

# The Church's Babies

Luke 18:15-17

Halifax: 22 April 2018, 10:30 AM

## Introduction:

Last week I did a general introduction to our new sermon series.

- The series is called: *The Christian in Every Stage of Life*.
- My plan is to look at each stage of the Christian life from the cradle to the grave.
  - We will look at how the Lord loves us and works in us in each stage...
  - At how we are to treat each other in each stage...
  - And how we are to live fruitful and beautiful lives in each stage.
- Last week in the general introduction, we took up a theme song for this sermon series—Psalm 90.
  - We saw in that Psalm how we recognise the wonderful reality that as God's church, He, the eternal God, is our dwelling place, in all generations.
  - In this Psalm we sing of how He works in our lives to make us wise and we plead with Him to make us beautiful and to establish our work as His people.
  - It is a most excellent thing to have the Lord as our dwelling place if we truly do know Him as a Saviour and follow Him with our whole heart.

Today, I want to begin with the youngest stage, the church's babies.

- Our scripture reading is Luke 18:15-17 where our Lord Jesus speaks about the church's babies.
  - He speaks about all the things that we want to consider...
    - How He (and His Father) regard them...
    - How we are to treat them...
    - And how they are to live beautiful and fruitful lives in the church.

Please listen now as I read our text to you—again, it is Luke 18:15-17.

- Here is the Word of God.

**Luke 18:15-17: Then they also brought infants to Him that He might touch them; but when the disciples saw it, they rebuked them. <sup>16</sup> But Jesus called them to Him and said, "Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God. <sup>17</sup> Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it."**

May the Lord bless to us the reading of His holy Word.

Before we get to our main points, I want to explain to you why I chose Luke for our text instead of one of the parallel passages in Matthew or Mark.

- I have selected Luke because in his description, he specifically mentions that *infants* were being brought to Jesus.
  - Older children also came to Him, but Luke found it especially significant that among these children were infants who were carried by the parents to Jesus.
  - Luke is known for his careful use of specific words, and the word he uses for those who are being brought to Jesus is βρέφος *bref'-os* which not only includes new born babies, but also children that are still in the womb.

- Luke uses this word in Luke 2:12 of Jesus in the manger as a babe wrapped in swaddling clothes;
- And he uses in Luke 1:41 of John the Baptist when he leapt in his mother's womb.
- So we have every reason to suppose that among those who were bringing their children to Jesus were expectant mothers with their babes in their wombs.
  - They would certainly desire to bring their children to Jesus for His blessing, all the more in the days when there was such a high rate of infant mortality.

So the stage of life we are looking at today is the stage from conception to weaning.

- These are the church's smallest people among us.
- Now the first thing we want to consider is this:

## I. How does the Lord regard the church's babies?

A. Luke 18 makes it clear that He regards them as belonging to His kingdom.

- You can see it in Jesus' words at the end of verse 16 about them...**for of such is the kingdom of God.**
- 1. We need to think about how Jesus uses this term, *kingdom*.
  - If we look through the gospels, we will find that He speaks of it both as something that *has come* (especially with His coming) and as something that is *yet to come* in its fullness.
  - Very often He speaks about the kingdom as something that some people are in and that some people are not in.
    - He speaks of what characterises and distinguishes those who will inherit His kingdom from those who will not.
    - For example, in Luke 6:20, he speaks of his disciples as having the kingdom: **Then He lifted up His eyes toward His disciples, and said: "Blessed are you poor, for yours is the kingdom of God."**
  - The kingdom seems to be equivalent to the visible church and so made up of both true and false sons.
    - I say this because Jesus speaks of it as the kingdom that Abraham was part of along with the prophets, but that some will be cast out of because of unbelief and that others will be added to.
    - In Luke 13, He is speaking about the kingdom and in verse 28-29, He says: **"There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and yourselves thrust out. 29 They will come from the east and the west, from the north and the south, and sit down in the kingdom of God."**
  - And right here in our text, in Luke 15:19—He says that those who do not receive the kingdom as a child will not enter it.
    - So to be in it does not necessarily mean that you are regenerate, but it means that you are associated with Jesus as a member of His kingdom.
    - Those who are not born again will be revealed and cast out in time.
  - It is the place of those who are regenerate, who truly do know Jesus in a saving way...

- But there are also those who do not truly believe.
  - They come into the kingdom as professing believers for a time, but are eventually turned out because of their unbelief.
  - That is why in His teaching Jesus sometimes distinguishes between those who are presently in His kingdom who will inherit it, and those who will be cast out.
2. But you see in our text that Jesus instructs the disciples to let parents bring their little babes to Him *because* these babies are part of His kingdom.
- He regards them as part of the visible church.
  - What does this mean for them? It means that:
    - they have the covenants and the promises of God;
    - they have the service of worship;
    - they have the signs of the covenant;
    - they have the oracles of God—most important of all the message of God’s grace that salvation is by grace through faith in the blood of the covenant that God has provided for the remission of sin;
    - they have the ministry of the word and working of the Spirit among them such that they are even said to be partakers of the Holy Spirit.
  - God loves them and protects them and provides for them,
    - He chastens them when they go astray,
    - He declares His love and commitment to them and puts His blessing upon them—even when the benediction is pronounced on the congregation.
    - He assures them that if they continue in His covenant, believing, they will truly be with Him in paradise.

TRANS> These are the blessings that belong to all who are in the visible church, but now...

B. Let’s look at a few places where the Lord shows us His regard specifically for the babies of the church.

1. We find it in His covenant promise in which He specifically declares that He is the God of the children of believers and that they are His people.
  - a. We read it in Genesis 17:7: **And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you.**
    - Notice what the covenant involves here—that God will be their God!
    - That is the essence of the covenant of grace—that we are reconciled to God as our God and that we are therefore His people!
  - 1) And lest anyone should think that God is talking about receiving the offspring of Abraham only when they are older, God appoints that the sign of His covenant be given to Abraham’s sons on the eighth day:
    - **Gen 17:12-13: He who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised... vs 13: He who is born in your house and he who is bought with your money must be circumcised, and My covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant.**
    - This is given for the purpose of marking out those who are in the covenant that says God is our God in distinction from those that are not.

- 2) Note that sons who are not circumcised are not regarded as God's people.
  - It is a privilege that belongs only to children of those who are God's people: **Gen 17:14: And the uncircumcised male child, who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, that person shall be cut off from his people; he has broken My covenant.**
- So the LORD told Abraham (and all who are in the church) that his children were His people...they were marked out from others as the people of God.
  - And this was not just an Old Testament thing either:
- b. In Acts 2, the Lord tells parents under the new covenant the same thing about their children when baptism is introduced to them as the sign of the new covenant.
  - After calling those who heard the gospel to repent and be baptised in the name of the Jesus for the remission of sins, Peter says:
    - **Acts 2:39: "For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call."**
    - Our children are included with us when we enter into God's kingdom.
      - The promises of God being our God and of us being His people belong to them too, even though it is a blessing that we receive through faith, just as under the Old Covenant.
      - Abraham was circumcised because he believed, but his sons were circumcised as infants because they were his children.
      - What a wonderful thing that we do not have to leave them outside when we enter into the church, but can bring them with us to nurture them in the house of God.
2. God consistently testifies of His acceptance of our children into His kingdom with us throughout the scriptures.
  - a. When some of those in His kingdom turned to idols, He cries out in indignation against them, saying:
    - **Ezekiel 16:20-21: Moreover you took your sons and your daughters, whom you bore to Me, [notice how He regards them as His] and these you sacrificed to them to be devoured. Were your acts of harlotry a small matter, <sup>21</sup> that you have slain My children [notice He calls them "My children"] and offered them up to them by causing them to pass through the fire?**
  - b. His generosity is seen in 1 Cor 7:14 where Paul teaches that even if only one parent is a believer, his or her children are counted as holy or sanctified...set apart as His people.
    - Paul says: **1 Cor 7:14: For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband; otherwise your children would be unclean, but now they are holy.**
    - In other words, instead of the household being considered unclean—cut off from God, because either the husband or the wife is an unbeliever,
      - God rather counts the whole household as holy.
        - That does not mean that the unbelieving spouse is a member of the church, but it means that they do not so defile the home that the children must be cut off.
        - No, they are counted as holy children who belong to the LORD.

- c. Here are a few more scriptures that speak of how He blesses them:
  - **Ps 147:13: For He has strengthened the bars of your gates; He has blessed your children within you.**
  - **Psalm 103:17-18: But the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear Him, and His righteousness to children's children, <sup>18</sup> to such as keep His covenant, And to those who remember His commandments to do them.**

C. And now let me ask you, how does the Lord regard those who are His people?

1. Oh how He loves them!

- It is for them that He left glory to come and die on the cross—that He might atone for their sins and reconcile them to God.
- He yearns for them to enter into His glorious inheritance that He has prepared for them—where they will behold the love of the Father and the Son and the glory that they have with the Holy Spirit.
- It is His good pleasure to give them the kingdom—all day long He stretches out His hands to them...

2. Yes indeed, how He pleads with them.

- He calls them to come to Him and obtain life.
- He sets His precious promises before them.
- He gives them His commandments and testifies of His love—that even while they were yet sinners, He died for them.
- He pours out His Holy Spirit on them to work in them.
- He rises up early and sends His prophets and pastors to minister to them,
- He pleads with them when they are going astray and chastens them that they might be restored.
- He quickly responds to them with mercy when they repent and forgives them.

TRANS> And now, seeing how the LORD regards the babies of the church, let us look at how He expects us to treat them.

## II. How are we to treat the church's babies?

A. According to our text, we are to bring them to Christ for blessing!

1. That is what the parents were doing with their infants—

- They were bringing them to Him that He might put His hands on them.
- What does it mean for the LORD to put His hands on our children?
  - It is for Him to bless them.
- You can put your hands on someone to harm them, but I think it is quite clear that the parents were not bringing their children for that.
  - Nor were they just letting Jesus feel their children's skin and hair.
  - No, putting His hands on them was putting a blessing upon them.
    - This is especially clear in Matthew 19:13 where it says the parents brought them that Jesus might put His hands on them and pray for them.
- This was not just a nice little ritual...no, no!
  - When Jesus prays for someone, blessing is conveyed.
  - He was praying for them as those who, as He says, belong to His kingdom.

2. It is clear that Jesus considers it a good thing that these parents were bringing their children to Him that He might bless them.
    - Clearly, it is something that parents ought to do!
    - Jesus rebukes His disciples who seemed to think this was nothing more than a sentimental exercise in futility...for they rebuked these parents and got this response from Him:
      - As our text says in Luke 18:15-16: **when the disciples saw it, they rebuked them. <sup>16</sup> But Jesus called them to Him and said, “Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God.”**
  3. It is no act of futility to bring your infants to Jesus for His blessing...
    - It is rather the duty of parents to do this!
    - Don't hinder children from coming to Christ...do all you can to encourage them and their parents to come.
- B. This means that the church should encourage and welcome infants as our brothers and sisters in the church.
- If God calls them “my children” then the church should call them “our children.”
1. As such, we are to give them the sign of the covenant.
    - We have already seen how Peter, upon calling the people who heard the gospel to repent and be baptised in the name of Jesus, also declared that the promise was to them and their children...
    - In every case in the New Testament where those with families are baptised, their whole household is baptised with them.
    - There are many examples of households being baptised, but there is not one example of a child growing up in a believing family and not being baptised.
      - We are told that Timothy was circumcised when he was older to avoid offending the Jews since, as having a Jewish mother, he should have been circumcised before...
        - But we are told that from childhood—the word is the same word that Luke uses in our text of an infant—so from infancy he had known the Holy Scriptures that were able to make him wise for salvation.
  2. In scripture, we find that little children are expected to be present in the worshipping assembly.
    - In Exodus 10, Pharaoh tried to get Moses to go and worship without the children, but Moses refused... he said: **Exo 10:9: And Moses said, “We will go with our young and our old; with our sons and our daughters, with our flocks and our herds we will go, for we must hold a feast to the LORD.”**
    - Later on in Deuteronomy, Moses says: Deut 31:12-13: **“Gather the people together, men and women and little ones, and the stranger who is within your gates, that they may hear and that they may learn to fear the LORD your God and carefully observe all the words of this law, <sup>13</sup> and that their children, who have not known it, may hear and learn to fear the LORD your God as long as you live in the land which you cross the Jordan to possess.”**
    - Sometimes the passage in Nehemiah 8:2 (where it says that those who could hear with understanding gathered to hear the word) is quoted to say that children were excluded from the assembly, but this is not sound exegesis because it contradicts passages that show that children were present...it is much more likely that a phrase like that is used of foreigners who did not know the language.

- In Ephesians 6, the children in the assembly are addressed in the epistle that was to be read in the assembly.
    - Paul expected them to be present when his letter was read.
    - Furthermore, in the history of the early church, we have examples of children and nursing infants being with their parents in worship—never of being separated into a different place.
3. So what does this mean for us in the church?
- a. It means that we are not to hinder, but encourage parents to bring their little children with them in the assembly.
    - Let them learn to sit under the word even as their language develops...babies learn to speak from listening.
      - Let it be the oracles of God and the prayers of the saints that are heard by them as they learn to utter their first words.
    - Let them see their parents and others singing praise to God even before they can talk—let them see parents doing homage to their creator and redeemer.
      - Indeed, we are told in Psalm 8 that out of the mouths of babes the Lord has ordained His praises—even as the dear children of the covenant begin to stammer along in bringing God’s praises.
      - Even as they experience the joy and the reverence in song in the womb—God receives it as an offering of praise from His dear children.
    - Let them see the congregation addressed by authoritative preaching—
      - This is of inestimable value from the start—it makes a wonderful early impression on them that their parents are under authority.
        - Even if they are confused as one lad was that the preacher is God because of exhortations to hear what God says...even that is part of shaping their developing understanding.
      - Let them see the reverence of their parents and learn what it is fear God.
    - Let them see the Lord’s Supper being received by those who are mature that they might begin to inquire of it and prepare to receive it.
    - Let them be in the assembly when the blessing is pronounced on the congregation by the minister.
      - Do not hinder them; let them be there to receive the blessing that is given in Jesus’ name—both while in the womb and as newborn babies.
  - b. It also means that the children are to be treated as God’s people among us in general...
    - We are to have the special regard for them that we are to have for all the people of God.
    - We are to go out of our way to care for them when they are in need.
    - We are to pray for them as those who are among God’s people, presenting them to Him as those he has redeemed.
    - If they should die in the womb or in infancy, we are to have a Christian funeral for them—to bury them in hope that they have gone to be with Christ.
      - And that not just based on a groundless sentiment that God would not condemn babies—but based on the promises of God’s covenant to be God to us and to our children—based on the blood of Christ shed for sin!

- We do not count them as innocent, but as sinners who have been redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ—the same as we do all the older members of the church.
    - It does not matter if they have received baptism yet—I mean, if they die before they were born—they are still God’s covenant children if they have a believing parent.
  - And if something should happen to their parents, we should be all the more glad to take them into our care...knowing that they are beloved of the Lord.
    - Speaking of which, if you have not done so, you who are parents should be sure that you have arrangements for believers to look after your children if something should happen to you.
- C. And now, having addressed how the church should treat our covenant children, let me have a word with you parents.
- There will be much more that I will say to you in future sermons in this sermon series—but for now I want to encourage you especially about parenting infants.
1. Let me begin with a tremendous encouragement that God has for you.
    - a. Parenting is a daunting responsibility about which we can feel our inadequacy and can cry out as ministers do, “who is sufficient for these things?”
      - This is especially so when you recognise that the LORD regards our infants as His own children, and has charged you with their primary physical and spiritual care!
      - The great consolation is that our sufficiency is in the Lord.
    - b. And to make the consolation even stronger and to encourage us to turn our eyes to Him for help, the Lord has promised special assistance to us in parenting.
      - In Isaiah 40:11, He is described as a loving shepherd to parents, saying: **He will feed His flock like a shepherd; He will gather the lambs with His arm, and carry them in His bosom, and gently lead those who are with young.**
      - It only makes sense that as He dearly loves the children of His people, He would be always ready to help those parents who look to Him!
  2. So parents, what should you do with these little ones?
    - a. You should cherish them—
      - Perhaps you would say that that is not hard to do—good for you!
      - But I am talking about when you are tired and your patience runs thin.
      - You need to continue to love them and treat them as you would treat the Lord Himself if we were under your care, for they are members of Him.
    - b. Furthermore, you should begin from their earliest days to teach them to seek the Lord.
      - Pray with them morning and evening—pray out loud—pray for them even before they are able to speak.
      - Read the word to them, sing praises with them in your arms.
      - Talk to them even now of God’s love for them and of the promises that He has made to them.
      - Tell them what Jesus has done for them and for you as His people, and about how He gives us the Spirit to help us.



- Bring them to church with you and teach them to worship with you.
  - Urge them also to continue in the grace of God—pray that they will, and urge them to do so.
- c. Realise that they also have the Spirit of God at work in them.
- Realise that all the commandments of God are given to them and written on their hearts according to their capacity...
    - I tell you all, spirit filled children have a lot more capacity than we think they do to grow in grace.
  - You can teach them patience by not following the world in catering to their every demand.
    - You are the parent and they are to honour you and to do all things without complaining, right from the start.
    - Feed them, not whenever they demand it, but when they actually need to eat.
    - Do not reward whining and complaining, but correct them and make them wait.
      - You would be surprised at how much you can teach them these things if you really try, even in their first days after birth.
  - Too often we confuse capacity with godliness.
    - Certainly, there are many things a child does not have the capacity to do, and you must make proper distinctions between inability and sin.
      - But the tendency in our day is to err in saying that children are not capable of sinning—even though the Bible says they come from the womb speaking lies.
        - **Ps 58:3 The wicked are estranged from the womb; they go astray as soon as they are born, speaking lies.**
    - Godliness is something they should have at every age.
      - The sooner we begin, the better it will be.

TRANS> And that leads me to the third thing I want to consider regarding the church's babies.

### III. It is for them also to live beautiful and fruitful lives in the Lord.

A. Notice how Jesus describes them in our text as examples to us all!

1. He describes them as models of how His kingdom should be received.
  - After saying that they should be brought to Him because the kingdom belongs to them, He adds: Luke 18:17: **Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it.**
  - Think of this—what are covenant children like?
    - Do they throw up objections to the gospel?
    - Do they resist the truth?
    - No, they believe what they are told.
      - This is not a virtue, of course, if they are being told lies.
      - They will believe in superstitions or embrace immorality or whatever.
  - But if covenant children are told the truth and the truth is lived before them, they will receive it even better than lies and even better than adults...

- Because God’s Spirit is with them...
    - Because truth is never proven wrong as they grow older...
  - The truth bears witness with our spirit—all people have an innate sense of God and all have a conscience and know that they have offended God.
    - As sinners, children are quick to learn to evade these realities and to take refuge in the lies of their parents,
      - but if they are taught about God’s sweet saving grace to sinners, they can rejoice and rest in the truth!
    - They are much more receptive when they are babes than they are after they have become hardened in the world’s system of evasion and lies.
2. It is instructive that Luke has put our text between two passages about those who were living in the lie that they were righteous by their own merits.
- a. Our text comes right after the passage about the Pharisee and tax collector, where the Pharisee takes refuge in the lie of self-righteousness...
    - **Luke 18:11-12: ‘God, I thank You that I am not like other men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. <sup>12</sup> ‘I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.’**
      - If you teach your children to think highly of themselves like that, they will learn it because they are sinners...that is what most parents do today.
    - But the tax collector takes refuge in the sweet truth of the gospel: verse 13 **“And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me a sinner!’ ”**
    - Jesus says that he went down to his house justified rather than the other...
      - If you teach your covenant children to take refuge in the gospel, they will learn that, because they have the Spirit of God at work in them.
  - b. And our text about children is placed right before the passage about the rich young ruler.
    - Here is another man that has learned from childhood, though he was brought up in the covenant, to take refuge in lies.
      - He came with lies, boasting that he had lived a life that ought to be acceptable to God...he had a good reputation...
      - And Jesus sent him away with sorrow, showing him that he did not have in himself what it takes to inherit the kingdom.
    - I have heard parents tell their children that lie—that they have what it takes.
      - But covenant children should be those who receive the truth that they are sinners who have been redeemed by our gracious Saviour.
      - They should be those who from their earliest days receive and rest upon Him alone for their salvation.
        - They should be examples, not of covenant pride, but of true faith in the gospel of Jesus Christ.
- B. And in connection with this they should be beautiful and fruitful!
1. There should be a marked difference in them and in the babies of the world.
    - Their honour of their parents, trusting in their care, responding to them, controlling themselves, should be seen from their earliest days.

- The beautiful fruits of the Spirit should be starting to develop through the grace of Jesus Christ before they can even talk.
2. Formally, they should be distinguished as those who worship God.
    - They should be seen with the sign of baptism upon them,
      - in the worshipping assembly each Lord's Day—they should be faithful apart from health or other issues that keep them or their parents away...
    - They should be engaged in regular prayer and praise in the home...
      - I know that this is dependent on their parents, but it is still what ought to characterise them in distinction from children outside the church.
      - The reason they are received into the church is because they have believing parents and it is expected that the parents will do what they have promised to do and bring their children to worship God.
  3. I hope you all have seen fruit that distinguishes covenant children from others.
    - I have seen children in an airport or in a doctor's office—and certainly in the church—that were full of the fruits of the Spirit when they were very little...
      - Children that have enabled me to see that they are Christian children by their fruit.
      - As sinners saved by grace, they were humble and obedient.
    - This is what covenant children should be by the grace of God.
- C. We need to pray earnestly that God's beauty would be seen upon the babies of the church and that they would be fruitful.
- These little babies are responsible to live for their Saviour.
  - He is truly at work in them both to will and to do of His good pleasure, even as babes.
  - They can be beautiful and fruitful Christians even while still in their parent's arms.