

Parenting

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[0 : 00] I'll turn to Matthew chapter 19, Matthew 19, and I want to look at verses 13-15. We've slowed down in this early part of Matthew 19, just so I think it's helpful to look at these things. Matthew 19 and verses 13-15 is on page 824. Jesus loves the little children.

I think it's fair to say that children in our culture occupy a position of extremes. My children are catered for unlike any previous generation. So I think for example the massive industry of early education, children's entertainment, all targeted at little people, aren't they?

There are lucrative targets for marketing. Food that's targeted at little children. Clothing brands, games. And then on the other hand, many children in our day are overlooked, neglected, and abused. Abortion. And the question that we're going to look at tonight is who will care for the children? Who will cater for their immortal souls? Bishop Jason Ryle says, who even notices that each infant possesses within its little body an undying principle that will outlive the pyramids of Egypt and see the sun and moon quenched on the last day? Who will address their greatest need of all their immortal souls? And the answer to that question is Jesus Christ. Christ, the omnipotent Son of God, and the creator of all things, the sustainer and upholder of the universe, spends down and cuddles little babies.

It's a marvellous thought, isn't it? And it is his glory that the slightest of all should get particular attention.

The weakest and the most vulnerable and the most overlooked of all, Jesus loves the little children. Let's think about these three verses, three headings. Bringing the little children, forbidding the little children, blessing the little children.

[2 : 29] Now bring me the little children. Verse 13. Then children were brought to him, that he might lay his hands on them, literally bless them, and pray for them.

And the disciples rebuked the people bringing the children, the parents. Remember the context Jesus has been giving us, the really practical teaching on the subject of marriage, and of divorce and of singleness.

That's a really fairly obvious place to go next, isn't it, children? And think about who is being brought to Jesus' children. Little children.

The word literally here in Matthew can refer to anything from newborn infants to small children, to toddlers, and so on. But Luke is even more explicit in his account.

He says, Luke 18, verse 15, they will bring even infants to him that he might touch them. Babies in arms, presumably. Brought by their parents to Jesus.

[3 : 34] And we have to ask him, why were they brought to Jesus? And we're told, that he might lay his hands on them and pray for them. And we need to recognise this is not like an American politician where the baby is kind of given to the politician.

It's not like that. It's not in a kind of, if, let's say, Wales won the World Cup and I take Phoebe to Cardiff for the open top bus parade and I get her to be held by one of the players.

That's not going to happen. But that's not what's happening here either. These are not simple, uneducated people coming to some well-known miracle worker, some celebrity, hoping that he's going to give them some magic touch.

It's not superstitious. If it was superstitious, what would Jesus have done? Jesus would have stopped them and rebuked them and sent them to write, but these are old covenant believers. They've come to recognise that in Jesus of Nazareth, they've come to see who he is. And they want to seek his priestly benediction.

[4 : 46] That's the word blessing. And his blessing on their covenant children. So this is more than some kind of baby dedication. Some kind of sentimental, well-wishing ceremony for the kids.

What those parents desire is a personal encounter with Jesus Christ. And that will issue forth in them being blessed. Blessed in all the fullness of the blessing of God.

Being brought into blessing. Salvation. Now if that is what is happening here, what does this account tell us about their children? what does this little story tell us about little children?

Well, shoot, it's really obvious, isn't it? It's really obvious that little children need Jesus. Little children need Jesus. Little children have sinful hearts.

They come into the world with the children of Adam. And they bear the guilt of original sin. There are fewer things, aren't there, more glorious in life than the birth of a new baby.

[5 : 53] A new life. A new life brought into the world. And yet, such babies, the Bible tells us, are born, spiritually speaking, stillborn. And they come into this world and came to them by sin.

We find that so hard to accept, don't they? And so, they come to Jesus and they need Jesus. You see, to lay his hands upon them and impart to them spiritual life.

Let me read to you from Westminster, the Shorter Catechism. wherein consists the sinfulness of that estate wherein to man fell. Here's the answer. The sinfulness of that estate wherein to man fell. This is where man fell. Consists in the guilt of Adam's first sin, the want of original righteousness, the corruption of his whole nature, which is commonly called original sin, together with all actual transgressions which proceed from it.

And many people would read that or you'd hear that and say, well, of course, actual transgressions that proceed from it. There you go. The little baby hasn't committed any transgressions. These little babies can't commit any transgressions on their own.

[7 : 01] They're so little, beautiful, innocent things, aren't they? To which, of course, we have to say no. Because even little ones have inherited Adam's corrupt nature.

And as Paul says in Romans 5, verse 19, by one man's disobedience, the many were made sinners. Do you remember, children, we did it, didn't we, with the dominoes and we did the children's talk on that question and one domino sets off all the other dominoes.

And so little children share in the guilt of Adam's sin, but as Paul continues, also by one man's obedience, many will be made righteous. And that's why little children need Jesus.

He is the man and by his obedience they too can be made righteous. So little children need Jesus. But we should also see here tonight very, very simply that little children should be brought to Jesus. Little children must be brought to Jesus. It goes without saying, doesn't it, that little babies cannot bring themselves to him. They need Jesus to pray for them because they cannot pray for themselves.

[8 : 19] Little children, little babies cannot pray the sinner's prayer. The sinner's prayer is not what saves either adults or infants. You see, what actually saves us is the priestly work of the Lord Jesus.

Where we confess that we are saved by Christ alone and by his life and his death and his atonement and his intercession. And he gives that salvation sovereignly and graciously to whomever he wills and that includes little children.

Notice here that the ignorance and the incapacity of little children is no barrier. It's no barrier to their personally receiving the benefits of the covenant of grace.

Any more than an adult who's got a mental disability for them to be eligible for salvation. You just need to be a sinner. A sinner. Salvation is not dependent upon your age.

It's not dependent on your earthly status. That's the message of the next passage, isn't it, in Matthew 19, the rich young ruler. What it depends on is your need of salvation as a son or a daughter of Adam.

[9 : 31] And that's not ignoring justification by faith that we are made right by trusting in Christ and declared right by God.

That as little ones come of age in the Christian home, the reality of their inclusion in the covenant that they are part of the covenant people will be seen in them exercising faith and repentance just as adults do.

It very well might not be dramatic. But in anticipation of that, children must be brought to Jesus on the arms of their parents' faith.

Because if little children are not brought, they never will be. That's what we learn about little children in this text. But what does it say about parents? Well, parents must believe the promises of the covenant of grace.

They must believe the promises of the covenant of grace, of God's promise and pledge. These little children are brought to Jesus on the arms of their parents' faith.

[10:46] We've already contended that these people were Old Testament believers who understood that the covenant of grace extends to their children also.

Genesis chapter 17 and verse 7. Let me read it to you. And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant to be God to you and to your offspring after you.

So I cross the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 7 verse 14 says that the children of unbelievers are unclean. Whereas the children of believers are holy. And so what you have in this passage is excellent parental role models.

they have faith in the covenant promise and they act upon that faith. And this faith is not a shrink wrapped compartment of their life.

Here's my religious life over here and here is my parenting techniques. Their faith is driving their parenting.

[12:13] And Christian parents they have liberty conscience like we talked about with dating this morning. Our Christian parents have liberty of conscience. We can differ on styles of parenting.

That's okay. Methods of education. That's okay. Discipline. How we discipline. But all Christian parents should be united in this. They should be united in this that they are trusting the covenant promises of God.

And they're trusting the covenant promises of God for themselves. Yes. But also for their children.

And so it follows by way of application parents bring your children to Jesus.

And that goes for you that have adult children. I'm sure that you do bring them to Jesus. I know that.

You bring them to Jesus in prayer all the time.

And maybe tonight you're saying you don't have children but you know children. let's bring the little children to Jesus. They have immortal souls and they need to be saved. And they have a mighty saviour who welcomes the weakest child.

[13:29] So you knew who was coming. Therefore parents present your children for baptism.

Recognize their status as children of the covenant and obtain for them the outward sign and seal of that covenant.

You claim that promise and then you bring them up in the training and the admonition of the Lord. Ephesians 6 verse 4. Do you believe that?

Do we really believe that our children are covenant children and not pagan children? But they're not strangers to the covenant promise of Ephesians 2 verse 12 but rather they are recipients of all the means of grace bestowed upon the Christian home and the visible church.

This is what the text says about little children and about parents but what does the text say about Jesus? We'll come back to what I just said. It says that Jesus has something to give little children.

Jesus has something to give to little children that the parents of these children cannot give.

You see parents can give life can't you? You can make provision you can materially provide for your children give them sustenance. Parents can even bring their children to the saviour.

[14:54] Parents can point their children to the saviour by the means of grace as we've just seen but parents cannot give their children new hearts. Can you? There's no doubt that these parents in our story had themselves put their hands upon the children and prayed for them.

But it is Jesus' touch that these children need. It is Jesus' blessing. It is Jesus' intercession. That is what these parents can give. John Trapp was a Puritan.

He had 12 children, four of whom died in childhood. And he commented on this passage. He says, we must present our children to Christ by training them up in God's holy fear, beseeching God to persuade their hearts.

For we may speak persuasively, but God only persuades. As Rebecca cooked the meat, but it was Isaac only who gave the blessing.

parents to be unsparingly active and diligent in the use of means. But they must also passively wait in full dependence and trust upon the Lord, the blessing giver, to bestow his salvation on their children in his good time.

[16:27] So much then, after braiding the little children. Secondly, let's move on to forbidding the little children. Let's look at the second part of verses 13 and 14. the disciples rebuked the people.

But Jesus said, let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for such belongs the kingdom of heaven. And we read, don't we, it's a very strong word at the end of verse 13, the disciples rebuked them.

That is to say, they rebuked the parents who were bringing the children in verse 13. So the amazing thing is that here are Jesus' closest friends and they stand between the parents and the source of blessing for their children.

I think it's hard to imagine a more discouraging thing than verse 13. these parents in this situation. They would scratch our heads and say, why the stern rebuke for these loving parents from the disciples? You read the commentators, they're all over the map on this.

[17 : 43] Maybe the disciples felt that Jesus was too busy, too important for their own children. It's quite possible. That this prejudice is coming in here. There's lots of talk about the culture. But actually we don't have to guess the reason it's given to us in verse 14.

Jesus shows us that the disciples have got a theological problem. That's the issue. As well as the prejudicial one. And their issue is not so much with the parents, but it is with their view of the children.

And Jesus shows in verse 14 that the disciples, when they rebuke the parents, secondly, they forbid the little children. And let me say that again.

The disciples are rebuking the parents, but in so doing, what the disciples are doing is they are forbidding the little children. Can you see the connection? Jesus says, don't hit them, hinder them, don't forbid them.

That's obviously what they were doing. Look closely at what the text says. It says the disciples rebuked them, that is the parents, but Jesus said, let the little children come to me and do not forbid them.

[18 : 50] You wouldn't say that unless they were forbidding them. Because the little children of such is the kingdom of heaven. Do you see the implication of what's being said?

The disciples are assuming that little children are not of the kingdom of heaven. They have a theological problem. They have a wrong theology of little children, if you want to put it that way. They assume that these little ones, they are incapable of being subjects of the king. They are too little to understand. For what they did not understand, and what they did not reckon, is that this king does not overlook even the weakest of his subjects.

Even the tiniest. In fact, Jesus has been warning them, chapter 18, about putting stumbling blocks in the way of the most vulnerable and overlooked people. You remember back in 18, verses 5 and 6, whoever receives one such child, one such little one in my name receives me, but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck, and be drowned in the depths of the sea.

So take heed. And then verse 10, see to it then that none of you despise one of these little ones.

And again, we shake our heads and say these are short memories, didn't they?

[20 : 18] they rebuked the parents and the disciples are forbidding the children. And then the disciples are rebuked by Jesus. A.B.

Bruce says, our Lord did not thank his disciples for thus guarding his person from the intrusion like a band of overzealous policemen. Our Lord did not thank them.

In fact, Mark 10, verse 14, says that Jesus was greatly displeased. In Matthew's account, that kind of displeasure is shown by a public contradiction of the disciples' attitude.

There they are with the multitude. No, no, you can't bring them here and Jesus cuts them off. It's very embarrassing for the disciples. Jesus is most displeased when we put stumbling blocks in the way of little children coming to him.

And again, we say, how can the disciples be so mean? In what ways can each of us do the same thing?

[21 : 23] How can the little children be forbidden, even by well-meaning disciples of the day? Well, one way it can happen is quite simple.

It's by erecting theological barriers. So, it's easy to point a Roman Catholic theology. The Roman Catholic catechism says, by baptism all sins are forgiven, original sin, all personal sin, as well as all personal sin.

Well, if that happened at baptism, why do you need Jesus? Why would you come to Jesus? I grew up as a Baptist.

and children of believers, if you push them out, although thankfully their practice is a lot better than their theology, if you push them, children are often regarded as not different from pagans and stators.

They can't be saved until they profess faith and are baptised. There's this really mysterious age of accountability that's been invented and seems to change from author to author.

[22 : 38] And before which point, before the age of accountability, whatever that is, all children go to heaven. And of course, Jesus might well have sent these children packing, mightn't he? And he might have said, oh listen, can you bring them back to me when they've reached the age of accountability?

They're good to go then. Now, what he does is very different isn't it? But closer to home, I think we can adapt. We can adopt practical barriers.

We run the same risk. More often than not, we can fail to instruct our children. Remember that baptismal vow we ask of parents that they will teach their children?

They will set a good example. We may of course fall short by neglecting to teach them at all. We may forbid the little children by discouraging their involvement in the life of the church.

So we believe, don't we, that preaching is a means of grace. It's how God chooses to strengthen our faith. And so, as you know, we are against children being sent out of worship.

[23 : 50] because we want children to have access to the means of grace. They want to understand everything. This is children's church.

Let the little children come to me. They are covenant members, and as members of the visible church, and how easy it is to view children as a nuisance.

Listen, 1 Thessalonians 5 verse 14, Paul says, we urge you brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the faint-hearted, help the weak, be patient with them all. And children need patience sometimes, don't they?

Children need patience from parents and the church. And so when they're being trained for worship and their noisy, we must not harumph.

You know, churches, we see that sometimes, when there's a noisy child, and the poor parent maybe doesn't take them out as quickly as they should, and the person harumphs, or just glances over.

[25 : 01] But we don't want that, be patient, chill out, alright? Mums, particularly mums, don't feel, don't pull up with harumphing.

We're very grateful to have your children here. Children need patience from parents, don't they? And they need patience from the church.

I'm probably more like this, we can forbid the little children by making the way of Jesus seem unpleasant. By making the way of Jesus seem unpleasant.

And of course, I know that the way of Jesus is a narrow way, and there is a cross which we must take up daily. But we've got to ask, do our lives and discipline, display great grace to our children, do we show that following Jesus is the best life?

That his yoke is easy and his burden is light. What do we harden our hearts against the gospel by legalism? There are little ones out there that have been turned away from Jesus because they've been taught all law and they've not been taught as clearly the gospel of redeeming grace.

[26 : 22] It's possible to portray God more as a threatening judge than as a loving father. And if we do that we've got the gospel wrong. Do we model a joyful Christian life and show before the little ones that the best day of all days is Sunday, the best place to be of all places to be, is to be with God's people.

And the best life to live is the Christian life. And do we urge them to be participants in church or do we make it a chore? Do we encourage them simply to be spectators in worship?

And all of this is forbidding the little children. Jesus loves the little children. So let me speak to the little children if you're awake. How can you come to Jesus?

Come to Jesus by going to the places where he will meet with you. Jesus already met with you when you were baptized. You don't remember that. You were little babies.

But now you are older, you can meet with Jesus when you pray. When you pray you find a quiet place to talk to him. When you meet Jesus as he reads the Bible. You read the Bible.

[27 : 41] Mum and Dad, when they read the Bible to you, what about family worship? You ask questions, what does that mean Dad, what does that mean Mum? read the Bible to you.

When you come here to worship in church, I hope you sing, I hope you pray, I hope you listen well. Because Jesus says, all of us need to hear this, let the little children come to me.

And this is your church. for the little children and finally blessing the little children.

Let's go back to verses 14 and 15. But Jesus said, let the little children come to me and do not hinder them for such for long as the kingdom of heaven. And he laid his hands on them. And he departed from there.

ran away. And we've seen the little children have to come to Jesus on the arms of faith. the parents disappointed.

[28 : 45] And the son of God bestows on these little ones his benediction. He blesses the little children. He responds to the faith of the parents. And he lays his hands on them.

Because he says, of such are the kingdom of heaven. He doesn't say, theirs is the kingdom of heaven when they reach the magical age of accountability. He doesn't say, theirs! is the kingdom when they heaven as little children.

What does the kingdom of heaven mean? It means in Matthew's gospel the saving rule of heaven through God's appointed King Jesus Christ. So to belong to the kingdom is to be a personal subject of King Jesus Christ.

And we become his subject not because of something we do, not because of something we have done, rather because he has done something. He has blessed us.

Let me read to you again from the larger catechism. And let me read to you from question 62 about who is part of the church.

[29 : 58] What is the visible church? The visible church, what you can see in a church is a society made up of all such as in all ages and places of the world to profess the true religion and of their children.

And I put it to you, if Jesus says little children are subjects of his kingdom, then they are to be afforded the privileges of the kingdom, the means of grace to bring them to a full understanding of the faith.

And of course, I want to argue, don't I, that baptism is the means to admittance, that is the entrance point of participating in those blessings. And at this point, the Baptists will say to me, hang on a minute, there's no mention of water baptism.

It's not mentioned in this text. Why do you pedo-baptists always bring water baptism into Jesus' blessing with children? And you're right. But I don't argue with you that you shouldn't expect it to be mentioned because the sacrament of baptism doesn't come until Matthew 28 verse 19, when Jesus institutes it.

Jesus and this passage is not illustrative of infant baptism, but we have to say it is illustrative of covenant theology that's behind it.

[31 : 18] The promise of God. We can say and argue that all the component parts of infant baptism are here minus the water.

Parents bringing their children to Jesus by faith in the promises of the covenant of grace. Jesus blessing each child individually, bringing them all the privileges of the visible church.

And you may ask, does this make the grace of baptism an automatic thing? And I want to say to you, of course not. Listen again to our confession.

Baptism is a sacrament of the New Testament. Paragraph 6, chapter 28. The efficacy, the efficiency of baptism is not tied to that moment in time where it's administered.

Yet not withstanding by the right use of this ordinance, that grace promise is not only offered, but rarely exhibited and conferred by the Holy Spirit to such whether of age when they're adults or infants, as that grace belongs according to the counsel of God's own will in his appointed time.

[32 : 30] What that's saying is that baptism doesn't save you. And we know all too well don't we that tragically there will be some covenant children that go away and they will become covenant breakers.

And even so God is sovereign in salvation and we anticipate by faith in him and in his promise and the diligent use of the means of the reality which baptism symbolizes that it will be effective to that child in God's good time.

Jesus lays his hands on them. And that's the hope of every Christian parent. As they hold of God's covenant blessing in bringing little children.

Forbidding little children and blessing little children. As I close let me just give a brief word. How does Jesus obtain the blessing for little children? There's a little detail isn't there that the passage closes with.

He laid his hands on them. Verse 15 He went away. He departed from there. It's a really interesting verb that Matthew is using.

[33 : 38] It conveys proceeding. He's going back on his journey. Jesus has paused at the start of Matthew 19 and he's blessed the children for now he's on his way back to Jerusalem.

And why Jerusalem? He's told his disciples twice to me he'll go and he'll suffer many things from the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and he'll be killed and raised on the third day. He laid his hands on them and he departed from there to the cross.

The cross. And as he did throughout the Old Testament he blesses these little ones prospectively and now he must depart from there to fetch the blessing that he has imparted for them upon them. And since Jesus has died to obtain a blessing for such as these let us bring our little children to Jesus. Let nothing and no one forbid them.

And if we have no children of our own we all know children. And let us bring them to Jesus and pray for them because we have every reason to expect a blessing because Jesus loves our little children.

[34 : 53] Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's Thank you.