

# Kingdom Kids

## Matthew 18:1-9

Kids say the darnedest things. At church one morning, a teacher was about to start her 4-year-olds' Sunday school class when a little boy showed up without any identification. The teacher managed to get his first name, but couldn't find out his last name. "Brian, what's your daddy's name?" she asked.

"Daddy," he replied.

She tried again, "Brian, what's your mommy's name?"

"Mommy," he answered.

Suddenly she realized exactly how she could get the answer she needed. "Brian, what does your daddy call your mommy?"

His face lit up. With a grin and a deep voice, he replied, "Hey, Babe." – *(Susan Boatright, Savannah, GA)*

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One grandmother tells about her four-year-old granddaughter, Amanda, who went to the doctor's office with a fever. The doctor looked in the little girl's ears and said, "Who's in there? Donald Duck?"

She said, "No."

He looked in her nose and said, "Who's in there? Mickey Mouse?"

Again she said, "No."

He put his stethoscope on her heart and said, "Who's in there? Barney?"

Amanda replied, "No, Jesus is in my heart. Barney is on my underwear." *(Carol Leet, New York. Today's Christian Woman, Vol. 18, no. 4. )*

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1. God's people are described in many ways throughout the Bible. However, one of the most frequent is that of children. We are called children of promise, children of the day, children of the light, beloved children, dear children and children of God.

2. Over the last few weeks we have been learning from Jesus about the Kingdom of God. Jesus is the King of Kingdom of righteousness. This kingdom is here right now as Jesus rules and reigns as Lord in our lives. And this kingdom is future as one day Jesus will return and will judge all people. As those who have believed in Jesus and been born again into God's family we are God's children. We are Kingdom kids. We enjoy the wonderful blessings of God's forever family.

What does it mean to be a Kingdom Kid? In Matthew 18, Jesus teaches His disciples about *becoming a child of God* (vv.1-4) and *offending a child of God* (vv.5-9).

## **I. Becoming a Child of God (vv.1-4).**

### **A. A Question for Jesus (v.1).**

1. Jesus had just displayed great humility in that He paid an unwieldy tax rather than **"offend"** the Jews. Now immediately on the heels of that event, the disciples display sinful pride by asking, **"Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?"**

2. Both Mark and Luke tell us that the question resulted from a quarrel the disciples had been having among themselves. Luke 9:46 says, **"Then a dispute arose among them as to which of them would be greatest."**

3. The disciples saw **"the kingdom of heaven"** as something that they would all inherit. They were arguing over who would get the **"greatest"** share. These twelve guys were not so different from us. They each probably thought they deserved the top spot. Imagine what they might have said as they argued for their position. Peter, James and John think they are the greatest because they had just been chosen by Jesus to go up the mountain where Jesus was transfigured before their very eyes. They saw His glory and heard Him talk with Moses and Elijah. Peter says, "Oh and after all, I walked on water." John reminds him that he also sunk, and says he is the greatest because he is the beloved disciple. Andrew says he found the Lord first. Matthew says he gave up the most lucrative profession to follow Jesus. Judas Iscariot says Jesus put him in charge of the money. Each of them had reasons for believing he was the **"greatest."** They believed Jesus would surely settle the argument.

4. While we might not be so bold as to ask for a special place in the kingdom, I'm certain some of our requests are equally selfish and trivial to God. While we are begging for a new car, Jesus wants us to plead for the salvation of a lost friend. While we are asking for deliverance from the pain of an ingrown toenail, He longs for us to pray for deliverance from the sin that easily ensnares us. While we complain about the neighbor's dog that barks too loud at night, we don't even care that this neighbor is lost without Jesus. We're not really that different from the twelve are we? They ask Jesus, **"Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?"**

## **B. Child-like Faith: Be Converted (vv.2-3).**

Listen to how Jesus answers them, **"Then Jesus called a little child to Him, set him in the midst of them, 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.'"**

1. Jesus is in the city of Capernaum. Mark tells us that He was **"in the house."** It was probably Peter's house. Jesus had spent time there before. He had healed Peter's mother-in-law when she was sick in that house. Now in this house Jesus **"called"** a **"little child"** to Himself. It might have been someone from Peter's family. The word for **"child"** means a very young child even an infant, or a toddler.

2. By the way, Jesus loved children. On several occasions in the gospel stories, we see Him gently holding children in His lap, laying His hands on them and blessing them.

3. In Mark 10 we read specifically of how parents brought their little ones to Jesus **"that He might touch them"** but the disciples **"rebuked"** them and tried to

send the children away. Jesus said, "**Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God**" (Mk.10:14).

4. Jesus took this "**little child**" and "**set him in the midst of them.**" Imagine Jesus with a little boy or girl on His knee and all 12 disciples gathered around as Jesus begins to teach.

5. Jesus said that unless we are "**converted**" and become "**as little children**" we will "**by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.**"

6. "**Converted**" comes from the Greek word *strepho*, meaning "to twist, turn around or reverse." Jesus is calling for a complete turn around in their thinking.

They surely thought that because they had spent so much time with Jesus, and done miracles in His name, and had left all to follow Him that they had earned themselves a place of greatness in Jesus' Kingdom. Jesus turn that line of thinking on it head. Jesus said unless we are "**converted,**" unless we are completely turned around, we cannot even be a part of the Kingdom.

So why call this kid? Think about it. Here is this little boy or girl sitting on Jesus' lap. This kid had done none of the great things that the disciples had done. All he or she did was exactly what Jesus said to do, and that was come to Him. Jesus called the kid and the kid came. The disciples were going to have to be converted, that is, they were going to have let God change their mind and change their heart. They needed to recognize how completely bankrupt they were, how completely dependent they were upon Jesus for their power and ability and everything else if they were going to be of any use to Jesus.

You see, Jesus wasn't setting up some physical kingdom, nor did He have any immediate plans to do so. His kingdom was about giving men and women the opportunity to hear the gospel and make a decision about God's provision for their lost condition. His kingdom was about doing the work of saving sinners. It was a work that He would leave them to do. His kingdom was about casting the net, sowing the seed, seeking the lost and using His followers to do it. But until they recognized how completely dependent on Him they were He couldn't entrust it to them.

We must be converted. We must come to God in faith just as the child had come into His arms or we cannot be saved, we cannot be a part of His Kingdom.

Ken Blanchard retells the story of a little girl named Schia. Schia was 4 years old when her baby brother was born.

"Little Schia began to ask her parents if they would let her be alone with the new baby. They worried that, like most 4-year-olds, she might accidentally hit or shake him, so they said no." Over time, though, since Schia wasn't showing signs of jealousy, they changed their minds and decided to let Schia have her private conference with the baby.

"Elated, Schia went into the baby's room and shut the door, but it opened just a crack--enough for her curious parents to peek in and listen. They saw little Schia walk quietly up to her baby brother, put her face close to his, and say, 'Baby, tell me what God feels like. I'm starting to forget.'"

Have you grown older and forgotten God? It's not too late to let God change you, to convert you. Jesus taught that to enter the kingdom of God, we must simply receive it like a little child.

### **C. Child-like Humility: Become as Little Children (v.4).**

True Greatness Is Marked by Humility (4-6).

1. The disciples had been converted in the sense that they had placed their faith in Christ for salvation. However, they needed to become converted in their thinking.
2. Spurgeon said, **"The apostles were converted in one sense, but even they needed a further conversion. They needed to become converted from self-seeking to humbleness and contentment. A little child has no ambitious dreams; he is satisfied with little things; he trusts; he aims not at greatness; he yields to command."**
3. The world encourages its citizens to ascend, to rise up to greatness. Heaven encourages its citizens to descend, to go down in humility. The flesh cries out for recognition, for greatness. The Spirit leads us in the path of servanthood and lowliness.
4. How does a person become a child of God? By humbling himself. If you are saved, you came to the place where you recognized and admitted your sinfulness. You also recognized your complete inability to do anything about your condition. In humility, like a **"little child"** you called out to God for salvation.
5. We become Kingdom kids, we enter the **"kingdom of heaven"** by humbling ourselves as **"little children."** However, the one who will be **"greatest"** in God's kingdom must continue to **"humble himself."** The Kingdom's economy is very different from the world. We go down, we humble ourselves or descend into greatness.

A.W. Tozer said it this way, **"A real Christian is an odd number, anyway. He feels supreme love for One who he has never seen; talks familiarly every day to Someone he cannot see; expects to go to heaven on the virtue of Another; empties himself in order to be full; admits he is wrong so he can be declared right; goes down in order to get up; is strongest when he is weakest; richest when he is poorest and happiest when he feels the worst. He dies so he can live; forsakes in order to have; gives away so he can keep; sees the invisible, hears the inaudible, and knows that which passeth knowledge."**

William Carey is considered the father of modern missions. This man who spent his early years as a cobbler became one of the greatest linguists the church has ever known. Carey went to India where he preached the gospel and translated parts of the Bible into as many as 24 Indian languages. When he first went to India, some regarded him with dislike and contempt. One time at a dinner party a distinguished guest, hoping to humiliate Carey, said in a loud voice, "I suppose, Mr. Carey, you once worked as a shoemaker." Carey responded humbly, "No, your lordship, not as a shoemaker, only a cobbler." Carey didn't claim to make shoes, only to mend them. -- *Today in the Word*, September 21, 1995, p. 28.

It's been said that humility doesn't mean that you think less of yourself; it means that you think of yourself less. Chuck Swindoll gave a good example of this. He told about some kids who built a playhouse and posted these rules on the door:

1. No one acts big.
2. No one acts small.
3. Everyone acts medium.

Do you want to develop the humility of a child? Act medium towards everyone. Treat everyone as your equal. Don't be the most important person in your world; develop the humility of a child – treat others as your equal. Act medium.

You see humility comes when we realize how great God is and how small we are. When we compare ourselves with others we might begin to think we are really somebody, we are great. But when we compare ourselves to God, when we see Jesus for who He is, we realize how very little we are. All of us stand on equal footing when we stand at the foot of the cross. All of us stand as sinners in need of a Savior. None of us is any better or any worse. We all must be born again.

The kingdom of heaven is an upside-down kingdom where the king dies for his subjects. It is a kingdom where the humble are exalted, a kingdom where to be like a little child is to be great. In the kingdom of Heaven our very citizenship has been secured by the blood of the King. The one we worship is the same one who loved us enough to die for us.

## **II. Offending a Child of God (vv.5-9).**

### **A. The Principle of Receiving a Believer (v.5).**

1. This "**little child**" in Jesus' lap is an illustration of the child of God, the believer. Of course Jesus wants us to gladly receive those who are physically children, but the great spiritual lesson centers on the receiving the spiritual children of the Lord.

Have you ever noticed how quick young children are to receive each other? If we are like a "**little child**" in our humility, we will quickly receive others.

2. To delight in the humble, unassuming and lowly of this world is to delight in Christ. If we joyfully serve children and people of modest stature and other believers we joyfully serve Jesus.

### **B. The Danger of Offending a Believer (vv.6-7).**

1. Again, when Jesus speaks of "**little ones**" the greater reference is to Christians because He says they are those "**who believe in Me.**"

2. Jesus speaks of those who cause Christians "**to sin**" or to stumble. The Greek word is *skandalizo*, which literally means "to cause to fall." God has serious judgment for anyone who is responsible for causing a believer to sin.

3. Jesus said 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 type of "millstone" to which Jesus referred was the large stone that required a donkey or ox to turn.

It usually weighed several hundred pounds. Romans sometimes practiced this form of execution.

4. Imagine the shock that came over the disciples when they heard this. In their dispute over whom was the "**greatest**" they had just caused each other to sin or stumble by inciting envy, jealousy and anger.

5. Zech.2:8 says of God's people "**he who touches you touches the apple of His eye.**" God is sensitive about His people. Whoever causes them to sin pokes his finger in God's eye.

6. How can we cause others to sin or stumble?

a. First, *by tempting others with our own ungodliness*. Misery loves company. Eve tempted Adam. Aaron caused national Israel to sin by molding and worshiping a golden calf.

b. Second, *by elevating our manmade traditions as equal or above the Word of God*. We give people false pride and humility.

c. Third, *by living a sinful example*. What we do is just as important as what we say. I shudder to think about how I've offended God in this way.

Imagine those who have said, "**My pastor [SS teacher, deacon, etc.] does or says...**" Rather, we ought to lead a righteous example. Paul said to Timothy, "**Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity.**"

d. Fourth, *by failing to lead them in the paths of righteousness*. Sometimes we withhold our spiritual insights and experiences with the Lord rather than share them with someone who needs them. Heb.10:24 says, "**And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works.**"

William Barclay told the story of an old man on his deathbed who was distraught in confessing a prank he had played as a child. He had reversed a sign at a crossroads. He said, "**I've never ceased to wonder how many people were sent in the wrong direction by what we did.**" How many times have we led others down the wrong paths either by a bad example or by absence of a good example.

7. Jesus goes on to say "**woe**" or a curse or condemnation "**to the world because of offenses**" or stumbling blocks. He says "**For offenses must come.**" The world is full of enticements to sin. Snares are laid on every side.

8. In a more personal vein, Jesus says, "**But woe to that man by whom the offense comes.**" He had already said it would be better for him to be drowned in the sea. Now He adds that such sin brings the judgment of God.

As parents you and I would do anything to protect our children. We would give our lives for theirs. We set boundaries around them. We keep a watchful eye on their friends. If we sinful people have this commitment to our children, how much more devotion does our perfect Heavenly Father feel for His children?

### **C. Avoiding Offending a Believer (vv.8-9).**

1. This is obviously figurative language because we know that no part of our physical bodies cause us to sin.

2. On top of that if we were to amputate a physical limb or pluck out physically one of our eyes, even such an extreme act would not keep us from sinning.
3. These verses are very similar to statements Jesus made during the Sermon on the Mount in 5:29-30.
4. Jesus used symbolic language to make a concrete point, *we should do whatever necessary to remove sin from our lives and to keep from causing others to sin.*
5. Nothing is so valuable, so important, and so necessary that it should keep us from pursuing a life of obedience to Christ. This is a call for drastic action against sin.

Dr. George Sweeting told the story of watching ice rushing down the river and plunging over Niagara Falls. Fish were frozen in the ice and the gulls landed on the blocks to feed. As they came to the brink of the falls, their wings would go out, and they would escape from the falls.

He said, **"I watched one gull which seemed to delay. It was engrossed in the carcass of a fish, and when it finally came to the brink of the falls, out went its powerful wings. The bird flapped and flapped and even lifted the ice out of the water, and I thought it would escape. But it had delayed too long so that its claws had frozen into the ice. The weight of the ice was too great, and the gull plunged into the abyss."**

6. Let me be clear in pointing out that only unbelievers are in danger of **"hell fire."** However, believers can understand from this teaching the seriousness with which God looks upon sin and the gravity of leading others to sin.
7. Paul said in 1 Cor.9:27, **"But I discipline [lit. "hit under the eye] my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified."**

The writer of Hebrews encourages us to **"lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us"** (Heb.12:1).

Do you know how Eskimos kill wolves? First, the Eskimo coats a knife blade with animal blood and allows it to freeze. Then he adds another layer of blood, and another, until the blade is completely concealed by frozen blood. He fixes the knife in the ground with the blade up. When a wolf follows his sensitive nose to the source of the scent, he licks it, tasting the fresh frozen blood. He licks faster lapping the blade until the keen edge is bare. His craving grows so great that he does not notice the razor-sharp sting of the naked blade on his own tongue, nor does he recognize the instant when his thirst is being satisfied by his OWN warm blood. Dawn finds him dead in the snow. Sin is like that. The difference is, it may not just consume you, your sin may consume others too!