

Matthew 18:3

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

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.

Analysis

Jesus declares kingdom entrance requirement: 'Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven' (Greek: ἐὰν μὴ στραφῇτε καὶ γένησθε ὡς τὰ παιδιά, 'unless you turn and become like children'). The verb στραφῇτε (turn, convert) indicates radical reorientation. 'Become as little children' (παῖδιά) requires humility, dependence, trust, and receptivity. Children in that culture had no status or rights - they were powerless. Jesus requires abandoning adult pretensions of self-sufficiency, status, and merit. Kingdom entrance demands humble dependence on God like a child trusts parents.

Historical Context

In Roman and Jewish cultures, children were valued but had no legal standing until maturity. Disciples had just debated greatness (18:1), revealing status-consciousness. Jesus radically subverts hierarchy by exalting children as kingdom model. This scandalized honor-shame cultures where adults sought status, recognition, and independence. Early Christian communities embraced slaves, women, and children as equal members (Galatians 3:28), living out this teaching. Childhood represented vulnerability and dependence Jesus requires for salvation.

Related Passages

Psalms 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Study Questions

1. What childlike qualities does Jesus require for kingdom entrance?
2. How does adult pretension of self-sufficiency hinder coming to Christ?
3. In what ways do you need to become more childlike in faith?

Interlinear Text

καὶ	εἶπεν	Ἀμὴν	λέγω	ὑμῖν	ἐὰν	μὴ	στραφῆτε	καὶ
And	said	Verily	I say	unto you	G1437	G3361	ye be converted	And
G2532	G2036	G281	G3004	G5213			G4762	G2532
γένησθε	ὥς	τὰ	παιδιά	οὐ	μὴ	εἰσέλθητε	εἰς	τὴν
become	as	G3588	little children	G3756	G3361	enter	into	G3588
G1096	G5613		G3813			G1525	G1519	
βασιλείαν	τῶν	οὐρανῶν						
the kingdom	G3588	of heaven						
G932		G3772						

Additional Cross-References

1 Peter 2:2 (Parallel theme): As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby:

Matthew 19:14 (Kingdom): But Jesus said, Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven.

1 Corinthians 14:20 (Parallel theme): Brethren, be not children in understanding: howbeit in malice be ye children, but in understanding be men.

Psalms 131:2 (Parallel theme): Surely I have behaved and quieted myself, as a child that is weaned of his mother: my soul is even as a weaned child.

John 3:5 (Kingdom): Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.

John 3:3 (Kingdom): Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

Luke 13:24 (Parallel theme): Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.

Acts 3:19 (Parallel theme): Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord;

Acts 28:27 (Parallel theme): For the heart of this people is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed; lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them.

Matthew 5:20 (Kingdom): For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.