

Sermon Title: I Am a Child of God – July 26, 2013

Scripture Reading: Matthew 18:1-4

Good evening church, welcome to Friday Fire. My name is Sky Becker and I'm serving as a Community pastor at the Itaewon campus. I'm also a part of a ministry called Jerusalem Ministry, where we serve the orphans in Seoul through various camps and volunteers we train. We just had our 6th annual soccer camp this week from Monday through Wednesday, who's seen pictures of our camp on Facebook? I've been bombarded with notifications this week because I'm one of the admins of our Jerusalem Ministry page. I think 99 is the cap number of notifications? I've been seeing the red block with the number 99 on it everyday... it kinda feels good. ☺

I want to thank those who's been praying for our camp because this year's camp was the craziest one yet, specifically because of the rain... man if you were in Seoul this past week, who knows that it was pouring like there was a hole in the Sky? But we got that much more testimonies from this camp, because God was all the more evident through the "hardships." So before I begin my message, I want to share some of the testimonies from the camp. And take a note of how God loves his children and cares for them, because that's what my message is about today. You guys ready to hear?

[picture #1]

So to tell you a little bit about our soccer camp, we get 3rd to 6th grade boys who are living in orphanages in Seoul, and we play soccer (of course), and games, we give each child a full set of soccer uniform (like legit ones), feed them good food, and most importantly, we love on them and encourage them like crazy through our volunteers. Because they rarely get that. The orphanages these boys are from, normally one dorm mom or dad takes care of 10-12 children, so they don't really get much attention from an adult figure unless they are in trouble. We had 46 boys and ___ volunteers this year, so it allowed almost 1:1 attention and relationship between the boys and the volunteers. Lots of hugging, loving, speaking life, and we teach them team work, to be thankful, and the transformation we see on these kids in just 3 days is amazing.

One of our volunteers, Danbi actually posted a series of pictures from day 1 to day 3 with one of the boys, and that's an epitome of our ministry... [picture #2] Danbi wrote on her facebook, "More than the other boys, I got to spend more time with Inhuk because I had the privilege to escort him and be on the same team. I just got to be a big sister or even a mom to him throughout the camp. He was very shy at first but by the second day, he called me by my name and everytime we won a game he came running with a huge smile and whenever I cheered for him, he laughed and blushed. It was such a big blessing to be a part of Jerusalem Ministry's Soccer Camp. There was extra joy because I was on the winning team! Thank you for the gogi buffet JM! And I look forward to seeing the camps go from glory to glory!" It's so amazing how powerful love is.

And God loves these children so much. He loves them so much. Each year, the camp has been going from glory to glory. Not just in our structure and influence, but favor and financial provision has been increasing each year. [picture #3] This was in year 2008, picture of the winning team; their team name was "Sharks (other team names were Bears, Wolves, and something else)." 1 coach, 1 assistant coach, and 1 volunteer. Kids would have more

injuries because it was on a dirt field. And 5 years later, [\[picture #4\]](#). No offense, but they don't look like orphans here! But the last picture, they look like orphans! Because what it means to be an orphan is that there is no parent figure who clothes them, feeds them, and takes care of them, so it's physically evident, the absence of a father's care. So people around them can normally tell by the way they dress, the way they don't cut their hair for a long time, and judge them as "neglected ones."

So as a temporary mother to them, my favorite moment of the soccer camp is when we clothe them in these nice uniforms. The kids walk into the field like they're superstars. They're out of their hand-me-down clothes and they're wearing the famous soccer players' jerseys, so they walk like one. And this is their true identity. God calls them my royalty. My children. My beloved.

This year we got sponsored enough money to buy each child a pair of Nike shoes. They're half cleats and half sneakers so the kids can wear them around everyday. In the past, the shoes were a prize for the winning team, and our staff was saying how amazing it would be to get a pair of shoes for each child this year. But I have to be honest, that I didn't think it would really happen. It meant 2-3 more grand just for the shoes on top of about 5 grand of the soccer camp cost. But God provided more than enough. I was putting on a pair Nikes on one of the kids and he said, "Wow, I've never experienced anything like this before!" And I was so blessed to see God's heart being shown through this pair of shoes. I don't know if you know, but Nike is considered the best sports brand in Korea. The kids were decked out in Nike this year, with Nike soccer balls, shoes, bags... and we didn't mean to match it like that, but it just happened. And through it all God was saying, "I want the best for these kids."

So I actually haven't gone into the detailed testimonies yet... haha. Here is the first testimony: The weather forecast kept saying the monsoon is coming for Monday through Wednesday, but because we always had our camp in the middle of a monsoon season and never had it rain for last 5 times, we just prayed for it in faith and went ahead with the camp. We were never worried about the rain because God's held it back for last 5 times, so it seemed like it would be lack of faith if we worried. But this time it looked serious. Especially when we woke up on Monday morning, it was pouring. And when I said, "What do we do, God," I heard Him say, "Have the kids pray." So we got the kids to the Yongsan base, we were so soaked because it was minor flood status. And we got all the kids in the gym and were coming up with a plan B... and pastor Jee (without me telling her) told the kids that they have to pray for the rain to stop. So all the kids bowed their heads and prayed for the rain to stop, and right after they prayed, the rain stopped completely. And we were able to do everything according to the schedule. So we felt that God wanted to involve the kids more in the testimonies this year. And the rest of the testimonies I'm going to share in a bullet form so I can get to my sermon today.

- 2nd day – it was raining pretty hard but the kids still enjoyed playing in the rain. Some kids even said, "God must be sending rain so we don't get too tired from the sun!"
- 2nd day – the rain was so heavy that we decided to cancel the rest of the camp after lunch (it was very chaotic, maybe a glimpse of what Moses had gone through with the Israelites), but right after everyone ate their lunch, the rain stopped around 1:30pm. We heard later that the rain continued in other places of Seoul until after 3pm. The kids were able to do penalty shootout and end the camp as scheduled with so much joy and fun!

- 3rd day – some kids woke up at 4am to pray for the weather, and the kids I was escorting to the camp didn't even bring umbrellas in faith, because they've prayed all night.
- One of the kids saw the other team's volunteer giving out their team pictures to the kids and wanted one so badly, that he offered to trade his prize of sports bag and soccer ball for a team picture.

There are a lot more testimonies, but I need to stop sharing so I can preach my message for the day. With that said, let's turn to today's scripture, **Matthew 18:1-4**.

At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" ² And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them ³ and said, "Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven." ⁴ Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

I learned so much about God's heart as I served the children with Jerusalem Ministry. Have your parents ever said something like, "Wait till you have your own kids, you'll understand what I'm saying?" When I was going through a rebellious stage, it was just a 잔소리, nagging, but now when I think about it, that's a word of wisdom right there. You can only understand the father's heart fully when you've been a father yourself to someone else. And I don't think I could fully understand what it means when Jesus said to his disciples, "unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."

The title of my message is "I Am a Child of God." So what does it mean to be a child of God? Do you remember how you were as a child? I don't really remember. And to be honest, growing up in a broken family where I had to be strong and take care of my family members, sometimes even my mom, I don't think I had much of a time of simply being a "child." So in order for us to remember and understand what it means to be a child of God, I want to share with you some things I've learned watching a child (or 46 of them). I want us to take off our "adult" hat today and put on a "child" hat, to fully understand our identity as a child of God.

Understandings that come with the identity as a child of God: **#1 is God loves to provide and go beyond.** **[picture #5]**

I already shared about how our kids were smothered with Nike goods. When I first found out about us doing that I was super happy, but a part of me was asking, "Is that not spoiling them?" You can ask my staff, I was a little against giving "too much." Because I had a skewed understanding of God's provision. A lot of times the way you were raised by your earthly father is the way you understand our heavenly father. It's supposed to be that way, but honestly a lot of our parents aren't perfect. And some of them are not even near what our heavenly father is like, like the parents of these children at the orphanage.

I grew up fighting for my father's provision between my step-siblings. My understanding of the father's provision was I have to earn it and I have to deserve it. So I found myself trying to do the same with our kids, and I realized that I was so wrong, when that one kid said, "I've never experienced anything like this," as I was putting on the shoes. As a parent, that's the parent's job and pure joy. There is no good parent who comes up with reasons why he should love his child. From the moment the child is born, that's the sole purpose of a parent. To feed, to clothe, to give the best he can to the child. **Luke 11:11-12** says, "What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; ¹² or if he asks for an egg, will

give him a scorpion? ¹³ If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”

To accept this verse fully, I had to see an example of a good father for me to understand it. Because I grew up thinking that my father wouldn't give me a fish when I ask him for a fish. For me, it was when I saw my father-in-law, JM's dad, and the way he provided and raised JM, even to this day. And another person that removed the skewed, broken image of God as a father was my husband, through the way he loved me and cared for me. Because when you get married, your husband is the one to represent the father's love, not your earthly father anymore. If anyone of you grew up without a good father figure in your life, I want you to ask God to show you people and incidences around you that showed the father's love to you. Because there are people God has placed in your life to be the father figure. Like the church and the leaders, or your Christian friend.

And another point is that as a child of God, we're required to have a child-like faith. [\[picture #6\]](#) **Point #2) Our identity as a child of God gives us a child-like faith.**

What does that mean? What does it mean to have a child-like faith? That means it's simple. Pastor Emily preached last time at Friday Fire about how “it's not that complicated.” Jesus is not that complicated, and God is not that complicated. A child does not sit there and analyze the 50 reasons and 50 consequences of believing in God when God says he can stop the rain. A child does not know enough scientific rules and the law of nature to start doubting God's power to change nature. That doesn't mean we gotta dumb down our intelligence, it means that we need to stop thinking too much, reasoning too much, and doubting too much.

I think we do that because sometimes we're afraid to believe in something and be let down, disappointed. What if I believe in this whole heartedly and God doesn't answer? What if I have the kids pray for the rain to stop and it doesn't? What do I do then? Let me tell you church, that child-like faith isn't having faith in God's 100% accuracy in his prayer answering, but it's faith in God's unwavering goodness. On the 2nd day, we did the same thing with the kids in the morning. We got to the soccer fields on base, and we all gathered under a tent and had the kids pray, and guess what. The rain didn't stop. And I looked at the sky and said, “What?!” “God, what if kids stop believing you?” and you know what the kids' responses were? “God must've sent the rain so that we are refreshed. So we can play with more energy.” Faith in God's goodness. No matter what the answer is, not doubting that he is good and he turns all things for our good. It says in Matthew 18, “whoever *humbles himself* like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.” When we humble ourselves, not thinking about our pride being let down in case God doesn't answer, and believe till the end, God surely blesses us in one way or the other.

So child-like faith means simple faith. Like my kids. “Why didn't you bring your umbrella?” “Because I prayed last night.” That's it. “Well, what if it rains?” “Well, then it will refresh us.”

Second characteristic of child-like faith is that we are fully dependent. [\[picture #7\]](#) You know, while interacting with the children, my favorite moments are when the little ones hold my hand. They would be walking by themselves, and at moments where they trip or they don't know where they are going, they just come right by me and grab my hand. Especially the tiny ones who can barely walk. When you depend on God, he knows exactly where to

take you. Have you walked with a kid, say when you're on a field trip with your hakwon or school, and the kid just runs off or tries to go a direction opposite of where you're supposed to go? Do you remember the frustration? Yea, that's how we make God feel when we try to do things our own way. And most importantly, we're frustrated because it's out of love.

When we were on base, we tell the kids that we're on American soil, and if you do anything wrong, the American police or soldier will come and take you away. It is true, we're not lying to them. But on the second day when it was pouring, me and my brother and one other escort was leading 6 kids, and when we were about to cross a bridge, one kid ran off into the rain and sprinted to the other side. Thankfully the cars were stopped but we let him have it afterwards, why? Because we love him and we don't want him to get hurt.

When we become an adult, it's pretty hard to be dependent on a father figure. I'm not talking about the unhealthy, mama or papa-boy type of dependency, but seeking the wisdom and knowledge of a father, and submitting to them with humility. No matter how old you get, do you know that to your parents you are always their child? When we get old, they get told too. They are always above us with their experience and wisdom of life. Then how much more could our father in heaven, creator of universe be wise and all knowing?

Last characteristic of child-like faith is that you are real with him. [\[picture #8\]](#) I had to get permission from John-Michael to use this picture. :P This is on the first day, John-Michael trying to cheer him up because this kid, Dongyun was so discouraged after their team lost the scrimmage game. He was the goalie for the Chelsea team, and the captain of the team yelled at him for allowing the goal, so the kid was so sad. So John-Michael went over and sat with him, spoke life over him, and was telling him funny stories to lighten up his mood. But the kid didn't seem to get better. But when he came back the next day and the following day, he was so happy to see JM and ran up to him with a big smile, giving him high-fives and hugs. JM said he did great the rest of the camp.

Dongyun, as a child, allowed JM to cheer him up. It only made sense for him to be down and upset. A lot of times we come to God, pretending to have everything together. Because we are "grown ups," we think that it's not ok to show emotions and weaknesses to God. But that is not true. God said in Matthew 11:28, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest." He didn't say, "Come to me, all you who have everything together and are strong." That's religion. That's foreign gods. Other gods say that your works is what gets you to heaven. How many score points you get on earth. But our God is the opposite. He is grace. I don't know if you guys noticed that preaching pastors have been preaching on grace lately. We didn't come together and decide to make the theme of this month "grace," but God has been speaking this to us separately. Which means, God really wants us to get this. When Dongyun came to JM all discouraged and depressed, JM didn't say, "What's wrong with you, you weakling! Suck it up and laugh!" God knows our hearts. God knows our weaknesses. If you want to learn more about grace, work with children.

One last story I want to tell you is this. Last year and this year, I escorted boys from a children's home that's at the end of line 6 to the Yongsan base, and what that entails is we have to walk from the home to the bus stop, up and down the hill, and take the bus to a subway station, take the subway about 30 minutes, and walk another 10 mins to the base. It doesn't sound that difficult, but when you're talking about 7-10 kids at once with some of them having diagnosed with ADHD and bipolar, it can become pretty difficult. So last year, I found escorting the boys more of a challenge than the camp itself. It drained me so much

emotionally, because I was trying to get them to act perfectly, like an adult. I had no grace for them, so when they would run off or don't listen to us, I would get so stressed out. But this year, thankfully it was less number of kids, and I was prepared at heart to show them much grace. Because of they're just kids. Who need a lot of patience and grace, especially because of their mental state. So this year was so much easier, not because the kids became miraculously perfect, but because I saw them with grace. And I was filled with love for them. Church, God knows us. He doesn't want us to stay in our weaknesses or flaws, but he knows that we are also not perfect.

My main points were: With us being children of God, we know that

#1) God loves to provide and go beyond.

#2) Our identity as a child of God gives us a child-like faith. Child-like faith: simple faith.

Faith that makes us dependent on God. Faith that allows us to be real with God because of his grace.

Pray.