

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Entering the Kingdom

Scripture: Matthew 18:1-4

Code: 2327

Take your Bible now and let's turn together to the eighteenth chapter of Matthew...Matthew, chapter 18. We embark upon a new chapter and a new adventure in the wonderful gospel of Matthew as we come to this great eighteenth chapter.

And as a setting for our message this morning, I want you to follow in your Bible as I read the first four verses, beginning in Matthew 18 at verse 1:

At the same time came the disciples unto Jesus saying, Who is the greatest in the Kingdom of heaven? And Jesus called a little child unto Him and set him in the midst of them 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. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is the greatest in the Kingdom of heaven.

Now, as we look at that passage, we basically are struck by the fact that Jesus picks up a little child in verse 2. And that child becomes the object lesson. The people of God are called by many names in the Bible, many beautiful names, many expressive names, many that describe various and sundry elements of belonging to God. But the most common name by which we are ever called is that of children. Beyond anything else, we are the children of God, the children of the Lord, the children of promise, the children of the day, the children of light, beloved children, dear children. Over and over again hundreds of times in the Old Testament and the New Testament, the people of God are called children.

And we rejoice in that reality. I think, however, for the most part we...we tend to see that as a term which links us to God. And when we hear that we are children, we celebrate the idea that that means we belong to God who is our Father, and surely that is true. And we have every reason to rejoice in that.

But the richness of the concept of being a child of God is not limited to the fact that that means we belong to God and we are His children and we are in His family. Inherent in the concept of children is the fact that we are children and we are well described as children. It not only means we belong to God, but it means like children we are imperfect, like children we are weak, like children we are dependent, as children we are simple and submissive and unskilled and ignorant and sometimes stubborn and very vulnerable. So that we see in the concept of children, not only that which implies a

relationship to God, but that which describes us as marked out as children, with all of the foibles and failings and weaknesses that children have. John tells us in 1 John 2:12 that we are children. And so he says, "I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven."

So, as we look at the concept of the believer, we see him as a child. Now the whole of the eighteenth chapter of Matthew describes the child likeness of the believer, the child likeness of the believer. Somewhere in your Bible at the heading of Matthew 18, you need to write that down. This chapter is all about the child likeness of the believer. We're not the high and the mighty. We're not the noble. We're not the lofty. We're not the mature and the adult and the profound. We are children with all that that conveys, lowly children at best.

And I believe that this chapter ranks as one of the great discourse chapters of the Scripture. There are certain chapters, for example, even in the book of Matthew, that stand out as great chapters of thematic teaching. For example, the great discourse in chapters 5 to 7 we know as the Sermon on the Mount in which Jesus teaches elements related to His Kingdom. And then there is the tenth chapter of Matthew where there's a great discourse on discipleship. And then there is the thirteenth chapter with the great thematic teaching on the Kingdom of heaven. And then there's the twentythird chapter, the discourse on the Pharisees. And then there's 24 and 25, the great Olivet discourse on the events surrounding the return of Jesus Christ. And, I guess, lost somewhere in most people's thinking is this eighteenth chapter which is equally a great and profound discourse. And its title is "the child likeness of the believer." It's a marvelous passage.

It fits into a section that began in chapter 17, verse 14 and runs all the way to the end of chapter 20. And that whole section is a section where Jesus teaches the Twelve. He's getting them ready for His death. He's getting them ready for His departure. He's getting them ready for their ministry. And so He's teaching them very important truths. The emphasis of these months before His cross is not on the crowds, though there were times when He met the crowds, the emphasis is on His own, His disciples. This is their time. They are the object of His teaching.

And so, as we come to chapter 18, He is teaching them. And we find that indicated in verse 1, as the disciples collect around Him and He teaches them regarding their own child likeness.

Now the whole discussion of chapter 18 is triggered by verse 1, look at it for a moment. "At the same time came the disciples unto Jesus saying, Who is the greatest in the Kingdom of heaven?" Notice that the verse begins with a simple little phrase, "at the same time." Same time as what? Oh, the same time as the preceding event. What was the preceding event? Do you remember in our study of Matthew 17:24 to 27 how that the tax collectors came to Peter after they had returned from many months of being gone from Capernaum. And when they saw Peter, they went up to him and said, "Does your Master plan to pay His tax?" And what they had in mind was the halfshekel temple tax that was due from every Jewish male every year. And Peter said, "Of course He pays His taxes." And

went to Jesus and said what about that? And the Lord said, "I plan on paying that and I have provide...I have provided for both you and me, all you have to do is go down to the sea and throw in a hook and pull out a fish and the tax money will be in his mouth."

And we looked at that story and we concluded from that that there is much teaching there from our Lord relative to the believer's responsibility in the world...the believer's responsibility in the world.

But on that same occasion, at that same time in that same place, chapter 18 is also taught. And this is not the believer's relationship in the world, but the believer's relationship in the family. And so, on the same day they get a tremendous insight into how they are to operate as citizens of the world and how they are to operate as children of God. It's at the same that that happens.

You remember what happened. The Lord said to Peter, "Now you go down there and you just throw your hook in and you pull out a fish and take the first fish you get. Open his mouth, you'll find our tax money there." Peter's gone fishing then between chapter 17 and 18. And as chapter 18 opens up, the other eleven disciples arrive. At that same time, when Peter's been dismissed to fish, came the disciples to Jesus. The rest of them have been walking on their journey. They've been walking around and they've been discussing some things and now they arrive. And so, the Lord teaches them this profound passage relative to their behavior as children in the family of God. It's in Capernaum, it's in the house in Capernaum...very likely, Peter's house, a familiar place.

Notice it says, "Then came the disciples unto Jesus." Now just to give you a little bit of a background, look with me at Mark 9 and let me show you what they were talking about on their trip to the house. Mark parallels the account with his insights under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. And in verse 33 of Mark 9 he says, "And they came to Capernaum and being in the house," now they've arrived, "He asked them that is our Lord what was it that ye quarreled about among yourselves on the road?" What have you guys been arguing about?

You see, you couldn't hide anything from Him, could you? Even though He wasn't there, He knew exactly what the discussion was. He knew exactly what they'd been talking about. And He gives them an opportunity to admit it. "What have you been arguing about?"

Verse 34, "But they held their peace." Is there any wonder why? They were embarrassed. They were ashamed. They didn't want to admit what they were arguing about. "For on the way they had argued among themselves who would be the greatest." I mean, they were really into that. They fought. They were proud, selfseeking and they wanted to be in the greatest places in the Kingdom. I mean, they were going to go for the whole shot. And so, when they're discovered you can go back now to Matthew 18 when Jesus has unmasked them as to their debate and they really can't hide it anymore, and He asked them and they say nothing, finally they put it in the form of a question that isn't really an admission of anything, they just say, "Who is the greatest in the Kingdom of heaven?" I mean, in

effect they're saying You can just settle this whole thing, Lord, if You just tell us. Would You just tell us who it is?

Their arguing indicates where their hearts were. They really sought superiority. And they say "who is the greatest," actually meizon in the Greek, who is the greater? Of all the great in the Kingdom, who is the greater than the great? Who stands out? Who is greater than all the rest? And Luke indicates to us that they really wanted to know who had the highest ranking. Who is going to be the chief one?

Now this is absolutely amazing. I mean, it just...the Lord has to deal with this with all of us, this...this inability to see things though they've been stated over and over again. And they are stuck on the same issue. How many times has the Lord told them that the Kingdom is not yet going to come in its earthly fullness? I mean, all of the parables of Matthew 13 should have given them some insight. And the Lord has also confessed to them that He must suffer, that He must suffer at the hands of the scribes and the Pharisees, that He is going to die and He's given them all of that data and they still can't compute it. They're still saying, in effect, we know the Kingdom is coming and we know You're going to set it up and who is going to be the greatest in it? And they're looking at the Kingdom in its earthly definition. They were seeking selfglory, prestige, prominence and Jesus had just been teaching them, chapter 16, verse 24, that if any man will come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me, let him lose his life if he wants to find it. And He's been talking about selfdenial and humility all along. And they still are selfseeking, grasping, desiring prominence. They are bent on self glory. They are bent on sitting in the chief seats.

And, by the way, this debate rages on. If you were to go over to the twentieth chapter of Matthew, which would take you a few months in advance of this time, you would find they're still debating about this and James and John, in the twentieth chapter around verse 20 to 28, send their mother to Jesus and they say through their mother, "Well, could my boys be the chief ones in the Kingdom?"

And in case you just want to lay all the blame on James and John, you might want to know that the Bible also tells us that all the rest of them were filled with envy and jealousy. They were all having the same problem. They just didn't all have a mother around who would do what James and John's mother did. So they were all in the same boat.

And you want to know something that's really sad? The night before Jesus' crucifixion, they were arguing about the same thing still. I mean, they just never bothered to get in on the fact that Jesus was going to die and demonstrate a little sympathy and a little care and a little comfort toward the one who would bear the sins of the world. They never came to that, to the very night before He died, they were still arguing about who was going to be the greatest in the Kingdom. I mean, they were really stuck on that issue. Ambition, pride, selfishness, selfglory were behind the discord, the dissension and the infighting among the Twelve.

And may I tell you that's always the case. I don't care what kind of team it is. I don't care if it's a team in ministry or a team in business or a team in athletics, you get a team fighting on the inside for one or the other to be the greatest and you will have the seeds of destruction...it doesn't matter what it is. I've seen it happen in athletics. I've seen it happen in business. I've seen it happen over and over and over in the church of Jesus Christ. You get a bunch of people who are seeking the preeminence and you will destroy everything. And that's exactly what was potentiated here. Contention arising among the Twelve about who would be the greatest. And it goes on all these months and it never even ends until after the cross.

Now it may be that in part their question is prompted because of Peter. I mean, they knew who was the leader, Peter was the leader. They knew who was the spokesman, Peter. They knew who was the water walker, Peter. None of them ever did that. And they knew who was the most intimate with Jesus Christ, the one who was always there. They knew who was one of the viewers of the transfiguration. They knew who was the object of the taxmoney miracle. And it wasn't them. And it would have been easy for them to say, "Well, Peter is the leader and Peter is the spokesman and Peter is the water walker and Peter was at the transfiguration and he was the one who wanted to build the booths and Peter's the one who got his tax money out of the fish mouth and all of us have to pay our own bills." I mean, they could easily have concluded that Peter was the guy.

But that was somewhat mitigated. I mean, none of them was ever called "rock." But it was mitigated by the fact that none of them had ever been rebuked by the Lord to the extent that Peter was. To none of them had He ever said, "Get thee behind me...whom?...Satan." And maybe they thought there was a little hope for them now. Up to now, maybe Peter was going to be the greatest but now that he'd been shot down so devastatingly, maybe somebody else could rise to the top. And the two most likely guys would be James and John since they were in the inner circle and now that Peter was disqualified by the rebuke, it's little wonder that they thought they were the closest to the prominence and so they sent their mother in chapter 20. But right now at least the question's up.

Who is the greatest? Who's it going to be? The very question is stupid. And it shows where their hearts were, doesn't it? They were looking into the Kingdom to see if they could be great. They were little differentare you ready?than Judas at this point. People ask the question, "Are they saved now?" I don't know. I mean, they believe to a certain point. I don't know how ever individual heart can be delineated. It's hard to know whether they were in the fullest sense redeemed. I lean to saying they were, but they had forgotten how that happened and they had progressed to a state of Pauline carnality, if you will. But the point here is they are arguing about something that is not to be argued about...who is the greatest.

I remember reading about two churches and they were trying to build a large church and so they decided if they competed against each other it would stimulate them. And they had this contest to see

who could get the most people. And the pastor that lost got sick and threw up. I read about it in the paper. Now you read something like that and you get sick and throw up. The Kingdom is not built by people competing at that level. But there are people who seek the prominence, who seek the preeminence, who want to be lifted to the top, who want to be elevated. And that's the thing they're in for. They're seeking the glory and that's exactly what was happening here.

And so, Jesus needs to deal with their delusions of grandeur and He does so in a rather profound way. He launches into this entire chapter and talks about the child likeness of the believer. But to start with, look at verse 2, "He called a little child," and some people think it might have been Peter's children. We know he was married cause his wife's mother was sick. And if he was married, it's very likely he had kids. And it's also possible that he had a little toddler. We don't know, that's speculation. But, Jesus called a little child to Him, "set him in the midst."

And then Luke says He brought him to His side. And then Mark says, chapter 9, that He lifted him up and held him in His arms. The Lord is in the sitting position, that's a teaching position. All the disciples are gathered around. I'm quite sure Peter had come back by this time, I just believe the Lord wouldn't give a profound lesson like this without him there. I mean, he needed it.

And so, the Lord gathers into His arms this little toddler, this little infant. The word there "little child" means just that, infant. And you can imagine this little infant looking with wondering eyes into the face of the very one who had created him, being totally at rest, totally at peace in the arms of God of very gods in human flesh, lost in the wonder of the majesty and beauty of this blessed person, in such innocence, such weakness, such confidence, such trust, being a perfect illustration. And so Jesus sits there and in His arms embraces this little child.

And I can't help but be struck as I think about that by the many, many times that Jesus had little children in His presence. Very, very many times...we've already seen it in Matthew 14 and Matthew 15 and now Matthew 18, and they'll be back in 19:21, 23. Children love to be in His presence and He in theirs. And so, with this little infant in His arms, He begins to teach.

And there are five lessons in the chapter. We're going to take one today and then the next four in the next four weeks. Five lessons, all lessons about the child likeness of the believer.

Lesson number one is the people of the Kingdom must enter like children. Lesson number two, the people of the Kingdom must be treated like children. Lesson number three, the people of the Kingdom must be cared for like children. Lesson number four, the people of the Kingdom must be disciplined like children. And finally, the people of the Kingdom must be forgiven like children. The whole chapter's about children. How they enter the Kingdom, like children, verses 3 and 4. How they're to be treated like children, verses 5 to 9. How they're to be cared for like children, verses 10 to 14. How they're to be disciplined like children, verses 15 to 20. And how they're to be forgiven like

children, verses 21 to 35. And so, we'll begin today with the first lesson, that people of the Kingdom enter like little children, verses 3 and 4.

Now listen very carefully because this is a very definitive text and a very definitive message. Jesus says in verse 3, "Unless you are converted and become as little children, you shall not enter into the Kingdom of heaven." Now that is a profound and farreaching statement. If you're not like a little child, you'll never get in My Kingdom.

Now we better find out what it means to be like a little child, then, shouldn't we? I mean, that's a pretty profound statement. That's pretty closed and pretty narrow. There's only one condition in this verse for entering the Kingdom, becoming like a little child. Do you know what that means? You ought to know because that's the way you get in the Kingdom. It's a profound statement.

Let's work our way through this brief twoverse passage. First of all, the Kingdom of heaven, we have to define it. What is it? Matthew uses the phrase 32 times. What is it? Who is the greatest in the Kingdom of heaven, they ask in verse 1? He says you have to be converted and become as a child to enter the Kingdom of heaven. In verse 4 He talks about the one who's greatest in the Kingdom of heaven. Three times it mentions the Kingdom of heaven, what is the Kingdom of heaven? We've already seen it in Matthew, so we don't need to cover all the ground again. And it's going to be there even more in the future, so we'll come back to it again. Let me just say that it means this, the sphere of God's rule. That's all. It is a general term, the sphere of God's rule. And it is synonymous with the phrase "Kingdom of God." They are not different.

Some have tried to get us to believe in the past that they're two different phrases meaning two different things, they are not. They mean the same, the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of heaven are the same and if you have any question about that, look at chapter 19, verse 23 and this should resolve that permanently. "Jesus said to the disciples, Verily I say unto you," Matthew 19:23, "that a rich man shall with difficulty enter into the Kingdom of heaven." Then verse 24 says, "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the Kingdom of God." And we know in the parable He is referring to the same thing, calling it the Kingdom of heaven in verse 23 and the Kingdom of God in verse 24, it must be the same thing, and it is.

You say, "Why the different titles?" Very simple. The Kingdom of God emphasizes the ruler. The Kingdom of heaven emphasizes the character of His ruling. It is God who rules that Kingdom and He rules it with heavenly principles and heavenly power and heavenly majesty and heavenly blessing, as opposed to that which is earthly.

So, what Jesus is talking about is the Kingdom of heaven insofar as it means the rule and reign of God, the dominion of God, the sphere of God's influence and God's power and God's rule and God's blessing coming into the Kingdom of the Lord, coming into the sphere of God, coming in to eternal

life, if you will, being saved, being redeemed, belonging to God, under His dominion. So, the concept of Kingdom of heaven simply means God's sphere of rule.

Now when you see the term "Kingdom of heaven," in the book of Matthew and you see it many, many times, as I said, there are many facets to that dominion of God, that sphere of God's rule, many facets. And when you see the phrase, you must carefully look at the context to help you to understand what facet of that Kingdom is in view.

For example, if you were to look at chapter 25 and verse 1, here you read, "Then shall the Kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins," and you remember the virgins who had the lamps, five had them ready and five didn't when the Lord returned. Now there you have the Kingdom of heaven relating to the return of Christ to set up His Kingdom. So it is the millennial aspect of the Kingdom of heaven in view in chapter 25. The future thousand year reign of Christ on the earth, that's in view with that use of Kingdom of heaven.

If you were to go back, for example, to the eleventh chapter of Matthew and the eleventh verse, it says, "Among them that are born of women, there's not a greater than John the Baptist and yet anyone who's in the Kingdom of heaven, even the least is greater than he." And there, I think, the Kingdom of heaven really sort of reaches forward and touches the eternal state. The Kingdom of heaven that is our eternal state and says that when we are in heaven with the Lord in eternity, we will all be greater than anybody who ever lived on earth no matter how great they were. Because a heavenly eternal existence is greater than any earthly existence. So you have a millennial usage of Kingdom of heaven in 25, you have an eternal one, certainly at least implied in Matthew chapter 11.

Now if you look at Matthew 13, you'll find other elements there. In Matthew 13, verse 24 to 30, you have the wheat and the tares. And there the Kingdom of heaven is seen as having the true and the false. So there the Kingdom of heaven broadens beyond just the saved to encompass all those who outwardly identify with Christianity. They're in the church, they attend the church, they say they know God but they're not genuine. They're the tares among the wheat. So sometimes the Kingdom of heaven is used then of just the title of Christianity, or the sphere of the church's influence whether real or false. And you need to know that.

If you read further in Matthew 13, you're going to find out that the Kingdom of heaven is also used to speak of the growing influence of Christianity as the mustard seed develops or as leaven leavens the whole lump. The influence that moves on until Jesus comes. And so you're seeing it there as an influence in the world as it touches all of human life and impacts all of human life, regenerate and unregenerate.

And then if you go further in chapter 13, you find that there are two parables in verses 44 to 46. A man finds a treasure in a field and he buys it and makes it its own...his own, having sold everything

he had to do that. He finds a pearl of grace...of great price, liquidates all he has and makes it his own. Those parables speak of the personal appropriation of the Kingdom. That is, personally embracing God as my Lord and King through Christ, personally entering into a relationship with God, taking the Kingdom and making it my own, selling everything I have to purchase that which is more valuable than everything.

So, sometimes the Kingdom of heaven can refer to eternity. Sometimes it can refer to the millennial earth, sometimes it can refer to the influence of Christianity on the world. Sometimes it can refer to the sphere of Christianity which includes the true and the false. Sometimes it refers to the personal appropriation of the Kingdom, that is coming into the Kingdom personally, receiving Christ, being redeemed, being saved in the genuine sense.

Now, it is in that way as it's in verses 44 to 46 of 13 that I believe it is referred to also in chapter 18. And now we can turn back to chapter 18. And I believe what the Lord is saying here is again relative to the personal appropriation of the Kingdom. He is not talking here about entering the Millennium, He's not talking here particularly about entering the eternal state, although those are all inherent in this because they will be the final end of all of those who are in the Kingdom. He's not talking about the true and the false existing within the sphere of Christian influence and the influence of the Kingdom. He's not talking about its influence on the world externally. He here is saying if you want to really genuinely enter in to God's Kingdom, if you want to become one of His subjects, one of His followers, a child of God, a Son of God, redeemed and saved and born again, it is a parallel, if you will, to the third chapter of John's gospel, it's another way to talk about regeneration and the new birth.

So, the aspect of the Kingdom of heaven in view here is personal appropriation, entering in to God's Kingdom by believing, receiving salvation. And I think that's clear from the context, it can't mean anything else. So, let's talk about that. We then know what the Kingdom of heaven is, let's talk about entering the Kingdom of heaven because He says in verse 3, "Except you be converted and become as little children, you shall not enter."

Is it important to enter the Kingdom of heaven? What does it assume? If the Bible tells us we must enter the Kingdom of heaven, what does it assume? That we're born where? Outside of it, right? We're born outside of it. And that entering it is an act which we must do. All men are born outside of God's Kingdom and are called to enter that Kingdom. And the gospel is presented that men may enter the Kingdom. "God is not willing that any should perish but all should come to repentance." God wants people in His Kingdom. Jesus looked at the city of Jerusalem and said, "How often I would have gathered you but you would not." He wanted to call men to His Kingdom and He did preach the Kingdom and John the Baptist preached the Kingdom and the Apostles preached the Kingdom and they called men into the Kingdom.

And that is exactly what our Lord is doing here. He's talking about entering the Kingdom. And by the way, that phrase is used three times in Matthew...chapter 7, verse 21; chapter 18, verse 3; and again in chapter 19, verse 23 as I read you earlier about the rich man. It simply means to become saved, to become redeemed, to become regenerate, to be born again, to come into God's Kingdom, God's family, God's influence, God's rule, God's dominion, God's world. It is synonymous, for example, in chapter 18, verse 8, with entering into life. For entering into God's Kingdom is entering into life. It is synonymous with chapter 25:21, entering into the joy of the Lord. When you enter into the Kingdom you enter into life. When you enter into life in God's Kingdom you enter into the joy of the Lord.

So, men are called to enter. There is a gate in Matthew 17 and we are to enter, right? By the narrow gate, we are called to enter which assumes we're outside and must come in...when it means to come under the rule of Jesus Christ, of God in His Kingdom.

Now Matthew, I believe, of all the gospels must systematically and carefully presents the message of entrance into the Kingdom. I believe even more than John. John's message is to prove the deity of Jesus Christ. Matthew's message is to get you in the Kingdom. And how does he do that? By making that an emphasis. And I thought about that this week and I sat back in my chair and I said, now if I were an unbeliever and I wanted to know how to get into God's Kingdom, what would I do?

Well, let's assume that I picked up the New Testament and somebody told me the New Testament would give me the answer. The place I'd start is Matthew and I think there's a reason that God put Matthew first. I think God was in control of that because I believe Matthew calls men into the Kingdom and tells them specifically how to get in there. And so I tried to imagine that I were an unbeliever, put away all my theology books, all the backlog of teaching and get myself down to ground zero. And if I just picked up the Bible at face value, started in Matthew, what would I discover was necessary to get into God's Kingdom?

Take the little trip that I took. Let's go back to Matthew chapter 3 and watch how this unfolds. By the way, while you're turning to it, let me say it resists a formula, the whole Bible resists formulizing. But especially does Matthew resist some kind of formula in the presentation of the gospel. Every time he talks about it, it has some kind of a different way of saying it. But let's see where he starts.

You're reading along, you're reading chapter 1 about Jesus Christ genealogy and His birth. You come into chapter 2, you read about the homage paid Him at His birth and the wonderful visit of the Magi, and you're all into that. And so you found out who Jesus is, Son of the Highest, God in human flesh, Jesus, Savior of people for her sins. We know who He is. All right, we've been introduced to Jesus Christ.

We come into chapter 3 and what is the first thing we run into? John the Baptist and what's he doing? He's preaching. And what does he say in verse 2? "Repent, for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand." Now what is the first thing you need to do if you're going to get into the Kingdom. What is it? Repent. You don't really have to be that scholarly to figure it out. It just hits you right there between the eyes.

And then you just follow a little longer and you get into chapter 4 and all of a sudden Jesus comes along to pick up where John left off in verse 17, and from that time Jesus began to preach and to say, "Repent for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand." Now the first condition that you're just hit with like a bolt is one word, "repent." It means basically to turn from your sin. And later on in chapter 9, verse 13, Jesus says you still don't understand that I am come to call sinners to...what? Repentance.

So, the first element of entrance to the Kingdom is repent. What does that mean? Recognize your sin and desire to turn from it. Recognize your sin and desire to turn from it. That's where it starts. That's where salvation begins in a recognition of sin and a desire to turn from it. You've got to be sorry for your sin and desire to turn from it, to repent.

Well, you read a little further, you come to chapter 5. And it begins this way, "He opened His mouth and He taught them," in verse 2. And verse 3 says, "He said, Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven." And now you're saying to yourself, "O, here's another element of entrance into the Kingdom. What is this? Poor in spirit?"

In other words, a sense of unworthiness. This is a beggar. The Greek term means to beg. You're not earning your own way, you're begging. You have no resources. And so you say I want to turn from my sin, I repent, I'm sorry for my sin, but I..I am unworthy to enter into Your Kingdom. I..I am a beggar. I have nothing in my hand. I have to cry out for anything.

And you see that same beggar in verse 6 and he's hungry and he's thirsty. And he wants to be filled and he wants to be quenched but he knows that he doesn't have any resource. Then this is the second thing that strikes you strongly in Matthew about getting in the Kingdom. There's a sense of inadequacy triggered by the conviction of sin. And a bankruptcy of personal character, you just don't...I mean, you want to turn from your sin and you want to come in the Kingdom but you know you're not adequate for that. And you know you have no resource.

And the third thing that hits you is in verse 4. You mourn and then verse 5, meekness. That's lowliness and humility. It's the kind of meekness, verse 7, that can show mercy to other people. The kind of meekness that seeks purity in heart in verse 8. The kind of meekness that makes a peacemaker. The kind of meekness that is willing to be persecuted. And you see humility here.

And so, just reading through at face value to get into the Kingdom, you must repent. To get into the Kingdom there's a poverty of spirit that must be recognized. To get into the Kingdom there must be

humility that says I'm nothing in front of you, I'm nothing, I'm nobody. You're not offering to God some great thing when you come to enter His Kingdom.

And I read a little further and I got into chapter 7 and I found out something else. Verse 21, "Not everyone that says unto Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the Kingdom." Oh, and now I learn it's more than talk. It's more than just saying you want to be in. "But He that doeth the will of My Father who's in heaven." It's an obedience factor here. There's a willingness to submit to God in obedience.

So, here we find first of all repentance, a sorrow for sin and a desire to change. And then out of that comes a sense of unworthiness knowing you don't have any resource for that, you can't change. You're personally bankrupt. You can't do anything to deserve it. And then you feel humble before such an awesome God and an awesome Kingdom. And then you learn that you've got to do more than just say you want that. It's not just saying you belong to the Lord. It's not external, it's something deep inside. And it's obedience to the will of God. And there you have submission to Lordship...submission to deity.

And you go to chapter 8 and you find the same thing. A guy comes along and he says I want to follow You, Lord, in verse 19. I want to be in Your Kingdom. I mean, I want to follow You. And the Lord puts him off and says, "The foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests and the Son of Man has no where to lay His head." And another disciple would be came along and said, "Permit me to go bury my father." Jesus said to him, "Follow Me but let the dead bury their dead." And here you know what He's talking about? Submission, dropping the things of the world, coming and following in obedience, letting go of the world. So, if I want to be in His Kingdom, I can't be fussing around with the stuff that doesn't matter, I've got to be willing to follow Him at any cost.

And then you read a little further and you come to chapter 10. And you're struck immediately by verse 32. "Whosoever therefore shall confess Me before men, him will I confess also before My Father who is in heaven." There's that heavenly Kingdom with that heavenly Father. And if you want to have a relationship with Him, you've got to confess Him before men, the Lord before men. "And if you deny Me," He says in verse 33, "I'll deny you." So there has to be an outward confession. There has to be a public taking your place with Jesus Christ.

How does someone enter the Kingdom? Repentance, turning from their sin and desiring to have a change, realizing their unworthy of such a change and such an entrance into a Kingdom, being left with meekness and humility and out of that a willingness to submit obediently to Christ's Lordship no matter what it cost. And then to outwardly confess Jesus as Lord and be willing to state that He's your Lord before men.

And then you're struck by verse 37 where it says, "If you love your father or mother more than Me, you're not worthy of Me. And if you love your son or daughter more than Me, you're not worthy of Me.

And he that takes not his cross and follows after Me is not worthy of Me. And he that finds his life will lose it and he that loses his life for My sake will find it." And you come to the point of selfdenial, selfsacrifice. It means you say no to everything. No to your comforts of like, no to your family, as we saw earlier, chapter 10, no to your own self will, your own desires, you're abandoning yourself to the Lordship of Jesus Christ, you're outwardly confessing Him, you're sacrificing everything, you're selling everything to buy the pearl, you're selling everything to take the treasure out of the field.

And then as you come to chapter 15, you see another ingredient. Verse 21, and Jesus is approached by this woman from Canaan and she cries out, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou son of David, my daughter is grievously vexed with a demon." And He doesn't answer her. And He doesn't pay any attention to her. But she kept up. And she kept up. And finally in verse 28, He says, "O woman, great is thy faith, be it unto thee even as thou wilt." This is another element. She wanted Kingdom blessing. She wanted to receive from His hand. And what was necessary was a sustained faith in the sufficiency of Christ...persistent.

The people who enter the Kingdom press their way in it. They go through that narrow gate and they walk that narrow way and there's a price but they are persistent in their confident faith that there's sufficiency in Jesus Christ. They can't be distracted. They pursue it. Like the guy who keeps knocking and knocking and the Lord responds.

So Matthew has laid it out for us very clearly. If you would just sit down and read that, you would see that in order to enter the Kingdom there must be repentance. There must be a sense of unworthiness. There must be humility. There must be a willingness to submit obediently to the Lordship of Christ and confession and selfsacrifice and a persistent pursuing faith. And may I suggest to you that that's Matthew's formula or as close as he's going to get to one for salvation. All the elements are there. And let me also say, none of those are produced in the flesh. They are all the work of the Spirit of God. But they are nonetheless the elements, the constituent parts that occur in the soul that is brought to the Kingdom.

And now as you come to chapter 18, in a most beautiful way, the Lord captures the essence of all of those. He distills the truth in this one statement. "Except you be converted and become as little children, you shall not enter into the Kingdom of heaven." And what's He talking about? Simple childlike humble trust.

So, let's go to the third point, the requirement for entrance into the Kingdom. What is it? Two things, He says. "Except ye be converted." Except ye be converted. What were the disciples right now? Proud, arrogant, selfseeking, selfish...were they repentant of their sin? No, I mean they were flaunting it among each other. Do they have a feeling of unworthiness? No, they had a feeling of worthiness. Were they humble? No, they were proud. Were they submissive to the Lordship of Christ? No, they wanted to be in control of their destiny. Were they selfsacrificing? Hardly. They were in antithesis of

all of the elements of salvation. And so the Lord says to them, "Unless you turn around.." and it is an aorist passive which implies that you've got to be turned around by somebody other than yourself...now I suppose we could say unless the Lord turns you around in the opposite direction.

It takes us right back to the idea of repentance. Conversion and repentance are really two sides of the same coin. Repentance is being sorry for sin and wanting to turn that's the emotion. And conversion is the will that does it. So entering the Kingdom begins with a repentant heart and a will that turns to God. And by the way, the word "converted" here, every other time it's used in the New Testament, 17 times, it's always translated "turned." This is the only time it isn't. Unless you be turned around and become like little children. You've got to be the opposite of what you are, you're proud, arrogant, selfseeking, boastful people. You've got to turn around.

There's no salvation without that kind of thing, without repentance, without turning. It's all over the Scriptures. It...Paul commends the Thessalonian church because they turned to God from idols, 1 Thessalonians 1:9. They turned. And you look at the book of Acts, and follow the preaching of the book of Acts with me for just a brief moment. Let me show you something. Acts 3:19, "Repent therefore," here comes the same message, "Repent therefore and be turned." Very often the compound form of strepho is used, epistrepho, thoroughly turned. "Be turned that your sins may be blotted out."

In verse 26, "Unto you first God having raised up His Son Jesus sent Him to bless you in turning away everyone of you from his iniquities." There's always the turning. You don't just go down the same road, going the same way and add Jesus to your activity. There's an abandoning of all of that and a turning.

And you go to the eleventh chapter of Acts and the message doesn't change, it's the same message. Acts 11:21, "And the hand of the Lord was with them and a great number believed and turned to the Lord." And you go to the fifteenth chapter of Acts and it's the same message again in verse 19, "Wherefore my judgment is that we trouble not them who from among the Gentiles are turned to God." And you go all the way to the twentysixth chapter of Acts, the eighteenth verse and Paul says, "My ministry is to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light." And in verse 20 he preaches that they should repent and turn to God. It's the turning, it's a turning always.

Now let me sum all this up that we've seen in Matthew and I'll give it some theological definition. This is a very fast course in soteriology the doctrine of salvation. Follow. Now this is an instant miracle, salvation is, but these are constituent parts. The first thing that happens is election. When Paul wrote the Thessalonians, he said, "I know you're saved because I know your election from God." That's where it started. Election...salvation is a result of these elements...election, chosen in Him before the foundation of the world. Elect before the foundation of the earth...election.

Then comes instruction. "It is the law of the Lord that is perfect converting the soul," Psalm 19, verse 7. "Faith comes by hearing a speech about Jesus Christ," Romans 10 says. So, first is election, then comes instruction the coming in of the Word.

Then comes conviction. As the Word comes, it convicts. Psalm 119:59, "I thought on my ways and turned my heart unto Thy testimonies." As a man begins to look at his own life in the light of the Word of God, he will draw himself to God. Lamentations 3:40, "Let us search and test our ways and turn to the Lord." Psalm 78:34, I love this, "When He slew them, then they sought Him." When they were devastated by the instruction, then came the conviction.

Election, instruction, conviction...conviction leads to repentance. When a person is convicted of their sin, they have the godly sorrow spoken of in 2 Corinthians 7:10 that causes them to want to turn from their sin to God. And repentance leads to conversion. Election, instruction, conviction, repentance, conversion...conversion is the turning to God prompted by the repentant heart. And that's what our Lord is calling for here. And then following that is obedience. A willingness to submit obediently.

Now listen, the disciples are the very opposite of all of this. Self seeking, selfwilled, proud, egotistical, wanting to run their own life, call their own shots, be the masters of their own faith, and He says if you don't turn around you'll never even get in the Kingdom. The point is this, folks, how can I answer the question "who is the greatest in the Kingdom" when you don't even know how to get in to start with? We've got to take a prior question.

And what is it the second phrase says in verse 3? How do you turn around? You turn around in becoming as little children. What is a little child like? A little child is humble, simple, unaffected, without hypocrisy, unambitious...that's a little child...meek. Children don't have great thoughts of personal greatness and grandeur and glory for themselves. They're not even conscious about what they wear. They could care...in fact they get irritated when you try to dress them up. They're not selfseeking in that sense. They're simple, little tender infant in Jesus' arms, so open, so without hypocrisy, so content to be held and directed and fed, so content to be dependent, so willing to submit, to unpretentious.

It's all bound up in one word, verse 4, "Where...whosoever therefore shall humble himself," that's the word He's after. It's that humility, it's the humility of repentance that says I'm wrong, I've got to change from my sin. It's the humility of unworthiness that says I have nothing. It's the humility of meekness that sees himself as lowly. It's the humility of submission that says I will follow the Lordship of Christ. It's the humility of confession that says I don't care what the world say, I confess Jesus as my Lord. It's the humility of selfsacrifice that says I don't want anything for my life except what God wants. It's the humility of persistent faith that doesn't care how it looks, it just keeps pursuing. It's that childlike humility, dependent, meek, trustful. A child doesn't want to push himself forward...a little infant, he just

wants to have his needs met and is content with that, no great ambition, seeks no grandeur, wants no fancy wardrobe, fancy room, just meet the needs, just give love and care. That's a child.

And they're so open. I remember some years ago when I was in Mississippi and I was traveling for several weeks preaching in black schools all through Mississippi, public schools, and mostly in high schools and junior highs, but several times had occasion to go into an elementary school. And went to this one little elementary school way out in the country and it was just packed with these beautiful little shining faces, you know, and they brought them all into this big huge like a room, auditorium room and I was the speaker of the day. And I looked out over two or three hundred or four hundred, I don't remember how many, just charming little kids from kindergarten through the sixth grade.

And I was going to present the gospel of Jesus Christ to them all. And I told the story of Jesus, you know, and I just had a wonderful time. And I told them how wonderful Jesus was and He was born and how He came into the world. And I...special little tidbits out of His life and some of the miracles, you know, and I got to the cross and His death and His resurrection. And they just...they were just charmed by this marvelous story of Jesus.

And I got all done with it and it was just very still. And I said, "How many of you would like to have Jesus live in your heart and forgive all your sin and be your Lord and Savior and take you to heaven, if you would, just let me know by putting your hand up?" Man, it's like five hundred little rockets, whish...those little hands went up. "Me...me...me, sir, me. Please, me." Every hand in the room. And we had a photographer with us who took a picture. I'll never forget that picture as long as I live. Here's a room full of little hands up in the air, every single one. Nobody was in there saying, "I'm skeptical about this whole deal. I mean, could you lay some proof on me?" There wasn't any of that at all. I mean none. Just a simple childlike beautiful trust, no selfseeking at all. And I..when I saw these hands, I just gasped. And I thought, I must have said that wrong. This can't be.

And I said, "But how many of you are willing to let Jesus control your life and you'll obey whatever He says?" Every hand went up again. Before that day was over, we counseled with those kids in little groups, little pockets of them all around that school and gave them little gospels. And I thought to myself, only God knows what really went on in the hearts of all those children, but you see that's the thing the Lord is after here, that unpretentious, unhyprocritical simple childlike thing that says I give Jesus my life, He's so wonderful, I don't ask anything but that He take me. That's the kind of thing the Lord's talking about.

There's a last point. We've talked about the Kingdom of heaven, entrance into the Kingdom of heaven, the requirement for entrance into the Kingdom of heaven and now among those who have entered into the Kingdom by the right requirement, who are the greatest in the Kingdom? And how He gets to their question in verse 4. Very simple...and then He said, "Whosoever therefore," in other words, based on what I just told you, now that we know how you get into the Kingdom, therefore,

"whoever shall humble himself as this little child, the same is the greatest in the Kingdom."

And listen now carefully and here's what He's saying, if you came in by humility, then humility is the standard. And the humblest is the what? Is the greatest. That's all. The humblest is the greatest. You see, you people are all messed up because you're arguing about who's the greatest and therefore you're all disqualified. And that's what Jesus meant when He said, "Whoever will be last shall be...what?...first. And whoever would be your chief, let him be your servant." You see, in His Kingdom, humility is the issue. You came in in humility and you rise to greatness by going down in humility.

That's why I hate with all my being and loathe the kinds of movements today that propagate "self." They are utterly antithetical to everything Scripture presents and to the very teaching of Jesus Himself. There is no place for me seeking the elevation of myself. That's disqualification. I can't even enter the Kingdom, let alone rise among the great to be the greater or the greatest. Just a simple principle.

The word "humble" there, by the way, in verse 4 is a verb form. It means to lower yourself, tapeinoo. The one who keeps lowering himself is the one who keeps rising, see. You know who the humble are? The humble are usually the people who aren't even aware of the issue, don't even think about it. Humility, no claims, no demands, no rights, no honors, bows low, humble, seeks nothing, isn't saying always "I don't deserve that, I'm better than that, I don't need to take that, they don't know how good I am, they don't know how well they have it." The one who in the Spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ didn't think it something to hold on to being equal with God but gave it all up and took on the form of a servant was made in the likeness of human flesh and even died on a cross. And he humbled Himself, humbled Himself. And he says, does Paul in Philippians 2, that's what you're to do, looking not on your own things but on the things of others, each esteeming others...what?...better than yourself.

The child in Jesus' arms, looked up and depended on Jesus totally. I mean, he couldn't do anything for himself. It's that childlike humble dependence that the Lord honors here. You rise higher within His Kingdom as you go lower. I love what the great Lutheran commentator, Lenski, said, "He who thinks of making no claims, shall have all that others claim and by claiming cannot obtain," end quote.

It's the same message the Lord gave in the Beatitudes. And the point is this: who's the greatest in the Kingdom? Well, everybody's great. Everybody in the Kingdom is great. The least in the Kingdom, according to Matthew 11:11, is greater than John the Baptist. Everybody in the Kingdom is great. But the greatest in the Kingdom are those who are the humblest.

Listen to this and I close with this, someone wrote this, maybe this can express our feelings.

"Make me, O Lord, a child again, so tender, frail and small. In self possessing nothing, in Thee possessing all. O Savior, make me small once more that downward I may grow, And in this heart of mine restore the faith of long ago. With Thee may I be crucified, no longer I that lives. O Savior, crush my sinful pride by grace which pardon gives. Make me, O Lord, a child again, obedient to Thy call, In self possessing nothing, in Thee possessing all."

As we humble ourselves, He exalts us. God gives grace to the humble. Great promise. Let's bow in prayer.

Father, we thank You for Your Word again this morning. We have touched the very throne of heaven for we have heard the voice of God. No different than were we on the mount with Moses, no different than were we on the mount with Peter, James and John, no different than we were in the waters of the baptism of our Lord, we have heard Thy voice for Thou dost speak through Thy Word and Thou hast reminded us of this profound truth of humility. Those who come to You come on Your terms, terms of repentance, unworthiness, meekness, submissiveness to the Lordship of Christ, confession of Christ, selfsacrifice, persistent faith in the sufficiency of the Lord Jesus Christ. All expressions of humility, of a lack of resource. And these are the terms for entrance. And thus become the terms for greatness. May we be great in Thy Kingdom, not because we seek for greatness or glory but because we seek Thy glory and Thine alone.

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