

- **\*READ John 13:33-35\*** It is probably the first spiritual song that most of us remember from our childhood. If there was an all-time bestseller list for children's church songs then it would probably take top spot without much contest. Sure *"This Little Light Of Mine"*, *"The Lord's Army"*, and *"The Wise Man Built His House Upon The Rock"* are all timers, but none of these are the OG of children's church songs. None of them are on the same level as *"Jesus Loves Me."* *"Jesus Loves Me"* (JLM) just feels as if it was destined for greatness from its original conception within the writers and composers, right? But what if I told you that this timeless song actually first found itself as a poem.
- JLM was originally written not to be used in actual music and worship, but it was a poem written as a part of a novel all the way back in the 1860s. Sisters Anna and Susan Warner were the authors of a book entitled, *"Say and Seal,"* and it was in this novel that a young child lay ill and dying. The novel's main character, Mr. Linden, is at the bedside of this sick young boy, and as a means of trying to give comfort to his ailing heart, Mrs. Linden recites this poem that begins, *"Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so."* The words hit their mark as they provided this dying child with a sense of peace and comfort during his last hours.
- As you could expect, this portion of the novel brought thousands of readers to tears, and the poem became a stalwart in the hearts of many men and women who were caught up in the heat of the Civil War. The comforting words that imaginatively eased the heart of a fictional dying boy, brought very real comfort and peace to the hearts of men and women all across the country during those years of war.
- It was during this time that a man by the name of William Bradbury came across this poem and instantly fell in love with its words and sentiments. Bradbury was a well-known musician who had a knack for putting spiritual lyrics to music. Some of his already composed well-known songs were *"Sweet Hour Of Prayer"*, *"He Leadeth Me"*, and *"The Solid Rock."* With these well-known songs already in his musical arsenal, Bradbury set out to compose what would come to be a world-famous song with the words of Anna Warner's poem.
- It is important to note, however, why it is that this song has found its way into the hearts of so many. While the music is simple and delightful, and children are easily able to remember the words...the true genius of this song as with any other number of well-known and popular spiritual songs lies within the message that is being presented. Yes, the music is simple and catchy, but the real reason we find this song being taught to kids so early on in their lives is because it is chock-full of strong and needed spiritual truths. This is a must within our singing because teaching and edification are major parts of our singing to God and one another. As we begin our efforts in this year's VBS this morning, I believe it is appropriate to take some time to focus on the truths of this song and 4 strong lessons that it teaches even the youngest of us concerning our wonderful Savior and His love for us all.

## 4 Lessons "Jesus Loves Me" Teaches Our Children

### I. The importance of the Bible.

#### A. We come to know of Jesus's love through the Word of God.

1. Maybe you have experienced something like this before when a younger child has heard so much about Jesus and what He has done for us that he or she asks one day, *"When do I get to meet Jesus?"* We know that little kids are very much visually based in the way they interact within the world for the first few years of life, and it shouldn't surprise us when they ask such a question. However, when we let them know that Jesus isn't here, but that He is up in heaven then they might begin to ask some more questions. *"How do we know so much about Jesus when no one has ever met Him? How can we be so certain that He truly loves us?"*

2. These are good questions for our kids to be asking because it shows that they are using their brains and reasoning skills, and we should appreciate such questions. The thing about it is that these questions have already been answered many times when these same kids sing the song "Jesus Loves Me." We know that Jesus loves us because, just as the song says, the Bible tells us so. If we have confidence that the Bible truly is the mind of God revealed to mankind, then we can have trust in what it tells us concerning God's and Jesus's love for us all. For it is within this book that we can come to know of God's love and willingness to give Jesus for us (**John 3:16**), and of Jesus's willingness to be that sacrificial lamb for the sins of man. (**Philippians 2:5-8**)
- B. If we truly want for our kids to know that Jesus loves them then we must be committed to constant and continual teaching from and attention to the Scriptures.
1. Our children will not know what we do not teach them, and this is why we must be dedicated to the diligent teaching of the Bible to our children. This past Sunday morning, we looked at **Deuteronomy 6:1-9** as we were talking about what we can do to remedy the problem of Biblical illiteracy, and I would like to give emphasis again to what is said within those verses for just a moment. Particularly, I want to focus on what the Lord tells Moses is a good time to focus on the Word of God.
  2. In this text, specifically in **verses 7-9**, we find the Lord telling the people that they need to not just teach their children every now and then...but the Lord instructs His people to teach their children "diligently!" They needed to give strong, concerted, and consistent effort in the teaching of their children. They were not to neglect the teaching of God's Word until it was just about time for them to move out of the home, but this was something they were to be doing continually throughout the raising of their children. They were to teach when they sat in the house, when they walked by the way, when they were laying down, and when they were rising up. They were to bind the teachings of the Lord to their hands and between their eyes, and they were to know that anytime they came into the house there was going to be a spiritual lesson that could be learned.
  3. This was God's desire for the spiritual education of the children of the Jews, and if the parents were faithful in this endeavor then generations would continually rise that knew the Lord and were faithful to Him. However...we know that wasn't what actually happened within the history of Israel. Sadly, we read in **Judges 2:10-14** that there came up a generation of Israelites who did not know the Lord their God who had brought them up out of slavery in the land of Egypt. They did not know the great God who had parted the Red Sea. They did not know Yahweh who had delivered this land overflowing with milk and honey. Because of this lack of knowledge, they forsook God and went after the gods of the people around them. God burned with anger, and they were continually punished for their unfaithfulness. I don't believe it takes a great deal of understanding to realize that **Deuteronomy 6:1-9** was not followed, and it led to the downfall of God's people. If we are not diligent to teach our own children of Jesus's love and to take advantage of opportunities provided by the church then they too will be set up for a great fall. We might not think of it as such a warning, but "Jesus Loves Me" reminds us of this serious and important thought.

## II. Jesus wants for them to come to Him.

### A. Jesus showed a great love for children throughout His ministry.

1. Time and time again we see Jesus interacting with children through His ministry on earth.
  - a) In **Mark 10:14-16**, we read of Jesus rebuking His apostles for not allowing the children to come to Him for prayer and blessings. "*Permit the children to come to Me; do not hinder them.*"
  - b) In **Matthew 17:18**, Jesus casts a demon out of a little boy who had been afflicted.
  - c) Jesus even healed the daughter of the Gentile woman in **Matthew 15:18**. "*O woman, your faith is great; it shall be done for you as you wish.' And her daughter was healed at once.*"

d) Greatest of all must surely be the raising of Jarius's daughter from the dead which is found in **Mark 5:22-42**. *"Taking the child by the hand, He said to her, 'Talitha Kum!' (which translated means, 'Little girl, I say to you, get up!')"*

2. While Jesus was most focused on turning the hearts of men and women toward the Lord their God, He was also very mindful and compassionate towards the little children that were brought to Him to heal or bless. Jesus certainly had a soft spot for the children, and He lovingly invited the children to come to Him. This isn't always the case, though, when it comes to adults and children. Some adults don't give much care or attention to children, but this isn't the case with Jesus, and this must come from His desire that we all become like little children.

**B. He says that we must become like little children if we want to come into His kingdom.**

1. In **Matthew 18:1-4**, we find Jesus responding to the disciples question as to who would be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Before our Lord says anything to the disciples, He calls a child to Himself, and then states, *"Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven."*
2. How does one become like a little child? I believe this type of teaching could be traced back to what Jesus says on the sermon on the mount in **Matthew 5:3** when He speaks of the poor in spirit and how they will be the ones that will have the kingdom of heaven. To be poor in spirit is to recognize our own weakness and incompleteness apart from God. Left to ourselves we are frail and broken, but with God we are made strong and whole. Sound familiar? *"They are weak, but He is strong!"* Jesus wants for children to come to Him and find strength for overcoming the world. This desire is for true children as well as those who have become like children.

**III. Salvation & forgiveness are provided by Jesus's love.**

**A. Jesus's love is shown through His sacrifice.**

1. As Jesus is speaking with His Apostles just prior to His betrayal and crucifixion in **John 15:9-13**, we find Him speaking of His great love that He has for His Apostles, and how He desires that they share in that same kind of love for one another. *"This is my commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you."*
2. It was Jesus's desire that they be a people who showed the same kind of love for one another and others that Jesus showed in leaving heaven, coming to earth, and giving His life for the sins of mankind. He sums up His feelings in **John 15:13** when He says, *"Greater love has no one that this, that one lay down his life for his friends."* Surely this is a great love...but Jesus might have been underselling what He was about to do a bit because He not only laid down His life for His friends, but He also gave His life for His enemies.

**B. Through Jesus's sacrifice we are able to be forgiven of our sins.**

1. It is in the text of **Romans 5:6-11** that we learn the truest extent of Jesus's love, and that is seen in the fact that He gave His life for those who were helpless because of their own sin, which includes us. The reality we found ourselves in is one where we have made ourselves enemies of Jesus by our turning away from the will of God in order to pursue our own selfish and ultimately sinful desires. **(Romans 5:6,8,10)**
2. Yet...the love of Jesus is so perfect and powerful that even those who had turned their back on Him were the subject of His ultimate act of love in giving Himself on the cross. *"But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."* **(Romans 5:8)** When we sing *"Jesus Loves Me"*, we are proclaiming that great love that led God to leave heaven and die for sinners who are so undeserving. We are singing of love that allows the weak to become children of the most high God. What better message can we teach our children than for them to know the extent to which Jesus wants for them to come to Him? He wants them so badly that He died so that they could be in heaven with Him forever.

#### IV. Jesus desires that they live their lives for Him.

##### A. It is never too early to teach our children that life isn't all about them.

1. From the time children come out of the womb, they are shown nothing but constant attention and care because they are exactly what we said earlier...they are helpless. This is just a fact of life in this stage of development, but that doesn't mean that can't cause problems later down the line. We've all experienced it as parents when our kids truly believe that the world revolves around them, and they must always get their way in every single way possible.
2. When the contrary is presented as being the actual truth...well that can be a tough pill to swallow at times. However, the quicker that pill can be swallowed the better because it then allows for real teaching to begin. Specifically, we are able to begin teaching that just because we want to do something doesn't mean that it is something that is good or right to do. We are able to begin teaching them that we don't live exclusively for our own desires, but that we try to live in such a way that God is pleased with what we do.

##### B. They need to know that life is about serving and pleasing God.

1. *"Jesus take this heart of mine. Make it pure & wholly thine."* When we sing these words, we are asking that Jesus take our hearts, the very things that move us in everything that we do, and shape it in such a way that it becomes something that is pure and pleasing to Him. Of course this isn't something that is easy to do because this requires us to give up our will in order to allow Jesus to have His way with us, but the second half of this verse gives us the motivation that can help us to accomplish this goal.
2. *"Thou hast bled and died for me. I will hence-forth live for thee."* It isn't easy giving up our will in order for Jesus to have His, but it is made easier when we remind ourselves of the sacrificial love of Jesus. He not only lived in this world for us, but He also died so that we might do just as the song says and live for Him. It is never too early to teach our children that living a life for Jesus is the best way to live a life, and every time we sing this song with them we are given an opportunity to teach them that valuable lesson.

Our singing together with and to one another is such an important aspect of our worship to God and our encouraging of one another. Though the songs be simple at times, the messages of the songs are overflowing with strong spiritual lessons that can be taught to ever the youngest among us. As we sing *"Jesus Loves Me"* may we be ever mindful of the words which we are singing...words that teach us these important lessons that we have considered this morning. May God help us to truly know of Jesus's love for us, what it has done, and what it should cause us to do. May we in turn love Jesus with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and may we seek to pass that love onto those who are coming up after us.

**\*PRAYER\*** *Our gracious Father in heaven...we are so thankful for the love of Your Son that we read of through Your inspired Word. We are forever grateful for the forgiveness of sins that comes as a result of what He did for us, and may we live our lives in appreciation for that great sacrifice. We are thankful for songs such as this one that we have considered this morning. May we always sing them with the understanding and seek to teach and encourage those who sing with us. We ask especially that You please be with us this week in our endeavors to focus on the young people of this church. May their faiths be established and strengthened as they consider the amazing power of Your Son. Bless our teachers in their efforts, and we hope that all things are done to Your glory. We love You so much because You first loved us, and we offer this prayer up to you in the name of Your Son, Jesus the Christ our Wonderful Savior...amen.*