

The Child in the Mist

First Series – Sermon One

Original by George MacDonald

Paraphrase by Dale R. Howie

The Child in the Mist is the first and foundational sermon in the Unspoken series. The title describes us perfectly. We are Children in the Mist! Perhaps this describes you before your mist is cleared away from the face of the Father? MacDonald uses the mist imagery often, for in Scotland, the fog can be so thick that you cannot see your hand in front of your face. In this sermon, he redefines us, Jesus, the Father, and the Kingdom within a relational context. This redefining is genuinely unique and vast in its scope and vision. MacDonald blows the mist away and clearly reveals the Father's character and nature in a transformational way. I would venture to say, if you don't see and understand this sermon, it would seem impossible, to me, to interpret the ones that follow!



MacDonald teaches as Isaiah says God does in chapter twenty-eight verse ten, "He is trying to teach us letter by letter, line by line, lesson by lesson." MacDonald says, "**I do not say this as some doctrinal truth, for I aim at no such logical certainty. Rather than prove, I aim to show, using my thoughts progressions to reveal the ideas I am relating.**" (Paraphrase)

Jesus' question to His disciples in Mark 8:29 asks, "But who do you say I am?" This question, whose answer reveals our very foundation, defines everything we believe about Life and the Cosmos! And who They are determines the very motives and intents of creation itself? Roots produce fruits, and if you don't KNOW the source, you don't know anything!

Outline

Essence of a Child – For the Childlike is the Divine

Kingdom's Nature – Kingdom thinking is Humble thinking

Simplicity of Childlikeness – Embracing Childlikeness is our Common Ground

Childlikeness of Father and Son – It is Simple, They are Childlike

Community of Children – Children Serving in Truth and Love

Father's Devotion – The Life of the Child is found in Their Self-Giving Love

Father of Little Children – He Alone is Abandoned and Devoted

Home – Our Childhood is Born of His Fatherhood!

Mark 9:33-37 NLT

After they arrived at Capernaum and settled in a house, Jesus asked his disciples, "What were you discussing out on the road?" But they didn't answer, because they had been arguing about which of them was the greatest. He sat down, called the twelve disciples over to him, and said, "Whoever wants to be first must take last place and be the servant of everyone else."

Then he put a little child among them. Taking the child in his arms, he said to them, "Anyone who welcomes a little child like this on my behalf welcomes me, and anyone who welcomes me welcomes not only me but also my Father who sent me."

Matthew 18:1-5 NLT

About that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Who is greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven?"

Jesus called a little child to him and put the child among them. Then he said, "I tell you the truth, unless you turn from your sins and become like little children, you will never get into the Kingdom of Heaven. So anyone who becomes as this little child is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven.

"And anyone who welcomes a little child like this on my behalf is welcoming me."

Essence of a Child

These passages record what Jesus taught his disciples against ambition and desire for superiority. But there is a higher truth here, a revelation, one about the very nature of the Divine itself.

Jesus used the example of an ordinary child with all the faults any child would have, but still possessing the quality of a childlike nature. In understanding Jesus' teaching on the child, we must recognize that He understood the essential quality of childlikeness as relational. Unfortunately and sadly, some children have been denied the opportunity of a childlike experience in their lives. These children are filled with so-called adult worldly wisdom, children who have had their divine childlikeness stolen and crushed. **For the childlike is the divine.**

If the disciples had understood the essence of childlikeness, which can only be represented in a child, then even the most selfish one would do. Being childlike has nothing to do with its character but with its nature of dependence, their vulnerability. These were the qualities used to communicate to the disciples' hearts. **Perceiving life from a child's point-of-view awakens the Spirit of love, the love uniquely expressed to children.**

Kingdom's Nature

Lets' look further into what this childlikeness reveals. The disciples had been arguing along the way about who was the greatest. Jesus wanted them to see that this type of thinking had nothing to do with His kingdom. So, He set the child before them to reveal His kingdom's nature.

Jesus told them they could not even enter His kingdom thinking this way. They would have to become childlike by humbling themselves. The idea of control, the power of place, was contrary to the essential quality of His Kingdom. There would be no more ruling, being in charge, but serving. No more looking down on anyone from a place of power and authority, even spiritual authority. But people lifted, served and persuaded of who they are in Jesus!

Simplicity of Childlikeness

Now let's look at a more profound truth upon which this lesson originates. That nothing is required of us that is not already within us, placed there by God. God calls us to be perfect as He is perfect. He puts his life and perfection inside us, enabling us to develop an intimate relationship with Them through His revelation within us; this makes room for maturity. For this reason, Jesus set the child before them.

So, the one who embraces the simplicity of childlikeness by giving a cup of water or holding a child welcomes the true nature of it. There can be no ulterior motive associated with these acts, such as to gain the love of people or even the love of God as Father. Only through embracing or giving out of the purity of heart and without any other motive can we truly understand the meaning or receive the lesson's blessing. That is the seeing of childlikeness as divine. It reveals to us the emptiness and strife of seeking a place of honor and power in His great Kingdom.

Therefore, a disciple represents his master and lives as a reflection of Him. Jesus could not call anyone His ambassador who could not act on His behalf. He goes on to say this appears in the receiving of others in His name. So, to become His disciple, our starting point is childlikeness. Childlikeness reveals the condition in which the commonality between the child, Jesus and the disciples are one. Jesus is saying there is no other relationship in which this occurs but in spiritual childhood! In my name implies a relationship, not because I "will" it.

Childlikeness of Father and Son

There is yet a second and higher revelation about childlikeness. Whoever receives Jesus receives not only Jesus but the Heavenly Father who sent Him. These are the connections between the first and second links in the chain. Then Jesus says that you are receiving Me when you receive a child, which connects the second and third links. **I do not say this as some doctrinal truth, for I aim at no such logical certainty. Rather than prove, I aim to show, using my thoughts progressions to reveal the ideas I am relating.** The Son is like the Father. The disciple who sees the Son's heart has also seen the Father's, for they are One!

So, it is with the child and Jesus. Childlikeness is at the heart of the Son. He is full of grace and truth. The child, expressed in its simple childlikeness, reveals that which is at the heart of the Son. It is here that we, the Father, Son and Spirit, find our common childlikeness. Then to receive a child in Jesus' name is to receive Jesus. **To receive Jesus is to receive the Father. Therefore, to receive the child is to receive the Father Himself!**

Community of Children

So, what constitutes Jesus' Kingdom? It is a community of children, serving one another in truth and love. A Kingdom with Jesus, as its King, being the servant of all. The kings of the earth exercise sovereign power, but it will not be that way with you. Jesus, your King, came serving! The Kingdom of Heaven is a Kingdom of servants laboring alongside the Father and Son. So, the greatest among you will be the least. "The greatest in the Kingdom of heaven is the one who humbles himself and becomes like this child." So, what is the sign that passes between King and people? In the kingdoms of the earth, their subjects kneel in homage to their King. But Jesus takes His people, His children into His arms, into His embrace. Jesus' Kingdom looks like this!

To receive a child because the Father receives it, or for the sake of its humanity, is one thing, but to accept it because it is in the image of God is quite another. The former does little to destroy ambition - the latter strikes at the very heart of it. Service performed for honor and not for service alone places the doer outside the Kingdom's motivation. Receiving and serving others in our own childlikeness is embracing and loving the true nature of mankind itself. Therefore, by accepting the child in Jesus' name, we are showing we are open and welcoming to all of humanity as well.

Now moving to the highest point of the passage, "Whoever receives Me, receives not Me but Him who sent Me." To receive a child in the name of Jesus is to receive the Father Himself. The only way to receive Him is to know Him, knowing Him intimately as He is. To know Him is to realize He is in us. Let us welcome this truth, as taught by Jesus, as the revelation of God Himself. This relationship is the highest truth we can receive from the lesson before us.

Jesus is one with the Father, for He is like Him. The child is one with Jesus, for the child is like Jesus. Therefore, the child is one with the Father. It is here that oneness and union is experienced as Divine Life. **Divine Life is childlike! The secret of seeing this revelation lies in simply receiving the Divine in the child.**

Father's Devotion

Do you believe in the incarnation? And if you do, was Jesus ever less than God? I will answer for you. Never! God is man and infinitely more. Jesus became flesh but did not become a man. Jesus took on Himself the form of a man, for He was a man already. And Jesus was, is and forever will be divinely childlike. Jesus could never have been a child if He had ever ceased to be one. For in Him the temporary, the transient found nothing new. Childlikeness belongs to the divine nature.

Obedience is as divine as the will and service as divine as dominion. How? They are the same in nature; both are a doing of the truth. The love in them is the same. Fatherhood and Sonship are also one. The Father looks down lovingly while the Son looks up lovingly. Love is all and God is all in all. The Trinity has always been looking for ways to come down to us. Wanting to be the Divine Man for all humanity. And we are always saying, "That be far from you, Lord!" We should be careful in our unbelief, seemingly protecting the Divine dignity from that which He would be too great to think or do.

Let us take this truth to yet an even greater revelation, that the devotion of God to His creatures is perfect! The truth is that They loved and were devoted to us first. And our devotion is but a mirroring of Theirs in return! They do not think of Themselves, but us! They want nothing for Themselves, for the Trinity lacks nothing and only lives to be a blessing! Their devotion and self-giving love are at the center of the Divine Childlikeness, the Universe's Heart and Life! They are the source and ultimate

expression of human relationships at their best as a friend, brother, sister, father and mother, expressed fully in our love perfect God! They are grand and strong beyond anything our imagination could conceive of heroic thinking and actions! Yet, delicate and tender surpassing human intimacy as husband and wife! They are comfortable and welcoming, exceeding all we could envision as the height of love and acceptance coming from fathers and mothers!

The question for us is will we receive as gift their other-centered and self-giving love trusting not in ourselves but in Their sacrifice for us? Will we respond in kind with thankfulness, giving our lives to others for whom They sacrificed, and loving others as They love us? God is pure and single-minded about His children, that we would be just like Them. Our thinking, feeling, meaning, and the possessing of Their Life is the plan to flow through us, to others.

It is so clear that anyone can see it, everyone should see it, and everyone will see it. It must be so! They are unconditionally good to us, and nothing will stand in Their way.

Have you met this other-centered and self-giving God? Or, is the one you've heard about the fabrication of human ideas of sovereign power?

How terribly have the theologians misrepresented God! "Nearly all of them represent Him as a great king on a grand throne; God thinking how great He is; making it the business of His being and the end of His universe the keeping up of His glory, wielding the lightning bolts of Jupiter against those that take His name in vain." They would never agree that this is their vision of Him. But follow out what they say to its logical conclusion, and this is precisely what they believe!

Father of Little Children

Dear brothers and sisters, have you found our King? There He is, kissing little children and saying they are like God. Again, there He is at the table with His beloved disciple lying against His chest. With heaviness of heart that even John does not yet understand Him well. **A simple peasant who loves his children and his sheep is more genuine than these other false representations. For this peasant is a more accurate type of God than that monstrosity of a monarch they present.**

This God speaks to the vast and ever-changing universe. With patience, who is willing to take millions of years to form a soul that will understand Him and be blessed? One who is never in a hurry. Who welcomes our simplest thoughts of truth and beauty as a good return on seed sown in the fields of eternity. Who rejoices in the man who responds in a faltering moment to His cry of wisdom in the street. The God of building, painting, and music, the God of mountains and oceans, the Lord of All. Whose purposes go out from an unseen point of wisdom and return without an atom of loss. The God of history working in time for Christ's fulfillment in the earth. **This God is the Father of little children. He alone is abandoned and devoted to His creatures.** The most profound and purest love that a woman feels finds its source in Him. All our God-given longings and desires can no more exhaust the abundance of His treasures than our imaginations can touch their fulness. With Him, not a thought, nor joy or hope of one of His creatures will pass unseen. While one of them remains unsatisfied, He is not the Lord of all.

Home

Therefore, with angels, archangels, and with the spirits of the just made perfect. With little children of the kingdom, even, with the Lord Himself and for all that don't know Him yet, we praise, magnify and exalt His name, saying, "Our Father!" We don't drawback because we are unworthy. Nor even because we are hard-hearted and uncaring towards that which is good. **For it is His childlikeness that makes him our God and Father. The perfection of His relationship with us removes all our imperfections, all our defects, and all our evils. Our childhood is born of His Fatherhood! Perfect faith in us is one who comes to His Father with the complete lack of true feelings and desires, without inspiration or aspiration. The one with the full weight of unworthy thoughts, failures, neglects, and unthankfulness and says to God, "You are my refuge and Life because you are my Home."**

This type of faith will not lead to assumption or presumption. The man who can pray this prayer will know better than any other that God cannot be mocked. He is not one to repent, to change His mind because of tears, emotional outbursts, and arm twisting. Us trying to bend His goodwill for us. **For God to give us that which is in disharmony with His Life in us would be to damn us, to cast us into outer darkness.** God knows that out of that prison, the childlike and even-tempered God will not allow anyone to leave until they have "paid the last penny."

And if we should forget this, the God to whom we belong will not. He will not fail us either. **Life is not a series of chances with a little grace sprinkled in to keep up a truly failing faith. But one of grace and the purposes of God.** And we will not live long before life itself reminds us. Perhaps with an agony of the soul of what we have forgotten. We will pray for comfort, and the answer may come in dismay, terror, and the turning away of the Father's face. God will, for love's sake, turn His face away from that which is not of love's kind. And we will have to read written on the dark wall of our imprisoned conscience, the words, both awful and glorious, "Our God is a consuming fire!"

CLIFFNOTES VERSION WITH ORIGINAL MACDONALD QUOTES

ESSENCE OF A CHILD

He took a little child... whose very faults were those of a childish nature... For the childlike is the divine.

That the child should be childlike; that those qualities which wake in our hearts, at sight, the love peculiarly belonging to childhood, which is, indeed, but the perception of the childhood.

KINGDOM'S NATURE

He told them they could not enter into the kingdom save by becoming little children—by humbling themselves. For the idea of ruling was excluded where childlikeness was the one essential quality. It was to be no more who should rule, but who should serve; no more who should look down upon his fellows from the conquered heights of authority—even of sacred authority, but who should look up honoring humanity, and ministering unto it, so that humanity itself might at length be persuaded of its own honor as a temple of the living God.

SIMPLICITY OF CHILDLIKENESS

Nothing is required of man that is not first in God. It is because God is perfect that we are required to be perfect. And it is for the revelation of God to all the human souls, that they may be saved by knowing him, and so becoming like him, that this child is thus chosen and set before them in the gospel.

This means as representing me; and, therefore, as being like me. Our Lord could not commission any one to be received in his name who could not more or less represent him; for there would be untruth and unreason. Moreover, he had just been telling the disciples that they must become like this child; and now, when he tells them to receive such a little child in his name, it must surely imply something in common between them all.

CHILDLIKENESS OF FATHER AND SON

I do not say it is necessarily so; for I aim at no logical certainty. I aim at showing, rather than at proving, to my reader, by means of my sequences, the idea to which I am approaching.

God is represented in Jesus, for that God is like Jesus: Jesus is represented in the child, for that Jesus is like the child. Therefore, God is represented in the child, for that he is like the child. God is child-like. In the true vision of this fact lies the receiving of God in the child.

COMMUNITY OF CHILDREN

What is the kingdom of Christ? A rule of love, of truth—a rule of service. The king is the chief servant in it. "The kings of the earth have dominion: it shall not be so among you." "The Son of Man came to minister."

But to advance now to the highest point of this teaching of our Lord: "He that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me." To receive a child in the name of God is to receive God himself. How to receive him? As alone he can be received,—by knowing him as he is. To know him is to have him in us. And that we may know him, let us now receive this revelation of him, in the words of our Lord himself. Here is the argument of highest import founded upon the teaching of our master in the utterance before us. God is represented in Jesus, for that God is like Jesus: Jesus is represented in the child, for that Jesus is like the child. Therefore God is represented in the child, for that he is like the child. God is child-like. In the true vision of this fact lies the receiving of God in the child.

FATHER'S DEVOTION

Let us dare, then, to climb the height of divine truth to which this utterance of our Lord would lead us. Does it not lead us up hither: that the devotion of God to his creatures is perfect? that he does not think about himself but about them? that he wants nothing for himself, but finds his blessedness in the outgoing of blessedness. In this, then, is God like the child.

That he is simply and altogether our friend, our father—our more than friend, father, and mother—our infinite love-perfect God. Grand and strong beyond all that human imagination can conceive of poet-thinking and kingly action, he is delicate beyond all that human tenderness can conceive of husband or wife, homely beyond all that human heart can conceive of father or mother.

Ah! it is a terrible—shall it be a lonely glory this? We will draw near with our human response, our abandonment of self in the faith of Jesus. He gives himself to us—shall not we give ourselves to him? Shall we not give ourselves to each other whom he loves?

He has not two thoughts about us. With him all is simplicity of purpose and meaning and effort and end—namely, that we should be as he is, think the same thoughts, mean the same things, possess the same blessedness.

How terribly, then, have the theologians misrepresented God in the measures of the low and showy, not the lofty and simple humanities! Nearly all of them represent him as a great King on a grand throne, thinking how grand he is, and making it the business of his being and the end of his universe to keep up his glory, wielding the bolts of a Jupiter against them that take his name in vain.

FATHER OF LITTLE CHILDREN

Brothers, have you found our king? There he is, kissing little children and saying they are like God... The simplest peasant who loves his children and his sheep were—no, not a truer, for the other is false, but—a true type of our God beside that monstrosity of a monarch.

This God is the God of little children, and he alone can be perfectly, abandonedly simple and devoted.

HOME

For it is his childlikeness that makes him our God and Father. The perfection of his relation to us swallows up all our imperfections, all our defects, all our evils; for our childhood is born of his fatherhood. That man is perfect in faith who can come to God in the utter dearth of his feelings and his desires, without a glow or an aspiration, with the weight of low thoughts, failures, neglects, and wandering forgetfulness, and say to him, "Thou art my refuge, because thou art my home." That for God to give a man because he asked for it that which was not in harmony with his laws of truth and right, would be to damn him—to cast him into the outer darkness.

Life is no series of chances with a few providences sprinkled between to keep up a justly failing belief, but one providence of God.