

Matthew 19:13-15 – “Let the Little Children Come” – Apr. 28, 2024

1. This is a familiar passage that many of us will remember from SS
 - a. We sang songs along these lines “Jesus Loves the Little Children”
 - b. The way we view little children is perhaps one of the greatest testing areas between those who are still in their sin and those who have been redeemed by Christ
 - i. Are they a nuisance and a distraction?
 - ii. Are they a vanity project or a personal accessory like a Gucci purse?
 - iii. Or are they little image bearers designed to fill the kingdom of God?
2. In 19:1-12 we got a picture of Jesus entering into the “Jeremiah phase” of His ministry, as He meticulously retraces the steps of OT Israel
 - a. Isaiah spoke of the Northern Kingdom’s exile to the Assyrians as divorce (50:1)
 - b. Jeremiah reminds the Southern Kingdom of Judah how God divorced Israel, and how He is now filling out divorce papers for them too, due to their whoring idolatry (3:1-8). Babylon is at the door and is about to take Judah away.
 - c. The same story that played out then is playing out now, but instead of the Babylonians, it is now the Romans who are going to serve as the rod of God’s judgment against Jerusalem for their stubborn refusal to listen to God’s messenger. They didn’t listen to Jeremiah, and they refuse to listen to the Messiah.
3. When the Pharisees try to trap Jesus on the question of divorce as He moves into Judea, He goes all the way back to creation to tell them how things were designed to work

- a. These men were so deep into their corruption that they could no longer see the big picture
- b. Christ goes back to Moses, back to Genesis to explain to them once again what man is for, what woman is for, what marriage is for, and what the sexual union is for
- c. After painting a positive and creational view of man, woman, marriage, and sex, it is entirely natural that this conversation makes its way to little children
- d. Creation is the standard to which Jesus has appealed, because this event stands above every culture, every time period, and every person, believer or unbeliever
 - i. Marriage is not just for believers but for the whole world
 - ii. It is not a sacrament of the church but an ordinance for all creation
- e. The Bible is unified in its praise of the goodness of creation
 - i. Unfortunately many Christians have taken a dim view of creation, of the physical world, of work, of marriage, of the body, and of children
 - ii. They think they are being “spiritual” when they have really absorbed the Greek philosophy of Gnosticism
 - iii. This, together with a view of the future that is usually inadequately formed by Scripture, has many Christians wondering why we should even bring children in to such a fallen world
 - iv. A positive view of creation, and a positive view of God’s redemptive purposes in history, however, must result in Christians having a positive view of children

- v. Christians have all the tools to understand why we ought to be lovers of babies and of children
- f. Children are so clearly a blessing from the Lord that even unbelievers are able to rejoice over a new baby being born
 - i. Yet the unbelieving mind is schizophrenic on this point
 - 1. Bill Maher – acknowledgment that abortion is murder; he just doesn't care because human life isn't that special
 - ii. Just like the ancient idolators offered their little babies to the flames of Molech in exchange for empty promises and lies, so too is the practice today
- g. In one generation, the western mindset has undergone a seismic and incredibly destructive change
 - i. In the 1960s, the birth control offered an unnatural and anti-creational divorce between pleasure and reproduction
 - 1. God made these things to go together
 - 2. A steak is enjoyable, but it is *for* nourishment
 - a. The one-flesh union of a man and his wife is enjoyable, but it is *for* reproduction
 - 3. The very first command from God was for the man and the woman to be fruitful and multiply
 - a. This includes more than childbearing, but certainly not less
 - ii. In the 1970s and 80s, battles raged when this twisted thinking inevitably followed the force of logic

1. If sex is no longer for reproduction, then reproduction is an unfortunate side effect
 2. And we have medical procedures to fix unwanted side effects, don't we
 3. This is how a society goes from rejoicing over life in a womb to talking about removing a clump of cells in a woman's body
 4. If Jesus loves the little children, it makes sense that Satan hates them
- iii. Of course, the white hot hatred against creation is never satisfied, and it must keep corrupting goodness, like cancer destroying a healthy body
1. Once the one-flesh union has been robbed of its meaning, it is reduced to an indoor recreational activity
 2. And you don't need to be married to have fun
 3. In fact, you don't even need an opposite gender person
 4. So called "same-sex marriage" is not an expansion of marriage, but the complete emptying of the word "marriage"
 5. Once this move is made, gender itself becomes meaningless, and idolatrous, unbelieving man no longer sees himself as conforming to the real world; he will rather kick against the real world trying to force it to conform to his perversions
 - a. This is how we arrive at Kaitlyn Jenner and Elliot Page

- h. What is meant to be the power plant that fuels creation, a one-flesh union between husband and wife in marriage has become the chief centre of corruption in pagan cultures like our own
- i. If we are going to recapture a healthy vision of God's purposes for creation, it will absolutely have to centre on productive Christian households
 - i. We have to consider our theology of children
 - 1. Not all birth control is necessarily sinful per se
 - a. Abortifacients always are
 - 2. "Husband and wife are a complete family"
 - a. In one sense, if God in His providence does not give children, it is absolutely still a legitimate marriage that served a real purpose in the world
 - b. Intentional childlessness is most likely sinful, however
 - c. 1.7 children/woman means that 2 people are being replaced by 1.7 people, which is a slow form of suicide for humanity
 - 3. There is not a mandate to have as many children as is physically possible, but we should be open to children
 - a. They are always spoken of as a blessing in Scripture
 - b. Who doesn't want a blessing from God
 - c. If you'd want a smaller family, ask which one of your kids you'd like gone
 - i. If we intentionally close ourselves off to children, we are closing ourselves off to actual people like

the ones we have come to know and love who are
currently in our families

- ii. Where the world wants pleasure without fruitfulness, it is asking for death instead of life
 - iii. “*All who hate me love death*” (Prov. 8:36)
 - iv. We have access to the mind of God on all of this; we have an understanding of what fruitfulness under the Lordship of Christ looks like
 - v. When antichrist belief systems devour themselves in death, we have words of life
 - vi. We are the ones with a positive view of creation
 - 1. We are *pro* creation
 - 2. It is no mistake that the act of bringing children into the world is called *procreation* (lit. advancing creation)
 - 3. LBCF 25:2 – “*Marriage was ordained for the mutual help of husband and wife, for the increase of humanity with legitimate offspring, and for the prevention of immorality.*”
 - j. It only makes sense that after painting a picture of the creational beauty of a man and his wife, that Jesus babies find their way to Him
4. VV.13-15 – “*Then children were brought to him that he might lay his hands on them and pray. The disciples rebuked the people, 14 but Jesus said, “Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven.” 15 And he laid his hands on them and went away.*”
- a. Luke 18 says that these children were infants

- b. These people are seeking a blessing from the Lord on their little ones
 - i. They are bringing Him the crowns of His own blessing back to Him
- c. Perhaps these parents have been compelled and moved by the Lord's picture of marriage and of the one-flesh union, and because it stands in such sharp contrast to the sexual immorality and the no-fault divorce that was so prevalent in their day, they overflowed in a renewed understanding of the meaning of their little ones
 - i. Perhaps they were filled with joy at how good and how pure this all was, and they saw in these little people the promise of fruitfulness and of a future
 - ii. They couldn't help but overflow in seeing a blessing and because the Lord was right there, they wanted Him to touch these children and bless them accordingly
- d. A blessing is often conveyed by the laying on of hands
 - i. Jacob gathers his sons and his grandsons and lays his hands on them to bless them
 - ii. Mark 16 speaks of laying hands on the sick
- e. The disciples tried to prevent these parents from bringing their children to Christ
 - i. Little children were often seen as the concern of women
 - ii. They would have to be older before they were seen as the concern of the men
- f. But Jesus has already spoken about little children in a positive way

i. In 18:1-9 when the disciples are arguing over who will be the greatest, Christ admonishes them to be like little children

1. Little children are trusting, they are dependent, they are curious and eager to learn

2. Christ said we have to be like this if we want to enter the kingdom

a. The kingdom of God has no room for the proud, for the self-sufficient, or for the autonomous self-made man

b. The problem with self-made men is that they worship their creator

c. And Christ has already shown us that while many people are too big for His kingdom, none are too small

3. Jesus wants these children with Him because they are a near-perfect picture of what it is like to be a Christian

a. These children aren't even big enough to bring themselves to Christ

b. Another has to carry them there, and what could better illustrate our own inability to come to Christ by our own power or our own free will or good choices or moral superiority

c. just as the Holy Spirit has to carry us to Christ so we can receive His hand of blessing, so the parents must carry their little ones to Him

d. these helpless babies are you and me

- g. Jesus wants them!
 - i. He says that they should not be hindered!
 - ii. He is pleased to lay His hands on them and offer all His benefits to them
- h. This has very practical implications both in our philosophy of parenting and in our philosophy of worship
 - i. Parenting
 - 1. In another passage where Paul is talking about divorce, marriage, and the sexual union between husband and wife, he says this (1 Cor. 7:12-14)
 - a. *“To the rest I say (I, not the Lord) that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he should not divorce her. 13 If any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever, and he consents to live with her, she should not divorce him. 14 For the unbelieving husband is made holy because of his wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy because of her husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy.”*
 - b. Now, neither unbelieving spouses nor children are saved because of the faith of another
 - c. Paul does not mean here the kind of sanctification that flows from justification
 - i. This is not automatic salvation

- d. “Sanctification” in this sense is to be set apart
 - i. That is, the environment is such that these children and unbelieving spouses will have the special blessing of being in everyday contact with the gospel of Jesus Christ
- 2. The Bible is clear that by nature we are children of wrath, our default setting is to be lost; we are lost until we are saved
 - a. God has no grandchildren; only children who come in by personal faith and repentance
 - b. Nobody is saved by birthright or by the faith of their parents
 - c. God grants faith to those who are His by His own sovereign pleasure
- 3. But we also must remember that God made a world with a reaping and sowing principle as well
 - a. Election is not cold fatalism nor is it random from God’s perspective
 - b. God connects the ends with the means, and He also providentially governs the family and the age and the circumstances that we are born into
 - c. Praise God that He breathes spiritual life into the least likely people, and He is utterly free to do that whenever and wherever He pleases

- d. But His normal way of working, through the Bible and through church history has been through families
 - e. It makes sense that there is a general pattern of God placing elect people in families where they are going to hear the gospel and naturally and organically mature into it
4. So on the one hand, we must avoid a view which presumes upon the salvation of our children just because we are saved
 5. On the other hand, we must equally avoid a view which treats the salvation of our children as a random coin toss
 6. Wise, godly parenting acknowledges that salvation is from the Lord
 - a. If the king's heart is a stream of water in the Lord's hand (Prov. 21:1), then how much more are the hearts of us lesser people?
 - b. Salvation is from the Lord, and no formula is going to force His hand
 7. At the same time, He gave your children *to you, a believer*
 - a. He did not give your children to an agnostic couple, or a Muslim couple
 - b. He gave them to you, and He instructs you to raise them in the *paideia* of the Lord (Eph. 6:4)

- c. The general pattern (not each-and-every promise) is that if we “*Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it.*” (Prov. 22:6)
- d. Of course, this includes education
 - i. All education is inescapably religious
 - ii. There’s always a core principle that unites the parts, and if this core principle is not the lordship of Christ, then it will be something else
 - iii. Education is about forming the whole person to live in the world, and so education must be explicitly Christian
 - iv. Our children must see that Christ is Lord of math just as much as He is of history, law, economics, the family, and private prayers.
 - 1. Homeschooling
 - 2. Classical Christian schooling
- 8. Godly parenting must teach the importance of repentance, faith, and personal conversion
 - a. But it should not be white-knuckled
 - b. Make your home the kind of place where the most natural thing is for your children to trust the Bible, to have peace with God, to know they are saved, and to live for the glory of God

ii. Worship

1. God's pattern for discipleship involves the wisdom of those who are older
2. In 1 Kings 12, after Solomon's death, his son Rehoboam foolishly listens to his friends instead of to his late father's grey-haired advisors
 - a. As a result, he makes some terrible decisions and the kingdom of Israel is split in two, North and South
3. Compare that with the wisdom of Titus 2, where the young women are being disciplined by the older women
4. We live in an age that is obsessed with tearing natural and organic bonds apart into demographic groups
 - a. Eg. Political polls that imply that if young and old want something different, it's proof of how out of touch the old are, so we just have to wait for progress
 - b. Church ministry has moved heavily in this direction as well, and the overall stats about how many young people leave the church would indicate that it's not working
 - i. We might say we shouldn't expect it to work because that's not the direction the Bible sends us in
 - ii. There's nothing wrong with smaller ministry groups, but the life and heartbeat of the church must be centred around the generations being together

5. Family-Integrated Worship

- a. Funny that we need a name for it today
- b. Until the early 1900s, it was just called “church”
- c. This is the wisdom of God that says the corporate worship of God’s people involves all of His people
- d. Sending children out might seem like it does no harm
 - i. It gives mom some freedom to listen
 - ii. Little kids don’t understand anyway
 - iii. Being with their peers is more fun and they get an age appropriate lesson
- e. But the message is that “big people church” is out of reach for small people
 - i. It’s not fun, it’s not cool
- f. Targeted demographic worship divides the people of God and sadly means that many children get quite old without ever participating in an actual corporate worship service
 - i. The fixation on the new and the novel means they will be robbed of learning the lyrics to old hymns
 - ii. It means that they will stay ignorant of vocabulary like “covenant” or “propitiation” which means when they’re 30, the church will feel the need to dumb it down even more

- g. Families, not peer groups, are the foundational unit of creation as God made it
 - i. The church itself is a family, and not a peer group
 - ii. We don't pick our brothers and sisters at home or at church
 - 1. David Wiebe and Juliet Bartmanovich have more in common than biological siblings who don't have a shared commitment to the gospel
 - iii. Part of integrating these little people involves some discomfort at times
 - 1. Babies make noise, they coo and move
 - 2. But when this gets too distracting, there is a place to take them, and in the providence of God, mom and dad both have two hands
 - a. One to carry the little one to a quiet place, and another to go over the mouth until they get there
 - b. Children should not be punished for being children, but as they get older, if their lack of cooperation is due to a rebellious heart instead of just being small, the providence of God has

also made it so that dad has a second hand and the child has a place of padding where additional instruction can be offered

h. The goal is not outward conformity, but rather for the child to love the Lord and to be part of the worshipping community

i. Leaving the sanctuary should be a disappointment, not a reward

ii. He should see that he's here because Jesus wants him here

iii. He's here to receive a blessing from the Lord

iv. He's here to learn about who she is, and where she belongs in God's world

v. She's here to learn about the wide, vast, deep history of God's people so she knows where she's entering the story

1. She has a sense of time and place and identity in a world that enjoys no such blessing

i. *Pamphlets*

5. A passage like this sets up such an incredible contrast

- a. One of the most horrific results of our society turning to pagan idols is that it makes the world incredibly unsafe for children
 - b. The most dangerous place to be alive in North America is in your mother's womb
 - i. What God made as a nurturing home has become a battlefield
 - c. The way we see children is every bit as much a test of worldview today as it was when Jesus was on earth
 - d. Children are trusting, children are humble enough to receive, they are dependent, they are teachable, curious, eager to learn, and they want to please their Father
 - i. To such belongs the kingdom of heaven
6. And for those of us who have been called either to a life of celibacy or a life where having children has not happened under the providence of God, we should also see a parallel here with last week's passage
- a. Jesus spoke in vv. 11, 12 about eunuchs, including those who were celibate for the sake of the kingdom
 - b. Jesus is one such man
 - i. He never enjoyed marriage or natural children
 - c. *Isaiah 56:1-5 speaks of how the eunuchs who were formerly excluded from the priesthood will now be fruitful in the Lord's service*
 - d. *In Ch. 54, he tells Jerusalem to rejoice as a barren woman rejoices over her children*
 - e. *The fruitful eunuch and the barren woman are gloriously put to service in the kingdom of God*

- i. *In the kingdom of God, eunuchs bear fruit and broken-hearted women have many children*
- f. *In this, we have a picture of the entire promise of the gospel; life out of death, recovery out of loss, restoration out of despair.*
- g. *The gospel is good news for children, for mothers, for fathers, for fruitful eunuchs, and for virgin mothers.*

7. CHARGE

- a. *In His all-wise providence, Christ extends His teaching on creation, maleness, femaleness, marriage, and the one-flesh union into its natural end – the goodness and blessing of children. The Lord Jesus’s teaching is pro-creational in every sense. Children are a blessing. Children are an inheritance. Children are the fruitful crown of the woman’s womb, and the continuation of a man’s dominion after his strength is gone. When others see a nuisance, Christ sees a blessed hope. Jesus, the unmarried man, is here surrounded by His children, blessing them like Jacob before He departs in death. The blessing of these children is not automatic, however; it is a stewardship. Children are to be instructed to discover the delight in God’s law and in His gospel. While these little ones are ultimately in God’s hands, we must press into the joyful and expectant task of shepherding their hearts towards Him, in the home, in education, and in our worship.*

8. BENEDICTION

- a. Numbers 6:22-27 – *“The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 23 “Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying, Thus you shall bless the people of Israel: you shall say to them, 24 The LORD bless you and keep you; 25 the LORD make his face to shine upon*

you and be gracious to you; 26 the LORD lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace. 27 “So shall they put my name upon the people of Israel, and I will bless them.”