

Series: Like A Child

“Childlike Praise”

Matthew 21:1-16

Last week, on Father’s Day, we began a new sermon series called “Like A Child.” As a father of four kids, I can confidently say that I love being a dad. As a father I, of course, love them and enjoy spending time with them. It is my responsibility to provide for them and protect them. It is my God-given calling to raise them to love and follow the Lord. God has called me to be the spiritual leader in my home. This is not done by high demands and loud tones, but by consistent example and patient instruction. As I parent, with each season it seems that there are new things that I want to teach my children and impart to them. As a parent, I know that more is caught than taught. This means that I must live my life in such a way that my actions are consistent with my words. I should live my life in such a way that my children will want to grow up to be like me in how I love the Lord and my wife and them. They should see my example of how I serve others and care for others that they, too, would want to be like me. The truth, though, is that this learning process isn’t one-sided. We often think about what we are teaching our children, but often fail to realize what they are teaching us. The fact is that God Himself teaches us some amazing things through children. Whether you have children of your own or not, in studying the ways of a child there is much to be learned, commended, and followed. In fact, there are some specific ways that God wants us to be like a child. We saw last week from **Matthew 18:3b** that being like a child is so important that Jesus said, “Unless you are converted and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.” We must be like a child to experience heaven.

It is important for us to recognize that being childlike doesn’t mean childish. “Childish” means to be juvenile and immature. Childish is throwing a temper tantrum when you don’t get your way or getting upset over minor things. We aren’t to be childish. In fact, the Bible warns us from acting in such a way. Jesus wasn’t encouraging us to be childish. **1 Corinthians 14:20** commands, “Brethren, do not be children in your thinking; yet in evil be infants, but in your thinking be mature.” Paul models this for us. In **1 Corinthians 13:11** he said, “When I was a child, I used to speak like a child, think like a child, reason like a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things.” Clearly, we aren’t to be childish, but we are certainly called to be childlike. Childlike means that one is simple, trusting, and like a child in virtue and perspective. God is encouraging us to have the same disposition and attitude towards Him as children do. We are to be childlike in four key ways. Last week we learned that we are to be childlike in humility. Today we learn a second trait, that we are to be childlike in praise.

Read Text

This passage of Scripture is very rich. It is filled with many wonderful truths and lessons that each are worthy of time and study. However, for this sermon’s purposes we are really focusing on only one aspect of the passage. I feel, in some ways, like we are taking a treasure chest, opening it up, and taking one gold coin to truly focus on. If the Lord allows, we may revisit some

of the other treasures of this passage later in the summer, but for today we are taking this one gold coin, this one key truth, and examining it. This key truth is that we should be like a child in praising the Lord.

Every single one of us should have a desire and a longing to praise the Lord. Praising God is something that Christians often talk about, but what does it really mean? The various words for “praise” are mentioned in the Bible almost three hundred times. They are used to describe the giving of thanks, honor, commendation, and at times it is used to describe how one expresses praises such as singing, bowing, dancing, shouting, etc. It is the idea that through praise we are exalting, honoring, and thanking another. Well the Bible says that there is only truly One who is worthy of our praise and that is the Lord. God is worthy to be praised in every situation, in every season, in every storm, and in everything. He is to be praised. David said in **Psalm 18:3a**, “I call upon the Lord, who is worthy to be praised.” In fact, the entire book of Psalms gives us song after song of praise to God. Just ponder the words of the final psalm, **Psalm 150:1-6 (show text)**. Praising God is so important that this final psalm mentions it 13x’s in these short 6 verses. Please be clear, though, that this was not just the encouragement of the Old Testament. Praise is also encouraged all throughout the New Testament. **Hebrews 13:15** declares, “Through Him then, let us **continually** offer up a sacrifice of **praise** to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name.” **Romans 15:11** commands, “Praise the Lord all you Gentiles, and let all the peoples praise Him.” Praising the Lord is a privilege and a blessing. **Psalm 147:1** says it well, “Praise the Lord! For it is good to sing praises to our God; For it is pleasant and praise is becoming.”

While there are many things that we could study in this passage of Scripture, this morning I want us to focus in on the praise that these children gave to Jesus. In doing so, we will make four observations that I believe will help us in praising the Lord.

I. Where the Children Learned to Praise (vs. 1-11)

This passage of Scripture records the details of one of the most significant moments in the life of Jesus. This moment is so significant that each of the gospel writers wrote about the day. It is known simply as the Triumphal Entry of Christ. This moment is literally one week before His crucifixion. Up to this point in Jesus’ public life and ministry, He had quietly slipped in and out of places. Whenever a crowd gathered around Him and tried to proclaim Him as king, He always managed to quietly slip away from the crowd. We often read of Him directly telling people not to reveal who He was. But, this time was much different. Knowing that His time was near and that He must be about His Father’s business, He commanded two disciples to go to a village and retrieve the donkey and the colt that God had ordained to be there. The disciples went quickly and found the donkeys gathered there just as Jesus described. The disciples brought the donkeys to Jesus and they took off their coats and laid them (cast them) on their backs. These coats became a temporary saddle for Jesus to ride into the city. Can you imagine a more humble way for the King of kings to enter the holy city? He didn’t come with a mighty army or with robe and crown or chariots. He came humbly on a donkey. As Jesus was making His way into the city, most of the crowd was going ahead of Him. They were casting their coats down in the road. This was their way of rolling out the red carpet. Others were cutting branches and spreading them throughout the road. This was a grand entrance to never be forgotten. Please note that all of this

was in fulfillment of the prophecies of the Old Testament. More than 500 hundred years earlier the prophet Zechariah had prophesied that this would all happen as a sign of the Messiah who would save the people. And here, as Jesus neared what would be His final week, it all unfolded according to God's plan. This humble but special moment is the entrance of the true King as He entered Jerusalem.

Please notice, though, what else took place by those who followed the Lord. The Bible says specifically says that those who followed the Lord were shouting, "Hosanna to the Son of David, Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest!" The word "hosanna" means "save now." Please understand what is happening. For hundreds of years the Jewish people had waited, longed, and looked for their Messiah – the One who would save them. As Jesus fulfilled His ministry, He gave sign after sign that He was the Messiah. As the scene unfolds and He publicly makes His way into Jerusalem it caught the attention of the people. Those who followed Him knew what this meant. They knew this was an outward display that He was the Savior so they cried aloud with their praises. It was as if they were shouting out "Savior, save us now!" This was no quiet, private moment. It was so powerful that even those who didn't know Him were taken aback and asked, "Who is this?"

This may be a simple point, but it is one that we must make this morning. Where did the children learn to praise the Lord? They learned from listening and watching the example of those who followed Jesus. It shouldn't surprise us by the end of the passage to find that when they praised the Lord, they used the same verbiage and expressions that the adults used as they followed Him. I said last week that children are very sensitive to the things of the Lord. I would add to that today to remind us all that they are also sensitive to the example that we are setting before them. When it comes to training children, much more is caught than taught. There are multiple reasons that many children are leaving the church today, but one of the greatest is the hypocrisy that they see in those who claim to love Jesus. Many of our kids are growing up with parents who profess to know and love Jesus, but in practice act as if they don't know Him. As adults, especially as parents, we must be reminded that it is our calling from God to invest in children and to train children in the ways of the Lord. God commanded in **Deuteronomy 6:5-9**, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates." In other words, we should use every means and every opportunity possible to teach our children to love God with all of their being. But this teaching isn't just done only by principle upon principle. It is also done by example. These children in the temple praised the Lord because they learned it from the adults. Adults, what are we teaching our children about the Lord? What are we teaching them about praising the Lord? **Psalm 145:3-4** instructs us well, "Great is the Lord, and highly to be praised, and His greatness is unsearchable. One generation shall praise Your works to another, and shall declare Your mighty acts."

II. Why the Children Praised the Lord (vs. 14-16)

It is important for us to recognize that the children weren't just saying mindless words. They weren't just repeating the words that they had heard. There were specific reasons that they praised the Lord.

It is also important to point out that there was something specific that had to be done before the Lord would receive this praise in the temple. We see in verses 12-13 that the Jewish leaders had completely forgotten the purpose of the temple. They had turned the temple, which was meant for worship, into a place where people could exchange money and buy animals to sacrifice. Jewish history would show that this was originally done with the good intentions of helping visitors from distant lands in their sacrifices to the Lord. However, the greedy, callous, hypocritical hearts of the temple leaders turned this into a lucrative business. The people selling things were charging ridiculous prices and no one could compete with them. They were taking advantage of people and using people for their own profit. And Jewish historians tell us that Annas, the high priest, was the leader of the whole enterprise. In other words, the people who were supposed to be praising and worshiping God were instead manipulating, deceiving, and taking advantage of other worshippers.

In order for true worship to be restored, Jesus had to rebuke the leaders and remove the obstacles. Here is Jesus, Who is gentle, meek, and humble, but in righteousness He overturned the tables of the money changers who were stealing and overturned the seats of those who were making worship an enterprise for profit and He drove all of them out of the temple. He announced loud and clear, "My house shall be called a house of prayer, but you are making it a robbers' den." There are many gold nuggets of truth there. Perhaps we will have the time to discover them further in the days ahead. But for now, I want us to simply see that hindrances to true worship had to be removed before true worship could be restored. Could that be true at Crosslink today? Could that be true in your home today? Could that be true in your own heart and life? Occasionally someone will say, "You know I was in that service and I was singing, but I just didn't feel anything." Many people assume that such a statement is a poor reflection of the worship leader, but more times than not that is an indication that there is something wrong in your own heart and life that needs to be examined and addressed. I have been there. There have been times when I have been in a worship service and I have found myself going through the emotions or thinking, "Why is my heart not really in it?" And each time as I examined myself, I learned it had little to do with the song selection or style or key or anything else. It was something in my own heart and life that needed to be addressed and dealt with. Once these things were dealt with, the environment was set for great praise. Notice why the children praised the Lord.

A. What They Beheld

After rebuking the money-changers, Jesus invited the blind and lame to come to Him. This should not surprise us at all. When Jesus said, "It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer'," He was quoting from Isaiah 56:7. The religious leaders knew the context of the passage. **Isaiah 56:7b-8** says, "For My house will be called a house of prayer **for all the peoples**. The Lord God, who gathers the dispersed of Israel, declares, 'Yet others I will gather to them, to those already gathered.'" In other words, what Jesus

did in Matthew 21 was further confirmation that He was the Savior. The scripture shows us a stark contrast in the crowds that filled the temple. It had been filled with self-righteous Pharisees who were taking advantage of people. Now, Jesus is welcoming in those who were typically viewed as the outcasts. These are the people who have been rejected from society because of their illnesses, disease, and physical challenges. This was likely the very first time they had ever made it into the temple.

This brings up a good point for the church. Those who are in need should feel welcome here and should know without question that we are going to genuinely care for them. If we love people and welcome them, God will use this church and our lives as a vehicle for Him to bring about healing in the lives of those who are hurting.

So, Jesus welcomed those who were despised and rejected. This would mean, also, that He welcomed the children into the temple. In that culture, children were seen as property and possession. Because they were physically weak, they were often considered to be burdens on society because they seemed to offer very little benefit to the life of the community. This explains why the disciples of Jesus were so adamant that Jesus didn't need to waste His time with kids. But, Jesus saw it all differently. He saw the importance and the value of every soul. Even those who were weak, small, or those who were diseased and neglected – He loved and valued them all. As a result, as the blind and lame came to Him Jesus healed them. The children were there watching it all.

B. What They Believed

Simply put, they recognized and believed in Who Jesus was. The religious, spiritually blinded people may not have honored Jesus as Lord, but the children knew who He was and they worshiped Him as such. What did they call Him? They didn't just say "Jesus". They cried, "Hosanna to the Son of David." Again, they are shouting, "Savior, save us now!" This is the meaning of "hosanna." Having seen His love, compassion, and mercy, having seen His wisdom and power to heal and cleanse, having seen His authority to silence the Pharisees, they were prompted by God to believe that Jesus was the Savior and they proclaimed it loudly for all to hear. Some have this notion that a child simply is too young to believe and make a decision so significant. But I remind you again that Jesus said, "Unless you become like a child you will not inherit the kingdom of heaven." These children were sensitive to the truth that they believed in Jesus and confessed Him aloud.

III. How the Children Praised the Lord (vs. 15)

While their motive in praising the Lord is important so, too, is the way that they praised the Lord. There is much that we can learn from their example.

A. They Praised the Lord Freely

The Bible says that they expressed their praise by "shouting". Now, there are many ways that we can praise the Lord. We can praise by singing, dancing, clapping, giving, serving, etc. Shouting is a common action that occurs at times of excitement and times of victory.

We often associate it with celebration. There are times when we get caught up in a moment and we shout. When was the last time that you shouted for joy over Who God is and how He was working in your life? These children freely praised the Lord. Do you see the contrast? The religious leaders were stifled in their religion. They were so caught up in all their traditions, rules, and rituals that they had completely forgotten and neglected Who they were called to worship. They were so blinded and callous that when God in flesh, Jesus Christ, walked into their midst they didn't even recognize Him. They didn't know that Jesus was God. They had seen all of His miracles. They had heard Him call the temple His very own house. They heard His claims but they failed to acknowledge Him as God. They failed to worship. But, the children didn't miss the opportunity to worship Him freely.

B. They Praised the Lord Courageously

I love the way these children praised Jesus, but I also love where they praised Jesus. The Bible specifically says they were "shouting in the temple." I believe that this took great courage. The adults were willing to shout their praises in the street, but the children (who were usually not allowed to be in the temple) were shouting in the temple. The religious leaders prided themselves on their rituals and so-called reverence, but they weren't truly praising the Lord. So, God raised up some who would praise Jesus. Isn't it fitting that the humble King of kings would be worshipped publicly by the most humble group present in the temple – the children? The children were shouting aloud for all to hear. Now, when I was a kid I'd get in trouble for something like this. ****ILL:** I remember getting in trouble for having a hat on in the building. I remember getting in trouble for running in the building. But, what I got in trouble for the most was for talking in church. When I was younger – it didn't matter if I was a child or a teenager – My pastor would call us by name if we were speaking out of turn during church.**

They were bold in their praise. They didn't care what others thought, said, or did. They were going to worship no matter what. And it obviously blessed Jesus because when the leaders indignantly rebuked the children, Jesus defended them. Yes, God is a God of order, yet, He doesn't mind it when we shout out, "Amen, Praise the Lord, Hallelujah, etc." In fact, He delights in it. He wants us to clap our hands, raise our hands, sing songs, give testimonies, and make a joyful noise. He desires that we worship Him without reservation. Too many of us are too concerned about what the person next to us might think. We might seem out of line, strange, etc. We might be mocked, ridiculed, and rejected. But friends, He is worthy of our total and complete praise. **1 Peter 2:9** says it well, "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, **so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him** who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light." My God help us to have the same freedom and courage in worship that we see in these children.

IV. What the Children's Praise Teaches Us

There are many things that their example teaches us. What is their example teaching you this morning? There are five key things that I believe they teach us.

A. Jesus is Savior and Worthy of Our Praise

He alone is Savior of the world and only He is worthy of all praise. **Acts 4:12**, “And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved.”

B. Jesus Welcomes Praise From All Who Trust in Him

The blind and lame can praise Him. The children can praise Him. The people of all the nations can praise Him. Both Jews and Gentiles can praise Him. **Romans 15:9b-11** explains, “ ‘Therefore I will give praise to You among the Gentiles, and I will sing to Your name.’ Again he says, ‘Rejoice, O Gentiles, with His people’. And again, ‘Praise the Lord all you Gentiles, and let all the peoples praise Him.’ ”

C. Our Individual Lives and Corporate Gatherings Should be Filled with Praise

D. Our Praise Should Not be Insincere, Lifeless, or Dull

The children’s praise was authentic and full of life and expression. They weren’t afraid of what others thought. Why should they be afraid? Their praise wasn’t for others, but for the Lord. **Psalm 66:1-2**, “Shout joyfully to God, all the earth; Sing the glory of His name; Make His praise glorious.”

E. Our Praise Should Point Others to Jesus

Why did the angry leaders take their issue to Jesus? Because the praise was all about Him. It was obvious that all of the praise was for Jesus.