

The King and His Children

What makes a person a Christian and what motivates one to become godly? Is it adhering to a set of rules to win God's favor and so ultimately to be accepted as His child and admitted to His presence? Or does one become His child first by being born again, and then just grows to become more and more like their Father?

Once upon a time in a land not far from here lived a king and queen who loved children. They had planned when they married on having a very large family. They wanted the castle filled with the laughter, voices, and noise of little princes and princesses, and of course, being a king and queen, they had vast riches so none would lack any good thing.

However, they were blessed with only one son who played alone, often asking his parents for brothers and sisters. The king and queen kept hoping, but the years went by and there were no more babies for the nursery.

One day the queen said to her husband, "It has been many years now since the birth of our son and I fear we will have no more children of our own. Let us go out and adopt children so that we may have the children we have longed for and our son desires as companions."

The king thought about this for awhile and then responded. "I believe you are right. And we will not adopt children from the nobles but from the streets - the poor, the orphans, and the homeless."

The queen agreed. They decided to go out into the cities and the countryside to find their children. When they found a child, they would talk to him or her and then write down names and addresses of those they had chosen.

Later in the castle, invitations were issued and then sent to each child by special courier. They read, "You have been chosen to be adopted into the royal household and become a prince and princess. Please come and present yourself at the castle gate as soon as possible." They were signed and sealed with the royal seal of the king and queen.

A few of the children who received the invitations ignored them because they didn't believe they were genuine - they must be part of some cruel joke. It would be ridiculous to believe the king and queen would adopt "gutter rats"!

A few of the other children said they liked their life on the streets, being self-sufficient and fending for themselves, and eating out of garbage cans. They didn't want to give up their independent lifestyle and have an adult tell them what to do. And they didn't want to have to go to school!

But most of the children did respond and came to the gates dressed in their rags and covered with grime from head to toe. They showed their invitations to the gate keeper and asked admittance.

Now the king had left word that his children would be coming any day and to admit those who showed their invitations. But the gate-keeper could not believe that the king would actually want children like this in his royal presence. He was horrified at the filth and ragged clothing and offended that they even had the audacity to come to the castle looking like that. These children were definitely not fit to become princes and princesses. But since they did have invitations, he couldn't just turn them away, so he said to the children, "I can't let you into the castle dressed like that in those rags and filth. It's just not proper. Go home and take a bath and get cleaned up. Fix your hair and put on nice clothes. Then come back and we will take you to the king."

The children turned to leave. Some were very sad and others were very mad. "I thought it was too good to be true," said others. They had had no choice but to come as they were. They had no homes to go to, no way to take a bath. And the clothes they wore were all they had. They were all badly hurt. Some became very angry at the king and blamed him. Others became very sad and depressed. "For awhile, we had hope," they said, "but now it is gone." They felt they could not trust

adults and especially the king and queen.

About a week after issuing the invitations, the king and queen began wondering where their children were. They started asking around. No one seemed to have seen them or knew anything about them. Finally,, they came to the gate-keeper who proudly told him the good job he had done in keeping the rabble out.

"Yes, your majesties, these little urchins came to the castle seeking admission, but you should have seen them, dirty, mud in their hair, clothes torn and patched, barefooted, scraggly unkempt hair. They were totally disgusting and not something your majesties should have had to look at. I knew there had been some mistake and they had gotten a hold of those invitations improperly." Then with a smile, as if he had done a good deed and would now be rewarded, he said, "So I sent them home to get cleaned up before they could be admitted, and no one has come back since!"

The king's countenance darkened. His eyes flashed anger. With great restraint, he replied to his gatekeeper, "You do not understand. These children have no homes. They have no bath. They have no other clothes. You have hurt my children and prevented them from coming to me. I may not be able to persuade them to return to the castle and so they will be lost to me. I think you may better serve me in the stables cleaning stalls than at the gate. Perhaps that will help you to learn that the value of a person does not depend on externals."

The next day the king and queen went out again to find more children. They issued invitations to these children as well as sending invitations again to the first group.

Soon the children started showing up at the gate in their rags and filth as before. This time, however, the gatekeeper welcomed them and made them feel wanted and important. He called the lord chamberlain who ushered them into the castle and saw to it that each one was assigned a maid or valet to assist in bathing and dressing.

"After you have bathed and are dressed in your new clothes, you are to come back here. We will begin your instruction on how to become a proper prince or princess," the lord chamberlain said.

The children were led off with much excitement to their respective rooms. Most had never had a bath before and the thought of actually getting into that big tub full of water was a little frightening. But once they were in it and felt the nice warm water, they began to enjoy it. It did feel good to be clean for the first time in their lives. After the bath, their hair was cut and the girls' hair styled with ribbons or hair ornaments. All the children were amazed at the clothes they were given and kept touching the fabrics with their fingers. The fabrics were so soft and the colors bright. Their clothes had been made of course wool; these were made of fine wool flannel, cool cotton and linen, or even soft velvet and shimmering silk.

They returned to the chamberlain in awe, amazed at their surroundings and the whole experience. They were overwhelmed and definitely wanted to learn to be good princes and princesses. They wanted the king and queen's approval so he would let them stay there.

The lord chamberlain stood up. "Young ladies and young gentlemen, hopefully to soon become princesses and princes, we will now begin your education in proper royal deportment." He paused and looked around to make sure he had everyone's attention, then continued with great dignity. "If you learn your lessons well and obey all the rules, then you will be allowed to meet the king and queen. And, if they approve of you, you will be adopted and become their children."

The children nodded excitedly and cheered. "We're ready!"

"Good," the lord chamberlain replied as he passed out a rather large book to each one. "This book tells all the proper procedure and behavior for every aspect of court life. It is our textbook for our studies as well as rule book for our lives. Remember to bring it with you every day."

"Since it will soon be time for dinner, we will now have our first lesson." He turned and pointed his hand to a long table set with plates and silver service. "Boys, come over here. You are to stand in back of a chair and pull it out like so," saying this as he demonstrated. "Now girls, you come and sit down as the boys help to push your chair in like this." They spent quite a while practicing as it

took awhile to get coordinated. A few girls fell on the floor when the boy didn't push the chair under them right, and a few tripped on the chair legs and fell, but no one was hurt and eventually, they were all seated.

The chamberlain was less than pleased with the way the first lesson had gone, but needed to proceed directly to the second which was proper use of table service. Most of them had never used silverware before, but had always eaten with fingers. The lord chamberlain demonstrated, "The fork must be held exactly like this, the spoon like this. This is how you sip your soup - delicately and don't make slurping noises - that is uncouth. The knife is held like so to cut with. Like this to spread with," and so it went. Each detail had to be perfect.

The children tried, but couldn't get it just right to the chamberlain's satisfaction. It was taking hours and was well past suppertime. The children who had not had much food all day were very hungry and began to complain, "When can we eat?" they wanted to know. They were getting very restless. The boys started poking the girls and the girls squealed, "He hit me." The chamberlain was getting frustrated and starting to get mad and yell at the children to maintain order. But finally he decided he had better feed them before he had a riot on his hands. He summoned the kitchen staff to bring in the food. After all that practice, most of the children still ate with their fingers and there was a lot of pushing and shoving and grabbing to get what they wanted to eat even though there was plenty for all. The chamberlain tried to ignore their lack of manners and enjoy his own meal, but to himself he said, "I don't know what the king and queen see in these children. They are like animals, totally uncivilized. I don't know if I will ever be able to get them to change."

The next day there were more lessons and more rules. "Today you will be required to eat with table service. If you eat with your fingers, you will have to leave the table and so go hungry." So they watched the chamberlain closely and when he was looking at them, they used their silverware, but as soon as he looked elsewhere, they went back to using their fingers.

They tried to work on passing food instead of grabbing for it. They kept getting confused and passing in different directions. One poor child would get the peas three times and not get the meat and another one waited and waited and waited for the gravy and finally ate his bread without it. And it took so long for everyone to be served.

Later they started classes on dress. They learned that since purple was the royal color, all their clothes should be purple. All the little girls were given the same identical style dress because that was what proper little princesses should wear. All the little boys had the same style shirt and breeches because that was proper for little princes.

There were more lessons on etiquette, how to greet someone or make introductions. Girls were taught a proper curtsy and boys a proper bow. The young men were taught to hold their arm properly for the young ladies who were to take the young men's arms just so. And so the etiquette lessons went, proper behavior for this occasion and for that until the children thought there must be no end to the number of rules and occasions to use them.

The boys were given lessons in weaponry. The captain in charge of training young knights felt that the bow was the only weapon truly fit for a prince because it could be used in the hunt as well as in war. So he only taught the boys archery. A few were very good at it and really enjoyed it, but other boys wanted to learn about the swords and shields and even use of the mace and the lance. A few were interested in machines of war and some in blacksmithing, in forging the swords and armor. But the latter occupation was considered definitely beneath the dignity of a prince, so was not allowed.

The girls, meanwhile, were being taught various forms of embroidery. However, other types of needlework such as knitting or sewing were not allowed as this, too, was too menial an occupation for a princess. And when they did their tapestries or table cloths or whatever they were to do, only the prescribed patterns and, of course, the proper colors could be used.

And so the days stretched on and on, classes and more classes, rules, rules, and more rules. The children started to say to each other, "This is getting to be so boring. All we do is work to learn more

and more dumb rules. We never get to do anything just for fun and we still haven't seen the king or queen. I'm wondering if we ever can learn to follow all the rules. There's so many and we're bound to forget some."

"Yeah," said another one, "I really miss being able to run around and do something fun. We haven't been able to play since we've been here. I'm beginning to feel like this place is more a prison than a palace."

"I agree," said yet another. "We're cleaner and we dress better and look better. We have food and a place to sleep. But I'm not so sure we really are better off now than before. Sometimes I wonder if we will ever get to see the king and queen. We could be all grown up before we get to see them at this rate!"

That night a couple of children snuck out of the castle to return to their former life. The next night a few more left and the night after that as well. The chamberlain noticed his group was getting smaller and smaller and he was worried. What was he doing wrong? He decided he had better go and see the king and queen.

The king and queen were on their way to see the lord chamberlain as he came to see them. As they met in the hall, the king asked, "Where are my children? Why haven't I seen them?"

"Oh, your majesty, that is what I am coming to see you about. They are so stupid and ignorant. I have tried so hard to teach them proper etiquette and manners. They seem to learn one thing and so we go to another, but then they forget the first thing. They are just too dull and now some of them have run off to return to the streets. I just don't know what to do with them. At the rate they are going, they will never be ready to come into your presence even if they do stay here."

The king shook his head sadly, "You don't understand. You have it all backwards. You have been trying to make them into princes and princesses by making them act like royalty. First, they must become princes and princesses and then they will learn to act like royalty."

"I want to enjoy my children now, to be with them, talk to them and love them now, not to wait until some unspecified future time when they are good enough - whatever good enough would be. Children by their very nature are imperfect because they are immature even when on their best behavior. They are unpredictable and spontaneous and that is partly what makes them so delightful."

"First thing tomorrow we want you to bring the children who are still here to our private chambers. Send out messengers to those who have left inviting them to return. I fear we will need to go out again to find more children ourselves to have a full household. When they arrive make sure they are taken directly to our quarters as soon as they have bathed and dressed. We will be responsible for their education."

The next day the king, queen, and prince greeted the children in their private chambers. The king spoke to them, "Children, we have invited you here to be adopted and become our children. If that is your wish as well, please step forward and receive the official documents that prove the adoption is complete. Accept the ring with the royal seal which only the royal family has a right to wear and use."

The children in great eagerness crowded forward to receive these items.

Then the king and queen stood and leading the way said, "Come, we will present you to the court," as they walked toward the great hall.

Here the king introduced the children each by name to the court and spoke, "You are my witnesses this day that these children have become our own. They have accepted the rights and responsibilities that accompany royalty. We accept the responsibility for providing for them and instructing them and we will treat them as we have treated our own son, the prince."

The king and queen hugged each one as the nobles of the court cheered. "From now on you will eat your meals with us, sleep in the private royal chambers, go on outings and excursions with us, and be with us on occasions of state. There will be some formal lessons where we show you specific things, but mostly you will just live with us."

By now it was time for the noon day meal. An extra long table had been set up in the royal dining hall. The king and queen were seated and the children followed, not without commotion, but the king and queen seemed not to notice.

The blessing was said and the meal began. Some of the children who had been in the chamberlain's class knew a little about table manners, but of course, the children right from the street knew nothing. The children began to eat as they normally did - with their fingers. And there was a lot of shoving, pushing, and grabbing to get what they wanted. Then one little girl sitting next to the prince saw that he was using a fork. She looked at the queen and saw how delicately and ladylike she was using her fork and knife. She watched the queen for a moment and then picked up her fork trying hard to imitate the queen. The queen noticed her attempt and smiled, nodding her approval. The little girl ate her first bite with a fork. It wasn't so difficult. She nudged the boy next to her and when he looked at her, she pointed to the king, queen, and prince and then showed how she could use a fork now, too. He looked at them for a moment and then at his own fork. He picked it up and tried to use it. The king looked at him and smiled, nodding his approval. The boy then nudged the child next to him and so by the end of the meal, they were all using forks.

While they were learning to use their forks, there was another lesson going on. They began the meal by grabbing and pushing to get the food. But the prince asked his mother politely, "Mother, please pass the meat."

She smiled at him and he was given the meat. A few children saw this and also tried it. Sure enough, the meat or whatever they asked for was given to them. The others picked up on this and by the meal's end, there was beginning to be some semblance of order.

The next day there were lessons, of course, but there was also a lot of time for fun as well. They especially loved the prince who seemed to do everything just right. They wanted to be just like him so they watched him carefully and tried to imitate what he did. The king and queen always smiled their approval when the children tried even if they didn't get it just right. There were also lots of hugs as well as words of encouragement.

Many things were not even formally taught. They just picked it up by being around the royal family. It didn't take long before the little girls knew how to do a perfect curtsy and the boys a courtly bow. Their language began to change as they associated with the royal family and the nobles of the court. They became polite without even being aware of it.

The king and queen were in charge of each child's education and individualized it according to each child's natural interests and abilities. All the boys, for instance, were given some training in weaponry. But those whose talent was in archery were given more practice and training in that area. Others delighted in swordsmanship and spent more time in that. And there were some who didn't enjoy weapons at all and preferred more scholarly pursuits. So they were allowed to spend more time in reading and studying.

Likewise with the girls. All were given some instruction in needlework skills, but some really excelled in that area. Others had the organizational ability needed to manage the castle. There were those who loved to sew and learned to design and make beautiful clothes.

Many children loved the outdoors. Some of them learned to garden, others to tend animals, and others to hunt.

They all had to learn about horses, but some preferred to ride in a stately carriage. Others loved to participate in the hunt, galloping their horses across fields and fences. Then there were those who enjoyed quiet rides just to enjoy the peace and quiet of the countryside.

They were taught about clothes and colors and what was appropriate for different occasions. But they were allowed to choose the colors that looked best on them and the styles that suited their personalities. Some of the girls loved ruffles and lace, but others a more plain, simple look. Some of the boys liked to dress like huntsmen, others like knights, and some like scholars. There was great leeway in their everyday dress. But on more formal occasions, the boys wanted to look like the king

and the girls like the queen, so the clothes they picked out to wear were very similar to what the king and queen wore and therefore very appropriate.

A year went by. The king and queen were very happy with their family. The prince enjoyed his brothers and sisters. Then a messenger arrived. A king from nearby country was coming to visit. Of course, there was a flurry of activity as all prepared for his visit.

The day arrived and the visiting king was received in the great hall with all the pomp and dignity due one of his royal standing. He was very impressed by the children he saw there. He could tell by their dress and demeanor they were obviously princes and princesses. But there were so many of them he asked his hosts, "How did you manage to have so many children? Surely they cannot all be yours. But I cannot tell which are yours and which are ones you may have adopted. They all walk like you, they talk like you, they even look like you. How did you do it?"

The king and queen smiled as the king spoke, "They are all our children, but all save one are adopted. They have become like us because they lived with us. They learned to love us as we loved them and so they wanted to be like us. And they have."

Psalms 103:13-14

Galatians 4:4-7

Romans 8:12-17

James 2:5

Ephesians 5:1-2, 8-10