

# Idols of the Soul

(and other  
lessons  
from Jesus)

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Matthew 18: 1.



At that time the  
disciples came to Jesus,  
saying, "Who then is  
greatest in the kingdom  
of heaven?"

Matthew 18: 1.





# I. Introduction: TO BE LIKE A CHILD

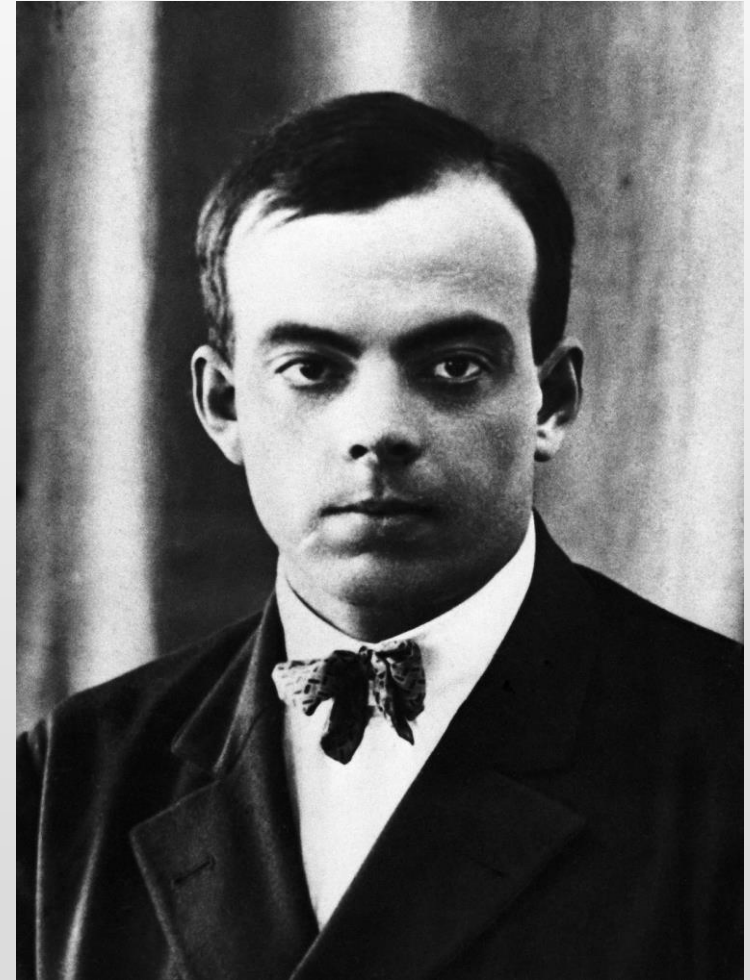
Jesus reminded His disciples that the true grandeur consists in humility and not in the constant search for superiority. This is why he suggested that the 'child mentality' is required for those who want to be part of His kingdom.



"All grown-up were once children, but only few of them remember it...

Grown-ups never understand anything for themselves, and it is tiresome for children to be always and forever explaining things to them."

Saint-Exupéry, *The Little Prince*.



“Christ spoke many words of his sufferings, but only one of his glory; yet the disciples fasten upon that, and overlook the others. Many love to hear and speak of privileges and glory, who are willing to pass by the thoughts of work and trouble. Our Lord set a little child before them, solemnly assuring them, that unless they were converted and made like little children, they could not enter his kingdom. Children, when very young, do not desire authority, do not regard outward distinctions, are free from malice, are teachable, and willingly dependent on their parents. It is true that they soon begin to show other dispositions, and other ideas are taught them at an early age; but these are marks of childhood, and render them proper emblems of the lowly minds of true Christians. Surely we need to be daily renewed in the spirit of our minds, that we may become simple and humble, as little children, and willing to be the least of all. Let us daily study this subject, and examine our own spirits.”

Matthew Henry



"O God... make me a child again, even before I die; give me back the simple faith, the clear vision of the child that holds its father's hand."  
Israel Zangwill, Dreamers of the Ghetto, "From a Mattress Grave," 1897.



“We must remain as close to the flowers, the grass, and the butterflies as the child is who is not yet so much taller than they are. We adults, on the other hand, have outgrown them and have to lower ourselves to stoop down to them. It seems to me that the grass hates us when we confess our love for it. Whoever would partake of all good things must understand how to be small at times.”

Friedrich Nietzsche





“Children have neither  
past nor future; they  
enjoy the present, which  
very few of us do.”  
Jean de la Bruyere





“Some of the most brilliant men and women the world has ever known were also followers of Christ, and it would be wrong for you to think you’d be committing intellectual suicide if you gave your life to Him!

One of the main reasons people reject Jesus is pride; they believe they don’t need Him and can make it through life on their own. But only when we renounce our pride and come to Him with the humility and trust of a child can we be saved.

Don’t let your pride, or anything else, keep you from Christ. Instead, humble yourself before Him, and trust your life completely to Him. Then commit all you are and all you have into His hands, for He alone is “the way and the truth and the life” (John 14:6).

Billy Graham

“When Jesus saw that his disciples were arguing over which of them was the greatest, “He sat down and called the twelve. . . .And he took a child and put him in the midst of them...

Receiving a child into your arms in the name of Jesus is a way to receive Jesus. And receiving Jesus is a way to receive God. Therefore how we deal with children is a signal of our fellowship with God. Something is deeply amiss in the soul that does not descend (or is it really *ascend*?) to love and hold a child.

Therefore, it may be good to call to mind the ways Jesus related to children. Ponder these and let them stir in you the longings of Christ.”

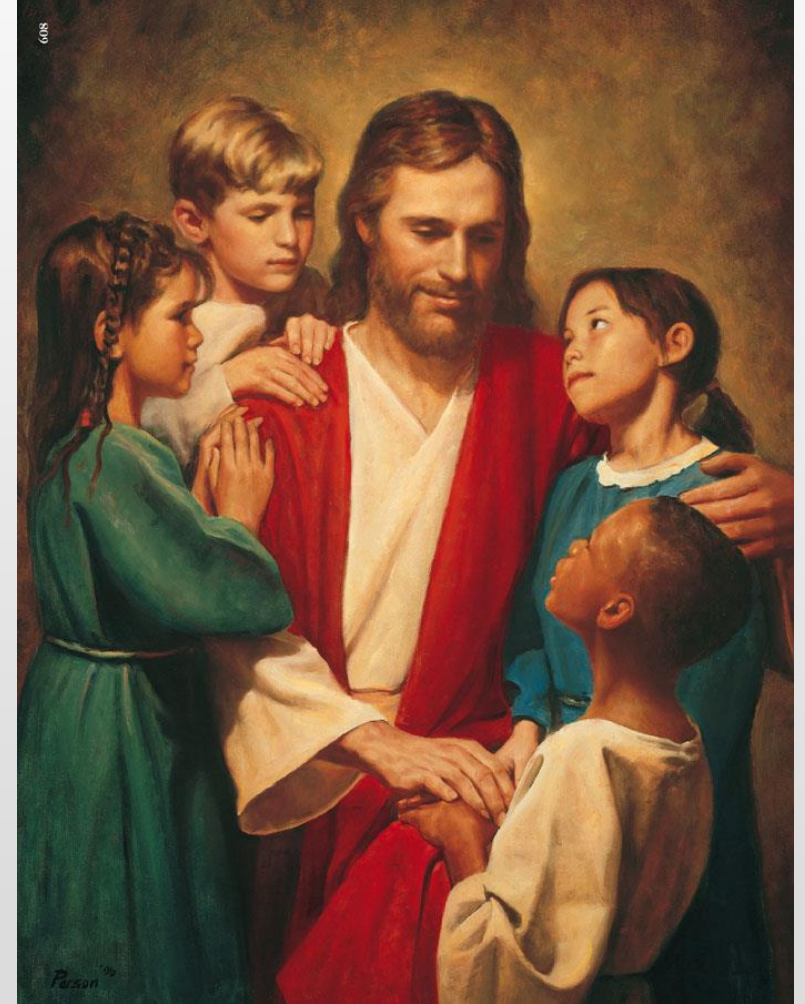
John Piper

## II. Context





In Matthew 18, Jesus answers to two questions. The first is about the greatness in God's kingdom, and the second about forgiveness. Jesus starts with the role of a child and ends with the unconditional love for a brother.



# True Greatness

## Matthew 18: 1 – 35. Structure

A	1 - 5	QUESTION #1 and JESUS' ANSWER: <b>CHILD</b>
B	6 - 20	TEACHING OF JESUS: CARE FOR THE LITTLE ONES AND FOR BRETHREN
	6 - 7	a. The Little Ones: <b>WORLD</b> (Scandal); hanging, 'binding' a millstone around his neck
	8 - 9	b. Dealing with <b>personal sin</b>
	10 - 14	c. Care of Jesus for the little ones: <b>They should not perish</b>
	15 - 17	b'. Dealing with <b>brother's sin</b>
	18 - 20	a'. Brothers: <b>CHURCH</b> (Authority); 'whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven'
A'	21 - 35	QUESTION #2 and JESUS' ANSWER: <b>BROTHER</b>
	21 - 22	Unlimited Forgiveness
	23 - 34	Parable on Forgiveness
	35	God's attitude regarding our Forgiveness

The central part of Matthew 18 is about the little ones. The care of the Saviour for them is obvious. "They should not perish", is the central message. It is also a reminder of the prophecy about the Messiah: "He will feed His flock like a shepherd; He will gather the lambs with His arm, And carry them in His bosom, And gently lead those who are with young." Isaiah 40: 11.





# Greatness for the Kingdom of Heaven

Three references about children

Matthew 18: 1 – 5. Structure

A	3a	Becoming like a CHILD
A'	3b	Entering into the Kingdom
B	4a	Humbling Oneself like a CHILD
B'	4b	Being Great in the Kingdom
C	5a	Receiving a CHILD
C'	5b	Receiving Jesus

III. Grandeur and Splendor of God's Kingdom are only for those who humble themselves and accept to love and to care.



1. Jesus was  
presenting the  
importance of being  
ready for the  
Kingdom of Heaven  
“At that time...”





After the affirmation that He will build His church on the confession of faith of his disciples (Matthew 16: 16 – 18), Jesus reminds them “Assuredly, I say to you, there are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom.” (16: 28). Obviously, the kingdom is essential for the teaching of Jesus.



In chapter 17, Jesus gave the foretaste of His kingdom through the experience of transfiguration. It is therefore normal for the disciples to ask Jesus about the values of the kingdom. But they wanted to include their mentality of competition and of superiority into heavenly reality.





“The Church has no reason to exist except for the advancement of His Kingdom into areas it has never been before!”  
John Willis Zumwalt





2. The disciple will  
always find the truth  
and the inspiration  
when he comes to Jesus  
“The disciples came to Jesus”



“People who are obsessed with Jesus aren't consumed with their personal safety and comfort above all else. Obsessed people care more about God's kingdom coming to this earth than their own lives being shielded from pain or distress.”  
Francis Chan



“When you come to Jesus, you don't come to get health, wealth and prosperity. You come to Jesus to get Jesus.”

David Platt





“When you come  
to Jesus, your  
search is over, for  
you have then  
discovered God.”  
Ravi Zacharias





### 3. The superiority is not part of the vocabulary of the kingdom

“Who then is greatest in the  
kingdom of heaven?”



“Nothing is like humility. This is mother, and root and nurse, and foundation, and bond of all good things; without this, we are abominable, and execrable, and polluted... How can a man extinguish pride? By knowing God. For if we know Him, all pride is banished.”

John Chrysostom



“If you want real power in your Christian life, seek the same death for which Paul shouted his joy: “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me” (Galatians 2:20). May you find yourself on the upper deck, dressed in the humility of Jesus, swept by the wind of the Holy Spirit and able to impart the glory of God to everyone around you.”

Todd R. Vick



“The proud person always wants to do the right thing, the great thing. But because he wants to do it in his own strength, he is fighting not with man, but with God.”  
Søren Kierkegaard





# V. Conclusion



“Now let us be like children before God. Let us be teachable, willing to learn, and then the Spirit of God will cement our hearts together, and we shall be one in Christ Jesus. Then the Father will love us, even as he loves his Son. Let this thought fill the soul with thankfulness, and go on your way to Zion, making melody in your hearts to God. You are called out of darkness to show forth his marvelous light. Go forward, rejoicing in the righteousness of Christ.”  
Ellen G. White, General Conference Daily Bulletin, April 13, 1891, par. 41.



“Ignorance and power  
and pride are a deadly  
mixture, you know.”  
Robert Fulghum



“Permanent superiority  
has never been  
realized by any nation  
in history. After the  
rise, comes the fall.”  
Karen Sarratt





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