

At School with Jesus: Learning to Stack

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Matthew 18:1-6 At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" ² Then Jesus called a little child to Him, set him in the midst of them, ³ 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. ⁴ "Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. ⁵ "Whoever receives one little child like this in My name receives Me. ⁶ "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.

After Jonah was swallowed by a sea creature and spit back out. After Jonah preached to the city of Nineveh. He went and sat on a hill watching the city of Nineveh. He was sitting there hoping the city would get what it deserved. As he sat there God caused a tree to grow up and give him shade. The next day the tree died. Jonah was really upset that the tree died. God told Jonah, "Why do you care so much about the death of a tree, but you don't care if all these people many of whom are children die."

As a kid I never really got the connection that God was making in this account. Part of my confusion is because the bible used the word pity, which we don't usually use for a tree. I always thought of course he was upset about the tree. The tree gave him shade. What does that have to do with the people?

That is the whole point God is trying to make with Jonah. That disconnect in our brain which separates that which affects me from that which affects others. We tend to care only about what affects us. People ought to take priority over a tree, and yet because the tree affects me directly, we often give the tree priority.

Jesus says in our text "humble yourself." What does it mean to humble yourself other than to prioritize the needs of others?

Jesus uses a child as an object lesson of this principle. Children are not a great example of prioritizing the needs of others. So, one might wonder why does Jesus give them the child as an example?

The child is an object lesson not so that we act like children, but so that we consider ourselves less important than this child.

Matthew 18:4 could also be translated, "**Whoever lowers himself to the level of this child, shall be considered greatest . . .**"

Again, we read in **Matthew 23:12** "**And whoever exalts himself will be [lowered], and he who [lowers] himself will be exalted.**

It's that lowering of our own importance in our own eyes that Jesus is talking about.

We can think back to our childhood, playing king of the mountain on a snow bank. Each one of us pulling and pushing down others to try and scramble to the top. That's what the disciples were doing when they asked Jesus, "who is the greatest?"

What an exhausting way to live, always fighting to stay on top. Yet we often live that way. We do it in our marriages. We do it in our family. We do it in church. We do it at church meetings.

Jesus tells us to change our hearts. The NKJV has "be converted." The Greek word of course means to turn around. Stop trying to fight your way to the top and turn around. Pull others up rather than pulling them down.

This humbling of ourselves isn't a little thing this is a substantive change in our life in our way of thinking.

Doctors remind us that if we want to seriously get healthy, we need to change. It's not enough to eat a salad every once in a while or go for a walk a couple times a week. You need to make real changes to your diet and your life.

That's what Jesus is talking about here. Turn and make real substantive changes to the way you think of yourself and others. Change the way you interact and talk about each other. Change the way you approach meetings and discussions.

"Lower yourself in your own eyes."

Jesus goes on to explain in our text that this substantive change, this choosing to prioritize the needs of others begins with children.

Matthew 18:5-6 ⁵ "Whoever receives one little child like this in My name receives Me. ⁶ "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.

We live in a society which rather than prioritizing the needs of children often exploits them, and often approves of the exploitation of children.

Divorce without a good scriptural reason is making a choice to do what I want rather than what is best for my children. Rather than staying and working on their marriage they put their needs ahead of the children's.

Malachi 2:15 But did He not make them one, Having a remnant of the Spirit? And why one? He seeks godly offspring.

Therefore take heed to your spirit, And let none deal treacherously with the wife of his youth.

Abortion is another exploitation of children. People want to "have fun" without having to worry about the responsibility of raising children. They approve of abortion, the killing of children, so that they can continue to do what is pleasing to them.

Children are exploited in many other ways. Some parents beat their children because they are angry or annoyed. Still others do not discipline when their children need it because its just easier to let the child have their way. There are of course many other ways that the exploitation of children is becoming more prevalent in our society.

We also put our needs before our children's when we fail to bring them to church because it's too hard, or too far, or we are too tired to get up Sunday morning.

To all of these people Jesus says it would be better if a millstone were hung around your neck. Jesus' warnings are serious and dire.

Jesus also talks in our text about what we should do with the children that he has given to us.

Matthew 18:5 Whoever receives one little child like this in My name.

Ephesians 6:4 bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord

Matthew 19:14 Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of heaven

The opposite of exploiting our children is to bring them to Jesus. Jesus prioritizes the needs of the children. He did not care about Jonah's tree, but he did care about the children of Nineveh. He spared the city from judgment for the sake of the 120,000 children. It seems obvious when you put it that way, but in our daily lives we often choose to prioritize our own needs over that of others, even children.

The greatest need for our children is that they are regularly brought to the feet of Jesus, who as their good shepherd knows each or them by name.

Turn your hearts, so that your priority is that your children receive God's word. Bring them to church. Stay afterwards so that they can attend Sunday school. Begin their day with prayer. Have devotion with them at supper every evening.

There are always so many reasons why we don't have time, but they always amount to the fact that our priorities like Jonah and like the disciples are wrong. Our priority in all things ought to be the need our children have to know their savior.

That is what we are doing here today with our Sunday school teachers. That is why we spend so much to support four teachers and a school building. God has promised that he has, does and will bless this effort to bring the children to him.

God saved the city of Nineveh, why? Because there were over 120,000 children for whom he died. He desired that those children too would come to him and be saved through his death. He saved Jonah from the belly of the sea creature despite the selfishness of Jonah who cared more about a tree than about 120,000 children. Jonah was also one of his children for whom he died. He saved you despite your selfishness and has made you his child through his word and water. Now he wants you to bring your children to him as well, that they might be his and he might be their shepherd.

Humble yourselves and put this need first in all things, the need the children have to know Jesus.

Amen