

VOTC May 21, 2017 C. Bosch

### Become Like Children

“ *I am the king of the castle but you’re a .....*” That’s not just a young children's boast for not a few adults are heard to exclaim with equal determination, “ I am the greatest”!

That’s certainly so at this time of the year when many sports teams are vying for a regional or national championship. When they do they lay claim to the crown and shout, “ We are the greatest”

Rather foolish, such boasting, isn’t it? Only think of the fact that championships appear to be short-lived as the team that reaches the top of the ladder may be found at its bottom the next season.

When the LORD Jesus was on earth he called a group of twelve followers to be his disciples. However it appears that some of them thought this close association with the Master made them deserving of special consideration, above other folks.

One day they approached Jesus with this question, ( recorded in Matthew 18:1) “ *Which of us will be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?*”

Jesus answered them with an example taken from ordinary life. As he saw a young child standing nearby he said to the youngster, “ *Come right over here*”. Then he took the boy by the hand and led him right into the middle of the group. He said to them,

*Truly I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me.*

It's been almost four decades since the International Year of the Child was announced with a lot of fanfare in New York. That doesn't mean however that things have changed a great deal for children the world over since 1979. Many not only still live in poverty but millions are not even allowed to see the light of day.

The LORD Jesus Christ considered every year to be the year of the child and every day as well. He implied as much when he said, *"Unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."*

What was it about children that Jesus lauded and approved? Surely it was children's simplicity, frankness, unpretentiousness and especially their humility, which Jesus was thinking of. Sure, there are many children who can't lay claim to these admirable qualities, but then they just might be imitating the bad attitudes of their parents.

Yet the expectations and attitudes of very young children can be refreshing indeed. Just think of their wide-eyed amazement at receiving a birthday or Christmas gift. The fact is that childlike humility and thankfulness are positive and attractive attitudes.

Children are often most eager to learn. Were they involved in some spat, some conflict. More often than not they're quick to forgive and

make up. They have a great capacity to love and be loved. Yet that basic virtue of humility stands out among them.

Yes, children, Like adults, can also be vain and selfish. In this they often just imitate those who should be exemplary role models but who instead drag children's attitudes down into the gutter with them.

Besides, of themselves, in their human nature, children too are tainted with sin. That too can show at an early age already. Pride can take hold of them and so can selfishness and greed. They need to be corrected, directed . Directed to Jesus and to the forgiveness of their sins.

Jesus however was speaking about children as they generally present themselves. They will often humbly acknowledge there are adults, and others they need to look up to.

God's grownup children have to come to that same recognition. Jesus' own disciples had to learn this. It appears that they had a difficult time realizing the importance of humility. Walking along the way with Jesus they had been discussing their place in the 'pecking order' as it were. They were vying for what they considered their rightful rank and station. That's clear from a parallel account in Luke 9. <sup>1</sup> That's why they asked Jesus, “ *Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?*”

Jesus knew their hearts. So he taught them this lesson in humility, O it must have been a rather difficult pill for those grown men to swallow

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<sup>1</sup> especially v. 46 which speaks of them “arguing” about rank and status

when Jesus told them that unless they “*Turn* and become like children” they would never enter the kingdom of heaven!

Jesus then went on to stress this essential character quality of humility. “ *Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.*” ( v. 4)

The “turn” which Jesus required is, in the bible the same as the act of *repentance*. It is a fundamental break with going in the wrong direction, and so walking, running, in the *right* direction!

Children need to trust their parents to do what is best for them. They will cling to such parents in loving surrender and follow their lead. Such parents have the total welfare, safety, and happiness of their children in mind and in heart.

Children of God, no matter how young or how old , trust their heavenly Father, knowing he will provide. They trust his Word, and they do not rebel. They don't doubt his sincerity. They realize the world they live in is full of pitfalls and temptations. Do they sometimes, and even frequently, lose sight of the Father's goodness? Are they tempted to forsake his guidance and the safety of his hand? They need to know and remember his forgiving grace. To trust that he sent his One and Only Son to die for them on Calvary's cross. That simply means they need to have faith, *genuine faith*.

Such faith that when they are confronted with the demands of the evil one to throw in their lot with him, they will reject his demands. When there is that tug of this world and of their own human nature to

dislodge their life from the care of Jesus Christ they will stand firm in the strength of the LORD.

Dear Listeners, becoming like children is a life-long adventure that is filled with hope, and hopefully, with joy. O yes, along the way there will be trials and temptations. They were there even for those who had spent three years in close association with Jesus Christ.

With Christ at one's side and with the Holy Spirit always ready to show the way, humble followers of Christ can be "*more than conquerors*" Romans 8:37. The apostle Paul, who at one time had breathed fire and slaughter as he persecuted Christians, had his life turned around. Later he was able to say, ( Philippians 3: 14) "*Forgetting what lies behind... I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Jesus Christ.*"

No, he didn't say he determined to do this in his own strength. He admitted he pressed on " Because Christ Jesus has made me his own." ( v. 12b) Children of God, rescued from the darkness of sin and death, and from the clutches of the devil are privileged indeed. When they are gifted with humility and reverence bowing as they seek the presence of God in prayer each day, they will realize their purpose and calling.

Jesus told those same disciples who had been so busy with carving out their assumed status, in pride and selfishness, something else. In what follow is Matthew 18: 5, 6 Jesus told them their task in protecting children rather than causing them to go astray. Should someone cause one of those little ones to sin, "*It would be better for him to*

*have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea". ( v. 6)*

Such millstones, were heavy, made of stone they were used to grind grain into flour. The top stone of the two commonly used had a hole in it through which the grain to be ground was poured.

O if Jesus' warning would only be taken to heart today. Also in our society where children are often abandoned to the spirits of the age. Under the pretext of, "*They have to make up their own minds*".

May we all, become like children, in genuine humility bowing before Jesus Christ and having our lives, our love, shaped, directed by his Word. He humbled himself all the way to the cross, that we might follow him!                      Amen    and thanks so much for listening.