

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. 16 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. 17 "Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it at all."

I think the King James is so beautiful here. *Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of heaven.*

Jesus has been marching to Jerusalem where He knows His life will be poured out for us. But along the way His teaching is in every case, some facet of the diamond which is the kingdom of God.

The authority of God to reign in the hearts of men instead of and as opposed to Satan. The long war that Satan has raged against God, introducing sin to God's creation and spoiling man who was formed in the image of God.

Satan introduced rebellion against God, sin which renders God's image bearers as ruined, spoiled, dirty, sinful. God loves us but sin has made us only worthy of His wrath.

Into that spoiled wreckage, God sent His Son, the Lord, Jesus Christ who will pay for sins penalty, the necessary punishment that we could never endure, death is decreed for every one, and then rising from the dead, Jesus having washed our sins away, gives every one who believes in Him, His perfect righteousness accounted to our accounts.

God is purchasing back a people of His own, a people for His name, a people for His own possession. The kingdom is the realm of all of the souls of men who have come out of this lost sinful world and into the authority to reign of God.

And as Jesus has traveled on His final journey to Jerusalem there has been teaching moment after teaching moment along the way. This idea of a realm

where God owns redeemed men, purchased out of a lost sinful condemned perishing world, two opposing kingdoms, side by side together, those who belong to God and do His will, and those who belong to Satan and do his will.

Ultimately the ones who are lost in sin and rebellion will suffer death and punishment forever away from God in a place of eternal torment. So Jesus, as He travels to Jerusalem has taken this multi-faceted truth of the kingdom of God and He is teaching and warning about who will be in the kingdom, and who will be rejected.

And to the astonishment of the religious and the powerful in the land of Israel, Jesus keeps teaching that the ones who God chooses as His own are not who the false religion of Israel thinks are the shoe ins to be there. Jesus keeps saying stuff like "the first shall be last and the last shall be first." His message is; The Kingdom of God doesn't play by this lost world's rules. It is counter cultural.

The proud pharisee's think they're first with God. Of course they are. They're more righteous than anyone else so of course they're first. And loser sinners dead last. Cursed by God. Losers.

But Jesus tells them a story that turns everything they think, upside down. The self righteous man goes to his house; **not** justified. And the loser vile sinner tax collector who simply beats his breast and cries out for mercy, he **is** justified??

It's upside down. It's backwards. It's 180 degrees opposed to everything they've ever been taught. For generations. And just at that moment, the providence of God causes a perfect illustration of what Jesus is teaching. Babies. Kids.

Jesus is trying to teach the pharisees and all of the proud, powerful, important learned men that all of that accomplishment in this world is zilch to God. He's not impressed with all the letters behind your name on some placque on the office wall. In fact, all that stuff only served to increase the pride that has

removed you from His presence. It's working against you.

God is looking for broken hearted spiritually bankrupt beggars crying out for atoning mercy. Those guys are at the front of the line. The proud self righteous powerful achievers are at the end of the line God is interested in. Jesus is trying to explain this in a parable.

Meanwhile, out of our view, completely unrelated and separate from Jesus and the mocking pharisee's, another little drama is unfolding that no one is paying much attention to. A bunch of parents have brought their babies for Jesus to bless. It's like a whole separate deal happening away from the main action. And the disciples are like, are you kidding me! Can't you see we're discussing important issues here. Weighty matters. We don't have time for babies. Beat it.

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.

I remember years ago a Chief of police at LAPD who used to speak about his experiences and he had a story about coming home after wrestling with an 85 million dollar budget all day and his wife has been trying to find an .85 cents discrepancy in the check book for 3 hours and is nearly in tears.

The different weights of the matters. 85 million and 85 cents. But his point was you dare not make that comparison to your wife at that moment. Weighty matters, and tiny matters.

To the disciples the parents gathering to have Jesus touch and bless their babies is a ridiculous matter, an 85 cent problem and the top officers in Israel slugging it out with Jesus about who will be in the kingdom is an \$85million dollar problem. And they were like, take your babies and beat it. We've got far bigger issues at hand!

But Jesus, who, *Oh by the way*, is God and who is Sovereign over the providence of this particular combination of events see's what's taking place

and throttles His disciples. He has a grand lesson for those pharisees, and the babies are center stage in His teaching point. Just exactly what He needs the mega important pharisees, and us, to understand.

16 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.

In Mark's account Jesus actually is indignant with the disciples and scolds them for what they were doing; *Mark 10:13 And they were bringing children to Him so that He might touch them; and the disciples rebuked them. 14 But when Jesus saw this, He was indignant and said to them, "Permit the children to come to Me; do not hinder them; for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.*

Mark uses a different word for children. Luke's word is babies. Little guys that you pick right up. Mark's word encompasses bigger kids also. Small kids of every size and shape and color. All of them.

And the first lesson in this passage is this. Children are precious image bearers. God loves and values children. Kids are valuable to God. Babies are precious.

How interesting then that Satan, as ruler of this world, targets what is most valuable to God, for destruction. We didn't like the last president. He had a lousy narcissistic personality. We didn't like him. He wasn't likeable. So we elected a baby murderer. A person who the only thing more important than slaughtering babies is perhaps advancing gender confusion among the survivors. Encourage gender confusion with small children that didn't get slaughtered in the womb.

Folks, that's satanic. That agenda is from the ruler of this world. And God is furious with that. God values babies. Far above proud pharisees. Extreme value to God. No value to this world. Figure it out people! It isn't difficult. God once said that messing with Israel was like sticking your finger in His eyeball.

In this passage and even more so in others which I'm going to read you next, God advises against messing with the little ones that are so incredibly valuable to Him. Poking God in the eyes is like child's play compared to troubling His precious wee ones. Beware of that!

Matt. 18:1 At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" 2 And He called a child to Himself and set him before them, 3 and said, "Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven. 4 "Whoever then humbles himself as this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. 5 "And whoever receives one such child in My name receives Me; 6 but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it is better for him that a heavy millstone be hung around his neck, and that he be drowned in the depth of the sea.

7 "Woe to the world because of its stumbling blocks! For it is inevitable that stumbling blocks come; but woe to that man through whom the stumbling block comes!

All those who slaughter babies and encourage gender confusion and harm to small children of any age, it would be better for you to hang a 100 pound weight around your necks and throw yourself into a deep well and drown. Better. God isn't mincing words here. Messing with the kids is a cause of God's fury. We are not surprised that that's where Satan's world goes first. No surprise, but Woe!

You know, I work hard every week studying and working to present a clear headed exegesis of whatever passage we happen to be in that week, and you folks are way too gracious, you overpay me for that, and I only allow it because God increases that generosity to your blessing.

But chances are, the more important work getting done in this church goes to Jackie who faithfully teaches our children, and Karmin who oversee's that ministry and any possible needs that may arise. If we weigh things in God's scale, that may be the most important work getting done here. Thank you!

Children are valuable and important to God. Babies, born and unborn are incredibly valuable and important to God. You teachers are to be highly esteemed. You mom's and grandma's who nurture the babies and teach the children to fear God and to respect and obey parents, are due the highest praise and esteem in all of the kingdom.

Why? Did you catch it in the Matthew passage? ***6 but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me*** stop right there. Why are kids and babies important and valuable. They believe. You take a little four year old and tell them about Jesus and there's no questions. They take it all in and they believe every word. No questions. No doubts. No nothing.

What happens when you tell a sweet little 7 year old tomboy girl that perhaps she's really a boy? We should shudder at the very thought. And we do! But that's the dangerous new world we've run to in this nation. Woe to our nation. God's fury is coming at us like a tsunami that's about to make landfall. It hasn't reached the shore. Yet. But trust this book. Trust what Jesus said. It's real and it's coming.

That's Jesus first lesson in our passage this morning. Children are precious to God. Highly valuable and He reacts to their mis-treatment with wrath. We are to protect and preserve God's precious innocent small children, born and unborn.

That's lesson one. But Jesus doesn't stop with that. He's going to draw a comparison between babies, and the pharisee's that are mocking and rejecting Him. He's going to make an object lesson out of the babies, directed at the rulers and the powerful in Israel.

17 "Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it at all."

What are the qualities that babies and children have that endear them to the Ruler of the kingdom of God as opposed to the pharisees and rulers of Israel.

Children are humble. Pharisee's are proud.

Children are open vessels to be taught the truth. Pharisee's are closed.

Children are powerless. Pharisee's are powerful.

Children are at the bottom of this world's social status value. Pharisee's are top.

Children believe in Jesus. Pharisee's mock Jesus.

Children belong to God. Pharisee's belong to Satan.

Jesus takes a toddler in His lap and tells the proud, the arrogant, the rulers, the powerful, the important; This baby is in. You're out. That simple. If you want to be in the Kingdom of God and belong to God, you've got to jettison all of this world's values and stuff and trade it all for the privilege of something greater. Knowing God.

You say; Does anybody really do that?? I can show you at least one pharisee who DID; *7 But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. 8 More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish in order that I may gain Christ, Ppn. 3:7,8*

Paul says, all that stuff, pride, position, power, influence among men, wealth, all of it . . . dung . . . compared to the value of knowing Jesus. Paul lost all of that, and RAN to Jesus. Matthew Levi. Not a pharisee, he was a rich tax collector. Very rich. He left it all and RAN to have Jesus. More valuable than all the gold in the world.

Jesus is the treasure in the field that makes you sell everything you have, in order to buy THAT field. Jesus is the pearl so rare, so valuable that you sell everything you have in order to buy THAT pearl.

Babies don't have to sell anything. They're already there. Isn't it interesting that the longer we spend in this world gathering it's power and prestige and treasure and influence and pride at our accomplishment, the farther away and

the costlier the Kingdom of God becomes. We'll see that very thing in our story next week. We'll meet a man that gets so close, asks the right questions, calculates the cost, and turns and walks away. Can't give up this world to have the next.

Don't do that!

Pam and I, at the end of the day, we relax and watch TV and as I reflect on what's on TV to watch, what seems to be selling these days is a vast variety of reality type shows where you have a dozen people in a competition of some sort trying to be the best in the world at whatever. We just finished watching one about glass blowers.

They're all the same, just different venues. Scratch your way to the top of the heap and be the penultimate glass blower, artist, dancer, singer, model, musician, sports, whatever. Be the top person on the planet. And then what? Discover that being the person at the top is also empty? Die 5 minutes later and be in hell for eternity.

Jesus offers an alternative. Scrap this world and everything in it and have Him. Have an intimate personal love relationship with the God of the universe having had your sins forgiven and removed as far as the east is from the west. Enjoy God forever. All of eternity, with Him, praising and glorifying Him.

But in order to be in that kingdom, first you have to be as free of this world and its cares and accomplishments and values as that baby that Jesus is holding. You have to come with that kind of humility and dependence. Believing everything God says in His word. Like a toddler believes.

We have a few minutes remaining and I thought it would be interesting to answer a question biblically that all of us have thought about at some time or other. Jesus said; *“Permit the children to come to Me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.*

We believe that all babies and children before they reach the age of accountability, should they perish from this world, will go to heaven. I thought it might be interesting to look at some of the scriptures that support that belief.

Babies and children are born sinners, born with the same sin problem that all of mankind inherited and passed down generation to generation from Adam. Why do we have this hope that babies and very small children will simply go to heaven if they perish? Here is a brief theology to support that belief.

We begin with the words Jesus said in vs. 16. Do not hinder them . . . who? Little ones. Babies. Infants. Toddlers. Small children. *for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these*

Such as these. Those words are inclusive not only of Jewish children of Israel, such as these includes all children before the age of accountability.

What is that age? It's different from child to child. In Deut. 1:39 it refers to children *who this day have no knowledge of good or evil*. They don't know the difference. Innocent small children who haven't had that thought process yet of understanding God's moral commands and doing willfully what God prohibits.

God withheld judgement from Ninevah partly because of the innocence of those *who cannot tell their right hand from their left*,

R. A. Webb, writing for the Presbyterians in 1907 in a book called The Theology of Infant Salvation that was published by the Presbyterian Committee on Publishing, said this;

"If a dead infant were sent to hell on no other account than that of original sin, having inherited the Adamic sin nature, there would be a good reason to the divine mind for that judgment because sin is a reality. But, the child's mind would be a perfect blank as to the reason of its suffering. Under such circumstances it would know suffering but it would have no understanding of

the reason for its suffering. It could not tell itself why it was so awfully smitten and consequently the whole meaning and significance of its sufferings being to it a conscious enigma, the very essence of the penalty would be absent and justice would be disappointed and cheated of its validation." end quote

Their little minds don't understand that they have offended God. That's what God meant when he said, they don't know their left hand from their right hand. Understanding. What age that happens is different in children.

Job offers some light about this phenomenon. In Job 3;

*11 "Why did I not die at birth,
Come forth from the womb and expire?*

*12 "Why did the knees receive me,
And why the breasts, that I should suck?*

*13 "For now I would have lain down and been quiet;
I would have slept then, I would have been at rest,*

Job is lamenting that in view of his suffering, how much better it would be to have been stillborn. To die at birth, and thus to be at rest. People in hell are not at rest. Babies who die; are immediately at rest.

The old testament concept of rest is to enter into God's rest that He entered after the creation. *There remains therefore a sabbath rest for the people of God.*

Heb. 4:9 Babies and innocent children enter that rest when they perish.

In 2 Samuel 12 we have the moving story of David and Bathsheba, and the child born of that sinful union. Nathan told David that the child would die, but David fasted and prayed prostrate for 7 days. His household servants couldn't get him to arise or eat during that process.

But when the child died, the servants feared for David because of the depth of

sorrow before the death, what would he do now. When he found out the child had died, it says; *20 So David arose from the ground, washed, anointed himself, and changed his clothes; and he came into the house of the LORD and worshiped. Then he came to his own house, and when he requested, they set food before him and he ate. 21 Then his servants said to him, "What is this thing that you have done? While the child was alive, you fasted and wept; but when the child died, you arose and ate food." 22 And he said, "While the child was still alive, I fasted and wept; for I said, 'Who knows, the LORD may be gracious to me, that the child may live.' 23 "But now he has died; why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he will not return to me."*

David knew the baby had gone to be at rest with God in heaven. He knew he would some day get to know that baby in heaven. On the other hand, when Absalom, his son, who was a rebellious murderer perished, David was inconsolable. He knew he would never see Absalom again because he had perished in rebellion against God.

John Calvin, the reformation theologian in the 16th century said commenting about what Jesus said in vs. 16; *"Those little children have not yet any understanding to desire His blessing. But when they are presented to Him, He gently and kindly receives them and dedicates them to the Father by a solemn act of blessing. It would be cruel to exclude that age from the grace of redemption. It is an irreligious audacity to drive from Christ those whom He held in His bosom and to shut the door on them as strangers when He did not wish to forbid them at all."*

Such was the reformed church's belief during the strictest of times. Another great theologian from the 1800's, Charles Hodge said; *"He tells us of such is the kingdom of heaven as though heaven was in great measure composed of the souls of redeemed infants."*

B.B. Warfield, the Princeton theologian, said this, *"If all that die in infancy are saved, it can only be the abrupt operation of the Holy Spirit who rules when and where and how He pleases, through whose ineffable grace the*

Father gathers these little ones to the home He has prepared for them." And then Warfield went on to say this: "Their destiny is determined irrespective of their choice by an unconditional decree of God suspended for its execution on no act of their own. And their salvation is wrought, by an unconditional application of the grace of Christ to their souls through the immediate and irresistible operation of the Holy Spirit prior to and apart from any action of their own proper wills. And if death in infancy does depend on God's providence, and it does, it is assuredly God in His providence who selects this vast multitude to be made participants of His unconditional salvation. This is but to say that they are unconditionally predestinated to salvation from the foundation of the world,"

Such has been the belief of God's people, based in His word, down through the centuries. God has received uncounted millions of little ones into His bosom as it has pleased Him to do. What a gracious God we have, who loves and treasures as precious and valuable all the little children of the world.

I don't know if anyone sings it any more after more than half a century but I can remember well the words I sang when I was a small boy;

Jesus loves the little children
All the children of the world,
Red and yellow, black and white,
they are precious in His sight,
Jesus loves the little children of the world.

