids are confident in their place in the family. And because of that, they can confidently approach us to ask anything that's on their minds...and I mean anything. They're not fearful or scared to approach me or call me "dad."

Faith and trust is developed in them in knowing that we love them and we're not going anywhere.

Likewise, to be a child is to rest confidently and trust in who God is. That He loves us, He protects us, and He will never let us go. And because of that, we can approach Him with confidence and ask anything that's on our minds.

Now - does this pass the "Scripture interpreting Scripture" test? You betcha.

Matthew 7:11

If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!

Jesus here is using hyperbole here to get across just how good the Father is, just how gracious and abundant our Heavenly Father is. And because of that, we can approach Him with whatever is on our minds. We can talk to Him and ask Him for things because we know we are his kids and He is our Heavenly dad.

And if you don't have that sort of confidence before God. Then I've got another verse for you. John 10:

John 10:28-29

I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.
29 My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand.

No one. Nobody. Not a thing in all of creation can separate us from the love of the Father. He is faithful. And will keep His Word. When he says, "You are my child" that is truest thing about you. When he says, "I love you and I will never forsake you" that means there is nothing you have done or could ever do to make the Father second-guess His love for you. You're his kid and nothing will change that. And because of that you can trust him.

Look, your sin does not scare God. Your sin does not make Him wince back in disgust or make Him second-guess His ability to save you. The verse is clear NO ONE is able to snatch them out of the Father's hands. If your faith is in Jesus, He will never let you go because you are His little child.

Last one for us...

3 - Imitation

When a kid develops dependence and trust with their parents, when they know my parents love me and they will provide me, over time, that child learns to imitate them. They eventually want to learn to talk and walk and be like them more and more. Imitation is the natural result of being in a loving dependent relationship like a child and a parent.

I remember clearly growing up, it was on a Saturday or Sunday, my dad was working on a car with a friend of his. And he had the hood open for what felt like a long time. And I remember watching him for awhile, with the tools and him covered in car oil and car grease and I thought "That's so cool." Eventually running up to my dad and asked, "Can I help?" (Now to be clear, I didn't know a thing about cars or auto mechanics. I still know very little about cars. But I wanted to be like my dad and do what he was doing.) So he looked at me and said, "Yeea sure son. And I got amped up and I proceeded to stick my hands all over the engine and around the car battery - clearly not knowing what I was doing AT ALL. And after a minute or two, while my dad and his buddy are standing back watching all of this - I get my hands out from under the hood and saw my hands all dirty with car oil and car grease - and feeling quite accomplished. And I was so convinced afterwards, that I helped fixed that car because I did what I saw my dad doing and I looked like him - I had the dirt to prove it.

And in the same way, little kids, when they know deep in their bones how loved they are by mom and dad, when there's a deep sense of trust and confidence - they want to be like their parents.

Now, once again the "scripture interprets scripture" method. Do we have other verses to back up this idea? Why yes.

Ephesians 5:1

...be imitators of God, as beloved children.

Matt 5:48

You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Now to be clear, Jesus is not arguing here for moral perfection. Instead, the word perfect is Greek, "telios," meaning wholeness. It's the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew words "shalom" and "tammim." Completeness. Single-minded devotion. Pure in heart-ness. The New Testament is filled with this vision - the more I look to my Heavenly Father and imitate Him, the more I take on His characteristics. Or to put it another way, **the more you look to Him, the more you will look like Him.** (It's catchy, so you know its true.)

The more I meditate on the Father's love, the more the Spirit works in me to become a person of love. The more I sit with His forgiveness of me, the more I have it for others. The more I dwell on His patience with me, even when I can be quite annoying - the more the Spirit works in me to become a person who can extend patience to others. The more I ask for His wisdom, the more I see the big picture of life like He does and the less I freak about all the little stuff that pops up in my mind.

The more I look to Him, the more I will look like Him.

Now those are three ways we can see from Scripture how to be like little children, and I'm sure we could think of more, but for the sake of time, I think this is a helpful snapshot.

And the question we have to wrestle with now is asking:

- "In what ways is it hard for me to live like a child of God?"
- "In what ways am I resisting being a child of God?"
- "In what ways is the Spirit prompting to become more and more like His kid?"

Because I would argue, as counter-intuitive as it sounds, the way to grow and mature in the Kingdom of God is to be more and more like a little child. Pressing further and further into these three ideas.

And if I can admit, it's so tough because parts within me still want to rebel. There are parts within me that still want to be self-sufficient. Which is standard in every other way manner of life.

Like, there will certainly come a time when my daughter and other kids will be self-sufficient. The day will come when they move out of the house, go to college, get jobs, and perhaps start families. I know that day's coming.

I've got a running joke with them where every time they celebrate a birthday, I get very serious, look them in the eye, and say, "Make me a promise. Stop growing up." And by now, they're used to the bit, and they roll their eyes and say, "Dad, I'm going to grow up." And part of the bit includes me pretending to sob, saying, "No, don't grow up!" And while I know that, even still, they're always gonna be my babies. And I'm always going to be their dad.

And even though every area of life says to grow and mature is to be self-sufficient and independent, the way of Jesus says the way to maturity is to realize your insufficiency. In God's Kingdom, if you want life, you must die to self. If you want to experience riches in the Kingdom, give away your riches in this life. And if you want to be a mature saint in His world, then we learn to be his little kids and never move away from that.

And it's strange, the older you get, the more you realize how helpless you really are in life. As adults we do all we can to plan and prepare and yet, when the unexpected happens, or you get the phone call you didn't expect, or when you enter into a new season of life - it opens your eyes to just how powerless you are and how much you need Jesus to sustain you.

I've got friends right now who are at that stage in life when their kids are graduating high school, and leaving the nest and they're telling me that even after years and years of parenting - they're having to rely on Jesus now more than ever to carry them into this unknown season.

They are learning to be more and more like little children in the Kingdom. Learning more and more what it means to be God's kids. And I imagine Jesus welcoming them with a smile on His face saying "Welcome. The Kingdom belongs to people just like you."

So I don't know how this sermon hits you and what you need to process with God right now. So to end our time, I think its fitting to simply go to Him in prayer.

Pray

And as quiet ourselves, let's remember what prayer is. It's a crying out to Him. It's an invitation to once again live into our role as His kids. So whatever you need from Him right now, ask Him. Whatever's bothering you, go to Him now.