

**Matthew 19:13-15**

13 Then little children were being brought to him in order that he might lay his hands on them and pray. The disciples spoke sternly to those who brought them; 14 but Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs." 15 And he laid his hands on them and went on his way (NRSV).

The Scripture takes place in the middle of a physical movement as Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem, walking, teaching, and healing. The lesson from the Scripture is in the middle of a larger lesson on the kingdom of heaven and the disparity between worldly values.

Every since Jesus first started his mission a lot of people were following him. They were excited, in awe, anxious to see him, to learn from him, to witness miracles, and anticipating what might happen next. Within the realm of a patriarchal society, Jesus welcomed women and they also wanted a divine blessing from Jesus for their children. So, they bring their children to the esteemed teacher to have him bless them. But the disciples intervene. Jesus does not stop the children; instead Jesus stops the disciples and welcomes the little children. There is an important social implication here. When children are ignored by the world, Jesus welcomes them into the community of faith, teaches others to do the same, and teaches about the kingdom of heaven.

Jesus values God and the kingdom and knocks down human barriers. The kingdom of heaven belongs to little children and those like them. So, the kingdom of heaven is for all generations. No one is to be excluded or left out. Jesus is for everyone! Jesus corrects a negative view of relationships and continues the overall big lesson of the nuts and bolts of the gospels; the kingdom of heaven over worldly views and social norms. The action of the disciples is one of objection. They act as bodyguards to keep others away and shield Jesus from a nuisance of people perceived to be inconsequential. We don't know why. We don't know if it is because of attitudes and they perceive Jesus as being too important for children. Maybe they thought that Jesus is too busy to be disturbed and can't be bothered with children. Maybe they were a bit selfish and did not want to share Jesus. We can only speculate. We do know that they did not fully grasp the kingdom values and were still ingrained in the ways of the world.

Jesus responds to the disciples and the situation with focused view of the heavenly realm. The perspective of Jesus is do not reject the children, let them come to him; welcome the children, and everyone else that are like them. Jesus gets them back on track with the heavenly realm. One of the most important things going on here is that the disciples are to model his example of reception and understand that the kingdom belongs to them and such as these. It is a lesson on humility. We are to surrender our concerns for worldly status. We are to be receptive and trusting without concerns for power and position. We are to be like children and have full confidence in the Lord as they have in their parents and be receptive, loving, and trusting.

Jesus teaches us to check our attitudes in regards to humility and welcoming others. This was a difficult lesson for the disciples to learn and follow. So, the contemporary lesson for us is to watch out. What was hard for them will be a whole lot

harder for us. They were with him full time and still struggled to get this lesson that was given to them just one chapter earlier. **Matthew 18:1-5** At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" 2 He called a child, whom he put among them, 3 and said, "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. 4 Whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. 5 Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me" (NRSV). The disciples had asked "Who is the greatest in heaven?" That question was based on ego as they want to determine if they were going to be the greatest. Jesus surprises them with a lesson on true greatness. It is the one that is like a child; humble, innocent, and pure. We should trust God as a little child trusts his or her mother. It is a very powerful lesson. Whoever welcomes a child, welcomes Jesus. Now only one chapter later, they have forgot the lesson and disobeyed. Their actions are back in alignment with their existing culture as they fail to focus on that lesson from Jesus and are subject to external influences. We learn from the behavior of the disciples how difficult it is to truly follow Jesus within the realm of the current society.

Jesus is for all generations. The church is for all generations. Jesus welcomes and blesses the children. In a culture where children are of little social significance, the little ones represent all who lack worth and status: children, immigrants, the needy, and the lonely. The mission of the church is not to pass a plate of food out the back door but to set a place for the outcast at the family feast. The mission of the church is also sustaining the ministry and making life available to the abused, broken, neglected, and forgotten. Jesus is model for being the kind of person we are to be.