



**A**T the same time came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?<sup>2</sup> And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them,<sup>3</sup> And said, *Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.*<sup>4</sup> *Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.*<sup>5</sup> *And whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me.*<sup>6</sup> *But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea.*<sup>7</sup> *Woe unto the world because of offences! for it must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh!*<sup>8</sup> *Wherefore if thy hand or thy foot offend thee, cut them off, and cast them from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life halt or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet to be cast into everlasting fire.*<sup>9</sup> *And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire.*<sup>10</sup> *Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven.*<sup>11</sup> *For the Son of man is come to save that which was lost.*<sup>12</sup> *How think ye? if a man have an hundred sheep, and one of them be gone astray, doth he not leave the ninety and nine, and goeth into the mountains, and seeketh that which is gone astray?*<sup>13</sup> *And if so be that he find it, verily I say unto you, he rejoiceth more of that sheep, than of the ninety and nine which went not astray.*<sup>14</sup> *Even so it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish.* (Matt 18:1-14)

At the same time came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? Where the objects of our own fortunes are involved, we hear much

better than when told of the glorious resurrection. Though the disciples did not understand that Christ would rise the Third Day, they **DID** realize that there was a coming Kingdom of which **THEY** would be a part. So they speculated among themselves as to what position each would be assigned, and which would be preeminent therein. It is shameful that, like the guards casting lots for His garments, these close friends would now cast lots for the coming positions of the Kingdom! This is the matter recorded in Mark as being a strife among the disciples. *And he came to Capernaum: and being in the house he asked them, **What was it that ye disputed among yourselves by the way? But they held their peace: for by the way they had disputed among themselves, who should be the greatest.** And he sat down, and called the twelve, and saith unto them, **If any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all, and servant of all.** And he took a child, and set him in the midst of them: and when he had taken him in his arms, he said unto them.* (Mark 9:33-36) The greed for power does beget strife! Had you noticed?

*And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them,* I love to imagine this scene. I can imagine a little child being singled out of the streets by Christ, and shyly coming forward without question to that great beckoning Voice. It is not a half-grown child, but a LITTLE child. Now, instead of the disciples being at the center of the dissertations of Christ, it is now a Little Child. Not only are little children at the center of Christ's audience, but at the center of His Love. ***Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.*** A grown man or woman cannot recover the innocence of youth without Christ. When we come to Christ, we must cast aside our doubts, our greed, our malice, and come just as one of these little lambs – trusting wholly in Him and fully aware of our own inadequacy. Though this little child was no doubt shy and felt out of place among these men, he came, regardless, at Christ's command. He knew no harm would come from Christ, but he did feel some embarrassment due to his smallness and his lack of understanding. It is precisely these features that Christ desires us to see in the child – the same that should be in us in coming to Him. That feature is summed up in humility!

**Ruskin, Modern Painters, Vol V., Peace**, sums the issue as follows: *So far as you desire to possess rather than to give; so far as you look for power to command instead of to bless; so far as your own prosperity seems to grow out of contests or rivalry of any kind, with other men or nations; so long as the hope before you is for supremacy instead of love, and your desire to be greatest instead of least, first instead of last, so long are you serving the **Lord that is last and least**, the last enemy that shall be destroyed, **death**; and you shall have death's crown, with the worm coiled in it, and death's wages, with the worm feeding on them. Kindred of the earth shall you yourself become; saying to the grave, 'Thou art my father'; and to the worm, 'Thou art my mother and sister.'*

***Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.*** A few years ago, I had two young men (high school football players) who were constantly putting themselves up above the others. One Sunday morning, I made copies of the front side of a \$100 and a \$50 dollar bill (I did not copy the green side to avoid forgery charges). I placed the bills face up on a table, along with a genuine twenty dollar bill, and called out three names - the two bullies and a precious little girl of seven years. I told the three to get in line and take the bill of their choice. Seeing the size of the bills, the two football players were first in line crowding the little girl to the rear. The first took the phony \$100, the second boy took the phony \$50, and the little girl was left to take the genuine twenty dollar bill. I hope the lesson was clear to the boys! Christ is head and greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven, yet, He served others and washed the Apostles' feet Himself. How much of Christ's Spirit do we own ourselves?

***And whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me.*** The emphasis of Christ changes here from **BEING** as a child, to how we should **TREAT** innocents. If we

receive the orphan with the same love as our own, we receive Christ along with the bargain. Feeding the hungry child, clothing them, giving them a cold glass of water, is the same as doing these things for Christ. Can you see the high value Christ places on children? They are full of future promise and, yet, gentle as lambs. He loves them, and we had better love them, too.

*But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea.* What a woeful warning from the LORD! We have legions of child abusers in our midst today. The day comes when the sea will be full of these great sinners and their millstones. China boasts of having aborted 400 million innocents in their mother's womb. The United States has aborted more little children in their mother's womb than we have lost in all of our wars combined. These precious and defenseless children had no choice to live or die, but the mother, for social convenience, is given the choice to murder these tiny gifts of God in cruel and horrible ways. May the Lord have mercy on the souls of such women and the doctors who facilitate this murder! And what of those who barter in little girls for a few dollars to destroy their innocence and their lives?

*Woe unto the world because of offences! for it must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh!* I recently discussed this very issue with a friend and Bible scholar. We agreed that the modern church does not hear this last line of Christ. I have had seemingly good Christian men and women tell me that all these evils are simply the fulfillment of prophecy and it is easier to 'go along' with those evils than to oppose them. I strongly disagree and, not for my own wisdom, but of that I glean from the stark Word of God! Great evils have always been coming upon the world. The early martyrs of the Church stood courageously against them. The great martyrs of the Reformation did likewise. If these men and women stood so staunchly against evil during times of peril to life, how can we sit on the sidelines while no threat of physical harm presents itself?

*Wherefore if thy hand or thy foot offend thee, cut them off, and cast them from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life halt or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet to be cast into everlasting fire. And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire.* Great admonition herein! Christ speaks of entering into life eternal which begins at the moment of conversion to Him. The loss of hand, or foot, or eye, is nothing compared to the eternity of life gained in the temporary loss of these. The loss is truly temporary on earth, for all shall be restored whole in heaven! The more body parts in hell, the greater the pains of it.

*Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven.* Please note the seriousness of the offense to a child! The angels of these children are in constant communion with the Father. No ill comes to them without the immediate intercession of angels before the Father. This is applicable – not only to little children in stature – but to little children in the Gospel!

*For the Son of man is come to save that which was lost.* Lost when? In that pleasant Garden at Eden! To ruin a child's morality or physical being is to mar the hope of salvation God has reserved for them by dying for them.

*How think ye? if a man have an hundred sheep, and one of them be gone astray, doth he not leave the ninety and nine, and goeth into the mountains, and seeketh that which is gone astray? And if so be that he find it, verily I say unto you, he rejoiceth more of that sheep, than of the ninety and nine which went not astray. Even so it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish.* It is the little

lamb closest to Hell that gets the LORD's greatest attention. *We all, like sheep, have gone astray.* (Isaiah 53:6) And we are all gone astray and needing the love and leading of Christ. The little lamb is short-sighted. He sees only a few feet to his front. And grazing as he travels, following the shepherd, he may see a nice clump of grass off the trail to which he wanders. And still another a bit further. These are the pulls and temptations of life. Soon, the lamb realizes that he has been separated from his companions and, more importantly, his Shepherd. He bleats (prays) to no end until the shepherd, leaving the healthy and secure in good hands, searches out the little lamb until it is found. He brings it back home carrying it on His breast (next to His Heart). God sends no one to Hell. If we wind up in Hell, it was our sins that brought us there. It is never the will of the Father that one of these little ones perish. Perhaps we should paste this verse on every abortuary wall in the land! Sin is also able to abort even a man who has thought himself a Christian by pulling him loose from Christ – the Rock of our Salvation.

Have you wandered away from the Shepherd, allured by the enticing treats of the world? Do not deny that you have been, for we all have been allured away at some point. But the Shepherd, if we bleat and pray, will find us in hill or dale.