

**The Parables of Jesus #14**  
**The Parable of the Children at Play**  
**(Mt. 11:16-19)**  
**Bill Denton**

INTRODUCTION

- A. In our definition of parables, we said that a parable is:
  - 1. A story, a comparison
  - 2. A less-well-known thing thrown down alongside a more-well-known thing in order to better understand the first
  - 3. Sometimes we say it's an "earthly" story with a "heavenly" meaning
  
- B. At this point, we've looked at several parables that tell us about God's kingdom
  - 1. A number of times, we've examined Jesus' words that tell us that the kingdom is "like" a thing familiar to the people
  - 2. Thus, we have developed quite an understanding of the nature and qualities of the kingdom of heaven
  
- C. If Jesus can describe the kingdom of heaven this way, he can also describe other things by using similar comparisons
  - 1. That is exactly what he does in the parable we will study tonight
  - 2. Jesus will describe the people of his own day
  
- D. Matt 11:16-19  
But to what shall I liken this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to their companions, and saying: 'We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we mourned to you, and you did not lament.' For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon.' The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Look, a gluttonous man and a winebibber, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' But wisdom is justified by her children.' (NKJ)
  
- E. In this little story, Jesus begins to reveal his insight into the state of mankind, and he will begin to reveal some of the basic problems of humanity

## I. THE PICTURE PRESENTED IN THE PARABLE

- A. Once more, look hard at what Jesus says he is describing for it is the key to understanding the parable
  - 1. Question: Mt 11:16 -- "To what shall I liken this generation?"
  - 2. Question: Lk 7:31 -- "And what are they like?"
  - 3. We know that this parable is going to answer those questions and tell us about the Lord's view of people
  
- B. He says that, in general, people are like children
  - 1. It is a picture of children out in the public places like the market where they would doubtless meet their friends and neighbors
  - 2. It is a picture as common as any group of children, anywhere
  - 3. But there is a problem with this group of children
    - a. one group of children has been trying to get another child or group of children to play with them
    - b. they have tried everything, but the other group just doesn't cooperate
  - 4. They "played the flute" and "mourned" but no response from the others
    - a. perhaps it's a way to illustrate all they have tried to get the other group interested
    - b. it's like saying -- we pretended to have a wedding, and then we pretended to have a funeral, but you just won't play
    - c. "what's the matter with you?"
  
- C. Though Jesus doesn't explain precisely, it's obvious that for some reason the other group of children are just disagreeable, and cannot be satisfied by the friends
  - 1. Haven't you seen children act just this way?
  - 2. Perhaps one child had made another angry earlier in the day
  - 3. Perhaps one child had gotten his feelings hurt over some slight
  - 4. Perhaps there was competition over who was whose friend
  - 5. Perhaps there was no good reason at all -- just an obstinate kid!
  - 6. Jesus' point was that if you've seen children behave this way toward one another, then you've got a good idea of what the world is like

## II. CHILDISHNESS IS A COMMON PROBLEM OF MANKIND

### A. Note the following passages

#### 1. Jer 4:22

For My people are foolish, they have not known Me. They are silly children, and they have no understanding. They are wise to do evil, but to do good they have no knowledge. (NKJ)

#### 2. 1 Cor 3:1-4

And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able; for you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men? For when one says, "I am of Paul," and another, "I am of Apollos," are you not carnal? (NKJ)

#### 3. Heb 5:12

For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. (NKJ)

### B. Though sometimes Jesus uses the positive qualities of children to identify what people should be, here he uses negative qualities to identify a basic set of problems

#### 1. Children can display definite immaturity

- a. Heb 5:12 -- babe = lit. one who cannot yet speak, immature (due to lack of physical and mental development)
- b. 1 Cor 3:3 -- carnal = one who is focused on issues of the flesh (selfish, self-centered, sensual)
- c. Jer 4:22 -- without a spiritual and moral base (foolish)

#### 2. Children are sometimes hard to satisfy

- a. what does a child want when he is fussy, cantankerous, out of sorts?
- b. totally dissatisfied and unable to be satisfied

#### 3. Children are sometimes capricious

- a. one day they like one thing and the next they like something else
- b. they are frivolous and constantly changing

#### 4. Children are sometimes argumentative

- a. sometimes it is hard for them to accept the answers or the authority of their elders
- b. they want to assert themselves, they want to be right, and they will even take the side of error and refuse to acknowledge it

#### 5. Children sometimes just want to do their own thing

- a. they want to be left alone
- b. they do not want to bend their will

6. Children (the immature) can display the very worst of human nature
  - a. 2 Tim 3:2-4  
For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, (NKJ)
  - b. the childish are often the worst among us

### III. JESUS STRESSES THE INABILITY TO SATISFY THE IMMATURE

- A. He used John the Baptist and himself as two extremes -- don't push the picture
  1. John -- presented an austere lifestyle
    - a. dressed in rugged attire
    - b. ate locusts and honey
    - c. he was a separatist, lived in the desert and had few friends
    - d. his message condemned sin and called people to repentance
    - e. Jesus said some concluded he had a demon
  2. Jesus -- came eating and drinking
    - a. Jesus wore the same clothes as everyone else
    - b. he attended banquets and ate in people's homes
    - c. he made many friends and acquired a band of disciples
    - d. he too demanded repentance, but he stressed God's grace and mercy
    - e. he was accused of being a glutton and a winebibber
  3. When it came to matters of religion and faith, the people were just like a group of dissatisfied people, immature, capricious, argumentative
- B. How very like that people tend to be
  1. They don't want God to be harsh, demanding, rigid, uncompromising, but they don't want God to be easy, undemanding, or permissive
  2. They don't want God to ask for their commitment, but if he doesn't then they conclude there's no reason to get too serious about spiritual things
- C. Immature, childish people who do not want to obey God will find any useful reason not to do so
  1. God can't please them
  2. Nothing satisfies them
  3. They're just like a bunch of kids who can't get along and who won't join their friends

## CONCLUSION

- A. Matt 11:19 . . . . But wisdom is justified by her children. (NKJ)
  - 1. This is probably another way of saying that wisdom is proved by the fruit that is born from it's labors
  - 2. It condemns the attitude of the immature
  
- B. Specifically, it would apply to these people to whom Jesus told the story
  - 1. They didn't like John the Baptist -- but the kingdom arrived anyway
  - 2. They didn't like Jesus -- but the kingdom thrives anyway
  - 3. They don't like and won't participate in many things relative to God's will -- but God's will is still accomplished in the world
  - 4. And, by the way, the fruit of their lack of wisdom is proven also
  
- C. This is actually another parable stressing the importance of participating in God's will for his creation
  - 1. Stop being children -- dissatisfied, capricious, immature
  - 2. Get a grip on reality and do the will of the Lord
  
- D. Invitation