

Jesus Receives Little Children

Matthew 19:13-15

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Introduction

Isn't it a marvellous thing to be a Christian?

- To know that you, a condemned sinner, have been redeemed by the precious blood of Jesus Christ and given an everlasting inheritance in the kingdom of God.
- To know that all your sins have been forgiven and that you, though a sinner, have been made a child of God for all eternity.
 - The Lord Jesus tells us that He gladly receives us when we come to Him for this salvation.
 - He assures us that we are His and that He will never cast us out...
 - He gives us the assurance of His love.

But what about our little children?

- What about our little children that are too young to come to Him on their own unless we bring them?
 - What is their relationship to the Lord?
 - Will He receive them or exclude them?

Surely this is something all of you who know His salvation want to know!

- You want to know if our Lord who has been so gracious to you will also be gracious to your children...
 - In Matthew 19:13-15, we are given the marvellous answer!
 - Parents were bringing their little children to Jesus...
 - The word *paidion* (pay-dee-on) translated "little children" refers to children from infancy right up to the age of twelve or so.
 - In Luke's account, he makes it clear that infants were included.
 - It refers to children who are of an age that they basically go to worship where their parents take them...
 - They came to Jesus primarily because their parents brought them to Jesus.
 - If their parents had taken them to an idol, they would have gone to the idol...
 - But as these parents earnestly made their way to Jesus, looking to Him to bless their little children, putting his hands on them and praying for them,

- the disciples of Jesus rebuked them...
 - We are not told why they rebuked them, but I am glad for our sakes that they did...
 - Because it provided an occasion for Jesus to tell us on no uncertain terms that He wants us to bring our little children to Him for His blessing...
 - In response to His disciples' action, He said:
 - "Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them."
 - More literally He says, "Stop hindering them."
 - Here is a clear answer to us that Jesus accepts our little children that we bring to Him—
 - that He wants us to bring them to Him for His blessing.

Let us examine what this wonderful account has to say to us about our children!

- to begin with,

I. Look at the basis on which Jesus receives them.

- He says,
 - "for of such is the Kingdom of Heaven."
- . What does that mean?
 0. He is saying that the kingdom of heaven actually belongs to them!
 - . The Kingdom of Heaven is what Matthew has been talking about throughout this gospel!
 - He has told us all along how Jesus went everywhere telling people the good news that the kingdom of heaven had come...
 - All along He urges them to enter the kingdom of heaven.
 - . And we have seen what the kingdom of heaven is...
 - It is that wonderful kingdom that the Son of God left the glories of heaven to establish in this fallen world...
 - It is a kingdom whose sole purpose is to restore sinful people to God.
 - It is the kingdom of the redeemed,
 - Jesus graciously purchased it by the shedding His blood on the cross...
 - Here sinners are pardoned and given the Holy Spirit to live for God...

- It is the kingdom in which condemned sinners are made fully acceptable to God through the work of Jesus Christ.
0. And Jesus says here that the little children are to be brought to Him because this kingdom of heaven belongs to them!
- . They are citizens of it, members of it, partakers of it...
 - He says,
 - “Let them come to Me, for of such is the kingdom of heaven.”
 - . It would seem that the very mistake the disciples made was to suppose that little children were not citizens of the kingdom.
 - But Jesus says on no uncertain terms that they are...
 - “Of such—of such as these little ones—the ones like this who are too small to come on their own...
 - My kingdom belongs to them...”
 - . In one way, this ought to give you great surprise!
0. If you are a true citizen of this kingdom,
- You know that you did not come to it by natural birth, but by spiritual birth.
 - You know that if left to yourself, you would have never come to this kingdom...
 - That it is only because God has taken away your stony heart and given you a heart of flesh that you have come to Jesus to obtain life.
 - You know that before that, you were dead in your sin—spiritually dead—and would no more come to Him than a corpse would come out of the grave on its own...
 - It was only because of His powerful call that came to you and raised you from spiritual death that you came to Him.
0. And so you hear Him say that your children belong to His kingdom...
- and you say, “How can this be?”
 - . You cannot go along with the notion of many that they are innocent until some age of accountability...
 - 0) In the first place, the kingdom of God is not for the innocent but for the redeemed—it is the place of those whom Jesus has redeemed...
 - 0) And secondly, you know the bible and your children well enough to know that they are not innocent.

-) You know that the Bible says that we are all conceived and born in sin...
 - It says that we come from the womb speaking lies...
 - It says that there is none righteous, no not one...
-) And you know that sin has spread to all men—including infants—because death has spread to all men—including infants.
 - God does not condemn the righteous or the innocent...
 - He is just and kind...
 - Babies die and babies suffer because they are sinners just like us.
 - You cannot pretend that there is some sort of innocence that belongs to them before a holy God.
- . And secondly, you know that the kingdom of God is for those who have repented of their sins and believed on the Lord Jesus...
 - 0) It is for those who have been awakened by the voice of Christ to see that they are sinners who need to be saved...
 - And who have been made to understand by the Spirit of God that Jesus, the Son of God, has shed His blood to atone for our sins...
 - You know that you are in the kingdom because you, by His grace, have trusted in Him to take away your sins and give you the Holy Spirit.
 - 0) But you look at your little children and you realise that they are not capable of understanding this gospel.
 - You know that this is something they will have to be taught as they grow older...
 - but that as little children, they cannot clearly confess the Lord Jesus...
 - They are not able to make a credible profession of faith.

TRANS> And so you are surprised when you hear Jesus say so clearly that His kingdom belongs to little children!

- 0. You cannot accept the rationalisations some make about this passage...
 - . Those that suggest that Jesus was referring to some of the older children among these children who were capable of repentance and faith...
 - . or others who suggest that when Jesus says, “of such is the kingdom of heaven,”

- He is not saying that the kingdom of heaven belongs to these children themselves...
 - only to those older person who have a child like spirit.
 - That would be to undo the very argument that Jesus is making—
 - That the children are welcome because the kingdom belongs to them.

TRANS> It is fine for you to marvel that Jesus says your children are accepted...

- In fact, you **ought** to marvel that he accepts these little sinners who do not yet understand what He has done...
 - But you ought not to marvel so as to deny it or try to change his clear meaning...
 - He says, “Let them come to me, for of such is the kingdom of heaven.”
 - You ought to be surprised at His marvellous grace to accept them in this way...
- . But in another way, their acceptance ought not to be surprising to you at all.
 0. It ought not to be surprising because from the very beginning God has included little children with their parents in His kingdom.
 - . Through out the ages of redemptive history, He has made this clear by His covenant promise...
 - When He first established His gracious redemptive covenant with Abraham, He said,
 - “I will be your God and you will be my people...”
 - And then He added,
 - “The promise is to you and to your children.”
 - And just to make sure there could be no mis-understanding,
 - He commanded Abraham and all who came after him to circumcise their sons on the eighth day.
 - He gave the sign declaring that it was the sign of their acceptance as His people...
 - that He was their God and that they were His people.
 - By giving the sign to them in their infancy,
 - the Lord make it clear that He was not talking about a future acceptance, but that these little ones belonged to Him from their earliest days.
 - The sign was given to them as soon as practically possible.

- . And so when Jesus says that the kingdom belongs to the children of these parents who bring their little ones to Him,
 - 0) It should come as no great surprise to us... it has always been so.
 - God is doing just as He has always done...
 - He is including the children with their parents.
 - 0) And because the kingdom belongs to them even as it belongs to us their parents,
 - it is a necessary inference that they should also be given the sign of the covenant—baptism, the sign of cleansing and forgiveness and new birth.
 - That is why when Peter is commanding the first converts to be baptised on the Day of Pentecost,
 - he says,
 - “the promise is to you and to your children...”
 - He is making it absolutely clear (as the Lord as always done) that the children of His people are also His people...
 - that they are partakers of the same mercies of which their parents are partakers.
 - 0) Some have gone on to argue that it is also a necessary inference that they be received to the Lord’s Table,
 - but this is not so...
 -) When the church administers baptism, we are not to do it indiscriminately...
 - If we administer it to an adult, it is only upon a clear profession of faith in Jesus Christ, backed up by a life of repentance.
 - If we administer it to a child, it is only because that child has at least one parent who makes a credible profession of faith.
 - We do not baptise children because they are children, but because they have at least one believing parent who is himself a member of Christ’s kingdom.
 - In this way, we show that Jesus accepts into His kingdom two sorts of persons...
 - Those who come by profession of faith...
 - Those who are brought to Him by their believing parents.
 -) But the Lord’s Supper expresses something different.

- It is reserved for those who make a credible profession of faith.
- There is a difference in being in the kingdom because you were brought there and being there on your own volition.
 - Children are to be catechised so that when they reach the age in which they are no longer little children (infancy to age 12 or so) but are themselves able to bear children,
 - they are called to come to make a credible profession of faith for themselves.
- Sentimental arguments are often used to say that the children are being wronged by their exclusion from the supper,
 - but this is not so—they are full members of the kingdom who are growing up to a mature faith...
 - and when that faith is formed so that they can clearly and maturely articulate it, they will be admitted.
 - As a child, their parents bring them to Jesus and He blesses them...
 - but as adults, they will come to Jesus on their own—with or without their parents—and He will bless them.

TRANS> But now to return to the main point—

- It ought not to surprise that God accepts children into His kingdom by virtue of their parents' confession—
 - This is the way it has always been.

0. But I want to make sure you understand something about this...

- . When the Lord says that they belong to His kingdom or that the promise is to them,
 - it does not necessarily mean that all of these children will be in heaven or are true recipients of His divine grace.
 - There are many in the kingdom of God that will be cast out on the day of judgement if not before...
 - They are “in” but only in a superficial way...
 - This is true of both adults and children who are baptised members of Christ's kingdom...
- . Jesus has made this very clear in His teaching as recorded in the gospel of Matthew...
 - 0) In the parables, He said the kingdom of heaven is like a field with wheat and tares...

- It all looks like wheat, but in the day of judgement, the tares will be separated.
 - He also compared the kingdom of heaven to a great drag net that catches all kinds of fish—which fish are separated at the end.
 - Until the judgement, they are all in the kingdom, but then those who are not true are separated.
 - In the parable of the sower, He likewise shows that there are many in His kingdom who are shown to be false even before the end...
 - They turn away from their profession because of persecutions that cause them to deny the truth or because of worldly temptation that lure them away.
 - We must understand that the final word is not out about those who are rightly received into His kingdom by baptism...
 - There are baptised children that will turn away (like Esau turned away),
 - and there are baptised adults that will turn away (like Simon the sorcerer or Judas).
- 0) And in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus spoke about two ways of entering the kingdom...
- By the wide gate and by the narrow gate...
 - Both gates lead persons into his kingdom...
 - But the wide gate leads to destruction and narrow gate leads to life.
 - As long as the earth stands—right up to the end—there will be many false sons in the kingdom of God who are not saved.

TRANS> And because this is so, you parents need to be very careful about how you bring your children to Jesus today...

- And that leads me to my next topic...

II. What does it mean for you to bring your children to Jesus?

- . First, I want you to see that you bring them with you.

0. There are many parents who don't bring their children to Jesus at all.

- . In some cases, it is because they have never entered the kingdom themselves—

- They have not come through either wide gate or the narrow gate, but are outside...
 - They themselves have never professed their faith and been baptised.
- For others, it is because they have not been faithful to their covenant responsibilities...they have not continued in God's covenant.
 - They themselves had once entered God's kingdom, but they have not remained and so they cannot bring their children.
- . Now it is very obvious that if the parents do not bring their little children to Jesus,
 - the little children will not come...
 - They may come later—when they get older, learn of their sin and their need of Christ and so repent and believe...
 - but they do come as those who are brought by their parents.
- . This is why we do not baptise the children of those who do not make a credible profession of faith themselves.
 - I have had parents ask me to baptise their children who themselves do not profess Christ,
 - but my question to them is,
 - “Why do you want to bring your children into something that you yourself reject?”
 - It is nothing but hypocrisy.
 - Your children have no right to this kingdom if you, as their parents, are in rebellion against the king!
 - You repent first, and then you can bring your children.
- 0. Secondly, there are also many parents who bring their children into the kingdom through the wide gate...the wide gate that leads to destruction.
 - . Perhaps some of you will remember when I preached about the wide gate and the narrow gate...
 - The wide gate is all those ways that people come in to God's kingdom which ways lead them to destruction...
 - They make a profession of Christ and they get baptised, but they do not come to the Jesus who is revealed in scripture...
 - In other words, they come to Jesus, but not in a saving way...
 - . Here are a few examples I have given you before...

- 1) There is the moralist.
 - He thinks he is accepted of God because he is a good person...
 - “I am a good person, I do the best I can, I try not to hurt other people...”
 - When such a person finds a church that will admit him on that basis, he brings his children into the kingdom on that false basis...
 - He brings them through the wide gate that leads to destruction.

- 2) Another person goes the sentimental route,
 - “I believe that God is love and that He would never reject anybody...”
 - That sounds sweet and nice, but it is not true.
 - Think of what an insult that is to a holy God who considered it necessary that His own Son should die to satisfy justice if sinners were to be saved!
 - Persons who say that will bring their children in on the same basis.
 - I know a couple who went to a baptism where the minister declared that baptism is a sign that God accepts everybody.
 - That is the wide gate that leads to destruction.
 - Yes, the child was baptised into the kingdom, but if the child continues in the faith of its parents, it will be cast out.

- 3) Then the ritualist comes along and says,
 - “I go to church and say my prayers, I have been baptised and I take the Lord’s Supper, so I am sure that God will accept me.”
 - Those are all good things to do,
 - but you do not gain acceptance with God by them unless you come through the narrow gate of faith in Jesus Christ.
 - Such a parent will teach their child to trust in their baptism instead of in the Lord who cleansing is represented by baptism.

- 4) Yet another says,
 - “I am a Presbyterian. I have read Calvin’s institutes and I can refute every Arminian and every Romanist that comes my way.”
 - Very well, if you are trusting in your own orthodoxy instead of the One orthodoxy points us to, you are as lost as the heretics you refute...
 - The broad way can make a righteousness out of anything—anything except Christ!

- Bring your children in by this gate and you bring them to destruction—not to Christ.
- 5) And then the consumerist evangelical who enters the kingdom to find a Jesus is all he ever wanted...
- He does not consult the scriptures to find out what kind of Saviour Jesus is, but his own felt needs...
 - If you bring your children to a Saviour like that, you bring them through the wide gate that leads to destruction.

TRANS> These are all idolatrous versions of Christ. They are all false ways of salvation that lead to destruction.

. I hope you see the point...

0) You are the one who brings your children to Jesus...

- If you come by the broad gate that leads to destruction, that is the way you bring your children...

0) This is exactly what the second commandment teaches...

- It says,
 - “You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness *of anything* that *is* in heaven above, or that *is* in the earth beneath, or that *is* in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the LORD your God, *am* a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth *generations* of those who hate Me, but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.”
- In the warning attached to this commandment, the LORD shows the effect that your worship of idols will have on your children.
 - Many times parents know the truth about Jesus, but for personal reasons—or even for the sake of their children...
 - they worship Him falsely and bring their children under His judgment.
 - It may be that you yourself are actually saved, but you foolishly bring your children to idols.

TRANS> No parents, don’t bring your children through the broad gate that leads to destruction...

- Yes, they can repent when they get older,
 - but you are not to presume that that will happen.

- You are to bring them to the true Jesus.
0. If you bring them through the narrow gate, you bring them to Jesus as He is revealed in the word...
 - You cannot expect idols to bless them...
 - You must bring them Jesus.
- . But perhaps you are wondering, “How do I bring them to Jesus?”
0. “It was one thing when He was here on the earth—
 - You could just take your little children to where he was and He would bless them... but how do I bring them now?”
 - Don’t be too hasty about saying it was easy!
 - Most of the covenant people did not find their way to Jesus.
 - They did not come and they did not bring their children to Him...
 - For the most part, He was despised and rejected by the people.
 - They preferred their idols to Him.
 - They would not submit to His truth.

TRANS> But I understand what you are asking...

0. How can I bring my children to Jesus when he is not physically present?
 - Well there are many ways that you are to bring them to Him...
 - . First, you can pray for them—and with them...
 - Every Christian knows that prayer is important, but many are terribly negligent...
 - Be sure that you don’t merely pray for their health and their success in the world...
 - pray also for their salvation—for hearts that love God and trust in Jesus alone for salvation.
 - And pray like Jacob did...
 - Do not let go of the Lord until He hears you since He has promised to bless our children.
 - . Secondly, bring your children to Jesus to adore Him...
 - Take them to see Him thundering forth the Ten Commandments at Sinai
 - Take them to see Him parting the Red Sea.

- Take them to see Him judging His people in captivity and then restoring them again...
 - Take them to see Him feeding the five thousand, healing the sick, and raising the dead...
 - Take them to the cross and then to the empty tomb.
 - Bring them to the scriptures every day! Bring them to church. Talk about these things around the house.
- . Thirdly, bring your children to His promises...
- Let them hear His promise to pardon all our sins, to give us the Holy Spirit, to prepare a place in heaven for us...
 - Teach them about justification, adoption, sanctification, and the promise of heaven
 - Let them hear His promise to keep us and to bless us and our children.
 - Bring them to the scriptures every day! Bring them to church. Talk about these things around the house.
- . Fourthly, bring them to hear His instruction
- Teach them His gracious law that tells us how to serve Him in love and how to serve our neighbour in love...
 - Teach them his ordinances and what they mean...
 - Bring them to the scriptures every day! Bring them to church. Talk about these things around the house.
- . Fifthly, bring them to receive His chastisement...
- He has appointed you to chasten them in His name—
 - to rebuke them and to chasten them with the rod that He has appointed with a view to bringing them to repentance...
 - apply to them the warnings about being cursed if they do not continue in faith...
 - and about being cut off from him if they harden their hearts...
 - Teach them to seek His grace to live differently and to pray for His forgiveness when they have sinned.
0. In all this, you are not to deal with them as those who are strangers to His promises and His grace...
- . You bring them to Him as those who belong to His kingdom...

- Bring them as those who are partakers of all that He is to us.
- . From before they can speak, you say to them:
 - “These promises are your promises, these laws are your laws, this saviour is your saviour, this kingdom is your kingdom.”
 - Bring them as full participants in all His blessings and all His grace.

TRANS> Oh parents, it wonderful that you can bring your children with you to Jesus!

- See that you do it!
- See that you go to Him yourself and that you bring them with you.
 - It is wonderful that you can...
 - But I have saved the best part for last...

III. Now I want you to consider what Jesus does when you bring them to Him!

- . First of all, see how He gladly receives them when you bring them...
 0. You know how glad he is when a sinner comes to repentance—
 - He tells the story about the prodigal son coming home and about the shepherd rejoicing to find the lost sheep...
 - Well brothers and sisters, He also greatly rejoices when you bring your little ones to Him who would otherwise be lost.
 - He is a welcoming Saviour who will cast out none that come to Him—and none that are brought to Him!
 0. See how indignant He was with the disciples for hindering these parents bringing their children...
 - . We know He was indignant because Mark says He was...
 - 0) It is one of the few times that He was indignant with His disciples...
 - and it was because He is so welcoming and receiving of the little children that are brought to Him—
 - and they were trying to stop it!
 - He said, “Let the little children and do not forbid them!”
 - 0) He is indignant with churches that hinder them by presenting a false gospel that leads them to idols rather than to Christ...
 - even more so when they do it in a most engaging and entertaining way!

- a false gospel engagingly presented is worse than a false gospel poorly presented!
- 0) We saw just recently in chapter 18 how the Lord says it is better to have a millstone hung around your neck and to be cast into the sea than to cause one of these little ones to stumble!
- Do not let misguided disciples hinder them,
 - Do not let misguided grandparents steer them from Christ,
 - These may try to discourage you from bringing them to Jesus...
 - They may try to distract you or urge you to bring them through the wide gate... but you must not listen to them!
 - The Saviour wants them to come and not be hindered.

TRANS> He burns with indignation against all who hinder them... and so should you!

- . Oh parents, He is surely indignant with you when you yourself do not bring these little ones...
 - When you do not chasten them because it is too much trouble...
 - When you refuse to lead them in regular family worship...
 - When you decide not to go to church for purely selfish reasons...
 - When you cave in to pressure from family to compromise the truth...
 - Do you see—when you compromise, so do your children!
 - They haven't a real choice...
 - if you skip church, so do they...
 - if you skip family worship, so do they.
- . No parents, do not hinder them—
 - come to this welcoming Saviour and know that He is very very glad to have you come!
 - He is always more eager to receive them than you are to have them received by Him.
 - Never forget it!
 - He makes it clear—He approves of your bringing of them!
 - He gladly receives them.
- . But more than that—He not only gladly receives them, He also freely blesses them when you bring them to Him!

0. In verse 15, it says that He laid His hands on them...
- He laid His hands on them to bless them...
 - . Parents, when you bring your children to Jesus, He **will** bless them!
 - He will lay His hands on them!
 - He will truly work in their lives and give them the grace they need to serve Him!
 - He will forgive their sins and remember their iniquities no more...
 - He will bestow on them assurance and growing faith and repentance.
 - He will fill them with a knowledge of His love.
 - He will cause them to bear much fruit.
 - . Brothers and sisters, Jesus' laying His hands on these children was no empty ritual...
 - He was actually bestowing His blessing on them...imparting grace to them!
 - His prayers for their blessing were not offered to God in vain...
 - How much more now that He has been received into heaven to intercede for us!
 - Bring your children to Him with confidence that He will bless them and do not stop looking to Him until He does!
0. What an encouragement for you to come when you know that He is able to actually bless them.... to actually give them grace!
- . He does not ask you to bless them...
 - He simply calls you to bring them to Him—to His word, to His throne...
 - You do the bringing, He will do the blessing!
 - . Indeed, parents, you can't give your children life and salvation...
 - You can no more save your children than you can raise the dead to life...
 - but Jesus can and Jesus will if you will only bring them!
 - . Do not be small in faith dear parents!
 - Do not look at those who have not obtained God's promises for their children... look rather at the promises and the Saviour who gives them!
 - Bring them to Jesus and He will bless them...
 - . And you will say,

- “But how can I bring them to Him?”
 - “My heart is not pure—no parent’s heart is pure—I will surely bring them at least in part to our idols and not to Jesus.”
- That is true—you will—
 - That is why no parent whose children go astray can ever say,
 - “The Lord did not keep His promise to me.”
 - We often fail to bring them Jesus...
 - Follow the way of polygamy as Abraham and David did and it is likely that you will have trouble with your sons as they did.
- But this is where you, knowing that He wants to bless your children, ought to cry out to Him to make **you** the kind of parent you ought to be.
 - The scripture promises that He gently leads those who are with young...
 - He is with you to help you...
 - He leads you in bringing their sons and daughters to Him for His blessing...
 - Look to Him dear brothers and sisters, and He will direct your way.
 - He is full of grace and love for your little ones, just as He is for you!

CONCLUSION>

So parents, bring your little children to Jesus with expectation that something good is going to happen...

- Do it with the same kind of faith that a farmer plants seeds and tends them...
- Not standing and watching to see what will happen in the next five minutes, but working and watching from day to day as the little plant begins to show through the ground... and as it grows stronger and stronger from day to day—until at last it reaches full maturity and bears fruit.
- Bring your little ones to Jesus with the joyful expectation that something good is going to happen them...
 - that He will truly bless them.