

THE RADICAL RABBI: A RADICAL VIEW OF CHILDREN BABY DEDICATION

5.9.21

INTRODUCTION

First of all: Happy Mother's Day! None of us would be here without you (although I think us dads maybe helped out a bit, too). So have a wonderful day. You all deserve every last bit of love and affection you are shown — on this day and every day. And “thank you” for all you do all the time. God bless you all!

Kids. It's one of the great common denominators, regardless of culture or ethnicity or nationality or background or wealth or poverty or religion or any other distinction. Once upon a time, we all were kids. Once upon a time, we all were little diaper dudes. Once upon a time, we all were so helpless we couldn't even move. Once upon a time, we all showed facial expressions that were little more than the result of gas. Once upon a time, we all depended upon other people for everything.

Today is a very special day in the life of our congregation as well as in the lives of two of our families. One of God's greatest gifts — new life — has been given our church family in these two precious little boys. To their parents belongs the day-to-day joy of their lives, but to us also is given responsibility, some of which we've already mentioned in the dedication part of our service.

While our “Radical Rabbi” was ministering here on earth, He gave us some really cool, really beautiful insights into just how special and important and loved these lives are — in His sight. So, for just a few moments, let's take a look at some of those insights. And let's begin that look by **looking to the Lord in prayer**.

TEXTS AND ANALYSES

“You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call Him Jesus” (spoken by the angel Gabriel) . . . the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son — Luke 1:31, 2:6b-7a.

Think about that — once upon a time, our Lord and Savior, our Redeemer, was an infant. Totally helpless, just like us. Totally dependent on His parents to get Him from one moment to the next, just like us. The One of whom one of His disciples would write, ***Through Him all things were made; without Him nothing was made that has been made — John 1:3***, was once upon a time unable to make anything. The One of whom the apostle Paul would write, ***[I]n Him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together — Paul, Colossians 1:16-17***, was once upon a time unable to hold even the smallest, lightest speck. The one of whom the psalmist proclaimed, ***By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, their starry host by the breath of His mouth. . . . For He spoke, and it came to be; He commanded, and it stood firm — Psalm 33:6, 9***, was once upon a time unable to utter a single word at all.

The point? Jesus of Nazareth was once one of us. From the moment He came to exist deep inside Mary's body to His birth, He was one of us. From the first moment of crawling, to the first stumbles of walking, He was one of us. From His first sounds to His first words to His first sentences, He was one of us. And as He grew from beautiful baby to laughing toddler to energetic teen to hard-working adult, He was one of us; He was all those things. That's the beautiful message that the author of Hebrews tries to convey in this one remarkable verse: ***Both the one who makes people holy and those who are made holy are of the same family — Hebrews 2:11a.***

So, the fact that He knows us so well, being a former child Himself, brings an added meaning to the ways He interacted with kids during His ministry. Here are some of the ways that His view of children impacted His ministry:

First: Jesus Viewed Children As Ideal Patterns.

At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Who, then, is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" He called a little child to Him, and placed the child among them. And He said: "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. . . . Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all. . . . [I]t is the one who is least among you all who is the greatest" — Matthew 18:1-4; Mark 9:35b; Luke 9:48b.

There is an old Irish saying that goes like this:

To live above, with saints we love

Will certainly be glory.

To live below, with saints we know —

Well, that's another story!

The disciples could have been the poster children for this saying. It seemed that, so often, they were jockeying for position in this coming kingdom that their Master had been talking about so often. All kingdoms have hierarchies, right? — rankings of important people, from top to bottom. So, they were frequently arguing about what rank they thought they deserved — and they were quite sure that was no place near the bottom. They even argued about this at the Last Supper — at a time that Jesus may have been a bit preoccupied with other concerns (Luke 22).

So, what did Christ do to address this issue? As there was likely (as always) a crowd around them, Jesus spotted a "little child" among the people gathered there. This would have been a very young child, probably old enough to walk but likely not much older; in other words, this was a child too young to have accomplished anything, and probably too young even to show off any potential. Jesus called that little child over to Him so that the child was standing next to Christ and in the middle of that crowd.

So, what did Jesus want with this little kid? To make a couple of points:

- 1) "Y'all better get off your high horse about who's the greatest." That by itself may have been quite a blow to the disciples, who probably thought they were doing a pretty good job serving Jesus and therefore rather deserving of a favored status.

After all, hadn't Christ even been using them in ministry? But yet, He makes the point: You need to change. You need to become someone different than who you are.

- 2) Now I can almost hear them saying, "Change to what?" Jesus answers their question with this child. "OK; you want to know what greatness looks like in My Father's kingdom? It looks like this child, this little kid standing right in front of you." So, what was Jesus saying? A little child possesses some really cool character traits that Jesus wanted the disciples to possess, in fact, wants all His followers to possess, regardless of their age or experience, and this little child provided the pattern: Specifically, the ability to have unquestioning trust, the ability to know you need the help of others with pretty much everything, the ability to seek the happiness of others, the ability to lose the ego of needing to boast, and the ability to think of others as better, and more deserving, than yourself. You see, contrary to earthly kingdoms, that run from the top down, the greatest to the lesser-great to the not-so-great, the kingdom of heaven is an "upside down" kingdom where the greatness is found in the "least" of these — just like that little kid. Jesus used that child to display a pattern of character that was, and is, absolutely necessary to be a part of His kingdom.

Second: Jesus Viewed Children as Active Partners.

When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming toward Him, He said to Philip, "Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?" He asked this only to test him, for He already had in mind what He was going to do. Philip answered Him, "It would take more than half a year's wages to buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!" Another of His disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, spoke up, "Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?" Jesus said, "Have the people sit down." There was plenty of grass in that place, and they sat down (about five thousand men were there). Jesus then took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted. He did the same with the fish. When they had all had enough to eat, He said to His disciples, "Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted." So they gathered them and filled twelve baskets with the pieces of the five barley loaves left over by those who had eaten —
John 6:5-13.

This episode of how Jesus viewed children comes to us courtesy of the gospel of John, being a part of the only moment of Christ's ministry outside of Holy Week that is detailed in all four gospel writings (even His birth makes only two of them). Once again, we find Jesus with a massive crowd of people. They have been with Him for some time, and we know that, as the realization of the probable hunger of this crowd became more apparent, the disciples, according to the accounts of all three of the other gospels, at first simply wanted Jesus to send them all away — you know, "Let's let them go so they can find something somewhere to eat." But it was now the end of the day, with darkness approaching. The disciple Philip briefly flirted with the idea of somehow finding enough money to feed them all, but that too was an unlikely solution, considering that 5,000 men

(the only ones counted) plus the women and children (probably making the crowd size at least four to five times that number) was going to be far beyond any possibility. And, in the meantime, the problem of a hungry crowd remained — and it wasn't going anywhere.

It is the disciple Andrew who brings a boy — again, a young child — to Jesus. He tells Christ that this little boy has not much more than a sack lunch with him — five small barley loaves (barley being the main bread eaten by the vast majority of people) along with two small fish. Andrew is on the verge of a huge faith statement, wondering if something can maybe be done with this small meal; yet, he too remains hesitant to believe in all that is possible once Jesus gets His hands on something, focusing not on the offering but rather on the need, and continuing to see this situation in strictly human terms.

But not Jesus. He chooses instead to partner with this little boy and his very small but generous offering because he knows that, as the old hymn says, “Little is much when God is in it.” All that was needed was faith in the power of Jesus, as He Himself said in the gospel of Luke: ***“What is impossible with man is possible with God” — Jesus Christ, Luke 18:27.***

In Christ's partnering with this little child, who was simply willing to give Jesus his lunch, He shows to everybody what can happen when we place our trust in the truth of His power. Give me all you have, He is saying, even if it seems a little, and I will make it what it needs to be. It's not about the size of the gift but rather about who the gift is being given to. This little boy believed Jesus could use his gift, even something as seemingly insignificant as a little lunch. What was that among so many? But he gave it all to Jesus, and Jesus used that partnership to feed thousands. What an amazing partner this little child proved to be!

Third: Jesus Viewed Children as Welcomed Participants.

People were bringing little children to Jesus for Him to place His hands on them [and pray for them], but the disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw this, He was indignant. He said to them, “Let the little children come to Me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.” And He took the children in His arms, placed His hands on them and blessed them — Mark 10:13-16.

Here we have group of people crowding around Jesus. But this is a special group — one made up of parents, moms and dads (and maybe grandmas and grandpas) — that came seeking the opportunity of Jesus simply placing His hands on their children and blessing them, in essence, praying God's best for them.

Now this would not have been unusual; it was a relatively common practice for people to bring their kids to a rabbi to receive blessing. But the disciples interrupt their plans with a rebuke that is intended to get all these people away from Jesus. Now while their hearts may have only been focused on Christ and His needs, their heads were out to lunch — and Jesus made sure they heard about it. The dictionary defines the word “indignant” as “feeling or showing anger or annoyance at what is perceived to be unfair treatment.” In other words, Jesus was really ticked off. “Will you guys get out of the way? Don't stop

them; don't ever stop them. Let them come. This is exactly who the kingdom of God belongs to. This is exactly how the kingdom of God is received, just like these kids are receiving Me. If you can't receive Me like a little kid, then you'll never receive Me at all."

APPLICATION

Jesus makes some amazing points in how we are to view our kids:

First, they model the completely trusting, completely helpless attitudes that Jesus wants us all to have. For all those times that people wish kids would act more like adults, Christ wants adults to act more like kids — not childish, but child-like. The fact is, repeating something we've talked about before, Christianity is essentially a faith that says, "I can't." I can't save myself; I can't lead a life pleasing to God. I am helpless! Little kids get to "I can't" pretty quick. But as we grow, as we get more educated and learn more skills, we become less able — or maybe it's less willing — to say, "I can't." Yet that's the place where Jesus wants us to be. Remember that He famously told His disciples: "*[A]part from Me you can do nothing*" — *Jesus Christ, John 15:5b*. In other words, "Guys, apart from Me, you're helpless." Grownups have a hard time with that. Grownups have a hard time saying, "I'm helpless; I can't do it; I really can't do anything." But it's from that place of helplessness that faith, that trust in Somebody bigger, greater, stronger — perfect — begins to be grown in our hearts. Helplessness lets us see not only how much we need Christ, but why we need Christ. Jesus wants us to be like little kids. That's where the great joys of the life in Christ are realized.

Second, the fact that Jesus would have these views of kids — as ideal patterns, as active partners and as welcomed participants — tells us how precious, how priceless and how irreplaceable every child is. One reason we hold so strongly to being "pro-life" is that, where God is concerned, there are no accidents. Even if a pregnancy happens out of sin, or if it happens as "unplanned," every life, from the moment of conception, is precious to God beyond our wildest imagination. Every child is truly a gift, a gracious blessing, from God Himself. And in God's eyes, no matter our ages, we are all His kids. Let us commit to seeing each other, each and every one of us, as precious, as priceless, as irreplaceable. That's how God sees us from heaven. That's how Christ saw us from the cross. That's how we will be seen through all eternity. So, let's reflect that awesome way that God views us onto each other — just like Jesus saw every one of the kids He came across.

CONCLUSION

And third, as we close: One of the greatest truths I have found that brought such a great joy and a great peace was when I realized that, before my two daughters were ever mine, they were God's. As we said during the dedication service, they have always been God's, and they'll always be God's. Nobody has ever known them better; remember God's words to Jeremiah: "*Before I formed you in the womb I knew you*" — *God speaking, Jeremiah 1:5a*. And in addition to that, absolutely nobody has ever loved them better; again, God speaking through Jeremiah tells us the eternal truth: "*I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with unfailing kindness*" — *God speaking, Jeremiah 31:3b*. So, a natural question might be: So where do the parents fit in?

We get a wonderful picture of that from Gabriel's words to Mary while announcing the coming of the long-awaited Messiah: "[Y]ou have found favor with God" — **Gabriel, Luke 1:30b**. It is estimated that there were approximately 300 million people on the planet at the time Jesus was born, yet it was to two young people living in the far reaches of the Roman Empire that God chose to show His favor, to bring His one and only Son into the world, beginning the long-awaited promise of salvation. Now in human terms, there were certainly people better situated financially, better educated, living in better, more advanced and developed societies, yet, for God's purposes, because a young woman named Mary had found favor with her heavenly Father, she and her fiancé, a young man named Joseph, were chosen by God to be the parents who would raise the most incredible child the world has ever known. In God's view, they were perfectly matched to the life that was on its way.

What's that mean for us? Well, first of all, Tyler and Lydia, of all the billions of people in the world today, you two were chosen by God to be the parents of Jack, the perfect match with the perfect home to raise your son to become the man that God has planned him to be. And Gavin and Jamie, you two are also just as chosen to be the parents of McCoy, again, the perfect match with the perfect home to raise your son to become the man that God has planned him to be. And that goes for all of us parents — and parents to be. As our kids have been chosen by God, so have we been chosen to bring them up and, in so doing, bring them to the knowledge of God — and His wonderful Son, Jesus Christ. Don't ever forget: They're God's kids, and He wants them to know His Son. He already knows them.

But there's more. God has also chosen this church family in the same way to be the perfect match for both these kids to be raised, as the apostle Paul wrote, ***in the training and instruction of the Lord*** — **Paul, Ephesians 6:4b**. That will mean Sunday School and sermons and Bible studies of course, but that will also mean living as examples of what it means to be a Christian, a sold-out disciple of Jesus Christ. It will mean providing an absolutely transparent picture of the love for each other that will make this place their beloved church home and the church family they can't wait to see again. And it means praying for them, day after day. We all will be an incredibly important portrait of what the love of Christ, and the joy in Christ, looks like.

So, to Tyler and Lydia, and to Gavin and Jamie, congratulations on these new lives in your families. And to all of you who are a part of this E-Free community, congratulations on these new lives in this family as well. To God be the glory! Let's pray!