

July 1, 2018

“A Reversal of Values”
Matthew 18:1-9

FCF: “So, where do we go from here?”

PROPOSITION: (magnet) The coming of “the kingdom” brings a reversal of values.
(anchor) We must learn to live in light of that.

SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:

“Where do we go from here?” Ever ask that? You have a sense things need to change. Things can’t stay as they are. But you’re not sure what that means or what it would lead to.

“Where do we go from here?” Jesus’ earliest disciples were asking that question. He had revealed His mission and purposes for them. But still, what did it mean? Where would it lead?

SCRIPTURE READING: [Matthew 18:1-9](#)**PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION****SERMON INTRODUCTION:**

A course of healing necessitates change. When your health is a wreck, you need to focus on improving your diet, getting exercise, and planning for better sleep. When a dictator is forced out and a new ruler comes to power, there will come a new set of advisors and policies for the people. A course of healing necessitates change. And all the adjustments that come with that.

Jesus’ message was “the gospel of the kingdom” - the dawning and arrival of the rule and reign of God on this earth. It was declared with His words and demonstrated by His works. And the coming of that kingdom necessitates change and all the adjustments that come with that. More to the point, this text shows us that the coming of the kingdom brings a reversal of values. The coming of the kingdom brings a reversal of values. We must learn to live in light of that.

How do we see this reversal of values? First, in our need to become like children. Second, in our need to be a community of care. Third, in our need to fight the temptations to sin.

I. OUR BECOMING LIKE CHILDREN

First, we see this reversal in the need to become like children ([READ Matthew 18:1-4](#)).

A) The Question

The disciples are wrestling with a question connected back to what Jesus has just said.

1. The presenting reason

He has said He is the son of the king. Beyond that, He has said they are part of the family, sons of the king as well. What might that mean? That’s the presenting reason behind their question.

2. The deeper reason

But there is a deeper reason - our obsession with preeminence, the higher place, a better seat.

B) The Answer

So into the hazy cloud of their confusion, Jesus breathes His answer. And it is bracing.

1. The need to turn

“Truly” - meaning “you need to listen.” They needed to turn, to reverse course. They wondered about rank in the kingdom. Jesus says they should wonder about entrance into the kingdom.

2. The call to humility

To illustrate His point, He points to a child. This is likely in Peter's house so it's likely one of Peter's children. But Jesus is not pointing to a supposed innocence of the child but his inability. Jesus is saying we must recognize our vulnerability and need. And then trust, just like a child.

(**READ Matthew 18:4**) To follow Jesus, we need to learn how to become like children.

Application:

This is foundational both to our relationship with the Lord and one another. Humility transforms how we think of ourselves and engage in all of our relationships. We cannot insist on anything. We are in no place to make demands. Our posture is but that of open empty hands.

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II. A COMMUNITY OF CARE

Pushing further, we must also become a community of care (**READ Matthew 18:5-6**).

A) *The Metaphor*

Clearly, this is connected to what Jesus has just said, still speaking of "children".

1. Not about literal children

But here, Jesus is not speaking literally of children. There are many other ways He does speak to the value of children. For example, in the next chapter and in commands to care for orphans.

2. But about His followers

But here, Jesus is not speaking literally of children. In context, He is speaking of His followers. They are the ones who are believing and who come to Him with the humility of little ones.

B) *The Meaning*

But that in no way reduces the sting or the power of what He is saying to us here.

1. Precious worth

Jesus is saying that His followers are of precious worth to Him. Each one belongs to Him. So much so, so strong is that tie, that Jesus says that a response to His disciple is a response to Him.

2. Strong warning

Which is why this strong warning is given. To fail to receive them, to cause them to stumble, is a grave offense - both to them and also to Him. And so punishable by the worst sort of death.

Clearly then, Jesus intends for us to become a community of care.

Application:

Which is another reversal of the ways of this world. How do we see one another? The way Jesus says He identifies with His own is striking. It is both comforting and convicting.

Are we a receiving community - a place in which "little ones" at every stage are lifted high and built up? No matter their age, race, class, gender, culture, struggles, or burdens?

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III. THE TEMPTATIONS TO SIN

Finally, this speaks also to our fighting temptations to sin (**READ Matthew 18:7-9**).

A) The Seriousness

Jesus speaks with real seriousness on the topic of sin and temptation. He is not playing.

1. Not sympathy

“Woe to the world” - not with a sense of sympathy or sadness. This is not “Oh, the poor world.”

2. But sobriety

This is not sympathy but sobriety, a proclamation of judgment. Yes, there is an inevitability to the stumbling blocks around us. But that inevitability is no free pass from our responsibility.

B) The Resistance

And so Jesus speaks with moral clarity, with seriousness. And of the need to resist.

1. Obvious hyperbole

Now obviously, as He speaks of cutting and tearing, He is using hyperbole. He is intentionally overstating to press hard on His point. This is not a call to self-mutilation but mortification.

2. Rigorous discipline

It is a call to rigorous discipline - seeing the danger of sin for what it is, hating it, despising it, and laboring towards its removal in every area of our lives lest we become the stumbling block.

Which is hardly natural. To follow Jesus, we need to learn to resist the temptation to sin.

Application:

This is yet another reversal of the ways of the world. Think with me. How do we view sin? Do we recognize it as an affront, as cosmic treason against the one true God? Do we see it as self-destructive, truly harmful to ourselves and others? Little wonder Jesus is so serious here.

Tied to that, how do we view temptation? If sin is not big thing, then there need be no big fight. But what if it is a big thing? What then? We would labor not to raise our hand in anger or to grasp for more. We would work not to go with our feet to places we have no business being. We would strive not to let our eyes be captured by the lies of consumerism or lust.

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CONCLUSION:

A course of healing necessitates change. And all the adjustments that come with that. Let me come back to that idea. I mentioned physical health and political leaders. Here are a few more examples. Think of a neighborhood lot trashed and overgrown. A kind donor pays for its cleanup and transformation into a park and playground. How should the locals respond? Taking pride in what they have and taking care of it. Or let's say you are college student struggling with your coursework. Someone pulls you aside, helps you see you're in the wrong major, your study habits are a mess, and pulls you through. What do you do? You don't switch back to your old major. You don't revert back to your old study habits. You see, with both the neighborhood lot and the college student, you don't go back to doing what got you into that mess in the first place.

It's something like that with the kingdom of God. With its coming, with its dawning upon this world, there is a newness to everything. God in His grace has made us into a new people. He has given us a new purpose. He indwells us with a new power. We can't go back to what got us into that mess in the first place. This calls for our becoming like children. This calls for our becoming a community of care. And this calls for a fight against the temptations to sin.

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