**VOLUME 3; CHAPTER 05 - THE PREACHING OF G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

**SUFFER THE CHILDREN by G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

*Suffer the little children to come unto Me; forbid them not: for of such is the Kingdom of God.*

*Mark 10:14*

THAT IS THE MAGNA CHARTA OF THE CHILDREN. Its words are of the simplest which ever fell from the lips of our beloved Lord. We are never able to recite them, I think I may venture to say, without feeling some thrill of the tenderness of His great heart in our own. Under whatever circumstances we hear them, they always produce the same result, touching us back from hardness to tenderness. Whenever we hear them recited, or recite them ourselves, there returns a sense of that childhood from which, alas, some of us seem to have travelled far along the dusty highways of life.

And yet, my brethren, if these words of Jesus are characterized by their simplicity, it is not the simplicity of superficiality. It is rather the simplicity of a vast and astonishing sublimity, and I sometimes wonder when I ponder these words - and others like them with which we are all familiar, the simplest things Jesus said - I wonder whether the very simplest of them all are not the sublimest.

To have heard Jesus say this would have been to be saved from misapprehension of the meaning of what He said. A statement like that seems to suggest that we have misapprehended His meaning, and I do think that we have very largely misunderstood that meaning, Not that we have misinterpreted Him, but that our understanding of His meaning has been circumscribed because we did not hear Him utter these words. There are things beyond the fine art of the printer. You cannot print a tone of the voice. You cannot reveal on the cold page, however exquisitely your work may be done, the temper of the speaker. Mark endeavors to save us from that very misapprehension by drawing our attention to the fact of the temper of Jesus at the moment when He uttered these words. "He was moved with indignation." The statement in the connection of these words is almost startling, and we are compelled to pause and consider its meaning. "Suffer the little children to come unto me." All heaven's sweetness is in the great command. It seems, if you will allow me the far-flung and spacious figure of the Bible, as though the very Mother-heart of God were singing itself out in these words. Yes, the voice thrilled in tenderness, but it vibrated in thunder; and when Jesus uttered these words there came together, into the apprehension of the men who heard Him the two things that even to this day it is so difficult to harmonize, and to understand their relation to each other: the goodness and the severity of God. No tenderer thing ever fell from His lips, but "He was moved with indignation." Out of His hot anger came the most gentle and beautiful thing that He ever said about child life.

These things being so, we need to appreciate and study these words the more carefully. Let me, however, say at once that I do not think any exposition can exhaust the meaning of this Magna Charta of the child. What I do hope to accomplish in our brief meditation is to lead you into the atmosphere created by the strong and tender words.

Notice carefully first of all that Jesus made an appeal and used an argument, and that the two constitute His great charge to His people concerning the children. There is an appeal, "Suffer the little children to come unto Me, and hinder them not," There is an argument, "for of such is the Kingdom of God." If we will take the appeal and the argument together and learn their interrelationship, we come into the atmosphere created by His words, and understand what His charge to His people forevermore is concerning the children.

I take these two first values of the text, the appeal and the argument, but in the other order, asking you to think for a few minutes, first, of the argument of Jesus, "of such is the Kingdom of God," and then, in the light of that argument, to listen to His appeal, "Suffer the little children to come unto Me; and hinder them not."

First, then, as to the argument, I put it first because if we are to understand these words, and become obedient to them, we must catch the profound significance of the argument that the Master used, and His reason for using it on this particular occasion. You will agree with me when I say that an argument is an appeal to conviction. It may be an appeal intended to produce a new conviction, but it is always an appeal to some conviction already held. If I say to a person on any conceivable subject, I want you to do this, because - what follows the "because" will reveal the opinion I hold of the person to whom I make my appeal. I should never appeal to a miser to give on the ground of his generosity! Whatever I make my appeal to reveals my opinion of the person to whom I make that appeal. If we can get back for a moment into the perfect human naturalness of the scene I think you will follow me. Fathers were bringing their children to Jesus. Mothers also, I have no doubt - but all the Greek pronouns go to prove that they were men who brought their children to Jesus, and the Hebrew law was that fathers were responsible for the religious training of the children. Of course the mothers were there. That goes without saying. These people were bringing their children to Jesus, desiring that He should touch them, and the disciples rebuked them, rebuked those who brought them, and so through them rebuked the children. They felt that Jesus had more important business on hand than that of holding receptions for children. They did not believe for a single moment that He could be troubled with these children. His mind was full of great matters. They knew full well that the deepest passion of His heart was a passion for the coming of the Kingdom of God. They knew perfectly well that those eyes that they loved to look upon were eyes that saw through to the infinite and far distances, eyes familiar with all the beauty of the eternal order; and they knew that He desired, for He had taught them so to pray, that there should be established in the midst of the wreckage and ruin of human conditions all the glory and beauty of the heavenly order. "Our Father who art in the heavens, Thy name be hallowed, Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, as in heaven so on earth." They knew, therefore, full well that He was there to teach men the meaning of the Kingdom of God, and to do such work as should bring the heavenly conditions into the earthly life. Therefore they were convinced that He had no time for children. It was a very pardonable thing that the fathers and mothers should desire that the prophet should touch the children, but it could not be. They knew His passion for the Kingdom of God, and so far as they had light they also were men into whom there had entered the self-same passion. They had caught His enthusiasm because they had seen His vision of the Kingdom of God. This misconception explains the anger of Jesus. He was moved with indignation because, notwithstanding the fact that they had caught His enthusiasm, having seen His vision, and consequently were men who knew something of the coming of the Kingdom of God, they had so little appreciated the real meaning of that Kingdom. Then He said, "Suffer the little children to come unto Me; and hinder them not: for of such is the Kingdom of God." The disciples hindered the children because they thought that the Kingdom of God was a great and weighty matter, and that because He was devoted to it He had no time for children. This misconception He rebuked and corrected by declaring that children are in the Kingdom, and of the Kingdom; and going still further, He declared that they could not enter into that Kingdom, though they had seen its gleaming glory from afar, until they became like the children, for "of such is the Kingdom."

But now mark the graciousness of Christ's assumption. He assumed the devotion of these men to the Kingdom of God. He used an argument that would appeal in their case. He knew perfectly well if they could but come to understand the nature of the Kingdom of God they would never hinder the child coming. They were men in whom the passion and fire for that Kingdom was already burning, and He made His appeal on that ground, "of such is the Kingdom of God."

Thus, when I consider this argument, and note its assumption, I touch the fundamental matter in all our work for the children. I think, brethren, there are many appeals I could make to men and women in order to arouse their interest in, and attempt to compel their work for, children. I think I could appeal to men and women on the basis of the fact that the child nature is full of interest. I think I could make an appeal to men on the basis of the harmlessness of a little child. I think I could make an appeal on the basis of the helplessness of a little child. But Christ made no such appeal, and yet all these were included in His. His appeal is always "of such is the Kingdom of God." Until we have seen that Kingdom at least in outline, and until the vision has captured us, and until a passion for the establishment of it is the master passion of our life, we have no right to try to help the children. I will revise that statement if you will let me. I will not say if it so please you that we have no right, but rather that we have no power to help the children. We can never help our own children, the children in our own home, the children in our schools, the children of the nation, until we have caught Christ's vision of God's Kingdom, and until that has become the master passion of our lives. The Church, spending its strength on disputes concerning doctrines, wasting its time in quarrelling about ecclesiastical formulae, becoming worldly and self-centred, always neglects the child. On the other hand, the church, seeking the Kingdom, restless in the midst of everything that is contrary to the will of God; passionately desiring the building of His city, and the bringing in of His rule - that church always seeks the child. A vision of and desire for the Kingdom of God is the master passion in all work for the children.

But while thus looking at the argument as to its assumption note its plain declaration, and consequently its simple revelation. Jesus said "of such." An old hymn is in my mind all the time this morning:

I think when I read that sweet story of old,

When Jesus was here among men,

How He called little children as lambs to His fold,

I should like to have been with Him then.

I wish that His hands had been placed on my head,

That His arms had been thrown around me;

And that I might have seen His kind look when He said,

"Let the little ones come unto Me."

Now let us try with all simplicity to see the actual picture. Those little children of Judea and Galilee, quite foreign to our children, were yet of the same blood, and the same nature, and the same spiritual essence. Let us, then, look them in their humanness. See them all about the Christ, some of them timid, clinging and shrinking; and others of them eagerly going forward. Get the human picture, do not buy it, but paint it and look at it. Now, said Christ, "of such," of these ordinary children, of these children from the cottage homes, and all the district round, "of such." For I pray you, remember that the children at whom Christ pointed were not even Sunday-school children. They were not children who had been converted in a Special Mission. I am not criticizing the Special Mission for the child, but pre-eminently desiring that we should understand that they were ordinary children. Half an hour after, if I know anything about children, they were playing and quarrelling! "Of such" of these ordinary, everyday children. Oh, but you say, He was speaking of the child in the ideal. Ideal nonsense! He was talking about the bairns these disciples wanted to keep back. "Of such is the Kingdom of God."

I make two deductions from this word of Christ. The child is the microcosm of the Kingdom. If we really will pay attention to a little child we have before us, focused, condensed, the Kingdom of God. And therefore, as a necessary sequence, the Kingdom of God is the microcosm of the child. If we take in the larger outlooks, the more spacious conceptions of the Kingdom, then in every little child, the little child you saw this morning, who does not go to Sunday school at all, the child in the gutter, is the picture of the Kingdom of God.

I say, first of all, that the child is the microcosm of the Kingdom. Notice what Christ said to these men. "Of such is the Kingdom," not, Of such will be the Kingdom, but, "Of such is the Kingdom." The child as I find it today, is not the microcosm of the Kingdom of God in the ultimate; but it is the microcosm of the Kingdom of God as it is: "Of such is the Kingdom." I think, brethren, that we too inclusively interpret the Kingdom in the terms of consummation. We say, the Kingdom of God, and we attempt at once to take in its vast and ultimate meanings and reaches. There are times when we ought to do it, for the ultimate is the inspiration of the present. But that is not what Jesus said. He who knew more about these children than did their fathers and mothers, declared that the Kingdom of God at the present time is as these children are. In a child I find potentiality, imperfection, and therefore, providing always that I have that passion for the Kingdom which is the fundamental necessity, an appeal. All the glory of the oak forest lies in the single acorn which I can hold in my hand. All the glory, or the shame of England, lies in the little child that sits by your side, or that you pass in the street. All the shame of humanity lay in the first child of the race, Adam. All the glory of humanity lay in the young child, in the manger, at Bethlehem. That is potentiality. But in a child there is also imperfection. An acorn is not an oak forest. It is not even an oak. It is imperfect; it is undeveloped potentiality. Finally, therefore, a little child is a perpetual appeal for the treatment that will realize all the things that lie in its personality. The little child is forever saying, So deal with me as to realize all that is in me. That appeal is the true philosophy of education. That perpetual cry of the child should condition all our attitudes toward it, and our relationships with it.

The child is the microcosm of the Kingdom. That Kingdom of God today is a great potentiality. The powers of that Kingdom are everywhere. There is no power being used basely, devilishly, but that if it can be redeemed, and put into true operation, is a power making for the ultimate Kingdom of God. But the Kingdom of God to-day is imperfect, not realized. The little child reveals to us what that Kingdom is in its present conditions. Just as having seen in the face of little child great possibilities, and great imperfections, we hear the appeal of its life for treatment that will correct the imperfections and realize the possibilities, so as we look upon the world today we see the possibility, and know the imperfection, and these become the prayer of the world in its need, calling us to active service. Children's Day, did you tell me this was? So it is, thank God. But children's day is London's day, and England's day, and the World's day, and God's day. "Of such is the Kingdom."

Or take the larger outlook, and see how the Kingdom is macrocosm of the child. We can only think of the Kingdom now in the narrow limit of our own world. Then it means first the right of God by creation, and by redemption. It means consequently that the whole world is crying out after that God Whose it is by creation and by redemption. And, finally, it means the whole world finds eternal life, that is permanence, only in right relationship to God. All these things that constitute your philosophy of the of God in its widest application are true of every little child. The right of God in a child is infinitely more than the right of a parent, for every child is His creation, and every child upon which we look, even if our eyes may not see it, has on its face the mark of redemption. Every child is crying out after God, however we may understand or misinterpret its cry. And hear the solemn word, not now to be dealt with at length, but to be stated of necessity, the child can find eternal life only as it has right relationship with God.

And now I turn briefly to the appeal, "Suffer the little children: and forbid them not." It has three applications. There is the first and simplest. It touches the child, it shows me my duty concerning the child. There is the second and the deepest. It shows me what I must be if I would obey the instruction concerning the child. Finally, there is the third and the widest, the application of this to the world at large, and to the Church's responsibility therein.

As to the first of these, I suppose I need hardly stay to deal with it. It is the old, old story, yet hear His words once more. Said He, "Suffer the little children to come unto Me." That is the positive application. Not, Bring the children to Me, but Suffer them to come. In order that it may be perfectly clear, He interprets His positive by a negative, "and hinder them not." "Suffer the little children to come." See, they are coming! Suffer them to come, and hinder them not! The negative interprets the positive. If we take this positive, and hear the negative interpretation of it, we find that Jesus meant to say that the child will come to Him if we do not hinder it. The Church's responsibility is not that of bringing children to Christ, but of getting things out of the way that hinder their coming. In that matchless picture in the last chapter of John's gospel, of Peter being restored to position and service, when Jesus gave him his work, He said first, "Feed My Lambs"; He then said, "Shepherd My sheep," and, finally, "Feed My sheep." He did not say, Shepherd My Iambs, but feed them. The sheep that has wandered away must be shepherded, but the lamb is here, feed it. I make you this declaration this morning. There is not a child born into the world but that will go straight to Christ unless someone hinders it. I do not know how to go on preaching. I never hear that word of Jesus without having my heart shaken like a tempest. Do not forget it. I would not apportion blame. Original sin, tendency to evil, is in every child; but a Saviour is waiting to receive the child, and if only we will get out of the way, and get everything else out of the way in the child's first home environment, and everywhere else, that child will get straight to Christ. Suffer them, forbid them not! Our business about the children is to see to it that we get out of the way the things that hinder. Hinder them not. Jesus was hot with indignation that men who had seen some vision of the Kingdom should hinder the children. They are trying to come today, and we are fooling the time away quarrelling about their education. God have mercy upon us! Hinder them not. I would like to have it emblazoned on every hall in which children meet. Hinder them not. That is our responsibility.

And then He turns upon our own souls this great word, Except you become like the little child, you cannot enter into the Kingdom. Unless you are a submitted soul you are bound to hinder the children. And you must be of the child nature also, understanding the child. My brethren, I am content to leave the application of all that. I think it is better made to this heart of mine when I am alone, and better made to yours when you are alone.

Let me take one minute with the last, and final, and widest thought. Make the application of this to the world. "Of such is the Kingdom." He puts the child at the centre, and He puts the Kingdom at the circumference, and if we will keep the child at the centre the Kingdom is assured; and if we will keep the Kingdom at the circumference the child is safe. "Of such is the Kingdom," He put the child at the centre. When shall we learn to do it? May God lead us there. During these weeks of absence from the country things have happened of which as yet I know nothing in detail.

I do not know about the Education Bill, I do not know about the Licensing Bill; I have not yet read the text of either.

But put the child in the midst, and then you will desire to lock Mr. McKenna and the Bishop of St. Asaph up in one room until they have settled this business once and for ever. I am ashamed; in the name of God, I am ashamed! Let us see to it that the child is made the test.

Licensing Bill! Put the child in the midst. That is the test. Vested interest? What do you mean by a vested interest? If for long, long years we have given a right to men for money's sake to harm a child, then in God's name it is time we had done with the business. No vested interest which harms a child can be permitted to remain. Does it harm a child? Oh, fools and blind, if you ask a question like that! Give some of us half a day in the slum, or in the West End! In the name of God, who is there who has not been touched somewhere by the devilry of this traffic in his own heart and life? Put the child in the midst, put the child in the midst, and fling your circumference of the Kingdom of God round it, and then you will have solved your problems.

I am glad to come back on Anniversary Day. It is a new beginning, and consecration, and I make it in the presence of the little child. We read that second chapter in Matthew for one purpose. Take a blue or red pencil, one that you will never fail to see, and put a line under these words, "the young Child." All the way through the great imperial King, the Lord Christ, Son of God, and Son of Man, is designated in that chapter, "the young Child." Thus God, to lead us and help us, makes the eternal King and Priest the eternal Child; and in proportion as we know Him, and are in fellowship with Him, we shall gather every individual child into our heart and our love; and we shall make a child the test of our Church life, and of our political attitudes; and all the things of life and service will be governed by the presence of the child, and "of such is the Kingdom."