

The King and The Kingdom Part 5

We continue our series of messages on the king and his kingdom. There is much to say about the kingdom of God and its' impact on our lives as citizens of His kingdom. I keep wanting to jump past the parables and teach on the nature of the kingdom, but the parables reveal the character and nature of the kingdom in a unique way. Plus, I felt the Lord directed me to teach on the parables so I'm trying to be obedient to what I felt in my heart.

Turn to Matthew 18. Matthew's gospel is where we find the majority of the kingdom parables (where Jesus says, "the kingdom of heaven is like..."). I started to skip past this "parable" because to be honest, I don't think of it as a parable. But as I studied and prayed about it, I realized the importance and value of this passage. We can't afford to overlook this one.

All of these parables, all of Jesus' teaching on the kingdom is meant to show us the contrast, the difference between his kingdom and the kingdom of this world. His kingdom is not of this world. The weapons of warfare of his kingdom are not of this world. The values and character and conduct of the citizens of his kingdom are to be different than the conduct of the citizens of this world. We don't get to act like everyone else. We don't conduct business like everyone else. We are citizens of a heavenly kingdom and we serve a different king! The kingdom of heaven is counter-cultural to the culture of this world. Our actions are at times counter-intuitive. Forgiving enemies, doing good to those who persecute us, turning the other cheek, going a second mile. The world says, "That's for shmucks. That's how you finish last. There is too much at stake right? You have to fight dirty, besides, the cause is noble."

I just want to caution us, to keep our eyes on Jesus and on his kingdom. One of my concerns is how quickly we lose sight of the values and ethics of His kingdom as we get caught up in the battles of the earthly kingdom. As we do, we start using the weapons of the earthly kingdom. It's so easy to denigrate and denounce people and not their platform. But that's not the way of His kingdom! We have to be careful to keep the kingdom of heaven in view. As Christians in America we start leveraging and relying on political power (even for a good cause) and as we gain more political power and influence, it's easy to forget and forsake the character and calling of Christ and the values of his kingdom. History shows that we Christians like our seat at the table and when we get there, too often we start looking for ways to remain in power and hold on to our position, even if it means acting like citizens of the world rather than citizens of the kingdom of heaven, telling ourselves the end justifies the means. We have to be careful.

It's easy to start relying on our own strength, power, position, political influence. We are impressed by and seduced by celebrity, by position and fame, by access to people of importance. In *The Jesus I Never Knew*, a book written 25 years ago by Philip Yancey, he wrote, "Despite Jesus' plain example, many of his followers have been unable to resist choosing the way of Herod over that of Jesus... History shows that when the church uses the tools of the world's kingdom, it becomes as ineffectual, or as tyrannical, as any other power structure. And whenever the church has intermingled with the state (the Holy Roman Empire, Cromwell's England, Calvin's Geneva), the appeal of the faith suffers as well. Ironically, our respect in the world declines in proportion to how vigorously we attempt to force others to adopt our point of view... Sheep among wolves, a tiny seed in the garden, yeast in bread dough, salt in meat; Jesus' own metaphors of the kingdom describe a kind of 'secret force' that works from within. He said nothing of a triumphant church sharing power with the authorities. The kingdom of God appears to work best as a minority movement, in opposition to the kingdom of this world. When it grows beyond that, the kingdom subtly changes in nature." He then quotes from the theologian Karl Barth, "The church exists...to set up in the world a new sign which is radically dissimilar to the world's own manner and which contradicts it in a way which is full of promise." I'm saying this not to influence anyone's politics or position or activism, but to simply urge us to keep our eyes on Jesus and on his kingdom; to make sure that our conduct, our conversation, our goals remain focused on his kingdom and his calling. Above everything, we are to be about winning souls and influencing people to know Jesus! The church is to be about showing the world what it should be and could be, a kingdom of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, a place of healing, hope, laughter and peace. It's about the king and his kingdom, not ours.

Everything about Jesus' setting, his context in history, would point to the value of using the tools of the world's kingdom but Jesus was showing us, showing the world another kingdom, another way to live. Everything he did was a sign that a new kingdom had come, one that was and is "radically dissimilar to the world's...and which contradicts it in a way which is full of promise." Think about it. Israel was occupied by the Roman Empire and governed by cruel and corrupt leaders. People were thinking, "It's time for a show of strength, a reliance on physical might and power, fight fire with fire, use political influence, enlist the aid of the Pharisees and

Saducees to form a coalition to defeat the Romans. We can gain control and then get even!” It’s in that context Matthew tells us...

“He called a little child and had him stand among them. And he said: ‘I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoever welcomes a little child like this in my name welcomes me. But if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea.’” Matthew 18:2-6

Unless you change and become like little children. The kingdom of heaven requires a change. King James says “Unless ye be converted.” But it was Jesus’ disciples that came asking the question “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” and that prompted this illustration or parable. Did they need to be converted, saved? Let me make it clear. Conversion, being born again through repenting of our sins and believing upon Jesus as Savior and Lord, that’s how we enter the kingdom of heaven. We accept his rule and reign, his governance over our life. But Jesus says this to his disciples, that they needed to change! Think of it in these terms: “You are born again, but there is going to have to be a change in your attitude, a change in how you view the world and how you behave as citizens of my heavenly kingdom.”

You’ll have to change and become Jesus said. You’ll have to make adjustments in how you respond to life, to others. You’ll have to allow the Holy Spirit to work in your life, to bring your life into alignment with God’s word and his will. It calls for humility, trust, unhindered access given to Jesus and his Holy Spirit to work in your life. Change and become like children! Childlike, not childish. So what does that suggest to us?

Children are humble. Jesus said we needed to humble ourselves like a child. 2 year olds don’t have much of a resume or list of accomplishments. They haven’t done anything to be proud of, they just simply are. And they are loved simply because they are.

You hold your newborn daughter and think, “I love this child.” But what has she done? Nothing! I just love her because of who she is. We think we need to try to impress our way into the kingdom of God. If we work real hard God and others will be impressed with us and our accomplishment. Really? Our best is on a par with a newborn child in God’s eyes. We have nothing to show for ourselves besides what a newborn has to show for himself. We know how to

make a mess and lie in it and that's about it most of the time.

Jesus said it's time to change and humble ourselves. When we humble ourselves, we admit we have nothing that would commend us to God. We are like every infant – powerless, helpless, humbled. We aren't trying to intimidate our enemies. We are the children of the king. We invite them to supper. We offer them food and drink. We don't overpower, we humbly look for ways to serve because we are children of the kingdom. We aren't trying to impress because we know we have nothing to impress with. Our boast is only in the Lord because it's all by his grace.

Think about the toddler saying, "Watch me daddy" and they jump two inches off the ground and we say, "Wow buddy. You jump so high. Don't hit your head." But we know it was nothing. That's us. The hymn writer wrote, "Nothing in my hand I bring, only to the cross I cling." It's not by our works or accomplishments but by his grace alone that we enter the kingdom. Change and humble yourself, admitting it's all about Jesus! We boast only in him!

Children are dependent. Infants can't survive without someone to help them. Nurturing, feeding, providing for them. It seems difficult for us at times to admit just how dependent we are. Children argue for freedom. "I can do this. Let me!" But then they find themselves in a mess, lost, stuck. "Daddy, help me!" Save yourself the trouble and admit you need the Lord. Surrender to him and his way, depend on him because his ways are best. Admit you can't do it alone. You need his help, his guidance, his counsel, his direction. Don't lean on your own understanding or your own strength, but lean on the Lord. You can depend on him.

Children are trusting. We worry they are too trusting because they haven't any experience to cause them to doubt everything like we skeptical adults do. A child trusts that what you give them is right and good. Infant's don't throw the bottle back at mom thinking, "I hardly know you. I don't know if I can trust you." They receive that bottle with absolute trust and acceptance. It's the way they embrace life and relationship. "You love me and you take care of me so I trust what I receive from you is for my good and not my harm. It's to help me have a great future."

Guess what? You have a heavenly father that has good gifts for you. Stop suspecting his motives and trust him! Become as a child and trust your heavenly Father. I remember when the girls were babies I would balance them in my hand. They never said, "Dad, I'm a little uncertain about your motives here. Are you sure you're going to catch me if I start to fall?" They trusted

me because I was their father. Trust your heavenly Father. Receive the life and grace and good gifts of God. Receive the kingdom like children, full of trust, humbly depending on him, and full of joy!

Children are welcoming. Here is another great thing about children. They are welcoming. Jesus said whoever welcomes one of these little children welcomes me. Jesus wants us to live with an open-arm – open-hand approach to others. We welcome Jesus into every area and aspect of our lives and we welcome others into the kingdom of God as well.

It's interesting how children tend to be more tolerant. They are taught prejudice by parents and grown-ups. They are taught to hate. Taught racism. Left on their own, children will befriend most anyone. They don't see color or ethnicity, they see friends, playmates. Jesus instructs us to be as children and welcome others into the kingdom, into the knowledge of his love and grace.

I remember a couple of years ago walking in a neighborhood at Grand Lake. Some other people were walking with kids and dogs. I petted the dog and started talking with the children as we walked. They told me they were staying with their grandparents on the lake. They were going home to have sandwiches. The little boy said I could come play with their dog if I wanted to and then he invited Paula and me to come home and have lunch with them. He told his grandma, "they're coming to eat lunch with us." I said, "he told me we were having sandwiches..." Grandma looked pretty alarmed until I laughed and we walked on.

The children were welcoming. Jesus says we are to welcome the children in his name. It means we will have to change remember. Change and become like children, not judging and condemning, but welcoming, inviting others to come experience the kingdom of God. Jesus said, "Don't forbid the children. Don't keep them from coming to me." He welcomed them.

Let's be like Jesus. Let's be like children, quick to welcome all who come to Jesus. Jesus said, "whoever welcomes a little child like this in my name welcomes me." How many times has Jesus walked through the doors of this church and not received much of a welcome? Every Wednesday night there are literally between 200-300 children and youth that come to this place. And whoever welcomes them in Jesus name is welcoming him. Think about it. Here is the last thought.

Children believe Daddy can fix it. It's simple trust that brings a child to their father with a broken toy, a broken doll, a broken bicycle, not enough memory for their computer.

Children believe Dad can fix it. Children believe mom can kiss it and make it better. They don't have all the knowledge and experience and facts. They haven't been confused yet by the details. They just know it's broken and daddy can fix it because daddy can fix anything. They trust and believe in Daddy and Mommy.

They have a **Two stage concept for repair: 1) It's broken. 2) Take it to Daddy.** That's it. It's that simple. We grown-ups have about a **Ten stage concept for repair. 1)Figure out what broke. 2)How did it break? (Who's responsible?) 3)How did it work to begin with? 4)How much would the parts cost? 5)How much would it cost to have it fixed? 6)When will I find the time to even try to fix it? 7)I wonder how much a new one would cost? 8)I wonder if the kids will notice if I just throw it away? 9)When would be the best time to tell her I can't fix it? 10) What is my back up plan? e.g. Braums?**

Part of that trust they have is based not just on confidence in daddy's ability, but rather confidence in the relationship. Daddy will want to fix it because Daddy loves me.

The Lord wants us to trust him and bring our problems to him, believing that he can fix it. He wants us to trust him, not just because he is big enough to fix it or powerful enough, but simply because of our relationship. He loves us so he wants to fix it for us. We can trust him and be secure in him because he loves us. It's because of our relationship.

I can rest in the knowledge that my heavenly Father, the one who can fix everything, is the one who loves me best of all. I don't have to figure it all out, I just know he loves me and that is enough.

"Here Daddy. I don't know how you will do it, but it's broken and I can't fix it. It's too hard for me. It's too broken for me. I can't put it back together. You'll fix it for me though, won't you?"

That's what we say as children coming to our Heavenly Father. He isn't waiting on us to get our lives put back together so we can come home. He expects us to come to him because we know our heavenly Father can fix anything. "Here I am Father. I don't know how you will ever do it, because I'm so broken and my life is so broken and my body is so broken and I can't fix any of it. It's beyond me. It's too hard for me. But you can. You'll fix it for me, won't you?"

We need to get back to that heavenly 2 step process. **1)We're broken. 2)Take it to the Father.** And because he loves us, we can trust him that he will make things right in our lives.

We sing the little chorus: "Leave it there, leave it there, take your burden to the Lord and

leave it there. If you trust and never doubt he will surely lead you out, take your burden to the Lord and leave it there.”

It’s what I think we children should do. Run to the Father with all our brokenness and leave it there. Bring it to him and ask him and trust him. Take your burden to him, like a child taking a problem to a loving father and leave it there, and let him fix it.

Jesus is teaching us how citizens of the kingdom live and act and behave. **“Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.” Matthew 18:4** Have you changed and become like a child? In how you view and treat others? In how you trust your heavenly Father? Have you humbled yourself and admitted your need, your dependence upon the Lord? Are you ready to approach life with joy, with trust in God, with acceptance and welcome for others? Are you ready to bring your life to the Father and let him fix it? It’s part of what it means to be a citizen of his kingdom. It’s time to become as a child in the kingdom of heaven!