

Luke 18:15-17 "The Gift of the Kingdom"

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Preacher: Derrick Harris

[0 : 00] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.

Thank you for playing that. That was great. I love that song. I selfishly requested that song. And James, obliged. Thank you. I know you had to learn that, and I appreciate that.

Good morning, everybody. I'm Derek. If I haven't met you, and you may have walked in since the last time I said, Hi, I'm Derek. I'm one of the pastors here. Happy fall break to you.

This week we're continuing in our series in the Gospel of Luke. Remember, we took a break last week when we had a guest speaker, Paul Hahn. So this week we're going to continue in chapter 18.

And as I was preparing for this, I thought to myself, I wonder how someone would describe me to somebody else. What would they say? Would it be kind? Would it represent me well?

[1 : 05] Would they say the same thing that I'd say about myself? Probably not. And so many times what we think about ourself is not what others think about us. And many times what we think about ourself actually hinders us from understanding who we really are.

We fear the truth a lot of times. We fear what others might think of us. So I'd like to start us off by watching a video, a quick video clip that highlights this tension of misplaced self-perception.

I'm a perfectionist, and so that's hard with kids.

There's definitely days when I have my doubts about my abilities. Struggle with my temper. I struggle with, like, how I react with situations. I wish I knew how to, I guess, just calm myself before speaking to them.

I wish I was better at taking time to sit down and just listen more to my child. I wish I was more confident in being a mom.

[2 : 21] I'm not the most patient person in the world. Patience. Patience is far and away probably the biggest struggle. I just want them to know just how much I love them.

My mom is totally awesome.

She's fun to snuggle with. Pretty, funny. She does cook a lot of food for me. She's just unique.

That's why I love her so much. We go on dates together. Like, we go shopping. She loves me a lot. I have a lot of favorite things about my mom.

We like to watch movies together and color and stuff. We go to church together. We volunteer together. She is, like, my heart, I guess you could say, because she's that close to me.

[3 : 37] My favorite thing is to jump on a trampoline with my mom. That's my most favorite thing, to go up high. We, like, get ice cream or something. And, like, go to the nail salon and have fun.

My mommy's my hero. She's pretty and beautiful. She is my hero. She just will care about me and just always love me forever.

She's the best. Oh, that's so awesome. I always seem to focus mostly on the negative.

And I guess I can walk out here and say that I'm doing something great. And that my child is viewing me in totally different lenses as I view myself.

So, that's inspiring. This is my calling. This is my job. This is what I love to do. And I will do it better and with love each and every day because those kids count on me.

[4 : 47] And they love me for what I'm doing. So, what I love about that video, well, one, I'll tell you a little about it.

It circulated the internet a few years ago on Mother's Day. And what I love about it is that the moms are feeling totally guilty about these things that their children are completely unaware of.

Right? And, in fact, their children have the complete opposite view of them that they are judging upon themselves. Instead, their children delight in them.

And the perspective here of a child changes absolutely everything. Well, God is very concerned about us having the correct view of Him.

So much so that He came to earth to tell us not only who He is but who we are. And we all start as children and we grow into adulthood. And for some reason we grow oftentimes from wonder into this state of worry.

[5 : 49] But to enter the kingdom of God, Jesus says that adults must become like children.

Through children we have the opportunity to actually see God the way that He wants to be seen.

And the opportunity to understand just how much He really does love us. And our passage this morning gives us an opportunity to see that love. And to let it instruct us.

So let's read together here from Luke 18. Father, would you please bless your word as it's preached.

And would your spirit be the one who talks. Touch our hearts, I pray. Change us in Jesus' name.

Amen. So the first thing we see here in verse 15 is that there's a little bit of Jesus paparazzi.

And then you see the disciples rebuking the children. Now Jesus is traveling from town to town.

He's performing miracles. Crowds gather wherever He goes.

[7 : 12] Who is this man who claims to be the Son of God? People are thinking. Who heals the sick? He speaks with the authority of Yahweh. So you can imagine when He comes to town, people show up.

When I was growing up in high school, I would get so excited when my favorite band came to town.

And my friends and I would line up to get tickets. We would camp out sometimes. Because we wanted the best seat so we could be the closest person to the artist that we loved.

And one time I went so far as to sneak backstage at one of the concerts. And I made it all the way to the door of the dressing room that read Pearl Jam. And this big arena.

And then I was greeted by a nice security man who literally kicked me out the back door. But when Jesus came to town, people would do anything to get near Him.

Reckless abandon. Chaos. Crowds rushing at the expense of each other. Just to get near Him. To hear Him speak. Sometimes just to touch Him. And parents would actually bring their children and even their infants to get near Him.

[8 : 16] And they brought them for a blessing. Jesus would say a prayer and bless them. Which is a continuation of an Old Testament practice. Now in America, we have this positive view of infants mostly and children.

We love their joy, their innocence, their squishy little faces and their laughter. But in Judaism, when Christ walked the earth, children and infants were viewed as being only as valuable as what they had to offer the family.

By contributing to the workforce. So we can't get too mad at the disciples. When they have this rebuke. They're continuing a view that was very common.

That they had learned. So the word rebuke there though in verse 15. If we could jump back to the verse. They rebuked them. That's a strong word.

It's usually used in the context scripturally of rebuking demons. Casting out. So this is a strong rebuke. Like get away. Sort of thing. So we don't know exactly why they did it.

[9 : 16] Maybe they thought that only important people who have something to offer can be around Jesus. Because this time is way too important. Or this is only for adults.

Move on children. Or maybe they're viewing the heart of God from a worldly perspective only.

Right? Maybe they thought that they were protecting Jesus from the crazy kid who was trying to sneak backstage.

But sometimes it's really easy to get caught up in the wrong things for the right reasons. So maybe that was it. I can relate to this. When I lived in Nashville at the last church I served in.

We served communion every week. And every week I would serve communion to the governor of Tennessee. To Grammy award winning songwriters. And musicians. And Kirk Herbstreet.

Which was the most random one of all. He would walk up a couple of times. And I'm glad though that I always had a little child right there helping me serve. Because it put things in perspective.

Because it's really easy to start thinking that the more important you are.

[10 : 17] Or the more famous you are. Then you need to be treated differently. And actually you're going to have more impact in the kingdom of God. And so we start to create these cliques. And these different class systems.

Even in Christianity. But it's not true. And none of that is true before God. So whatever the reason was for the disciples' rebuke. Jesus took that opportunity to turn it around. And set the record straight. And show us how God wants to be viewed. And how he wants us to actually approach him. So that's the next question I'll ask. How should we approach God? If you look at verse 16. It says, Jesus called them to him saying, Let the children come to me and do not hinder them. For to such belongs the kingdom of God. So in the same way that the children and even infants approach Jesus. God wants us to approach him. But as helpless and dependent creatures. [11:14] We have an opportunity to see that here. Jesus says, Let them come to me. Now in verse 15 as I mentioned. They spoke about infants.

Now that's important. Because in the gospels of Matthew and Mark. The Greek word used for children is *paideia*. But here Luke uses the word *brephi*. Okay. This is an important distinction. It doesn't occur in the other gospels. Because it denotes newborn. And even unborn children being brought to Jesus. And that paints a picture of helpless dependence.

In these beautiful creatures of God. We see utter dependence. Commentator Kent Hughes writes this. He says, Every child born into the world is absolutely, completely, totally, actually helpless. And so it is with every child who is born into the kingdom of God. Children of the kingdom must enter it helpless. And you see the children, they were welcome. Jesus says, Come to me.

[12:17] So they were welcome to approach him. I bet they ran to him. I bet they were laughing. And when they did, they did it without merit. They did it without money. Without power, position, joy. But they had hope and excitement and joy. And there is no mention of status. There is no mention of race. There is no mention of jobs. And in the same way, we can approach God.

Bringing nothing but our helplessness. And he wants us to know that about him. That is what he delights in. God welcomes helpless, dependent creatures with open arms. No enmity at all. Now, when my child, John Paul, was an infant, I took this picture. I'm holding him in my arms. And I remember that moment looking at him, thinking, You can't speak, but I can talk to you, and there's nothing between us right now.

And it hit me, if we are in Christ, that's how God looks at us all the time. That feeling. And if you can go there, or you've ever held a child, and you know how beautiful it is, that's just an ounce of the love that God has for you all the time, if you are adopted as his children.

[13:34] Helpless dependence. Right? That's a picture of that. He's the creator. We are the creatures. But so many times, we're hindered from running to him.

But he's saying, Come to me, I love you. And that's where this next, the next point leads us. If we look at the verse again, in verse 16, it says, But Jesus called them to him, saying, Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them.

So what are we to learn here? What hinders us from approaching God? Well, in the same way that the children approach Jesus, God wants us to approach him completely unhindered.

Freedom is what that's speaking of. So how do you know what's hindering you from approaching God? Could be so many different things. We've got to ask God by his Holy Spirit to help us identify what's actually hindering us.

Typically, it's going to be what you're looking to for your significance. And it's going to get upside down. Our hearts, it's been said, are idle factories.

[14:47] Where we're constantly finding our identity in the wrong things. And we run to the wrong things for blessings instead of running to Jesus. Jesus, maybe we're hindered because we have, like the disciples view here.

Where we find our identity in having others think we're important potentially. Where I don't want anyone to tell me I'm not important. Because if they do, then that insults me.

So I want them gone away from me. I want to push them away. That's kind of the waters the disciples may have been swimming in. Not for sure, right? When Jesus walked the earth, we did the same thing to him.

Didn't we? We didn't really want him near us. So we pushed him away. If you think about it, like a child, Jesus came to us. He got in the way of adult things.

He was a nuisance. He bothered us with his words. He said things that made us uncomfortable. It took up way too much of our time. He talked about things that sounded childish and many times like

nonsense.

[15:51] He said things that some viewed as just plain crazy. And it must have just been his childish imagination. So we as adults handled the situation. And we put him on a cross and we killed him.

To get him out of the way so that we could go back to our very, very important adult lives. But we were very, very wrong. Jesus is actually the most important person that we could ever be near. Because he's God. So perhaps we're hindered by our view that we're too important. We don't like to be needy. Perhaps we're hindered by consumerism. You know, we live in a world where we are surrounded by on demand.

Get things our way. Get it right now when we want it. And we think that when we do things a certain way, perhaps then we can get certain expected outcomes and results.

And when we project that sort of thinking upon the gospel, it becomes very, very problematic in our understanding of God and who he is. And it's especially problematic when we project this consumeristic expectation upon the church.

[17:06] God's people. And it's everywhere. Where we start to treat the church like a fast food restaurant. Give me what I want. The way I want it.

Right now. This is how the ministry to me should look if you want me to volunteer. Or serve. Or come to your church. Or tithe. When we start to treat the church entrusted with the gospel as a mere business, we start to judge success by numbers, by accolades.

There's a side effect of starting to view pastors and staff and volunteers like SEC coaches who need to produce wins for us and victories.

And it has been said to me, national championships. I'm still trying to get my head around that one. People and children, when they become our metrics and when God becomes our CEO, God weeps.

This shows us that we have things completely upside down. It's the opposite of a spirit of dependence. The complete opposite. And Jesus says that only by bringing nothing can we receive anything.

[18:28] That's the seed. That's the root of our understanding. And when we let consumerism infiltrate our discussions in the hallways and in homes, we poison our kids in the parking lots before they even set foot in the church.

We teach them the wrong view of God. We teach them comparison and consumerism. And God is the victim. And we not only hinder ourselves when we do that, we hinder our children. And may that never be.

I know we don't want that. But it's alive and it's well. And we need to kill that. That's something worth killing. But only by the spirit of God can that be killed. God has entrusted to us not only ourselves to give to him and give an account, but the next generation to every one of us.

And this doesn't just apply to those of you who have children. We are called to raise the community of believers. That's why we had a baptism this morning. I don't think anyone was sitting down when I asked if you would help them raise their child.

That's what this is about. Coming together as a community dependent upon Jesus because we need each other. And we're going to all have to give an account one day.

[19:40] But what hinders us? You know, what hinders us from running to God? It's many times our views of who he is. And is what's hindering you and me hindering the next generation too?

Are we passing this down? Jesus calls us sheep. Okay? And he says that we need him as our shepherd and apart from him we are headed for slaughter.

And in the same way that the children in this passage approach Jesus, God actually wants us to run to him with joy, excitement, unhindered, and in complete freedom. Without that money, without that performance, without the status.

God, you owe me this because I did this. It says, nothing in my hands I bring, simply to the cross I cling. It's Jesus who makes all things grow. And it's Jesus who makes all things new.

So what's hindering us? What's hindering you? What's hindering me? Perhaps it could be believing that he's real at all. That's fair. That's a fair thing to say.

[20:42] And if you're here and you are struggling with that, I'm so glad you're here. Praise the Lord. This is a place where you can struggle with that. And you can talk to other people who may have actually dealt with that and may be dealing with that right now.

But we've got to ask God by his spirit to help us identify what hinders us from running to him. Our hearts, like I said, they're idol factories. Constantly putting other things in the place that's actually reserved for God.

And it's because of sin. And we're born into this world. Sin doesn't merely make us bad. And we need to go to church to get some good in us. Sin makes us dead.

And Jesus didn't come to earth to make us good. Jesus came to earth to make us alive. To actually revive dead souls. And it is only through him and only through running to him that we can experience life at all.

That's what he's saying in the gospel. Yet we trust so many other things than him for that life. And children give us an opportunity to think about that and to take that to him and ask him to break it.

[21 : 51] And when he breaks that idol, there's going to be one standing right behind it. And that's the process of sanctification. Beautiful process. That God is making us more and more like him.

But if you've never come to Jesus, consider that. Consider the reality of letting him into your life. And heal you for the first time. Here's the great news. He wants all of us to receive the kingdom of God.

So as we read the next verse there. Verse 16. The end of verse 16. And then to verse 17. It says, I think it's important to ask, to whom does the kingdom of God belong?

And how is it received? It's a direct answer here. The kingdom of God belongs to the children of God. And the way that children receive the kingdom of God is the way that God wants us to receive it.

But there's that word again. Kingdom of God. What is the kingdom of God? Let's ask that for a quick second here. The kingdom of God is already, but the kingdom of God is also not yet.

[23 : 09] So there's a present reality and there's a future reality. The great prophet Will Spinks says the kingdom of God, he describes it this way.

There's a present reality and a future reality. So the present reality first. In the Bible, the kingdom of God is wherever Yahweh is worshipped, trusted, and obeyed. Where his reign is active and people submit to him as king.

So we as a church seek to see his kingdom advance in our hearts and our lives here and everywhere. People more and more trusting and following the king.

Present reality. It's also used to talk about eternity. Where the rule of King Jesus will be fully and finally established in the new heavens and the new earth.

Richard Gaffin, who's a theologian, says it this way. It's a little more convoluted and deeper vocab. Kingdom of God is the eschatological rule of God.

[24 : 09] The ultimate end of all things. The final order of creation inaugurated at Jesus' coming, consummated at Jesus' return. It concerns nothing less than the salvation of sinners and the renewal of the entire cosmos.

It is an eschatological reality that has a present and a future. So Jesus in this passage, when he's talking about the kingdom of God, he's talking really about salvation.

Okay? The present miraculous work of God evidenced through the salvation of sinners. Who he reconciles to God through his death and his resurrection. He literally makes peace with God for you. And he offers you entrance into his eternal kingdom. And he says that we have to just simply receive it as a gift. So there's a future reality, if we do that, of eternal peace for those who've actually received the kingdom of God.

We receive that through faith. Merely believing what he says. And asking him, then, to give us a new heart. He then promises, if we do that, to use us in this life.

[25 : 11] The present reality will be that we are renovating the world one relationship at a time until he comes back for us and makes the entire world and universe completely brand new.

But the kingdom of God belongs to who? It belongs to the children of God. The kingdom of God belongs to the children of God.

So, what do children teach us, then, about how to receive the kingdom of God, as Jesus was saying in this passage? Well, think about it. You can, children, we work with children a lot upstairs.

If you want to know what they're like, y'all come on up. We got room for you. Okay? But you can come as you are as a kid. There's not a lot of kids that are doing their hair up before they show up. Sometimes their parents do. And that's okay. But children are who they are. They don't typically like to dress up in nice clothes. Most of the time, they want to be comfortable.

[26 : 11] My son, recently, they had this week of themed dress-up days at his school. And each day had a theme to wear something different, right? But he found a way to wear his favorite outfit every day and make it fit the theme.

So, team day, he was an Auburn fan. Career day, he was an Auburn sports coach. Wacky day, he's a wacky Auburn fan. Every day, Auburn hat, Auburn shirt, gym shorts.

He just wanted to be who he was in his outfit. And children teach us things that we can come to Jesus in the most comfortable outfit. We don't have to dress up for him. All you need is your need of him.

So, we could receive the kingdom by coming as we are. We receive the kingdom with laughter.

That gift of laughter. Children are always laughing and they're full of joy.

And they're full of fun. They love games. If you have a game, they'll drop everything to go do it. We receive the kingdom of God with true repentance. Kids exemplify this.

[27 : 13] They do not like when you're upset with them. If there's something wrong, they will cry immediately, especially the young ones. And they want to make it right immediately because they don't like that you're upset with them. In the same way, we must be repentant.

We need to understand our Heavenly Father's view of us. But we also should desire to actually please him. And children bring us new perspectives. I saw this picture when I was at the grocery store a couple weeks ago.

And, of course, it's John Lennon. And my son looks at me, look at this. He goes, Dad, is that Harry Potter? And I was like, no, but see, that's a different perspective.

I never would have thought that. And they give us an opportunity to see God differently. And, in fact, Jesus tells us to see him the way he actually is. They teach us more about God than typically as adults we understand.

That's what I liked about that video at the beginning. See, God may not be who we think that he is in our minds. And the moms, I didn't like that they were feeling guilty.

[28 : 19] But what they were feeling guilty about was the complete opposite of what the kids thought of them. Instead, their children delighted in them. And so many times what hinders us from coming to God and from running to Jesus and receiving the kingdom of God like a gift, like a child, is that we think that we're unlovable.

So we hide. And like Adam and Eve, we make fig leaves for ourselves. We hide and we feel shame and we don't want God to see us because we've done so much wrong that he couldn't ever forgive us in our minds.

We think he's mad at us and that he thinks we're failures all the time. That's why I'm glad he gives us the scriptures to remind us that he has the power to change murderers into Bible writers like Paul.

No matter what we think, in reality, God delights in his creatures.

He has removed the wrath of God for us by paying the penalty of sin for us on the cross. And he welcomes us to be adopted into that kingdom as children of God and he offers it right here as a gift.

[29 : 39] We're adopted as children of God through faith when we accept that free gift of salvation offered to us. And he says, receive it like a child. That's the only rule for adoption.

A child receives a gift. You think of it, they simply take it. At their first birthday, they're not even really sure what a gift is. They just stare at it and eat the cake. At two years old, if they have siblings, they understand a lot more, especially, what a gift is.

And by the time they're three, they're really into receiving gifts. Think about Christmas morning, waking up early, rushing downstairs or upstairs or to the tree to receive the gift waiting for you. Wrapping paper just flying off, right? But I also realize that in this broken world, not all of us have any pleasant memories of childhood.

That may be a reality here today. For some of you, when I say the word infant, it may bring pain. It may bring up loss in your life and grief. Christmas morning, when I say that, it might be this terror that you're still trying to escape.

[30 : 47] But in God's kingdom, all of that will be made new. All of it. It's all going to be okay.

The kingdom is offered to the helpless, to the needy, to the powerless, to the dependent. It's offered to all who would receive it like a child.

It's offered as a gift. God is at work redeeming the world. He's restoring brokenness through those who've accepted this gift. His Christmas gift, if you want to think of it that way.

