

Simple Faith Matthew 18:1-6

Conclusion

- Aside from seeing someone come to faith, watching someone grow in their faith is one of the most fulfilling aspects of ministry
 - It seems that we see that growth happen the most with our children and youth, which is a good thing
 - However, how often does that happen to us as adults; that we see signs of continued growth in our faith?
- Excitement for Children's Ministry
 - Recall the children's Christmas program: The Wonky Donkey- the enthusiasm of the kids
 - Girls singing- on going development of the gifts they share
 - Jr. High Class- desire to understand God, salvation, faith
- It's true that if we only allow our kids to participate in worship occasionally and only think of our worship as adult worship and their worship and children's church we will all miss out on the lessons and blessings that God intends for us.
- As much as we can learn from the faith of our children and youth, how many of you think it would be a good idea to leave the children downstairs by themselves or in a classroom without a teacher?
 - I love my kids and I love the faith of the kids in this church, but there's no way that I would want our kids to be left alone.
 - Left to their own devices would be disastrous and irresponsible
 - Even though they are growing in their faith, they still need structure, parameters, and shepherding.
- Today, as we continue our series "Keep It Simple" we are going to explore Simple Faith
 - **Matthew 18:1-6**
 - You may be familiar with Jesus' words, **"Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven (vs. 3, ESV)."**
 - Jesus' words challenge us as we consider the innocence and simplicity of a child's faith, which often stands in contrast to our own faith.
 - Oh, for a childlike faith!- A Simple Faith
 - Yet, if we think about the implications of Jesus' words especially in the complex world that we live in, is it even possible to have a Simple Faith like Jesus calls us to have?
- Before we explore this passage, let me remind you of a few things that we have said throughout this sermon series, "Keep It Simple"
 - *Simple* doesn't necessary mean *small* or in the case of what we will discuss today, *Simple* does not mean that our faith lacks depth or responsibility
 - *Simple*, however is defined by a singular focus on what is most important
 - As Jesus calls us in **Matthew 6:33 (ESV), "But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you."**

- A simple focus can lead to big things!

We need a shepherd to grow in our faith

- **Matthew 18:1-6**
 - Consider what led Jesus to focus on children in this passage
 - An argument about who is the greatest
 - Keep in mind in Chapter 16, Peter confesses his faith in Jesus as the Christ and in Chapter 17, Jesus reveals himself through the transfiguration to Peter, James, and John—all of these are big moments of faith
 - And yet, despite all of these incredible moments and leaps of faith, the disciples reduce themselves to petty fighting about who is the greatest
 - Like listening to grown men discuss their glory days when they were in high school and made the big play and measure their accomplishments
 - Or, like small children arguing over who is the best
 - Here is what I want you to take note of as we begin to dissect this passage today
 - We have two pictures of children in this passage
 - One picture is of an innocent faith, which Jesus encourages us to have
 - The other picture is of a faith that reveals a necessity to mature
 - In many ways the disciples reflect both of these pictures
 - At times they grow by leaps and bounds
 - At other times that appear to fall way behind in their faith
 - From these two pictures, if we are honest we get a picture of ourselves
 - **Matthew 18:10-12**
 - Jesus returns to talk about children, but here it is about looking out for them
 - Jesus offers the necessity of parameters, and the significance of a shepherd
 - I believe that Jesus offers us a clue as to what it means to have a childlike faith, or a simple faith
 - It is a faith that in its innocence also requires shepherding
 - Without a shepherd, just like children we will be led astray
 - I asked you at the beginning how many of us would think it wise to leave the children alone downstairs or in a classroom.
 - We all agreed that this would not be a good idea, because no matter how amazing our kids are as they grow in their faith, they still lack the maturity to be left alone
 - Can I tell you, we all need that kind of shepherding in our life?
 - We all have the potential to step out of line
 - We all have the potential to fall into sin
 - We all still need to grow in our faith
 - Two questions

- Can you identify at least one area in your life where you are growing in your faith?
- How are you cultivating that faith? In other words, How are you being shepherd in your faith?

Simple Faith is cultivated through Humility

- There are at least three other places in the gospels where this argument of who is the greatest shows up
 - Along with the example of a childlike faith, is an example of how serving others is produced through Simple Faith
 - Mark 9:35b (ESV), “If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all.”
 - Luke 22:26 (ESV), “Rather, let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves.” (Also ref. Luke 9:46-48)
- Simple Faith is a faith that keeps focused on who Jesus is: A Servant
 - The religious leaders lost their focus and as a result began serving themselves and promoting themselves
 - The disciples lost focus of Jesus and as a result their faith was reduced to childlike arguments.
 - And yet, the one aspect Jesus focuses on that defines a child and defined Jesus’ life is humility.
- Humility allows for two things
 - The desire to learn and realize that one does not know it all.
 - Jackson and Long Division
 - Trying to do long division without knowing his multiplication problems
 - Lots of counting on his fingers and discovering he doesn’t have enough fingers
 - Need to go back and learn the foundations of his multiplication problems in order to apply to long division
 - It’s simple, but requires some commitment, and patience
 - The need to apply a simple faith to complex problems in our life
 - It’s not that God’s truth is inadequate to meet the complex problems in our life
 - Or that God’s truth is too difficult to understand
 - It comes down to whether you have developed the simple foundation that builds depth to your faith and allows you to face the complex problems in our life
 - The desire to serve others, rather than to be served.
 - Plain and simple- the true reflection of our simple faith is serving others
 - In order to truly serve, you have to be humble
 - We serve out of a duty that is greater than ourselves

- We can make excuses for not serving, but there is really no excuse for an immature faith that is unwilling to serve.
- “The humility of a child consists of childlike trust, vulnerability, and the inability to advance his or her cause apart from the help, direction, and resources of a parents.”¹
- A childlike faith is not an excuse to not grow in your faith; neither is your experience in faith an excuse to not continue to grow in your faith.
- A simple faith is cultivated through the desire to learn and to serve; it takes humility to learn and serve.

You are an Example to a Younger Generation

- Pretty harsh warning that we all need to heed
 - **Matthew 18:5-6**
 - Children are the most vulnerable and influenced
 - Parents have a responsibility that we will be held accountable for
 - BUT, so do all Christians
- Definition of a leader
 - A person of influence
 - Everyone has influence, therefore everyone is a leader
 - BUT, not everyone is a good leader
 - Hitler was a leader, but not for good
 - Jesus led by example, He not only called his disciples to serve, but he showed it through the cross.
- Whether we like it or not, we can blame the culture for its influence on the current generations, BUT the church bares some responsibility as well
 - The current generations aren’t only absent from our churches because they are influenced by culture, but because of what they have witnessed within the church
 - Think about leadership as influence, if the church pushes away one family, they are not only pushing away the parents, but those parents then influence their kids, and those kids then influence their kids
 - Multiple generations have been impacted by the negative influence of the church
 - Look around—you can blame culture, or other people, but be humble enough to bare some of the blame yourself.
 - Warren Wiersbe, “The selfishness and disunity of God’s people is a scandal to the Christian faith. What causes these problems? Pride-thinking ourselves more important that we really are.”²
 - Simple faith includes confession which then produces the desire to learn and serve even the current generations that you might find yourself at odds with.
- Example from our family

¹ *ESV Study Bible*, Wheaton: Crossway, 2008. Pg. 1858.

² Warren Wiersbe, *The Wiersbe Study Bible, NKJV*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishing, 2018. pg. 1425.

- Really trying to live this idea of “Keep It Simple”
- Evaluating how we spend our time and how that is shaping us
- Some of our influence has been the busy schedule that has then created a lack of disciplined structure within our household
- Chaos!
- How do we reconnect?
 - Saying “no” to things
 - Eating a meal together
 - Instead of T.V. —family board games, which has been influenced by “Come to the Table”
- Personally it’s a hard pill to swallow to consider how I might be negatively influencing my kids, but I must take what Jesus says to heart.
- Whether you realize it or not, you are an influence to a younger generation
 - You may not like certain things about them
 - But, as we discussed last week we are called to love them
 - Love is shown by the example that we display, which as Jesus describes here begins with humility
 - Humility produces a desire to learn and to serve
 - “How Long??”
 - **Matthew 18:22 (ESV), “I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times.”**
 - Repetitive times in order to get it without giving up on them
 - Till the end of time: just like Jesus
 - Anything less is a sin!

Conclusion

- Simple faith is not an excuse not to grow
 - *Simple* doesn’t necessary mean small
 - *Simple* means we have a simple focus
 - **Matthew 6:33 (ESV), “But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.”**
 - Simple Faith can lead to big things!
- Like a child, we need a shepherd, because we are all prone to stray
- Like a child, humility opens the way for us to learn and serve
- Like a parent, we all bare the responsibility to be an example to the younger generations