

## Like a Child – Put away your Idols

*At that time the disciples came to Jesus and said, “Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” And He called a child to Himself and set him before them, and said, “Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever then humbles himself as this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoever receives one such child in My name receives Me; but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him to have a heavy millstone hung around his neck, and to be drowned in the depth of the sea.*

*Matthew 18:1-6*

### **Jesus Blesses Little Children**

*And they were bringing children to Him so that He might touch them; but the disciples rebuked them. But 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. Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it at all.” And He took them in His arms and began blessing them, laying His hands on them.*

*Luke 18:15-17*

### **The Rich Young Ruler**

*As He was setting out on a journey, a man ran up to Him and knelt before Him, and asked Him, “Good Teacher, **what shall I do** to inherit eternal life?” And Jesus said to him, “**Why do you call Me good? No one is good except God alone.** You know the commandments, ‘DO not murder, DO not commit adultery, DO not steal, DO not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honor your father and mother.’” And he said to Him, “Teacher, I have kept all these things from my youth up.” Looking at him, Jesus felt a love for him and said to him, “One thing you lack: **go and sell all you possess and give to the poor**, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.” But at these words he was saddened, and he went away grieving, for he was one who owned much property.*

*And Jesus, looking around, \*said to His disciples, “How hard it will be for those who are wealthy to enter the kingdom of God!” The disciples were amazed at His words. But Jesus \*answered again and \*said to them, “Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.” They were even more astonished and said to Him, “Then who can be saved?” Looking at them, Jesus \*said, “With people it is impossible, but not with God; for all things are possible with God.”*

*Peter began to say to Him, “Behold, we have left everything and followed You.” Jesus said, “Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or farms, for My sake and for the gospel’s sake, but that he will receive a hundred times as much now in the present age, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and farms, along with persecutions; and in the age to come, eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last, first.”*

*Luke 18:18-34*

### **Jesus' Sufferings Foretold**

*They were on the road going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking on ahead of them; and they were amazed, and those who followed were fearful. And again He took the twelve aside and began to tell them what was going to happen to Him, saying, "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered to the chief priests and the scribes; and they will condemn Him to death and will hand Him over to the Gentiles. They will mock Him and spit on Him, and scourge Him and kill Him, and three days later He will rise again."*

*James and John, the two sons of Zebedee, \*came up to Jesus, saying, "Teacher, we want You to do for us whatever we ask of You." And He said to them, "What do you want Me to do for you?" They said to Him, "Grant that we may sit, one on Your right and one on Your left, in Your glory." But Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?" They said to Him, "We are able." And Jesus said to them, "The cup that I drink you shall drink; and you shall be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized. But to sit on My right or on My left, this is not Mine to give; but it is for those for whom it has been prepared."*

*Hearing this, the ten began to feel indignant with James and John. Calling them to Himself, Jesus \*said to them, "You know that those who are recognized as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them; and their great men exercise authority over them. But it is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant; and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."*

Mark 10:32-45

### **Bartimaeus Receives His Sight**

*Then they \*came to Jericho. And as He was leaving Jericho with His disciples and a large crowd, a blind beggar named Bartimaeus, the son of Timaeus, was sitting by the road. When he heard that it was Jesus the Nazarene, he began to cry out and say, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" Many were sternly telling him to be quiet, but he kept crying out all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" And Jesus stopped and said, "Call him here." So they \*called the blind man, saying to him, "Take courage, stand up! He is calling for you." Throwing aside his cloak, he jumped up and came to Jesus. And answering him, Jesus said, "What do you want Me to do for you?" And the blind man said to Him, "Rabboni, I want to regain my sight!" And Jesus said to him, "Go; your faith has made you well." Immediately he regained his sight and began following Him on the road.*

Mark 10:46-52

*Brethren, do not be children in your thinking; yet in evil be infants, but in your thinking be mature.*

1 Corinthians 14:20

**All you have to have to enter the kingdom of heaven is nothing, but most people don't have that.**

**Jesus is not telling us to be naïve like a child, but to be free from heart idols, like a child, like a baby. We are to be wise, but free from the encumbrances of idolatry. Notice that these are babies, not teens, not pre-teens, not even toddlers. These are babies that are being brought to Jesus. Babies simply trust their parents to provide food, clothing, shelter, etc. – to meet all of**

their needs. They do not look to anyone else for life but to their parents. In idolatry, we turn away from looking to God to meet our needs, to give us life, to sustain us, and we begin looking to other things. But soon, as we grow up, we learn to say mine, say no, we start to lie (and have to learn not to), to set our heart on things, etc. As we get even older we begin to covet, to be selfish, etc. Gradually, over time, we become idolaters. The process of growing up is a picture of us going astray, "each of us going our own way", leaving God, departing from His word. Just as a teenager often devalues their relationship with their parents, so the idolater devalues their relationship with God the Father. Just as an adult usually leaves their parents and cleaves to their spouse, so the idolater leaves God the Father and cleaves to their idols. From baby to adult, we see a picture of the fallen nature of man, leaving God for idolatry. Jesus says we must become like a child, like a baby, in order to enter the kingdom of God. We must give up our idolatry, trust God, worship God.

Receiving the kingdom of God like a child also means (among other things) that we do not "DO" anything to enter the kingdom of God. Just as a child does not "DO" anything to be born into a family, we cannot "DO" anything to be born into the kingdom. It is the work of God, the work of the spirit, the work of the Son, that enables us to enter into the kingdom. Jesus hints at this with the rich young ruler when He says, "Why do you call me good, there is none good except God." But the young man does not understand, he is still thinking that we must DO things to enter the kingdom. This reveals a key aspect of idolatry, namely that idolatry is what we DO to feel good about ourselves, to have meaning, to appease the gods so to speak, to make life work, for our source of identity, etc. Idolatry consists of the things that we feel we must DO in life to be successful, to have meaning, to be somebody, to be happy, etc. It is not enough to just be, but we have to add our idols to our life to feel good about our day, to feel good about our life, to feel good about ourselves.

When I was a small child, I simply lived each day. There was no agenda, no internal compelling that drove me, no heartfelt needs beyond the basic requirements of life...I simply lived life and enjoyed each day. I did not worry about anything. Slowly, the world, the flesh, and the devil piled on me the things that would drive me as an adult. These became my idols. The love of a woman. Success in school, then in business. Nice things. A good reputation. Doing good for others. Being a good person. Having a good car. Living in a good house. Marrying a good spouse. Pursuing a good career. Doing good works. Etc. Failure in any of these areas results often in addictions and other coping mechanisms, and I picked a few of these up as well.

Then God showed up, and He cut me loose. HE cut me loose from the coping mechanisms, but He also cuts us loose from the idols themselves. It takes time, it has not happened overnight. The internal attitude and desire happened overnight, but the reality of actually living free again, like a child, has taken time. It took time to unravel the tangled mess of idols and coping mechanisms that had ensnared me. Years in some cases. I am still being unraveled, even today. But I am freer today than I have ever been, since I was a child. And I actually am beginning to feel like a child again, because of the freedom I have in Christ. Freedom to live, unencumbered

by the drive of idolatry. To simply live life. In this freedom there is true joy. Joy that cannot be taken away. All of the driveness is slowly fading away, it is vanishing as I let go of my idols. The addictions are vanishing. Life is becoming clearer and clearer. I am able to see thru the lusts of the flesh, lust of the eyes, and the boastful pride of life, both in myself and in others, more and more each day, each week, each month, each year. I see it for what it is – empty, hollow, absurd, foolish, sinful, passing away. Even sex has lost its stranglehold, and I am able to be celibate at will, just as I was celibate when I was a child. Amazing. Never thought that day would get here.

The key to becoming free from idolatry (and its associated ‘coping mechanism’ hang-ups, addictions, and agendas) is perhaps to become like a child again. Perhaps that is what Jesus was trying to tell us in the above verses. That until we become like children, fully trusting in Him for life and everything we need, living as people born into His kingdom rather than earning our way into the family, we cannot enter the kingdom of heaven. This is what Jesus meant when He said the kingdom is here now. When we become like a child, we leave the bondages of idolatry and enter into the freedom of Christ.

*“Whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it at all.”*

*“Little children, guard yourselves against idols.”*

#### **Idolatry and the Kingdom of God**

Jesus starts by telling us to become like children, and that unless we reach that level of faith we will not enter the kingdom of God (this is a very big deal - we are talking about what determines our eternal destiny here), then he shows us an example of someone who does not have the childlike faith (rich young ruler - rather than just being a child, born into the family, he is working his way to heaven - what must I DO, he asks, to get it), then the disciples say what about us, we gave it all up, Jesus says "Dude, you have no idea what giving it all up even means, sure, you'll get your stuff, along with suffering, but you have no idea what I am going to give up for this". But the disciples still don't get it, and James and John want Jesus to make them his top dogs, which gets them all stirred up and arguing over greatness, over who has DONE the most, who DESERVES the biggest reward, who has EARNED top billing and will get to be at the top of the foodchain - they are still thinking like the rich young ruler. So Jesus tries again to set them straight, by telling them that God's kingdom is different than the world's system, the ones at the top are not there to be served by others, but to serve others.

The entire lesson is a lesson in idolatry. The child has no idols yet. The child simply lives, trusting in their parents to provide, no agendas, no appetites or desires driving them beyond just the basic stuff to survive, no things they cannot live without, etc. Over time, as the child grows, we pick all this idolatrous baggage up, and become like the rich young ruler. The rich young ruler could have just as easily said to Him that he had sold all his possessions and given them to the poor, and Jesus still would have said to him "One thing you lack...", because his issue was not that he had lots of

riches, but his heart idolatry. His appetites and his desires were driving him, not God. James and John reveal the same heart idolatry in their request for greatness, fame, fortune, sitting at either side of Jesus atop His kingdom (as an aside - you have to remember that they thought there was going to be a revolution and Jesus was going to be King of the world soon, overthrowing Rome, etc., and ruling the world. They were not thinking like we do today, that it is some distant thing that will occur sometime in the distant future. They were thinking that they were actually going to watch Jesus defeat Rome and set up a new kingdom right then, in their life span, and they wanted to be at the very top. Luke even tells us clearly that the disciples did not understand what Jesus was saying here about His death. They thought Jesus was going to defeat Rome and set up the Kingdom of God in their lifetime.)

The disciples arguing about greatness in God's kingdom also illustrates that our tendency to move towards idolatry affects us, even in the body of Christ. That as Christians, even as ministers, we have to guard ourselves against idolatry. Our tendency is to want to rule, to be at the top, to be in control, etc. Even in our Christianity, we must be on the alert for Christian idols. We can become driven by having the biggest church, the best sermons, the nicest building, the best people. We want to sit at Jesus right and left side, just as James and John asked. Churches compete rather than working together, just as the disciples began to argue. Jesus is showing us in this last section that even when we have been born again, we must continue to guard ourselves against idolatry, even in the church, the body of Christ.

Idolatry in our life reveals that we are not embracing Christ and the gospel as a child. We are still being driven by our appetites and desires. That is the main point of this whole passage, maybe the whole bible. When we let go of our appetites and desires, when we let go of our idols, exchanging them for following Jesus, the gospel begins to drive our life instead, and we actually begin to feel like we did when we were a child. I know this because it has been happening to me over the last two years. Each day that I am a bit more childlike in how I live, accepting the gospel completely, trusting God completely, for everything, dropping my appetites more and more, redirecting my desires to Him more and more, each day that I do this, I become a little bit more like a child, to the point that can actually feel it. It is amazing. I believe it is the transformation of the heart by the holy spirit of God, nothing less.

At the end of this section of Jesus teaching, we read about blind Bartimaeus receiving his sight. We have just read that the disciples did not understand what Jesus was saying. They were "blind" to his teaching, "blind" to their idolatry, "blind" to the very words of God as He is literally speaking them to the disciples. So Jesus comes to Jericho and there is a blind man there, crying out. In Luke we read that the disciples actually tried to keep him away from Jesus. But Jesus heard him and Bartimaeus is brought to Him. Jesus gives him his sight, and he is no longer blind. This is a picture of how blind we are to our idols, and how strongly we do not want to let go of them, and that only Jesus can heal us of our idolatry.

Most of us do not even know that we have idols. Maybe all of us. We are blind to them, just as Bartimaeus was physically blind. They are hidden from us. One way to begin to see them, is when they are taken away. If our looks is our idol, and we are badly disfigured in a car wreck or in war, and we are no longer physically attractive, we quickly realize that our physical appearance was an idol to us. Joni Mitchell sings in one of her songs that we “don’t know what we’ve got til it’s gone.” Just as the addict does not know they are an addict until they do not have the substance they are addicted to anymore, so we do not know what our idols are until they are gone. Sometimes this actually happens, our idol is taken away. Sometimes we reach a stage in our life when we realize we are never going to get it, and it is taken away in that respect – the hope of attaining it someday is no longer there, and we realize it was an idol, the future hope of it was the idol in that case. Then other times we get it, and it does not deliver as promised, and it is taken away from us as an idol because it did not deliver to us what we had hoped it would. When our idol, that we are usually blind to, is taken away, one of the ways we know this has occurred is we lose part of our zeal for life, become depressed to some degree, maybe even losing the will to live at all.

This is not to say that when we suffer loss, we should not feel the loss. If I lose my spouse to death or divorce, it is normal to grieve, to suffer pain, to maybe even struggle with depression, to lose certain desires, etc. This is normal, but this should not continue indefinitely. We should eventually get over it.

For example, when my father left my mother, I was angry, very angry. This anger lasted quite a while. I had to struggle through the loss, come to grips with what he did to my mother, abandoning her in her old age. But I did, and after five years I reached a place of peace about it. I am no longer angry. I am still sad that he did what he did, but I have accepted it, love him again, and have moved on. If it was an idol to me, I would never get over it, and remain bitter and angry the rest of my life. My anger about this might even define who I am eventually. So there is a difference between dealing with the normal losses we experience in life, and losing an idol. When we lose an idol, we are not just hurt by it, we are devastated beyond recovery. We may lose the will to live. Our life may no longer have meaning. We no longer have purpose, may feel lost, adrift. We may no longer have anything driving us to do what we do. And it may be something that we do not have yet, but are working towards getting or accomplishing, and it is the working towards that idol that drives us, fuels us, defines us, gives meaning and purpose to our life, etc.

We do not have to actually lose our idols to identify them. We can simply imagine they are gone. So we can ask ourselves, what can I not live without? What would make me lose the will to live if it were gone? What would cause me to lose meaning in my life if it were gone? What would cause me to lose my sense of who I am, my identity, if it were gone? What would take away my drive if I lost it or if it were never a possibility? How would I fill in the blank in the sentence, “If only I had \_\_\_\_\_, then I would be happy, have joy, be the person I am working to become, etc.”? We are typically blind to our idols. Answering these questions, and questions like them,

will open our eyes to the idols in our life. And we must also ask God to help us identify them. We must cry out to Jesus to heal us, so we can see them. We must ask Him to reveal them to us. That is the first step. "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me", show me my idols.

Second, we do not want to let go of our idols. Just as the disciples would not let Bartimaeus come to Jesus, we try to keep our idols away from the cross, away from Jesus. We want to hang on to them. They have become a part of us. They define us. We think that in them we have life, joy, peace, fulfillment, etc. They are often a source of identity to us. Often, our happiness is tied to them, and we do not think that we would be happy without them. Sometimes, they are the very reason that we do everything we do. I know in my case, it is the beauty of the daughters of Eve that have driven me my entire life. Since I can remember, I have dreamed of that elusive relationship with a beautiful woman. It has driven me my whole life. It has been behind everything I do. It is the reason behind almost every single thing about me. If I were to give in to this idol, it would consume me. I would have been married and divorced multiple times, had dozens of affairs, etc., etc. "But God."

### ***Made Alive in Christ***

*And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.*

***But God***, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

*For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.*

*Ephesians 2:1-10*

But God. The third thing is that we are powerless to deliver ourselves from our idols. Only Jesus can deliver us from our idols. We may know that we have idols, just as Bartimaeus knew he was blind, but we are powerless to get free from them, just as Bartimaeus was powerless to fix his eyes so he could see again. All the self help books in the world cannot fix us. AA cannot fix us. Therapists cannot fix us. More money, more sex, more cars, more good works, more of anything cannot fix us. Even if we are able to completely quit a surface idol, the root idol that is driving it will simply pop up somewhere else, and we trade one surface idol for another. (Note: The root idol is what is driving the surface idol. Surface idols are visible manifestations of the root idol. For example, maybe I have a root idol of security, so on the surface money becomes an idol and I work and save until I am a millionaire, to meet the desire and drive of the root idol. Making and saving money becomes the surface idol, which is actually a form of worship. The surface idol is how we worship the root idol. It is the form that our worship takes.) So if my surface idol is success, it expresses itself in my becoming a workaholic, and I finally am able to get over that somehow, the next thing I know, the root idol has sprung up to the surface of my life again, and now I am

obsessed with succeeding at some sport, or I am over eating all of a sudden, or I am now constantly committing to volunteering to charitable organizations, or I am always doing things at church now, or I have joined Peace Corps and am overseas teaching English or feeding the poor in some far away land, etc. I have just traded one surface idol for another. The root idol is still there. I have changed the way I worship the root idol, also known as the heart idol, but I have not become free from it. Only Jesus can set us free, by changing us on the inside. Returning to the story of Bartimaeus:

*“Take courage, stand up! He is calling for you.” Throwing aside his cloak, he jumped up and came to Jesus. And answering him, Jesus said, “What do you want Me to do for you?” And the blind man said to Him, “Rabboni, I want to regain my sight!” And Jesus said to him, “Go; your faith has made you well.” Immediately he regained his sight and began following Him on the road.*

*Mark 10:49-52*

Notice, firstly that Jesus calls him. “No one can come to Jesus unless the Father draws him”, and “No one can come to the Father unless the Son draws him”. It begins with God calling us. We are all sitting on the side of the road blind, just like Bartimaeus. Blind to our idols, helpless to do anything about it. As Jesus passes by, the most we can do is call out to Him. But our love for our idols will keep us from going to Him. Jesus must call us to himself, to a relationship with God. Once Jesus has called us, we can come to Him. The next step is to respond, to get up and go to Jesus, go to the cross. Unfortunately, many are called, but few respond to the call of Christ on their life. Our idols have a very strong grip on our lives. Most of us have had them as long as we can remember. They define us, drive us, we look to them for our happiness, meaning, identity, etc. We cannot imagine life without them usually. But we must overcome the resistance, and go to Jesus, in order to regain our sight, in order to be healed, in order to be set free from our idols. Once we respond to Jesus, we are to tell Him what we want. We must ask.

*“Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.*

*Mark 7:7*

We come to Jesus and we ask. Ask Him to set us free, to heal us. All that He requires of us is faith. Mark 10 (and Luke 18) is a lesson from Jesus on idolatry, and how to become free from it. Starting with the lesson on becoming like a child in order to enter the Kingdom of God, then moving through the idolatry of the rich young ruler, then assuring us that giving up our idols is worth it (that we will receive much more in this life and the life to come), then revealing to us how much Jesus has given up, then warning us that idols can even express themselves in the body of Christ as the disciples argue, and then finishing with the story of blind Bartimaeus who regains his sight. Mark 10 is a picture of the freedom Christ offers us, if only we will get up and ask Him for it. Freedom to be like a child again. Is Jesus calling you? Do you want to regain your sight? Have you responded to His call? If not, what are you waiting for? Why have you not responded? Get up now, go to Him, and ask Him to set you free from your idols, to give you your sight back. He will. Come to Him like a child comes to a parent, trusting Him completely, knowing that He has your best interest at heart, relying on Him for everything in your life. Just go to Him, and let Him heal you, and you will become like a child again. You will know again the freedom you felt as a small child.