

- or is there objective evidence that the events narrated occurred in the order indicated by Matthew?
4. Explain the significance of the peculiar question placed before Jesus by the Pharisees. What was there about the divorce issue that served the critic's purpose to trap Him?
  5. List the points Jesus made in His reply.
  6. What Bible texts did Jesus quote to the Pharisees in support of His argument? Explain how Jesus could affirm that these texts represent the words of God.
  7. What did "hardness of heart" have to do with divorce? How would "hardness of heart" require a bad law on divorce?
  8. What exception did Jesus make to His universal prohibition of divorce? In what does this exception consist? Explain why only this exception is justifiable.
  9. How much of Jesus' discourse on marriage, divorce and the single life was publicly presented to the Pharisees and how much was stated privately to His disciples? How do you know?
  10. What was the disciples' objection and what provoked it? That is, what were they objecting to, AND what in them caused them to do so?
  11. What is a "eunuch" and why could Jesus use such a person as an illustrative basis for His discussion?
  12. Who or what is a person who has "made himself a eunuch for the sake of the kingdom of heaven"?
  13. What is the major lesson on marriage and the single life that Jesus taught at the conclusion of this section?
  14. List the texts in Matthew 18 that find practical application in this section and show their connection.

## Section 48

### JESUS BLESSES THE LITTLE CHILDREN

(Parallels: Mark 10:13-16; Luke 18:15-17)

TEXT: 19:13-15

- 13 Then were there brought to him little children, that he should lay his hands on them, and pray: and the disciples rebuked them.  
14 But Jesus said, Suffer the little children, and forbid them not,

to come unto me: for to such belongeth the kingdom of heaven.  
15 And he laid his hands on them and departed hence.

### THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. Do you think that Jesus had ever blessed little children before? If so, why do the disciples object only here? If not, is there anything indicated here about the nature of the people in Perea who would desire this for their children, something that people elsewhere did not feel?
- b. Why would these parents have brought their children to Jesus to be blessed? What, do you suppose, was in their minds as they did so? That is, what positive good did they imagine such a blessing would bring their children?
- c. In what sense is it true that the Kingdom of God belongs to such? If the Kingdom really belongs to God, how is it also true that it can belong to such as those who are like children? Explain the meaning of "belong" in each case.
- d. Jesus said, "Let the children come to me," and yet it was their parents who brought them, i.e. they did not necessarily COME on their own without their parents. So, what does the Lord expect us to understand about how the children are to come?
- e. Mark and Luke add here the warning: "Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall in no wise enter therein." What is there in common between "receiving" and "being like a child"?
- f. List several possible reasons why the disciples rebuked the parents for bringing their children to Jesus.
- g. Of what principles in Jesus' Sermon on Personal Relationships in Matthew 18 is this section an illustration?

### PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

Now there were some people who were bringing their children—yes, even babies—to Jesus, so He could lay His hands on their heads and pray. But when His disciples saw their intentions, they criticized and scolded the parents who brought them. Jesus was furious when He saw what was going on, and called them all back to Him. "Let the children come to me! Do not stop them from doing it, because the Kingdom of God belongs to people like this! I can guarantee you

that unless a person has the humility of a child enough to let God give him the Kingdom, he will not enter the Kingdom at all!"

Thereupon He put His arms around the little tots and, laying His hands on each one, gave them His blessing. Then He resumed His journey.

### SUMMARY

Parents, anxious for their children to have the blessing of the young rabbi, Jesus of Nazareth, brought them to Him. His disciples, however, concerned about this interruption of Jesus' precious time, rebuffed them brusquely. But the Lord, deeply angry at this misunderstanding of His concerns and mission, called them all to Him, arguing that children have their proper place in God's plans. He further threatened that entrance into the Kingdom would be refused to any who do not do so with that humble submission characteristic of a child. Not only did Jesus formally lay His hands upon the children and pray for them, but took them up to hug them. He had time even for little kids!

### NOTES

#### II. THE LORDSHIP OF GOD IN CHILD-ADULT RELATIONSHIPS (19:13-15)

##### A. SITUATION: PARENTS BRING CHILDREN TO JESUS FOR BLESSING. (19:13a)

19:13 **Then were there brought unto him little children, that he should lay his hands on them and pray.** Although Matthew and Mark consistently call them *little children (paidia)*, Luke (18:15) says "infants." Luke's expression recalls Jesus' healing ministry which was continuing during this period. (Mt. 19:1, 2) This, because not only were many sick people brought to Him for healing, but, as Luke has it, "even infants, that he might touch them." That these were not merely larger children in whom one might suspect the presence of a seed-germ of faith, is shown by the usual translation of Luke's word *bréfōs*, "babe."

See Lk. 1:41, 44; 2:12, 16; note 2:27 *paidton* 40 days old; Ac. 7:19; 1 Pt. 2:2. 2 Ti. 3:15 "from childhood" is not necessarily counterevidence, since it may mean "You have known the Scriptures all your life!" Timothy's faith in God's Word could hyperbolically be said to have begun almost before he was born, because of the faith of his devout grandmother Lois and his godly mother Eunice.

There was likely a mixed group of children and babies brought to Jesus. Some think that the Jews customarily brought their children to the synagogue on their first birthday for a blessing from the rabbi. The special interest in Jesus shown by the folks who brought these children to Him certainly underlines their appreciation of His goodness. It is not unlikely that the parents, having observed Him lay His hands on the people He healed, blessing them with complete healing, would naturally consider it a special privilege for their children to be blessed by this great Rabbi.

#### B. THE DISCIPLES' REACTION: THEY REBUKED THE PARENTS WHO BROUGHT THEM.

The disciples' behavior recorded here is another indication of the Gospel writers' straightforwardness and impartiality. Although they must report what is embarrassing to the disciples themselves, this candor confirms our confidence in the reliability of their narration.

**The disciples rebuked them.** Note that these men scolded the adults, not the infants. Their reaction is not totally blameworthy, inasmuch as Jesus had established no Sunday Schools, no Daily Vacation Bible Schools or Christian Service Camps. Without being against such methods, He dealt with the decision-makers at the head of the house. The Apostles could cite no example where Christ worked first with children. And yet, here they are mistaken! What went wrong?

1. If, as suggested above, Jesus' time for teaching them was constantly invaded by demands for healing people of their sicknesses, in this case, however, parents had brought to Him their little ones who were quite healthy, begging to let Him touch them. The Apostles deemed this unreasonable request intolerable.
2. It may well be that some of them were thinking, "Children do not count in the adult business of the Kingdom. They are not important to its progress." So they begin hindering the parents,

rebuking them for the nuisance. Theologically, this reaction is inexcusable and shocking, since these disciples had personally heard Jesus' teaching on the little people's importance for the Kingdom. (Mt. 18:1-14) But it is psychologically understandable on the basis of the disciples' other inconsistencies and inability to connect Jesus' concepts with practical situations they faced. Nevertheless, these disciples represent stumbling blocks for these parents on the road to God, just as they had been a hindrance to the isolated worker of miracles. (Mk. 9:38-41; Lk. 9:49f; see on Mt. 18:5, 6)

3. A corollary of their devaluation of the children was their misplaced emphasis on the importance of adults. According to them, the Kingdom of God is the prize and possession of qualified, worthy people who have merited it by doing the right deeds. Once more His followers show their inability to understand Jesus and the nature of the Kingdom.
4. Theirs might be the common human reaction to an embarrassing situation where, when people do not know how to handle it, they try to make it go away. On another occasion they had planned to send the people away without needed help. (Mt. 14:15f)
5. Were the disciples, in their rebuke of the parents who brought the children, partly moved by a misconstruction of His words concerning celibacy for the Kingdom? Did they suppose that an Essene-like celibacy was to become the Kingdom ideal? Did they suppose that in the renewed universe (= in the Messianic Kingdom) people would be as the angels, neither marrying nor being given in marriage, hence would have no children? What place would children have in such a scheme? From this standpoint, it was providential that the mothers brought their little ones to Jesus for His blessing not long after He had spoken words which might have been misinterpreted as a criticism of sex and family relations. Certainly, the Son of God intended no ascetic view of sexuality by His lesson on "eunuchs for the Kingdom." Because children are the living reminder that a fully sexual marriage is real, because they are its natural product, the blessing of the children furnished Jesus the providential opportunity to protest strenuously against any such misreading of His words.

C. JESUS' ANGRY REACTION: "CHILDREN ARE SO IMPORTANT TO THE KINGDOM THAT THEY ARE THE ONLY SORT OF PEOPLE OF WHICH THE KINGDOM IS MADE!" (19:14f)

19:14 **But Jesus said, Suffer the little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for to such belongeth the kingdom of heaven.** Far from being soft, mushy sentiment, these words snap with Jesus' anger. (Mk. 10:14) Why should he NOT burn at the injustice shown these God-fearing caring parents who bring their dearest possessions, their children, seeking His blessing? How could anyone, much less His own disciples, who had heard the mighty Sermon on Personal Relations and the importance of little ones (Mt. 18), slam the gates of the Kingdom of God in the face of the very persons most qualified for entrance into it? To suppose Him, the Messianic King, to be unwilling to welcome a child is to misunderstand and misrepresent Him to the world—and should He not be angry?

**Suffer the little children** (*áfete tà paidía*) Permit them: do not hinder them! **Forbid them not.** See note on Mk. 9:39 after Mt. 18:5. People who desire to come to Jesus to labor in His service and receive His blessing must not be hindered but encouraged to do so, regardless of what we think about their qualifications, importance to us or their merits. **For to such belongeth the kingdom of heaven.** According to Mark (10:15) and Luke (18:17), Jesus repeated here a line out of His Sermon on Personal Relations (Mt. 18:13): "Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it at all." The Kingdom of God is not something that can be bought or earned by self-complacent people certain of their own importance and worth to God. It must be received as a gift from God as the result of His divine initiative. (Cf. Lk. 12:32) This is a gift of grace, not founded upon the supposed greatness and worthiness of its recipients. The only worthy attitude in which to receive the Kingdom, therefore, must be that of the children who cannot earn it and to whom it must be given, if they are to have it. Like these children brought to Jesus, those who enter God's Kingdom do not march in and take over. They are carried in by the grace of Christ. Their only sufficiency is of God. (2 Co. 3:5)

On the question of infant baptism it is worthy of notice that Jesus did not regard children as "little pagans," but as people to whom the Kingdom rightly belongs. It is a false dichotomy that emphasizes "of such" (*toiouton*) against "of these" (*touton*), as if Jesus meant,

"Not these particular children, nor all children, but those who are childlike in character, are possessors of the Kingdom." (Plummer, *Matthew*, 262) This distinction is manifestly false

1. because of its bad logic: how could these very children be thought unqualified for the blessings intended for those of whom they themselves are the standard?!
2. and because Jesus had already clarified it that *children* per se enter the Kingdom. (Mt. 18:2ff)

Their real innocence of any personal sin is a proper condition for their entrance. Only sin excludes. If the Kingdom rightly belongs to them, His reason is that He does not believe the doctrine of inheritable sin, but rather its antithesis, the natural innocence of children. The purpose for which these parents brought their children to Jesus was for His blessing; not for soul salvation or circumcision or any other purpose. It is a distortion of this event to see in it a justification of infant sprinkling or "baptism" which the child-baptizers think took the place of circumcision.

Children have an unconditional right to be admitted into the Kingdom of God because of their innocence. No baby baptism is necessary to remove non-existent "inherited sin." They would not be thought of, however, as members of the Church of the redeemed, because they are not even qualified to be redeemed, since they have no sin from which to be saved. Until the child sins, he is like Jesus, mortal but sinless. However, they are positively members of God's Kingdom and may live with Him and His people forever, should they die in their infantile innocence, because they have never sinned. They cannot partake of Christ's atonement for sinners any more than He Himself needed atonement. The tragedy Jesus sees ahead for children is a diabolically inevitable future bristling with temptations to sin. (Mt. 18:6f)

Here we may notice that sinlessness in children is part of the standard they represent for the adult disciple. This is because the self-humiliation and repentance, the tender consideration of others, the long-suffering and forgiveness, the spirit of unity in seeking God's will, the altruistic service Jesus required in Mt. 18:1-35, must inevitably eliminate sin. And yet this is the spirit of the child, dependent upon others, in need of guidance and help. By inculcating receptiveness, humility and childlikeness, Jesus eliminates the selfishness and pride that lies at the root of sin. This is the practical side of love that makes a man perfect. (See notes on 5:7, 43-48; 7:12.) In a positive way He requires here what sounded so negative in self-denial and

cross-bearing. (Mt. 16:24ff) The result, however, is the same.

So, as long as children are children, their innocence or sinlessness is the standard and goal for every disciple. The perfect absence of rebellion against God (= sin) is, on the negative side, what the Kingdom is all about. Sadly, when they grow to the age of awareness and become conscious of the appeal of temptations, wittingly or not, they join the ranks of those who rebel against God and turn against His beneficent rule and leave their natural place in God's Kingdom. *Then they too must become like children to recover what they have lost.*

Although on this occasion the parents brought the children to Jesus, hence His words must mean that the disciples are to let the parents of the children bring them to Him, nevertheless **Let the children come to me and do not hinder them** may well look forward to a time when the children, on the basis of their personal love for Jesus and desire to be with Him, would want to come to Him on their own. They must therefore not be hindered but encouraged. Do we not see here His exhortation to the entire adult community of disciples to encourage the personal decision and individual responsibility of children who are maturing decisions about Jesus? Thus, the accusation of some that we baptize more babes, even though they are seven or eight years old, is false. These children who grew up in Christian families with proper teaching and so have had excellent opportunities to know the Lord, must not be hindered from obeying Him. But, it is objected, if these understand their need of a Savior from their personal sins, they would not therefore be "such" as those to whom the "Kingdom of God belongs," because they would not be innocent, as argued earlier. This would overturn the decision that they were really innocent of inherited sin, hence proper candidates for the Kingdom. But this is false, because, whereas before their arrival at awareness they were innocents, hence candidates for the Kingdom and the sinless standard for everyone else, now, even as they are becoming more and more aware of their present imperfectness, they are still humble, trusting, teachable people, the very kind of people Jesus can work with most easily. Hence, even here, they are the standard for adults, and Jesus can still say, **Of such is the kingdom of heaven.** Let them come, then, while their heart is tender, their mind impressionable, their will pliable and their conscience sensitive to Jesus! God's Kingdom rightly belongs to such people, and to NO ONE ELSE!

Some commentators note that the Evangelists locate this event



logically right after the major discussion on marriage because of the appropriateness of discussing the importance of and concern for children. Here, then, is another corrective for the mistaken notion that a permanent marriage union is undesirable and inconvenient: what of the children?

19:15 **And he laid his hands on them.** Mark underlines the Lord's tenderness with these little ones, both in the Sermon on Personal Relations (Mk. 9:36) and here, however with the added significance of this occasion, "He took the children in His arms and blessed them, laying his hands on them." (Mk. 10:16) What a contrast there is between His welcoming, embracing and blessing the weak, needy children, and the bumptiousness of the officious disciples who presume to form an isolating cordon around the Master to intercept these "troublesome interruptions of His important work!" Jesus would have them learn that to be kind and considerate to sincere, needy people and seek God's blessing upon them, especially where they are trying to do their best, is His work and theirs too!

Very likely He placed His hands on the head of each child and called down the blessing of God upon each. (Mk. 10:16, *kateulógei*: "to praise highly, bless," Rocci, 1017; "to call down blessings upon," Thayer, 339) Thus, He prayed for the children as the parents had requested. (19:13) Remember how Jacob took Joseph's sons in his arms, kissed them and blessed them (Gen. 48:8-16), or how the old Simeon took the Baby Jesus in his arms and prayed, then blessed His parents (Lk. 2:25-35)

The Church of Jesus Christ today can measure her faithfulness to her Lord by the degree to which her program deals with the needs and growth of the children. How deep, then, must be the concern of all parents, that their children be brought up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord and that from a child they have the blessed opportunity to know the sacred writings which are able to instruct them for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. If the Lord of glory turned aside from what others thought was the main thrust of His busy ministry, to defend these defenceless children and bless them, dare any man or woman who shares His attitude turn their care and development over to others less able or less concerned to give them such blessings as God has commissioned us as parents to give them?

## FACT QUESTIONS

1. Explain what the parents desired for their children when they brought them to Jesus. That is, what does it mean to them for Him to "lay His hands on them and pray"?
2. What was the attitude of the Apostles toward the children and those who brought them?
3. What was the attitude of Jesus toward the children and those who brought them?
4. Explain: "To such belongs the Kingdom of God."
  - a. What phase, or expression, of the Kingdom of God belongs to them?
  - b. In what sense does it "belong to such"?
  - c. Who are the people intended by the expression "to such"?
5. What additional teaching do Mark and Luke include that further clarifies Jesus' meaning? Where in Matthew have we already encountered this?
6. What is the total impact of this vignette in the life of our Lord? There may be several points to notice.
7. List the texts in Matthew 18 that find practical application in this section.

## Section 49

JESUS TESTS RICH YOUNG RULER  
AND ENCOURAGES DISCIPLES

(Parallels: Mark 10:17-31; Luke 18:18-30)

TEXT: 19:16-30

## A. The Demands of Discipleship

16 And behold, one came to him and said, Teacher, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life? 17 And he said unto him, Why askest thou me concerning that which is good? One there is who is good: but if thou wouldest enter into life, keep the commandments. 18 He saith unto Him, Which? And Jesus said, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, 19 Honor thy father and thy