

Children and the Kingdom of God, Part 1

Scripture: Luke 18:15-17

Code: 42-230

We come this morning to the gospel of Luke again in our ongoing study of this great treatment of the life of our Lord Jesus Christ by the inspired physician Luke. And we come to a brief but potent and important portion of Scripture, chapter 18 verses 15 through 17...Luke 18 verses 15 through 17. And I've entitled this section and it's suitable, it's the obvious title, "Children and the Kingdom of God...Children and the Kingdom of God."

All of us who are Christian parents, all of us who have been given the responsibility to raise children carry the weighty concern for their eternal destiny. In fact, there probably is no greater concern in our lives than that, surely there is none. We pray for the salvation of our children. We work for the salvation of our children. We expose our children to gospel truth. We endeavor to live before our children in such a way as to bring honor to Christ and make the gospel attractive. We engage our children with every opportunity we can in the life of the church that they might be influenced by the things of Christ. We are selective about who are children play with and who they associate with and where they go to school because we want good gospel influences to prevail in their lives. And that's a very, very understandable thing for parents to do because there is no greater concern than the salvation of our children. We want our children in heaven and not in hell. We are compelled with the eternity of life and the consequence of rejection of the Lord Jesus Christ and His gospel should that be the path that our children would take.

This is a dominant concern. It is not just a dominant concern for us, but it is a concern really for all people who have any sense of eternity. All religious people carry the same weight, the same burden. I remember when I was meeting with some of the leaders of the Mormon church, they told me their greatest concern was that Mormons were losing their children to their religion and thus their children were forfeiting a future in the kingdom of God. Well even though their religion leads no one into the Kingdom of God, the concern of parents again is illustrated. In any religion, parents are concerned that their children follow the path that they think, any way, is going to lead them to heaven and to God and to eternal well-being. For those of us who are real Christians who understand the true gospel and the only way to heaven, this is our great compulsion as parents.

And the text before us then is very, very important. It is foundational to our understanding of how God views children in relationship to His Kingdom...the place of children in the Kingdom of God. Let me read this text to you. It is very brief but it is so loaded with important truth that it's going to take us a couple of weeks to discern everything the Lord would have us know from these few verses. Verse 15,

"And they were bringing even their babies to Him so that He might touch them. But when the disciples saw it, they began rebuking them. 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. Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the Kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it at all.'"

I don't even want to deal with this in some outline fashion. I just want you to be there on this event...be there in this event, on that day with Jesus and those parents and understand what is going on. Let me give you a textual setting before we actually engage this particular scene.

You will notice that twice in those three verses references made to the Kingdom of God, once in verse 16, and once in verse 17. And that is very suitable to the larger context because the whole discussion in this section of Luke's gospel and the whole emphasis of our Lord's teaching is on the Kingdom. If you go back to chapter 17 and verse 20, the Pharisees raised the question as to when the Kingdom of God is coming. And Jesus answers by saying, "The Kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed, nor will they say, 'Look, here it is, or there it is,' behold, the Kingdom of God is within you...or in your midst," and thus began an entire section looking at the Kingdom of God. To whom does the Kingdom belong? And who belongs to the Kingdom? That is the larger theme beginning with chapter 17 and verse 20 and that runs all the way over to chapter 18 and verse 30 in which there is a discussion in verse 29 regarding those who have left house, wife, brothers, parents, children for the sake of the Kingdom of God. The larger theme here then is about the Kingdom, the sphere of salvation, the realm of redemption. Those who will belong to God and are under His sovereign rule and care, the spiritual kingdom which some day has a millennial element and finally an eternal reality. But we're talking about the realm where God rules and where God exhibits His care for those who are His. That is the subject.

The question then comes...who is in the Kingdom? To whom does the Kingdom belong? And who belongs in the Kingdom? And that is really the main emphasis through this whole section. Now we learned in the prior section who does not belong in the Kingdom. And the ones who do not belong in the Kingdom and to whom the Kingdom does not belong are those who are likely the most convinced that they are in the Kingdom. It is the elite religionists like the Pharisees and those who followed them who believed that the Kingdom of God belonged to those who earned it by their morality and by their religion...by following moral law and religious or ceremonial law and doing so fastidiously or astutely or devotedly or carefully, they had therefore pleased God with their achievements and were granted by God forgiveness of sin and a place in His Kingdom because they had earned it. That is the Pharisee in the prior story, verse 9, the ones who trusted in themselves that they were righteous. And you remember in the parable that Jesus told about the Pharisee who went up to the temple, when he went down from the temple he went down not justified, that is, not right with God, not just in the eyes of God, not righteous in the eyes of God, only righteous in his own eyes and in the eyes of the people who watched him and bought in to the religion of human achievement.

So we know then that those who are in the Kingdom are not the self-righteous. We also learned, on the other hand, from the parable immediately prior, that those who are in the Kingdom are those who know they are not righteous, who know they cannot achieve righteousness, who know they are sinful and in a lowly, broken, humble, contrite fashion illustrated by the tax collector who wouldn't lift up his eyes but who pounded on his chest in remorse and grief over his wretched heart and consequent wretched behavior and cried out for God to apply the atonement on his behalf by mercy and by grace. They are in the Kingdom because Jesus said that man went down from the temple justified, right with God, pronounced righteous before God. So what we learned in that parable is that the people who think they are in the Kingdom because they have achieved a level of morality and righteousness are not in the Kingdom but the people who are in the Kingdom are the lowly and the broken who know that they cannot do anything to earn salvation...illustrated by the broken, humble, penitent, lowly, self-effacing tax collector pounding his breast and asking God to mercifully apply the atonement to him.

Now, no one illustrates better that only the lowly enter the Kingdom than a baby. No one illustrates better that you cannot achieve anything to earn salvation than a baby. And so the transition to verse 15 is a very logical transition. Who has achieved less morally than a baby? Who has achieved less religiously than a baby? Who has less law knowledge? Who has less law obedience? Who has less devotion to God? Who has less commitment to the truth than a baby? A baby then becomes a perfect illustration of the non-achieving way in which God saves. And that is why the transition is what it is here. Pharisees and the religious elite, those who are attempting to earn the Kingdom of God by their own moral and religious efforts are completely shut out and Jesus says babies are included in the Kingdom and the people who approach the Kingdom like babies. It's really a dramatic statement. In fact, it's a stunning thing that Jesus says here. The shock waves of these words are still reverberating in the theological world even today. This particular passage has created no end of discussion among theologians even today. But in that day, in a works/righteousness system dominated by the Pharisees, the whole idea of the Kingdom of God was that you entered the Kingdom of God when you achieved a certain moral spiritual level, a level of religious devotion and achievement and you were acceptable to God and God then forgave you for your failures and allowed you to anticipate the privilege of eternal life in His presence. No one then in that kind of system had a place for a baby in the Kingdom because they didn't know anything, they didn't believe anything, and they didn't achieve anything. And so what our Lord says here is another stunning rebuke to the Pharisees and all those who, as verse 9 puts it, trusted in themselves that they were righteous. That system was not just the teaching of the Pharisees but it was the effective teaching of the Pharisees that had permeated Judaism and it even showed up in the fabric of the disciples' belief. And that's why they reacted to this incident the way they did. Even they had bought in to some degree to the Pharisaical idea that since salvation is achieved, babies can't achieve it.

But there were at the same time in the hearts of parents profound longings for their children. Just like you, just like any parent, they wanted their children in the Kingdom of God. And so verse 15 says they

were bringing even their babies to Him. Now by the way, this incident is recorded in Matthew chapter 19, and in Mark chapter 10....Matthew, Mark and Luke all record this brief incident and all basically treat it the same way. The combination of the three treatments gives us the full picture of what went on in this incident. It is that important, it is brief, but it is absolutely critical, it is the definitive foundational statement of our Lord by which we gain an understanding of the place of little ones in the Kingdom of God. And as we go through this text, I'll be relating to you the portions from Matthew and Mark that help elucidate this one.

Now let's look at the obvious. They were bringing their babies. Parents who had the same kind of concerns that any parent has about the future of their babies...were they going to grow up to be in the Kingdom of God? Now Matthew tells us that all of this happened in front of a massive crowd no doubt numbering in the thousands. And in every one of those crowds there were Pharisees and the Pharisees had this plot always to trap Jesus in His words and discredit Him before the crowds and to discredit Him severely enough as to bring about cause for His execution. And so they tried all kinds of things to trap Him. And this particular occasion, Matthew tells us and Mark also tells us in the parallel passage in Mark, that the discussion marriage, singleness, remarriage, divorce. That was the topic of discussion that Jesus was engaged in because that's what the Pharisees were wanting to trap Him in. So the discussion prior to this actual incident was about the family, about marriage and singleness and divorce and remarriage. So it's a logical step from that kind of discussion, the parents of children come who are endeavoring to live by the Law and do what is right before God in their marriages and in their families, and they bring their little ones in the hope that Jesus can pronounce some blessing on them that may in the future secure them for the Kingdom of God, even though in their infancy they have no capacity to do that.

And by the way, our Lord demonstrated love for children. Back in the eighteenth chapter of Matthew He taught how important child-like faith is and He taught that having a little infant in His arms. This was something that no doubt Jesus did many times, demonstrating His love and affection for little children. That's what made Him so attractive even to this crowd. He must have had a reputation for that. Well come to think about it, He healed people from all their diseases, He raised dead people and therefore He demonstrated compassion at the most profound level of human need. He fed people by creating food when they were hungry. He removed the distresses of life from them through those miracles that He did. And it would have been to undermine all of that demonstration of compassion had He not shown compassion to children which, of course, is the special object of the love of adults. And so unquestionably Jesus had demonstrated His love for children and parents felt very comfortable in bringing their little ones to Him, even though there were times when He was frightening and fearful, such as when He cleansed the temple, and such as His open rebukes of the Jewish leaders. He was also the tender, compassionate one and demonstrated that, and the parents knew it. He was not sentimental about children. He was not simplistic about children. He knew that children were sinful. And I'll tell you how I know that, because in the eleventh chapter of Matthew's gospel Jesus was speaking and He wanted to illustrate the rebelliousness, the stubbornness of Israel, that

Israel would not accept Him, that He would not accept the truth of God, that He would not accept the reality that God had sent His Redeemer and how is He going to...how is He going to describe Israel? And this is what He comes up with. You are like children playing in the marketplace...He says...you're like children playing in the marketplace and in the marketplace, the middle square of the villages, that's where the kids always played. They still do today in environments like that. And the children would play, and they would play games that would mirror what the adults did. And the two biggest events in the Jewish social world were weddings and funerals. They were very public, very prominent, very long-lasting, very visual, full of all kinds of things and kids in ancient times played wedding and they played funeral. And Jesus uses that as an illustration and He said, "We...we came and you were like children, we played the flute and we said come dance with us, we played...we played the party side, we played the wedding side. We offered you the party, the joy and You wouldn't play with us and then we sang a dirge, a funeral song and you wouldn't come to that either." And e's emphasizing the fearful part of His ministry in the pronouncing of judgments. It didn't matter what we were saying, you wouldn't play. You were recalcitrant children in the village square who won't play no matter what the game is. And so, Jesus understood that children could be peevish and stubborn and selfish and rebellious. There's no shallow superficiality, no sentimentalism about children, He knew they were sinful and they were a good source of illustrating what sinful adult behavior and rebellion looks like.

But in spite of all of this, the Lord still embraced children in a very, very special way. In fact, you do remember, don't you, when He entered in His triumphal entry that the little children praised Him. And He said, "Why are you surprised at this?" Matthew 21, "doesn't the Old Testament say that out of the mouth of babes and sucklings He has perfected praise?"

So Jesus had a relationship with the children that was clear. He understood that they were sinful. He could use them as a sinful illustration. He also understood that they had the capacity to offer praise to Him that was acceptable and suitable and even prophesied. And so He had a special love for the children that must have manifested itself to make the parents eager to bring the little ones to Him.

Now remember, these were parents also who did this as a routine. If you study any of Jewish history, you come across some very interesting things in regard to how Jewish parents dealt with their kids. One of the things they used to do was take their children to the synagogue. In every synagogue there were elders who led the synagogue and were the responsible spiritual leaders, those who were closest to God theoretically in the religious system, whose prayers would most likely be answered. And typically a father would bring his child to the elders at the synagogue. He would lay his hands on the child according to the traditional way and put his hands on the child, bring his child to the elders. The elders would then take their hands, place them on the child and the elders would pray a prayer. Some of these prayers, by the way, are still in existence. One of the most common ones that we have found goes like this, here the elders pray this for the prayer...for the child...he would grow up famous in the Law, faithful in marriage and abundant in good works because...of course...that was the way to make sure you got into the Kingdom of God. You couldn't do the Law unless you knew the law. And

so they started out by praying that He would become, or she would become famous in regard to the Law, having a full understanding of the Law, therefore complying with the Law demonstrated in a faithfulness in marriage and in an abundant of good works. In a sense, they are praying for the child's salvation. They are praying for the future of that child to be drawn to the Law of God, obedience to that Law, conformity to that Law and therefore a place in the Kingdom.

The Talmud also tells us that particularly on the day before the Day of Atonement, the day before the Day of Atonement when everybody was very, very sensitized to the need to cover sin, for the great Day of Atonement was the offering that covered, as it were, the sins of Israel for the year. On the day before that it was traditional to bring your children for a blessing and to have your children brought to the elders or the rabbi to be blessed by the prayers of that man of God on behalf of the child. How interesting that it is linked to the Day of Atonement and it would be a special prayer that the Atonement the following day would apply to the child because the child was not in a position to know the Law, understand the Law, apply the Law, obey the Law.

So the Jews had valued this kind of blessing that came from their religious leaders. So we're not surprised that these parents do this when Jesus is present because Jesus' reputation, of course, is far and wide in the land of Israel, that He is in fact the man of God, He has now gathered not only the Twelve Apostles who have been proclaiming His message, the seventy who have gone out two by two, proclaimed the message, there are those who are now categorically believers in Him, His disciples, the message has gone far and wide. We don't know anything about the faith of the parents, but we know that they bring their babies to be blessed by Jesus. Why? Same reason you would do that if you were in that environment, because you are concerned about the future of your children with regard to God and His Kingdom.

Now with that in mind, let's go back to verse 15. They were bringing even their babies to Him. Matthew and Mark, the parallel accounts, use the word "children," *paidia*, children. But Luke is even more definitive. Children would be a fine term but Luke uses *brephos*, and the translators are right in translating it babies. It means nursing infants, the smallest. Now, of course, they nursed in those days often for several years, certainly longer than most today in our society. So these are from newborn infants to those that are still being nursed in the first years of life, the little ones. This...this starts the incident. When Jesus, however, responds in verse 16, He uses the word *paidia*, permit the children. So He extends the truth here or the principle beyond just those suckling infants. And by the way, in Mark 10:16, Mark says Jesus took them up in His arms which would confirm the idea that they were very little babies and small children. So these parents, just like you or any parent in any society who has any religious desire, these parents concerned themselves with the future spiritual condition of their children with reference to God, and they bring them to Jesus. They have some hope in Him in His spiritual power, some hope, some faith, or some wish in His access to God. He has spoken about God, He has preached the Kingdom of God. He has talked so much about the Kingdom that He must know how to get in the Kingdom. He must have access to God who is the King and whether or not He

is God or whether He is a true prophet, whether He is the Messiah, we don't know, nothing is said about the faith of the parents. But they are driven by concern for their children, hoping that He does have special access to God and that His prayers will be specially heard. For the blessing that would be pronounced would be a prayer, it would be a call on God to show goodness to the child. I can't help but think the parents wanted Him to pray for the future salvation of their children.

As important as this was to the parents, it was not at all important to the disciples.

It was intrusive, it was an interruption, it was unnecessary, it was unimportant, it was pointless and it had to be stopped. So we read in verse 15, "They were bringing even their babies to Him so that He might touch them," the touch not just being a simple touch, but putting His hands on them in the traditional manner which symbolized blessing. "But when the disciples saw it, they began rebuking them."

They watched this begin to happen and begin to unfold. And as those parents collected and started to move toward Jesus to have Him bless their children, pray for their children, the disciples began rebuking them. The form of the verb means that they started and kept it up and the word rebuke, *epitimao*, is a compound form and I always tell you compound forms of the verb intensify the verb's action. They are censuring these people, they are reprimanding these people. By the way, the noun form can be translated punishment. They're indicting them for being out of line. And we learn here then, as I said a little earlier, that the disciples had become victimized by the current Pharisaic world view that had no place for children. Children were an intrusion. Children were an interruption. Even though the synagogue they had training for children, there were certain boundaries for children. And the adult world of theological discussion about the Kingdom of God was not an appropriate place, nor in their view was it appropriate for Jesus to stop what He was doing to pay attention to these little ones who had capacity to understand or to believe. So they strongly protested the parent's action.

But they were really wrong and we read in verse 16, "But Jesus called for them." Literally in the Greek called is summoned them, a sort of official word. He gave them a summons. You come in complete opposition to what these disciples had said and we have to assume that the disciples means the apostles, though not limited only to them. In fact, Mark 10:14 adds this, "When Jesus saw this...meaning the action of the disciples trying to stop the parents...when Jesus saw this, He was indignant...indignant, *aganakteo*, He was angry. He was furious." This is not an insignificant word and this is not an insignificant action on the part of Jesus. Stopping those parents from bringing those babies to Him made Him very angry. This would have to be classified as righteous indignation, wouldn't it? Righteous anger, holy anger. Not only were the Pharisees and certainly the crowd that had been influenced by their theology out of touch with the things of God, but even the disciples on this account were out of touch with the attitude of God. He doesn't rebuke the parents, He summons them to come. He does rebuke the disciples for their wrong assumptions and their bad theology. This is very, very significant because Jesus is about to bless non-believers. They're non-believers. They

don't believe. They can't believe. They're prior to the capacity in life at which a person can believe. But they must be brought, He will receive them, He will take them in His arms and He will bless them. And by that, I mean He will pray for them.

This is the only time our Lord ever spoke blessing on non-believers, only time. It therefore puts them in a very unique category...very unique category. Jesus never pronounces blessing on people outside His Kingdom because there is no blessing for them. And certainly He is not obligated to bless them. But here it is right to bless them, it is wrong to prevent them from being blessed and He does bless them. And so in verse 16 He 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." Permit the children...literally, let them come...let them come. That's the positive, *aphiemi*, let them come. Then the negative, "Don't ever forbid them," present tense. Let them come now and don't ever forbid them.

This moves the attitude of Jesus in the words of Jesus beyond this incident. Don't ever do that. Don't ever hinder children from coming to Me...babies. When He says let them come and when He says don't ever hinder them, and has demonstrated anger at the disciples for trying to prevent that and has in fact summoned the parents to bring the children, we can conclude that these children are His very special concern. And why? Back to verse 16, He gives you the reason, "For the Kingdom of God belongs to such as these." The Kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Folks, that is unqualified, that is unambiguous. There are no caveats. There are no exceptions. There it is in simple straightforward words, for the Kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Matthew and Mark, "For the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to such as these," Matthew 19:14, Mark 10:14. And Kingdom of God and Kingdom of Heaven were always used interchangeably, heaven being just another way to refer to God. In all accounts Jesus says the Kingdom of God, the Kingdom of Heaven and He probably repeated this on several occasions at this very incident. They all say the exact same thing.

Now please notice what He doesn't say. He doesn't say "For the Kingdom of God belongs to these," that would be *touton* in the Greek, t-o-u-t-o-n, transliterated into English. He doesn't say the Kingdom of God belongs (meant belongs) to these or people would say, "Well, this was a special sovereign act dispensing salvation to those infants on that occasion and just those infants alone. And there are some people who believe that, but the language does not allow for that. The Kingdom of God belongs to these would allow for that but that's not what it says. Rather than *touton* it is *toiouton* which means to such as these. And it moves it from those specific children to the category to which those children belonged. Such kind as these, meaning the whole class or the whole category of beings to which these belong. The Kingdom of God belongs to these who are in this category. What category? Little children, infants, babies, those who...to borrow the language of Jonah...don't know their right hand from their left hand, those whom God in the Old Testament call innocent. The Kingdom of God belongs to these. It is theirs, they possess it. Strong language. There's nothing mitigating in the verb belong, and there's an unlimited categorical statement here that babies are in the Kingdom of God because they are in the category of babies. Children are in the Kingdom of God because they're in

the category of children. And the Kingdom of God is simply the Kingdom of God. It's the sphere where God rules over those who belong to Him.

Nothing is said about the parents faith. Nothing is said about the parents having circumcised the children so that they were then covenant children. Nothing is said about any covenant at all, parental covenant, national covenant. Nothing is said about baptism. There are no caveats. There are no qualifications. The simple statement is the Kingdom of God belongs to these in this category...babies and children. Jesus uses the word children. They brought babies and He expanded the truth to encompass children. Children would simply be the category of those who are unable to believe savingly. They have not reached the condition of personal accountability. Not an age, it's a condition and it varies from child to child. They belong to the Kingdom and the Kingdom belongs to them because they're babies. This is wondrous truth. This is rich truth.

Now if Jesus ever wanted to teach covenantal inclusion in the Kingdom, this would have been the place to put it. If He had said, "The Kingdom of God belongs to all the children of faithful Jews who are part of the covenant," or if He wanted to say, "The Kingdom of God belongs to all circumcised children who have manifest the sign of the covenant," or if He wanted to say, "All children who are baptized," or if He wanted to say, "All children who are not Gentiles," or if He wanted to say, "All children of parents who are faithful to their covenant to God, all children of those who know God," but there are no such exceptions, or limitations. Babies because they're babies, children because they're children belong to the Kingdom and the Kingdom belongs to them.

And there's a certain joy. There is a certain expression of gladness in the unrestrained words of Jesus. What are we to understand from this? I can't go where the Bible doesn't go but I'll tell you this, the Kingdom belongs to them and they belong to the Kingdom. What does that mean? That means that God has special care and special rule in their lives when they are children. You say, "Are we saying that they're not sinful?" Some have concluded, "Well, this is before they became sinners." No, no, no they were born sinners, right? But in a child sin has not yet developed to the degree that it produces conscious resistance to the will and the Law of God. Willful sin has not developed so that it depreciates the honor of God. The Law of God has not yet fixed itself on the conscience so as to produce convicting power when that law is violated in a heart of that individual, for children and babies it's pretty much what mom and dad say. If you say it's bad then it's bad and if you say it's good, it's good. Because the Law has not yet done its work. That doesn't mean they're not sinful, "In sin did my mother conceive me," Psalm 51, from the very womb we are sinful. Whatever is born of flesh, Jesus said, is flesh, John 3:6. We all sinned in Adam and we all inherited not only the guilt of Adam's sin but the corruption of Adam's nature. And children are sinners, and we all know that sooner rather than later. The Bible is absolutely clear that all children are sinners from conception. The principle of iniquity is imbedded in their person. The idea somehow that people are born without corruption, without moral corruption without an irresistible bent toward evil, the notion that children are morally neutral, free from any predisposition to sin, but being influenced by sinners around them wind

up falling into that course is against what Scripture says. That view, Pelagianism, which has continued to bounce around throughout history has always been denounced as a heresy. Infants are sinful, iniquitous. They are not morally neutral and the proof of it, the most dominating proof of it is that they have all the signs of decay, they grow old and they even die sometimes before they come out of the womb and the wages of sin is always death. Death is the evidence that sin exists and they die even before they've made a conscious choice to sin.

And so, the Bible is clear that they are sinful. First Kings 8:46, "There is no man who does not sin." Psalm 58:3, "The wicked are estranged from the womb. Those who speak lies go astray from birth." Psalm 143:2, "In thy sight no one living is righteous." Proverbs 20 verse 9, "Who can say I have cleansed my heart, I am pure from sin? No one." Ecclesiastes 7:20, "Indeed there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins." "Every heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked," Jeremiah 17:9. So sinfulness is a condition, an existing condition when children come into the world. Proverbs 22:15, "Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child." Psalm 58, "The wicked are estranged from the womb." Again maybe the most definitive verse. Genesis 8:21, "The imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth." And then Isaiah 48:8 says, "I knew that you would deal very treacherously and were called a transgressor from the womb." God says that to Israel. So children come into this world corrupt in their motives, attitudes, desires, ambitions and objectives. They are sinful. The evidence of that is the principle of death operates on the littlest infants.

What does it mean then to say that the Kingdom of God belongs to them? I believe there's only one way to understand that and that is that they are until they reach the condition of accountability where they stand personally accountable before God for the work of the Law in their hearts and in their conscience and the truth of the gospel revealed to them, they are under some special gracious divine protection. Jesus didn't say I'll let your children come but I just want you to know they're little pagans...they're little heathens. He says the Kingdom belongs to them. It's an amazing statement. They are sinners, that's why they all die eventually, and some even in infancy. But in the early years they are not responsible for their condition, they're not responsible for their choices. They're not able to control their behavior. They're not able to understand the Law of God, to affirm the Law of God. They're not able to understand and believe the gospel of Jesus Christ. So until they reach the condition of being personally accountable for that, they belong to God in a special way. For this reason Mark 10:16 says, the parallel passage to this account, "Jesus began blessing them, laying His hands on them." He never did that to someone outside the Kingdom. And by the way, He began blessing them and the word bless is *kata eulogeo*. To eulogize means to bless. *Kata* means to intensify it. He expressively, fervently blessed them. This is not a blessing pronounced upon someone outside the Kingdom. They're a part of His Kingdom, they are under a special grace until they are themselves responsible.

A great evidence of that is what happens to them if they die. They die which is evidence that they're sinful. But when they do die, the big question is what happens to them? I am convinced that the

Scriptures absolutely clear that when babies die and children die before reaching the point of personal accountability, they go to heaven. And I have collected all that material in a book called *Safe In The Arms of God* which is available. But it's important for you to know the summary of those truths that are revealed in Scripture and so next time I want to take you through them briefly as a kind of introduction to finishing up this text, and I want to show you that the proof that they are in relationship to God in a special way as subjects of His Kingdom by grace during those years, the fact that when any child anywhere any time dies, they go to be with the Lord. And I think Scripture is clear on this and I'll show you a number of passages next time that indicate that. But before we get to that, let me just give you a reminder.

When you understand that at this period of time they are in the special gracious care of God, you will also understand how that this is the best time to evangelize your children. They're not in open rebellion. They are not out from under a special providential care. When you say to your little children, "Let's bow and talk to Jesus and pray," they fold their little hands, they bow their little heads, they're not in open rebellion. When you say you want them to know and love Jesus and you want them to invite Jesus into their hearts, they pray those little prayers, don't they? They pray them because there's no open rebellion, there's no hostility. It hasn't blossomed. There's a providential grace that is over them at that time which then, I'm convinced, makes the most fertile opportunity for evangelism in the world, Christian parents evangelizing their children. That's why we are told to train up our children, as I read this morning in Colossians, in the nurture and the admonition of the Lord because there is an openness and a susceptibility to that and a sweetness. How wonderful it is when your children come home from being at the church and they sing the little songs about Jesus, how it warms your hearts. There's no rebellion there. They're not asking you the questions of an agnostic or an atheist or a practiced sinner, or someone whose rebellion has reached a fever pitch and they do not want to subject themselves to anything like that. It is in those years of tenderness that they are most open to gospel influence.

Now I would venture to say that probably most of you were converted to Christ either in your childhood or your youth. Or if you came to Christ later in life, the seeds of that were planted well by faithful parents in those early years. So you want to take the opportunity that God gives you. We're going to talk about that next time and exactly how you can do that effectively in evangelizing your children. But that's for next time. Let's pray.

Our hearts are so encouraged to hear the word that our Lord spoke in just this one sentence, Father, how encouraging it is to us to know that the little ones are kept under a special grace. We're all saved by grace. We're all saved by sovereign grace. We're all kept by sovereign grace and so we know that they are, in a sense, an illustration of what all of us who know You have received, but ours is an everlasting and an eternal grace and this is a temporary grace, a providence for the years when they cannot be responsible. It is still a grace. We thank You for this immense grace, this protective grace and we as parents and grandparents and family members and friends want to do all we can to bring

to bear upon these little lives the influences of the gospel through what we say and how we live that they might be drawn to that everlasting saving grace when they reach the age to make that commitment. And we thank You for Your precious Word to us this morning in Christ's name. Amen.

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