

TO SUCH AS THESE

Matthew 19:13-15

Matthew 19:13–15 (2022 LSB) — **13** Then some children were brought to Him so that He might lay His hands on them and pray; and the disciples rebuked them. **14** But Jesus said, “Let the children alone, and do not hinder them from coming to Me; for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.” **15** And after laying His hands on them, He departed from there.

Let’s read the parallel passages as well, and note what they all contribute.

Mark 10:13–16 (2022 LSB) — **13** And they were bringing children to Him so that He might touch them; but the disciples rebuked them. **14** But when Jesus saw this, **He was indignant** and said to them, “Permit the children to come to Me; do not hinder them; for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. **15** “**Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it at all.**” **16** **And He took them in His arms** and began blessing them, laying His hands on them.

Luke 18:15–17 (2022 LSB) — **15** And they were bringing **even their babies** to Him so that He would touch them, but when the disciples saw it, they were rebuking them. **16** But **Jesus called for them**, saying, “Permit the children to come to Me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. **17** “Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child will never enter it.”

We can supplement Matthew’s text this way.

Matthew 19:13–15 (2022 LSB) — **13** Then some infants and nursing babies were brought to Him so that He might lay His hands on them and pray; and the disciples rebuked them. **14** But Jesus was indignant and called for them and said, “Let the children alone, and do not hinder them from coming to Me; for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these. Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the Kingdom of

God like a child will never enter it at all.” **15** And Jesus took them into His arms, and after laying His hands on them, He departed from there.

Let’s make sure that we understand what took place that day.

1. Children were brought to Jesus.
2. The disciples objected.
3. Jesus was angry at their interference.
4. He called for the children to be brought to Him.
5. He said that the Kingdom of heaven belongs to those who are like children.
6. He said that those who do not receive the Kingdom of God like a child will never enter it at all.
7. He took the babies in His arms and blessed them.

THE HEART OF THE TEXT

Jesus makes a clear point in all three passages:

Matthew 19:14 (2022 LSB) — **14** “the kingdom of heaven belongs to **such as these.**”

Mark 10:14–15 (2022 LSB) — **14** “the kingdom of God belongs to **such as these.** **15** Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God **like a child** will not enter it at all.”

Luke 18:16–17 (2022 LSB) — **16** “the kingdom of God belongs to **such as these.** **17** Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God **like a child** will never enter it.”

This should have been a familiar theme, especially to the disciples. Early in Matthew 18 Jesus says,

Matthew 18:3 (2022 LSB) — **3** and said, “Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.”

In Matthew 18:3, as with our passage today, the heart of the passage is to describe what is necessary for salvation. The Kingdom of heaven belongs to those who are converted by the Spirit of God and become like children in their relationship to God.

No sinner enters heaven as he or she is. The Gospel call urges people to “come as you are” to the Savior; believe the Gospel and be saved. But the very reason we need salvation in the first place is that no one gets into heaven “as they are.”

By the testimony of two witnesses a matter is established; here are two witnesses to the restrictions placed on eternal life.

Revelation 21:6–8 (2022 LSB) — 6 Then He said to me, “They are done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give to the one who thirsts from the spring of the water of life without cost. **7** He who overcomes will inherit these things, and I WILL BE HIS GOD AND HE WILL BE MY SON. **8** But for the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and sexually immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, **their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.**”

Revelation 22:14–15 (2022 LSB) — 14 Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the authority to the tree of life and may enter by the gates into the city [that is, eternal life in the presence of Christ]. **15 Outside [that is, in hell] are the dogs and the sorcerers and the sexually immoral persons and the murderers and the idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices lying.**

I’ll say it again; no one gets into heaven “as they are.” We must be converted and become like children. Revelation 21:7 even uses the imagery of father and child to describe the relationship of God with His people: “He who overcomes will inherit these things, and I will be his Father and he will be My Son.” God is described as a Father almost 300 times in the New Testament; it is a rich, beautiful picture of His love and care for His people.

We cannot remain as we are and be right with God; we must be converted.

God in His wisdom designed physical creation and human relationships to illustrate spiritual reality and His relationship with His people. He did not look at parents and children and say, “Wow, that’s pretty cool; you know, I can use that relationship to explain what I want with My people.” No, He created both marriage and children to depict exactly the sort of relationship He would have with His people for all eternity. There are husbands and wives because God would shelter His people with His lovingkindness and provision. There are parents and children because God would adopt sinners to be His people and grant them His kindness and provision.

So sinners must be converted and become like children. Heaven does not belong to those who insist on being their own masters. Heaven does not belong to those whose lives are marked by pride, self-accomplishment, and independence. Heaven belongs to those whom God converts, so they lay aside their self-ambition and accomplishments, give up their ideas of position and power, and trust and obey their heavenly Father. Heaven belongs to those who become like children in their relation to God.

TRANSITION: I believe that this is the primary point of Matthew 19:13-15. But the Word of God is rich and complex and multifaceted, and we often find multiple truths closely woven together. Let’s think about Jesus and the children for a few moments.

JESUS AND THE CHILDREN

Parents brought their children to Jesus. Luke gets more specific and says that they were bringing babies, *brephē*, to Him. That word includes babies in the womb and specifically describes nursing babies. These are not youngsters or adolescents; these are little babies. They are probably being brought by moms since many dads would have been working. Here come

a group of young moms, some carrying babies, others leading toddlers by the hand.

These mothers – and perhaps fathers, too – want something precious. They want Jesus to bless their children. For you and me that sounds nice but fairly generic. But given their culture and customs, they probably had something specific in mind.

For instance, the rabbinical traditions of their time called for parents to bless their sons with the words, “May God make you like Ephraim and Manasseh,” the sons of Joseph blessed by Jacob. Parents were to bless their daughters with the words, “May God make you like Sarah, Rebekah, Rachael, and Leah.” And all children were to be blessed with the blessing of the high priest in Numbers 6:24-26:

Numbers 6:24–26 (2022 LSB) — 24 Yahweh bless you, and keep you; **25** Yahweh make His face shine on you, and be gracious to you; **26** Yahweh lift up His face on you, and give you peace.

Parents would take their children to the synagogues around the Day of Atonement for the elders to bless them: “may the Lord make you righteous in the Law, faithful in marriage, and abundant in good works.”

In our time most parents would be concerned with wealth, health, careers, fulfillment, achievement, and happiness. That is to say, the so-called blessings that put the child at the center of the universe.

These parents wanted their children to be holy and righteous, at peace with God; faithful in every relationship; overflowing with good service both to God and man. They valued holiness over happiness; wisdom over wealth; faithfulness over fulfillment. They knew that if God blessed their child with righteousness, faithfulness, and goodness, they would enjoy (if you’ll pardon me for putting it this way) their best life.

TRANSITION: It's been said that parents can have guilt anytime they want it; all they have to do is think about how they raised their children. There's a lot of truth to that statement. No one is a perfect parent. It is simply true that when it comes to bringing children to Jesus, the younger they are, the better. But it is also true that while our children and we live we can continue to bring them to Jesus for His blessing. Let's talk about that for a few moments.

BRINGING OUR CHILDREN TO JESUS

We can and should teach our children many things, but we cannot teach them to be converted. We must bring them to Jesus for His blessing. The first and highest call of evangelism is our own children and grandchildren.

What does it take to bring our children to Jesus?

Well, we must know the way ourselves. We ourselves must be faithful to Jesus. Some parents have little or no interest in spiritual things and just drop their kids off at the closest church to get them a little religion. That's a pointless exercise; those children might enjoy the lessons and the songs for a time, but then they will abandon their shallow religion just as they grow out of believing in Santa Claus. We must be men and women of the Spirit, which means being men and women of the Word and prayer. We cannot bring our children to Jesus if we do not know the way.

And we must live openly as Christians. Our children must see us in the Word of God; they must see us in prayer. They must see us in fellowship with the church. They must see us confessing our sins and forgiving the sins of others. They must see the Gospel in us as clearly as they hear the Gospel from us. We must live our faith "out loud." I can't prove this scientifically, but I believe that religious hypocrisy does more damage to a child's view of God than any other single issue. Fathers and mothers who treat church as a social event or play at

religion when it suits them undermine the Gospel for their children. Now, I've known many *faithful* parents whose children wandered from the Lord in their adult years; the fact that a child grew up and walked away from the Lord is not proof their parents were unfaithful. That being said, I don't know of any *unfaithful* parents whose children grew up to be committed Christians. We must live as Christians ourselves.

And we must tell our children the Gospel. We begin simply by telling them that Jesus forgives sin, and that He has forgiven OUR sins. As they grow we expand on the details, adding more and more as they are able to understand. One year when our children were very little we saw an Easter play on TV. When the moment of Jesus' crucifixion came, our kids became almost hysterical and wanted to stop watching. We made them keep watching, though, because WE knew the rest of the story. Yes, Jesus died, and it breaks our hearts, especially when we learn that He died because of OUR sins! But Jesus also rose from the dead and is alive today, and in fact, He is ruling all things from heaven. That very same Jesus still saves those who call upon Him in faith. We look for signs that our children understand their guilt before the Lord, and then we show them the promise of forgiveness if they call upon Jesus. There is no substitute for opening our mouths and speaking the Word of God.

And we pray for our children and grandchildren. We quite literally bring them before the Lord and place them in His arms. We don't pray that they would be happy or have a nice time in school. We don't pray that they would have nice friends or a good trip. We pray for their souls. We call upon OUR Savior to be THEIR Savior, too. We plead with our Lord to look in His book of life and find their names written there. We pray that the message of the Gospel would penetrate their hearts and minds, that the Spirit of God would soften their hearts, give them faith, cause them to be born again, give them a living hope, and teach them repentance and obedience to Christ. We bring them to the arms of Jesus and then because He is sovereign, we leave them there with Him, longing for His eternal glory and their eternal good. We pray because the actual work of saving and securing our children and grandchildren belongs only to God and never ourselves.

We must know the Gospel ourselves. We must live the Gospel. We must tell them the Gospel. And we must bring them to the Lord in prayers of faith, seeking His glory and their good.

BRINGING IT HOME

First, just a reminder that no one is born a child of God. We must be reborn. We must be converted by the Holy Spirit, according to the will of the Father and the work of the Son. That is entirely His work. We contribute nothing to our salvation but the need for salvation.

Second, whether our children will be saved is not our decision to make. We have no ability to save them. We cannot force God to do what He is not willing to do. We can bring them to Jesus as I have described, but we cannot control the outcome. What Jesus said about our own salvation is equally true about theirs:

John 3:7–8 (2022 LSB) — 7 “Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’
8 The wind blows where it wishes and you hear its sound, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who has been born of the Spirit.”

Third, we should never diminish the importance of what we CAN do in bringing our children to the Lord Jesus for His blessing. If we ourselves know Jesus as Lord and Savior, then we will long for Him to justify our children, saving them by His blood and causing them to be born again. If we know the Lord, we will long for them to be sanctified by the Holy Spirit so that they live in peace, holiness, and faithfulness. If we are true Christians, then we will long for our children to live godly lives, full of goodness and abundant in good works.

Fourth, there is no such thing as a perfect parent. We have all made mistakes, some of which have had long-term effects on our kids. It is never too late to bring them to Jesus: to be

clear and secure in our own salvation, to openly live as faithful Christians, to show them the Gospel with our lives and tell them the Gospel with our words, and to bring them to the Lord in prayer. It doesn't matter if your child is 4 days, 4 months, 4 years, or 4 decades. It is never too late to pray.