

# Like A Little Child

Matthew 18:1-5



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**FOCAL Read Responsively** **Matthew 18:1-5** At the same time came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? [2] And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them, [3] And said, **Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. [4] Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven. [5] And whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me.**<sup>KJV</sup>

The greatest problem afflicting mankind is not cancer. And though Alzheimer's is a terrible disease, this is not the greatest problem we face. Our greatest problem is with our "I"s. We have an "I" problem. Pride pulls at us, drawing us away from God. How did Satan strike at us in the Garden of Eden? The Bible says that Satan came to our fore-parents and said:

**Genesis 3:4b-5** "You shall not 'surely die': **(5) God knows that the day you eat of this so called 'forbidden fruit' that your eyes shall be opened, and you shall be exactly like Him**". Author's Paraphrase

Pride was the string that Satan pulled in the heart of Adam, and pride that led Cain to kill his brother Abel. Pride led to the Great Flood that destroyed all but eight souls. It was pride that caused Noah's children to settle in the land of **Shinar** – **modern day Iraq** – and decide to build a tower that would reach all the way to Heaven. The people said:

**Genesis 11:4** And they said, Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.

“Let us make us a name”. Pride tried to reach God with human works, and pride caused God *confuse our language* so as to scatter mankind over the face of the earth.

The disciples are walking with Jesus Christ, Eternal God in human form. Here is the Greatest Person Who has ever lived. And yet, as they walk with Him they cannot hear Him because they are focused on themselves. “Who is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven?”. How can I be “top dog” when we get to Heaven? This would be a recurring theme among the disciples throughout Christ's entire earthly ministry. At one point two of the disciples would *get their mother* to come to Jesus and ask:

**Matthew 20:21** “Grant that these my two sons may sit, the one on thy right hand, and the other on the left, in thy kingdom.

Jesus told her, “I can't do that”, but He did promise her that her children would “**drink of My cup**”. The disciple **James** would be the first martyr in the early Church (Acts 12:2), and the disciple **John** would be exiled to the Isle of Patmos. Both would drink the cup of suffering for the benefit of God's Church.

You cannot serve God – nor His Church – while pride rules in your heart. God uses the surrendered, the

humbled, the willing. He saves those who come to Him in faith, believing on the Lord Jesus Christ.

Pride is the flame that destroys local Churches. Pride will lead a man to attempt to save himself apart from faith in the Lord Jesus Christ - and will cause that unsaved man to die and enter a place of eternal punishment.

You cannot enter Heaven proud. You cannot serve the Lord and be proud. You can be proud of the Lord, but if you ever find yourselves thinking "Who is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven?" your train has derailed.

There is only one Who is the Greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven, and that is God. He is great in His love. He did not need to save us, but He did. He did not need to die for us, but He did. He did not even need to make us, but He did. God is great in His being, in His faithfulness, and in His provision. We are nothing, but we are something because He makes us so.

You will not hear the Lord say "well done" unless you have "done well". You cannot do well in the eyes of God unless you become as a little child in the presence of Almighty God. As Adrian Rogers said "**The devil would rather send you to hell from the pew than from the gutter**". You cannot be saved without bending your knee to Jesus. You cannot serve the Lord without bending your knee to Jesus.

May God touch your hearts with this Word!

## 1. You Need To Watch For That “Snare Of The Devil” Called “Pride”

**ILLUSTRATE** Preachers often get called to do funeral services for people who are disconnected or homeless. This happens quite often in the bigger cities. A preacher received a call one day from a funeral home to do a “graveside service” for a homeless man. The preacher got lost on the way to the cemetery and was about to give up when he saw some workmen filling in what appeared to be the grave. He stepped out of his car and, Bible in hand, preached a short message and closed with a heartfelt prayer. As he turned to go to his car a worker came up to him to shake his hand. The worker said, **“Preacher, I've been at this job for a long time and I've never seen or heard anything like that. That was amazing!”** The preacher - puffed up - asked, **“How long have you been digging graves?”** The workman said, **“Graves? This isn't a grave. We just planted a septic tank!”**

Pride is a snare of the devil. Of the *seven deadly sins* pride is listed as the *very first*:

**Proverbs 6:16-17** **These six things doth the LORD hate: yea, seven are an abomination unto him: (17) A proud look, ...**

The Bible says that **the wicked are bound with chains of pride (Psalm 73:6)**. We are told that

**Psalms 10:4** **The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God: God is not in all**

**his thoughts.**

Men and women leave this life, lost and undone, because of pride. They will not come to Christ and be saved. They believe that their own goodness or their own good works will save them. They are drowning men who refuse the life preserver of Christ, but instead reach for the heavy chain that Satan throws overboard to them. Pride destroys lives.

Pride always looks for the best opportunity to strike. Look at our text:

**FOCAL Matthew 18:1** **At the same time** came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, **Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?**

You might be tempted to overlook those first four words – DON'T. These words tell us something. You see, pride looks for an opportunity to strike. It looks for some crack in your life to crawl out of. **“At the same time”** tells us to look at our context and see what happened to bring up this prideful debate about greatness in Heaven. Look at your preceding context:

**CONTEXT Matthew 17:24-27** **And when they were come to Capernaum, they that received tribute money came to Peter, and said, Doth not your master pay tribute? (25) He saith, Yes. And when he was come into the house, Jesus {stopped and said to him} **What thinkest thou, Simon? of whom do the kings of the earth take custom or tribute? of their own children, or of strangers? (26) Peter** saith unto him, Of**

strangers. Jesus saith unto him, **Then are the children free. (27) Notwithstanding, lest we should offend them, go thou to the sea, and cast a hook, and take up the fish that first cometh up; and when thou hast opened his mouth, thou shalt find a piece of money: that take, and give unto them for me and thee.**

The disciples are in Capernaum, and the Tax Collectors of that area – men commissioned by Rome – ask *Peter* “**Does your Master pay taxes?**”. Peter quickly replies “**Why, yes He does**”, because to not pay taxes to Rome was considered treason. Jesus used this occasion to teach Peter and the disciples to **rely on God for their provision**. The Tax Collectors addressed *Peter*. Jesus addressed *Peter*. Jesus told *Peter* to go out and catch a fish, and there find the tax money in the fishes mouth. Here is a great lesson on the Providence of God.

And I'm afraid no one got it.

While God in the flesh – Jesus Christ – was trying to teach the disciples how to trust in the Lord, there was a heckler in the crowd called “Pride”. As the Master spoke and showed “Pride” kept disrupting the service. Pride got up during the invitation and slammed the door. Pride – like a crying baby – got everyone to watch and hear it and not the Master Teacher. Pride said “Look at me, don't hear Him”. Pride.

Let me explain, and give it to you in context. The Gospel of Matthew was written by Matthew, also known as **Levi, the son of Alphaeus**. When the Apostle Matthew was called by Jesus he was actually a *tax*

*collector*. Jesus was teaching a large crowd of people in **Capernaum** when He saw Matthew. The Bible says:

**Mark 2:14** As {Jesus} walked along, He saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me," Jesus told him, and Levi got up and followed him. <sup>NIV</sup>

Jesus was in Capernaum when He met Matthew. Matthew was a Tax Collector when he met Jesus. Why are these men asking *Peter* about paying taxes? Why is Jesus teaching *Peter* to explain the provision of God?

I don't know if Matthew is the first one to bring up the question, but I do know that “**at the same time**” shows us that the situation with the tax collectors are bringing things to a head. Trouble is brewing in the Lord's Church. The Lord Jesus has been singling out **Peter, James and John** to do special things. Jesus took **Peter, James, and John to the Mount of Transfiguration (Matthew 17:1)**. Can you imagine them telling the other disciples of their field trip when they returned? "You should have seen it - it was beautiful. Jesus positively glowed, and we saw Him as God! He stood talking with Elijah and Moses - we just know who they were - and God the Father spoke to Peter, saying "**This is My Beloved Son in Whom I am well pleased; Hear HIM!**" (Matthew 17:5). I'm telling you, you should have been there!"

**"At the same time"**. Jesus caught His disciples fighting among themselves as to **who would be the greatest**.

The Gospel of Mark tells us that Jesus addressed His little Church, saying:

**Mark 9:33-34 ... What was it that ye disputed among yourselves by the way? [34] But they held their peace: for by the way they had disputed among themselves, who *should be* the greatest.**

Pride takes our eyes off of that which is most important. When we are prideful we cannot be used of God. God uses the humble, the willing, the loving. God had a reason for taking **Peter, James, and John** off to the side. **Peter** was Jesus' choice to lead the Apostles. The Bible says:

**1 Corinthians 12:18 But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body {His Church}, as it hath pleased him.**

Jesus chose **Peter** to lead the Apostles, though it was **Andrew who introduced Peter to Jesus (John 1:40-41)**. Jesus took **James** to the side and trained him specially because it would be James who would Pastor the Church of Jerusalem. This same James would also be **murdered by Herod as the first martyr in the Church (Acts 12:1-2)**. The Apostle **John** would be meet Jesus again after our Crucified and Risen Lord *ascended to Heaven*, for John would be exiled to Patmos and would write not on the Book of Revelation, but also the largest portion of the New Testament.

Peter, James, and John would need their special training from the Lord. Peter would eventually become –

according to Rome – *Public Enemy Number 1*. He would die – according to tradition – crucified upside down. Peter, James, and John would drink deeply of the cup of suffering, but God would also use the other disciples to great things for His glory.

## **2. Jesus Calls You, Jesus Sets You In The Midst**

**FOCAL Matthew 18:1-2** ....At the same time came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, **Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? [2] And Jesus called a little child unto Him, and set him in the midst of them,**

**ILLUSTRATE** The beginning of greatness in God's eyes comes when you and I *respond to the Lord Jesus*. The Lord is not impressed by sincerity or human goodness. You can be sincere, and be sincerely wrong. H<sup>2</sup>O and H<sup>2</sup>SO<sup>4</sup> are both clear liquids. H<sup>2</sup>O is the chemical formula for **plain old water**, whereas H<sup>2</sup>SO<sup>4</sup> is the formula for **sulfuric acid**. If two glasses were set before you and you drank the water you'd be fine. If you drank the **sulfuric acid** horrible things would happen *no matter how sincere or how good you are*. Sincerity doesn't change a thing - poison is poison and acid is acid.

If you want to be **great in the Kingdom of Heaven** you must first respond to the call of God. The phrase "**Kingdom of Heaven**" occurs 32 times in the Scripture, and only in the Book of Matthew.

**Word Study** Notice that **Jesus called a little child unto Him**. The word "**called**" is the Greek

**PROSKALEOMAI** (προσκαλεομαι **pronounced** *pros-kal-eh'-om-ahee*). Peter uses this same word when he preaches on the Day of Pentecost.

**Acts 2:37-39** .... they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men *and* brethren, what shall we do? [38] Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. [39] For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, *even* **as many as the Lord our God shall call.**

The beginning of salvation is when a person responds to the call of God. **Jesus called a little child unto Him.**

Notice the **child's name** is not mentioned. He isn't called "Larry" or "David" or "Jack" or "Jill" or even "Methuselah". In order to be saved "I" must become "i".

You lose your pride, lose your identity, and focus on *needing to get to Christ*. When you come to God it's not YOU that matters, but it is that you are "**a little child**".

**Word Study** The word translated "**little child**" is the Greek PAIDION (παιδιον pronounced *pahee-dee'-on*) which is used *for infants, toddlers, and young children.*

You are saved when you come to God *completely helpless, just as an infant is helpless*. An infant cannot feed itself. It cannot clothe itself. An infant relies on the Parent to sustain it and to even keep it clean. An infant will mess up on itself. It is totally helpless.

You cannot be great in the Kingdom of Heaven unless you come to God, helpless and totally dependent on His saving Grace. **You must be a little child.** This is why the Bible tells us that:

**Galatians 3:24** Wherefore the law was our **schoolmaster** to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith.

We think we know so much. We live in an age when information flows on a thing called an Internet. **Knowledge puffeth up.** The truth of the matter is that we know much today, but for all our knowledge we still cannot be saved by our own efforts. As one preacher put it, "**We know more than a dog knows, but by ourselves we can no more achieve eternity than a dog can**". Knowledge is not the issue. This is what the **schoolmaster** or **tutor** we call **the Law** teaches us.

**ILLUSTRATE DR Law and DR Grace** The old time preacher *Lester Roloff* often used this illustration: A man had an incurable problem, so he went to see Dr. Law. He said "**Dr. Law, I have a problem with my eyes, my hands, my feet, and my tongue. My eyes want to look at the wrong thing. My hands touch things that degrade me. I find my feet carrying me to places that I ought not to be. My tongue tastes things that make**

me sick. I fear for my life, for I can't stop these things. What can I do, Dr. Law?" Dr. Law says, "The problem is not with your hands, your feet, your eyes, or even your mouth. The problem is with your heart. Your heart is deceitful above all things. Your heart is crooked, perverted by sin." The man says, "I know this. Dr. Law, you need to fix me. Tell me what to do!" Dr. Law replies, "I can't fix you. I can only diagnose your problem. You need to go see my friend Dr. Grace. He is the one who can fix you". The man replies, "Oh No, Dr. Law, you have been my doctor for years. I won't see another. Tell me what to do.!" But all Dr. Law says – over and over again – is "You are sick. Go and see Dr. Grace".

Dear friends, you must *humble yourselves and submit to Jesus* if you want to see the Kingdom of Heaven. The Bible says:

**Hebrews 10:4-9** For **it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins. .... (8)** Above when he said, **Sacrifice and offering and burnt offerings and offering for sin thou wouldest not, neither hadst pleasure therein; which are offered by the law; (9)** Then said he, **Lo, I come to do thy will, O God. He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second.**

It was **not possible that the Blood of bulls and goats should take away sins.** If they cleared the sins of the people they would have ceased being offered. God was not pleased with the Law. He was not satisfied with the Blood of an animal covering the sin of man. For this

reason Jesus came into the world. The Scripture tells us that:

**Hebrews 10:10** By the which will **we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.**

We are **sanctified** (HAGIAZO, set apart, made holy) **through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once and for all.** Just as Jesus called that little child to Him and that child responded and came to His side, in the same way you and I are saved.

**Hebrews 10:14-20** For **by one offering he hath perfected forever them that are sanctified. (15)** Whereof the Holy Ghost also is a witness to us: for after that he had said before, **(16)** This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord, **I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them; (17)** And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more. **(18)** Now where remission of these **is, there is no more offering for sin. (19)** Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, **(20)** By a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, **his flesh;**

Look once more at our focal text. Jesus said:

**FOCAL** **Matthew 18:3** **Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.**

**Word Study** Jesus said that **you must be converted**. The word “**converted**” is the Greek STREFO, which means “to twist back on yourself, to change your mind radically”.

You can keep on trying to work your way to Heaven, but it is a fool's bet. The Lord tells us that it is by “**one offering He has perfected forever them that are sanctified**”. When you come to Jesus by faith – heeding His call – then His embrace cleanses you in the eyes of God the Father. You are given His holiness, and He is given your sin. All sin has been laid on Jesus Christ and judged. But not only this, God takes the born again believer a step further.

Dr. Grace gives us a *heart transplant*. Through Grace God says “**I will put My laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them. Their sins and iniquities I will remember no more.**” (Hebrews 10:16)

Just as the infant – the little child – cannot give itself life, neither can the Christian give himself life. We are born again by responding to the call of Christ. Just as the infant – the little child – needs to be fed and taught, neither can the Christian feed and teach himself. The Christian way of life is the life of the little child. We who believe rely on the Lord Who called us.

**FOCAL Matthew 18:1-2** .... Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? [2] And **Jesus called a little**

**child unto Him, and set him in the midst of them,**

It is Jesus Who **calls**. It is Jesus Who **sets us in the midst**. It is the Spirit of Jesus Christ that sets us in His Church. It is the power of God's Holy Spirit that teaches us the precious Word of God.

It is all of God, and none of us.

### **3. You Will Only Hear God's “Well Done” When You Have “Done Well” In Humility**

**FOCAL Matthew 18:4** **Whoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.**

**Word Study** The word translated “**humble**” here is the Greek TAPEINO. It means “to take a place of lower rank. To abase oneself, to set others above yourself”. It denotes a willingness to submit to another.

Jesus modifies the command by adding the qualifier “**as this little child**”.

Listen up, Christian: If you will not follow Jesus, Jesus will use someone else!

When Jesus called the child to His side the child did not hesitate, but he came. **The child did what Jesus asked him to do**. The child could have refused. He could have

been playing and said “I’ll come later”. Many believers do the same thing. The Lord calls them to do something, and they are so busy playing at life that they put the Lord on hold. Dear friends. Heaven is all about God. If you do not put Jesus first *now* then you will not be first in Heaven. **Gordon Dahl** wrote:

**“Most ... Americans tend to worship their work, to work at their play, and to play at their worship. As a result their meanings and values are distorted. Their relationships disintegrate faster than they can keep them in repair, and their lifestyles resemble a cast of characters in search of a plot.”**

When Jesus called the child to His side he **humbled himself**. He left off his play, he left off his friends, he left off everything he was doing and came to the Savior's side. The child had no preconceptions. **Please note again that the child's name is not used.** It is frightening to me that so many people will not serve the Savior unless they have a title, a position, or a name. Jesus warned us against the way of the Pharisee. He said:

**Matthew 6:1-2** **Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven. (2)** **Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.**

**It is hypocrisy to serve so that you can make a name**

**for yourself.** This child came to Jesus without any name. He came *because it was Jesus Who called*. He came *because it was Jesus Who asked*. If you are serving God – or seeking to serve God – so that people will remember your name, remember what Jesus said: **“You have your reward”**. He said:

**Matthew 6:5** **And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.**

You will not hear God's **“well done My good and faithful servant”** if you seek out and receive accolade now. Serve the Lord for the joy of serving the Lord. Serve the Lord because He has saved you, and because He deserves your service.

#### **4. What Has God Promised Those Who Humble Themselves?**

**FOCAL** **Matthew 18:5** **And whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me.**

When you are serving the Lord in humility, then you are representing the Lord. Not only that, but the Scripture tells us that the *more you submit to Christ, the more He works through your life.*

The Apostle Paul spoke of a **thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan that attacked his life**. Paul went to the Lord three times in prayer and asked that God

remove this **thorn**. The Lord told the Apostle, “**My Grace is sufficient for you**”.

**2 Corinthians 12:9-10** {God} said unto me, **My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. (10) Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.**

Power in the Christian life is only found when you *immediately obey the directive of the Lord*. The power in the Christian life is the *humble submission of a little child*. I do my best in serving Jesus, and Jesus looks after ME!

The heart that says, “Lord, whatever You want, that I will do. I am yours to do with as You will”. When the born again child of God rests in the arms of Jesus the Lord uses him, flows through him, shines through his life for His glory. Look what Jesus said:

**CONTEXT Matthew 18:6** **But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea.**

Jesus Christ protects those who are His. If you are born again by faith in Jesus Christ then trust Him. Rest in

Him. Rest in His Word, and do as He tells you to do.

**John Piper** rightfully said: “**Humility is the soil in which everything in the Christian life grows**”

Are you trusting Jesus? Are you surrendered to Him? Oh, don't wait. Run to His nail scarred hands. Let Him embrace you in every area of your life.

**ILLUSTRATE** A Christian family went through one of the dark moments. A husband lost his precious wife to cancer. He lay in bed that night with his little daughter grieving. He heard his little girl stir next to him. “Daddy, it's so dark. Are you there?” Yes honey, I'm here. “Daddy, I can't see you. Is your face turned toward me?” Yes honey, though you can't see me, my face is turned toward you. You are my child, and I love you. As the child went to sleep the daddy quietly slipped out of bed. Kneeling next to it he prayed, “Father, it's so dark ... Are You there?” In his heart he heard the Lord reply. Yes honey, I'm here. “Father, I can't see You. Is Your face turned toward me?” Yes honey, though You can't see Me, My face is turned toward you. You are My child, and I love you.

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Genesis 3:4b-5; Genesis 11:4; Matthew 20:21

### 1. You Need To Watch For That “Snare Of The Devil” Called “Pride”

Proverbs 6:16-17; Psalm 73:6; Psalms 10:4; Matthew 18:1; Matthew 17:24-27; Mark 2:14; Matthew 17:1; Matthew 17:5; Mark 9:33-34; 1 Corinthians 12:18; John 1:40-41; Acts 12:1-2

- Jesus was in \_\_\_\_\_ when He met Matthew.  
Matthew was a \_\_\_\_\_ when he met Jesus.  
Why are these men asking \_\_\_\_\_ about paying taxes?  
Why is Jesus teaching *Peter* to explain the \_\_\_\_\_ of God?

### 2. Jesus Calls You, Jesus Sets You In The Midst

Matthew 18:1-2; Acts 2:37-39; Galatians 3:24; Hebrews 10:4-9; Hebrews 10:10; Hebrews 10:14-20; Matthew 18:3

- Notice that **Jesus called a little child unto Him**. The word **"called"** \_\_\_\_\_

- The word translated **"little child"** is the Greek PAIDION (παιδιον pronounced *pahee-dee'-on*) which \_\_\_\_\_

- Jesus said that **you must be converted**. The word **"converted"** is the Greek STREFO, \_\_\_\_\_

### 3. You Will Only Hear God's “Well Done” When You Have “Done Well” In Humility

Matthew 18:4; Matthew 6:1-2; Matthew 6:5

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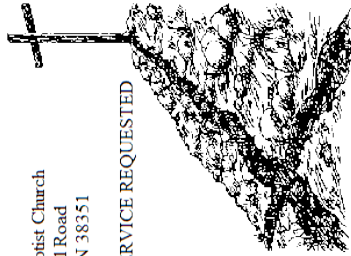
### 4. What Has God Promised Those Who Humble Themselves?

Matthew 18:5; 2 Corinthians 12:9-10; Matthew 18:6

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