

Title: Children and the Kingdom
Text: Luke 18.15-17
Theme: Pure Love
Series: Luke
Prop Stmnt: Only those with child-like faith get the Kingdom

A dad I know recently allowed 3 strangers he had never met before, to take his daughter from him in public and drive away. That sounds terrifying because you do not let anyone touch your child unless you trust them, or unless you believe that the one taking your child is able to do something for your child that you cannot. In this case, a little girl in our church had a medical emergency. She was with her dad and brothers. When the ambulance came, the dad could not go with her because he had to stay with his sons. Why was this dad willing to let his daughter be taken away by EMTs? Because they would give her or get her the medical help that she had to have that the dad could not provide in that moment. He entrusted her to them because she needed them. In fact, he called for them. That story has a happy ending. She got to the hospital and received good care, praise God and is doing fine. But when it comes to children, our sensitive meters go on hyperdrive.

Our text is a deeply personal scene. People (presumably parents) are bringing children, “*even infants*” (Luke says) to Jesus that he might touch them, and pray for them. Matthew and Mark also record this scene and they say that Jesus is holding the children and praying for them. The verb tense that Luke uses may indicate that this sort of thing had become a regular occurrence. It sounds like the disciples were not fans.

Read Text:

As a kid, I saw pictures that displayed this scene with green grass, flowers, butterflies, children with happy faces and Jesus sitting on a large rock surrounded by these well-dressed, well-behaved, well-groomed and clean little kids. Of course, the kids all looked like they were from Sweden instead of Israel, and Jesus looked a bit too English as well. The real scene was clearly a bit more chaotic. The kids were likely dirty, some of the clothes worn, torn or missing. Parents were probably fighting to get their kids as close to Jesus as possible, and none of the pictures I saw as a kid showed the disciples muscling the parents, doing double duty as bouncers nor of Jesus yelling at them to cut it out. Pictures like that wouldn't be as popular, but they would be closer to reality. But think about what these parents are doing. Seriously, this is a good thing.

1. **A Parent's Priority** (15a)

If you had a child and you understood how vulnerable your child was to the corruption of his own heart, to the influences of this world, and to all of the dangers in it, you would be so overwhelmed that you would find it difficult to sleep at night. If you knew how incredible the love of Christ is, how infinitely powerful he is, how merciful, gracious and personal he is, you would know that your child's greatest hope and greatest need is Christ. And if you knew that there was a possibility for Jesus to hold your child and pray for him or her, you'd go, you'd wait

in line, you'd do about anything you had to in order to get your child to Jesus. And these parents are doing that. These parents are doing the most important thing a parent could ever do and that is, get your child to Jesus.

In this scene, these parents are literally and physically doing that. Matthew, Mark and Luke all record this scene. We know that Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem. Some of the Samaritans did not want him going through their territory (9.51-56), so Jesus and the disciples probably went (Map) on to the east side of the Jordan, somewhere south of the Sea of Galilee and went south through Perea before crossing back over the Jordan near Jericho (possibly near where Israel entered the promised land) in order to head west to Jerusalem. If that is the case, and it seems like it, that means that this event took place in a rather remote area. There were no large cities in this region at the time. My point is simply this. It was not convenient nor easy for these parents to get their children to Jesus. But they did. They did what they had to do on that day to get their kids to Jesus. They knew that Jesus was someone their kids needed and they knew that Jesus was someone who loved their children.

Paul Tripp described parenting as standing at the base of an 80-floor office building with a net trying to catch your kid who just jumped off the top floor. The rest of the story is that your kid cannot save himself, though he likes to think he can. But neither can you save your child, though you like to think you can as well. Something else you need to take to heart. Sports cannot save your child. Academics, skills, degrees, awards, scholarships, recognitions, and a good career or even a good marriage cannot save your child. Only Jesus can save your child. Therefore, as a parent, you have one priority that outweighs every other one. Do everything you can to get your child to Jesus, which means, remove every obstacle along the way. Expose them to the gospel, to the people of God and to faithfulness. Your child learns by your example. They know if you really value the weekly gathering of God's people to hear his Word and make much of him in worship. They know if there is a confusing gap between how you talk/live here and how you talk/live at home. They know by what you are most upset about what values really hold your heart. If I am going to get my kid to Jesus, I need to get to Jesus and stay close to him.

2. Natural Assumptions (15b)

When the disciples saw all of these people bringing these kids to Jesus so he could hold them, pray for them and bless them, they assumed that this was a waste of time. It was a commonly held belief in those days that children were not all that valued until they were able to contribute meaningfully to the home or estate. The message may have been subtle, but it was understood. You had value based on the value you created. Until a kid could work and be productive, he was a distraction at best. Not everyone believed this, but it was generally understood. Among the Romans, boys were prized over girls. If a woman gave birth to a girl, the father could give a thumbs up or thumbs down on whether the infant would live or die. Children with birth defects (like blindness – John 9), were considered cursed or the parents cursed and were subject to shunning and shaming.

The other assumption the disciples reflected was the idea that important people do not have time for unimportant people. I walked by a venue recently where a guy running for governor was holding a fundraising event. I wasn't invited, I just happened to be walking by. What do you think would happen if I, bypassing the table where pledge cards were being filled out and checks taken, walked in and tried to introduce myself to the candidate? Does this guy have time for me? No! Important people don't have time for unimportant people. Important people don't want to be bothered with unimportant people. Again, Jesus and the disciples are on their way to Jerusalem. Jesus is going there to die. The disciples have heard that, but they don't yet believe it. They think Jesus is going to Jerusalem to lead a revolt and take over the government and establish his kingship and kingdom. He's going to show them who's boss. We are on an incredibly important mission and we don't have time to waste on a bunch of insignificant kids. You can imagine their conversations. "If we don't get a handle on this, we'll never get out of here. People will never stop coming and we don't have time for this. We've got to do something." So, they do. The disciples start rebuking the people in an effort to stop them from "bothering Jesus" with their children. Seriously, as Luke points out there were people bringing even infants. Jesus was not happy about that.

3. **What we need to know about Christ** (16)

Let the children come to me and do not hinder them."

What we need to know about God is that children matter to God. Your child(ren) matter to God. This is really an amazing scene. Here is the very King of the actual Kingdom of God, the most powerful person who will ever be on the earth, the God-man who rules over the most powerful and invincible of all kingdoms ever, inviting children to be with him that he might bless them, pray for them and enjoy them. This is not a politician kissing babies for photo ops, and votes. This is our God. This is our Savior, who delights in children, not because of what they can do for him, because he actually loves them. This is our God. This is our Savior. This is our King and this is what you need to know about him. He notices the weak, the insignificant and the vulnerable. And he calls his church to do the same.

"Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world." (James 1.27)

"Listen, my beloved brothers, has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which he has promised to those who love him?" (James 2.5)

How do you respond when your child rolls over for the first time (assuming he doesn't do it off the changing table and falls 4 feet to the floor)? How do you respond when your child takes her first step, says her first word, throws a ball, or claps? How many of you said, "eh, that's nothing. I've been rolling over for 30 years! You think taking a step is impressive? Look at what I can do. Or watch these Olympians! Now that's impressive! You've done nothing meaningful." We don't do that. Why not? Is rolling over, taking a step, saying a word or throwing a ball all that amazing, one of a kind, never done before? What happens when your little kid draws you a picture of

their favorite monster truck for your birthday? Do you go, what is that? No one would drive something that looks like that. The lines aren't even straight and the colors don't match. Besides, you've got the 7 upside down. No! We love our kids and therefore, we delight in them and enjoy them and celebrate their development and all of the good firsts in their lives.

Colossians 1.15 and 16 is speaking about Christ and says, *"He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities – all things were created through him and for him."*

Christ, the 2nd person of the Trinity spoke the universe and everything in it into existence. He created us. He formed us. He made us in his image. We are more like him than anything else in all creation and he did it in order to enjoy us. He delights in our joys and grieves our hurts, even as he remains sovereign over all. He knew the moment you or your child or any of these children coming to him were conceived. He designed that fascinating and intimate process. He is a deeply personal God who delights in watching a zygote (human life) come into being, and then become an embryo and then a fetus and then a baby. From the moment that zygote is conceived, that human life never stops developing. That life never stops forming. He made it all. He gave us the capacity to talk, sing, laugh, tell stories and tell jokes. He also gave us the capacity to know him, love him, trust him, relate to him, worship him, esteem him, and delight in him as well. These are the children he has made. They matter to him. Jesus knows what the end game is. Everything that he has done, is doing and will do is for the fulfillment, formation and establishment of his kingdom. Jesus also knows that in the eyes of the world that he is the king of the upside-down kingdom. His kingdom does not operate the way we naturally do. He knows that his kingdom is only populated by those who trust in him because they know they need him. And in order to be part of his family, and his kingdom, you have to trust him, just like a child trusts. And this is...

4. **What we need to know about ourselves.** (17)

Jesus will use the word, "Truly" not because what he is about to say is truer than what he says at other times, obviously, but he says it to get our attention. Don't miss this. *"Whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it."*

I was scheduled to go to Brazil to teach in a college for a week and to preach in the evenings. I had my passport and flight tickets. What I did not have was a travel visa. I did not know that I had to have one. But I found out at the ticket counter that I could not get on the plane because I did not have what I had to have. It didn't matter that I didn't know. It didn't matter that I prepared my lectures and sermons and that the school was all set up. I didn't have a travel visa and that was that. The ticket agent simply said to come back with a visa if you want to get to Brazil. "Next in line." That day I learned something that I needed to know. But then I had to do something about it. I had to get a visa. When Jesus speaks about the kingdom of God, he is referring to eternal life with him. Jesus is going to live with and reign over his people forever. He is the king and only his people are the ones he will live with. Being a citizen of his kingdom, or a

member of his forever family is the entire point of life. This is the goal! If you miss this, you lose. You lose it all. If you get the whole world, become leader of the most powerful nation, the wealthiest, smartest, fastest, strongest, prettiest, most popular, whatever, but miss the kingdom, you will have wasted your entire life. If you get the kingdom and nothing else, then you will have gotten the most important prize. So, how do you receive the kingdom of God? How do you get it? Jesus is telling you right here. If it were complicated, it would be worth doing everything you could to figure it out. But it is not.

Look at the end of v.14. Jesus concluded the story of the Pharisee and the tax collector with this summary. *For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.* So, what does it mean to humble yourself? Now, we know. To humble yourself means to trust in Christ with the kind of a trust a child has. A humble person does not sit in judgment of God, but simply accepts his Word for what it is, without arguing. You can see why Jesus was so confrontational with the disciples. These children were demonstrating what genuine saving faith is. What does it mean to receive the kingdom of God, like a child?

When you give a child something, does he ask you where you got it? Does he care how much you paid for it? Does he suspect that you have alternative motives, that you are setting him up or have some sinister secrets? One of the grievous things about this life is knowing how the beautiful, early faith of children has to be tempered and guarded or it will be crushed. Stranger danger is real. Strangers handing out candy can be a really bad thing. This world is full of evil. There are people who lie and break promises. A child who has only known security, consistency, love, touch, protection and provision, will instinctively accept whatever is offered to them, without question. If daddy is in the pool telling them to jump in because he will catch them, they know they can experience the thrill of jumping because if daddy is there, there is no danger. My daddy is bigger than me. My daddy is smarter than me. My daddy loves me. He would never tell me to jump if it would hurt me.

I love the doctrine of justification. The doctrine of propitiation is humbling and glorious. The Bible's teaching on election, calling, union with Christ, adoption, baptism, sanctification and glorification are thrilling. But you do not need to understand all of those aspects of our great salvation in order to be a follower of Christ. You need to know that Jesus died to pay for your sins and acknowledging your sin, you simply trust your entire life to Christ. He is the pool and he says jump, and you jump. Don't make it complicated. You can drill down on all the glorious aspects of the cross of Christ, but in the end, you simply jump.

3 things in conclusion:

- 1) Yes, children can be genuine followers of Christ.
- 2) Child-like faith is how we become followers.
- 3) Child-like faith is how we live as followers.