

**Matthew 18:1-7**

1 At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" 2 He called a child, whom he put among them, 3 and said, "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. 4 Whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. 5 Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me. 6 "If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were fastened around your neck and you were drowned in the depth of the sea. 7 Woe to the world because of stumbling blocks! Occasions for stumbling are bound to come, but woe to the one by whom the stumbling block comes!"

What is Jesus talking about? Unless you change and become like children? OK, let's break out our toys, get up and run around, and play, and giggle. We can see who can be the silliest today and have a lot of fun! Unless you change and become like children reminds me of one of our devotional stories where a mother had cut her hand and the daughter age 5 said let me see it. When she saw it she gasped and then she prayed in a soft angelic voice "Dear Jesus , heal Mama's hand, you can do it now, or tomorrow, or whenever you want."

Unless you change and become like children. When I was little child we would run and play and our energy was virtually limitless. Mama was forever commenting about our energy. She would say things like "you kids have so much energy, you wear me out just watching you, I wish I had that kind of energy." I thought "I'll never slow down, when I grow up I will not lose my energy." Well, will power and physical ability are two different things.

Unless you change and become like children. When I was in the 2<sup>nd</sup> grade the boy that sat next to me kept getting into trouble. He was nice to me and he was good with his friends. But he kept getting into trouble. For the teachers and the administration he was a nightmare. There was nothing they could do. He would run when he wasn't supposed to. He would scoot his desk during class. He would not sit still. He was constantly misbehaving, interrupting the class, and getting into trouble. Nobody could do anything. The teachers were frustrated. So, one day, I asked him "why?" No answer. He would not tell anyone why. I was concerned that he was going to fail. So, one day, I said "you are not going to make it to the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade." He said "I didn't want to go to the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade." I asked "are you afraid of the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade?" He said "yes, I heard it is too hard." So, he wanted to fail 2<sup>nd</sup> grade in order to avoid going to the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. I told the teacher and she did whatever teachers do.

In today's Scripture - unless you change and become like children - the call is not to adopt the character traits of little children. You see, the question to Jesus was one of selfish ambition. I will paraphrase it like this "We want to know where will we fit in heaven? What will our social status be?" In Matthew chapter 18 Jesus is teaching the disciples how to live together and treat others. In other words Jesus is teaching them how to be the church. So, what Jesus is addressing is a human problem where the attention of the followers is on the self. They want to know their social status. Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? What about me? Where will we be? Jesus teaches it is not about your pride, ego, and self interest. Take a look at a child; a little child. Be like this little child - humble. Whoever is humble like a little child is the greatest in heaven. The key point is change. This is another Scripture lesson on change, there are several because change is a key point of our faith. One must be converted. Faith is not a matter of adding another

worthy cause or a more worthy cause. Faith is a matter of starting over, being born again, dead to the old self and alive to the new - change. It is a matter of giving up issues of self importance and turning your life over to God.

Recently I was reading and there was one thing in particular that caught my attention. It was this statement "the purpose of the church is to bring about change in people's lives." Well, we can argue the point of whether or not that is **THE** purpose of the church. Like as if there is one purpose. I get the point the author was making but I don't think it can be simplified to the point that there is one purpose. The church is to serve God, worship God, follow Christ, make disciples, pray, feed the Lord's sheep, etc. I think most of us can agree that one of the main goals of the church is to change lives. A key point of our faith is change. From today's Scripture we see that change is a commandment from Jesus. Yes, change is a commandment from Jesus.

At the heart of change is revelation. I am not talking about the book Revelation. The word revelation refers to something that is revealing; it is a matter of awareness. When you realize what another has done for you then you appreciate it. There is no appreciation until there is realization of the value. Once it is realized, then it is appreciated, then the individual changes, and then the relationship changes. This is true for our relationship with the divine and true for our interpersonal relationships especially with our mothers.

When you appreciate, truly appreciate, what your mother has done for you, your relationship with her changes. A lot of stress in interpersonal relationships comes from a failure of appreciating the other. We tend to look at the relationship from our own perspective, make judgments and assumptions, and then we begin to focus on those judgments and assumptions instead of appreciating the other. When you appreciate, truly appreciate, what God has done for you. Then it's not a matter of coming to church out of discipline. It is a matter of devotion - love for God to the point where worship is something you cannot do without.

The teachings of Jesus is not just a matter of being good or doing right, it is an internal compass where love, admiration, and appreciation guides you. I am going to conclude with a statement. There is a contrast between faith and a life of faith. Faith has knowledge of God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. But there is tension between the world we live in and a life of faith. There are two contrary forces. The life of the flesh which is full of wants and the life of the Spirit which is full of internal and eternal love, peace, and joy. The Jesus perspective is to exchange your life of struggle and competition for a life of innocence and purity.