



The King's Ransom

Matthew 20:28

Text

Matthew 19:13-15

Topic

Jesus rebukes His disciples for trying to prevent children from being brought to Him to be blessed

Title

"No Child Left Unblessed"

Introduction

They've been labelled 'brat-bans.' It's a trend among businesses that are telling parents their children are not allowed. Leading the charge are a handful of movie theaters, restaurants, airlines, and vacation destinations that have put child free policies in place in order to create a better experience for adults.

On its double-decker aircraft, Malaysia Airlines imposed an age-limit on the whole upper floor, banning children under 12 years of age from being seated there. Babies are banned in the first class cabin.

The Alamo theater chain in Texas and Virginia bans children under 6 years old. CEO Tim League says, "If the movie is a non-crossover kids movie, we sometimes flex this age down to 3 and up, and we also have select 'Baby Day' screenings each week for infants and small children. If you want to take your 4-year-old to see *The Hangover 2* at 10pm, however, you'll have to go somewhere else."

Jesus' disciples were notorious brat-banners. They tried to turn-away parents who were bringing their kids to Jesus to be blessed by Him. He rebuked His disciples, uttering the famous line, "Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of heaven."

Was His intention simply to overrule any possible ban we might put on children, in any circumstance, on any occasion?

Or was He using the occasion to teach us something much more profound about kids that we should pay closer attention to?

Let's take a look and see what conclusions we can draw. I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 Bring Your Kids To Jesus' Loving Arms, and, #2 Trust Your Kids In Jesus' Loving Arms.

#1 Bring Your Kids To Jesus' Loving Arms

It's important we set the scene for Jesus' comments. He had just finished a controversial discussion with the Pharisees regarding marriage, divorce, and remarriage. In the parallel account in the Gospel of Mark we learn that Jesus and His disciples went into a house, where they pressed Him further about the issues of marriage and celibacy (10:10-16).

It was in the house, having a conversation with His boys, that parents were coming to Him to have Him bless their children.

In Luke's Gospel, the kids involved - at least some of them - are described as infants (18:15-17).

Mat 19:13 Then little children were brought to Him that He might put His hands on them and pray, but the disciples rebuked them.

Many reasons can be suggested for them wanting to turn away the children. Let's give them the benefit of the doubt: Maybe they wanted to go on having an adult conversation about human sexuality and knew it would be inappropriate for kids.

I think almost all of us believe that there are age-appropriate boundaries we should set for kids. It's not a brat-ban to be careful what kids are exposed to.

In the Jewish culture of the first century, according to sources I read, parents had a practice of bringing their infants, usually on or around their first birthday, to the synagogue so that the rabbi could pray over them and pronounce a blessing.

This event in Matthew was what we would call a baby dedication. Dedicating a baby, or even an older child, is not one of the two ordinances required of Christians in the New Testament. As Christians, we are to be baptized, and we are to participate in the Lord's Supper.

I've been told that baby dedications are therefore unbiblical, but that's not really true, because all we are doing is acknowledging that the child is a gift from The Lord and praying for him or her and the parents.

There does not seem to be any conflict with Scripture as long as parents do not view it as something that is required, or as somehow assuring the salvation of the child.

The dedications in Matthew were prompted by the news that Jesus was in the house. If you wanted Him to bless your baby, you'd have to take advantage of the timing, because He'd be on His way soon enough (v15).

Mat 19:14 But Jesus said, "Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of heaven."

Mat 19:15 And He laid His hands on them and departed from there.

When the disciples rebuked the parents, The Lord overruled them, and turned their error into a teachable moment.

He had previously explained to them that the humility of an obedient, trusting, submissive child to his or her father was a model for our behavior as citizens of His kingdom. Rebuking them for their attempt to turn away these kids was a reminder of that important truth.

There was very definitely a spiritual principle in His words. We could put it like this: For whatever reason or reasons, the disciples were acting *childishly* when they should have been more *childlike*.

As for a literal principle to follow, we could say the text is telling us to bring our kids to Jesus.

How do we bring our kids to Jesus today?

Being God, an attribute of His deity is that Jesus is everywhere. But I don't think it's a stretch to say that we ought to bring our kids to where Jesus said He'd be in a special way - among His gathered church on earth when we meet.

Secondly, we bring our kids to Jesus when we dedicate them. As I said, dedication is not a requirement, but neither is it unscriptural or prohibited. It's a very precious custom. It's humbling and exhilarating to stand before your church family and ask for prayer to help you raise your children in the ways of The Lord.

Thirdly, we bring our kids to Jesus by exposing them, all the time, to The Lord and to the things of The Lord. We are not Israel, but the exhortation of Deuteronomy six to parents is still appropriate for raising godly children:

Deu 6:4 "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one!

Deu 6:5 You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.

Deu 6:6 "And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart.

Deu 6:7 You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up.

Deu 6:8 You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes.

Deu 6:9 You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

Fourthly, we bring our kids to Jesus by evangelizing them. We're going to talk more about a child's spiritual condition, and about the age of accountability, in just a moment.

For now, we need to be reminded that our kids need to make a personal, willful decision to trust Jesus Christ as their Savior from sin. We should ask them to receive The Lord and, since they are kids, go on encouraging them to receive The Lord until they have attained an age of accountability.

Our granddaughter, CJ, is 8. Last April, on the 12th of April to be exact, she was over and, on her own, wanted to watch the recent series, *The Bible*. During the episode about Abraham she started asking us about going to Heaven. We told her all she needed to do was to ask Jesus to come into her heart. I asked her if she wanted me to help her with a sinner's prayer; she said "No," that she could pray on her own.

And then she did. She told God she'd been sinning a lot and wanted to be forgiven and be a good little girl and be better at school.

It was a sweet blessing for Pam and I.

So far we understand Jesus' comment, "Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of heaven," to be a spiritual rebuke or reminder to us to have childlike humility; and, on a practical level, to be an encouragement to constantly expose our kids to the things of The Lord, including church, in order to evangelize them.

I want, briefly, to mention something that has made me, in particular, extremely unpopular over the years. It's our policy of asking parents with young children to not sit here in the main sanctuary, but rather in one of the other locations available to them, e.g., the fabulous and family friendly Fellowship Hall.

I bring this up now only because, whenever someone objects to this policy, they quote these words of Jesus about letting the little children come to Him.

On a purely biblical level, and without getting emotional about it, Jesus did not mean that kids of any age could interrupt Him anytime they or their parents wanted to. When He uttered that sentence, He was hanging out in a house; He was not in a synagogue or in some more formal setting.

The Bible does suggest, at least on one occasion, that you might want to restrict younger kids from the public assembly. It's in the book of Nehemiah. They gathered together all the people to hear the reading of the Law. In Nehemiah 8:2 we read,

Neh 8:2 So Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly of men and women and all who could hear with understanding on the first day of the seventh month.

Those "who could hear with understanding" were children over a certain unspecified age. Children were welcome, but there was an age-appropriate restriction.

I think our accommodation of kids is really pretty fantastic. Recognizing that younger kids can, in fact, cause distractions, we have a beautiful, comfortable, casual place for families who prefer being together to experience worship and the word.

Wednesday nights we are extremely family friendly as kids join us for worship and, if their parents desire it, for the entire service. We make sure that the things we do are kid-friendly.

Let me tell you, it can be pretty noisy on Wednesday nights as the kids wiggle and giggle through the worship, and sometimes the study.

One more thing. Our Children's Ministry isn't just for babysitting. We share the Gospel in age appropriate ways in order to evangelize the kids. The kids love their teachers, and enjoy their classes. Why wouldn't a parent want to take advantage of that kind of help bringing their child to Jesus?

We take Jesus' statement seriously, but we place greater emphasis on the spiritual component. We want to see children brought to Him in order to be saved, so we provide age appropriate instruction. Recognizing the rights of parents to stay together as a family should they so desire, we provide places on campus where that is possible and extremely comfortable, while simultaneously maintaining the sanctuary as a place where distractions can be kept to a minimum for folks who want to focus totally on the Word. And we have a much more lax policy at our mid-week service.

I see it as a win-win for everyone and I am truly sad when folks are offended we have any policies in place.

We saw in Nehemiah a biblical reference to those "who could hear with understanding." It indicates that understanding brings responsibility; or, as we more commonly say, *accountability*.

When you start saying there is an age of accountability, it raises all sorts of important questions. The most important one might be, "What happens to children who die **before** the age of accountability?"

We say they go to Heaven.

#2 Trust Your Kids In Jesus' Loving Arms

If you think all Christians agree that children who die before the age of accountability go to Heaven, you've got another think coming. The most common answer you'll get is, "I don't know," or "We can't be certain."

Some come to the very opposite of our belief that they go to Heaven. They go so far as to say that infants and children who die are, in fact, condemned to Hell - although they might soften this by suggesting that the children of believers, and certain other infants and children, are among God's elect.

When talking about infants and children who cannot believe because they lack understanding, theologians normally include those with mental impairments that render them incapable of believing. We'll refer to them all as those who cannot believe.

The Bible makes no distinction between some who need salvation and others who do not. All are equally lost - including those who cannot believe.

You enter the world a sinner, with a sin nature, before you ever commit a conscious, willful act of sin. Everyone is born "dead in trespasses and sins" (Ephesians 2:1).

Everyone - including those who cannot believe - are lost, perishing, condemned, and under God's wrath. One author put it this way: "Babies are beautiful and lovely, but they are also lost. They are delightful, but also depraved. They are filled with life, but they are also dead in trespasses and sin."

All are in need of God's salvation, and that is why Jesus died for all. Many passages teach that salvation is sufficient for, and intended for, **everyone**:

Joh 3:16 For God so loved **the world** that He gave His only begotten Son, that **whoever** believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

Heb 2:9 But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for **everyone**.

Joh 12:32 And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw **all peoples** to Myself."

1Jn 2:2 And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the **whole world**.

Jesus Christ died for everyone, **but** not everyone will be saved. There is one condition: whoever **believes**.

1Ti 4:10 For to this end we both labor and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Savior of **all men**, especially of those who **believe**.

Let's talk about what it means to believe, since it is the one condition for salvation.

Why do people believe in Jesus? Do they believe on their own, without any outside influence by God?

No, they do not decide on their own. It is only by the grace of God operating on the human heart that a person can exercise faith to believe and thus be saved.

The Holy Spirit plays a vital role in bringing a sinner to see his or her need for salvation. Jesus said, "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him" (John 6:44).

The Father draws men to Himself as the Holy Spirit uses the Word of God to convict of sin, of righteousness, and of the judgment to come. God's grace operates on the human heart to free the will of the sinner to be able to believe and receive The Lord.

A child or the mentally deficient **cannot** believe. The ministry of the Holy Spirit is therefore *not* able to operate on those who are incapable of understanding the Word.

Only adults, and those who can understand, are commanded to repent and believe in order to be saved. If you cannot understand, or repent, or believe, then the work of Jesus on the Cross, which is unlimited in its scope, can be rightfully applied to you by God.

If the one condition of salvation is to believe, and a person cannot believe, will they be held responsible by God for something they were unable to do and miss out on Heaven? To say "Yes," to me at least, is an insult to everything Jesus Christ reveals to us of the character and nature of God.

Taking these biblical facts into account, we say the following:

All who can believe must do so to receive eternal life, but all who cannot believe receive the same eternal life provided by Jesus for them since they are unable to receive it or reject it.

Our arguments are good, but are there specific Scriptures about children that can help us? And by that I mean, Are there specific passages that address the eternal destiny of those who cannot believe? There are.

Job was being severely tested by God. He despaired of his life. He cried out,

Job 3:11 "Why did I not die at birth? Why did I not perish when I came from the womb?"

Job 3:12 Why did the knees receive me? Or why the breasts, that I should nurse?

Job 3:13 For now I would have lain still and been quiet, I would have been asleep; Then I would have been at rest.

Job wished he'd been still-born. He believed he would have been better off. He describes the destiny of the still-born using the words "still," "quiet," "asleep," and "at rest."

He's certainly not describing a state in which he would have been annihilated and ceased to exist. If he meant that, he would have said that it would have been better if he had never been conceived.

It seems clear to me that Job thought he would be in a place of eternal rest. He didn't know as much about Heaven as we who have the complete revelation of God know; but he knew there was a better place, and that an infant still-born would go there.

The most often referenced Bible passage regarding the destiny of the unborn is Second Samuel 12:22-23. King David had sinned by sleeping with Bathsheeba and having her husband killed. The prophet Nathan rebuked him, letting David know that, as part of his punishment, the child born to him with Bathsheeba would die shortly after birth.

David fasted and prayed for the child until he died. Then he got up, cleaned-up, and ate, and went about his normal routine as King. His servants were confused about his behavior. They thought he should be all the sadder at the death of his son.

This was his answer:

2Sa 12:22 And he said, "While the child was alive, I fasted and wept; for I said, 'Who can tell whether the LORD will be gracious to me, that the child may live?'

2Sa 12:23 But now he is dead; why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me."

Life after death was a certainty for David. He definitely and confidently believed that he would in the future again be with his son. He had no doubt whatsoever that his infant son, taken in death before he could receive or reject his father's God, would be there also.

Two arguments are leveled against this position by those who say it doesn't teach the salvation of those who cannot believe:

1. The first argument is that David simply meant one day he would join his son in death. They say there is no expectation of Heaven in his words. But that is absurd to me, because it is

clear from David's words that he was anticipating a joyous reunion that could only take place in Paradise.

2. The second argument is that David's son would indeed be in Heaven, but only because he was the child of a believer. Their position is that the children of believers do indeed go to Heaven, but not (or most likely not) the children of nonbelievers. I find this, too, to be absurd. While a believing parent or parents are a blessing, no one is saved because their parents were saved.

Notice that those who use the second argument are conceding that people who cannot believe *can* be saved apart from personal faith which they cannot exercise. They are compelled to limit it to the children of believers not on account of the Bible, but because of their theology. Their understanding of the Cross limits the atonement Jesus made for sin to an elect group rather than it's being available to whosoever will believe.

If the Bible teaches that there is an age of accountability, that, too, would be strong evidence God does not hold those under that age accountable but instead saves them if they die before reaching it.

It seems that there **is** an age of accountability. In talking about the children of the wicked city of Nineveh, The Lord described them as those who could not "discern between their right hand and their left" (4:11). In other words, they were too young to have conscious discernment.

In Deuteronomy 1:39 The Lord was speaking to the generation of Israelites who had sinned by refusing to enter the Promised Land. He describes children as those who "had no knowledge between good and evil." They were therefore not held accountable and would be allowed in to the land.

We saw, too, in Nehemiah that there was an age at which a child could understand what was being said in God's Word.

What is the age of accountability? No definite answer can be given because it varies from person-to-person. James 4:17 tells us what accountability is, but cannot give us a specific age.

Jas 4:17 Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin.

We say, therefore, that there **are** specific passages that address the destiny of those who cannot believe, and that, taken together, reveal to us that they **do**, in fact, go to Heaven.

There are undoubtedly infant and child deaths represented here today. Miscarriages... Abortions.

You might be a believer; you might be an unbeliever.

Your child, or children, who died for whatever reason before they could be held accountable: They are safe in the arms of Jesus.