

Thoughts on Matthew 18:1-5

Jesus calls people to become like children in order to enter the kingdom of heaven.

The word He uses basically means “to turn around”. It means that we recognize that we're going in a wrong direction; and that we must turn around and go in the opposite direction. This means, by the way, that there are some “converts” that have never been truly “converted” at all.

Think of this in terms of the disciples. They were after “greatness” in Jesus' kingdom; and Jesus doesn't rebuke them for having that ambition. In fact, I would suggest that Jesus *wants* us to be great in His kingdom. But the problem was that the disciples were going in the wrong direction to get there. They were engaged in a program of elevating themselves; and of putting everyone else in the position of serving them. They were preoccupied with “one-upmanship”; and were trying to crawl up to greatness upon one another's backs. And yet, to achieve true greatness, they needed to turn around and go the other direction.

Jesus' path to greatness in His kingdom is not upward-mobility; but rather downward-humility. In His kingdom, the moral law of gravity states that "whatever comes up must first go down". Jesus pointed them toward the true direction of greatness when He later told them,

So, to become like a little child means that we cease from being “haughty” or “proud”. It means that we cease from raising our eyes in a “lofty” or “arrogant” way. It means that we humbly accept that there are things that we cannot understand about the greatness of God's plan. It means that we cease being so arrogant and self-important that we won't accept what God says, unless it makes perfect sense according our standard of reasoning. In a word, it means that we are meek and humble before God and His Word.

Second, it means that we become content in God's love. It means that we don't fret and worry about tomorrow's needs. It means that we become like a little child resting comfortably and satisfied in mother's arms after being fed. It means that we become calm within our soul because of the Father's good care for us. In a word, it means we're at peace in God's care.

And finally, it means that we hope in God. We don't look to our own resources. We don't imagine that it's all up to us. Instead, we place our hope in God's good care; and know that He will never let us down. We entrust tomorrow to Him, and look expectantly to His good plan. In a word, it means we're confident in God's power.

More thoughts on Matthew 18:1-5

It seems that Jesus' message has not truly penetrated the minds and hearts of the disciples. Perhaps they have heard the part about the kingdom of heaven drawing near, but they have not understood what kind of kingdom this is, for they are preoccupied with questions of their status in this kingdom.

In response, Jesus offers a profound critique of their very question. He calls a child, places the child among them, and tells them that unless they change and become as little children, they will never even enter the kingdom (18:3; Matthew uses the strong double negative, *ou mē*). As long as they are concerned about their own status, they have missed the point completely.

A child in the ancient world was without status or rights, completely dependent on the good will of others to care for him or her. Notice that Jesus does not tell the disciples that they should have faith like a little child -- as if they could conjure up this kind of faith on their own -- but that they need to become like little children. Jesus further specifies what this means in the following verse: "Whoever humbles themselves like this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 18:4). It is giving up claims to power and status and knowing one's total dependence on God that counts as greatness in the kingdom of heaven.

Jesus takes it one step further in saying, "Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me" (Matthew 18:5). Jesus humbles himself in identifying with a little child, one without power or status. This is neither the first time nor the last in Matthew's Gospel that Jesus identifies with those who are powerless, needy, and marginal, and says that our response to such persons is, in effect, our response to him (10:40-42; 25:34-46).