

Alêtheia Christian Fellowship

May 3, 2020

“Humbleness?”

Zoom & In-person Sunday school at 8:30, Online & In-person Service at 9:15

NEWS

Check out the video message Thursday evenings for updates to the schedule.

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Matthew 18:1-6 ~ ¹NASB At that time the disciples came to Jesus and said, “Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” ²And He called a child to Himself and set him before them, ³and said, “Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. ⁴“Whoever then humbles himself as this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

Besides getting these verses right, it will set us up for understanding the remainder of this “_____” chapter.

“At that time,” would be easy to _____, but it will help us understand. It means that this incident is related to what came before...

Not only was Jesus, God’s Son, Peter was as well. Wouldn’t that cause a discussion about _____ for the rest of the Apostles?

Of course, we know that God is our Father too (Romans 8:16&17).

To His Disciples, the Kingdom was imminent. All Jews, then as now, expect Messiah to _____ in the Kingdom in full... Now.

That's the Palm Sunday exclamation of the people... "Save us, we pray, O LORD - save us now!" – אָנָּא יְהוָה הוֹשִׁיעָה נָּא (ä-nä Yä-wěh hō-shē-ä nä).
The Greek of אָנָּא יְהוָה, is ὁσσαννά (hō-sän-nä), Anglicized as _____.

Whenever people think of a new life, in a new place, they desire to know where they would _____, within the new framework, and why.

The Disciples vied for greater _____ and got into heated arguments over their relative position and status, even family members got involved (Matthew 20:20-21).

"Greatest," is μέγας (mě-gäs), usually, "most important," but here, _____ as "more important." The question is "How can I be more important in the Kingdom of Heaven?"

The child is, παιδίον (pī-dē-ōn), a young kid, under ___ years of age. So, a ridiculously small and unimposing little person set in the middle of group of towering men.

It created a stark contrast

1) The first thing we need to think about, is how were _____ seen in that time?

2) The second thing we need to get _____ will not only serve us here, but everywhere in the Bible as we study. There seems to be a vagueness...

Are we to determine the _____ that children possess, and then choose which of those applies, interpreting Jesus' meaning accordingly?

Jesus didn't intend this to be a scavenger hunt for the secret quality that makes children noteworthy, because He _____ told us what He intended in verse 4. It's translated as "Humbleness."

The word is ταπεινόω (tä-pā-nō-ō). It means to _____. The noun ταπεινός (tä-pā-nōs), means low, as opposed to high.

Figuratively, it can mean to be low in attitude, or social standing, or financial position, etc. Therefore, a near synonym is _____.

This is the verb. It means to make something lower than it was, or lower than something else... There is a _____ aspect. In context, Jesus was saying that if you want to enter the Kingdom of Heaven you must make yourself lower than you are - as low as a small child.

Fill out the other side, detach this part of the page, and place it in the offering plate or the prayer/suggestion box in the lobby or with an Elder or Deacon of the church.

God Bless You!

Is there more to this than a figurative humbleness? Yes. We see it in the demonstration. The child-like trait that must be fostered is their absolute lowness. A child has no power, no strength, no authority, no way to demand their way, relative to an _____.

The NASB has, "Unless you are converted." Unless you στρέφω (střē-fō), turn around, do a 180°, reverse course, change the path you're on... Unless you abandon your current way of looking at things you won't even be in the Kingdom, let alone have to worry about _____ within it.

What we must recognize is that we are far _____ and far more needy than any small child has ever been, in relation to God and the Salvation He provides.

My dear friends, God doesn't add requirements to what is necessary for Salvation. When you lower yourself to the position of a weak, helpless, and completely _____ kid, you are in a position to gratefully accept the Salvation that has been provided for you.

discourse, ignore, status, usher, Hosanna, fit, significance, comparative, 7, children, straight, qualities, bluntly, lower, humble, comparative, adult, greatness, weaker, dependent.

Check all that apply – detach and place in the offering or the prayer box

_____ I want to talk with the pastor about _____

_____ I want prayer for _____

_____ I want to volunteer to _____

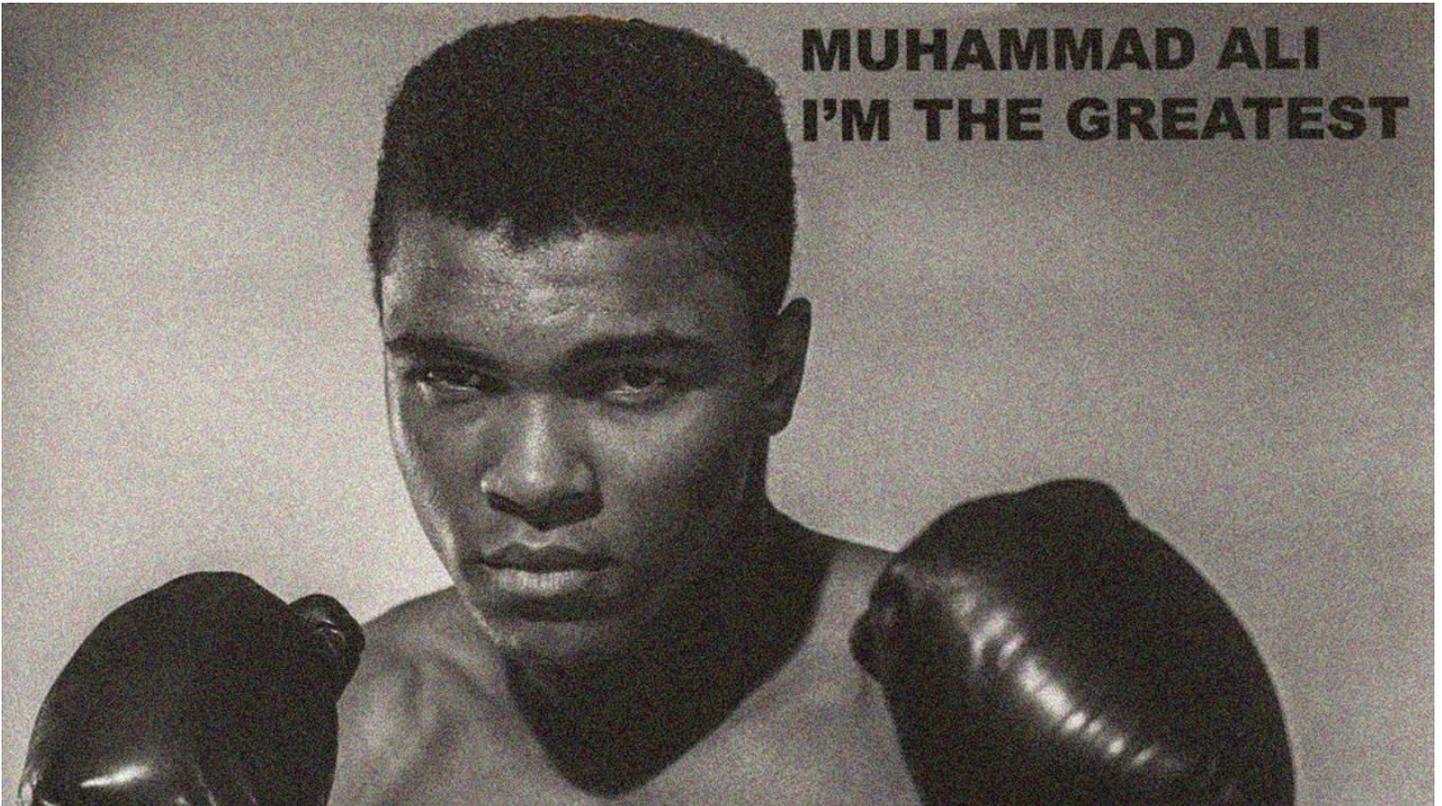
_____ I want more information about _____

_____ Other _____

Name _____ Address _____

Phone _____ Email _____

Alêtheia ~ Matthew 18a ~ 050320
“Humbleness?”



Matthew 18:1-6 ~ 1At that time the disciples came to Jesus and said, “Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” 2And He called a child to Himself and set him before them, 3and said, “Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. 4“Whoever then humbles himself as this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

Just four verses today, but I must tell you these are four verses so misunderstood, so often misrepresented

so commonly misapplied that we need to spend some time here.

Besides getting them right, it will set us up for understanding the remainder of this chapter. Chapter 18 is a discourse chapter. Jesus will teach us about the Kingdom and at the end, He will begin His march to the Cross that awaits Him in Jerusalem.



We start with, “At that time.” I just want to mention again, that when we read the Bible, we should never just skim over any of the words - each one of them is there by divine appointment.

It would be easy to ignore the opening and get to the meat, but the opening will help us understand the meat.



In this case, it is telling us that this conversation took place soon after the incident between Jesus, Peter and the shekel munching fish. Therefore, it is somewhat loosely related to that event - that's the purpose of mentioning it - the question asked by the disciples is connected to what just happened with Peter.

Where did we end up with that exchange? Jesus both said and then demonstrated that He was the Son of the One true King, God the Father. Beyond that... He

wasn't alone. While no reasonable person would equate human children of God saved by Grace, with the One and Only Son through Whom Grace flowed, we are, nevertheless, also Sons of the same King.

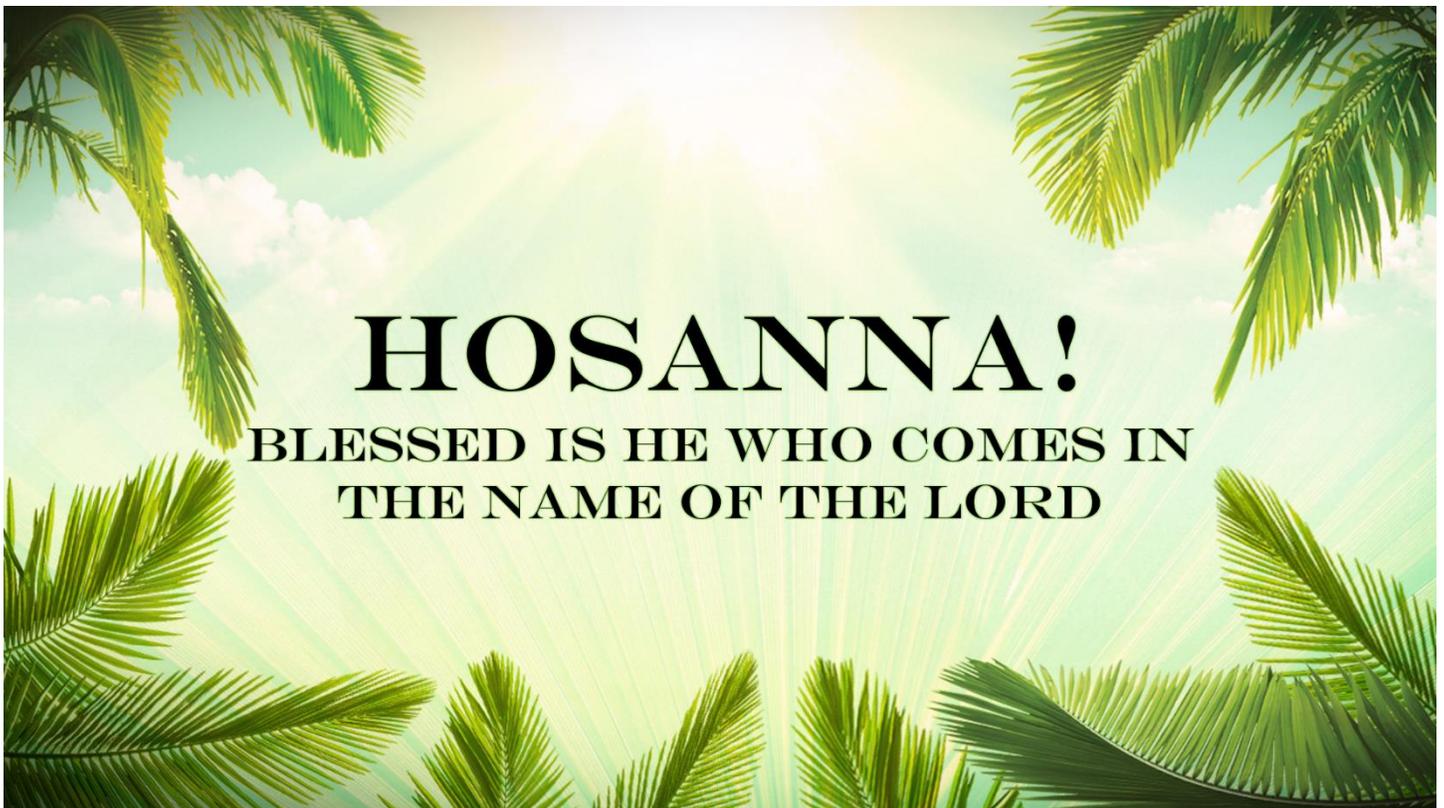


God is our Father too, and in that sense we are joint-heirs with the Lord Jesus, as it is said in Romans 8:16&17, 16NASB The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, 17and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ.

Beyond that, Peter's tax was taken care of by the Father's provision, but as far as we know, that special, supernatural provision was not extended to the rest of

the Apostles... Do you think that they might have wondered why?

Jesus had already talked often about the Kingdom of God, both in the here and now, as well as what was to come. To His Disciples there “At that time,” it would have been a transitioning Kingdom as it is for us, but they still thought that it would reach it’s fulness in short order. Practically any day, Jesus would wave His hand and poof all would be established forever. That’s what all the Jews, “At that time,” expected of the Messiah - the new perfect Kingdom... Now.



That’s the Palm Sunday exclamation of the people...

Jesus entered Jerusalem as prophesied, “Gentle and riding on a donkey.” The people all along the way through the Kidron Valley, up into the city and onto the Temple Mount – the whole vast crowd rejoiced shouting, “Save us, we pray, O LORD - save us now!” – אֲנִי יְהוָה הוֹשִׁיעָה נָא (ä-nä Yä-wěh hō-shē-ä nä). Of course, they would have said Adonai, instead of Yahweh, but it is, “O! Yahweh Save Now!” “O! God of Israel - O! Lord God Almighty Come Save Us Now!” The Greek of אֲנִי יְהוָה, is Ὡσαννά (hō-sän-nä), and it is Anglicized today as Hosanna; it refers primarily to... Psalm 118, “Save now, I pray, O LORD; O LORD, I pray, send now prosperity. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD!” (Psalm 118:25&26a).

It was completely natural that the talk and the expectation of the Kingdom, coupled with the Father’s provision for His “Sons,” Jesus and Peter, would evoke the Disciples question concerning the specifics of Kingdom life and their relative positions within that new reality.

Whenever people think of a new life, in a new place, the question as to government, laws, rules, authority, hierarchy, status, forms and customs naturally comes

to mind. Beyond that there is a desire to know where you would fit within the new framework.

None of us would move to Zimbabwe without learning what we could, about those things, and especially how we should expect to be treated, and how they would expect us to act.

The Disciples vied for greater significance - they even competed with each other and got into heated arguments over their relative position and status.

There were a number of times that Jesus tried to correct their thinking on the matter. For the Sons of Zebedee, James and John, even their mother got involved in the competition, making a request of Jesus, most likely her nephew, to put her sons, one on His right and one on His left (Matthew 20:20-21). It was a common theme with them.

Here, Matthew skips over the argument among themselves and gets to a quiet moment in the small room where they frequently gathered and to the question, they had, concerning their future.



It is not so much them asking which is the greatest as it is them asking what resulted in greatness. What did they need to do in order to be the greatest? What qualities, traits and actions did the Father see as indicative of executive material. What were the things that were laudable and would lead to a promotion or at least a medal? How could one be the greatest?

The NIV children's Bible renders their question, "Who is the most important person in the kingdom of heaven?" That's helpful, but there's one change we need to make. The word translated as "Most important," here and "The greatest," in the NASB is μέγας (mē-gās), giving is all our mega words. It means

just what the translators said, but there's a nuance the Children's Bible completely misses and the others only hint at... The word in Greek, instead of being an absolute state, "Most important," can be comparative as "More important." That's the idea here. They aren't really asking who the greatest is - they basically know the answer to that...



What they want to know is how they stack up compared to others and specifically what it is that they can do to be greater than their brothers. The question is "How can I be more important in the Kingdom of Heaven?"

Jesus, ever the master at making a point, instead of simply answering their query, uses a dramatic living parable.

Jesus called a child over and placed him in the midst of all these imposing full-grown men.

The child is, παιδίον (pī-dē-ōn), a diminutive, and so a young kid, a single-digit midget for sure. 2,500 years ago, Hippocrates, the Father of Medicine and namesake of the Hippocratic Oath, defined a παιδίον as a child under 7 years of age. So, a small nose miner - Not an infant, probably not a toddler, but surely not much bigger... Definitely an ankle biter and so, a ridiculously small and unimposing, perhaps a bit scared, little kid set in the middle of group of towering men in a cramped room.



It created a stark contrast - Jesus would have paused for effect... Letting it sink in. Letting everyone get a little uncomfortable and once they were squirming a bit at the awkwardness... Jesus spoke, starting with His classic, “Truly I say to you.” Ἀμὴν ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν. “Verily, verily, I say unto you all.” It was His way of telling them, listen up, this is important, pay attention to what I’m teaching you here... There will be a test.

Then Jesus did what He so frequently did... He opened His mouth and shocked them with what came out. It doesn’t seem so radical to us for a variety of reasons, but trust me, when I tell you, those guys there would have been floored by Jesus’ next words. “Unless you

are converted and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.

Now, let's take a step back from the passage and get a few things straight...

1) The first thing we need to think about, is how were children seen in that time?

We 21st century Americans have a completely different view of children than those guys in that room 2,000 years ago. That I guarantee you. To them, young children were nothing more than a burden... Nothing more than that. There was potential in them, that they would get big enough and strong enough to be useful, but as young ones, they were only a drain on resources. They required time, effort and money, which were all in short supply.



You've heard the old saying that "Children should be seen and not heard." That was a very real thing even in our world only a few generations ago, and it is still the norm in most other parts of the world.

You may bring up the Biblical principle that many children are like "Arrows in your quiver," and that children are a blessing. Sure, because of what having many children says about virility and fertility and the favor of the gods, or even of the God. Sure, because of their potential to care for you in your old age and to give you a viable heir to carry on your name and legacy.

Please understand though, in that place, at that time, small children contributed nothing of value, but instead had to be cared for - they were a lot of work, they drained family resources and they were, in general, seen as a nuisance. They had no rights whatsoever - they were the property of the fathers and could be sold, bartered, or indentured without question.

In the very next chapter, the Disciples, even after this object lesson, will rebuke children for bothering Jesus (Matthew 19:13). They weren't just being jerks, or being overly protective of Jesus - they were simply first century men.

Kids were an annoyance to be shooed away. It is no accident that the word παιδίον, a small child, was also the most common way of addressing a slave.

2)The second thing we need to get straight will not only serve us here, but everywhere in the Bible as we study, do our proper exegesis, and follow up with a legitimate interpretation.

There seems to be a vagueness to what Jesus finds so commendable in children. Did He leave the attributes

of small children open-ended, or was He much more specific than it seems at first blush?

Is it reasonable for me, and for you, and for everyone else, throughout the course of time, to determine the qualities children possess and then determine which of those applies and then interpret Jesus' meaning accordingly?

Maybe it will be easier to see where I'm going with this if I give you some examples... Over the last 20 centuries, Christian scholars have lived in a variety of differing circumstances, with differing cultures, differing societal pressures, differing problems within the church. In short, each one, down through the ages, has had a different perspective, or bias, and that has come out in their varied interpretations of this passage... For example:

Origen of Alexandria, almost 18 centuries ago, in about 230, said children are not consumed by sexual passion - they've yet to burn with lust and that's the deal. To enter the Kingdom, one had to be celibate, like a small child. Of course, Origen was a dude so preoccupied with asceticism and chastity, that he gave away everything he had inherited and castrated himself.

Hilary of Poitiers in about 350, saw the obedience of children to their fathers and their loving devotion to their mothers as the key - He was one of the first to elevate Mary. In another place he wrote, "No matter how sinful one may have been, if he has devotion to Mary, it is impossible that he be lost."

Basil of Caesarea, in about the same time as Hilary, taught that the characteristic required was a small child's docile acceptance of instruction. Basil is considered to be one of the three greatest theologians of all time and did a whole lot of teaching - that was his bias - he liked teachable people.

Let's skip ahead to Martin Luther in about 1530, a guy known for strict discipline, he said it was a child's acceptance of punishment by its parents.

John Calvin, shortly afterwards, said it was a child's humility that had to be imitated. Calvin was best known for God's sovereignty and so man's humility. That was his focus.

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, in about 1800, being quite philosophical, said what Jesus was pointing out was the potential good in children theoretically, as it was as yet untainted by the evil they would inevitably do as adults.

Leo Tolstoy, a hundred years later, said it was the innocence of children Jesus spoke about. Specifically,

for Tolstoy it was their lack of prejudice. Before kids are indoctrinated and taught to hate others for being different, they love all people equally.

Other ideas over the years have revolved around children being unpretentious, not holding grudges, trusting of all, their joyous carefree nature and even their desire to just be held and nurtured. It goes so far, that I even heard a justification for indulging in whatever makes you happy as an adult, because children play without regard to the rules and the approval of others.

I hope I've shown, that when we view Jesus' point about children as being open to interpretation, we inevitably provide an interpretation in line with our own bias, experience and purpose... That, not Jesus, not the Bible, not the Holy Spirit determines our interpretation. So, did Jesus intend for each of us to find in His teaching what works for us, or do we merely assume that authority?

If you hadn't guessed by now, I, and others, are convinced that it isn't open to interpretation at all. In fact, I would say that none of the scholars I mentioned had ever spent much time around children in any real way. Not only did they go too far with Jesus' example,

they had an unrealistic estimation of the qualities of kids, as any parent, can easily confirm. I would say that none of the characteristics I mentioned are truly inherent in kids. Kids are, after all, just miniature versions of adults - and that's actually the key.

Besides all of that, and several other technical reasons I won't go into, we know that Jesus didn't intend this to be a scavenger hunt for the secret quality that makes children noteworthy, because He bluntly tells us what His intended point of comparison actually is in verse 4. It's translated as "Humbleness."



The word is ταπεινώω (tä-pā-nō-ō). It means to lower.

The noun ταπεινός (tä-pā-nōs), means low, as opposed to high. A low part of a ridge, like a saddle compared to a high part of a ridge, like a peak.

Figuratively... You see what I'm saying? Figuratively, symbolically, emblematically, metaphorically, it means to be low in attitude, low in social standing, or low in financial position. A near synonym for this figurative meaning is humble. So then, a person of humble means, humble standing, humble esteem.

This is the verb. It means to make something lower than it was, or lower than something else... There is a comparative aspect to the word low. It's only low as compared to something that is higher. In context, Jesus was literally saying that if you want to even enter the Kingdom of Heaven you must make yourself lower than you are - as low as a small child.

When we automatically jump to the figurative meaning of lower yourself, to be humbleness, we are actually jumping the gun. It seems like a reasonable leap, but is it? Are all children humble - is that what defines small kids? Have you never met a child that was actually quite arrogant? I know that I've meant a few. Is there

more nuance here than just assuming that to lower simply means be humble?

These are the kind of questions we must ask before deciding what the Bible means in every place, we find ourselves studying. Our exegesis of the text determines our interpretation of the meaning, which, in turn, determines our application. How we do that alters our Christianity. It's why there are so many different and often competing ideas of what Christianity is and how it is to be practiced.



Sloppy, irreverent, out-of-context, inconsistent, man-centered interpretation of God's Holy Word is the

reason the universal church is so corrupt, dysfunctional and self-serving. It is a real sadness - God forgive us.

So, is there more to the literally than just a figurative humbleness in this place? Yes. We see it in the demonstration. Jesus placed the small unimposing child in the midst of a crowd of imposing men. He placed what was very low in the middle of many who were comparatively very high.

What Jesus was clearly showing is now seen, as we carefully looked for His meaning, rather than just rushing to put our own meaning on it... The child-like trait that must be fostered is their absolute lowness, relatively speaking.



A child has no power, no strength, no authority, no way to demand their way, relative to an adult who refuses to give in.

Now, today, we have horrible parents who say no to their kid 5,000 times a day, but give in on every single demand at the end of the day... Just understand, that's not how it has to be.



If you're an adult, no small child can force you to do anything. If as an adult you refuse to be bullied, you can easily overrule a kid on every single demand.

Good grief they're three feet tall and weigh 35 pounds - I think you can take them. Any adult would make Bruce Lee look like a wimp, compared to a child. They're little - you're big... You're up here - they're lower.

Children, especially back in those days, have no actual power, authority, or position. They are, my friends, therefore completely dependent upon others - they can't survive the hostile world without the benevolence of others. Drop a four-year old off in the middle of the

Bob Marshall and see what happens - they must have a savior, if they're to live. Now, let's put it all into context...

Verse 1, the guys ask Jesus about their personal status. That's the truth. I know it seems like they asked a general question, but they, as is natural with us humans, are interested in knowing the hierarchical structures, positions, privileges and rewards of the Kingdom to find out where they stand relative to others and to understand what God's looking for in order to advance their lot.

Their question is framed less self-centeredly than that... "Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" But, make no mistake about it, each one is interested in the greatness of others only to evaluate the greatness of their own placement.

Verse 2, Jesus doesn't answer them, but instead creates a living parable by placing a small boy in the midst of the men.

Verse 3, Jesus solemnly and emphatically warned them that their question and their entire thought process that spawned the question... In fact, their

entire worldview, or perception, which gave rise to that thinking, was completely wrong.

Jesus said in essence, “You’re concerned about honor and prestige in the Kingdom and that concern shows that you don’t have a clue what the Kingdom is... You must change your entire perspective if you even want to enter the Kingdom.”

The NASB has, “Unless you are converted.” Did you notice those four words when we went through the passage? They are important words. Another way to state it would be, “If you do not reverse course, you will not even enter the Kingdom, let alone need to worry about how it works.”



It is every bit as much a slap in the face as “Get behind Me Satan.” Unless you στρέφω (střē-fō), turn around, do a 180°, reverse course, change the path you’re on... Unless you abandon your current way of looking at things you won’t even be in the Kingdom, let alone have to worry about greatness within it.

And what was the wrong course they were on, why was it eternally fatal and what was the new way they were to adopt?

It has nothing to do with the supposed qualities of children per se. It has to do with a child’s fundamental weakness and therefore dependence. A kid who is

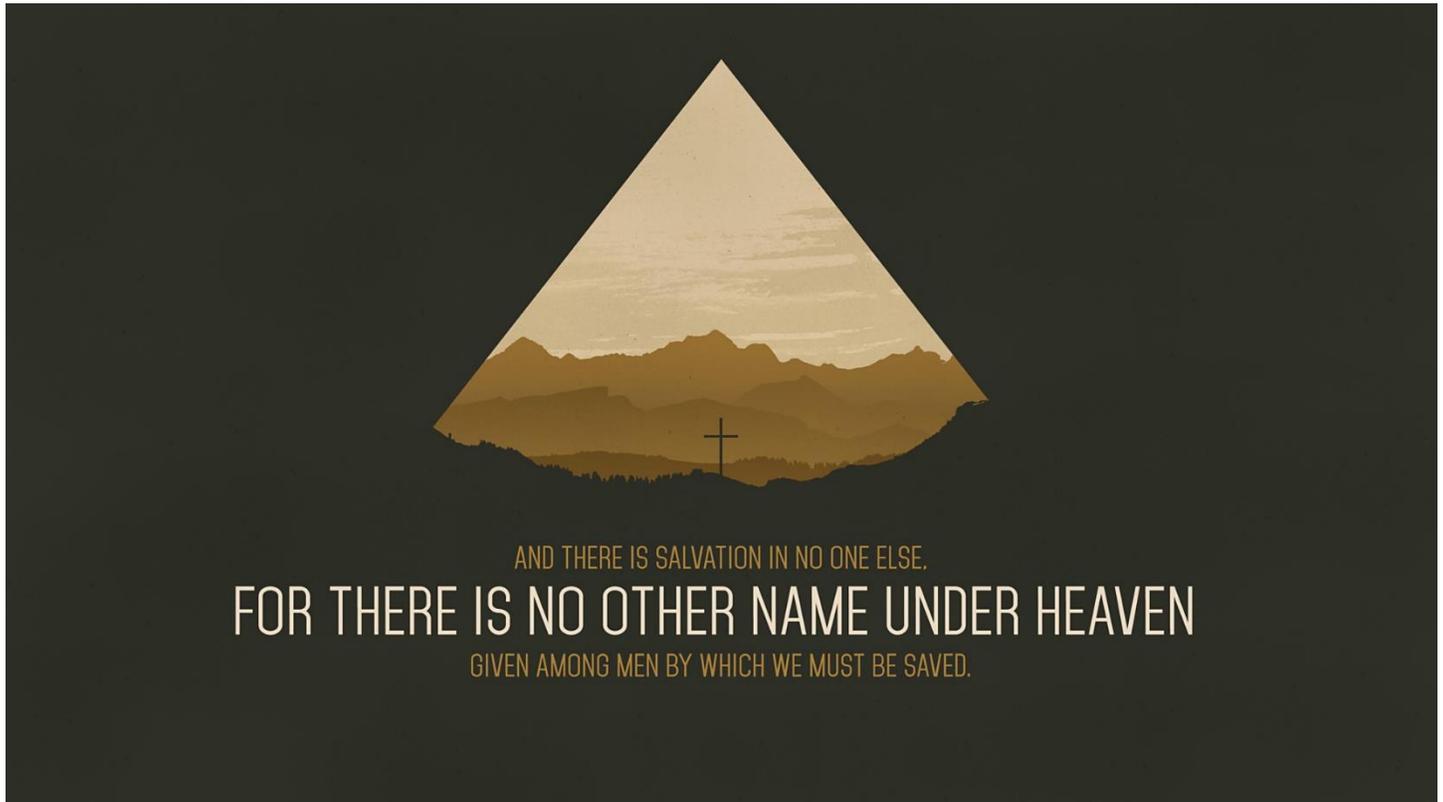
actively being helped when they have a genuine need is unconcerned about personal power and glory.



A small child has a horrible nightmare and run into mom and dad's room for comfort, protection and assurance... At that moment, the kid is unconcerned that they look weak and needy.

What we must recognize is that we are far weaker and far more needy than any small child has ever been, in relation to God and the Salvation He provides.

My dear friends, God doesn't add requirements to what is necessary for Salvation. He's told us before what's needed to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.



He's not adding to the requirement - He's not changing what's necessary... He's restating what He constantly states in a different way, because the Disciples didn't get it and we are in the same boat. What is necessary for Salvation?

In a word, the Word. It never changes, there is nothing else, ever... It is Jesus, always Jesus, only Jesus. That's it - anything beyond Him alone, is blasphemy.

That is precisely the Message Jesus was trying to convey to the guys in our passage. It is the Message recorded here for 20 centuries worth of guys... It is so simple.

It's not about you. It's not about what you have done, what you are doing, what you will do in the future... It is about what Jesus has already done once and for all... Can you see it? Can you see how clear it is in His Word my friends?

Unless you abandon the way in which the world thinks, and become weak and dependent, without any claim on greatness, you've missed what the Kingdom is...

When you lower yourself to the position of a weak, helpless, and completely dependent kid, you are not thinking in terms of what you can do to earn, or enhance your own future. You are humbly accepting of the provision He gladly, generously, abundantly gives and you are grateful.