

ST. BARTHOLOMEW'S ANGLICAN PRO-CATHEDRAL IN THE TOWN OF TONAWANDA

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Scripture: Mk. 10:13-16; Mt. 18:1-4

"Kingdom Living (2): Entering and Remaining in the Kingdom of God"

IT'S ALL ABOUT THE KINGDOM!

Last week we began a series on Kingdom Living. What is life supposed to be about? The Kingdom of God. What is the Kingdom of God? It is where the King rules and reigns. Who is the King of the Kingdom of God? Jesus Christ. Thus the Kingdom is where Christ rules. Christ rules over all but not all submit to His authority. And so the benefits of the Kingdom cannot be experienced unless one first knows the King and follows Him (ie. submits to His authority – to His rule). And if one does so, he or she will experience the Kingdom. This rule begins within – within the human heart. Jesus came the first time to deal with sin – with self-centeredness and selfishness. That's why He proclaimed, ***"Repent for the kingdom of God is near."*** And when our spirit is transformed, then the world around us can be transformed.

But the Kingdom won't fully be established until Christ returns and deals with human sin once and for all through judgment and when the new heavens and earth are created. Christ comes the first time as a lamb to die and pay the penalty for our sin so that we can be set free from the curse of sin and death. But He is coming a second time as a Lion to judge the living and the dead and to give the Kingdom once and for all spiritually and physically to those who have submitted to His Lordship. It is plain and simple. It is not complicated.

THE KINGDOM MINDSET

So if we know what the Kingdom is and how we are to experience it, today I want to talk about how we actually enter and stay in it. What should be the attitude and mindset of one who is following the King of kings and Lord of lords? Well, Jesus tells us in Mark and Matthew. I want us to look at both passages. They are the same teaching and give us the answer.

First, please turn with me to **Mark 10:13-16**: ***And they were bringing children to Him so that He might touch them; but the disciples rebuked them. 14But when Jesus saw this, He was indignant and said to them, "Permit the children to come to Me; do not hinder them; for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. 15"Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it at all." 16And He took them in His arms and began blessing them, laying His hands on them.***

Now let's look at **Matthew 18:1-4**: ***"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."***

First, note how kingdom of heaven and kingdom of God are used interchangeably. They mean the same thing. Recall Matthew was writing to Jewish believers so it was customary not to refer to God directly in

reverence for the 3rd commandment of not taking the Lord's name in vain. Mark was writing to Gentile believers so this would not be a major issue.

In any event, the point is clear. We enter and remain (experience the Kingdom of God) by being like children – not childish, but child like. Now what is true about all children? They are needy, they are trusting, they are humble, and they are teachable. Think about those four characteristics for a moment.

When children are born they are totally dependent upon their parents. They need to be fed, bathed, clothed, and funnest of all they need their diapers changed! They also are completely vulnerable to the outside world. They cannot protect themselves. They also need to be taught everything.

You see, in many respects parents are like God to their children. They serve in a role that mimics what God does for us in His creation. That is why the commandment of honoring your father and mother is so prominent – it is why it is the first of the commandments that deal with our relationship with other people, and is the only commandment with a blessing. For if one attacks his or her parents, then it is no different than attacking God. Now if parents are doing a good job, something will naturally follow from their children. Recall a child recognizes his or her need and when parents recognize this need three things will follow.

CHILDREN TRUST

First, they will trust their parents to meet those needs. In fact, children are naturally trusting of adults. That is why we need to tell our kids not to take something from strangers or go with strangers who appear nice. It is why we need to share with our children the love and truth of God in Christ. For they will naturally trust us.

It is no different in our relationship with the Lord. In order to enter the Kingdom of God, we must be born again. In order to be born again there must be a spiritual rebirth in our spirit where we acknowledge our total dependence on the Lord and turn from simply doing it our way and turn to doing it God's way. Isn't that what children know that they need to do with their parents? They won't grow, learn, or have their needs met unless they are trusting in mom and dad.

We must do that to enter the Kingdom, but we also must do it to remain in the Kingdom. In other words, if we are going to experience the Kingdom. How many times have you heard of folks who stop believing, stop trusting because they disagree with God's Word or because things have not worked out the way they wanted them to work out, or they can't understand the questions of life? Sometimes I think we get too smart for our own good.

Why do you think Jesus says it is so hard for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of God? Because they lose sight of their need for God and they no longer feel they need to trust Him. Same goes for someone who is very intelligent. Sometimes they think they know so much and can figure so much out that when it comes to God He somehow becomes the dummy and they end up judging Him!

But not so in the Kingdom. God doesn't tell us not to question – we will see in a moment that children do question a lot. What God wants is for our questions not to get in the way of our trust in Him. He doesn't

want the blessings of life to cloud our need for Him. He wants us to trust Him always like a child trusts his or her parents.

CHILDREN ARE HUMBLE

You see when children recognize their need, not only does it lead them to trust their parents, but it also leads them to be humble. Look again what Jesus 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.”***

Humility is the key to experience God’s kingdom blessing. Children are naturally humble – until they get spoiled or old enough to think they know better than others or place their confidence in their own successes. Think about young children. They don’t judge people based on whether they are rich or poor, black or white, what family they are from. They accept people for who they are. They realize they aren’t big shots but need the help of others. They love their mom and dad not because of how they look, or what they do for a living, but simply because they are mom and dad. Children show us the importance of humility - of not looking down on others, of not being overly critical of others, of not simply focusing on what they know.

So too, for us. We are called to be humble before God – ***“humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, ⁷ casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you. and he will exalt you.”*** (1 Peter 5:6-7) We are to be humble among others. Paul writes in **Philip. 2:3,5** ***“with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as better than yourself. Have this attitude in yourselves that was also in Christ.*** And if I have a humble spirit, that means I am going to be like what James writes, ***“slow to speak, quick to listen and slow to anger.”*** (James 1:19)

CHILDREN ARE TEACHABLE

Finally, children show us another kingdom characteristic. They are teachable. Do you remember how many questions you asked your parents when you were little, or how many questions your kids asked you? Children want to learn. They want to know why. They want to grow. In fact, between the ages of 4 and 5 children learn more than what a person learns during four years of college! They have a thirst for knowledge. They ask, “Why does this happen?” “Where does this come from?” “What is this?” “What is that?” On and on it goes. Why? They want to grow in their understanding of life.

So too in the Kingdom. The only way we are going to grow spiritually is if we ask questions, if we are open to finding the answers and following them. Such growth comes from seeking to hear from the Lord; and the only way we are going to hear from the Lord is if we spend time with Him, if we spend time in His Word, with His people. To be teachable means to be wanting and willing to learn. It means being flexible – that we are open to change and correction, and that we are willing to teach others.

There is a reason why Jesus said when He gave us our marching orders in the Great Commission – ***“All authority in heaven and earth has been given to Me. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations,***

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baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey all that I commanded you." (Mt. 28:18-19)

If I am going to enter the Kingdom and remain in it, it means being childlike in my relation to the Lord – recognize that I am needy, always trusting, staying humble and remaining teachable! In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, AMEN!