**TITLE: The Kingdom of Heaven**

**TEXT: Ps. 123:1; 1 Co. 13:11-12; Rev. 21:2-5;**

**Mt. 19:13-15; Mt. 18:1-4; Mt. 6:9-13**

**INTRODUCTION:** Last week we talked about how we have been called by God to stand firm in the faith and press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called us Heavenward in Christ Jesus.

 This morning I want to talk more about that prize that we are called to press on toward.

 The prize of eternity, eternal life in the Kingdom of Heaven.

Just what is the Kingdom of Heaven?

First and foremost, it is the place where God dwells, where God resides, the place where we will one day actually enter into His literal presence.

**Psalms 123:1 (NIV)** **I lift up my eyes to you, to you whose throne is in heaven.**

Heaven is the dwelling place of God..

It is the place that the faithful will go and meet their creator and God face to face.

**1 Corinthians 13:11 - 12 (NIV)** **12Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.**

 This is a promise of heaven!

 Now, in this life, we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror…

 The mirrors of Paul’s day were usually just pieces of polished metal such as brass or silver.

 You could look into them and see a reflection of yourself, but the reflection would be kind of vague.

It would lack detail. It would be a relatively poor reflection.

 The promise of Heaven here is that when we get there we will see, not as in a mirror, but as if we were seeing face to face. We will see all things, as they in fact, really are, not just how they may appear to be.

Paul says**:** Now, in this life**, I know in part;** then, when I enter Heaven, **I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.**

 This is the promise of literally having the mind of Christ. Of seeing and understanding things as God sees and understands them.

All the mysteries of the universe will be revealed to us…

 All of our “whys” will be answered…

We will know fully even as we are fully known!

We will know and understand God just as He knows and understands us..

 I love John’s description of Heaven that He was given in his revelation while on the Island of Patmos…

**Revelation 21:2 - 5 (NIV) 1Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea.****2I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. 3And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. 4He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”**

**5He who was seated on the throne said, “I am making everything new!” Then he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.”**

This is the goal, the prize that we as a Christian, are called to press on toward-- The prize of Heaven.

 A place where we will literally dwell with God and He with us! **Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.**

 Heaven is a place where the old order of things will pass away, and everything will become new.

 What is the old order of things that will pass away?

 One thing that will pass away is the frailties of these bodies of ours…

**4He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”**

In heaven death will be done away with! In Heaven mourning, crying and pain will be no more!

Every day will be a good day! Every day you will wake up feeling good! You will never have a bad hair day in Heaven! And for those of us who have no hair I believe that our hair will be restored to perfection!

Just think about it? You will never again experience crying, sorrow, sickness, pain or death but only an eternity of feeling great basking in the very presence of God…

 This is the promise that awaits us… This is what we have been called to press on toward… This is the prize we have been invited to win….

So just how do we achieve it?

The pat answer is that well we have to receive Jesus Christ as the Lord and Savior of our life. And that is 100% true. But just what does that mean? What exactly will that entail.

**Matthew 19:13 15 (NIV)**

**13Then little children were brought to Jesus for him to place his hands on them and pray for them. But the disciples rebuked those who brought them.**

**14Jesus said, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.”****15When he had placed his hands on them, he went on from there.**

Jesus said: **“Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.**

 One day the disciples were having a discussion amongst themselves about who would be greatest in the kingdom of Heaven. I can just picture them arguing over which of them would be greater in Gods kingdom then the others….

 Each of them probably had their reasons why they thought they would be greater, would hold a higher place of honor and respect in the Kingdom of Heaven then the others…

 Finally, they go to Jesus to have him settle the issue…

  **Matthew 18:1 - 4 (NIV)**  **1At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?”**

 **2He called a little child and had him stand among them.****3And he said: “I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.****4Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.**

What a blow this must have been to the disciple’s egos!

**“I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.**

 What is so special about little children that Jesus said that we must become like one of them if we are ever to expect to even enter the Kingdom of Heaven?

 I have heard it taught that Jesus was referring to their innocence! That we must become as innocent as a little child or we can never enter the Kingdom of Heaven..

 But that cannot be the case!

Why? Because little children are not innocent!

We often say that a little child is innocent, but we say that only in a relative sense. In comparison to us they may be or seem innocent but that does not make them innocent.

 I have raised three sons! I have 7 grandchildren and I think 9 great grandchildren. I have nieces and nephews. I have known many, many other children in my lifetime. All more innocent than I. But none are innocent…

In fact, most every child that I have ever known has been very selfish, very self centered.

Think about it? They are hungry and they want to eat and they want to eat NOW! It doesn’t make any difference if you have had a bad day and gotten behind with their supper. A baby doesn’t take their mother’s feelings into consideration when they are hungry or they need their diaper changed.

 If one little child is playing with a certain toy and another little child comes into the room and would like to play with that same toy, most often the child that has it doesn’t put the wants of the other child above their own wants and give them their toy to play with.

 If the other child tries to take it from them what is it they most often say if they have mastered elementary speech? MINE!

 Don’t expect two two year olds playing together, if one smacks the other, that the one smacked will have the discipline or theology to turn the other cheek.

 I love my kids and my grandkids and my nieces and nephews and when they were small children each of them was a lot more innocent than I am but none of them were truly innocent.

Innocence is a relative term when it comes to children..

 Jesus couldn’t have meant that we become as innocent as little children if we are to ever enter the Kingdom of God…

 So, if Jesus wasn’t referring to innocence, then what was he referring to?

 What is it about a little child that is so special that we need to model that quality in our life if we are to ever enter the Kingdom of Heaven?

It is not innocence, because none of us are, or in this life, will ever be truly innocent. So what is the quality of a little child that we are to model?

I Believe it is DEPENDENCE! DEPENDENCE!

 When a little child is hungry their cry says mom, dad I am hungry and I can’t feed myself, feed me..

 When a little child wets or dirties their diaper their cry says: mom, dad, I am uncomfortable and I need changed and I can’t change myself, change me…

 Their cry may say: mom, dad I need clothed and I can’t cloth myself, cloth me…

 Mom, dad, I want to get from here to there and I can’t get there myself, carry me…

 Mom, dad, I am sick and I can’t make myself feel better, help me…

 The one thing that separates you from your little children is dependence…

 A newborn is dependant on their mom and dad for almost everything!

 All little children are dependant upon their parents…

 And that is the point that Jesus is trying to make to us!

**“I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. 4Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.**

There is no greater act of humility than to be dependent on someone else and recognizing that fact..

I believe What Jesus was saying was that in order for us to ever enter the Kingdom of Heaven that we must become as dependent upon God as our children were dependent upon us.

**4Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.**

Greek for humble***: tap-i-nos'***

**to *depress*; figuratively to *humiliate* (in condition or heart, *humiliated* (in circumstances or disposition):—base, cast down, humble, of low degree (estate), lowly.**

It means to humble oneself to the point of dependency on another…

We need to become as dependent upon God as a little child is dependent upon their parents…

 Isn’t this in fact what the Lord’s Prayer is all about?

 In instructing us how to pray Jesus says ….

**Matthew 6:9 - 13 (NIV)**

**9“This, then, is how you should pray:**

**“‘Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,**

**10your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.**

**11Give us today our daily bread.**

**12Forgive us our debts,  as we also have forgiven our debtors.**

**13And lead us not into temptation,  but deliver us from the evil one.****£****’**

My Heavenly Father I am hungry and I need you to feed me! Provide my spiritual as well as my physical bread.

 Heavenly Father I need you to forgive me as I cannot forgive myself.

 Heavenly Father I need you to keep me from the temptation to sin as I cannot do it myself.

 Heavenly Father I need healing and I can’t heal myself.

 Heavenly Father I need comfort because I can’t comfort myself.

 Heavenly Father I need courage because in myself I am full of fear.

Heavenly Father I need direction because I cannot direct myself.

We talk a lot about childhood diseases…Mumps, measles, chickenpox, But there is a disease that is primarily an adult disease…And that is PRIDE!

Pride says…God I can do it better myself... Pride is the exact opposite of humility and dependance.

 Muhammad Ali was in his prime, and as he was about to take off on an airplane flight, the stewardess reminded him to fasten his seat belt. He came back brashly, "Superman don't need no seat belt." The stewardess quickly came back, "Superman don't need no airplane, either." Ali fastened his seat-belt.

 A man by the name of Dick Jones lived as if everything in the whole community depended upon him. One morning he woke up early with a high fever. His wife called next door to a doctor friend.

 When he diagnosed that Jones had viral pneumonia, he suggested that Dick stay in bed for several days but Dick complained, "No! I've got a breakfast meeting at the school, I'm president of the PTA board, and then I've got crucial business at the office, a luncheon date, and three very important dates this afternoon, and then the Building Committee at church this evening. There's no way I can be sick today doctor."

 "I'm sorry," says his doctor friend, "but Dick, I don't know anyone who's indispensable, and I suggest you stay in bed." But at that very moment, as the story goes, Dick's high fever sent him into a trance. And there in that trance, he saw himself looking in on heaven. The angels were gathering around God and His holy throne. But everything seemed to be in disarray; some papers were being passed around and finally after some discussion, the angels passed a significant-looking paper to God, He read it and God was obviously upset. God got up off His throne and said "Oh, no! Oh, no! What will I do today? What will I do?" The angels in chorus said, "What is it, God? What is it?" And God replied, "What will I do today? Dick Jones is sick!"

Just think---God might have to take a day off if you do…

**Jesus said: “I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. 4Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.**

 Is it your desire to be great in the kingdom of heaven?

 Is it your desire to at least enter the Kingdom of Heaven?

 Then we must humble ourselves as a little Child.

 We must become as dependent upon God as a newborn baby is dependent upon its parents.

 This kind of humility will require a crucifixion.

 Particularly the crucifixion of pride! Our pride! Our, I can do it better myself, attitude!

 There was a story (supposedly true) about Chief Justice Charles Evans Hughes. When he moved to Washington, D.C., to take up his duties as chief justice of the Supreme Court, he transferred his membership letter to a Baptist church in the area. His father had been a Baptist minister and he also made a profession of faith in Christ.

 It was the custom for all new members to come to the front of the sanctuary at the close of the worship service. The first to be called that morning was Ah Sing, a Chinese laundryman who had moved to the capital from the West coast.

 He took his place at the far side of the church. As the dozen or so other people were called forward they stood at the opposite side of the church, leaving Ah Sing standing alone. But when Chief Justice Hughes was called, he took his place beside the laundryman. When the minister had welcomed the group into the church fellowship he turned to the congregation and said, "I do not want this congregation to miss this remarkable illustration of the fact that at the cross of Jesus Christ the ground is level."

 The man sharing this story commented: "Mr. Hughes behaved like a true Christian.

 He took his place beside the laundryman, and by his act of humility he prevented embarrassment to this humble Chinese man; he also showed the love of Christ by his humility".

 This is something that you would expect a little child to do, not necessarily a chief justice of the highest count in the land.

 **I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. 4Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.**

How about you this morning?

 Have you truly humbled your life, have you truly humbled your heart before God?

 Are you as dependent upon Him as a little child is dependent upon their mother & father?

Jesus said: **I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.**

 Have you become childlike in your faith in Christ?

 Have you humbled yourself to the point of total dependence upon God or are you still trying to do it yourself…..

 Are you one who thinks or acts like if you had to take a day off that it would through Heaven and God into a state of disarray?

 Or is your dependence on God so great that you realize that without his aid you can do nothing of real value?

It is our childlike dependence on God that will gain us entrance into the Kingdom of Heaven…

 Have you humbled yourself in childlike dependence on God this morning?