

The Way of Life

"Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven."

- Matthew xviii,3

Isaiah lvii,13-end

Matthew xviii,1-14

Psalm 79

New Book of Worship, Psalm 77, p.63

The eighteenth chapter of Matthew begins with the incident in which the disciples contended among themselves as to who would be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. They came to the Lord and asked Him to settle the dispute, saying, "Who is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?"

Each of the disciples desired to be greatest, and to rule. This is the condition of the natural man, and continues to be that of every man until he comes under the dominion of the Lord.

In appealing to the Lord to settle their dispute, the disciples acknowledged His authority as supreme, and they were disposed to abide by His decision. They expected, however, that He would merely decide for them what they themselves could not agree upon - which of them should be greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

But when "Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them, and said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven," they were astonished. This idea had never entered into their thoughts, much less into their discussion.

This scripture declares to us the great and fundamental fact that the Lord can teach His truth only to those who are humble at heart. The Lord cannot teach those who are self-centered and proud of their own learning and ability, nor can He overcome the evils and falsities in them. Since it is the Lord's great desire to teach mankind the truths they need for the sake of right living, it is our greatest need to learn of Him, to have our own wrong ideas corrected, and truer concepts put in their place. So it is of vital importance to know what may come in the way and prevent our learning of Him. We know that we do not like a person who is proud of what he knows and boastful. We know that such a person is conceited, and that the teachableness of the mind has been destroyed in him. He does not wish to be taught by the Lord and to have his faults corrected.

The disciples had not asked what was required to enter the kingdom of heaven, but who would be greatest in it. It was, therefore, first necessary for the Lord to tell them what was required in order that they might be admitted into the kingdom at all. Yet at the same time He does specifically answer their inquiry. He had already taught them that those who should do and teach His commandments would

be great in the kingdom of heaven. Now He tells them who would be greatest, in the words, "Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven." Little children trust their parents and depend upon them. It is innocence and trust that qualify us for heaven. There the most humble are the most exalted, and the least the greatest. The highest angels are those who trust least in their own learning and wisdom, and who always look to the Lord for guidance. That is what is meant by the words, "Whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiverh me." To receive one such little child is to acknowledge not merely in our thoughts but from the heart that we have no virtue or independence of ourselves.

It is written of the Lord, "For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones." The word "contrite" means being sorry for our weaknesses and for our failures to be what the Lord would like us to be. One of the Blessings reads, "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted." If we are not sorry for our faults, we do not make any attempt to get rid of them.

Isaiah, in his prophecy of the great day of the Lord, says, "All thy children shall be taught of the Lord; and great shall be the peace of thy children." These words are quoted by the Lord Himself and recorded in the Gospel of John, and it is added, "Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me."

Those who first came to Him, the disciples themselves, failing in humility contended with one another as to which should be greatest in the kingdom. It is not the glory of doctrine or the knowledge of revelation that makes the church great, but the recognition of human weakness which leads it to turn to the infinite power of the Lord in His Divine Humanity, humbly serving Him, and faithful in obedience to Him, seeking Divine instruction from His Word.

That is why we are commanded to learn and keep the precepts and commandments, and to teach them to our children. The commandments are not from the wisdom of men, or merely arbitrary laws. They are the unchangeable laws of Divine order, and the only basis of sure success in this world or in the world to come. They are laws which can not be evaded without harm or neglected without loss.

One of the primary virtues is obedience, for children and for adults as well. There is no danger of overestimating its importance; the danger is all on the other side. Obedience is the basis of all order in the family, in the state, in the church, on earth, and in heaven. It is safety in danger; it is the basis of freedom; it is the means to a lovely character. "To obey is better than sacrifice,

and to hearken than the fat of rams." And we are told that we should teach the commandments to our children and talk of them "when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up." In the home life keeping the commandments brings safety and harmony. But they cannot be taught merely by using words. It can be done only by example, by "walking in the way." Only by trusting in the Lord can we teach our children to trust. Only by keeping the commandments ourselves can we teach them to keep them. Only by worship of the Lord can parents teach their children to worship the Lord.

The little child thinks that his parents have unlimited means and power, and he feels safe and secure in the home. There is only One who has unlimited means and power, and through our trust in Him, and only in this way, can we lead our children to trust in Him, and to turn to the guidance of His unerring wisdom when their own knowledge and resources fail.

The reason for this is that children as they grow up want to use their own powers. They cannot always be carried; they have to learn to walk. They must learn to think and act and to provide for themselves. Parental care is only provisional, and a child's trust and dependence should be transferred gradually from the parent to the Lord. This can be done if the parents have laid up the Lord's words in their hearts and souls. They will be constantly looking to the Lord and showing their dependence upon Him. If our children see us relying upon ourselves alone and consequently full of anxieties and cares, oppressed with doubts and tormented with fears, if they find that we do not think about our Heavenly Father and take into account His Divine providence in all human affairs, that we do not in any practical matter regard Him as our merciful Father who is in the constant effort to protect us from harm, to supply our wants, our words will not lead them to trust us or to put their confidence in Him.

Many professing Christians convey to their children an entirely false idea of religion. They show by their manner that they regard it as a painful duty. But religion is not a renunciation of life; it is entering more fully into even its natural joys, and adding joys that the natural mind of itself has no capacity of experiencing.

"Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? there is no searching of his understanding.

"He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength.

"Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall:

"But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint."

Amen.