

## Children in the Kingdom of God

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### Scriptures:

Matthew 19:13-14, Mark 10:14, Luke 18:16

Matthew 18:1-5, Luke 9:46-48

Hebrews 12:6

Psalms 127:3-5

Proverbs 13:24

Exodus 20:12

Deuteronomy 5:16

1 John 2:28-29

1 John 3

In my study of the gospel recordings of Jesus' love for little children and His teaching that the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to them, I realised how modern day culture may be misleading our understanding of what it meant in ancient Judaism to become like a little child. This teaching was clearly of great importance to God since it is recorded in three of the gospels. (Matthew 19:13-14, Mark 10:14 and Luke 18:16).

In Matthew 18:1-5 and Luke 9:46-48 we find the disciples arguing over which of them is the greatest. Clearly they had completely missed all that Jesus had been teaching them by word and example. They saw success only through the eyes of this world where everyone clamours for attention and yearns to be the most famous. Just as a male peacock displays its feathers, so Jesus' disciples were celebrating all they had done to deserve the highest place of importance and honour. They had failed to understand that Jesus came to turn this thinking on its head. Hence, He reminded them by taking a little child as an example of the Kingdom of Heaven.

In order to understand why Jesus used children as His example, we need first to look at the culture of children in His day. Historians tell us that in Judaism parents and children were bound to each other by a series of commanded responsibilities and sacred practices. Children were expected to show reverence to their parents, especially their father who was head of the household. In Scripture there is evidence that children and parents were bound to each other as a way of honouring God. Jewish children were nurtured and trained into learning the Scriptures, they had no rights of their own, but were taught to obey their parents. Disobedience resulted in discipline in order to guide them into right paths. (Proverbs 13:24). The Commandments taught Jewish children they were promised long life if they honoured their father and mother. (Exodus 20:12, Deuteronomy 5:16)

It is a sobering thought that honouring parents is mentioned twice in the Old Testament and six times in the New Testament. Clearly the honour of parents mattered greatly in Jesus' day. Psalm 127:3-5 reveals that parents saw their children as a precious gift from God, therefore the children were loved and greatly valued. Discipline was born out of love and a desire to guide children into paths that honoured God.

With this understanding, we can begin to see why Jesus took a little child as an example of the Kingdom of God and it teaches us so much more about our own

relationship with Abba Father whose love for His children is greater and purer than any earthly father's could be.

When the disciples argued about who was most important in God's Kingdom, they were making the assumption that their good deeds had earned them the right to the highest place. This thinking led them into pompous arguments! They had failed to see how greatly Jesus hated pride. Hence, He took a child who had no rights and nothing with which to buy favour, yet was greatly loved and valued, as the perfect example of those we will find in the Kingdom of Heaven.

What a wonderful picture to teach us how we are to relate to our Heavenly Father today, with simple childlike faith, full of humility and gratitude for His great mercy and grace toward us, knowing that as His precious child He will discipline and guide us because He loves us. (Hebrews 12:6). Out of this understanding our gratitude should flow through our own delight in obeying His commands out of a heart full of love for all Jesus has done for us.

**Prayer:** Heavenly Father, I come to You now in childlike faith thanking You that my salvation is purely because of Your great love for me. Thank You that through the sacrifice of Your own precious Son, I am able to be born into Your family and so become Your adopted child and a co-heir with Jesus. Holy Spirit help me to live a life that is honouring to God. Amen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y47vEE1zbDE>