

Taught by Children

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[0 : 0 0] Well for a short while I'd like us to turn back to the chapter, well it was really to the passage that we looked at with the children in Matthew chapter 19 but we were referring to chapter 18 as well. Chapter 19 of Matthew's Gospel at verse 13, then children were brought to him that he may lay his hands on them and pray. The disciples rebuked the people but Jesus said, let the children come to me and do not hinder them for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven. And he laid his hands on them and went away. Now as we saw with the children these verses are wonderful because they teach our children many precious truths and it's very encouraging for children to know that Jesus is calling them to come to him and that they are welcome, they are precious, they are important to him. So these verses here and the verses referring to children in Matthew 18 teach our children some very important lessons. However the main point of these passages is not to teach children. The main point of these passages are not teaching children rather the main point is that we grown-ups have a lot to learn from children. These verses are telling us that we can be taught by children when it comes to the things of the kingdom of God. Now these verses and indeed the whole of scripture are teaching us the most important things that we'll ever hear. The words of Jesus are the most urgent, most important, the most fundamental truths that we must learn in our lives and Jesus is telling you and me today that the answer to some of life's most crucial questions are to be found by looking at children. We can be taught by the example of a child. And so today I want us to see what we can indeed learn from that and we are going to ask three vitally important questions. The first thing we're going to ask is how do we come to God? How does anybody come to God? Secondly we're going to ask how do we relate to God? What kind of connection do we have with Him? And thirdly we're going to ask how do we please God? These are some of the most important questions you and I can ever, ever ask. If you think of your life and of your eternity and how you stand before God, these things are of unbelievable importance. These are the questions that we must all be thinking about. So first of all, how do we come to

God? How are you to come to God? This is one of the most crucial things that we can ever ask and we are constantly emphasising the fact that we need to come to God. The fundamental problem faced by humanity is that we are alienated from God. We are separated from God because of our sin. And our message, the message of the Gospel is a message which is calling people back to God. That's what we mean when we tell people that they must repent. It's the idea of turning and coming back to God. That's what Jesus said when he proclaimed the Gospel.

The time is fulfilled, the Kingdom of God is at hand, repent and believe the Gospel. Every single one of us has to turn around and come back to God. And the vital question for us all is how do we do that? And Jesus is telling us here that we do that like a child. If we go back to Matthew 18, it says at that time the disciples came to Jesus saying who's the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven? And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them and says truly I say to you unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the Kingdom of Heaven. So when we talk about repenting, we're talking about a big theological word behind which lies some vital truths of Scripture. But it's to be understood as coming to God like a child, turn and become like children. And this is a vital point because this is a point at which many, many people get it wrong. And in fact if you go home and read Matthew chapter 18 and Matthew chapter 19, they are full, these chapters are full of people who are constantly getting it wrong. The disciples were fussing about who was going to be the greatest. That was where their priority lay. The Pharisees came to Jesus to test him in chapter 19. At the beginning, you can read about that. And then at the end of chapter 19, we read about the rich young ruler who again came to Jesus thinking that his own achievements were going to make him acceptable to God, that he was there to just boast about all that he had accomplished. In fact, it's very, very interesting.

When you read the second half of Matthew chapter 19, you read the little passage that we read to the children about the children coming to Jesus. And Jesus welcomes them. And then in verse 16, immediately afterwards, it says that a man came to Jesus and he got it all wrong. The children had it right. It was the man, the grown up who had got everything wrong.

And so Jesus is telling you and me that we are to be taught by children. The way to come to him is to come as a child. And this, these verses here are reminding us that at the heart of that is humility. Jesus says in verse four, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Now, when you hear the word humility or humble, it's the idea of being low, the idea of being a low level. And that's exactly how God wants us to come to him. And again, this is so important because we get it wrong. Grown ups think that they have to push themselves up before they come to God, don't they? Grown ups think I have to make myself better. I have to reform my life. I have to become a certain standard of person. And then I can become a Christian. Grown ups think I have to, you know, look back on the fact that I've been a decent person all my life, that I compare favorably to other people. And if I see myself at an upward level, then I'll become acceptable to God. And that's completely the opposite of what God is saying to us here. He's saying,

[7:17] I'm not wanting you to come and puff yourself up. I'm not wanting you to come and lift yourself up to a certain standard before you come into my kingdom. He's saying, I want you to be humble. I want you to come with empty hands. I want you to come as you are with all your weakness, with all your vulnerability. And that's exactly how a child is. A child doesn't come to their parents saying, I've accomplished this, this, this and this. I did a really good, I got all my sons right at school and I got, I wrote a really good story. Therefore, I expect you now to love me as a result of that. I expect you to help me because I've accomplished all these things. No child comes to their parent like that and no parent would want their child to come like that. A child comes just as they are in humble, humble reliance.

And that is how God wants you to come to Him. Now that's an incredibly important lesson and maybe it's a lesson that you have not learned yet. Because if you are thinking to yourself, well, I can't be a Christian because I'm not good enough or I can't become a member of the church because I don't know enough or I can't be involved in the things of God because I'm just not at that standard of person, then you need to learn this lesson. God wants you to come in humility, to come as you are. Likewise, God does not want you to come to Him proud. God does not want you to come to Him saying, well, you know, I think I'm definitely good enough for you, God. I'm better than my neighbours, better than my colleagues.

I don't tend to put a foot wrong in my life. That's not humble. That's proud. And God doesn't want us to come to Him like that. If you look at the very end of chapter 19, Jesus says, many who are first will be last and the last first. So often we want to make ourselves first, but Jesus is saying that's not how God wants us to come to Him. It's very, very interesting to notice that there is a key difference between children and adults.

Now, I want you to think about this because I think this is really, really important. Children don't always know what they need. Children don't always know what they need.

If children are feeling sick or if they're hurt, they don't always know what they need. Sometimes you'll find a baby will be crying so much because of hunger that they will refuse to eat. They need food, but they don't realise it and they cry. And sometimes it can be very difficult because they want, you know, they need to eat, but they're refusing to do it because they're so upset. Children don't often know what they need, but they always know who they need because they always cry out for their mother or their father. They're not interested in the details. They just know who it is that they need. They don't need an explanation of their nutrition system. They don't need an explanation as to how their arm is going to be healed if it's hurt. They don't need an explanation as to why they're upset. They just know who they need. They go straight to their parents. They don't know what they need. They know who they need. Now, adults are the other way round because we know what we need. We know what we need in life. We know that we need relationships.

[11 : 09] We know that we need security. We know that we need love. We know that we need encouragement. We know that we need friends. We know that we need people with us. We know that we need a path for our lives. We know that we need purpose. We know that we need a meaning in our lives. We know exactly what we need, but we seem to have forgotten who it is we should go to. Because if you think about it, you will never see a child trying to make themselves feel better by going and spending money or by going and drinking or by going and doing all sorts of things that they shouldn't do. But plenty adults will. And although they know what they need, they go to the wrong place, the wrong person. How many adults, when they are looking for love, looking for comfort, looking for support, go headlong into a terrible relationship? How many adults looking for a way to cope with the stress and the busyness of life go further and further down the path of drinking and socialising until it becomes a mess? You grownups know what you need, but we are all too quick to go to the wrong place.

And so we can all learn from children. We know, we must learn who it is that we need.

That the place to find peace and joy and happiness in life is with God. So that's the first question. How do we come to God? The answer is like a child. The second question is this. How do we relate to God? Now that's a really, really important question as well. If you're going to come to God, what sort of relationship are you going to have with him? How is it that you're going to connect to God? What is it that God is to you and what is it that you are to God? In other words, when you think of God, what should you think of? And again, the answer to this question, how do you relate to God is given to us by children. Because if you are a Christian or if you become a Christian first and foremost, God is your father. Your relationship with God is a father to their child. That's why Jesus says, let the children come to me. Do not hinder them because to such belongs the kingdom of heaven.

The kingdom of heaven belongs to those who are God's children. And this is reminding us of one of the most wonderful and fundamental truths of the Gospel, that if you are, I put our trust in Jesus, we are the adopted children of God. This is the wonderful truth. Jesus is the child of God by a natural state. He is the begotten, the only begotten Son of God. He is the one who has that status. But we share in that status not by being begotten, but by being adopted. We also become the children of God. And we must stretch our minds to see the wonder of that. When we talk about adoption as a theological truth, we mustn't just think of it as something cold and something technical. It is the most wonderful privilege for us.

As God's children, we are loved with a special, special love. That's what we read at the very beginning of the service. We'll see what kind of love the Father has given to us that we should be called the children of God. And so we are. What kind of love does God love you with if you are a Christian? A Father's love. A Father's love. The love of the perfect Father. And every morning when you wake up as a Christian, I hope you will remember that.

[15 : 45] I hope you will remember that you are loved by the most wonderful, wonderful Father. A love that is so deep, so precious, so strong. You, you are loved by that. And if you are a Christian, please do remind yourself that your Father loves you. My Father loves me.

We must, must remember that. We are also under God's care. Matthew 6.8, Jesus says, your Father knows what you need before you even ask Him. Any parent wants to care for their children's needs. We want to provide for them. We want to help them. And God is exactly the same. Now, sometimes that means giving. Sometimes it means withholding. Every parent here will understand that. Sometimes you give things to their children for their good. Sometimes you withhold things for, from your children for their good. But what we must, must remember is that at all times, God cares about every aspect of His children's lives. If you go to work tomorrow morning and it's a struggle, God cares about that. God cares about how you're feeling. God cares if you wake up in the middle of the night and you remember something from your worker, from your circumstances that, that causes you to be tense and worried and nervous. God knows about that. God cares about that. If you have worries, if you have concerns, if you have things that leaving, are leaving you feeling so weary and worn and low. God cares about that. God knows about that. These things matter to God. Every detail of your life is important to Him. We are under our Father's care. And as God's children, we have incredible privileges because we are members of God's family. In Romans 8, it's a wonderful chapter that talks about that. You did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you've received the spirit of adoption of sons by whom we cry Abba, Father. The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God. And if children then heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with Him in order that we may also be glorified with Him. If God is your Father, then you are a member of the household of God, a member of His family, and you are entitled and blessed with astounding, astounding privileges. Never, ever think that Christianity is not offering you much. Never, ever think to yourself, well, you know, sometimes I would like to be a Christian, but you know, I'm going to lose too much. Never think that the

Gospel is offering you little. Because today, Jesus Christ is calling you to the highest level of privilege where you will be a child of God, loved, precious, and indescribably privileged. That's why Jesus says the last will be first. And those who come to Jesus in humility become the most important people in the universe, in God's sight. We are called to incredible, incredible privileges. It's quite amazing when you look at the New Testament, especially when you look at Jesus' life, you see this perfect relationship between a father and a son, God the Father, God the Son, in an incredibly perfect bond of love.

If you read the Gospels, one thing you will definitely discover is that Jesus is loved by his father, and Jesus loves his father. The relationship between them is incredibly strong, incredibly deep. It is absolutely astonishing. But what's even more astonishing is that you and I are called into that very same relationship. Jesus has even prayed that that would happen. In John 17, he says, I and them and you and me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them as you loved me. I desire that they, Father, I desire that they also whom you've given me, maybe with me where I am, to see my glory that you've given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. O righteous Father, even though the world does not know you, I know you, and these that know that you have sent me, I may have known to them your name and will continue to make it known that the love with which you've loved me may be in them and I in them.

Now, please, please grasp what that is saying. The love that the Father has for Jesus, the preciousness that Jesus has in this sight, his importance as the Son of God, that is what God wants to make you. You are that important. You are that precious. The Gospel is offering you that much. God wants to make you a fellow child, a fellow heir brought into his family.

[21 : 32] Now, I want to ask you if you ever wonder whether you matter to God. Do you wonder if you matter to God or not? Does God care about you? Does God think about you? Does God notice you? Is God remotely bothered about you? It is so easy to think like that. It is so easy to feel like that. It's very easy to wonder whether or not we matter to God. Well, I hope I hope that you can see how much you do matter to him. In fact, I hope that rather than wondering if you matter to God, I hope that you will stand back in utter wonder at how much you matter to God. When we describe God as our Father, we can use many, many wonderful adjectives.

We can say that he's a loving Father. We can say that he's a gentle Father. We can say that he's a patient Father. We can say that he's a strong Father, a wise Father, a kind Father. We can say that he's the greatest Father. All of these things are true. There are many amazing adjectives to describe the Fatherhood of God. But do you know what the most amazing adjective of all in terms of describing the Fatherhood of God is? It is the one that begins the Lord's Prayer, our Father, your Father. That is the best adjective of all in describing the Fatherhood of God. How do we relate to God? Well, if you put your trust in Jesus, if you want to understand what that relationship is like, just think of a child who is utterly, utterly loved by their Dad, because that is exactly what the

Bible is telling us. Our third question, and briefly, is this. How do we please God? We want to come to God, and I hope that we all will come to God as a child. We relate to God as children to their Father if we put our trust in Jesus Christ. But how do we please God? How do you live a life that is pleasing to God? Again, this is a vital, vital question, because sometimes the relationship between a parent and a child can be very, very far from what it should be. And sometimes what the relationship is on paper, it isn't in real life, and that's a desperately, desperately difficult situation, and it's something that is incredibly hard for anyone to deal with. But what's that? That is reminding us of the fact that the relationship that we have as parents to children and as children to parents should shape the way we live our lives. Children should live in a way that pleases their parents.

And so if we ask the question, how do we please God, the answer is again found by looking at a child. I want to say two things here very quickly. The first thing is this. At the heart of a parent-child relationship is dependence. Now, from the moment a child is born, they are utterly dependent on their parents. They're dependent for nourishment, for protection, for growing, for learning. In every way, a child is dependent. And the vital, vital point that we must all, all learn is that God wants us to depend on Him. God wants you to depend on Him. In fact, God is glorified when we depend on Him. If you want to glorify God in your life, depend on God. Because by depending on Him, you are saying that He is our God, that He is our rock, He is our strength, He is our Father, and we depend on Him. And that sounds so simple, but yet again and again we get it wrong. You go back to the Old Testament, the people of God got it wrong again and again and again. The verse here in Hosea 11, when Israel was a child, Israel, God's people in the Old Testament, when they were a child, when Israel was a child, I loved Him and out of Egypt I called my son. The more they were called, the more they went away. They kept sacrificing to the bails, the false gods, and burning offerings to idols. Do you see what these verses are saying? God is saying, I called my child. I wanted to look after Israel. I wanted to protect them. I wanted to lead them, but the more I called them, the more they went away. They thought they could stand on their own two feet. Again, if you go home and read the rest of chapter 19, you'll read about the rich young ruler who was doing exactly the same thing. He was trying to prove his independence, the fact that he didn't need God. And maybe you're like that. Maybe sometimes you feel that you can prove to God that you're independent, that you're good enough, that you've accomplished enough. But the truth is, and the vital truth is, is that if you are a believer or if you become a believer, God wants and God expects you to depend on him. I could imagine nothing worse for a parent to hear than for their child to say to them, I don't need you anymore. And don't think that God is any different.

God wants us to lean on him, to rely on him. How do you please God? By depending on him every day. But the second thing in terms of pleasing God is obedience. Again, at the heart of a parent-child relationship is obedience. A parent, a child should obey their parents.

[28 : 15] Now, this is very important to understand. A child should not obey their parents because they are a slave. A child is not there to just be used and abused by their parents.

That's not what we mean by obedience and that's a horrible corruption of a parent-child relationship. It's not a slavery obedience. A child should obey their parents because their parents know best. And that is exactly how we should understand God's law. When God gives us instructions, when God tells us to do things, it is not because he is a brutal slave driver. It is not the expectations of a taskmaster. How often do people think of God as a hard taskmaster?

And yet it is utterly wrong to think of him in that way. God gives us instructions because he is an utterly loving father. Now, the world, the whole world and especially 2016 Britain has got this desperately wrong because our nation thinks that God's law or in fact really any law is an unwanted restriction. We look at things that laws and standards and models that have been in place and these are being rebelled against because people see law as restrictive and as unhelpful and people want to push, push, push, push all of that away. And it's tragic because the truth is that God's law is a statement of wonderful, wonderful protection. People today think that God's law leaves us, you follow

God's law, you're narrow minded. People think that you're restrictive, that you're harsh, that you're cold, that you're being narrow. Now, if you're a parent, if you imagine that your child is going to walk down to the school, you would say to them, when you go out, stop at the road, watch for cars, do not cross unless the road is clear. When you get to the other side, stay on the pavement. If somebody comes along and you don't know when they talked, you don't talk back to them. If you see something dangerous happening, keep away. If you see the other children from the school, stick with them and go to school together. When it comes to cross the road, make sure you cross at the specific point where it's safe, not where the road is busy, not where the road is dangerous. You would fill them with laws. But it's not because you're narrow minded. It's because you love them and you want them to be safe. Now, God is exactly the same. That's why he gives us laws. That's why the word of God, the Bible should be a rule of life. Don't ever, ever think that it's being narrow minded to follow God's law. The whole reason that we have it is because God loves us. And so we please God by obeying him and obeying him in our daily lives is a statement of trust in God. We're saying to God, yes, we know that you know best. And the amazing thing is, and what the word doesn't realize is that it's by obeying God's law, by living in God's way, that we find true happiness, that we find true freedom, that we find joy in our lives. Imagine going to a swimming pool. And imagine that at that swimming pool, there was no laws. Imagine there was no lifeguards, no restriction. People could do whatever they wanted. It would be chaos and dangerous and horrible to be there. But the laws and the rules of the swimming pool mean that you can go in and have a fantastic time. Exactly the same as true when it comes to God's word. So as God's children, we please him by depending on him in faith and by obeying him in faith. So how do we approach God? How should you approach God as a child? How do you relate to God if you become a Christian or if you are a Christian as a child? How are you going to please God as a child depending on him and obeying him? And I hope that every single one of us will see how simple it all is. We grownups are so good at making things complicated. Children are so good at keeping things simple.

God wants you as his child. It's as simple as that. Let us pray.