

December 20, 2009

**FAMILIES IN THE KINGDOM & THE KINGDOM FAMILY:
CHILDREN IN THE KINGDOM FAMILY
MATTHEW 19.13-15**

In Jesus' test from the Pharisees and dealings with his disciples, the relationship of families to the kingdom of heaven is shown to be a renewal of creation; fundamentally the same and yet radically new. In 19.13-15 Jesus again shows that creation is being renewed through welcoming and including children into the kingdom of heaven.

1. THE CHILDREN AND THE DISCIPLES

2nd time Mt records Jesus dealing with children (cf. Mt 18). The child's faith is paradigmatic for kingdom-entering faith and causing little ones to stumble should be avoided at all costs.

Jesus is dealing with children, not merely metaphors. Do represent more than children (e.g. marginal, weak, etc.) but children are the primary example of the whole group.

The disciples are reflecting the attitude of the prevailing culture of the time in their relationship to the children. They rebuke those bringing the children (i.e. reprimand and try to keep them away).

How do we keep children away from Jesus?

We can do this by unnecessarily delaying their baptism or bringing them to the Table where Jesus offers himself to us, telling us to draw near.

We may also keep children away from Jesus by teaching them to doubt Jesus' promises to them.

We must not fall into the trap of believing – and God forbid – communicating to our children that Jesus only loves smart people or mature people. Infants are capable of faith. Jesus said so.

We keep children away from Jesus when we don't live before them consistent with our confession.

Hope for us: the disciples came to be the foundation of the church. Jesus is patient, kind, and forgiving with us. He will correct us, but he will also be patient with us as we learn as individuals and as a community.

2. THE CHILDREN AND JESUS

Note: the children are *brought* to Jesus. Lk speaks of *infants* being brought (Lk 18.15-17). They are not coming when they have grown up and are able to make the decision "for themselves" as to whether or not they want to be a part of Jesus' people.

Just like the birth, the family, and the name you gave your child when he was born over which he had no influence, so he is given a birth, family, and name by God's sovereign choice and promise.

This is a gift of God's free grace.

Note also: there is no indication at all that this is any special class of children in Israel. These were part of the "ordinary citizenry" of Israel.

The laying on of hands is a rich, multi-faceted symbolic action. Touch conveys either life or death, covenant blessing or curse.

E.g. touching unclean in OC makes you unclean. Death spreads through touch.

Man transferred his sins/death to animals by laying on of hands at the Tabernacle/Temple.

Jesus touches the unclean and gives them life. He doesn't contract death but overcomes death and gives life.

Jesus is conveying his life to the children. These children stand in need of Jesus' touch. They are somehow unclean and need life.

Laying on of hands also has special reference to life within the covenant/covenant succession. Cf. e.g. Gen 48–49 & Jacob. Gives his name, Israel, to his sons and with it his inheritance and vocation from God.

Jesus' laying hands on the children: These children belong to him. They are receiving his name. They have covenant standing. They have privileges and responsibilities. (Note: "of such is the kingdom of heaven")

The fact that children are members of God's family would have been no shock to the people of Israel. Indeed, the parents aren't forced to bring the children. They do so understanding that their children are to be included.

Children having membership is nothing new. What is new in some sense and intriguing, esp in light of the context, is that these children are not Jesus' biological children.

Remember context: Jesus is *the* Eunuch who receives a name that will not be cut off. He is the one who does not have children according to the old creation order; i.e. through marrying a woman and raising up a bio son to give his name.

Jesus becomes the fruitful Eunuch. And in this we see the transformation of the old creation order (though not its abandonment). What Jesus is doing is greater than what has been able to be done in the past.

Union with Jesus as the Messiah is greater than "biology" or the old Adamic creation order (even though it is continuous with it).

The old creation order is still in place and God works with it to accomplish his original and greater purpose (including, of course, the birth of children). But the old creation order and its fruit (e.g. children) cannot be embraced as it is in sin. Rather, it must be transformed.

So, God takes the old creation – embodied very literally here in children – and transforms it. In this God is transforming the family as the family in all its relationships. The original family – man, woman, & children – now relate to one another in Christ.

Therefore, our bonds as a family are not their strongest or found primarily in our blood or biological relationships. The strength of our family bonds and that which dictates how we relate to one another as the family is found in Christ.

But how does Jesus touch and lay hands on our children today?

In baptism Jesus initially touches our children and declares that they have his name. They are given covenant status and responsibility to go with it. Theirs, it is proclaimed to them, is the kingdom of heaven.

In this the fact of their need to be touched by Jesus is recognized by the parents and the church. They are conceived in a state of sin and are unclean. They need the healing touch of Jesus.

In the Supper Jesus continually comes to and touches our children, confirming his continuing presence and promises to them throughout their lives.

Our children need to be brought to Jesus continually through participation in worship and through our prayers as a church.

Jesus also lays hands on our children through parents, who also bear his name, nurturing and caring for his children.

This aspect of Jesus' touching our children is something that must be done in his absence. Jesus leaves.

The parents who brought these children receive their children back, now in a new relationship with them. The children, interestingly enough, are not brought and simply "left" with Jesus. They are now the parents' *kingdom responsibility*.

Pattern: God creates something for his people, gives it to them, entrusts them with authority to develop what he gives them, leaves them, and then one day comes back to evaluate or judge the faithfulness of the servant. Cf. Mt 25

This is what he does with parents and children.

Children's membership in the kingdom, therefore, cannot legitimately promote lazy presumption.

Yes, they are members of God's family. Yes they have promises given to them. But they must learn that with these privileges comes responsibility. That which summarizes their responsibilities in the kingdom is faith. They must learn to live by faith.