

Text: Matthew 19:13-15

Title: God's Care for Children

Truth: God cares for children, who are like God's children.

Date/Location: Wednesday June 16, 2022 at FBC

Introduction

As he ministers, the Lord instructs His disciples not to treat children like a nuisance, but to bless them. More importantly, he takes the opportunity to remind his audience that it is child-like faith that is the distinguishing mark of heavenly citizens. Without that, you are a child of the devil.

I. The Lord's Care for Children, 13-15

- A. Contrast this paragraph to the previous mention of children in 18:1-11. There, the Lord spoke of little ones who believe (v. 6, 10). He spoke about his disciples being converted and becoming as little children to enter the kingdom of heaven. By so saying, he spoke of the humility and repentance needed—expressions of true faith—that characterize those who are citizens of the kingdom of heaven. As for the contrast, there Jesus was talking about believers being *like* little children. In 19:13-15, He is speaking directly, literally, about *actual* little kids, but making the same analogy that he did earlier.
- B. Parents brought their children to the Lord so that He could lay hands on them and pray. These children, according to Luke 18:15-17, were infants. The word is used for babies both inside and outside the womb (Luke 1:41, 44; Luke 2:12, 16). Notice that the author in both examples is Luke, *the physician*. See also Acts 7:19, 2

Timothy 3:15, 1 Peter 2:2. Obviously the word can refer to what we might call a fetus as well as a newborn. I wish we didn't even have a word fetus, frankly, for people to try to make a distinction between inside and outside the womb, for both are babies.

Anyway, my point in carefully defining the word is that these children did not likely bring themselves to Jesus, and it was likely their parents, since such small children were very likely with their parents. This was almost a baby dedication!

We would probably say something like this: the parents wanted the blessing of the Lord on their children. They knew this man was at least a special rabbi, and maybe some of them understood more than that. Who would *not* want this perfect man to bless their children? I'd be first in line for that!

- C. Some of these parents may have been “religiously superstitious” but others were quite likely expressing faith-filled appreciation for the Lord and hoping He would do something for their children. Maybe that something was unspoken, part of their prayers for their young people, and perhaps the Lord blessed them toward that prayer request. We do not know, because the text does not tell us, for this issue is not the point.
- D. What is the point is the contrast between the disciples' response and the Lord's response to the children.
- E. The disciples rebuked the parents/children. They saw the children as a distraction, as an interruption, as unnecessary, or as unimportant.

- F. Can you imagine the scene? The parents are hopeful, the children are bewildered, the disciples are telling them to back off and go away, and the Lord Jesus himself wants to see those children. What a stressful situation.
- G. In our life, if something like that happened, it would be easy for us to “rebuke” the disciples just as hard or with even more force than they were rebuking the parents. And they deserved it. But the text tells us that the Lord simply responded—evidently in a kind and gentle way, and I am sure quite firm—that he wanted to see the children. Any expression of desire to be close to Jesus was favorable and should not be rebuked, even if it was an “interruption.”

14 But Jesus said, “Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of Heaven.”

- H. The Lord corrects the disciples here in a very direct way and says what He means both in a positive way and negative: let them come, and do not forbid.
- I. The reason He gives is this: because of such is the kingdom of heaven. Here, he hearkens back to the “believers like little ones” analogy of 18:1-11. There is a kind of innocence, dependency, and helplessness that is inherent in small children. These same characteristics mark a believer in his relationship with God. The Lord Jesus wants to highlight these qualities as over against the hard-hearted, superior, self-sufficient, sinful adults who are opposing His ministry. The disciples were unwittingly being somewhat like them by refusing the children.

J. Children are not an interruption. Bearing and raising children takes work, sacrifice, finances, sweat, pain, sometimes painful emotions. Churches should not see children as “rug rats” or messy or inconvenient or whatever. They are our closest mission field! I heard of a pastor once who did not like children. I wondered how he could be a genuine servant of the Lord. Perhaps he was, but needed to get an attitude adjustment from Jesus on this matter.

K. The Lord did indeed lay his hands on the children. This undoubtedly means that He said some words of blessing over them (Mark 10:16). Did this have a mystical benefit to them? I do not believe so. As long as they followed the Lord and took heed to the words He spoke to them, *that* and the blessing that comes with it would be the benefit.

We believe based on the description in the parallel passages that the children were too small to exercise faith—and yet the Lord blessed them anyway.

L. A word about the innocence of children. They are sinners just like everyone else: they know how to lie, cheat, steal, and talk back to authority. And they do that. They are sinners by imputation from Adam (Romans 5:12), by nature, and by behavior.

But relatively speaking, young children are innocent of great transgression (Jeremiah 19:4). They are naïve to the sinful ways of the world. It is when their friends or older people introduce them to this or that evil practice that they become much more sinful.

M. The fact that the children are used as a pattern for believers indicates support for how most of us understand Scripture to teach that the youngest of us

who die—who are unable to exercise faith—are graciously regenerated by God’s sovereign grace (just as in every other case of regeneration). God chooses (elects) to do that. It does not seem in accord with God’s gracious character to dump millions of infants into an eternity apart from Christ. They are living humans from conception, and do receive God’s caring attention, just as we should do.

I often forget to mention this as well, but the people who are incapable of faith must also be incapable to express voluntary unbelief. If they can express unbelief, then they can express belief.

Their relative innocence does not *demand* God’s grace, but it does help us understand God’s disposition toward those who are fatherless or weak or mentally incapable of deciding on the gospel. Their extreme youth and incapability also demonstrate to us just how needy we are for God’s gracious salvation. We must put aside our self-sufficiency to humbly receive God’s grace.

See also 2 Samuel 12:23, another verse that is used to support the belief that God regenerates infants who die in infancy and welcomes them into heaven. He does not *have* to do that, but we understand from these passages that He does do so. But note that He only does so through regeneration—unless a person is born again, he cannot participate in the kingdom of God.

Conclusion

The Lord left that location and went on to another place to continue His ministry.

But we are left with the question of how to apply this text. We intuitively understand that we must care deeply for young people. The church and its individuals must minister to little ones. The society at large and its laws must protect them from harms of all sorts. Yet today, we do not protect, but rather *expose* our young ones to dangerous and immoral ideas. We do not teach them religious instruction and thus by omission make many think that religion is irrelevant.

Again, and more importantly, we are reminded that kingdom citizenry is not opened up to self-sufficient people. It is for those who are like children in their estimation of themselves.

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