

## Let the Children Come, Part 3

Luke 18:15-17

So listen, it's of such as these that God's Kingdom belongs. The foolish, not the wise; the weak, not the powerful; the ignoble, lowly, despised and disregarded, not the highborn, sophisticated and well-regarded and well-connected of this world. True citizens of God's Kingdom, they have a right disposition toward the Kingdom. There's no list of qualifications that commends them. They are wholly unable. They are utterly dependent.

So they're not like the Pharisee in our previous parable, listing all of his positive attributes to God in prayer. They're like the tax collector who could only see the deficits. They're not like the rich young ruler having kept the commandments of God from childhood. They have no positive merit to commend themselves before an absolutely holy God.

And listen. That is why Luke uses the word in verse 15, *brephos*, "infants." "They were bringing even infants to him."

Matthew and Mark used the broader word, "child," *paidia*, but it's the same intent there. And Luke just wants to make the sure, that this point is inescapably clear for us as Gentile readers. If children have nothing to offer; if they have nothing to commend themselves, no merit to their account at whatever age, infants have even less, right? They got nothing at all. Babies are even weaker, even more helpless. Their dependency on others even more dire than a child. As Edwards points out, newborns are too young to exhibit the trust, openness and receptivity of children, which is the point. They are wholly dependent on God.

Now contrast this picture of childish weakness, infantile weakness with the young man who's next in line to meet Jesus. We meet him in verse 18. He's a ruler. He has authority over others. Infants? Got no authority at all. Always under authority. The ruler came to Jesus on his own power. Infants had to be carried because they have no power. Had to be carried by parents, placed in his arms. Jesus, giving them back to their parents. They got no power. The ruler had power at his disposal. He could project power as a ruler. Infants have no power at all. They are the epitome of helplessness. He's done good works. He'd

already accomplished a lot in his young life. Infants, they've done nothing at all. They've accomplished nothing at all.

He's, he's not young. He's not a, or, he is young. He's not a child young, but he is young and strong. And that's in contrast to those who are older, those whose bodies and their energy are on the decline. But he's strong and he's capable. He's young. He's self-reliant. Infants, they're at so, so young. They are utterly reliant on others. He's rich. He's extremely rich, which just serves his power and his influence. But this, these infants, they have nothing. And even if they had something, even if they had an inheritance coming to them, they don't understand what they have. They've got no knowledge, no comprehension of that. They have no ability to use it, will to use it.

At the beginning of our time, I told you that this is a simple account. Parents bringing their children, their infants, to Jesus. Disciples are in error, rebuking the parents, hindering him, Jesus correcting them. But listen, tucked into this simple account is some truly profound, beautiful theology of divine grace. Can you see it? In the previous section, the

Pharisee and the tax collector, they illustrated extremes, didn't they? We see the same thing here, the tax collector, theologically speaking, he is the picture of total depravity.

Here, the infants, they are the picture of total inability. Both things are true of us in coming to Christ. Total depravity and total inability. The tax collector, just as he epitomized the extremes of sin he portrayed for us (Jesus intended it this way), that he would portray a wholly undesirable person, one who everybody would think, full stop, "This guy is unsavable." And yet, Jesus said they can go home justified. Justified by faith in divine atonement.

Infants ex, epitomize an extreme as well. In the picture of the tax collector, Jesus tells us divine grace can save us from our total depravity. In the picture of infants and all children, Jesus tells us divine grace can overcome our total inability. I've said this to people who are trying to grow in some area of their life and work out repentance, and they're frustrated, maybe even a bit dejected, discouraged about their sanctification.

And sometimes I tell them, "It's like you're being asked to climb Mount Everest from the very sea floor, the bottom of the ocean, and get up to Mount Everest." And it's like, "Yeah, that's how it feels." And I say, "Oh, no, it's even worse than that. You're being called to climb Mount Everest in this issue of sanctification in your life, but without any arms or legs." They're like, "Yeah, that's sometimes more how it feels."

You know the good news in our Gospel? That you don't need arms and legs. In fact, they are a liability to you entering into the Kingdom, if you think that you can rely on your power. That's the point here. And the most depraved sinner who humbles himself and confesses his sins and trusts in Christ's atoning sacrifice to propitiate his sin before a holy God, that one will go down to his home justified and not anybody else. Doesn't matter he has no power, no ability to change himself, no merit of his own. In fact, it's to acknowledge that that accrues to us as a benefit.

The right disposition toward the Kingdom? It's to realize our total inability. It's to recognize our utter dependency before God. And when we acknowledge our helpless condition, when

we have our hands out, raised up, open wide before God like a dependent, needy child; that child that looks up and says, "Mama pick me up," we're in the right disposition toward the Kingdom. We're in the right position to be able to receive what God is so willing and eager to give.

So the good news of the Gospel is this: Heh, in contrast to our der, total depravity, Jesus is a Savior who comes in the power of holy purity and perfect righteousness. And in contrast to our total inability, Jesus is a Savior of consummate power who is able to save because he's kept the whole Law of God perfectly on our behalf. So it's not our purity that saves us, but his. It's not our power that resurrects us from the dead, but his. That is such good news for us totally depraved, totally unable sinners: that by faith in Jesus we can be saved. All of us, every single one of us.

Such is the character of our Lord that he regards the weak and the helpless, saves them. Which is why Jesus ends in verse 17 (and this is the fourth thing to point out) with a serious caution. He's taken action, he's given direction, he's provided an explanation. Now he provides us, fourthly (verse 17) with a

serious caution here. He says, "Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the Kingdom of God like a child, shall not enter it," or more strongly, "shall by no means enter it." The strongest way of negating something in the Greek language, *ou me*, "shall by no means enter it."

Several ways to interpret that saying if we isolate it from its context. But there's really only one interpretation that takes into account what Jesus taught in verse 16, what he did in verse 15. And the key interpretive questions have to do with the meaning of the word "receive" in this context, which is the verb *dechomai*; and then the point of comparison of the subordinate conjunction *hos*. That's the word *hos*.

So here are some options: Shall we receive the Kingdom as we receive a child? That is, is the point here "showing hospitality, and mimicking Jesus' receptivity toward children?" That's one option. Or shall we receive the Kingdom as though we are a child, that is, we are passive recipients (second option). Third option: Shall we receive the Kingdom as a child receives it (that is: humbly, freely, eagerly, dependently, all the rest)?

The first option emphasizes one of several meanings for the verb *dechomai*, which is a *legita me*, meaning to show hospitality and to have a receptive attitude toward children, open to receiving children. But that can't be the meaning here, right? Because it makes entrance into the Kingdom dependent on a proper attitude. It depends, it depends on us. It depends on our showing hospitality, which is really a form of works salvation. But you know, but there are some people who teach that.

That third option, that's the one that kind-of romanticizes children and imagiz, nem, imagines them in soft hues and kinda pastel colors, you know, "Precious Moments" kind of view that says "Ch, children are so innocent." This is the kind of the liberalizing attitude that says, "They're innocent, they're unspoiled by the world, and that's how we need to come to J God, you know, having an open, humble attitude, eager to receive gifts."

I mean, for so many reasons, this can't be the option either. This can't be the right interpretation. It's the same as the first option, that it's kind-of like by works, a slight



variation. Besides, we've all seen children opening gifts at Christmas. We see how hum, humble, and eager they are to receive a pack of new socks when they wanted something else. You want to see a kid break down in tears and sometimes throw a tantrum on the floor? Give 'em socks instead of a truck.

Only the second option here is the acceptable interpretation. Luke has drawn our attention to parents bringing infants to Jesus. This is the point. Newborn infants, utterly dependent on their mothers, they are passive recipients of absolutely everything. That's what we are, every single one of us who comes to the Kingdom, we are passive recipients. When it comes to the Kingdom of God, that is the right disposition that we all need to have about the Kingdom, and we need to walk in humility, mindful of our total inability. We need to walk in humility before God and meekness before others.

How do we get that right disposition? God gives it to us. God grants it by his grace. It's called regeneration. It's called being born again. We need to be born completely anew, born from above, in order that God takes out that old pride, self-reliant nature, and replaces it with this one: Childlike,

in the sense of infant-like. Everything we have, we receive as a gift of divine grace.

When we have the right disposition, the right nature toward the Kingdom, we'll also have the right intuition about the Kingdom. The right intuition and instincts about our fellow citizens. We'll be very, very careful that we do not despise any of these little ones. We're gonna share Jesus' view of the little children. We're gonna love them and receive them and bring them to Jesus. We're gonna honor the weakest of these. We're gonna esteem them so highly as living pictures of our total inability. No one receives the Kingdom in his own strength and in his own merit. Nothing pictures that better than an infant.

As Christians, Kingdom citizens, in the end we're all passive recipients of divine grace. As we look at infants, we see what the hymn says: "My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and his righteousness." "No merit of my own I claim, but wholly lean on Jesus' name." That's the theology we find in this text. That's the theology that we sing whenever we sing that song, "My hope is Built on Nothing Less." And

hopefully now when you sing it, you'll sing it with information, right information in your mind.

In Matthew 21, after Jesus has entered into Jerusalem (which we're gonna see pretty soon here), he's just gone to the Temple and cleared out the Temple, all the money changers and the buyers and the sellers. He's just wiped them out, driven them away. Says, "My Father's house is not to be a den of robbers. It's to be a house of prayer for all the nations."

And in the aftermath of that event, as he's there in the Temple, it says in verse 14, Matthew 21, that the blind and the lame came to him in the Temple. He had just displayed ferocious anger, driving away all these people: Powerful people, rich people, people with financial interest. And the blind and the lame, they're not driven away. They now feel comfortable to come. They hear the invitation, and it says there that the blind and lame who came to him in the Temple, he healed them. Again, another expression of compassion for those who are wholly unable on their own. The blind had to be led there, the lame had to be carried there. They're virtually infants.

When the chief priests and the scribes saw all of this, and they heard the children, says there in the text, "children crying out in the Temple, 'Hosanna to the son of David,'" you know what they were? They were not praising God along with the children. They were indignant, and they said to Jesus, "Do you hear what these are saying? Like "Blasphemy!" Jesus said, "Yeah, I hear it. Have you never read, 'Out of the mouth of infants and nursing babies, you have prepared praise'?"

Jesus has always understood this. Back in Luke 10:21, "He rejoiced in the Holy Spirit, saying, 'I thank you, Father, Lord of Heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and the understanding'" (and the chief priests and the scribes and the Pharisees and all these religious leaders), "'You've hidden 'em, and you've revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for such was your gracious will.'"

And this is why Jesus commands us as his disciples, "Let the children come to me, don't hinder them." Let 'em come. Those are the only imperatives, by the way, in the text in this account. "Let 'em come, don't hinder." So how are we encouraging children to come to Jesus? Are we intentional about evangelizing

our children and modeling Christlike behavior before them? Do we do that in our church? Do we do that in our homes? How wy, how might our words, our behavior, our actions, our lack of action; how might that be hindering children from coming to Jesus?

Be very careful that you do not follow the example, certainly, of the chief priests and scribes and the Pharisees who tried to rebuke Jesus. Or even, like these disciples, unwittingly putting stumbling blocks before children (whether your children or anybody else's children). Be very careful how you think about other people's children. As a disciple of Jesus Christ, you know what your job is? It's to bring others to Jesus. Both the totally depraved and the totally unable, which we all are, folks. All of us. Whether it's your own kids, or it's other kids as well. Looking at these newborn babies, taking these helpless infants into his arms, Jesus saw in them what we need to see: that an infant is a living picture of a true Kingdom citizen.

Moms, remember that when you're tired. When you've had kids pulling on you all day. When your little ones are arguing with themselves and you're just, you can't stand the noise anymore.

When you've done all the clean up and everything, and your children spills everything all over the table again. Remember that when your kids are testing your patience; when they are showing their sin to you and they're tempting yours to come out. Remember that.

And when you clear your head, when you go to a private place, sometimes in your closet, sometimes on Pluto, you know, just to get away from the kids. But remember that: that God has given you these children, yes, to raise in the fear and admonition of the Lord, but also to remind you daily that these infants are a picture of you. Totally depraved (and on their worst days you see it), but also totally unable. They need you, just as you need your Lord.

As Jesus looked down at this infant in his capable hands (these are hands that would soon be pierced by iron spikes), and he must have thought something like this, looking at that infant: "My people, for whom I will lay down my life, are as helpless and as needy as this infant. They need me. They need me and I can save them. I love them all, and the Father has given them to me, and I will lay down my life for them." Like a loving

parent, the Father places his elect tenderly in Jesus' capable arms and says (Luke doesn't wrap it up this way, but Matthew and Mark do), in Matthew 19:15, "He laid his hands on them." He blessed 'em, (Mark 10:16), "He took them in his arms and he blessed them all, laying his hands on them."

Jesus loves the little children, doesn't he? And so do we. So do we. We have the right disposition because we're Kingdom citizens, and that means we have the right intuition, the right instincts about all these children. Helpless, weak, needy. They are living pictures of all of us. In a condition of total inability, wholly dependent on divine grace, like every single one of us. Amen? Let's pray.

Our Father, we are profoundly grateful that you have been pleased, in your divine grace, to save us. Every single one of us has acted the spoiled child and thrown tantrums on the floor. Every single one of us has ignored proper, right, good commandments, and gone and done our own thing. Every single one of us has defiled ourselves with sin and committed great sins against you, before your presence. And we are like that tax

collector and like that Pharisee. We are totally depraved and yet proud of it.

And Father, you were pleased, as we were lying there in our sins, you were pleased to reach down and pluck us out of that mess. Like brands in the burning fire, you plucked us from the burning fire, and you've saved us.

We were unable to save ourselves, and yet you are wholly able. And what's more, you are willing. And we see in the Lord Jesus Christ your compassion shine through, and your mercy, and your kindness that calls us to you. And so I pray, Father, that you would be pleased, if there are any here who do not yet know your mercy and compassion and the saving grace of Jesus Christ, we pray that you would bring them to come and make that need known, and let us lead those people to Jesus Christ.

We pray for the rest of us that you would deepen our appreciation of the Gospel that we have been so blessed to receive. That we would have deeper gratitude and joy in the Lord Jesus Christ who's been pleased to save us with those nail-scarred hands, shedding his own blood, putting his own body on



the Cross that we might be saved. Father, we love you. We thank you so much for your grace. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.