

The Gospel According to Luke

Luke 18:15-17

Parallel Passages: Matthew 19:13-15 and Mark 10:13-16

Sermon #77

May 10, 2020

Barriers to Children Coming to Christ

We are living in another political hyper cycle as primaries are taking place and preparation for the presidential election is everywhere. If one is a politician almost everything in their life is exposed to everyone. However, it was only until recently that politician's children were considered off limits. Donald Trump's son Barron is one of the youngest children, at age 12, to begin living in the White House and has been used as fodder for journalists. Barron is not the youngest child to live in the White House. The youngest children were John F. Kennedy's daughter Caroline age 6 and John Jr. who was just 3 years Old. President Kennedy was one of the most filmed and documented presidents and families while in office. The Kennedy children were treated only positively by the press as small children.

Kennedy, was quite dedicated to preserving his thoughts and feelings about both world events and everyday experiences through the use of the Dictaphone in the Oval Office. One day, in 1963, Kennedy was quite discouraged by recent events in Vietnam. A recent event had not been handled well and Kennedy sat down to record his feelings and thoughts about lessons learned from the experience. As he spoke with both an obvious tone of frustration and concern, one can hear another voice appear on the recording literally out of nowhere. "Hello," says the childish voice of three-year-old John-John, as the toddler completely ignores the gravity of the moment or the subject matter that his father is attempting to preserve.

What is fascinating is that when John-John broke into the room, his father immediately shifted his attention and his focus to his son. For the next few minutes they talked about the seasons of the year and the things that they did as a family during those seasons. In an instant, the mood and the conversation shifted from warfare and Vietnam to the color of fall leaves, sailboats and the beach at their Maine retreat. There is a sudden shift in mood, all because a little boy wandered into the room and a father stopped to listen. Ironically, Kennedy could have never known how fleeting such moments would be in his life with his son, for only three weeks later he would be assassinated in Dallas. Time with our children is precious.

Our passage out of Luke chapter 18 reminded me of the famous recorded conversation between President Kennedy and his 3-year-old son. Jesus and his disciples were experiencing success and difficulty in ministry, just as Kennedy was experiencing success and difficulty in 1963. For Jesus the crowds continued to grow and there was success with those coming to understand and believe that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the Living God and there was opposition because the same teachings were creating conflict with the Jewish religious leadership and were the cause of growing concerns for the Romans. Jesus and the disciples, like Charles Dickens's *Tale of Two Cities*, were experiencing the best of times and the worst of times. In the midst of all that is going on - parents bring their children seeking time with Jesus. It is like the quiet before the storm where one can smell the sweetness in the air, everything is still and it is as if time stands still.

As we prepare to hear what God would want us to learn today, let me begin with prayer.

Now I begin by reading this short passage of 3 verses. It is easily overlooked because of how brief it is, but there is much to learn. Reading at Luke chapter 18 beginning at verse 15, [“Now they were bringing even infants to him that he might](#)

touch them. And when the disciples saw it, they rebuked them. ¹⁶ But Jesus called them to him, saying, ‘Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God. ¹⁷ Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.’” (ESV) This is the Word of God, Amen. There are parallel passages in Matthew and Mark and they add some detail to Luke’s account. Matthew 19, verse 13 adds some detail to the purpose of the parents who brought their children, stating, “Then children were brought to Jesus that he might lay his hands on them and pray.” In Mark chapter 10 we read of the results of the parents bringing their children to Jesus, in verse 16, it says, Jesus “took them in his arms and blessed them, laying his hands on them.” In Jewish society at the time small children were the responsibility of the mothers, but the pronoun translated “*they*” in verse 15 is masculine and this would indicate “*they*” probably includes the fathers. So, the fathers set aside their work, just as Kennedy did, to go with their wives to bring their small children to Jesus. The fact that the fathers came indicates the importance these parents felt in bringing their children to Jesus.

We see here that the disciples were trying to protect Jesus and his time; it is as if the disciples are telling these parents go away Jesus is in the middle of something important and cannot take time for you. Jesus response to the parents was; welcome, please come there is nothing more important than my spending time with your children. My beloved, our jobs, hobbies and all the demands of the world are not as important as spending time with our children. All the material things we own require time to maintain them and to a certain extent they own us as they demand our time and can rob our spouses and children of the time they deserve. We must work at not letting all the distractions of job and demands of things crying out for our attention rob us of our time with our children.

The key idea I want you to lock onto from this passage is; *As disciples of Christ, we should do everything possible to remove all barriers that prevent children from coming to know Jesus Christ as their Savior.* First our efforts begin with our own children, time with them is more important than everything with the exception of our time with Christ and then time with our spouse. After time with our children, our efforts to remove barriers for children to know Christ expands out to our nieces and nephews, grandchildren, the children within our church community and then those children the Lord places within our lives.

Everything in our country speaks of and promotes relationships, the need for relationships is used to sell products in ads, in politics, in business, in church and on and on. But the truth is our society and many of the disciples of Christ do not do relationships well. Our society is becoming filled with broken families and relationships, and the result is a society who says it is well but in truth is sick and faltering at every point, just as societies have done in the past until they collapse. Research shows those who identify themselves as Christian in America are not fairing much better than American society; the divorce rate is over 50% and it is only slightly lower for pastors! Using this passage in Luke 18, I want to focus on barriers to children primarily, but also siblings, co-workers and others, what prevents them from coming to know Jesus as the Christ. It is we, you and me, that must work to make a difference for the kingdom, to make a difference in people's lives.

Four Barriers

Applying this teaching of our Lord to our own lives I want to address what I see as four serious barriers to children coming to know Jesus as their Savior. They are the barriers of pride, parental unbelief, weak or wrong beliefs and the lack of discipline.

Pride

The first barrier to children coming to Christ is something found in us as adults and we pass it on to our children, that is **pride**. In the parable just prior to this event Jesus finished by stating in verse 14, “**Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.**” I believe there is a connection with this parable and our passage of study today that ends with Jesus saying in verse 17, “**Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.**” Verses 14 and 17 are saying the same thing in different ways; when Jesus says, “**Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled**” is it not similar to when He says, “**Whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it**”. The opposites are likewise true and mirror each other; verse 14 ends with, “**the one who humbles himself will be exalted**” and does not this mean the same as slightly adjusting verse 17 to say the positive, “**whoever ... receives the kingdom of God like a child ... will enter it.**” So, I believe when comparing these two passages one can conclude childlike faith is a humble faith.

We should also note that Jesus is teaching more than one should have childlike faith to receive the kingdom because from Matthew and Mark we learn that the “**children were brought to Jesus that he might lay his hands on them and pray**” and Jesus “**took them in his arms and blessed them, laying his hands on them.**” There has always been power to heal and comfort from praying with childlike faith and the touch by the laying on of hands. Certainly not the power that Jesus possessed, for He is God, unless Jesus grants His power to be used for His glory, but certainly power beyond our normal physical world.

James wrote concerning faithful prayer, taking us to chapter 5 beginning in verse 14, “**Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord.**”¹⁵ And the

prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. ¹⁶ Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.” Prayer, faith and the laying on of hands is powerful when there is childlike faith. A child’s faith is simple from a small child’s perspective; they live in awe of their parents, totally dependent upon their parents and think their dad and mom can do anything; I remember when my little girls thought their daddy could do anything – I was like a superhero. Let me ask, is this not the faith we should possess and the faith that carries us along as we live before God? Question; do we live in awe of and totally dependent on God?

In verse 15 the dads and moms are bringing their children for Jesus to pray over and bless them. The disciples in their effort to protect Jesus’ time for they think He has much more important things to deal with than the needs of children, so they rebuke these families for intruding. Jesus rebukes the disciples for their rebuke of these families and He warns his disciples by giving them a new principle for the kingdom, “Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God. ¹⁷ Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.” When Jesus saw the disciples hinder the parents from bringing their children to Him, he sees the disciples are elevating themselves above others and considering themselves more important than others and this is rooted in pride. Jesus had strong words for anyone who tried to prevent a child coming to know Him, recorded in Matthew 18, verses 5 and 6, Jesus said, “Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, ⁶ 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 to be drowned in the

depth of the sea.” Jesus places a high premium on children and for believers to live with a humble childlike faith.

If one receives the Kingdom of God with childlike faith, they will live in awe of God knowing He truly can do anything and they will serve others in Jesus’ name. They will share the gospel because they want everyone to come to know this great and awesome God. On-the-other hand, if one lives thinking they can earn their way into heaven and that heaven might get a little crowded and they are in competition with others then that person becomes a barrier to others and to children. There is a close connection to one’s humility and their ability to relate to others, to get on their level, whether that person is a rocket scientist or a small child, by being humble they can help others see their need for Jesus. Pride destroys a great many things and relationships with others, the destruction of relationships is the worst. Pride often disguises itself in many ways and forms for Satan is subtle and works in the shadows. Many problems have pride as their foundation, let me deal with barriers in which pride is often at the foundation and how they affect a child’s ability to see the kingdom and coming to Jesus.

Parental Unbelief

One major barrier to children coming to Jesus is parental unbelief. When a child’s parents are unbelievers it puts that child at a great disadvantage. There is no one to model Christian values and standards. There is parental love for a child, but not the love, agape love, that is spiritually based, that puts others before self and Jesus above all. We all have grown children or siblings or family that this is true of; they are unbelievers and those who look to them for guidance to the purpose of life are hindered from seeing Christ.

There is also the problem of shallow belief, which in truth, is unbelief. Where the parent labels themselves as Christian, but it is mostly talk and not lived out and not truly believed. They may go to church, have a Bible or two in their home, but they spend little to no time with in reading and studying it. They may say a prayer at meals but the rest of their day they have no relationship with God. They only turn to God when things go wrong and they are desperate.

There are two ways to try and help families in this situation. First, some adults think it is good for their children to have “religion” even if it is not for them. They are hoping it will teach their children to be honest and not to lie and to respect them. However, since the parent does not model respect for God they should not be surprised when their child grows up and does not show respect to them. If this is the case then invite these children to spend time in your home as you model studying the Bible and praying with your children. Offer to take these children to church; some of these parents will welcome having a little time with no children to worry about. Do what you can to open the door to the kingdom for these children.

Second, and what would even be better and far more beneficial to the children and the entire family is to invest time with the parents and lead them to Christ. If the greatest barrier for the child is the parent’s unbelief, then bringing the parent to belief would be the far better way to remove the barrier for the child than anything else I can think of.

Weak or Wrong Beliefs

This next barrier is one that affects much of what is called the “Church” in the world and America and New Mexico and the East Mountains and that is weak

or wrong beliefs or as pastors would say the wrong theology and doctrine. When pastors, church leaders, Sunday school teachers and parents have wrong beliefs then people have a false belief system and think they are saved and yet they are not. Muslims believe Jesus is a prophet, but not God incarnate. Mormons believe Jesus was a mortal man who was good enough to become a god, but this is wrong. I could go on and on. If this problem is present in the church and family it will be a great barrier to the children in coming to the one and true Jesus. This is the environment I was raised in and it was a barrier keeping me from Jesus until I was 33 years old. How I wish I had been raised in home where the parents were believers and led me to Christ at an early age. Still, even though this did not happen – I praise God for His saving me.

One of the things I learned in business was that if I knew my products and services well, I could explain them in a way that the rocket science or the mechanic or a child or anyone else could understand. I could relate to people on their level. The same is true with the Bible; the better we know and understand God's Word the easier it becomes to relate the kingdom of God to people and for them to see their desperate need for a Savior. This is true, whether, they are adults or children. If things are explained in long, highly detailed or in a convoluted manner it is usually a sign in business or in religion that something is wrong. The truth is straight forward, especially when one grows in their understanding of the entire Bible receiving the whole counsel of God.

Here at Canyon Bible one can use the term: Family Integrated Church. What that means is families stay together during the worship service. I have been amazed since beginning serving in ministry some 30 plus years ago how much children can absorb and retain and understand as the concepts of the Bible are preached, taught

and shared. When they have questions, because they were sitting next to dad and mom, who better to answer their questions than parents that have a right understanding of the scriptures.

It is for these reasons that it was decided Canyon Bible would preach and teach the Bible verse-by-verse to lay a solid foundation in God's Word. Unlike many religions and some churches, we do not need additional books to explain or deal with the problems of scripture, other religions have problems with their scriptures, but the Bible when studied in its entirety gives us the whole counsel of God clearly and is eternally true. Sharing the great truths of the Bible is a wonderful experience with adults and children – I love it when I am looking into someone's eyes and I see the lights go on as they grasp the truth of God and who they are in God. As we learned last week believers persevere in all things in order to know the Word of God and it is their duty and pleasure to share it with others.

Lack of Discipline

The last barrier I want to visit that keeps a child from Christ is one I struggled with as a new believer and the spiritual leader of my family, is the lack of discipline. We fail to teach our children eternal truth, not just because we lack understanding, but because we do not take time. Time to study God's Word, time to plan out how to share biblical truths with our children, and finally we do not make time with our children as a priority and during the time we are with them it should be time to help them know the Triune God; God the Father, God the Son who saves us and God the Holy Spirit that lives in every believer. Often one looks back in their life and thinks how did my children grow up so fast. We cannot regain that time. So, we must take hold of time now for the sake of our children's future. It is amazing what is discussed and comes to the surface when the table is

cleared after dinner and the next half-hour to hour is spent talking with each other about God and life and the day's events.

In our passage today as I said earlier infants and small children were the responsibility of the mothers, but here we see that it is both the dad and mom bringing the children. God has given a special calling to fathers to be the spiritual leaders of their household. Fathers, it is your duty, yes, I said duty and yes, it is a sacred calling to teach your children about the glorious truths of justification, sanctification, redemption, regeneration, adoption, salvation, reconciliation, original sin, the deity of Christ, the substitutionary atonement, the resurrection, the second coming, the work of the Holy Spirit, the nature and importance of the church, the inspiration and authority of the Bible. It is a great disadvantage to our children if we fathers do not sit down and plan a systematic presentation of these things to our children during family devotion times. It is a great disadvantage to our grandchildren, nieces and nephews, siblings and friends if we avoid speaking of Christ during family and social gatherings. Fathers is there anything more important than for those you love to come to saving faith in Christ? Fathers, your faith needs to be the faith of a child who sees God as the most amazing person and you cannot help but speak of Him and live for Him. Fathers the primary responsibility is yours to teach eternal truths of God to your children and the church secondary. This is why at Canyon Bible we strive to teach so the parents will have a strong and true knowledge of the Bible. The leadership stands ready to help the parents in any way possible to fulfill this sacred duty. If you do not know where to start try the Westminster Catechism and systematically take your children through it. Read to your children the Word of God and listen to their questions and answer them honestly. I am speaking out to you fathers; I understand your father may have been an unbeliever, for mine was and it was me that shared the gospel

with him and he became a believer at the end of his life. Your father may have failed you, but God your Father never fails and with the faith of a child you will not fail. God asks for your heart and obedience and He will give success.

Closing

So, in closing, I believe, the teaching of this passage is plain; *As disciples of Christ, we should do everything possible to remove all barriers that prevent children from coming to know Jesus Christ as their Savior.* My beloved let us work hard at slaying the barriers in our lives that keeps people and especially children from coming to Christ. Let the study and meditation of God's Word retool our minds and attitudes. Let time spent in prayer change our heart of stone into the heart of flesh that has the unconditional faith of a child, an absolute awe of You, our God. Let us as individuals and as parents and as a spiritual community work to slay pride, work to develop right and deep knowledge of God's Word that leads to right belief. Help strengthen us, so we will work to discipline ourselves to block out the world and spend time with our spouses and children teaching Your truth.

Lord, I pray we look to Your Word, the Bible and nowhere else for eternal truth. Father, as we study and meditate on Your Word build us into teachers of your eternal life-giving Word for our children, grandchildren and all the little ones you put into our lives. Lord, God, I pray as community we will challenge each other to grow strong in Your Word and hold fast to Your truth. Lord remove the barriers in our lives that might keep anyone from seeking Christ. Let us not have the pride of seeking to elevate ourselves, but give us the love in humility to serve others in Your name and for Your glory. Lord, we cry out to You for Your help that our children and grandchildren and for every generation to come until You return will walk and live as believers in You, Jesus, our Savior. Amen and amen!