

ONLY THE HUMBLE SHALL SHARE THE KINGDOM.

FEB. 10, MATT. 18:1-14. (Mark 9:33-50; Luke 9:46-50.)

Golden Text – "It is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish."

THE subject of this lesson is one worthy of the most careful and prayerful consideration of every child of God, and especially of all those who are in any way tempted to ambition and rivalry or vain glory in the Lord's service. While the humility of the Lord's apostles is very marked in their subsequent career, in the beginning of their course they were all to some extent influenced by old ideas which it was the object of Christ's teaching gradually to eradicate.

After the peculiar experiences on the Mount of the Transfiguration and the selection by the Lord of three of their number for that notable occasion, the question of relative prominence in the Kingdom was naturally suggested to their minds, and apparently it led to a dispute which manifested some selfishness. It was to correct this disposition, and to show its antagonism to the spirit which must prevail in the Kingdom of God, that our Lord sought an opportunity to converse with them on the subject. (Verse 1 and Mark 9:33,34.) "And he came to Capernaum, and being in the house, he asked them, What was it that ye disputed among yourselves by the way? But they held their peace [certainly not indefinitely, for that would have been showing disrespect to the Master; but there was a brief silence which indicated some embarrassment]; for by the way they had disputed among themselves who should be greatest." By and by one of them inquired, "Who is [to be] greatest in the Kingdom of heaven?" Then followed the lesson, so important to the apostles, who were subsequently to be specially exposed to great temptations to ambition and rivalry among themselves for the chief place in the estimation and in the hearts of the people of God – the Kingdom in embryo – among

whom they were all to be leaders and teachers – chosen witnesses of God. And the Lord would have them be not only witnesses of his truth but exponents also of the power of his spirit in transforming the heart and moulding the character into graceful conformity to the divine will. But if the lesson was thus important to the apostles in their position as leaders, it is also important to the whole Church, all of whom are, to a greater or less extent, exposed to temptations to rivalry and ambition.

Verses 2-4; Mark 9:35. "And he sat down, and called the twelve, and saith unto them, If any man desire to be first [*i.e.*, if he manifest the spirit of rivalry], the same shall be last of all, and servant of all." The spirit of rivalry being the very opposite of the spirit of love and meekness which must characterize all who shall be counted worthy of the Kingdom, this statement is seen to be the logical sequence of such a course; for if such a one shall ever enter the Kingdom he must first have that disposition thoroughly eradicated; and if it be deep seated or long cultivated, it may take considerable time and discipline to accomplish it, while, meantime, others, not so afflicted, may be engaged in the more rapid development of those graces of character and of mind which fit them more and more for extended usefulness and exalted service, thus necessarily leaving the one under discipline to be the last and least instead of the first and foremost. Thus viewed, the saying, He that humbleth himself shall be exalted; and he that exalteth himself shall be abased (Luke 14:11), is seen to be the statement of a philosophical principle of divine law. Let us, therefore, as the Apostle Peter urges (1 Pet. 5:6), humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt us *in due time*.

"And he took a child and set him in the midst of them, and when he had taken him in his arms, he said unto them, Verily, I say unto you [the manner is impressive **R1766 : page 34**] and solemn: it is as though he would say, I want you to take this lesson to heart and ponder it well], Except ye be converted [*i.e.*, unless ye turn away entirely from this self-seeking spirit of rivalry], and become as little

children, ye shall not [even] *enter* into [much less be *greatest* in] the Kingdom of heaven. Whosoever, therefore, shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the Kingdom of heaven." The special characteristics of a little child are simplicity of heart, meekness, truthfulness, freedom from ambition and rivalry, faith, confiding trust, love, obedience, teachableness, indifference to social distinctions and popular opinions, and guilelessness.

The maintenance of such a spirit after the dormant powers of childhood have expanded and brought the world, with all its attractions, allurements, ambitions, hopes, etc., within the mental grasp of *the man*, after the intellect has been quickened by the pulsations of life until he begins to realize that he is the peer of his fellows, and that he has [R1767 : page 34] advanced in the acquirement of knowledge and the development of skill and ability even beyond many other men, is indeed the evidence of that self-control and self-discipline which invariably bespeak a noble character.

The possession of such a spirit indicates (1) That the man is not overestimating himself. Though, in comparison with the ignorance of his childhood, he may have made considerable progress in the acquirement of knowledge and the development of his faculties, perhaps beyond the majority of his fellow men, he sensibly considers that he is still only on the shore of a boundless sea of truth, and that if he has outstripped the speed of some of his fellows it is only because of some superior advantages of birth or education of which his benevolent soul would gladly see all men partakers. He views himself as God sees him – as a very imperfect man, striving in much weakness to measure up to the standard of a perfect man, and realizing that his best efforts still leave him far short of the mark of perfection. And so he is humbled, in consideration of his failures, rather than puffed up, by comparing himself with those of still lower attainments.

(2) It indicates a tender consideration and love for other men which cannot vaunt itself or behave unseemly toward them. It regards

inferior learning and lack of intellectual development with that gracious sympathy and helpfulness which seek rather to supplement what the illiterate have, and to conceal their lack or deformity, than to expose their ignorance; while it cheerfully recognizes moral and intellectual equals, and pays due deference to superior attainments. It has nothing to do with the false standards of excellence which the world sets up, but, measuring self by the divine standards, it lives apart from, and far above, the spirit of the world – above its strifes, ambitions, bickerings, envies and selfishness; and, in the language of Paul, it has learned that whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report, if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, to think on these things (Phil. 4:8), and not to think of self too highly, but to think *soberly*. – Rom. 12:3.

Such, our Lord declares, must be the spirit of all who will be permitted to enter into the Kingdom of heaven; and he who cultivates it most will be the greatest; not, however, by any arbitrary law of retribution, but on the philosophical principle that humility leads to greatness, and is of itself a great achievement. It is just such loving generosity and meekness as this that will be necessary on the part of the "royal priesthood" of the Millennial age, to cooperate with Christ in the great work of lifting up the fallen to the high privileges of perfect manhood.

Verse 5. "And whoso shall receive [recognize and show kindness to] one *such* little child [the least and humblest of God's children] in my name [because he is mine], receiveth me." That is the Lord's valuation of even the least and humblest. How it helps even the least of us to realize his love!

Verse 6. "But whosoever shall insnare [beguile and lead astray – from the truth, the spirit of the truth, or holiness of life] one of the least of these who believe in me, it would be better for him that a

millstone were hanged about his neck and that he were sunk in the depth of the sea."

Such a warning needs no comment: if any one should find in his own heart the least intimation of such a disposition, let him quickly halt in his erring way and earnestly pray God to renew a right spirit within him.

Verse 7. "Woe ["great tribulation" – "a time of trouble such as never was since there was a nation" – is coming] unto the world because of [wilful] offences [offences against sufficiency of light to avoid them]; for it must needs be that offences come [because men's hearts are not right], but woe to that man [that wilful sinner] by whom the offence cometh."

Verses 8,9. See our issue of February, '93.

Verse 10. "Take heed that ye despise not [that ye do not hate or in any way persecute] one of these little ones; for I say unto you that in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven." ("Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister to them that shall be the heirs of salvation?") And (verse 14), "It is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish." The intimation is plain that any persecution or ensnarement of these will surely be observed by the Lord, and the evil-doers will in due time be brought to justice. Though the Lord may permit persecutions to severely try his saints, it shall only accomplish their purification; for "all things shall work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose."

Verses 11-13 tell of the loving zeal of our good Shepherd in seeking and caring for his sheep. Let us rejoice in his care and diligently hearken to his voice.
