

LETTERS FROM GRANDPA
413

Dearest grandchild,

Today's letter will deal with how to obtain greatness in the kingdom of heaven. This, as you know, was a question the disciples asked Jesus. The answer of Jesus may surprise you. Let us begin with a brief background to their question:

- Jesus had been with his disciples over two years without telling them that he was going to die.
- To prepare them for this news he took them to the region of Caesarea Philippi. This was not only where the head waters of the Jordan began but also a place of religious significance.
- Before telling them of his impending death he asked: **“Who do people say the Son of Man is?” (Matt. 16:13)**
- **They replied, “Some say John the Baptist, others Elijah; and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets” (Matt. 16:14).**
- **“But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?” Simon Peter answered, “You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God” (Matt. 16:15-16).**
- **“From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life” (Matt. 16:21).**
- Six days later Jesus took Peter, James, and John to a high mountain where he was transfigured before them. On this occasion Jesus spoke with Moses and Elijah about his death in Jerusalem (Lk. 9:31).
- It was comforting to realize that the death of Jesus was completely in harmony with the Law and the Prophets!
- Jesus told Peter, James, and John: **“Don't tell anyone what you have seen, until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead” (Matt. 17:9).** This, no doubt, created some jealousy and controversy with the other nine disciples.
- That controversy was enhanced by the failure of the nine to cast out a demon (Matt. 17:14-21).
- After this Jesus asked them, **“What were you arguing about on the road?” But they kept quiet because on the way they were arguing about who was the greatest” (Mk. 9:34).**
- While Matthew, Mark, and Luke all tell the story, we will quote from Matthew's Gospel: **“At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, ‘Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?’ He called a little child and had him stand among them. And he said ‘I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter into the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven’” (Matt. 18:1-4).**

DEPENDENCE

While there are many desirable attributes of little children worthy of emulation, in today's letter we will focus only on the fact that little children are dependent. In the eyes of men this is something bad, but in the eyes of Jesus this is something good. In fact, it is not only good, but essential. Godly people do not brag on themselves, they brag on God. Little children can help us to learn this lesson. They cannot survive without help and neither can we. Little children may be afraid when they are alone, but when their father is with them they are fearless and can go anywhere with confidence. Hymn writer Jessie Brown Pounds captured this truth by proclaiming: *“Anywhere with Jesus I can safely go; Anywhere He leads me in this world below; Anywhere without Him dearest joys would fade; Anywhere with Jesus I am not afraid. Anywhere with Jesus I am not alone; Other friends may fail me,*

He is still my own; Though His hand may lead me over dreary ways, Anywhere with Jesus is a house of praise. Anywhere with Jesus I can go to sleep, When the darkening shadows round about me creep; Knowing I shall waken never more to roam, Anywhere with Jesus will be home, sweet home. Anywhere! Anywhere! Fear I cannot know; Anywhere with Jesus I can safely go.”

Jesse modeled dependence. She was born to a farm family in Hiram, Ohio on Aug. 31. 1861. She was a sickly child and could not go to school and therefore depended on her parents for her education. Under the watchful eye of her mother she began writing religious verses for various newspapers when she was only 15. This developed into a marvelous ministry for she during her life she wrote 800 hymns, 80 short stories, 7 novels, lyrics and scripts for cantatas, and numerous other articles and essays.

Jesse and her family had a rich heritage among the heirs of the Stone-Campbell movement to restore New Testament Christianity. Her parents, Holland and Jane Brown, were led to Christ by the famous evangelist Walter Scott. The Browns were also privileged to receive a Christian preacher into their home named James Garfield. Garfield, as you know, later became president of the United States. As an adult Jesse edited four journals affiliated with the Stone-Campbell Movement: *Disciple of Christ*, the *Christian Standard*, the *Christian-Evangelist*, and *The Christian Century*. She was an editor with the Christian Standard Publishing Co. from 1885 – 1896. Jesse married John E. Pounds who was minister of the Central Christian Church in Indianapolis. She passed away March 3, 1921.

As we have said, the point of this letter involves greatness in the kingdom. Jesus said this greatness involves becoming like a little child. Being dependent upon our Heavenly Father, therefore, is not a liability, it is an asset. When Jesus ascended into heaven he promised not to leave his disciples like orphans, but to return to them in the person of the Holy Spirit (Jn. 14:15-20). When Jesus commanded them to go and make disciples of all nations he promised **“And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matt. 28:20)**. In Heb. 13:5 he invoked five powerful negatives in the Greek language to assure his children that he would never ever leave or forsake them!

Jesse Brown Pounds helps us to understand this childlike trust! In spite of her many obstacles and dependency she became one of the most famous hymn writers in history! She was quick to make clear, however, that she did not do it on her own. She did it because Jesus gave her the power to do more than she could ask or imagine! (Eph. 3:20) Our Latino brothers have a saying that beautifully illustrates our relationship with Jesus. It seems that a fly was sitting on the horn of a giant ox. When someone asked the fly what he was doing, he replied: “estamos arando”! (We are plowing)

I love you,

Grandpa Boyce