

Luke 18:15-17 — Jesus Blesses the Children

(Matthew 19:13–15; Mark 10:13–16)

15 Now people were even bringing their babies to Jesus for Him to place His hands on them. And when the disciples saw this, they rebuked those who brought them. 16 But Jesus called them [the children] to Him and said, “Let the little children come to Me, and do not hinder them! For the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. 17 Truly I tell you, anyone who does not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.”

This story follows immediately on the heels of a parable about humility before holy God. We should be sure to connect the dots between the tax collector’s attitude of repentant humility and the childlikeness by which one receives the Kingdom.

v.15

“Even” — This is a bit of commentary inserted as the Greek text was rendered, but it helps by putting the situation in context. People brought their babies to Jesus *in addition to* the sick, infirm, demonized (eg 4:40, 6:17-19, 7:21, 17:11-19).

Note also the two different words in the passage: ‘babies’ and ‘little child(ren).’ This is because the Text uses two different words: *brephē* (S1025 infant) and *paidion/paidia* (S3813 a half-grown child).

“Rebuked” — The disciples censured (S2008) those who brought the children. The ISV renders it: “sternly told them not to do that.” Alexander Maclaren offers a penetrating insight: “A great man’s hangers-on are always more careful of his dignity than he is, for it increases their own importance.” No doubt the disciples were trying to protect Jesus’ time. He was constantly overrun by the crowds. They thought his teaching and healing were for adults, not little children. Why waste his time with babies?

Obviously, the disciples were still on their learning curve and they wind up being publicly contradicted by the Master for their wrong impulse. People want their little ones to be blessed by leaders they respect. Who would not want their little one blessed by the miracle-working rabbi about whom some whispered

“Messiah”? Mark’s gospel adds: “And he took the children in his arms, placed his hands on them, and blessed them.” Maclaren calls this an “infinitely beautiful and touching incident which the world perhaps knows better than any other in our Lord's life.” Jesus loves all the little children of the world (as the Sunday school song has it) and each one ought to know the loving touch of Christ and his disciples.

Do not fail to recognize that you yourself can do for your child what Jesus did for these. The same Spirit is in you. You can pray to the Father in Jesus’ name. Don’t minimize your position in Christ, as a child of God and joint-heir with the Lord. Bless your children with your loving touch, your constant prayers, your teaching, and your example.

This story brings to mind another of Luke’s accounts (9:51-55) in which Jesus had to rebuke yet-clueless disciples: A Samaritan village refused to welcome Jesus and James and John wanted to call down fire from heaven to consume them. We have the full benefit of Jesus’ teaching, yet still we at times rebuke what the Word does not. We must know Jesus’ heart and adhere closely to the fact that he did not come to destroy lives, but to save them.

This story offers no basis for an argument promoting pedobaptism. Redemption belongs to those who have made a heartfelt commitment to follow Jesus in discipleship. We should, however, allow children to respond to salvation’s call when they are ready, then grow them in Christ. The problem with many professing Christians today is they never progressed past a childhood decision. They become living examples of the 2nd and 3rd soils (8:4-15).

v.16

W.C.C. Wright preached that “Every child is born close to heaven's gate. Children's hearts have fresh affections that turn to Jesus almost as readily as climbing plants in June.” And Spurgeon noted: “Instead of the child needing to wait until he grows up and becomes a man, it is the man who must grow down and become like a child. We do not enter into the kingdom of God by working out some deep problem and arriving at its solution; not by fetching something out of ourselves, but by receiving a secret something into us. We come into the Kingdom by the Kingdom's coming into us: It receives us by our receiving it.”

The Pulpit Commentary adds: “If they who are like little children belong to the kingdom of heaven, why should we for a moment doubt that the little children themselves belong to the kingdom? Doubtless they all do. And if that change which men call death happen to them while they are still little children, we may rest assured that it will be to the little ones by everlasting.”

v.17

“Will never enter” — A strong assertion, made even more so by the following story about the rich young ruler. I love Alexander Maclaren’s insight: “The entrance gate is very low, and, if we hold our heads high, we shall not get through it. It must be on our hands and knees that we go in. There is no place in the Kingdom for those who trust in themselves.”