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Better A Millstone

1101-A

**Series: Why Do You Run When I'm Crying
(The Caring Church in a Hurting World)**



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INTO HIS LIKENESS RADIO

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Better A Millstone

Watch Him as He feeds the multitudes. Listen to Him as He weeps over the city. Follow Him as He walks among the lame, the blind, the sick, the dying. Always He is vulnerable. Always He is sensitive. Always He is reaching out, stretching His life to its limits to give Himself away. That is why He came. To give Himself away.

There He goes to the tomb of Lazarus. He is weeping. You say, “But isn’t He God?” Yes. Then why is He weeping? He is weeping because those He loves are weeping. And God cries when we cry. Because He cannot solve our circumstances? No, Jesus was about to solve Mary and Martha and Lazarus’ circumstances in one of the most awesome demonstrations of His power that He would ever give on planet earth. Then why is He crying? Why is God crying? God is crying because those He loves are hurting. And, Beloved, all about us, those He loves are hurting.

The issue is, do we hear them? Or even more to the point, if we hear them, do we care? That is the matter we have decided to look at and listen to in this twelve-week study together. We have decided to ask ourselves why the world is asking us, “Why do you run when I’m crying?”

Today we look at the third part of that series. We will look at how God views a particular part of His body. It is a part He cares about so much that the Scriptures reflect tenderness at every turn when Jesus confronts this group of people. We look at how God feels about children and in particular, hurting children.

I- THE PERSPECTIVE

The thread of Christ’s heartbeat for children runs throughout every syllable of the New Testament. But it was in Matthew chapters 18 and 19 that Jesus stopped for a moment and, using an object lesson or two, made sure that the disciples (and we who were yet to come) understood once and for all the place these little ones occupy in the heart of God.

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Let's listen carefully as God addresses the topic of little ones. We will read from the Amplified Bible:

At that time the disciples came up and asked Jesus, Who then is [really] the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?

And He called a little child to Himself and put him in the midst of them,

And said, Truly I say to you, unless you repent (change, turn about) and become like little children [trusting, lowly, loving, forgiving], you can never enter the kingdom of heaven [at all].

Whoever will humble himself therefore and become like this little child [trusting, lowly, loving, forgiving] is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

And whoever receives and accepts and welcomes one little child like this for My sake and in My name receives and accepts and welcomes Me.

But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in and acknowledge and cleave to Me to stumble and sin [that is, who entices him or hinders him in right conduct or thought], it would be better (more expedient and profitable or advantageous) for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be sunk in the depth of the sea.

(Matthew 18:1-6 Amplified Bible)

Then little children were brought to Jesus, that He might put His hands on them and pray; but the disciples rebuked those who brought them.

But He said Leave the children alone! Allow the little ones to come to Me, and do not forbid or restrain or hinder them, for of such [as these] the kingdom of heaven is composed.

And He put His hands upon them, and then went on His way.

(Matthew 19:13-15 Amplified Bible)

These men had spent months now walking in the footsteps of the Living God. They had heard Him speak for hours without stopping. They had listened as He sat around a campfire telling parables. They had heard spiritual stories wrapped in practical packages, and they marveled. They had seen Him walk on water, turn water into wine, feed five thousand men and their families with a box lunch. They watched Him heal lepers, restore sight to men born blind, cause lame men to leap for joy and turn the tables on the money changers in the temple who were bartering for profits at the kingdom's expense.

They had seen the tenderness in His heart as the multitudes pressed upon Him and interrupted His plans. They had watched in amazement as He shouted to a corpse that had been in the ground for four days, "Lazarus, come forth!" This one He loved so much arose from the dead. These twelve men had been in on the ground floor of eternity. You might say, "Oh, if I'd seen all that, I'd have my priorities in order; it's just that I wasn't there!"

Nonsense. They saw all that, heard all that and did all that. Now look at what was burdening these spiritual giants: they wanted to know which church was God's favorite. They were preoccupied with which seminary Jesus thought taught the truth. While the miracles of heaven and earth were unfolding before their very eyes, these who had so much and seemed to perceive so little were pondering the issue of greatness in the Kingdom. They wanted to know what it took to get God's attention so that He would focus His attention on them before and above all others. How foolish.

They stood in the shadow of Humility personified, and they wanted recognition. They stood at the feet of the One who thought it not robbery to be equal with God but made Himself nothing, and asked how to be equal with God. They missed it. And Jesus had said it in so many ways it almost seemed redundant. So He decided to play "show and tell." He loved to do that. He loved to use olive trees and rocks and wind and rain to teach about reality. Only this time the object lesson was alive.

I'll bet you can picture it in your mind. Jesus kneels down and tenderly beckons to a little lad in the crowd, picks him up, and sits the child on his lap as the crowds surround them, wondering what will happen next. Tradition has it that the child grew up to be Ignatius of Antioch, surnamed Theophoros, which means "God-carried", or "God-borne." It doesn't matter who the child was. But it matters that he was a child.

Now listen carefully. The Living God was answering a team of recognition-seeking followers by asking them if they understood what a child was. The problem was, they didn't. Do you? Here's what He said:

1- Every time you look at a child, remember: children possess the kinds of attitudes required for a man to meet God. Jesus said, "Would you like to know God? Here's your example." Only He wasn't pointing to the greatest philosopher of their age. He wasn't

referring to one of the theologically-learned minds of His day. He was pointing to a child. He said, "Here's how to find God. Come to Him the way a little boy would come to his father, humbly, sensitively, trustingly, without guile and without malice. Come with the childlikeness of this little lad and you will unearth the treasures of heaven. Many of the great minds of our day and of days gone by will spend eternity in hell apart from God because they could not detach themselves from all of their knowledge, from all of their achievements and from all of their self-consciousness long enough to fall on their face in humble trust before a holy God. Jesus burned it into their minds. He proclaimed, "Unless you fall down before God in utter childlike abandonment, you cannot even enter the kingdom of Heaven!"

So every time you see a little child, think of the simplicity of the plan of God. He not only made it so simple that a child could understand, He made it so pure that no one who would not take on the mindset of a child would be able to understand. Think about it.

2- "Now," Jesus said, "how would you like to know who's the greatest person in the whole kingdom?" There must have been a holy hush throughout that crowd. Surely this would answer the disciples' question. If they knew who the greatest was then they could know how to become the greatest. Jesus went on, "The greatest person in the kingdom of heaven is the person who becomes (once he is in the kingdom) the most childlike in his relationship with God." (Not child-*ish*, child-*like*.) In other words, the one who becomes the least conscious of who they are will become the most conscious of who God is and thus will bring the most glory to His name. A child would come into the kingdom bringing God nothing but love. In other words, that little boy who sat, perhaps a bit uncomfortably at the moment amidst all that attention, on Jesus' knee, may well have been the most spiritual person in that entire crowd. The next most spiritual may well have been the one whose inner character most nearly mirrored the guilelessness of that child.

3- Jesus continues, "Now, how would you like to be sure you have opened your heart and welcomed the Son of God into your life and into your world?" Silence again. By now, perhaps, no more second-guessing. Good thing. Listen to His answer, "Open your heart and your home and your life to even one little child like this one and you will have opened your heart and your home

and your life to Me.”

Jesus equates what you and I do with the children we meet to what we do with Him. That staggers my imagination. My mind whirls back just a week or two ago to the insensitivity and unconcern I have exhibited in the presence of children where I work, where I live, and even at church. I hear Jesus saying, “Why didn’t you speak to Me?” I answer, “Lord, I would never pass You by and not speak, or not smile, or not care.” Jesus answers, “Yes, you would. Yes, you did! Every time you failed to receive one of these little ones, you failed to receive Me, but every time you gave your life to one of them, you gave your life to Me.”

My soul is flooded with portraits of Sunday school teachers, choir directors, loving mothers, patient nursery workers and school teachers who pour their lives into these little vessels with virtually no recognition on earth. I envision an awards ceremony in heaven where those very same people are going to be drawn into the arms of Jesus with the words, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant,” because every time they welcomed one little one, Jesus took it personally. Very personally.

4- Every time you or I do anything that will stumble or hinder or prevent a child from becoming all that God in His plan intended for them to become, God also takes that seriously, very seriously. So seriously, in fact, that He specifically tells us the consequences. He says it would be better for you to have a huge rock wrapped around your neck, (the word here is used of a rock so large that it could be moved only by a donkey pulling it to turn it), and for you to use that rock as an anchor to drown you in the depths of the sea. The word “sea” here means the deepest part of the ocean far, far from where you could be rescued. According to Barclay, the average Jew feared the sea. For the Jew, heaven would be a place where there would be no more sea. The worst possible punishment would be drowning in the deepest part of the ocean. That is the punishment described in this passage.

Jesus was clear. These little ones are so precious in His sight that to in any way be a stumbling-block or hindrance to their spiritual maturity is a grievous offense to God.

So there you have God’s perspective of little children. It is absolutely awesome. A child is God’s example of how to come to Him. A child is God’s illustration of greatness in the kingdom. Therefore, to welcome a child in Jesus’ name is to welcome Jesus

Himself. Likewise, to hinder or stumble one of His little ones is so serious an offense that God Himself proclaimed we would be better off with a millstone about our necks in the far reaches of the ocean than to spiritually harm a child. That, Beloved, is God's perspective!

II- THE PORTRAIT

Can we not, then, assume from this clear-cut definition of the worth of little ones that God intends us to seriously consider the way we deal with children on a day-to-day basis, and the way we minister to them as a church? I think we can. And He, as always, really left nothing to our imagination. For I believe no other relationship is more perfectly portrayed in Scripture than the relationship between adult and child. So perfectly is it painted that it forms a three-dimensional overlay that, like a paint-by-numbers set, only requires us to pay attention and stay within the lines to honor God.

That portrait is His relationship to us. The Bible calls us "His children". New converts are called "babes in Christ". Growing believers are referred to as "growing children". Immature Christians are described as "babes, needing milk when they should be on solid food". The entire adult-child relationship is inscribed on the scrolls of eternity by a picture of God's relationship with us. In fact, many conclude that this whole passage applies both to little children and to newborn believers as well. So find how God treats us (His children) and you have a portrait of how we are to treat the little children He sends into our worlds. Look at the similarities and take note of the portrait.

This is obviously only a mini-study. Your assignment (should you choose to accept it) will be to add to this list from your own study of the Scriptures this week. Nevertheless, this will serve as a beginning.

1- God loves all His children with a constant love.

Jeremiah 31:3 tells us,

... "Yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love."

Psalms 139:17-18 from the Living Bible reminds us of this,

"How precious it is, Lord, to realize that You are thinking about me constantly! I can't even count how many times a day your thoughts turn toward me. And when I waken in the morning, you are still thinking of me!"

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What that means is two-fold:

a) It means God loves all of His children the same. His love is a constant, abiding expression of His nature that does not play favorites. We then must love children the same way. (No favorites.)

b) Not only does that love not vary from person to person, that love does not vary from time to time.

He loves His children with a continual love, no matter what they do. His approval of what they do may vary and, discipline may even ensue. But Hebrews reminds us that even that discipline is proof of His love. God never stops loving His children, nor changes either the intensity or the quality of that love. Thus, our inability to love unlovable children does not come from God, but from the enemy.

2- God is never too busy to listen when His children call. Psalm 34:17 is a classic:

The righteous cry out, and the Lord hears, And delivers
them out of all their troubles. (NKJV)

God's children are the righteous ones. They have been made righteous by virtue of what He has done. Therefore, no matter when they call, the line is never busy. God is never too preoccupied to sit down and hear us through.

3- God understands the frailties of His children. Therefore, His expectations never exceed their limitations. Psalm 103 reminds us of this:

As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed
our transgressions from us.

As a father pities his children, So the Lord pities those who
fear Him.

For He knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust.

As for man, his days are like grass; As a flower of the field,
so he flourishes.

For the wind passes over it, and it is gone, And its place
remembers it no more.

But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting
On those who fear Him, And His righteousness to children's
children, (Psalm 103:12-17 NKJV)

Think about that. God understands the limitations of His

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children and He is sensitive to those limitations as He patiently waits for us to become what He wants us to be. That portrait, Beloved, is a demonstration of how we are to view the children He sends our way.

4- Even when God's children stray, He never loses hope. One of my favorite verses is Jeremiah 29:11. It says this:

For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope.
(Jeremiah 29:11 NKJV)

God's thoughts mirror I Corinthians 13:7. The Living Bible says it this way:

If you love someone, you will be loyal to him no matter what the cost. You will always believe in him, always expect the best of him, and always stand your ground in defending him.
(I Corinthians 13:7 TLB)

5- When God's children cry, God notices as we see in Psalm 56:8, and God cries as we see in John 11. The Living Bible translates Psalm 56:8 like this:

You have seen me tossing and turning through the night. You have collected all my tears and preserved them in your bottle! You have recorded every one in your book.
(Psalm 56:8 TLB)

And you remember Jesus at Lazarus' tomb. He wept. Not because Lazarus was dead but because Mary's heart was broken. He cares. He cares enough to cry. And we must learn to cry when hurting children cry or else the Gospel we preach to them will fall on deaf ears, and we will have hindered them from coming to Jesus.

6- Finally, and this is vital, God views each of His children individually and He considers each of His children unique. A whole lesson could be taught on this one principle. God does not see us as a mass of "little children". He sees each of us as a vital, unique creation, so unique that He has given each of us our very own name and He never calls us but that He calls us by that name. He spoke these words to Israel in Isaiah 43:1, and they ought to speak comfort to us:

But now, thus says the Lord, who created you, O Jacob, And He who formed you, O Israel: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name; You are Mine."
(Isaiah 43:1 NKJV)

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God calls every star by its name and every child by its name as well. We are individuals to God. And every child we meet we must treat the same. Proverbs 22:6 rightly translated fills in the other part of the story. It says:

Train up a child in the way he should go, [instruct and direct, each child according to the particular bent of His personality and character, treating Him as unique], and when He is old, he will not have departed from it [his chosen course].
(Proverbs 22:6 paraphrase)

Like snowflakes, God has not created any two children exactly the same and in their diversity lies their beauty. Oh, the travesty of trying to clone our children rather than listening quietly to their heartbeats and lifting them up for who they are.

We must love all children all the time, ready to listen when they cry, understanding their frailties, never losing heart and always speaking peace to them instead. When they cry we ought to be men enough and women enough to cry with them, never forgetting their divine uniqueness in God's sight. The God who calls them each by name loves each one as divinely different but equally important. Those are just a few of the ways the portrait unfolds. But perhaps they give us at least a foundation on which to build a framework for not hindering or restraining or diverting little children from God's plan for their lives, for we know that if we do, better a millstone.

III- THE PRINCIPLES

In closing, I believe we have seen some principles that 1) ought to affect the way we deal with our children when they are small; 2) ought to highlight our responsibilities to all little children especially those in the church family, and 3) ought to, as well, teach us how we as a church and how every church ought to view the role in ministering to the child.

Here are a few places to start:

1- You and I had better, as individuals, learn to stop, listen, and love every single child that God sends into our lives. We'd better learn their names and listen to their tears. We may well be the ambassador God has sent to lead that child to Christ. And better a millstone be hanged about our neck than that we should hinder them by our ignoring them or rejecting them or simply being too busy to notice them.

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2- Perhaps we need to develop a prayer chain just for those who teach little children. The Bible says that every time they welcome or encourage or love these little ones they welcome Jesus. For us to glamorize and maximize the work of the preacher or the adult Sunday school teacher or even the missionary and overlook praying consistently for those who hold in their hands the keys to the hearts of these little ones is not in balance, to be sure.

3- If you are one of those who teach little ones in school or Sunday school or choir or in some other place, take your responsibility seriously both to pray for them and to love them and to witness to them. God takes it seriously to be sure. Your accountability factor is high, but then so is your promise of rewards.

4- As church leaders we need to be sure not to shuffle the children aside as second class citizens, stuffing them in inadequate facilities with inadequate teachers so we can better minister to the adults. When you hinder them, Beloved, you offend Jesus.

5- We need to carefully pray about our responsibility to the orphans around the world, to the homeless in our midst, and to the single parent whose children need a balanced love.

In short, each of us needs to take the time this week to ponder our roles and our callings in the process of drawing little ones to Jesus. He will never turn them away when they come to Him, and He warns us so clearly, "hinder them not for of such is the kingdom of Heaven."

Verse 10 of Matthew 18 gives us a final note of reference where God's love for children is concerned. It is, I believe, a fitting conclusion for this study. There, Jesus said this:

Beware that you do not despise or feel scornful toward or think little of one of these little ones, for I tell you that in heaven their angels always are in the presence of and look upon the face of My Father Who is in heaven.

(Matthew 18:10 Amp Bible)

Jesus is saying that every child has an angel and that angels always have an audience with the King. If only those who abuse or reject little children knew what wrath awaits them when they stand before Almighty God. They would be better off if a millstone had been hanged about their necks, drowning them in the depths of the sea, than to have harmed even one of God's little ones.

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And, Beloved, if you and I do not treat carefully these admonitions concerning children, particularly the hurting children God sends our way, then the same can be said of us,

Better a millstone. Better a millstone, indeed!

Let's pray.

Our loving God, we thank You for Who You are. We worship You, and we are in awe, once again this morning Father, at the utter simplicity of Your plan; a plan so clear; a plan so simple; a plan so amazing that the best way to understand it is to take on the mind of a child. Maybe there is one here this morning Father, who has not come to You because he or she has never been able to abandon the complexity of self-consciousness and just fall on their faces and take You as You are, take Your plan as it is and trust You. I pray this morning Father, that that person might become a little child, vulnerable, guileless, and open, and say, "Yes" to The Heavenly Father.

I thank You Father, that You have reversed life's order, and that the greatest in the Kingdom will be the one who is the most childlike, the most unconscious of their own worth, and the most conscious of Yours. And our Loving God, we pray this morning that we as individuals, and we as a church, and those others who will be listening by tape in churches and other places, would somehow re-evaluate this morning the tenderness and the concern we have for our little children, and that those of us who do not work with little children would somehow be burdened to lift up constantly, without ceasing, those who do.

Teach us Father, Your mindset toward little ones, for if we don't learn it, You have made the consequences clear, "better a millstone."

In Jesus we pray, Amen.

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