



# Do not look down on one of these little ones

Yesterday I attended a fund-raising coffee morning for a church overseas. One of the well-heeled ladies present had with her two young grandsons, who, despite all the lovely edibles, readily agreed that they found grown-up parties boring. They clearly longed to opt out. This morning, at a church breakfast convened to pray for all the children at risk in our world, we considered another small boy who had been drawn into an adult circle. 'Jesus...called a little child and had him stand among them.' (Matthew 18:1-11)

I have often wondered about that little boy. Did he, too, long to be somewhere else? Was he shy or smiley, was he a street child, or perhaps the beloved son or grandson of someone there? We can surmise that Jesus made him feel special, perhaps a little more subdued than usual, but sure of Jesus' care for him. In fact, we are simply told that he was little, that he responded to Jesus' call, and he did what was asked of him. If he was under ten years old, which seems likely, he would not have understood the parable that Jesus was drawing out from his humility, but all the same he was used to teach those present (and those to come) a very important lesson.

The famous pioneer missionary to inland China, Hudson Taylor, once wrote, 'God chose me because I was weak enough. God does not do his greatest work by large committees. He trains someone to be quiet enough, and little enough, and then he uses him'. Jesus' awful warning was that if we fail to emulate child-like humility, consider ourselves too important to do what he says, and fail to put total trust in him whether or not we understand his purposes, then we cannot enter his kingdom.

He gave a dire warning, too, to those who entice children to do

wrong - better to drown than to do that. We might think of such people as nasty unsavoury characters, but might we not, however unwittingly, be wielding a harmful influence ourselves? We in the developed world prefer to blame poverty on unemployment here and overpopulation elsewhere, but the technically advanced and affluent lifestyle of many westerners has a global impact. Broken homes on the one hand and hunger and disease on the other hit the children hardest. If they survive at all, they are likely to suffer long-term effects, some enticed into bad ways as a direct result of emotional or material poverty. They have angels in heaven but need helpers on earth.

So what can we do? Unlike the little boy standing before Jesus, we get the message, but the child teaches us to hear his call and obey whatever he asks of us. Only then can we be used to fulfil his great purposes of justice and mercy for our damaged world, both through renewed humility of lifestyle and ready obedience in service.

Paul, reputedly of small physical stature himself, reflected: 'God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things - and the things that are not - to nullify the things that are, so that no-one may boast before him'. (1 Corinthians 1:27-29)

Whoever welcomes any such small people in the name of our Lord Jesus has, he said, the great privilege of welcoming him. Surely none of us wants to opt out of that.

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