

## Let the Children Come, Part 2

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.'"

In the ancient world, children weren't regarded as they are now in our time, in our society. You see children, and they evoke feelings of tenderness. There's a sense of indulgence, but that's not the way it's been throughout history. Bearing and raising children, in many times and many places in the past and all over the world, was a matter of survival. Expanding a family

and having a huge family was all about not only survival (because you're gonna lose some of those children along the way), but also wealth creation, expanding your holdings, expanding your influence. Children all, always, didn't always survive birth and infancy. Again, infant mortality is around 30% or even higher, and so that affected, obviously, the depth of parental attachment to children. And children who survived? It wasn't until they reached a productive age, until they started working and earning and producing and providing for the family; children were, until that time, something of a liability. They're just another mouth to feed with no guarantee that they're gonna turn out to benefit your family. They could die along the way.

Parents obviously treasured their children. They weren't harsh, cold, unfeeling, completely. But in the ancient world, children were not significant. Not until they proved themselves, not until they started earning their keep. There was no sentiment like we have in our day. No Hallmark cards, no Precious Moments statues, figurines, no, nothing like that regarding children.

And parents, by the way, they didn't tolerate foolishness from their children. No backtalk. No disobedience. And it wasn't just out of principle. It wasn't just out of good parenting. It was out of concern for survival, for being able to thrive as a family. A child rebelling against the command and authority of his father, that meant that field doesn't get plowed. That meant that field doesn't get plowed, those crops don't get planted. That means the crops don't get harvested. That means we don't eat. So, "Knock off the rebellion and get to work." That's how parents thought.

Children are on the Earth to work, and to work hard and contribute to the family. It was only a few generations ago that it was the same thing in our country as well. And how far we've fallen away from this idea of children actually serving the family with their behavior, with their attitudes, with their obedience, and seeing their place lined up under the authority of their parents.

While they were still young and weak, children were not in this time regarded highly. They were actually relatively insignificant compared to adults, definitely. No resuss, no

resources of their own, no strength, no wisdom, no experience, nothing to contribute to a conversation. If a child spoke up in the presence of adults, he's like, likely to get a backhand. He had no place speaking in public because he has nothing to offer. So nothing to offer, nothing to contribute. Joel Green says this, "Children were viewed as 'not adults.'" That's how they're viewed, "not adults." "They might be valued for present or future contribution to the family business, especially in an agricultural context, but otherwise they possess little if any intrinsic value as human beings."

Seems harsh to us, doesn't it, this view? But that is the first century mentality. It's actually the mentality of most of the history of the world up until our time in the West. People were very practically-minded. They lived in the harsh realities of life and death in the real world. That view of children, by the way, was not softened by religious, by religion. It was shared by religious leaders as well as other leaders and parents. To the rabbinical mind, spending any time with a child was a total waste of time. One rabbi, he warns scholars about various wastes of time, and he says this: "Morning sleep, mid-day wine, chattering with children... destroy a man." Stay away from what's gonna destroy you.

This is why Jesus here, and throughout the gospels, we see such a different picture. He is such a contrast to everything, not just in the society, but everything they've come to expect of a religious leader. Who is this guy? He is such a foreigner, such a stranger to this culture. It's like he's been dropped in from another planet, or maybe from Heaven.

This is also why the disciples think nothing of rebuking these parents for bringing their children to Jesus. I mean, if I were rebuking children in front of Jesus, even if I was inclined to do that, I'd, like, try to hide it, thinking, "Man, this is really bad. He's so loving, and I'm, I'm not being loving." They don't even think twice about it. They do it right in front of him 'cause they don't think it's wrong. They think they're acting appropriately. To them, children, for him, are a complete waste of time. "Jesus can't be bothered with babies. He's got real work to do. Kingdom work, preach the gospel, heal the sick. So get these parents and all their crying babies outta here. Get 'em away from him. Now."

There's another reason the disciples just might be trying to shoo these parents away. Because, waiting in the wings (if you'll look ahead just to verse 18), there's this ambitious and promising young man who is eager to speak with Jesus. There's no grammatical break here in the narrative. In fact, Luke is quite intentional in keeping verse 18 connected with verse 17. He uses a coordinating conjunction to start out that sentence, the word *kai*, "And," that we will not separate these two scenes. We are to read them together.

So could it be, here, that the disciples are trying to clear the path, get the babies out of the way and all these parents and this nursery out of the way, so that this VIP can meet Jesus? After all, he's rich. After all, he's a ruler, which means he's got authority. He's got power, he's got some connections, he's got high levels of influence. Man, this guy could be really, really useful once we get to Jerusalem.

Rich young ruler here seems to be the perfect candidate for discipleship. I mean, in contrast to a bunch of crying babies, many of 'em needing diaper changes, this guy could be the face of the messianic movement. He's got a clean-cut image. He's

young, he's already attained a position of authority. Excellent connection to make. Truly wise use of Jesus' time. This is a good investment. Not that, not those baby. "This guy, this guy needs your time and attention, Jesus." Whatever the disciples were actually thinking in verse 16, Jesus corrects any misunderstanding, corrects all their ambitions, corrects all their misguided zeal, and he takes action. He rebukes them for hindering the parents and children from coming to him, and he teaches them.

He teaches them about the right disposition toward the Kingdom. Let's read verses 16-17 again. Then we'll come back and break those verses down just a bit further. "But Jesus called them to him." Who's "them?" "Them" is the parents. He's not obviously not calling the infants and saying, "Get over here." He's saying the parents, calling to the parents. "He 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.'"

Children are the perfect illustration of Kingdom citizens. Children are the perfect illustration of those who populate the Kingdom of God because they have the right disposition toward the Kingdom. Children have the right disposition toward the Kingdom. Jesus sees this very clearly. It sees it intuitively. He understands this perfectly, and that's why he acts the way he does, in contrast to his entire culture. The disciples do not. They're people of their culture, they're men of their times. They don't see it the way he does. They got a lot to learn, but they will. They will learn here.

Based on Jesus' view of children, which we'll see in a moment, first we see Jesus take action. He takes action. His action is opposed to his disciples. Look at the contrast in verse 15. "When the disciples saw the parents bringing the infants, they rebuked them, but Jesus called them to him." Compared to Mark, got Mark's gospel? Luke has presented Jesus' reaction here rather mildly. Mark's account says Jesus saw what his disciples are doing and he was "indignant," very strong word. He is angry to see them putting up roadblocks, to see them hindering parents, preventing children from coming to him. He's angry that they, his disciples, have become a stumbling block. Totally, ath, antithetical to what characterizes Jesus.



Antithetical to what characterizes the nature of his ministry, to the tenor of his entire teaching. It's contrary to his heart. Contrary to his entire mindset.

I mean, these guys have been with him for what, two years? They have seriously blown it. They have misrepresented the Kingdom of God. That's a serious thing. So he sorts that out first. He wastes no time. He affirms the parents. He establishes this receiving line once again. The disciples tried to mess up and destroy and drive away. He re-sorts it, sets up the assembly line, and he's overt about it. He summons them to himself. That's the, that verb there, *parakaleo*, it means to summon, to call to himself, and that put an end to what the disciples are trying to do. He stops that immediately, post haste.

Secondly, he gives them direction. So, first he takes action; secondly, he gives them direction. "Let the children come to me and do not hinder them." "Let the children come." Here, the word is, that he uses, "children," *paidia*. And Jesus, he's been receiving infants, but here he widens the scope beyond just the infants to include a broad range of children.

As, like we already said, childhood here is less about a certain age. It's not about chronology, it's more about a condition. It's not a certain chronological age. It's what childhood represents. Childhood: Weakness and dependency and immaturity and inability. And that's what's pictured, real, that's why Luke uses the word *brephos*, because *brephos* captures that perfectly. Infants are being brought to him by their parents. That is to say, we can't picture infants walking up to Jesus on their own power. Even, even by their own will, they don't do that. Picture here is one of helplessness, weakness, dependency, inability. And whether we see the word *brephos*, or we see the word *paidia*, we're to see the same qualities.

"Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them." Grammatically, that prohibitive there is, "stop hindering them, stop getting in their way." It's calling 'em to a full stop here. They are getting in the way. The disciples had put a stumbling block in the way of these parents and children, and that had to stop immediately. So, Jesus here has laid down a principle. It's a dividing line, really. It's a watershed text between how the world tends to think about children, and how Jesus in his Kingdom wants us to think about children. And this is a principle of non-interference which not only affirms the

value of children, but actually encouragement to increase and raise the esteem in the estimation of Kingdom citizens and in the economy of God's Kingdom, by using children to illustrate the right disposition of Kingdom citizens.

That's what he's using them for here, that's what he wants to call the attention to. And in this, Jesus has done here what no spiritual leader has ever done. Not before, not since. He has so dignified children by ensuring that no one who names the name of Jesus will ever despise one of these little ones again. It's very significant. We are to encourage children coming to Jesus and never, ever to hinder them. One theologian has said, and rightly so, that if Jesus' disciples had prevailed here, if Jesus had said nothing and let this go, "Another gospel," quote, "another gospel would have resulted, and not that of Jesus; and another church rather than his church, had children been kept from Jesus," end quote.

That's true. Whatever religion would have resulted would have just mixed in with all the religions of the world, because there was no distinction, no difference between the religions of the world and the culture of the world. In fact, that's what

religions do. They are a artifact of culture, to preserve and protect the way people typically think. That's why the Christianity, technically, it is not a religion. It is not a religion in that sense.

So Jesus here has taken immediate action, stopped everything. Returned it the way it was supposed to be, the way these parents, and the way Jesus instinctively think about children. And he's given his disciples, given the first, the parents, restore them back into the receiving line. But also his disciples, he's, he's corrected them. He's given them immediate direction on what they should do and what they should not do.

And third, notice the explanation that Jesus gives. The explanation he gives at the end of verse 16. And this is why we are to let the children come to Jesus and not to hinder them. "For," (explanatory clause), "For, to such belongs the Kingdom of God." "Because to such belongs the Kingdom of God." That's why we're not to hinder them. That's why we're to encourage their coming to Jesus. We understand every life is important. Every human life is important. Every life, human life created in the image of God. Every human life is valuable to God. Every

human life is under God's watchful eye. Even in a deadly, destructive culture such as ours, every single one of those lives is under the special care and watch of God. Every human life, which includes the lives of children, which includes the lives of the children yet to be born. God cares for them all, and God will have an accounting for every single life, and how every single life is treated. That justice gives us great hope, even as we see murder happening all around us. A bloodbath.

But in this short explanatory phrase at the end of verse 16, Jesus does not mention the fact that children represent the image of God here. Rather he sees them as representing something more specific, in this instance. "For to such belongs the Kingdom of God." King James Version translates this more literally: "For of such is the Kingdom of God." "Of such is the Kingdom of God." "Belongs" is kind of a translator's massaging it to try to make it more understandable to us. But it says, "For such is the Kingdom of God. And the word "of such," *toioution* or *toiouton*, it is a plural word, it's in the genitive case.

So the Kingdom of God is (genitive case) "of such." And that's why the "possession" idea, the "belonging to" idea is used here. It's a genitive of possession. "Kingdom of God is of such," genitive of possession, and it's "of such" what? "As these," plural. "The Kingdom of God belongs to ones like these." "Ones such as these." He didn't say it belongs "to these," that'd be a different word. He says it's "of such as these." There's a comparative idea here. There is a certain quality in these children that is shared by the citizens of God's Kingdom, and it's a quality that no Kingdom citizen is without.

And that is the million-dollar question, isn't it? In light of verse 17, that is the life and death question. It's the "in or out" question. It's "are you a Kingdom, in the Kingdom or out of the Kingdom?" That's the, the nature of this question. "Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the Kingdom of God like a child shall by no means enter it." This is very, very serious. So what is that childlike quality which we need if we're going to enter into the Kingdom? What is this *sine qua non*, what is this essential, non-negotiable prerequisite for entry into the Kingdom?

Interesting, isn't it here, that we are forced here; by Luke's putting this together, he has prepared us to ask the exact same question that the rich young ruler asked in a different form. But in verse 18, what does the rich young ruler say? Look at it. "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" What should I do? Essentially the same question we're asking: "What do we need to have to enter into the Kingdom of God?" And what is the answer to the million-dollar question? If you want to get out your pens, sheet of paper, write this down. Here's the answer. What do we do? What do we have to have in order to enter into the Kingdom of God? The answer is, "nothing." It's not even gonna take much ink. In fact, you can probably remember it. "Nothing." It's a paradoxical point, isn't it? But it is the point. What did these infants do to come to Jesus? Nothing. They were brought to Jesus.

What do children have? Let's say they grow a little bit. What do children have banked away as credit to make them worthy of consideration, make them worthy of acceptance into the Kingdom? What gains them an audience with the king? What gains them an entrance into the Kingdom? Nothing in them. That's what everybody in that crowd understood. That's what the disciples

understood. That's why they acted the way they did. Those children have nothing.

As we said, no one listening to Jesus on this occasion would have had any sentimental thoughts about children. Green says, "Although it's easy to romanticize about children, such qualities as innocence, openness to the future and trusting are not the first ones that come to mind when reviewing general perceptions of children inna, in the first century." That's not how they thought.

And I know that this text, you've heard this taught many, many times. And this is oftentimes, in the worst sense, sentimentalized. And in the best senses it can be, "We need to be dependent." Like, you know, like, "Look at the children being so trusting, and they come with their hands out and hands open, and there's just trusting, and they're gonna come to Jesus." I mean, be a parent for like a year and see how your children are. You who have fed them and clothed them, provided for them, and given over and over and over again. Why do they call it the terrible twos?



The disciples understood perfectly what Jesus is saying here. If children are valued by their earning potential, by their production value, then they are nothing and they have nothing. And that is the point here.

For one perspective, we understand this, don't we? We get this. Children are the ultimate consumers, aren't they? Newborn babies, little infants, even little children; do any of them earn their keep? Can they care for themselves? Any of you see your toddlers waddling home in diapers with a paycheck? Are they not the most dependent of all God's creatures? In fact, they're often remarkably contrasted with the animal kingdom, because animals days old and hours old can survive even without their mother, some of them. Not children, not babies. Babies are unable to survive without the care of a mother, and that is the point. We're not supposed to think Jesus is here pointing to some virtue found in children, such as innocence, humility, trusting nature. In some manner of speaking, those things can be true at times of children, but not necessarily true. Not all the time true. But that's still not the point here.

As Edwards says (and get this, this is very important):  
"Jesus does not bless the children for their virtues, but for their deficits. They are important" (he's speaking about here),  
"They are important because of what they lack. They are small, powerless, without sophistication, overlooked and dispossessed."  
End quote. My friends, that's all of us when it comes to the Kingdom economy. That's every single one of us. We don't even have the key to put into the lock at the gate to the Kingdom of God. And if we had a key, we don't have a pocket to hold the key. If we had a key and a pocket, we don't have hands. We have nothing. That's the proper estimation of all those who enter the Kingdom of God. And that's the disposition that every Kingdom citizen ought to have about themselves, about other Kingdom citizens, is they've got nothing.

Paul said it this way in 1 Corinthians 1: "For consider your calling, brothers. Not many of you were wise according to worldly standards. Not many uh were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish in the world to shame the wise. God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong. God chose what is low and despised in the world, even the things that are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, so that

no human being might boast in the presence of God." Amen and  
Amen.