

“Innocence”

By Chris Ulrich

Sunday, August 19th, 2019

Amen, Amen. Thank you, you may be seated. From the Book of Matthew, chapter eighteen, verses one through six:

Matthew 18:1-6 *At the same time came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them, And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me. But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea.*

Thanks, Mike. So, verse three is our theme verse for this month, the month that we celebrate the youth. But, I felt that reading the entire passage, in its entirety, would give us a little bit more about the backstory. So, there was a statement I remember hearing, about twenty-five years ago, and it went something like this, “The older I get, and the more I know, the more I realize how much more I don't know.” I'm sure it's something others of us have heard, before. And, I'm sure it's something that other people have said, and used that expression before. But, it resonated with me, it stayed with me, it made me realize that there is a lot to know, there's a lot of information, and, there's a lot of things that we're never going to know. And, it makes sense, of course, if we stop and think about it, and realize that the more we do learn about different things, whether it's history, or math, or language, or engineering, or medicine, or maintenance, we realize how much more there is. Knowledge and information is limitless. And, yet, no matter how hard we try, we'll never know all there is to know.

I'd like to ask if you could bow your heads in a word of prayer with me.

God, we come to You right now, God, and ask You for Your guidance, and Your direction, and for wisdom, Lord God, and the direction of the message today, as we hear what You have in store for us, Lord God, and I also want to make mention about our sister Lorraine, who was brought to the emergency room down in Chicago, and Laygoze's there with her, at her side, Lord God, but we ask that You, God would be with them Lord God, she's had a bout with cancer, God, in the past couple of years, Lord God, but she's been strong, and she's been an inspiration to many of us, Lord God, we just ask You to be right there in the room with them, Lord God, and give her many more years, Lord God. And, just give her strength, give them both encouragement, Lord God, and let them know that You're with them, and let them know that we're praying for them, Lord God. We just want to ask, God, for You to guide us and direct us, God, that we'd hear what You have for us to have in this message, Lord God. Thank You God, for Your understanding. Thank You, God, for teaching us. And, thank You, God, for knowing Your truth. We just want to ask these things in Your name, Jesus. Amen.

So, I was on a trip about five years ago, and one of the places that we were planning on passing through was in southern California. It was a place called the Joshua Tree Monument. Has anybody ever heard of that before? Okay. A few of us have. I had never seen it before, but the person I was traveling with, Jim Bailey, had never seen it himself. We'd only seen pictures of it, we'd only heard a little bit about it. So, we weren't really that familiar with it, So, we looked on the map, and, on the map, it just says, “Joshua Tree Monument.” So, we were of the understanding that our plan was to eventually get to the tree. We were going to see this

magnificent tree, or whatever it was that we thought, so, keep in mind, again, that we'd only seen it in pictures, and we're thinking, the whole time, that it's just one tree, and, even though it didn't resemble anything that's around here, as far as it being that type of climate, we figured, "Well, it's worth a trip, I mean, if they've dedicated an entire national park." So, as we were driving through this area, which is pretty large, we started realizing that this resembles—all these trees that we're starting to see resemble this one tree that we're looking for. And, then we started realizing that there's hundreds, and thousands, and tens of thousands, and, I don't know, Pete, if you've got a little picture, that...



But this is a Joshua tree, and, as you can see, there's several more in the background, there. As we're driving through—this was daytime—and, thinking, okay, well, we'll eventually get to the monument. But we're realizing, there's a lot more to this. There's a lot more than just one location. And, to put it in perspective, it would be as though we were thinking, "Well, let's get to Mount Rushmore," and then, all of the sudden, you see thousands of Mount Rushmore's. or, "Let's try to get to Pike's Peak," and you see all these mountains that are Pike's Peak. Or Grand Canyons. But there's only one Mount Rushmore, there's only one Grand Canyon, there's only one Pike's Peak. So, we figured we would change the name of it to Joshua Trees, based on the many that we did see. So, thinking about that trip, and, as I was preparing this message, and the fact that it was something I learned, it made me think of other aspects in life that I have little or no understanding about. How about all the history that's happened, that we weren't there for, and all we have is just an account. Whether factual, or falsified, there are things that have happened throughout the course of history that we just don't have any absolute proof of, except the Bible. So, we think about what lies beyond this planet, we think about what lies beyond the solar system, we think about what lies beyond this galaxy that we don't know about. Or, about what lies beneath the first few miles of the earth's surface, or about what's at the bottom of the ocean floor. Or, what's even going on in the house next door. So, I just wanted to share something that, it struck me as profound. Pastor Lee and I were talking, maybe a year and a half ago, and we were just sitting at my house, we were just discussing some things, we were just talking about the wonders of God, and about that things of God, and he said, "Well, I don't even know what's going on in that house next door." And, you know, that's a very simple statement, but, the more I thought about it, it was profound. Because, I thought, "I don't either." I don't know what's going on a house across the street, I don't know what's going on in that building down the street, I don't even know

what's going on in the next room of my own house. And, it just makes me realize, it makes us realize, about the mysteries and the wonders of God. And, about the things that lie beyond our own understanding about what we just see in front of us, what we have an understanding of, that's just a miniscule amount. And, as advanced as we sometimes think we are, it seems like every time we turn around, we hear of a new species of some kind of animal, or they find another plant, and say, "Oh, well this is newly discovered in this rainforest in this South America," or a different scientific element. Has anybody ever heard of the table of elements? Okay, when I was back when I was a kid in high school, there was one hundred and three, and, if you go through the chart, I mean, it's things that—a lot of us are familiar with like hydrogen, helium, lithium, gold, silver, aluminum, tin, things like that, but as they've gotten more into understanding, and getting discoveries, I mean, when you get towards the end of the table of elements, there's things that they named after the scientist that found them, like Lawrencium, or Einsteinium, things like that. So, now, after that many years, it's up to one hundred and eighteen. And, who knows what the limit is? Because there's no limits. I'm going to ask if you could turn with me to the Book of First Timothy, chapter three, verse sixteen. This is our first Scripture for this morning, and it says:

1 Timothy 3:16 *And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.*

Part 1: Mystery and Wonders

And, part one of the message today is mystery and wonders. We think about a mystery as something that's a challenge, and hard to understand or figure out. Or, we wonder about how we're going to do something or go somewhere, or take—fix some problem. Now, that may seem like a little bit of a misplaced statement, as far as, and without controversy great is the mystery of godliness. But, a lot of it has to do with just believing, and knowing that God is in control, and it's not a matter of trying to overthink it, or trying to overcomplicate it. Because, the just shall live by faith (Habakkuk 2:4, Romans 1:17, Galatians 3:11, Hebrews 10:38). So, we have faith to believe that God is in control, and we're not going to know it all. That's not the goal, either. God was manifest in the flesh, Jesus Christ, he lived a life that set an example to, not only those that lived back then, but to those of us future generations, hundreds of years, thousands of years later. But, even then, we know to walk in the spirit (Galatians 5:25). Seek the Lord while he may be found (Isaiah 55:6). Seek first the kingdom of God (Matthew 6:33). And, that doesn't necessarily mean we understand everything, or have every move calculated, or have every problem figured out. I'm going to ask right now if you could turn with me to the book of Deuteronomy, chapter twenty-nine, verse twenty-nine. This has become one of my favorite verses because it gives us an understanding that there are things that we will absolutely never know, but then it doesn't let us off the hook, either. Because, God is telling us, "There are certain things that are unknown, but then I've given you a plan of salvation, I've given you enough to know." So I'm going to read it. It says:

Deuteronomy 29:29 *The secret things belong unto the LORD our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law.*

So, we're not off the hook. Just because we can't give an explanation to every single solitary thing, or happening, or occurrence, or unknown, or mystery, or wonder. So, I'm going to ask everybody a question now: How many's ever get biblical, or religious, or spiritual questions that you can't answer, on occasion? I would hope everybody. I would hope everybody. It could come from friends, it could come from family, it could come from co-workers, or we might think of

it on our own as to why something is or why something's not. And, I imagine we all do, and, though it's uncomfortable, it's inevitable. There's a degree of discomfort to being stumped. If you think about—well, you like to think, as a teacher, or an instructor, or mentor, as brother Todd mentioned, that you've got all figured out, but that's not the case. That doesn't mean we don't have some things figured out. That is true. I mean, you think about from a point of birth to however old all of us are in this room, there's certain orders of society, there's certain orders of just existing that we do have figured out, you know, we know how to tie our shoes, we know how to maybe cook a meal, then there's things they get a little more difficult, operating a computer, and then there's things to get more difficult that deal with physics, or engineering, and they're more advanced. So, it doesn't let us off the hook from studying and praying to God for understanding to try to figure things out, either. So, just when we think about, "Okay, well, I can't answer that question. I don't know what the answer is," doesn't mean that an answer can't be gotten, it just means that's going to happen on occasion. Nobody's a know it all, and nobody likes a know it all. Do you remember that expression? So what does any of the mystery or wonder that we've been talking about have anything to do with being converted, as being as little children like Christ spoke about? I'm going to answer that question with another question, and that is, how many that are, I guess, older than ten, which I think is everybody in this room, how many remembers would it was like to be a child, or much younger than you are now? That's good, that's good. I'm making that more of a standpoint for us to think back, to be able to remember the wonder, and the intrigue that we experienced as children. Because, everything we did, that we did it for the first time, if you think back, it was magnificent. And, I'm not talking about, "Oh, well, I had a difficult childhood," or, "I had this problem going on," I'm talking about, I know this is going to sound a little odd, but, I think, sometimes, when we fast, when we really give ourselves to God in fasting, and I know that's another—this is not related to this, this is free, as they say—fasting's no fun, but it's needed. It's a very important part—prayer and fasting. We talked about that about a month ago. Christ talked about to the disciples, they couldn't cast out a demon, He said, "This kind comes forth by nothing but prayer and fasting." (Matthew 17:14-21) So, that's it, but there's been times that we've fasted and I believe God—the Bible says the Holy Ghost brings all things into our remembrance (John 14:26), and there's times when God will bring back certain things, and I remember, one time, as simple as it is, look at a coin, look at a coin, and remember what was the first time when you saw it coin. Maybe you didn't know what it was, that it was money, or whatever, but you look at, even like the design, and the way it's laid out, or a dollar bill, or a five-dollar bill, or anything like that, and you're thinking... and that's just a small example. I'm not talking about, "Oh, the majesty of the mountains, or the ocean," because that's beyond belief, at times. I mean, that's something that we've talked about in music, we've talked about in messages. But, just something is simple as that, but, when were that age, when were little kids, we don't pretend to have all the answers. That's what we rely on our teachers and our parents for. Kids are notorious for asking a lot of questions. That's a good thing. I see sister Abby nodding her head. We're not sure what we want to do when we grow up, because we'll worry about that tomorrow. Now, I'm going to—this is a little comical, I think, so, I'm going to ask our brother Jordan to come back up, this is so, prior to the service, I was looking for a couple of people to read—(to Jordan) come on up—so, Alex said, "Well, could you use Jordan as a reader? This is his last day." And I was like, "I don't think so," but, then I thought, "Well, I think I have an opening." So, then, I looked at my notes, I found a verse, and, then, when Pastor Lee called him up, later, I think you thought, "This is my cue. This is where I'm going to read." And that's not on you, I just thought... I was sitting over here, and I was thinking, "No, no, don't read it! Share a testimony." So, I am going to ask you to read, Second Corinthians, five, seventeen one more time:

2 Corinthians 5:17 *Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.*

This is about being born again. Our sins are gone, and our burdens are lifted.

Part 2: A New Perspective

Part two of the message, today, is “A New Perspective.” The way we look at our journey through life, we look at our day-to-day routine, we look at family, friends, coworkers, neighbors, and strangers. Old things are passed away and all things are become new. So, there's a show called, “The Football Life” on the NFL Network, and, I was watching, maybe a year ago, and it featured a guy that a lot of us remember from when he played in Chicago, back in the '70s and '80s. His name was Walter Payton. He's pretty well known, in the football Hall of Fame, so definitely had a memorable career. So, anyway, Walter retired in the 1980's, still very healthy, but he took an unexpected turn in the late 1990's with a rare liver disease that would take his life when he was forty-five. So, to put it in some perspective of the popularity of Walter, and those of you that don't know, that aren't—and I'm not from Chicago, originally, but I did hear a lot about him growing up, as I suspect a lot of us did, that like sports. But, before Michael Jordan was the man, Walter Payton was Chicago sports. I mean, for all practical purposes, if you think about it, I mean, there were guys that preceded him, the Dick Butkus, the Ernie Banks, and people like that, but Walter Payton was a legend. And, so, anyway, in this episode of this show I was watching, they were kind of paying tribute to him, and there was another guy that played around the same time by the name of Eric Dickerson, and, he shared something that I think was very heartfelt to me personally. And, it was very, humbling, and what he talked about was, when he visited Walter, and Walter was knew that his death was inevitable, basically, he was given only months to live. He said that Walter Payton said, “I'm scared of dying, because I've never died before.” And, that struck me, just because, more than anything, I appreciate that honesty. And, this is more than about football, this is about life. Because, at this point, now, his career is over, the time of that part of his life is over, and now you're facing the end. And, now, I know there's examples, both of people that we know, or, you could really kind of say, biblically speaking, of people that are not afraid. If we're right in the eyes of God, we shouldn't be afraid of death, right? Don't answer that. Ah, but it's still a mystery, and, it's still an unknown, and, when it happens, it might be the result of an accident or a sickness, or, like we used to hear, just old age, it was just old age. But, I would still have to tell you that the finality of it is a scary thing. I'm not talking about living in constant fear or paranoia. We need to enjoy the joy of the Lord. That needs to be something that is an ongoing, daily—the Bible says rejoice in the Lord always and again I say rejoice (Philippians 4:4). But, I'm talking about the understanding that the sting of death is great; that's what the Bible says. The Apostle Paul—I was talking to Brother Bob Heitzler, and, just mentioning, I asked him that question, too, and he gave an honest answer. I said, “You know what? I appreciate that answer,” because, he said, “You know, there's a verse that says, where Apostle Paul said, ‘I fear after I've preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.’” (1 Corinthians 9:27) That's a pretty sobering thought. Now, I'm going to tell you this, this is not a doctrinal issue, if you feel like, “I'm totally fearless,” or, you're like, “I'm scared,” or, if you're somewhere in between, it's not a doctrinal issue.

I'm going to read from the Book of James—actually, I want to just share a quick story, personal story, as far as, as a kid. I remember, as a kid, I was scared of it. Now, I want to share something that might kind of lighten the mood, I think. So, in our basement at home, we had kind of a circular—it wasn't a real big basement, but, there was a water heater, and there was a red button on it. Now, I don't know, this was in the '70s, so, the button, I just remember my dad telling me and my brother, “Whatever you do, don't push that button! Don't push that button!” and, I'm like, I don't even know what would happen if we would have. But, so, we're down in the basement, and we're playing street hockey. You know, like slapping a puck around, and, you know, checking each other, and pushing each other. Brent, you'll appreciate that. Brent's a hockey player. So, anyway, I forget what exactly happened, if, you know, somebody hit the puck, and it bounced,

and hit that red button, or, you know, elbowed it by accident, but it sure seemed like we pushed the red button. So, at that point, I'm scared, because I'm thinking the house is going to blow up. I mean, you're a kid, you're just thinking, "Who knows what could happen? Dad said don't push that button! Whatever you do, don't push it!" And I'm thinking, I'm like, we're standing there, waiting, just staring at it, like it's going to change anything. Thank God, obviously, I'm still here; nothing happened. I think it just resets, I think that's all it was. Why our dad made it, you know, to be as big of a deal as he did, that doesn't matter, that doesn't matter. I'm going to read from the book of James, chapter four, versus thirteen to fourteen:

James 4:13-14 *Go to now, ye that say, To day or to morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.*

I know that those are some sobering statements in Scripture, as far as talking about that inevitably of death, but, I'm also going to tell you right now that if we're living right according to the Word of God, and we've prepared ourselves by being born again, God doesn't want us to live in constant fear, but God does want us to have a child-like humility and a reverence to Him that is real. And, God does want us to love Him with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and rely on Him daily. God is our sustenance. God is the provider. Every good and perfect gift comes from above, from the father of lights, the very breath of life, there's not a thing we could do without Him. So, I think we've all heard the term 'carefree' used to describe a person or someone who seems to go through life that doesn't seem weighed down by the problems around them. It's a term not to be confused with careless because that's another behavior altogether. Being carefree can have both positive and negative connotations, depending on who you ask, but one thing someone that's carefree is typically resilient and can bounce back from setbacks. Does anybody here know anybody like that? A few people. Does anyone here think of yourself that way? That's good. Is anyone here jealous of people like that? Don't raise your hand.

Part 3: God Will Take Care of Us

Part three of the message today—I'm going to ask Jennifer Fuentes if she could come up. She's going to read, on her last day here before she heads off to college, from the Book of Matthew, chapter six, versus twenty-five through thirty-four. And, part three of the message today is, "God Will Take Care of Us."

Matthew 6:25-34 *Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature? And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.*

Thank you. So this is one of those passages that's easier to read than to actually believe or to live. Can we agree with that? As far as, being worried or weighed down or wondering where the next paycheck, or wondering where the next meal, or wondering whether this problem's going to get fixed, or that situation is going to get handled. It's something that does burden us down, and I'm not saying that's right or wrong, I'm just saying that that's human nature. Because, we're all survivors. We're all looking to survive, to live another day, to get through this life, to enjoy this life, and to hear those words, "Well done, thy good and faithful servant." That is the ultimate goal. But, while we're here, and I'm just going to share something—I've shared this before, but I thought, I appreciated this a lot, Jennifer, I'm going to brag on you just a moment here, when we had studies at Kirk and Nubia's house, this was Wednesday nights, probably five or six years ago, Kirk and I would do the studies, and, so, we would occasionally, like, maybe every couple of months, we would ask the people that regularly attended, "What topics are you interested in hearing about?" So, you know, you'd hear different things, "Oh, could you talk about holiness?" "Could you talk about pastorship?" Well, Jennifer, she said, "I want to hear about the future." And, it was one of those that kind of stumped us, but it was, to me, I thought, "That's great!" because, at the time, I think she was ten, eleven, twelve maybe, somewhere around there, and so, because I think a lot of times what happens is the routine, sometimes, of Christianity is, we're thinking, "The end. The end is coming. Endure to the end. The world's getting worse, there's so many problems, this that and the other." On, and on, and on, and on. And, so, how do we present the future to our youth. are we presenting it in a grim, hopeless way? Or, are we presenting it in a way, if you trust in God, God will take care of you? If you believe in God, and you obey God, and you keep His commandments, God will take care of us. But, so, where's the balance in between being responsible and being concerned, and yet, at the same time not being overburdened with every problem real or imagined? Where did we stand when it comes down to taking care of our family, taking care of ourselves, taking care of our jobs, taking care of responsibilities in God? It's impossible to know every situation that everyone has to endure, and, God only knows that. But, more than anything, it's up to us to have faith in God, and believe it. Not just read it and think, "Well, that's good. That's good to hear." And, put it into practice. Trust that there's a lot of mystery and wonder that we're going to face even every single day. I'm closing here in a moment. But, the message the title of the message, today, is a simple one, it's, "Innocence," and that's based on the child-like outlook that we need to have as adults, and still have faith to believe God will take care of us. I thought about a different title, and, prayed about a different title, not because I didn't like it, but because I just thought, "I don't know if that's adequate. I don't know if that's really enough." But, thinking about innocence, it's based on being born again, and having that child-like perspective, and having a purpose in life. And, there's definitely innocence in that. And, it's based on knowing that there's still plenty of wonders in mysteries in this universe. Now, will never know everything, and there's an innocence in acknowledging that, too. But, we most of all we need to know that God cares for us, and God will take care of us, if we humble ourselves as little children.