

Let the Children Come, Part 1

Luke 18:15-17

I would like to invite you to turn again in your Bibles to Luke Chapter 18 for this, what we're going to see is such a precious insight into the tender ways of our Lord Jesus Christ. And as we see, as per usual, there is a lot beneath the surface of what seems to be such a simple account of parents bringing their children to Jesus. Uh, Some very profound theology here. It's the theology, once again, of divine grace. Of divine grace, here in Luke 18:15-17. Let's read those verses together.

"Now they were bringing even infants to him, that he might touch them. And when the disciples saw it, they rebuked them. But Jesus called them to him saying, 'Let the children come to me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the Kingdom of God. Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the Kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.'"

At this point in the narrative of Luke's gospel, Luke has just now, at this point, rejoined the other two synoptic gospel

writers, Matthew and Mark. From the point of departure in Luke 9:51, as we entered into this travel section of the narrative of Luke's gospel, Luke has had a lot of original material, material that's distinct to his gospel, and we've been through that together. But here he comes back together, joining up with where Matthew and Mark are in their gospel narratives. And from this point on, you can see that Matthew 19, Mark 10, and Luke 18 pretty much track together and move forward together.

So we have Jesus, children in the Kingdom of God here in this text, and then we'll see immediately following is the encounter with the rich young ruler. Then we see that Jesus makes a third prediction of his suffering, and then so on, we come to the triumphal entry, the Passion narrative. There are a few differences here and there but, pretty much, Matthew, Mark and Luke will track together from here on.

For our purposes today, it's important for us to notice, it's important for me to point out to you that all three synoptic gospel writers connect Jesus' teaching on the children in the Kingdom to his encounter with the rich young ruler. The two are connected. They immediately follow, one after the other.

All three writers, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, they want us to read these two accounts together.

But when we do see these two accounts connected closely together, we see once again two extremes that are epitomized. The illustration of two extremes in the children on the one hand, and then the rich young ruler on the other. These characters: the children and then the rich young ruler, they illustrate stark contrast. Polar opposites. They are the kind of people, on the one hand, who will receive the Kingdom, versus the kind of people who will not.

You may have noticed when we read verses 15-17 that, in the short space of just three verses, Jesus spoke twice about the Kingdom of God. In verse 16, "to such belongs the Kingdom of God." Also in verse 17, "Whoever doesn't receive the Kingdom of God like a child," and so on. So twice in a row, "The Kingdom of God." The next time Jesus will speak about the Kingdom of God, it's also twice in a row. Look up at verse 24, Jesus says "How difficult it is for those who have wealth to enter the Kingdom of God," and then verse 25, "For it's easier for a camel to go

through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of God."

Two other synoptic writers, Matthew and Mark, they follow exactly the same pattern, so this must be important, right? In fact, it's critical. It's vital. This passage is vital for us to understand, since you can see that Jesus enjoins his disciples, "Let the children come, and don't hinder them." And then he adds this warning: "Whoever does not receive the Kingdom of God like a child, that one" (and there's a very strong emphasis here in the Greek), "that one shall by no means enter into the Kingdom."

So it's especially critical here because Jesus has corrected not just the crowds: not the Sadducees, Pharisees, the scribes; not the elders, the chief priests. He's corrected, here, his disciples. These are people under his correction, who are in our position as disciples of Jesus Christ. We'd better take note here that these disciples had the opposite intuition that Jesus Christ had with regard to these children, and they ended up contradicting the Lord publicly. Publicly doing the opposite of what he wanted. How did that happen, and how can you and I avoid doing the exact same thing?

Let's dive right into our outline, and we just have two points for this morning. Number one, we're gonna talk about the right intuition about the Kingdom, the right intuition about the Kingdom. And then the second point will be the right disposition toward the Kingdom. So the right intuition about the Kingdom, first point, and then the right disposition toward the Kingdom. Let's look at point one, the right intuition about the Kingdom. Jesus had the right intuition about the Kingdom, he had the right instinct, obviously. He had the right sense. The disciples did not. They did not. And we need to understand what went wrong here.

Look at verse 15 again. "Now they were bringing," Luke says, "even infants to him, that he might touch 'em. And when the disciples saw it, they rebuked them." Here at this late stage in his ministry, Cross is just a couple months away. But Jesus has this large crowd of disciples following him. So this includes (obviously) the Twelve, his chosen Apostles, his Twelve, along with other disciples who are at varying degrees of understanding and varying degrees of commitment.

But they are following along. They have left all, whether in Galilee or in parts of Judea or Perea (where-ich is where they are right now), they've left everything, and they are following along with Jesus. And this whole entourage is there, making their way through Perea, eventually to go through Jericho and then up, making the route up to Jerusalem. But they've come to a stopping point along their journey, and probably taking rest in a village.

And as was typical in these little villages where Jesus came to visit, people there brought their sick to come see Jesus. They, they brought their sick and their infirm and even the demon-possessed. They brought them to Jesus to have him heal their sick loved ones. Also was, as was typical, Jesus never ever was reluctant to give of himself. He didn't say, "Look, I, I've been walking a long time, I need a break, OK? Can you just keep the sick away for right now?" Never says that.

He never puts his disciples in front of the sick, or in front of the infirm, or in front of the demon-possessed and says, "Guys, can you create a barrier for me? Can you do something about that?" He's never reluctant to give of himself,

he's never reluctant to teach people, to heal them, to cast out demons. And he does it even at the cost of his own energy and strength, even becoming weary in the work. But his compassion is always available.

It's evident in his willingness (often, as we see, and Luke has drawn this out time and time again), it's often evident in his willingness to touch people, to put his hands on them, even very sick people, even lepers, he's willing to touch them, to demonstrate the tender compassion of God in healing them. The verb for touch, *hapto*, it's used quite a bit in Luke's gospel. Luke actually is drawing attention to it time and again. He portrays physical contact between Jesus and those in need of healing, those in need of forgiveness.

So if you're one of those people in our midst who is a hugger, and you like touching people and hugging people, listen, you've got the points on this one. I have no argument against you. I, in fact, I'm the one who needs to repent. I get it. You've got biblical evidence for why you should be hugging people. But I just want to challenge you: Go the extra mile and

give them that kiss of affection, right? The, all right? Be consistent.

Jesus, in Luke's gospel, he didn't shy away from touching a leper in Luke 5. And that just wasn't done. You didn't touch lepers. There was a concern about contamination, which is why they had to stay at the outskirts. They had to stay beyond the population to be quarantined away from people. (That's how quarantines are done. You quarantine the sick, not the healthy.) Lepers were quarantined, and not to touch people. And yet Jesus, because his power would overcome their sickness and overcome their leprosy, he had no problem reaching out and touching them.

In Luke 6, he didn't pull away from the massive crowds who drew near, all of them wanting to touch him. He didn't even wear a mask in their presence. He touched them. He brought them near. He was mobbed by them, surrounded by them. He didn't demand personal space. In Luke 7, he even touched a funeral bier to halt the procession. It's a funeral procession going on. The only son of a widow had died. She was not only heartsick and heartbroken over losing her only son. Being a widow, had nobody, and so she was left destitute. No one to provide for her. And

yet he reached out and touched the bier to halt the procession, raising her son from the dead and giving him back to her.

In Luke 7, also, he allowed a notoriously sinful woman to touch him, washing his feet with her tears as she wept about her sin in his holy presence. She saw the mess she's making, and she wiped his feet with her hair, and then anointed his feet with perfume while she's kissing his feet. A lot of human contact there. Made everybody around him uncomfortable. And yet he received that act of worship from that dear woman. Forgiven.

In Luke 8, physical contact with a hemorrhaging woman. She'd been hemorrhaging for 12 years. Dangerous condition she was in, and she's healed just by his touch. His willingness to touch people, to make physical contact, not only shows the humanity of our Lord, but conveys, all the time, his affection for us sinners. It demonstrates his compassion, his mercy. That's what we're seeing here, is Jesus, who is the anointed King of God's Kingdom, he's acting in this kingly way that he says, "In this Kingdom, in this Messianic Kingdom, in the Kingdom of God, the King is accessible to people." He's approachable, he's a gentle king.

And these parents feel, evidently, no hesitancy at all. "They were bringing," it says, "even their infants to him that he might touch them." The practice here is common in this first century time among the Jews. They were common for parents to come visit famous rabbis and also elders and scribes, and to seek their blessing for their children. And so how fitting it is here for them to bring their children to Jesus. He had the power to deliver people from demons, from disease, even from death itself. His power could conquer anything. So, infant mortality rate sat at about a 30% or even higher in these days. So we can understand any parent's desire to inoculate their children with just one touch of Jesus Christ, right?

But their chief interest was not just in the physical good of their children, but also the spiritual good of their children, like any godly parent. Like any religious-thinking parent (and they were certainly religious), they wanted their children to be raised in the Lord. They wanted to teach their children to fear the Lord and to listen to his Word and heed the Word of God, such as the Law of Moses, and then hear and obey the prophets as well. Parents wanted their children to be wise

and understanding, to fear the Lord, to receive his blessing over their entire lifetimes.

And so obviously, as any good parent would do, they discipline their children in the fear and admonition of the Lord from a very young age, before they could even walk, while they're learning their words and their letters, while they're using their bodies and learning how to use everything, parents are teaching their children. They're teaching them to sit still and learn and listen so that they can receive the word of God. And here they bring their children to this famous rabbi, Jesus. And they want his blessing. Why wouldn't they? Wouldn't you? That's what's happening in verse 15 as parents bring their children to Jesus.

It's the imperfect tense here, and that helps us to picture that there is a, a steady flow of parents, moms and dads are just lined up here, constantly flowing. It's like a receiving line. And they are coming, bringing their children to him to receive his blessing. Luke is actually more specific than Matthew and Mark in his account. He tells us they were bringing even infants to him. Matthew and Mark use a broader, more

general word for children, which is *paidia*, referring to kids of various ages (could go from newborns all the way up to toddlers, younger boys, younger girls).

Generally, *paidia* refers to those who are not yet in a condition of accountability. They're unable to understand the teaching of the law, so they listen dutifully, they learn their letters and they receive instruction from their parents. But they still don't have that sense of abstract reasoning and able to, to figure out concepts and things like that. So that's the idea of *paidia*. They're in not in a condition, yet, of accountability, and they're being brought to Jesus by their parents.

Luke, though, is more specific in his account. He uses the word "infants," *Brephos* (which refers to newborn babies), being brought to Jesus. It could also refer to pre, you know, preborn babies, babies still in the womb, but obviously they're not being placed in Jesus' hands. Newborn babies are a, little infants. So just think about that for a moment. I've had the, the privilege of seeing this recently, uh, close-up and personal. And I know that there are a number of children born to

our congregation. Such a grace of God to our folks here, to see babies come into the world, and being born into this world and put into the arms of their parents. But if you can observe anything about new moms, they're not gonna give their baby just to anybody, right?

Think about that here. They're putting their newborns into the hands of an unmarried, relatively young man in his early 30s. I know some men in their early 30s. I wouldn't give 'em a hammer, let a, let alone a infant. Says a lot, doesn't it, that these moms are so at ease in his presence, so comfortable with him that they're willing to put their infants in his hands. Our Lord made himself accessible. He's approachable. He's gentle with people.

And listen. This is the spirit, the very spirit and essence of hospitality. To help people be at ease and comfortable in your presence, so that you take down barriers; any barriers to their intimidation, any barriers to their awkwardness, you try to remove those and, and make peep, people feel comfortable with you. That's hospitality.

These parents brought their children, their infants, to Jesus, and they had the right instincts about him. They knew that he was safe. They had the right intuition about the King and about the Kingdom of God, and they sought, rightly, his prayer for their children. They sought his blessing, they through him sought God's blessing in their families and for their lifetimes. So Jesus has the right intuition here. The parents have the right intuition. The babies, if they could speak up, they would feel comfortable in his presence too.

So how odd it is, isn't it, that his own disciples here are so out of touch. Notice what happens when Jesus' "handlers" get a glimpse of what's going on. Back to verse 15, so, parents "were bringing even infants to him that he might touch 'em, but when the disciples saw it, they rebuked them." What? Matthew and Mark are virtually identical in how they portray the scene, but Luke differs from them in just a couple of details. Matthew and Mark tell us rather flatly, "The disciples rebuked" (aorist tense). It's like "one and done," just the plain fact of it. But Luke says, "When the disciples saw" (that is, when they noticed what was going on), that's when they act. It's the imperfect tense here. That's when they "were rebuking them."

So they're continually rebuking parents. They see more parents come in the line. They're like, "Whoa, whoa, hold on, step back." "Imperfect tense" describes the disciples, and they're reacting to the (imperfect tense) action of the parents who keep on coming, and the disciples keep on rebuking. Parents try to come, disciples try to hinder. As these parents keep on bringing their infants to Jesus, the disciples, they see what they're doing, they keep on rebuking them. And get, how completely opposite of what we would expect, right?

These disciples, instead of facilitating access to Jesus, which is exactly what a disciple is supposed to do. Do we not get it? Weh, it's not about us. We don't want people to come to us individually, personally, except for a testimony that points people to Jesus Christ. Because all of their salvation, all their hope, all their joy, all their sanctification is found in him, not in us.

Who are we to get in the way of those who want to come to Jesus Christ? Disciples here, they're doing the opposite of what they're supposed to be doing. They became gatekeepers, blocking access to Jesus Christ. And they do that by this very strong

word, "rebuke," *epitimaō*. *Epitimaō*. That's the verb there. And in Luke's gospel, we see most of the time that verb, *epitimaō*, the one doing the rebuking is usually Jesus himself. And it's appropriate whenever he does it. He rebukes a demon in Luke 4:35, and then later on in the chapter, verse 41, he rebukes a fever. He rebukes the wind and the wa, raging waves. He rebukes an unclean spirit. He rebukes, also, James and John, remember, when they want to incinerate a Samaritan village.

He, he's the sovereign, clearly, throughout Luke's gospel and the other gospels as well. He is in charge. So his rebuke bears the weight of his authority. It's backed by divine power, *epitimaō*. That is the appropriate word. Fascinating word here. At its root, the verb *timaō*. So *epi* is a preposition. When, whenever a preposition is added to a verb, it intensifies it. It strengthens that verb that here, *timaō*, the root verb means to honor, it means to revere, to esteem highly, as in, "Honor your father and mother."

So, the honor inherent in *epitimaō*, the idea is that this stern warning, this strict charge, this severe censure, comes from the one who ought to be honored, whose position of

authority must be regarded, whose word ought to be heeded and obeyed. And that's why it's totally appropriate here for the incarnate Son of God, throughout Luke's gospel, to rebuke demons. He's in charge. They need to listen to what he says or suffer the consequence. Disease obeys his command. Natural phenomena like wind and waves, and the elements themselves obey Jesus Christ.

Overzealous disciples? Hm. That's why it's totally inappropriate, by the way, for overzealous disciples to use this verb of crowds, and parents, and children making their way to Jesus Christ. They are not sovereign. Here, they seem concerned about protecting Jesus from the crowds. They're concerned about protecting him and guarding him from the enthusiasm of these parents. They're maybe concerned about some protocol, some propriety that's not being regarded here. "This isn't the way it's done. How inappropriate. How unfitting." They believe they're doing Jesus a service, but yet they are way, way outta line. And we're right to wonder, right to ask the question, "Why would they do that? Why would they rebuke parents for bringing their little children to Jesus?"

After all, his disciples, these men themselves, had made the decision to follow Jesus. They, they made the decision to leave everything behind and follow him as disciples. Why would they do that? It's so that they could be nearer to him all the time. Oh, they get the idea of close contact and access to Jesus Christ. They desire it. So why would they deny these parents, and deny their little ones from coming to Jesus Christ? We're not told why (explicitly, anyway).

In any of the gospels, we're not told overtly or explicitly why this is so, which tells us something that this original audience hearing Jesus, and the original readers of the gospels, they implicitly understood. They intuitively knew what was going on here. We're removed by 2,000 years, we're removed by culture, removed by geography and language. But these people of the same culture, they shared the very same view of children, which is what the disciples were acting upon. That was where their intuition was lined up. It wasn't lined up with how Jesus thinks.