

Intro:

Our study on prayer in the life of Jesus continues today with a most interesting passage. It is one often misused. As we come to it, we need to ask ourselves the question: do we misuse it? If yes, what must we change? If not, are we obeying it fully?

Let's read the passage in each of the Synoptic Gospels, though our main text is in Matthew.

Read Mt 19.13-15; Mk 10.13-16; Lk 18.15-17

There are slight variations in each passage, some of which we may touch on.

The word that draws our attention today is in Mt 19.13, 'that he should put *his* hands on them, **and pray**'.

What does this 'and pray' mean? What is it that these parents wanted? What did the Lord grant to them? How should we apply this passage to our lives and ministry?

I want to answer these questions by these points:

1. The Lord is not endorsing infant baptism
2. The Lord is teaching something about salvation
3. The Lord is teaching something about parental concern for children

Proposition: Our Lord is one who may be entreated for personal interest in the souls of our little ones.

I. The Lord is not endorsing infant baptism

A. Those who teach infant baptism eagerly see a connection in this passage

From my Lutheran commentary: "The Church commonly applies it to the institution of infant baptism, explaining it as meaning, children which are offered to the Lord, and come to Him. Hence, such as are dedicated to unto God in baptism, — the children of the theocracy as the generation which embodied the hope of the kingdom of heaven."¹

Commenting on the attitude of the disciples: "But in this instance the disciples seem to have displayed a less liberal spirit — we should almost say, that they were inclined to Baptist rigorism."²

¹ Lange, *Matthew*, p. 342.

² *Ibid.*

And, “Baptists are apt to ignore the possibility of faith as a seed in the heart of infants, just as they fail to perceive the full idea of the Christian family, and the blessing which may descend from Christian parentage.”³

- Now, my intention is not to beat up on those who teach infant baptism, but merely to show that they teach it from this passage, and that they teach the notion of a ‘seed of faith’ in covenant children.

B. Reasons why the passage is not teaching infant baptism

1. The passage is not about baptism at all [the clinching argument]
2. The commentaries of the ancient church, even when it practiced infant baptism, did not make this connection [an additional argument]
 - a. Extensive reporting of ancient commentaries in Broadus
 - b. Augustine apparently the first to make this connection (AD 354-430)
 - c. Even so, little made of this connection among the majority of commentators

C. The Lord is not even instituting a practice of formal dedication of infants

1. The bringing of these infants is in keeping with Jewish practice of bringing children to Rabbis for blessing
 - a. Matthew and Mark have the word for young children
 - b. Luke has the word for babies
 - c. The fact that Jesus is able to take them up in his arms (Mark) indicates these are quite young children
2. Church I grew up in had child dedications, when I joined Baptist churches, I found some who would have a ‘dedication of parents’ ceremony
3. But note: there is no command of the Lord to bring infants for dedication, only a reception of these infants [for a reason we will see later]

³ *Ibid.*

- a. No command: hence, I have never had the desire for either dedication of infants or dedication of parents
- b. The ceremony is a wrong response to a right desire
 - 1) It is right for parents to want their children to know and be blessed by the Lord
 - 2) But mere ceremonies (especially over a baby who doesn't know his right hand from his left) make no lasting impression and are no guarantee of the Lord's blessing

In fact, in our church growing up, most of the children I saw brought to church for baby dedication were by parents who rarely showed up at church on other occasions.

II. The Lord is teaching something about salvation

- A. The key words: **Suffer** the little children to come, for of **such** is the kingdom
 - 1. Let's consider the context
 - a. The Lord is on his way to Jerusalem, the final journey, teaching on the way, especially teaching his disciples
 - b. Lk 18 – where we have been the last two sessions
 - 1) The persistent widow and persistent prayers for the Lord's vindication of the saints (a place of trust and humility)
 - 2) The Pharisee and the publican and two prayers – one of pride, the other of humility
 - c. Mt 18.3 (sometime earlier, prior to Lk 18 parables)
 - d. Mt 19.1-12, Mk 10.1-12 – Jesus teaching on divorce, to Pharisees, then to disciples privately

Not included in Luke, but immediately preceding the event (after the parables in Lk 18)

- e. Now come the parents with their children, interrupting the Lord's teaching session on such a vital subject as marriage and divorce
- f. Immediately following, all three Gospels: the rich young ruler

What is the general theme of the whole context?

- Humility, trusting the Lord

What is the problem these disciples have with the parents?

- They are interrupting my important teaching time with the Lord

2. The Lord's response

- a. "Suffer": Allow these children to come to me
- b. "Of such": These children are emblematic of something

B. The qualifications for entrance into the kingdom of heaven

1. It is not that children are innocent and without sin
2. But children tend to simply trust without reservation and doubt and with humility
 - a. The Lord wants his disciples to get this message
 - b. Began in Mt 18.3
 - c. Continues in the parables of Lk 18
 - 1) Wait on the Lord (and pray) for vindication [believe God's promises]
 - 2) Come before the Lord with humility, confessing your own sin, not comparing yourself with others
 - d. Teaching on marriage/divorce
 - 1) Highly interesting, controversial
 - 2) Heady, adult-like, something to be filled with pride about because you know the answers
 - e. And now this... little children interrupting
 - f. And next this... a rich young ruler, unwilling to humble himself before the Lord

"Of **such** is the kingdom of heaven"

The Lord is teaching something about salvation: in order to receive it, you must adopt a childlike trust in the Lord.

But there is something more in our passage... what about that word 'and pray'

III. The Lord is teaching something about parental concern for children

- A. The parents desired that the Lord might offer a rabbinical blessing and prayer on their children
 - 1. It seems that these parents perceived something more about Jesus than merely the presence of a Rabbi
 - 2. Jesus is now at a period where many have fallen away from him and opposition is mounting in the whole nation to him
 - 3. Yet these parents want his blessings and his prayers for their children
- B. The Lord delights in this kind of concern by parents for their children
 - 1. A comments from a commentary:

“In the life of the church too often nearly ninety-nine per cent of its time, money, and strength is devoted to ministrations to adults, whereas to the children is devoted only a fatally insignificant portion. Only those congregations which, by means of thorough training of Sundays-school teachers, regular and effective services for children, Sunday-school libraries, etc., take heed that the command of the Saviour is obeyed can hope to be flourishing congregations in the future.”⁴

- 2. Parental concern for spiritual needs is *natural* in believing parents (and it is commendable)
- 3. The involvement of the whole body of disciples in meeting the needs of that concern is approved by the Lord
 - a. In Mark, the Lord is *indignant* with the disciples
 - b. He instructs the disciples to *suffer* the coming of the children (to permit or allow)

The body of disciples is going to have to change its attitude if the Lord is going to approve them.

That means we should take means to be training our little children to love the Lord.

⁴ Geldenhuys, p. 455.

- It takes work and workers
- It takes administration and planning (how I hate administration and planning!)
- It takes humility [“How do you exercise your spiritual gifts?” “Well, I *just* teach children.”]

4. If you ask the Lord to bless and pray for your children, do you think he will do it?

Conclusion:

Proposition: Our Lord is one who may be entreated for personal interest in the souls of our little ones.

I believe that the Lord is personally interested in the salvation and discipleship of every young person and child in our church.

I believe that the Lord would have us be more conscious of his interest and *prayers* especially for the little ones among us.

I believe that the Lord would have us as disciples concerned about the entrance of these little ones into His kingdom.