

## ***Like a Child***

Matthew 18:1-4 - NCBC, December 13, 2020

Main Point: **You must humble yourself like a child to experience salvation.**

- Repent from trusting in your own works and words.
  - Pride believes God owes me something.
  - Pride serves self and rebels against God.
  - God opposes pride!
- Receive God's works and words as good.
  - Humility trusts God for all my needs.
  - Humility obeys God before having all the answers.
  - God saves the humble!

Application: **Gladly receive whatever your Heavenly Father is doing or saying.**

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### **Opening Announcements:**

- **Remember to visit [myncbc.org](http://myncbc.org)** and follow our NCBC Facebook page to stay informed on all ministry/event updates during this season of careful regathering.
- **Outreach Training on Zoom this Weds (12/16) at 6:30pm.** Everyone is invited to join our Outreach Pastoral Intern, Seth Swartzendruber, for a special 1 hour equipping session online. Join us and get motivated and encouraged on how to share God's goodness with your loved one this Christmas! Watch your email this week for the link.

<<Joy has Dawned>>



Doesn't that truth give us great hope today? The child named Jesus is now the Lord of history.

We've gathered this morning to worship and adore King Jesus and renew our minds with the good news of His salvation of sinners like us.

May God give us all humility like a child today as we open our Bibles to **Matthew chapter 18. Matthew 18 verses 1-4** is our focus this morning, so please prepare to read these verses together soon.


I offer a special welcome to those worshipping online or in our Extra Precautions Chapel. For those online, please use the links alongside the livestream for fill-in-the-blank sermon notes, the preaching manuscript, and children's coloring pages. At any time you may pause this video, print those files, and then rejoin our worship with those notes in front of you.

I want to thank you all for your prayers and kind encouragements in recent weeks as our family navigated some sickness and quarantine. We continue to pray for those of you who are still in quarantine or struggling with


physical weakness in these days. We pray for God's healing mercies for you, and for God to grant you a spirit of thanksgiving and gratitude in the midst of your trial.

For me personally, I confess that I used my family's quarantine to justify some self-pity, grumbling, and discouragement. And that's why I'm so thankful for Pastor Scott's sermon last week from **1 Samuel 8** about idolatry. Because God used Scott's faithful preaching to call me to repentance and reawaken my gratitude for all that Christ has done for me. Certainly God has given us all many blessings to count, and we all need to have our minds renewed with God's Word now even more than ever.

So today, we return to our *Behold King Jesus* series from the Gospel of Matthew. **Matthew** is written so that we can know that Jesus is the Messiah – God's anointed King – who fulfills all of the Old Testament promises.

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO MATTHEW				<small>STAYOLD</small> 
1-3 Presentation of the King				
<b>4-7</b> Proclamation of the King  <i>Sermon on the Mount (5-7)</i>	<b>8-10</b> Power of the King  <i>Sending out the 12 Apostles (10)</i>	<b>11-13</b> Rejection of the King  <i>Kingdom Parables (13)</i>	<b>14-20</b> Priorities of the King  <i>Topsy-Turvy Values (18)</i>	<b>21-25</b> Progress of the King  <i>Olivet Discourse (24-25)</i>
Kingdom offered to Israel			Kingdom offered to all Nations	
26-28 Passion & Proof of the King				

You may remember that the body of **Matthew's** gospel is arranged into 5 topical sections. Each section begins highlighting some of the *works* of King Jesus, and then each of these five sections conclude with an extended discourse of Jesus' *words*.

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26-28 Passion & Proof of the King				

**Matthew 18** marks this transition from Jesus works to His words in this fourth section of the book. **Matthew 18** is an extended discourse from Jesus about the Topsy-Turvy, or radically unexpected, values of His kingdom – particularly in **chapter 18**, pertaining to the relationships of His kingdom citizens with each other.

**Matthew 18** is perhaps one of the most important chapters in the entire New Testament pertaining to how Christians should relate to other Christians. If you ever find yourself in conflict or interpersonal frustration with another Christian...Jesus has profound wisdom for you in this chapter. The more I've studied this chapter, the more I've become convinced of its importance for our own church family and our relationships together.

So if you're able, I'd invite you to stand for the public reading of God's Word, as I read the first four verses of **Matthew chapter 18**, from the English Standard Version:

*At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" 2 And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them 3 and said, "Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.*

*4 Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.*

This is the reading of God's Word.

### **Let's Pray Together.**

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One of the greatest testimonies for the glory of God is the unity of God's people together.

When you stop and consider that God creates His church from radically diverse people from all nations, ages, ethnicities, cultures, classes, and economic privilege... the oneness of God's gospel community is a staggering testimony of His goodness and grace.<sup>1</sup>

Just think for a moment about our own New Castle Bible Church community. We have members who are very wealthy, and we have members who are very poor. We have some who are very healthy, and some who are very sick. We have educated, and uneducated. We all live in multiple communities across four different counties, and we've all come from a wide variety of religious tradition.

Some of us have great concerns about the corona virus, and some of us have no concerns about the corona virus.

So I ask you, how does God unite people who require masks, with people who refuse masks, in one gospel community? How is it possible for a union laborer and a corporate manager to worship and serve Christ together with sincere care and concern for one another? What

causes Jews and Gentiles, Republicans and Democrats, or Presbyterians and Mennonites, to joyfully experience spiritual oneness together in Christ's church?

The answer of course, is that we have been united by our common salvation through faith in Jesus alone. Through the death, burial, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus, God has rescued each one of us from our proud sinfulness and adopted us into His own family.

With all our diversity, we are now eternally united by one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all, and in all.<sup>2</sup> Our common salvation has radically transformed our inner natures, making us one gospel community who is submitted to our Heavenly Father together.

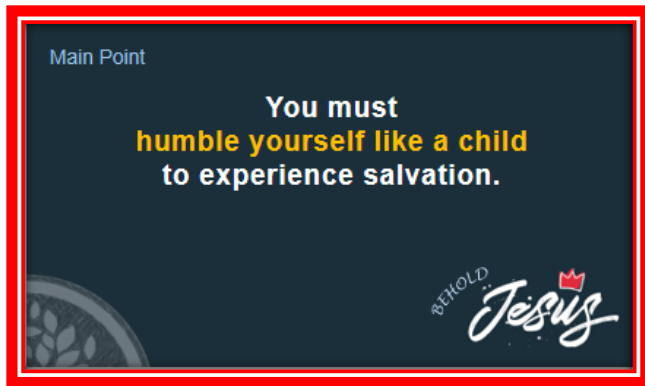
So today, the first four verses of **Matthew 18** call us out of the selfishness and disunity that scandalizes Christ's church today, to remind us of the essential mindset required to even enter God's family.

We might summarize the main point of these four verses this way:

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<sup>1</sup> John 17:22-23; Ephesians 2:13-22  
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<sup>2</sup> Ephesians 4:5-6



You must humble yourself like a child to experience salvation.

Unless you turn and become like a child in your vertical relationship with God, you will never even enter the kingdom of heaven. There's only one way into the family of God, and it's the path of humility. You must humble yourself before you can experience God's salvation and then experience God's good design for His redeemed community as described in the rest of **Matthew 18**.

So let's quickly review the setting for Jesus' teaching here.

Remember back in **chapter 17**, Jesus took Peter, James, and John on a mountain-top prayer retreat, where He was transfigured before them, and they got a glimpse of His heavenly glory. Meanwhile, the other 9 disciples were left behind to continue serving the crowds.

But when Jesus and the three disciples finally returned from their mountain-top experience, they found the other

9 disciples arguing with the religious leaders<sup>3</sup> out of frustration for their inability to heal a demon-possessed boy.

After healing the boy, Jesus rebuked the disciples for their poor quality of faith in Him, and then reminded them again in **verses 22-23** that His glory was going to be first shown to the world through His death and resurrection, before it would ever be seen through power and judgment.

But the disciples didn't understand Jesus when he talked like this. It didn't fit their preconceived ideas about what God sent the Messiah to do. They were expecting a national restoration of Israel. Freedom from the Romans. Not the Messiah getting killed in Jerusalem.

And so in their confusion and fear, they kept their questions to themselves as they traveled back from northern Israel<sup>4</sup> to Capernaum on the Northern shore of the Sea of Galilee.

The last paragraph of **Matthew 17** offered profound insight into the freedom of all who are a part of God's kingdom as Jesus taught Peter to put his Gospel witness ahead of his own personal rights. Once you are a child of God, you are free to really love and serve others without self-interest. God will always provide what a loving gospel witness requires. The king's grace has set His children free from living for ourselves!

Now then look at **Matthew 18 verse 1**:

<sup>3</sup> Mark 9:14

<sup>4</sup> The region of Caesarea Philippi and Mt Hermon – compare 16:13 with Page **4a** of 14

*At that time the disciples came to Jesus...*

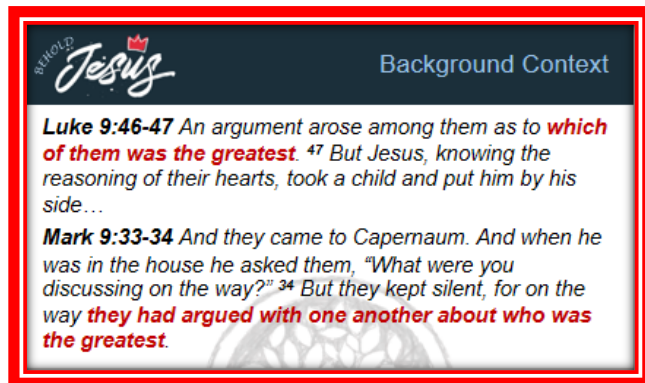
Perhaps all the disciples now arrive at Peter's home, asking this question to Jesus:

*Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?*

This is tragically ironic. The disciples are asking the King who is the greatest in the kingdom.

*When you set up your rule, which of us will receive the highest honors?*

Now the parallel accounts in **Mark** and **Luke** fill in some background behind their question:



**Luke 9** tells us that the disciples had been arguing among themselves about which of them was the greatest. They were certain that Jesus was the Messiah, and these flashes of His glory and power were only exciting their expectations. **Mark 9** tells us that they had argued with one another about this all the way back from the region of Caesarea Philippi.

You can almost hear their passionate Middle-Eastern bantering back and forth while they were walking together:

*"It's probably one of His three favorite disciples that Jesus allowed to see His glory. After all, Jesus had said that He would build His church on Peter's rock.<sup>5</sup> Yeah, I agree it's Peter because he's the one who walked on water, remember? True, but don't forget Jesus called Peter, "Satan"! That's a real demerit on Peter's record. Ok, but you really think one of the Sons of Thunder will be given the highest position in the kingdom? Come on! James and John have way too much hot air..."*

On and on they argued, and now they finally come to Jesus to settle it. When it comes to the kingdom of heaven, or the reign and rule of God, which of us should expect to receive the highest position, honor, and authority?

So in **verse 2**, Jesus calls over a little child, perhaps one of Peter's younger children, and uses the child as an object lesson, saying,

*Truly, I say to you* – In other words, listen up. What I'm about to say is really, really important:

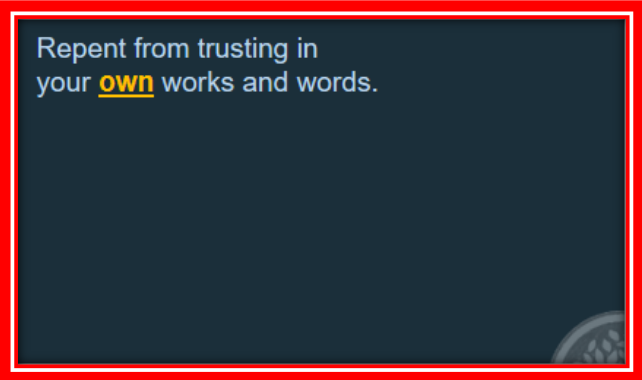
*Unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.*

You disciples all assume that your association with me has guaranteed your salvation. But listen carefully. Unless you turn – or repent – or change how you are thinking and living – and recognize you are as dependent

<sup>5</sup> Matthew 16:18

and needy as this little one here – you won't even be part of my kingdom at all!

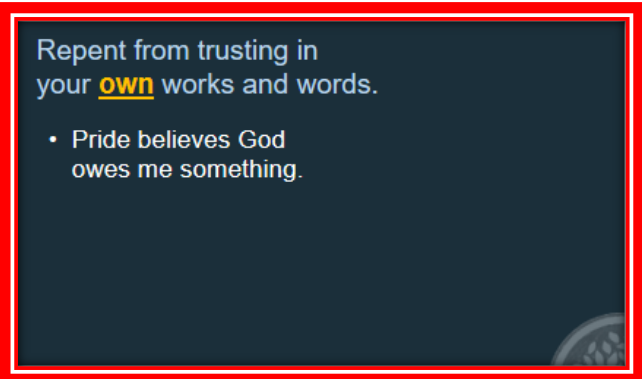
In other words, Jesus is powerfully calling us to,



Repent from trusting in  
your own works and words.

Repent from trusting in our own works and words. This heart of proud self-focus will keep you from entering into the good rule of your Heavenly Father.

You see, here's a lesson we all can learn from this text:



Repent from trusting in  
your own works and words.

- Pride believes God owes me something.

Pride believes God's owes me something.

Far too often, we are like these disciples, who believe we are entitled to some special treatment. Whenever we experience disappointment or difficulty, aren't we quick to become embittered at God? As if God has somehow forgotten all that we've done for Him, and He's now treating us unfairly?

Listen carefully friends... a proud person can be religious. But pride only tries to *use* God for our own selfish gain. Pride refuses to trust that God is actually good enough to provide what I need for a satisfied life. Pride trusts no one but self, and ultimately believes I deserve to be treated better than Jesus was treated on this earth Himself.

Do you ever think like this? Like you deserve to have a better standard of living than Jesus of Nazareth? Like you deserve to never be persecuted or taken advantage of? Do you ever think God owes you a better life than what King Jesus had on this earth?

Repent from trusting your own ways and wisdom. This is thinking like the kingdom of this world...not the kingdom of heaven.

You must turn around – do an about face – repent from your adolescent spirit of independence and pride. This heart of pride which pursues self-advancement is the spirit of this world which refuses to submit to God.

In other words,



Repent from trusting in  
your own works and words.

- Pride believes God owes me something.
- Pride serves self and rebels against God.

Pride always serves self and rebels against God.

Pride forgets all that God has done for me<sup>6</sup> and takes the credit for all my own success.<sup>7</sup> Like the disciples who had witnessed miracle after miracle from Jesus, and heard amazing sermon after sermon, yet just like us they continued to believe that true satisfaction was found from personal ambition more than obeying God.

So what about you? Are there any areas of your life where your pride has stiffened your neck,<sup>8</sup> or hardened your heart,<sup>9</sup> so that you feel completed justified in disregarding or disobeying God's Word? Where are you trusting your own achievements more than what Jesus has already done for you? How are you listening to your own voice more than the life-giving words of God?

Remember, the Scriptures teach that,

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<sup>6</sup> Deuteronomy 8:11

<sup>7</sup> Deuteronomy 8:17

<sup>8</sup> 2 Chronicles 30:8-9, 36:11-14

Repent from trusting in  
your own works and words.

- Pride believes God owes me something.
- Pride serves self and rebels against God.
- **God opposes pride!**

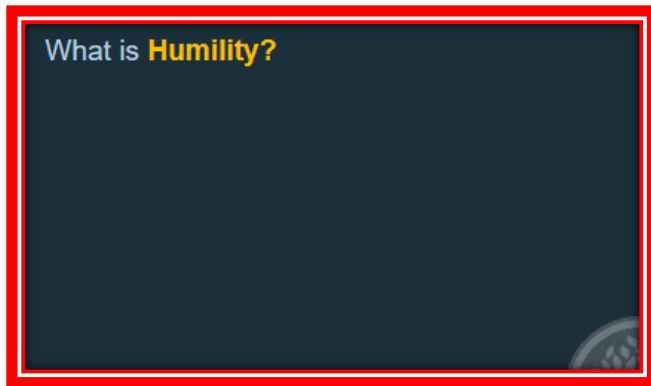
**God opposes the proud.**<sup>10</sup> Unless you repent and turn from this natural heart of pride, you can never be saved. You can become quite respected in your religious pursuits, but you will remain the enemy of God, and the object of His wrath.<sup>11</sup> Only those who humble themselves like a little child will experience God's good kingdom rule as one of His beloved children.

Now don't get confused with **verse 3**. Jesus is not commanding His disciples to become *childish*. He's not encouraging short-attention spans, or recommending we live with a perpetual case of the wiggles, or value ignorance. **Verse 4** clarifies why He uses a little child for His object lesson. The child is an example of humility. An example of contented dependence upon his father for all he needs to live. Childlike humility is the necessary characteristic of all who live under God's rule, and the essence of spiritual greatness.

<sup>9</sup> Exodus 9:34-35, 10:20; Deuteronomy 8:14; Daniel 5:20; Ezekiel 17:14

<sup>10</sup> James 4:6; 1 Peter 5:5

<sup>11</sup> Ephesians 2:1-3



So then, What is humility?

What is this necessary mindset that is required for every person before they can experience salvation?

Humility is often misunderstood in our culture today. Please understand that humility is not beating yourself up, denying all compliments, or even living with a quiet or timid personality. Those misconceptions don't describe how a healthy child lives at all.

In fact, biblical humility is actually much more about how I respond to God's humbling of me,<sup>12</sup> rather than how I treat others. Biblical humility is more about my vertical response to God before it ever is about my horizontal relationships with other people.

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<sup>12</sup> Biblically, to be humbled is to be caused (through suffering or judgment) to realize that God is worthy of my worship since true life comes through obedience to His Word (Dan 4:37). C.f. Deuteronomy 8:2-3, 5, 10, 16; 1 Samuel 2:7; 2 Chronicles 28:19-20; Job 30:11; Psalm 55:19; Daniel 5:21-  
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Now truly the Bible commands humility in both its vertical and horizontal dimensions. But by far, the clear emphasis of biblical humility is related to our response to God's testing or teaching of us:

**Micah 6:8** calls us to *walk humbly with your God*.

**James 4:10** says, *Humble yourselves before the Lord*...

**1 Peter 5:6** commands us to *Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God*...

In fact, it is our vertical humility towards God that enables our horizontal humility towards others. Only after we have become one of God's children ourselves, can we rightly relate to others in God's family.

So let me just share a quick summary of what I learned this week by surveying humility through the Bible:

According to Scripture, vertical humility is expressed by obeying God's Word,<sup>13</sup> resting from your own efforts,<sup>14</sup>

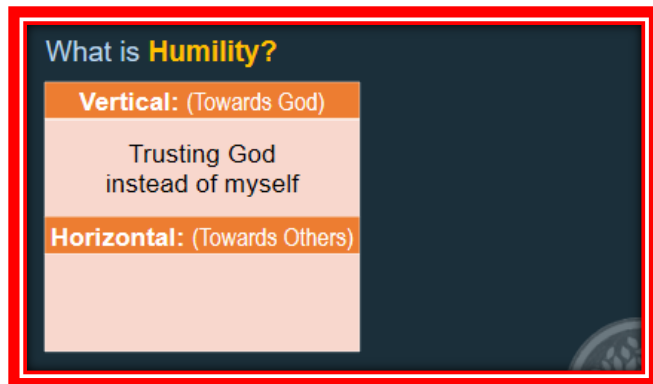
22; Acts 20:18-21; 2 Corinthians 12:20-21; Philippians 4:11-13

<sup>13</sup> Exodus 10:3; 2 Chronicles 30:8-9, 11-12; Proverbs 22:4; Isaiah 66:2; Jeremiah 44:10; Zephaniah 2:3; Philippians 2:8; James 4:7

<sup>14</sup> Leviticus 16:29, 31; 23:27, 29, 32 (NASB); Numbers 29:7 (NASB)



praying and fasting,<sup>15</sup> and repenting of sin.<sup>16</sup> Let that soak in... to humble yourself is to repent of your sin, pray and seek your satisfaction from God alone, rest, and obey whatever God has told you to do.



In other words, to humble myself like a child before God is to trust God instead of myself. This is the foundational heart of vertical humility.

Then when you consider the biblical commands to live in humility with one another, horizontal humility can be summarized living as a servant for others,<sup>17</sup> or forgiving and bearing with others in love.<sup>18</sup>



Therefore, the biblical call to walk humbly with others is a command to serve others instead of myself.

So what is humility? It is first a vertical response to God which trusts Him more than myself, and then seeks to serve others instead of myself.



Simply put, **humility is the heart of faith and love.**<sup>19</sup> Like a child who is content to depend on his father for everything, and like a child who cares nothing about

<sup>15</sup> Ezra 8:21; Psalm 69:10; Isaiah 58:3-5, 10; Daniel 10:12; Zephaniah 3:12; 1 Peter 5:6-7

<sup>16</sup> Leviticus 26:40-41; 1 Kings 21:27-29; 2 Kings 22:19; 2 Chronicles 7:14, 12:6-8, 34:27; Proverbs 6:3 (NASB); James 1:21, 4:8-10

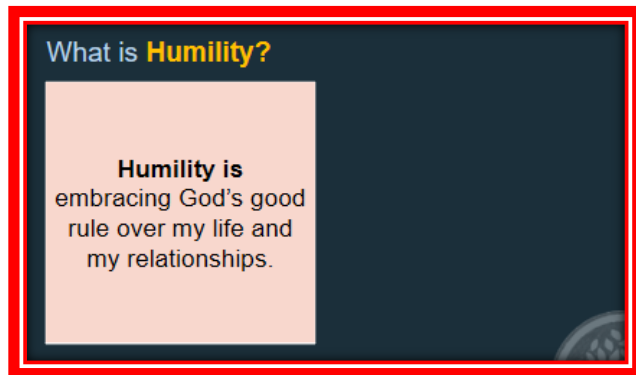
<sup>17</sup> Luke 14:10-11; Romans 12:3, 16; 2 Corinthians 11:7-9; Philippians 2:3-4

<sup>18</sup> Ephesians 4:1-3; Colossians 3:12-14; 1 Peter 3:8, 5:5

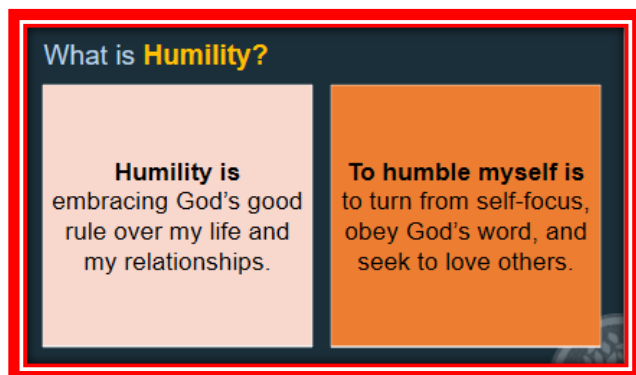
<sup>19</sup> Galatians 5:6

personal ambition or self-advancement...Jesus says only those who humble themselves like a little child can experience God's salvation.

Now, let's see if we can put all of this together in a simple definition for you to write down in your notes today:



Humility is embracing God's good rule over my life and my relationships. Humility is embracing God's good rule over my life and my relationships. Humility is fundamentally about how I respond to God's Lordship.



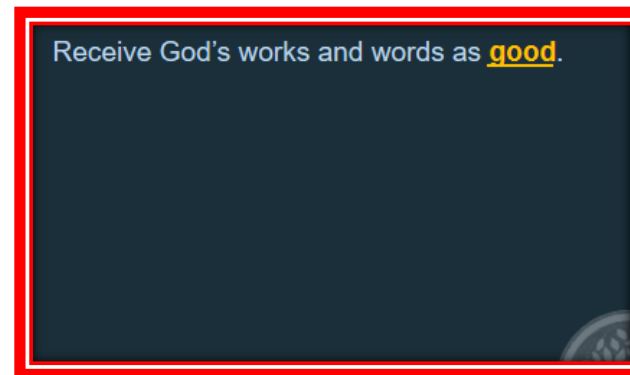
Therefore, to humble myself is to turn from self-focus, obey God's word, and seek to love others. To humble

myself is to submit to God's rule in my life and relationships.

Does this make sense?

It doesn't matter how religious you may be. You will never experience God's salvation until your heart is transformed to embrace God's good rule over your life and your relationships with glad submission.

We must turn, and repent from all self-advancement and proud rebellion against God, and instead, we must,



Receive God's works and words as good.

Loved ones, No one can make themselves more humble. You will never become humble by looking more at yourself.

As CS Lewis is well known for saying, humility is not thinking less of yourself...it is thinking of yourself less. A humble heart is self-forgetful, for all his needs are met in God's good provision.

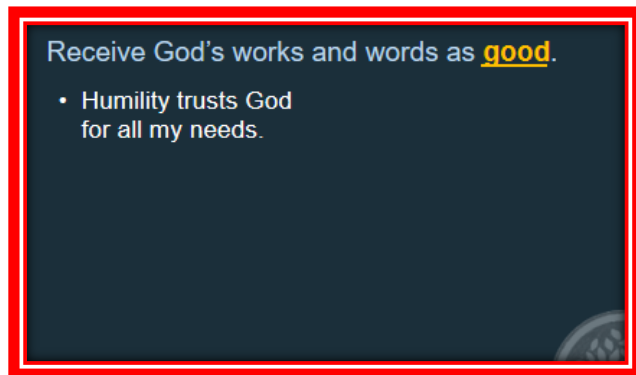
Therefore, humility is expressed by simply receiving God's Lordship as good. To cultivate your humble embrace of God's good rule, you can only gaze long at your Heavenly Father through the window of the Scriptures ...so you might see the majestic splendor of our Creator who gave His one and only Son to rescue us from sin and adopt us as His dearly beloved children.

Look at the lowly manger in Bethlehem where the King of Glory took on human flesh in order to come as your substitute and take your place on the cross – paying the penalty that your sins deserved.

Look at the empty tomb, where Jesus conquered death to give you newness of life. Delight in the ascension where Jesus returned to the Father's side to live forever as your Priest and intercessor.

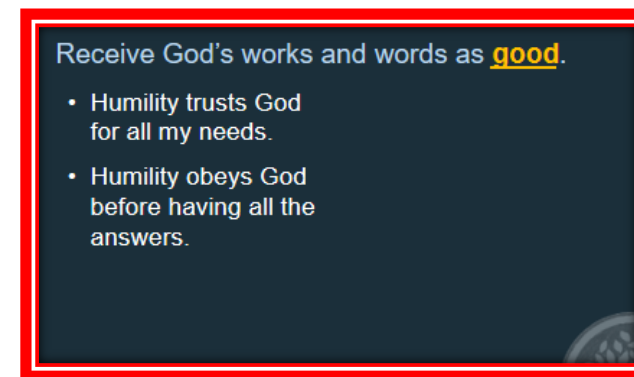
And then receive all that God has done, and all that God has promised and commanded you, as good as it truly is.

A proud heart believes that God cannot be trusted, for God is not fundamentally good.



**But humility gladly trusts God for all my needs.** Like a young toddler who is content to depend entirely upon his parents for everything that is required for his life...this is the necessary mindset for every Christian on the planet. No soul has ever entered into the blessings of God's rule apart from this divine gift of faith and love.

And let me just add, that like a young child,



**Humility obeys God before having all the answers.**

There's certainly much about God's testing of us, and God's teaching to us, that we will never fully understand on this side of eternity. But church, we know that our God is good, and therefore we can receive all of His dealings with us as good and without disputing or resisting.

For contrary to how God opposes the proud,

Receive God's works and words as **good**.

- Humility trusts God for all my needs.
- Humility obeys God before having all the answers.
- **God saves the humble!**

God saves the humble!<sup>20</sup>

**Psalm 149:4** says the LORD ...*adorns the humble with salvation*. God gives grace to the humble,<sup>21</sup> and promises them future honor in His kingdom.<sup>22</sup>

The humble are those who have turned from their self-reliance and have been born again by the Spirit of the living God so that as one of His children, they now see God as good, and trustworthy. And for all the humble, God promises the joy of His kingly rule.

So then the lesson from today's Scripture is very clear:

Main Point

You must  
**humble yourself like a child**  
to experience salvation.

BEHOLD  
*Jesus*

We must humble ourselves like children to experience salvation.

The way of selfishness and pride disqualifies a soul from entering God's kingdom. God's kingdom is only made up of people who have submitted their souls in glad dependence to God as one of His adopted children.

Application

**Gladly receive**  
whatever your Heavenly Father  
is doing or saying.

BEHOLD  
*Jesus*

Therefore today we must **Gladly receive whatever our Heavenly Father is doing or saying to us**. No matter how God is testing you right now, or no matter what God is trying to teach you with His Word right now... **Matthew**

<sup>20</sup> 2 Samuel 22:28; 2 Chronicles 12:12; Psalm 18:27, 76:9; Zephaniah 2:3

<sup>21</sup> Proverbs 3:34; James 4:6; 1 Peter 5:5

<sup>22</sup> 1 Samuel 2:7; Proverbs 29:23; Matthew 23:12; Luke 1:52; James 4:10; 1 Peter 5:6

**18** urges us to turn from our proud self-reliance, and become like a child. Gladly receive whatever humbling our Father is bringing into our lives right now.

Certainly many of us have experienced God's humbling in fresh ways this year. But we must never think we know better than God what is best for us. We must turn from the proud spirit we can easily see in the disciples, and trust that God is truly good, and our lives will never be more satisfied than when we embrace His good rule over my life and my relationships.

Church, just like we pray for God's help to believe His Gospel, and just like we pray for God's help to sincerely love others... we should also pray for God's help to be humble. We should pray that God will help us to gladly receive His will with contented dependence and submissive obedience.

After all, Jesus taught us in the Beatitudes,

*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*<sup>23</sup>

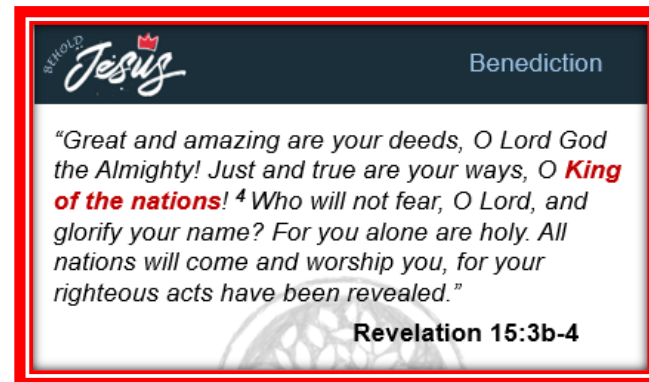


**Let's pray.**

<<Yet Not I but through Christ in Me>>

*Remember to take advantage of the online Downloads and links!*

**Let's pray our benediction together as we dismiss.**



*Great and amazing are your deeds, O Lord God the Almighty! Just and true are your ways, O King of the nations! Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship you, for your righteous acts have been revealed.*  
**Revelation 15:3b-4**

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<sup>23</sup> Matthew 5:3

### **Recommended Resources on Like a Child:**

- Proverbs 3:34
- Matthew 5:3; 20:20-28; 23:11-12
- Mark 9:33-37
- Luke 9:46-48; 22:24-27
- Romans 12:3
- Philippians 2:8
- James 4:6-10
- 1 Peter 5:5-6
- <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/how-do-i-humble-myself>
- <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/humble-yourself-like-god>
- <https://www.desiringgod.org/labs/what-you-need-to-kill-pride>
- <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/seven-subtle-symptoms-of-pride>
- <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/humble-yourself-and-fast>
- “Spiritual Bankruptcy” sermon on Matthew 5:1-3 on May 19, 2019
- “The Humble Boldness of Love” sermons on Galatians 5:25-6:6 on Aug 20 & 27, 2017
- *The Freedom of Self-Forgetfulness*, Tim Keller
- *Humility*, CJ Mahaney
- *Battling Unbelief*, John Piper

### **Growing Deeper: Life Group Questions**

1. Read Mark 9:33-34 and Luke 9:46-47 to understand the context of Matthew 18. What sins threaten to destroy the gospel community of Christ’s church? (c.f. James 4:1-2). Yet from God’s perspective, who is the greatest in His kingdom?
2. Review Matthew 18:1-4. What does it mean to “enter” or be “in the kingdom of heaven”? Does the kingdom of heaven refer to a physical place or a spiritual activity of God? (c.f. Matthew 5:3, 10; 6:10, 33; Romans 14:17)
3. Review Matthew 18:1-4, then consider Exodus 10:3, 2 Chronicles 7:14, Isaiah 66:2, Philippians 2:8, and James 4:8-10. What does it practically mean to humble oneself? What is the definition of biblical humility?
4. Read Matthew 5:3. Are you “poor in spirit” or “middle-class in spirit”? Do you believe God owes you anything? Do you believe you deserve to be treated better than Jesus was treated on earth? Do you see Jesus as your good example or as your very righteousness, life, and joy?
5. How do you seek to cultivate humility in your relationship with God? Pray together that God will increase your faith by giving you a more biblical understanding of your own sinfulness and His glory.