

The Kingdom Of God Belongs To Such As These

Luke 18:15-30

Key verse: 16

“But Jesus called the children to him and said, ‘Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.’”

We have been studying about the kingdom of God through the gospel. Jesus’ first message was Mark 1:15, **“The time has come,” he said. “The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news.”** In Luke 17, Jesus helped us to have a right view of the kingdom of God that the kingdom of God is in our midst.

In today’s passage Jesus called the little children to him and placed his hands on them. And he said, **“The kingdom of God belongs such as these.”** In the past and present, many believe that those who call on the name of the Lord and keep the law of God will enter the kingdom of God. Who, then, will enter and receive the kingdom of God?

First, Let The Little Children Come To Me (15-17).

Look at verse 15. **“People were also bringing babies to Jesus for him to place his hands on them. When the disciples saw this, they rebuked them.”** It was customary for a mother to bring her children to a rabbi for a blessing. Jesus was more than a rabbi. He is the Son of God, the promised Messiah. Whoever was touched by Jesus was healed instantly, and whoever touched Jesus by faith was restored immediately. People began to recognize that Jesus was from God and the source of blessing.

Everyone wants to be blessed by God, particularly mothers want blessing for their children. We saw how important it is to receive God’s blessing in the Genesis story of Jacob and Esau with their mother Rebecca. In the Bible Jesus welcomed everybody, anytime and anywhere. So Jesus is a good shepherd to each of us, sinners. However, his disciples rebuked those parents who brought their babies. In those days women and children had no social status. So the disciples viewed them as an interruption to Jesus’ important ministry.

As we all know, babies make lots of noise and become bothersome.

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Do you know what a baby's language is? It is crying. You can imagine what the atmosphere looked like with many babies around Jesus.

What did Jesus do? He was different from his disciples. He called them to him. He was ready to bless them even in the middle of teaching about the kingdom of God. Jesus loves little children so much (hymn #738: Jesus loves me). So we must bring our children to Jesus for his heavenly blessing.

Look at verse 16. **“But Jesus called the children to him and said, ‘Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.’”** It doesn't mean that children automatically belong to the kingdom of God. Rather, the kingdom of God belongs to “such as these”— that is, to those who possess childlike-faith, not who are childish. Child-like faith comes from children's characters.

Firstly, children have pure, honest and very simple hearts. Around 20 years ago, I was counting the offering after CBF worship service. At that time, I took care of the CBF offering. The children's offering was mostly coins. It took time to count the money without missing even one penny, because it was little children's offering to God.

While I was busy counting, one little girl approached me with a question, “How do you send this offering to God, in express mail or UPS?” When I heard this, I did not know how to answer instantly, because I never expected such a question. As a teacher, I couldn't say, “I don't know. Neither. I will get back to you later.” I had an emergency prayer based on James 1:5, **“If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you.”** Then I asked her, “Do you remember what we did after offering at the worship service?” She answered, “Yes, we had an offering prayer.” “That's it. Through our offering prayer we sent it to God and he accepted it, and then, sent it back to us to use for God.” The girl responded, “Okay, that's why offering money is still here.” Wow.

Secondly, children have humble learning minds. Because of this, they are teachable. They are like a sponge which absorbs water so quickly. Also they don't ask “why.” Children have great potential. They can master 5 languages before 12 years old. Shepherd Rich and Jenna Ryzewski have twin sons and a daughter. To my surprise, Enoch and Noah under three years old spoke to their dad in Polish, to their mom in Korean and to their older sister, Priscilla in English. Another amazing thing was if I asked them, “Who created you?” they said in unison, “God.”

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Probably their parents taught them about God's creation, whenever they gave them a bottle of milk. These humble learning minds of children enable them to grow both physically and spiritually day and night. Children are our future. They can grow endlessly and become godly men and women who can serve their own generations.

Thirdly, children have total dependence through full trust. Every little child trusts their parents. It is because parents love their children more than anything else. Parent's love brings children's trust. That's why total dependency comes from absolute trust.

During the Korean Civil War between 1950-53, our family fled from the North to South on foot. Half way to the South I lost my beloved father. So my mother became the leader of our family with a 6 year old only son. In front of us there were fierce battle grounds here and there, in between the South and the North. So we often went through deep mountains, forests and rivers without roads in order to avoid the battle fronts. Sometimes we went through the roads and passed through so many dead bodies due to bombing and fighting. To us, nothing was certain and everything seemed to be impossible to overcome. Survival was our first priority. But my mother was always singing one hymn song by herself. At first, I didn't pay attention at all. But my mother sang it hour after hour and day after day. Sooner or later I began to follow her. Finally we sang together like this (hymn #430-Singing I go).

“The trust-ing heart to Je-sus clings, an-y ill fore-bodes, But at the cross of Cal-v'ry sings. 'Praise God for lift-ed loads!' Sing-ing I go a-long life's road, Praising the Lord, prais-ing the Lord; Sing-ing I go a-long life's road, For Je-sus has lift-ed my load.”

As a matter of fact, I didn't know about Jesus, especially the cross of Calvary. Through singing this hymn with my mother, I began to learn faith in Jesus who takes care of our burden of life and guides me in my life's long road. My trust in the Lord Jesus grew and grew so that I depended on him from my heart though I was little. This dependence on Jesus brought us to the South safely and up until now in my life. There is a saying that children do not learn by understanding but by imitation.

This is the reason that I am eager to engage in “Teachers and Parents Education” (T&PE) that teachers and parents should be role models for their students and children, for our precious second generation.

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Look at verse 17. **“Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.”** This verse is a stern warning to anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child. The kingdom of God is a lasting hope and final destination for all believers. It is because God is king and reigns with his love, peace and righteousness. In addition, the kingdom of God is the free gift to those who believe in Jesus’ cross and his resurrection. Then, what does it mean to receive it like a little child? It means having the simple, trusting attitude that children show to adults on whom they depend. Jesus wants to give the kingdom of God to those who have child-like faith, otherwise they will never enter it.

Second, “What must I do to inherit eternal life? (18-30)

Look at verse 18. **“A certain ruler asked him, ‘Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?’”** In ancient times a ruler had a position with wealth. In light of this passage, this ruler was very rich. No doubt those who have power and money want to live in this world forever. This is man’s life problem. Sinful human beings cannot solve their own problem, but only the Creator God can. That’s why Nicodemus visited Jesus at night with his ‘born again’ problem (Jn. 3). The ruler in this passage was no exception.

Jesus did not respond to his question right away. In order to get an answer from Jesus he needed to correct his concept of goodness. **“‘Why do you call me good?’ Jesus answered. ‘No one is good – except God alone’” (19).** This ruler came to Jesus with the compliment that Jesus was a good teacher who healed the sick and taught the kingdom of God like other prophets. Here, Jesus’ question was challenging to him, “Do you know who I am?”

Jesus did not ask him directly, “Do you love God?” Instead, he continued in verse 20, **“You know the commandments: ‘You shall not commit adultery, you shall not murder, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, honor your father and mother.’”** This second part of the Ten Commandments pertains to the relationship between human beings. 1 Jn. 4:20 says, **“Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother or sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen.”**

To our amazement, he said, “All these I have kept since I was a boy” (21). We can imagine what kind of life he had lived both physically and spiritually from

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his youth. In spite of the ruler's presumptuous answer, Jesus gave him a shocking command.

Look at verse 22. **“When Jesus heard this, he said to him, ‘You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then, come, follow me.’”** Jesus pointed out his fundamental problem that he had no treasure in heaven though he had earthly treasure. Good shepherd Jesus gave the solution to this desperate ruler with an instruction and promise—how to inherit eternal life, and an invitation to discipleship: “Sell everything you have, and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then, come, follow me.”

Why did Jesus tell him to sell everything and give to the poor? Lk. 12:34 says, **“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”** And also, Mt. 6:24 says, **“No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.”** These verses indicate that this man's heart was in the world and his master was his wealth. In order to inherit eternal life, he must give away his wealth. Likewise, we must put God in the first place in our hearts. Otherwise we still lack one thing even if we keep God's law perfectly like this ruler.

How did the rich man respond? He became very sad, because he was very wealthy. He seemed ready to do anything Jesus commanded in order to inherit eternal life. But in this moment, he couldn't make a right decision because he loved money more than God. His worldly wealth made his life comfortable and easy, and also gave him power and prestige. Now, Jesus offered him heavenly treasure which could never perish, spoil or fade. It was too good to believe. However, he couldn't trust God simply nor depend on God like a little child.

I know one young man who graduated at a prestigious Ivy League school with magna cum laude honors. Also he was accepted to medical school. His future seemed to be bright and desirable as a young man. However he sent a letter to his parents asking their approval and blessing to go to seminary school instead of medical school. In his letter, he wrote that he does not expect a luxurious life but he has one life to serve God. His parents couldn't but agree with him. Now he is teaching the Bible to graduate students in Yale University.

Look at verses 24-25. **“Jesus looked at him and said, ‘How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God! Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go**

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through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.” A camel is the biggest animal in the Middle East. On the other hand, the eye of a needle is the smallest opening. This is not merely difficult, but impossible. This picture looked like a funny cartoon. But it is Jesus’ warning to the rich and to those who want to be rich without God.

Those who heard this asked, **“Who then can be saved?”** This ruler seemed to be over qualified to enter the kingdom of God comparing to their own qualification. But he failed due to his richness. **Jesus replied, “What is impossible with man is possible with God.”** Man cannot save himself. Only God can save us. Peter also had same idea as others. But he found himself together with the other disciples quite different from this rich ruler. **Peter said to Jesus, “We have left all we had to follow you!”** It means, “What is our reward?”

Indeed, Peter had given up his fishing career in order to follow Jesus. So did James and John. Jesus assured them with a wonderful promise in verses 29-30. **“Truly I tell you,” Jesus said to them, “No one who has left home or wife or brothers or sisters or parents or children for the sake of the kingdom of God will fail to receive many times as much in this age, and in the age to come eternal life.”**

Jesus deeply acknowledged the sacrifices for the kingdom purpose his disciples had made. Their most difficult sacrifices were not leaving behind fame or wealth, but their homes and family members. Jesus promises them many times of blessing that is overflowing in this age, and in the age to come eternal life.

Today, Jesus teaches us how to receive the kingdom of God and inherit eternal life. We must receive Jesus with simple faith like a little child. We must make a right decision to sell what we have and follow Jesus. Then, we can enjoy God’s blessing in this life and also, have eternal life in the age to come.