

## The Importance Of The Child In Our Midst.

Text: Matt 18:1-14

Suggested Hymns:

150, 144, 330, 85, 417

1) Is our Heavenly Father's concern

2) Is the concern of every adult

3) Serves as an example of humility

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Matthew 18:1-14, <sup>1</sup> *At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?"* <sup>2</sup> *Then Jesus called a little child to Him, set him in the midst of them,* <sup>3</sup> *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.* <sup>4</sup> *"Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.* <sup>5</sup> *"Whoever receives one little child like this in My name receives Me.*

<sup>6</sup> *"But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea.* <sup>7</sup> *"Woe to the world because of offenses! For offenses must come, but woe to that man by whom the offense comes!"* <sup>8</sup> *"If your hand or foot causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you. It is better for you to enter into life lame or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet, to be cast into the everlasting fire.* <sup>9</sup> *"And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you. It is better for you to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes, to be cast into hell fire.*

<sup>10</sup> *"Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that in heaven their angels always see the face of My Father who is in heaven.* <sup>11</sup> *"For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost.* <sup>12</sup> *"What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them goes astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine and go to the mountains to seek the one that is straying?"* <sup>13</sup> *"And if he should find it, assuredly, I say to you, he rejoices more over that sheep than over the ninety-nine that did not go astray.* <sup>14</sup> *"Even so it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish. (NKJV)*

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

In helping to solve the large problems of the world and the Church, the voice of the child does not count for much. We do not look to children to supply a workable plan for peace between the nations. Even in the Church we tend to pass by the children by measuring our strength in terms of communicant members. In the home, parents often remind their children that “little children should be seen but not heard.”

By the very fact that we generally look upon children as being of little consequence in furthering the interests of the State and the Church, we are apt to despise and neglect them.

The newspapers at times cry out against the sin of parents who neglect to provide even for the physical needs of their children. Too often parents pass off with a smile the problems of their children because they are too busy, and the problems seem so trivial.

The appalling neglect of parents in providing for the spiritual needs of children is witnessed by the fact that today less and less children attend Sunday school and church.

Against this sin of the neglect of children our text is a loud rebuke. Here Jesus brings out most forcibly the importance of the child in our midst. May the Lord bless our meditation.

### **1. Each Child Is Important Enough To Be The Object Of Our Heavenly Father's Concern**

God's concern is like that of a shepherd. In our text Jesus illustrates the concern of God for every child by a heart-warming story, <sup>12</sup> *“What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them goes astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine and go to the mountains to seek the one that is straying? <sup>13</sup> “And if he should find it, assuredly, I say to you, he rejoices more over that sheep than over the ninety-nine that did not go astray.*

Here is a shepherd with one hundred sheep. He knows each of them. He calls them by name. If just one of them should wander from the fold and become

lost, his love for that one will prompt him to leave the ninety-nine and seek the one.

If he finds it, his heart is filled with joy, with more joy over the one sheep found, than over the ninety-nine which are safe in the fold. With telling force Jesus makes the application, <sup>14</sup> ***“Even so it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish.*** As the shepherd, so God knows each child. It is His gracious will that not one, not even one, of these children should perish. He loves them all and wants them all to be saved eternally. This is His gracious and good will.

If left to themselves, they would surely perish. For every child born of woman is conceived and born in sin. But in order that none be lost eternally, God provided in Jesus Christ, the Saviour also for children. Jesus reminds us of that blessed fact when He says, <sup>11</sup> ***“For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost.***

Jesus came into the world to save sinners. He came to ransom the souls of men from sin, everlasting death and hell, and by His life and death to win for them peace with God, righteousness before God, and everlasting life. Not only for adults, but also for children Christ shed His blood upon the cross.

But more than that. Jesus instituted, especially also for children, the Sacrament of Holy Baptism. Through this means of grace the blessings which Christ has won become the possession of every child. It is for every child that we read in Titus 3:5, <sup>5</sup> ***not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit.*** Having instituted this blessed Sacrament, Jesus says to parents in Mark 10:14, <sup>14</sup> ***“Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God.***

As a final thought to show God’s concern for children Jesus says in our text, <sup>10</sup> ***“Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that in heaven their angels always see the face of My Father who is in heaven.*** God in His love gives His angels charge over little children. Though weak and helpless themselves, children are guarded by the angelic ministers of heaven. So much does God think of each of them.

In summary, each child is important enough to be the object of our Heavenly Father's concern. God's concern is like that of a shepherd, Jesus is concerned for little children and came to save them too. Jesus also instituted Holy Baptism which is also for children and God provides angels to guard them.

## **2. Each Child Is Important Enough To Be The Concern Of Every Adult**

The argument of Jesus is telling and convincing. If children are so important in the eyes of our heavenly Father, can they be of lesser importance in our eyes?

If God has given His Son to save them, would it not be rebellion of the highest order against God for us to deny them their spiritual birth-right? If the holy angels guard and protect them, can we be indifferent about their physical, emotional, and spiritual welfare?

Jesus introduces this subject of the Father's concern for children only to lend emphasis to His solemn warning, <sup>10</sup> ***"Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones.*** To despise them is to think meanly of them, to neglect them, to look down upon them, to fail to supply their real needs, physical and spiritual.

Children are important. They are the greatest earthly blessing God can give to parents. The Psalmist is correct when he says in Psalm 127:3,5, <sup>3</sup> ***Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD, ...*** <sup>5</sup> ***Happy is the man who has his quiver full of them.*** What joy they bring into the home! What a source of security for old age is God's gift of children! God says in Ephesians 6:4, <sup>4</sup> ***And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.***

To despise children, therefore, is a crime of the worst kind. It is a crime against God. But how often children are in want for the bare necessities of life because a father drinks or gambles or a mother spends lavishly on self and pleasure! How many a child's personality is affected for life because of want of parental love and concern! And, oh, the army which shall arise and accuse parents on the day of Judgment because they did not think it important to bring their children to Jesus.

Parents, listen to Jesus! He wants you to give your children a healthy diet. He wants you to give them adequate medical and dental care so that their physical

life may not be impaired. He wants you to love your children, to be their companions, helping them solve their problems, which to you seem small but which to them are important.

Above all else, God wants you to have in your home a program of Christian education. He wants you to tell them of the love of God in Christ and of His will. To help you there is Sunday school and Confirmation Classes. Give your children the blessings of a Christian education. In addition, Christian parents will want to bring their children to God's house so that from their tender years they learn the value of worship.

Do not offend children. Jesus tells us in our text that we are not to despise our children either by failing to give them what they deserve or by leading them to sin by a bad example.

Our text says, <sup>6</sup> ***"But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea. "*** <sup>7</sup> ***"Woe to the world because of offenses! For offenses must come, but woe to that man by whom the offense comes! "*** <sup>8</sup> ***"If your hand or foot causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you. It is better for you to enter into life lame or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet, to be cast into the everlasting fire. "*** <sup>9</sup> ***"And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you. It is better for you to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes, to be cast into hell fire.***

The word "offend" does not mean here to hurt one's feelings. Rather it means "to trap" or "ensnare" or "to lead into sin by a bad example." It is bad enough, Jesus indicates, for a man to be led into sin by his own hand, foot, or eye. If that is the case, he should rid himself of that member rather than continue to have it to be cast into hell.

But doubly sinful it is for an adult, be he parent, teacher, or friend, by his bad example to lead a little child who believes in Jesus into sin. For such a person Jesus knows no better fate than that a huge millstone be tied around his neck and he be drowned in the midst of the sea. ***"Woe to that man by whom the offense comes!"***

Children learn by example. Children learn more by example than by command. They tend always to follow patterns set for them by their parents.

How important, therefore, is the example which parents set for their children! Every sin is doubled when a child sees it; every virtue is twice blessed when witnessed by a child.

How much we ought to pray to God to help us to be good examples for our children! Let us seek daily to live as children of God, especially also that we may be fit guides for our children, for they will surely follow our steps. Let the words of Christ always be to us a solemn warning not to offend even one of these little ones who believe in Him.

By way of encouragement to us Jesus adds the thought, <sup>5</sup> *“Whoever receives one little child like this in My name receives Me.* Think of the dignity that Jesus attaches to the work of child guidance. He counts whatever we do for our children as done unto Him. Let us always remember this as we by word and example train our children. Let us see the image of Christ in the face of every child and count whatever we do for children as done for Jesus.

### **3. Each Child Is Important Enough To Serve As An Example Of Humility**

Children are important. Jesus indicates this also by using a little child to teach His disciples the lesson of humility. They came to Him with the question, *“Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?”* The disciples had evidently been discussing this question among themselves. They thought that soon Christ would establish an earthly kingdom, and each was coveting a position of influence in it.

To answer their question, Jesus called a little child to Him and used this child to teach an important object lesson. He 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.* <sup>4</sup> *“Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.* Here the disciples were arguing about the highest place. Jesus bluntly tells them first to consider well whether they are in the Kingdom.

To enter it, they must become as this little child. He came to Jesus having nothing. But he came looking to Jesus for everything he needed. These disciples must have the spirit of this child if they hope to enter His kingdom. Like this child, they must be humble, realising that they have nothing, are able to do

nothing, nor earn anything by which to gain entrance into His kingdom. But, at the same time, like this child, they must look to Him for everything — for the forgiveness of their sins, for spiritual and eternal life.

The world needs humility The world needs this lesson badly today. All about us we have the trappings of pride. A man who has risen a bit above his fellows intellectually, socially, or economically is apt to assume that he is also big enough to enter Christ's kingdom on the basis of his earthly attainments.

But today as always, as we read in James 4:6, ***“God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble.”*** Today, too, He calls, ***“unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.”*** Today, too, the child is our teacher.

Like the child, we must know our wants and feel our need. We must know that both by nature and by experience we are poor sinful beings. We must realise that we have nothing with which to redeem ourselves.

But like the child, we must come to Jesus that He may fill the empty chalice of our life with the blessings which He alone can give, forgiveness, peace with God, and the blessed hope of eternal life.

Let us learn from the child in the midst the lesson of the spirit which makes for greatness in Christ's kingdom. God give us always that childlike spirit which says:<sup>1</sup>

*Nothing in my hand I bring,  
Simply to Thy Cross I cling;  
Naked, come to Thee for dress;  
Helpless, look to Thee for grace;  
Foul, I to the fountain fly;  
Wash me, Saviour, or I die.*

Let us conclude with the words of our text, ***“Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.”*** Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Hymn 330