

Unless You Are Converted

Conversion Series #1

Mt 18:3

By Bill Denton

INTRODUCTION

A. This morning I want to talk to you about something that is one of the most neglected of topics

1. Matthew 18:3 -- and said, "Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven." NASB95

2. The subject is conversion – and it deserves far more attention than it gets

B. The word carries a very specific idea that is essential to understanding and practicing Christian faith

1. By definition, the word translated "converted" means "turned"

2. Be converted *strateete* (NT:4709). The word converted has acquired a conventional religious sense which is fundamentally truthful, but the essential quality of which will be more apparent if we render literally, as the English Revised Version (1885): "except ye turn." The picture is that of turning round in a road and facing the other way.

(from Vincent's Word Studies of the New Testament, Electronic Database.
Copyright (c) 1997 by Biblsoft)

3. When we're talking about conversion, we're talking about the process by which a person turns or changes

4. Jesus was saying that unless we are turned or changed we cannot enter the kingdom of heaven

C. It is that last part of the statement that makes this turning or changing such a crucial thing

1. Today and the next two Sundays, I want to explore the idea of conversion

2. Anything deserves our attention that has such serious implications as allowing or disallowing a person from entering the kingdom of heaven

I. THERE ARE A FEW EXPLICIT CONDITIONS TO ENTERING THE KINGDOM

A. John 3:3-5 -- 3 Jesus answered and said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." 4 Nicodemus said to Him, "How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born, can he?" 5 Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. NASU

1. Very simply, Jesus declared that a new birth was necessary in order to enter the kingdom

2. We ought to understand (and we do, I believe), that a new birth is an essential element to a person's salvation, and that without it there is no entering the kingdom

B. 1 Cor 15:50-53 -- 50 Now I say this, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. 51 Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, 52 in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. 53 For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality. NASU

1. This is part of the great chapter on the resurrection of the dead
2. Paul's point is really a simple one – we must experience a tremendous change from perishable, mortal people to imperishable, immortal people if we ever expect to inherit the kingdom of God
3. The reason is simply because the kingdom is not of this world, not of this physical, material realm – it is spiritual in nature and we must be fitted for that existence in order to actually receive the kingdom

C. 1 Cor 6:9-10 -- 9 Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, 10 nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God. NASU

1. Paul goes on to acknowledge that “such were some of you”
2. But, they had been washed, sanctified and justified in the name of Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of God
3. The point is simply that it takes a resolution of the problem of sin for people to enter the kingdom

D. Gal 5:19-21 -- 19 Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, 20 idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, 21 envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. NASU

1. Again, the point is simply that people who display certain conditions of the heart will not inherit the kingdom of God
2. There is a consistent picture drawn in all these passages
 - a. the sinful state of humanity leaves us in a condition unfit for the kingdom of God
 - b. something must be done about this condition, and what must be done can be summed up as the process of salvation, justification and sanctification – all of which is the work of Jesus on our behalf
 - c. that work involves turning us away from that which destroys us
 - d. it involves changing us from what we were to what God wants us to become
 - e. that turning or change is literally what “conversion” is all about

II. THIS IS THE REASON WE MUST BE MORE INTERESTED IN THE SUBJECT OF CONVERSION

A. Illustration

In Charles Schulz's "Peanuts" comic strip, Lucy asks Linus, "Do you think people ever really change?" "Sure," replies Linus, "I feel I've changed a lot this past year." Lucy says, "I meant for the better." -- Robert C. Shannon, 1000 Windows

1. This cartoon illustrates more than one attitude about change
2. First, there is the satirical attitude that scoffs at change – that's pretty much Lucy's idea
3. Second, there is the assumption that change has happened, and it's always better -- that's Linus's idea – while Lucy's assumption is quite different
4. The truth is that most people resist change of any sort – status quo is preferred

B. Illustration

I read once about a college student who was challenged to become a Christian. This student was carefully taught and encouraged from scripture to consider Jesus and forgiveness of sins. But, the student never responded to the gospel. Finally, a teacher took that student aside and asked why he would not obey the gospel. The student replied that he would obey the gospel, but if he did, he knew he could no longer live the way he wanted to, and he liked the way he was living.

1. At least that student understood something that often escapes people who profess faith in Jesus Christ – he knew he couldn't remain the same person he was
2. He understood that Jesus was calling him to a different life, a different kind of life, with very different principles, by which to live
3. He understood he would have to be converted

C. Jim Wallis, The Call To Conversion, p. 4

The first evangelists did not simply ask people what they believed about Jesus; they called upon their listeners to forsake all and to follow him. To embrace his kingdom meant a radical change not only in outlook but in posture, not only in mind but in heart, not only in worldview but in behavior, not only in thoughts but in actions. Conversion for them was more than a changed intellectual position. It was a whole new beginning.

1. Conversion begins with repentance (change of mind)
 - a. Matt 4:17 -- 17 From that time Jesus began to preach and say, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." NASU
 - b. Acts 3:19 -- 19 "Therefore repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord; NASU
2. This is precisely the point where our neglect leaves us in danger of missing one of the great desires of God for us – he actually wants us to leave our sin, to make the effort to change our lives, and with his blessing and his help, we can do just that

D. Illustration

1. It's hard to effect change unless people feel a compelling need to change.
-- Max De Pree, Leadership, Vol. 15, no. 3
2. This is why we need to pay attention to the passage in Matthew 18:3
 - a. Matthew 18:3 -- and said, " Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children , you will not enter the kingdom of heaven . NASB95
 - b. what is it about "little children" that could possibly be so important
 - 1) they are just starting out in their life – in conversion we enter a new life
 - 2) they are unformed, pliable, able to learn – in conversion we are asked to be conformed to the image of Jesus
 - 3) children do not have the problems of pride, competition, or class status -- in conversion, we leave these things to become servants of God
 - 4) children embrace change – in conversion, we must embrace it or fail
3. What happens if we're not willing to do these things – we miss the kingdom!
 - a. is that a compelling enough reason for you?
 - b. you either change from what you were before becoming a follower of Jesus or you end up canceling the whole benefit of the gospel

CONCLUSION

A. If you want to become a Christian, you must be converted

1. We're going to look at more on this issue in the next two sermons, so we're not finished with the whole idea of conversion
2. But, it's necessary that people understand this part of the God's call

B. God wants to change your life – and he can and will, but you must cooperate

1. You can't cling to habits, or family traditions, or societal customs or any other standard of living – when you come to Jesus, you must come ready to give it all up and be changed
2. If you've been trying to follow Jesus for a while, and you've held on to things trying to live the way you want to live, you've got to surrender it all to Jesus
3. Conversion is the bold challenge to become something you never were and never will be without Jesus Christ
 - a. 1 Peter 4:1-5 -- Therefore, since Christ has suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same purpose, because he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, 2 so as to live the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for the lusts of men, but for the will of God. 3 For the time already past is sufficient for you to have carried out the desire of the Gentiles, having pursued a course of sensuality, lusts, drunkenness, carousing, drinking parties and abominable idolatries. 4 In all this, they are surprised that you do not run with them into the same excesses of dissipation, and they malign you; 5 but they will give account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. NASU
 - b. you may have to leave things that have great appeal, and others may laugh at you

C. Invitation