

## RECEIVE THE KINGDOM AS A LITTLE CHILD

(SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 18, 2024)

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SCRIPTURE: PSALM 127; LUKE 18:15-17

### INTRODUCTION

We say with all confidence, the message of salvation through Jesus Christ, the truth of God's Word, is the only right way for understanding the world.

And yet the gospel message is considered to be most foolish by the world.

These two statements are not at all contradictory.

Throughout Luke we see that God's perfect plans and truth go against the expectations of men.

A great summary of this theme is found in 1 Cor. 1:18.

**1 Cor. 1:18.** "For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God."

In Matthew's gospel, Jesus begins his final journey to Jerusalem starting in chapter 19.

Luke presents this final journey earlier, starting in Luke 9.

By Luke 18, we are getting very close to Jerusalem.

And at this point in Luke's gospel, Luke and Mark cover the same material here - from Jesus blessing children to his conversation with the Rich Young Ruler to the declaration again of His coming suffering and triumph.

We will look at these verses in three parts.

Last week – It was the tax collector who went home justified and not the Pharisee. *Really?*

Main Point: **You must receive the kingdom of God as a little child.**

1] Parents, Infants, and Disciples, Luke 18:15

2] Jesus Called Them, Luke 18:16

3] Assuredly I Say to You, Luke 18:17

### **1] PARENTS, INFANTS, AND DISCIPLES, LUKE 18:15**

Luke does not give us much background information for verses 15-17.

We should not think that the disciples *hated* little children.

I was thinking the other day just about how young Jesus and His disciples were.

Jesus was about 30 years old when He started His public ministry – Luke 3:23.

Some have suggested that the disciples were even younger, dare we say even teenagers?

We sometimes forget they were quite young, not old, grumpy men who couldn't find their slippers.

What was the problem with the disciples that made them upset that parents were bringing their children to Jesus?

They must have felt that Jesus had other business more important than blessing little children who were brought to Him.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Hagner, 553.

Instead of recognizing the place of little children in the kingdom of God, the disciples rebuked those who brought their little ones to Jesus.<sup>2</sup>

The verb **rebuke** is a rather strong word.<sup>3</sup>

There is in both Scripture and Jewish tradition background for understanding why parents brought their little ones to Jesus.

In the evening after the Day of Atonement, children were brought to Jewish elders for “blessing, strengthening, and prayer.”<sup>4</sup>

Also recall the beautiful picture of Simeon in Luke 2 who took Jesus into his arms and blessed God for letting him see God’s salvation.

We must consider here the beautiful picture of our Lord Jesus Christ who was not too busy, even on the way to the cross, to bless the little children who were brought to Him.

## **2] JESUS CALLED THEM, LUKE 18:16**

In Mark’s gospel we are told that Jesus was greatly displeased with His disciples. He demonstrated a holy anger with His disciples.

Luke does not share that same detail with us, but we do see a very different attitude with our Lord than the disciples demonstrated.

The disciples had rebuked the parents.

Jesus called them and their children to come.

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<sup>2</sup> Does ‘them’ refer to the children or to the parents? The TYN/KJV/NKJV/HCSB following the Greek more literally leave it ambiguous. Other versions refer more specifically either to people or those who brought them. NET Bible note: “In the translation the referent has been specified as “those who brought them,” since otherwise the statement could be understood to mean that the disciples scolded the children rather than their parents who brought them.”

<sup>3</sup> Mark and Matthew use the exact same word.

<sup>4</sup> France (727) notes this from *Sop.* 18:5.

**Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God.**

There are some who only want to think of Jesus as He is pictured here.

This is almost the only thing that Jesus did in their view.

But in our zeal to be faithful to all of God's word, let us not neglect to often consider and put into practice the kindness of our Lord.

Dr. Erwin Lutzer in a radio program once gave a good challenge.

In our very needy and dark world, intentionally seek for opportunities to bless others in the name of God.

No, we don't think of ourselves as Jesus in so doing. But as His followers you should look for ways to show the kindness of Christ, especially to children and to those with special needs.

It has been a few chapters, but listen again to the words of our Lord, when His disciples were arguing about which of them would be greatest.

**Luke 9:46** Then a dispute arose among them as to which of them would be greatest.  
**47** And Jesus, perceiving the thought of their heart, took a little child and set him by Him, **48** and said to them, "Whoever receives this little child in My name receives Me; and whoever receives Me receives Him who sent Me. For he who is least among you all will be great."

It would seem that the disciples forgot this instruction.

And is it not true that we sometimes do not see the kingdom of heaven as we should?

Would you be more eager to be the friend of some important Christian leader or to give help to a poor, needy Christian?

We live today in the age of attention and celebrity.

It is about being seen and who you are seen with.

The kingdom of God is not made of those who think of themselves highly but of those who have been humbled before the Lord.

Let me also encourage us, therefore, as a church that we give special attention in our prayers and actions to the children in our church.

I think in general we have a very positive view of children in our church.

Rightfully we believe that children of believing parents should be baptized. We believe in properly teaching and raising children in godly education.

These are some of our strengths.

But let us not think that we are already doing everything that Christ would command.

I encourage you even now, think of some way to show either true Christian love or help to a child or younger person in this church.

And when you see a child in this church, think of your duty to humble yourself as a child.

### **3] ASSUREDLY I SAY TO YOU, LUKE 18:17**

Indeed, this is the final admonition from Jesus as recorded by Luke in this section.

**Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it.**

The word **assuredly** in our versions is a translation of the Greek word that we know as Amen.

Jesus is the only one in the NT who uses this type of language for emphasis, though it has a foundation in the OT.

Here is something that Jesus wants us to always keep in mind.

**If you do not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, you will not enter it.**

We do have to ask the question, what does this mean? I don't think it is that difficult to answer.

Receiving the kingdom as a little child has a connection with humility and with trust.

It is not that little children are examples of sinlessness or perfection. Anyone that has had children or has spent time with children know this is not the case.

But children are great examples of humility, especially in the culture of the NT.

We tend to glorify and exalt children in our culture, but that was certainly not the case in the time of the NT.

**Matt. 18:3** and said, "Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.

The other aspect to highlight is that of *implicit trust*.

Even children who can be unruly and undisciplined still tend to demonstrate a complete or implicit trust in their parents.

R. C. Sproul commented here:

God wants from His children *fides implicita*, an implicit trust. **And He is the only being who deserves implicit trust.** Why shouldn't we trust Him implicitly? Has He ever lied? Has He ever broken a promise? Has he ever uttered a falsehood? His Word is truth. Trust it. That's what Jesus was saying here. If you don't give that kind of trust to God, you're never going to enter the kingdom of God...<sup>5</sup>

Throughout this chapter, Luke has brought together parables and accounts that describe God's work of salvation and grace to sinners.

The entire basis for our salvation is what Jesus Christ suffered and His victory over sin and death, as we see in verses 31-34.

Then we notice the different pictures in this chapter.

- 1] A widow who does not give up in seeking justice.
- 2] A tax-collector who in great humility seeks that God's wrath would be turned away from him in contrast to the proud Pharisee.
- 3] The example here of little children.
- 4] Next, we will see the contrast in the rich young ruler.
- 5] The final account is that of a blind man who cries out to Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!

The widow, the tax collector, the children, the blind man – they have nothing to offer.

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<sup>5</sup> Sproul, 463.

They are the despised by the world.

They can only come with an open hand to seek for mercy and grace.

“Nothing in my hands I bring, simply to the cross I cling.”

## CONCLUSION

**You must receive the kingdom of God as a little child.**

1] A proper focus and love for children to see that they come to know and love the Lord Jesus Christ.

2] A challenge also for children to trust and rest in the Lord Jesus Christ.

3] Big difference between *childish* and *child-like*.

**Heb. 5:12** For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need *someone* to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food.

**1Cor. 3:2** I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able *to receive it*, and even now you are still not able;

We don't want to be childish.

How do we seek to learn and mature and still be child-like?

True learning and maturing should humble us.

It will be demonstrated in our attitude before God and before others.



**1Pet. 5:5** Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to *your* elders. Yes, all of *you* be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for

*“God resists the proud,*

*But gives grace to the humble.”*

**6** Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, **7** casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.

**Prayer**

**Hymn 644**

**BENEDICTION – HEBREWS 13:20-21**

Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom *be* glory forever and ever. Amen.