



The King's Ransom

Matthew 20:28

Text

Matthew 18:1-14

Topic

Jesus instructs us to remain childlike while waiting for Him to return for us

Title

"I'm a God's 4 Us Kid"

Introduction

Wanna feel like a kid again?

You might need to travel to Peru. One McDonald's in Lima is hoping to make you feel like a kid again by installing a huge counter that forces adults to reach way up to pay their bill and grab their food.

If that won't do it, maybe a life-sized, drivable Mario Kart will make you feel like a kid again. The battery-powered kart features forward and reverse driving, on and off road tires, a seat belt and a brake pedal system. It comes loaded with sound effects from the video game. Too bad it has a maximum speed of 2.5 mph.

I got to thinking about feeling like a kid because of something Jesus says in our text.

Mat 18:3 and said, "Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted **and become as little children**, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.

Mat 18:4 Therefore whoever humbles himself **as this little child** is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

According to Jesus, we are to become and remain childlike.

He then warns about severe consequences if we are not childlike, or if we somehow mistreat those who are.

I'll organize my thoughts on our text around two points: #1 Get Back To Thinking Of Yourself As A Little Child, and #2 Go Forward Treating Everyone As Little Children.

#1 Get Back To Thinking Of Yourself As A Little Child

(v1-4)

The "child" Jesus has in mind is a child at his or her best. He's not talking about a spoiled child, or one we'd call a 'brat.' He's not referring to the kid who ruined the movie for you by throwing a tantrum, or who was slugging his mother in line at WalMart.

We are in a section of the Gospel of Matthew in which Jesus was revealing a mystery to His disciples. Because Israel's leaders would reject Him as their King, He would not at that time establish the kingdom of Heaven on earth that the Jews were promised in their Scriptures. Jesus would be crucified and buried, but rise from the dead to ascend into Heaven.

He would be returning and, in His Second Coming to the earth, He will establish the kingdom.

The disciples - including us - live between these comings as the members of something totally new, the church. While we wait for Jesus to return for us, we are citizens of the kingdom of Heaven, but live on a hostile earth that is still under the sway of the devil.

Jesus has been giving us instruction on how to live during this perilous delay. The instruction He gives in this section is, in some ways, the most unusual thus far. He wants us to be childlike.

Mat 18:1 At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?"

The boys wanted some clarification. They'd seen Peter, James and John go up the mountain with Jesus. Then Peter had been singled-out by the enemies of Jesus to ask if The Lord had paid His Temple tax. Then Jesus sent Peter to catch a fish that had money in its mouth with which to pay the tax.

It seemed as though there was a flow chart emerging, with Peter, then James and John, taking prominence.

Jesus had been speaking to them of His *abasement*; they spoke to Him of their *advancement*. How dense we can sometimes be.

Mat 18:2 Then Jesus called a little child to Him, set him in the midst of them,

Mat 18:3 and said, "Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.

Since they were most likely at Peter's home in Capernaum, there has always been speculation that this was one of his children. We can't know for sure.

"Converted and become as little children" is another metaphor for getting saved. It's not unlike Jesus telling Nicodemus, "you must be born-again," as a way of illustrating what it means to be saved.

You must be born-again to become a child of God. Have you been? Have you been converted? Nothing else matters unless you are His child by virtue of a new, spiritual birth.

Mat 18:4 Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

The disciples were concerned about "greatness," meaning position, and prominence, and power in the new kingdom.

A child has no position, or prominence, or power, in a kingdom. They must be protected and cared for by others. Sadly, tragically, in many countries, children are neglected or exploited and treated as mere property.

To enter the kingdom of Heaven you must be born-again as a child of God. The born-again child of God is then to *remain* childlike. It's not automatic; it requires your commitment.

Spiritual humility is, first of all, recognizing personal sinfulness and unworthiness and inability to do anything at all to become worthy before God and earn salvation wholly or even partially. Humility depends entirely on God's mercy for forgiveness and salvation. It looks to Jesus Christ as the Savior, who offered up himself as the perfect sacrifice for all sins.

"Humble **yourself**" means you must consciously choose to approach life with the best qualities of an unspoiled child.

- You humble yourself by choosing to **depend** upon The Lord the way a child must depend upon his or her father.
- You humble yourself by choosing to **obey** The Lord the way a child ought to obey his or her father.
- You humble yourself by choosing to **submit** to The Lord the way a child ought to submit to his or her father.
- You humble yourself by choosing to **trust** The Lord the way a child ought to trust his or her father.

Those qualities by no means exhaust the best of what it means to be childlike. We could add things like being teachable and vulnerable. But those four are the ones that best communicate the spiritual qualities of childlikeness.

Dependance, obedience, submission, and trust are choices you must make everyday in your walk with The Lord. To the extent you choose them, you humble yourself and follow God's plan for your life, rather than your own plan, or someone else's.

When you are first born-again and become a child of God, you are in a childlike spiritual state. Coming to Christ and confessing and repenting of your sins, you are totally dependent upon Jesus to save you. You trust in Him alone for eternal life. You want to submit to Him and obey His every desire and command for you.

It's as we grow older in The Lord that we can move away from this childlike state. One commentator said, "it's easier to believe Jesus for eternal salvation than it is to depend on Him for gas to put into your car."

The point is well taken. And that's why I'm saying, "**get back** to thinking of yourself as a little child." It's where we all started.

I know life is serious; tragic, even. I know many of you have suffered, or are currently suffering.

None of that cancels-out Jesus' love or the Father's care. I'm to depend, obey, submit, and trust as a child.

Not just any child. I am **His** child, the one in whom He has begun a good work, and has promised to complete it.

#2 Go Forward Treating Everyone As Little Children

(v5-14)

We start off well; but the world is a perilous place, and both the devil and my flesh can interfere with my humbling myself to remain childlike.

The remaining verses of our text instruct us about some of the perils we face going forward while waiting for The Lord.

Mat 18:5 Whoever receives one little child like this in My name receives Me.

Mat 18:6 "Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea.

The disciples - including us - have a mission while Jesus is away. It is to be His witnesses, to share the Gospel of salvation by grace alone through faith.

These two verses seem to describe the two possible responses to our message.

- Either someone "receives" us as God's "child," and thus "receives" The Lord.
- Or, someone rejects our message, and thus rejects The Lord.

The phrase, "whoever causes one of these little ones to sin," does not necessarily mean that the believers are led to commit sin. The *Expositor's Greek Testament* says, "it is the opposite of receiving; it is treating [someone] harshly and contemptuously."

Another version puts it like this:

(BBE) But whoever is a cause of trouble to one of these little ones who have faith in me...

We can certainly apply this verse to enticing the followers of Jesus to sin. That is one way of causing them trouble. But it also has a broader application, that of rejecting them, and with them The Lord, and actively causing them trouble, e.g., by persecuting them.

It would be better for such a person to die a criminals death before they had any opportunity to mistreat God's children.

These two verses, then, are about the reception, in this age, that others give you as a born-again child of God. Some will receive Him; most will not, and, for them, they face condemnation should they die in their sins.

Something to note; something precious. Jesus says that whatever is done to you, it's being done to Him as well. He identifies with you that much.

Mat 18:7 *Woe to the world because of offenses! For offenses must come, but woe to that man by whom the offense comes!*

Instead of the kingdom of Heaven on the earth, the devil remains loose on the earth, and the world system is antagonistic to us little children.

Thus, "offenses must come," meaning the world will hold peril for us so long as Jesus is away. William MacDonald writes, "the world, the flesh, and the devil are leagued to seduce and pervert."

"Woe to that man by whom offenses come" tells us that men will be held responsible for their beliefs and behavior. It can seem a small comfort, or no comfort at all, that God will one day call nonbelievers to account while they are allowed to go unpunished now. But we must understand that their end is horrifying, should they not be converted before their own death.

We are to choose to remain childlike despite living in a kingdom on earth that is hostile to God's spiritual children. Some will receive The Lord, while most will not but will, when given opportunity, cause us trouble of the most severe kind.

As if that isn't bad enough, we have ourselves to contend with, as described in verses eight and nine.

Mat 18:8 "If your hand or foot causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you. It is better for you to enter into life lame or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet, to be cast into the everlasting fire.

Mat 18:9 And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you. It is better for you to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes, to be cast into hell fire.

Jesus was referring to what the Bible calls "the flesh." When we talk about the flesh, it isn't the actual, physical members of your body we mean. It is that principle you find left in you after you are converted, that tendency to sin.

Your flesh utilizes the physical members of your body to try to satisfy its lusts; but cutting off body parts can't overcome the flesh.

This is an illustration - *not* a recommendation. **If** your hand, or foot, or eye, was responsible for causing you to sin, then you'd be better off cutting them off, or plucking them out.

The flesh should be dealt with just as radically as if you were amputating a limb or an eye to prevent you from sinning.

Sin is serious. If a person dies in their sins, without trusting Jesus Christ for salvation, they will be "cast into the everlasting fire," "cast into hell fire."

These verses are not about a Christian somehow forfeiting his or her salvation on account of sin. They are about the two ways of life on earth while awaiting the return of Jesus.

- The unsaved go on living in the flesh, seeming to prosper and satisfy themselves, but, in the end, they will perish eternally by being cast into hell fire.
- Meanwhile the Christian denies his or her flesh, and can therefore look like an amputee for their spiritual discipline. But they are living for something and for Someone beyond this earth.

It is better to choose Jesus, and appear to the world as a spiritual amputee, than to remain unsaved and perish eternally.

Sin, which brought death into the world, and is punished by eternal suffering in Hell, is why Jesus Christ came into the world, as a man, and died in our place. He died so no one ever need perish on account of sin.

And by His death and resurrection, He provides the power for you as a believer to overcome sin.

Why would we then, as children of God, want to toy with sin? Jesus didn't die so we could sin a little, or a lot, and still go to Heaven. He died, and rose again, so we could be set free from sin, so that we could yield our members to Him rather than to our flesh.

That being the case, we ought to yield our members to the Holy Spirit rather than to the flesh. We must be in constant discipline over the flesh - mastering it, maiming it, mutilating it.

It is better to be a believer and go forward in life maiming and mutilating your flesh, spiritually speaking, than to have remained in sin as a nonbeliever and perish eternally.

It's like that scene in *Jaws* when the fellas are comparing their scars. They're the marks that tell the story of the choices they made. Just so, the spiritual amputations you choose when you deny, rather than indulge, your flesh tell your spiritual story.

I keep being reminded of how childlike a person is who gets saved later in life. Old habits are abandoned - sometimes literally thrown in the trash. For some it will be books, or music, or videos, or alcohol, or recreational drugs, or some hobby or habit that was an idol.

Over time, things that you were once so excited to be free from start to creep back into your life. You start toying with sin - the very sin that Jesus died to set you free from; that would have led you to perish eternally.

We are to pursue holiness, not revert to the flesh. We are to master, maim, and mutilate sin, not try to manage it.

We are waiting for The Lord with other little ones - other believers. Verses ten through fourteen encourage us to value each child of God as the Father does, despite their being difficult.

Mat 18:10 "Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that in heaven their angels always see the face of My Father who is in heaven.

Do we each have a single guardian angel? A Clarence?
Probably not; but angels are God's messengering servants, and angels are always watching over us.

"Despise" can have a variety of meanings, e.g., *to look down upon*. The best single word definition would be *dis-esteem*. The idea is to esteem every other believer as a precious child of God - to see them as God sees them.

Mat 18:11 For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost.

While we were yet sinners, in rebellion against God, lost in our disgusting sin, Jesus valued us enough to come into the world we had ruined to save us.

How can I therefore not value each and every person for whom He died?

Jesus switches metaphors, from the little child to sheep.

Mat 18:12 "What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them goes astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine and go to the mountains to seek the one that is straying?

Mat 18:13 And if he should find it, assuredly, I say to you, he rejoices more over that sheep than over the ninety-nine that did not go astray.

Making sure the ninety-nine are safe, the shepherd searches for the one who is "straying." It's obviously a problem sheep; it put itself in danger, and both the shepherd and the rest of the flock.

But the shepherd won't write it off as a loss. He is compelled to go after the sheep. He wants to spare it from the lion or the bear or the wolf; or from starvation or dehydration or injury.

If a shepherd so treats his sheep, how much more should we treat one of God's dear flock?

We normally apply this to going after Christians who are sinning; and that is a fine application.

But the bigger teaching here is to value all God's sheep the way He does. Some of the ninety-nine are less than desirable. They may not be straying - but you sort of wish they weren't staying!

We are to instead esteem them better than ourselves. We are to serve them - to serve one another.

Mat 18:14 Even so it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish.

Jesus applies the parable of the lost sheep to the little ones He's been talking about - the born-again children of God. Jesus died on the Cross so they would not perish; how can we treat them as if we did not care if they perished?

Charles Spurgeon said it like this:

We must not treat the poor, the obscure, the little-gifted, as though we thought they would be better out of our way, or as if they were of no consequence whatever, and could be most properly ignored. This is in a certain sense to make them perish; for those whom we regard as nothing become to us as if they were nothing.

Do you want to feel like a kid again? If you were saved later in life, and you experienced a radical conversion, then think back to the childlike faith you had when you received Jesus Christ. Get back to the dependance, the obedience, the submission, and the trust you had as a baby believer. Live there don't grow out of it.

Maybe your conversion wasn't so radical. In fact, you may have gone on struggling with some sin for quite some time afterward.

Or maybe you were saved from a very young age - when you were still a child.

You can still grasp what we are talking about - what it means to be childlike. It's a simple, but powerful, illustration.

Perhaps you've never come to the Cross to confess and repent of your sins. Better do it today. God is not willing you should perish, but apart from faith in Jesus Christ, you'll be cast into the everlasting fire, cast into hell fire.