

September 6 Matthew 18:1-14

Prayer: Lord, where we are wrong, make us willing to change. Where we are right, make us easy to live with. We confess our pride, but we are pursuing humility. Help us to be more serious about self-denial. Help us to see that our words matter. They show whether we're proud or humble. By putting people down we build ourselves up and grieve Your Spirit. Our confidence is in You, not in ourselves. We rest in Your grace, and pray in Jesus' Name, Amen.

The disciples came to Jesus. They came openly and unashamedly asking, **"Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?"**

Most likely they would have remembered what Jesus had said about John the Baptist, **"Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist."**

Now that John is dead, it is logical for them to ask, "Now, who Lord, since John is gone is the greatest? The desire for prominence goes all the way back to the Garden of Eden, where the serpent promised greatness to Adam and Eve. The serpent didn't say to them: "Be bad and disobey God." He held out a promise to them: "You will be wise. You will be like God." We're all tempted to pride, which is the essence of sin.

The disciples remembered what Jesus had said about John being the greatest of those born of women but apparently, they had forgotten the words that Jesus had spoken next.

"Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he."

So Jesus sets them straight. He calls a little child to Himself. He then sets the child in the midst of the disciples as an example.

"Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven." Unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

This informs us of the need for us to turn. To change our thinking. That's what Jesus did to the disciples. He turned their presuppositions between 'least' and 'greatest' on their heads. They had been thinking along one line and he gets them to start thinking along a different line.

He bypasses them completely and calls a child over. He insists that they "change and become like little children" in order to have a place in God's Kingdom. **"Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven."**

He didn't tell the child to become like His disciples. He told the disciples to become like the child. To be childlike means to put aside pride. It means to rely on God with reverent awe and delight. We are not to be childish. We are to be childlike. Unfortunately, some people never grow up. Let me share a truth with you: **"You are only young once, but you can be immature forever.** We all have to get older but we don't have to get wiser.

C.S. Lewis said, **"Christ wants a child's heart but a grownup's head.**

Childlike faith is not childish faith. The first resonates with and embraces the neediness, dependency, and smallness of those who understand their place in the kingdom of God. The second simply refuses to grow up.

Over and over again in the New Testament we see the apostles exhort Christians to mature as Christians—to grow up in the gospel. Paul exhorts the church in Corinth, **"Brothers, do not be children in your thinking. Be infants in evil, but in your thinking be mature."** Paul isn't contradicting Jesus's teaching about becoming like a child in order to inherit God's kingdom. He's simply recognizing that having childlike faith doesn't mean celebrating childish thinking. In fact, he informs the Colossians that the focus and aim of his ministry is maturity.

"Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me."

Embracing childlike faith means we accept that Christ's call to kingdom greatness looks like service and not harsh ruling. It looks like meekness and not selfish ambition. It is a continual dependence on God's grace.

Anyone who has pursued service, meekness, and dependence will tell you these characteristics don't come easily to sinners. It takes Spirit-empowered wisdom and maturity to excel in these things.

Pastor Rick Warren notes that the mark of spiritual maturity occurs when a believer **"takes off the bib and puts on an apron."** Immature children wear bibs. They expect others to meet their needs. Those who don aprons don them to serve. A little child represents the least of the least. Yet they have a special place in the heart of Jesus. To receive "one such" is to receive Jesus. And to receive Jesus is to receive God Himself.

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

So how do we "become like little children"? Being childlike means being humble enough to trust Jesus. Even when we're tempted to place all our trust in ourselves. Jesus is not suggesting that children are innocent or sinless. Babies show all kinds of signs of selfishness. Toddlers who reach the "terrible twos" can make anyone believe in Original Sin. Jesus is urging us to be child-like, not childish. Children understand that they depend on others. They usually know their limitations. They respond to God's world with wonder...and then they grow up.

Adults tend to boast that they never rely on anyone. They are self-made. They make an idol out of self-reliance. Unless we humble ourselves, we will never come to Christ. There is no room for God in people who are full of themselves.

Benjamin Whichcote wrote, **"None are as empty as those who are full of themselves."**

Have you ever met a prideful, arrogant person? They are always telling you about themselves. They are forever talking up their accomplishments. They want you to know just how smart and wonderful they are.

Then they look at you to continue the conversation about them. They pause then in their self-acclimation for a moment to give you the opportunity to affirm their magnificence.

This is what Abraham Lincoln had to say about such people, **"What kills a skunk is the publicity it gives itself."**

In regard to the sin of pride, St. Augustine said: **"Every proud man heeds himself and he who pleases himself seems great to himself. But he who pleases himself pleases a fool for he himself is a fool when he is pleasing himself."**

How much nicer the world would be if there were no prideful and arrogant people. If each of us were only concerned with others instead of ourselves. How different would our world be if all the prideful people suddenly realized the uselessness of talking about themselves? After all, what is the point? Why talk about yourself anyway? As soon as you leave the room, there are plenty of people willing to do it for you.

Where would we be if Jesus hadn't saved us from our self-centered and self-destructive ways? Humility is our greatest friend and pride is our greatest enemy.

Winston Churchill was reviling a political opponent. A reporter interrupted him. "But surely, Mr. Churchill, you must admit that he is a humble, and modest man?" To which Churchill replied: "He is a humble man, but then he has much to be humble about!"

Humility is elusive. When you think you have it, you've lost it! Pride is a spiritual cancer. It was once seen as the deadliest of sins, but nowadays it has become a virtue in our culture of self-expression. We admire the proud. The advertising industry feeds our pride: "You deserve this product."

In sharp contrast, Jesus modeled humility. Before Jesus, no one ever used the word "humble" as a compliment. People desired power and glory. They were driven by selfish ambition. Yet Jesus wore a different kind of glory. He portrayed the glory of humility. Jesus shows us that it's not "God helps those who help themselves", but those who humble themselves. The proud don't want any help. Humility is honestly assessing our strengths and weaknesses in light of God's holiness and our imperfection.

Rick Warren says **"Humility is not denying your strengths; it is being honest about your weaknesses."**

To be humble is to do an honest self-appraisal. It begins by admitting the truth about ourselves. This means that we avoid both bragging and putting ourselves down. Humility is acknowledging the truth about what we are and what we are not. Humility requires a bit of self-forgetfulness.

C.S. Lewis wrote, **"Humility is not thinking less of yourself, but thinking of yourself less."** That's profound.

C.J. Mahaney wrote, **"We should begin every day "by acknowledging our dependence upon God, our need of God, and our confidence in God."**

Salvation is for those who admit they are not worthy. It is for those who realize that they need what only God can give. Humility is the key to faith.

Andrew Murray stated it like this, **"It is only by the indwelling of Christ that we become truly humble."**

We are to fear God and walk humbly before the Lord. We are trust God and He will provide. We need to admit we're in a mess we can't fix. We have much to be modest about. We're saved by grace. That's the only way we're ever going to make it to Heaven. That's a humbling thought!

Philip Yancey wrote, **"we deserve punishment and get forgiveness; we deserve God's wrath and get God's love."**

So what is humility, and what makes humble people different? Humility is the absence of self in all we think, do or say. You know when you encounter humility because you are irresistibly drawn to and awestruck by its presence.

People with the quality of humility are interested in everyone else. In conversations, they want to know about you. They are not looking for ways you can be a blessing to them, they are looking for ways they can bless you. Humility is the very opposite of pride and arrogance. In a disagreement, pride is concerned with who is right, humility is concerned with what is right. Pride and arrogance are all about self, they are always looking down at everyone else. Humility looks up. Jesus presented humility as a description of what we shall be unconsciously when we have become rightly related to God and are rightly centered in Him.

Andrew Murray said it like this, **"Humility is the displacement of self by the enthronement of God."**

He went on to say, **"Humility is the soil in which the graces root; The lack of humility is the sufficient explanation of every defect and failure. Humility is not so much a grace or virtue along with others; it is the root of all, because it alone takes the right attitude before God, and allows Him as God to do all."**

Our humility before God has no value, except that it prepares us to reveal the humility of Jesus to others. The religion of Jesus is the religion of a little child. But it can be lost.

**A little girl with shining eyes,
Her little face aglow,
Said, "Daddy, it is almost time
For Church.....let's go!"
They teach us there of Jesus' love, Of how he died for all
Those who on Him call."**

**Oh, no!" said Daddy, "Not today. I've worked hard all week; I'm going to the creek,
for there I can relax and rest,
And fishing's fine they say.
So, run along; don't bother me. We'll go to Church someday."**

**Months and years have passed away
But Daddy hears that plea no more -
"Let's go to Church." Those childish days are o're.**

**And now that Daddy's growing old, when life is almost through,
He finds some time to go to Church -
But what does Daughter do?
She says: O Daddy, not today!
I stayed up almost all night;
I've just got to get some sleep. Besides, I look a fright."**

**Then Daddy lifts a trembling hand
To brush away the tears,
As again he hears the pleading voice
Distinctly through the years.**

**He sees a small girl's shining face upturned, with eyes all aglow,
As she says, "It's time for Church..... Please, Daddy, won't you go?"**