

The following sermon was preached at Redemption Baptist Church on Sunday, 2 March 2025. We encourage you to look up the Scriptures that are referenced and see the context for yourself. May the Lord speak to your heart as you study His Word.

Let the Children Come to Christ!

Matthew 19:13-26

Many of you have heard the story of **Corrie Ten Boom**, a Dutch believer who, along with her dad, her sister Betsy, and other family members, hid Jewish people in their home during WWII. (It is estimated that they either personally hid, or helped whisk away to safety, about 800 Jews!)¹ In February of 1944, Corrie, her dad, and her sister Betsy, were arrested by the Nazis; and her dad died in solitary confinement only ten days later. She and Betsy were taken to Ravensbrück Concentration Camp, where Betsy died of sickness in December of that year. Corrie alone survived—and that by a miracle. Through an “error” on the prison clerk’s part, Corrie was released from prison; but all the women in her age bracket were sent to the gas chambers only a week later.² Obviously, God spared Corrie from death for a very specific purpose. One of those purposes was to show the world the power of God’s love and forgiveness. For example, after the war, one of the Ravensbrück prison guards, who had mercilessly beaten Corrie and her sister, became a Christian. When he happened to meet Corrie in a church, he reintroduced himself to her, and asked forgiveness for the horrible things he had done to her family. Though in her flesh she didn’t want to forgive him, she chose to yield to the Spirit of God; and she soon found herself shaking hands with her old enemy. You see, from earliest childhood, her parents had taught her to love and forgive her enemies; and now that she was halfway through life, she did not depart from Christ’s way.

Throughout the rest of her life, God gave Corrie opportunities to share her testimony all over the world; and she often spoke about her loving Christian parents, who had led her to Christ when she was five years old. On one occasion, as she was speaking to a group of people about the importance of leading children to Christ, she quoted **Matthew 19:14**, which says, **“Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven.”** After that meeting, she received a letter from a lady who told her about what God had done in her own family on account of Corrie’s testimony that night. The lady said, “I went home after that meeting and went directly to my little girl, Mary, who was in bed. She knew *about* the Lord, because she had been in Sunday School; but that night, in her bed, she gave her heart to Jesus. The next morning she said, ‘Oh, Mummy, I’m so happy that Jesus is now in my heart. He made me a child of God.’ Mary was singing the whole time before she went to school, and I was amazed that she sang many songs about heaven. My husband went to school to pick her up that day, and as he approached the schoolhouse, he noticed that a great many people were standing around, and there obviously must have been an accident. Then he saw what had happened. Mary was on the street, her little body crumpled like a rag doll. She was dead.”³ The girl’s parents were grieved beyond words; yet, through this tragedy, the dad (who had never truly received Christ as his Saviour) believed on Jesus that

very day. He was struck by the simple testimony of his daughter's salvation, and by the songs about Heaven that he had heard her singing that morning. Because of this tragedy, many of Mary's classmates received Christ as Saviour, as well. As for Corrie, this story motivated her, all the more, to *urge* parents to lead their children to Christ, while their hearts are still young and tender.⁴

Brethren, little children *can* be saved—and sometimes, at a much earlier age than we might think. As we will see this morning, Jesus not only *invites* little children to come to Him, but He *rebukes* us adults for *not allowing* them to come to Him. We will also see what is required in order for *anyone* to come to Christ for salvation. The title of this message is *Let the Children Come to Christ!*

Read Matthew 19:13-15.

I. The children who came to Christ (vv. 13-15)

In last week's message, we saw that Jesus and His disciples had gone to the eastern side of the Jordan River, into the province of Perea. Once again, Jesus was withdrawing from the land of Israel, on account of the people's rejection of Him. Yet, even though most of the nation refused to believe on Jesus, there were many Jewish people who *did* believe on Him, and who *did* seek after Him; and they were willing to go outside the borders of Israel to find Him. As we saw in last week's Scripture, many people came to Jesus so that He might heal them of their diseases. However, in today's passage, we find that there were some who came to Jesus for a very different reason (and, apparently, an entirely new one). They came to Jesus with their *children*, so that He might touch them, bless them, and pray over them.

Now, before we go any further, let's look at a parallel passage in **Mark**, so that we may get an even fuller picture of what Jesus did and said on this occasion.

Read Mark 10:13-16.

If you were here when we were studying **Matthew 18**, you'll remember that Jesus had spoken on the subject of "*little children*" not so long before this. In **Matthew 18**, the disciples had been arguing about who would be the greatest in the Kingdom; and Jesus had corrected their pride by setting a child in the midst of them, and telling them that unless a man be converted, and become like a little child, he will by no means enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Here in **Matthew 19**, though, the occasion is quite different. Jesus wasn't speaking *privately* with the disciples, as He had been doing in **Matthew 18**: instead, He was speaking publicly; and as He was speaking, parents brought their children to Him, so that He might touch them, hold them, bless them, and pray over them. These were two very different events; yet, *what Jesus said* on these two occasions is very similar. Essentially, Jesus said the same thing that He had said

before. He said that in order to enter the Kingdom of Heaven, you must become “like” a little child. This means that you must set aside your adult pride, and your so-called “wisdom”; stop cynically doubting and questioning Jesus’ words; stop thinking of yourself as “righteous,” and admit that you are spiritually bankrupt, and condemned by your sin; and, with the simplicity of a child, *believe* on Jesus as Saviour, and *receive* Him into your heart. Just as Jesus picked up those little children in His arms, and lovingly held them, so He will take *anyone* into His arms at the moment that person believes on Him (even if he be 80 years old)!

Now, you’d think that after hearing what Jesus had said about “*little children*” only a few weeks earlier, the disciples wouldn’t have turned away even one child from Jesus. Yet, that is exactly what they did. It certainly wasn’t wrong for the disciples to *manage the crowds*, and to make sure that there was decency and order as people approached Jesus. (They did this sort of thing all the time; and it was very necessary, because the crowds were huge.) Where they erred was in assuming that it was *not important* for Jesus to see the children, or to pray over them. Now, in contrast, the parents of these children “got it.” Apparently, the news of what Jesus had said about children had gotten around; and they were simply taking Jesus at His word. They figured that if *adults* must become like “*little children*” in order to enter the Kingdom, then children must be very important to Jesus! Sad to say, though, the disciples didn’t see it this way. In their thinking, these were, after all, “just little children.” “They can’t possibly understand these deep things that Jesus is teaching,” they figured. “The *adults* need to hear the preaching, and the children should be kept home.” Once again, the disciples got it dead wrong; and Jesus was “*much displeased*” with them. By the way, this is the only place in the Gospels where it specifically says that Jesus was “*much displeased*” with His own disciples. That’s significant, folks! With a tone of sharp rebuke, Jesus said, “*Suffer* (“allow”) *little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven.*”

Brethren, when we discourage children from coming to Jesus, it is a serious thing. We may *think* that we would never be guilty of such a thing; but it is actually quite easy to do. If the *Apostles* made this mistake, so can we! Remember, Jesus didn’t give this warning to lost, wicked men, who were trying to corrupt or deceive children: He gave it to His own *Apostles*. Even *believers* can be guilty of forbidding children to come to Christ.

How, then, can we be guilty of this? Well, for one thing, we can forbid children to come to Jesus by doing exactly what the *Apostles* did. Just as the *Apostles* did, we, too, can **wrongly assume that children are too little to understand the Gospel**. Many Christian parents have the idea that it’s not so important to take their children to Sunday School, or to make sure that they are in every church service. “When they’re older, I’ll make sure they’re in church all the time; but right now, we need family time.” Folks, that is like telling your children, “You don’t need to come to Jesus!” The Bible says that the church is *Christ’s assembly*—the place where Christ meets in the midst of His people. His presence and power is here, every time we meet together; and there is a good chance that if children are brought into this place where Christ’s

Spirit is, and where His Word is taught and preached, they will, in time, come to know Him as Saviour. To say that sitting with your children in front of the telly, or in a fishing boat, is more important than being in Christ's house, is the same as saying that children *don't* need to come to Jesus.

Another way we can forbid children to come to Jesus is by **not taking time to pray with them, read the Bible with them, and have serious and meaningful talks** about the things of God with them. Dad and mom, those children are growing up fast! Don't let a minute slip by. Win their hearts to Jesus while you can! Of course, you *do* need to have family time, and play games together, and have fun together; but throughout the day, *Christ* must be distinctly held up as the Head of your home—both in your words, in your actions, and in your demonstration of Who is the most important Person in your life. Your children should know that they are subject to the authority of Dad and Mom; but they should also know that Dad and Mom bow *their* knees before the Lord Jesus Christ, and submit to *Him*. They should know that they, too, need to bow the knee to Jesus Christ, because they see *your* example of submission to Christ throughout the day. They hear you speaking lovingly of Christ while you are sitting together in the house, or riding in the car, or working around the house, or playing together.

Read Deuteronomy 6:4-9.

Read Ephesians 6:1-4.

How else can we forbid children to come to Christ? **By assuming that there will be plenty of time *later* to discuss salvation with our children.** The thinking is, “We don't want to scare them right now with talk about hell, because it might give them nightmares.” Listen, folks: the gates of Heaven and Hell are just as open to children as they are to adults; and every day, there are children who enter through both these gates—for eternity. There *is* an age of “safety” for infants and toddlers, before they have reached an age of understanding; but children are able to understand the simple Gospel message much earlier than we may think. That little girl named Mary made it through Heaven's gate because her mom decided that it was time to *confront* her little girl about salvation, and to *invite and challenge her* to respond *personally* to Jesus' call to salvation. Thank God that she got the invitation in time!

Is there any other way that we can forbid children to come to Christ? Yes. We can also forbid **children who *are* saved to answer Christ's call to service.** We can do this by showing them, by example, that seeking treasures of this world is more important than sharing the Gospel with people, or serving the Lord in His assembly. We can also do this by discouraging our children from entering full-time service, because it's “too dangerous” to go to that mission

field, or because “there’s no money” in being a pastor or missionary. We can do this simply by not looking for ways to encourage our children in the Lord. You know, I still remember a Sunday morning church service when I was 12 years old, when my pastor looked down at me from the pulpit, and, for the very first time, asked me to come up to the pulpit and lead the congregation in prayer! My heart nearly jumped out of my chest! You know what, though? Even though I was scared to death, it *encouraged* me to know that my pastor had invited me to serve the Lord in that small way. Perhaps he saw in me the potential of a future pastor; or, perhaps he simply saw a future husband and father, who knows how to lead others in praying to and worshipping the Lord in his local church. Whether you have children of your own or not, find ways to *encourage* the Christian young people around you to serve the Lord with their whole heart! Bid them to draw near to the Good Shepherd, and learn from Him!

II. The man who did *not* come to Christ (vv. 16-26)

Read Matthew 19:16-26.

In the Gospels of **Matthew**, **Mark**, and **Luke**, this account of the rich young ruler appears immediately *after* the account of Jesus’ blessing the children. It seems, then, that this event happened shortly after Jesus had blessed the children—perhaps on that very same occasion. Most likely, this young nobleman was in the crowd, and had *just heard* Jesus say that in order to enter the Kingdom, you must be converted, and become like a little child. How did these words affect him? Obviously, it stirred up a bit of uncertainty in his heart. Had *he* been “*converted*”? Had *he* become like a “*little child*”? What did Jesus mean by this? I don’t know exactly what was going through his mind; but one thing is clear: he completely *misunderstood* Jesus’ words. Rather than coming to Jesus with childlike faith and repentance, as Jesus had just urged people to do, this young man was looking for some outstanding thing to *do* in order to *earn* eternal life. The very first words that came out of his mouth were, “*Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?*”

Do you see the assumption that this nobleman was making? He thought that he must “do” something in order to earn eternal life. This was what he had been taught from earliest childhood, by the rabbis. He had been steeped in a salvation of “good works.” He had always believed that keeping God’s laws, and the traditions of the elders, as best he could, would merit him entry into the Kingdom of Heaven. Yet, Jesus seemed to be saying something very different; and he was bothered enough to ask Jesus about it. In essence, he was asking, “*What else* do I need to do? There are hundreds of laws and traditions: so which ones do I *really* need to focus on? Is there something extraordinary that I must do?” Now, Jesus *could* have answered this young man in the same way that He had answered the multitudes on the day after He had fed the 5,000. Let’s look at what He said on that occasion.

Read John 6:24-29.

Do you see what the crowds were asking Jesus, here? They were asking Him the same thing that the rich young ruler asked Him. They were asking what they must “do” in order to obtain eternal life. Jesus’ answer to them was simple: “Since you think that you must ‘do’ something in order to have eternal life, here is what you must ‘do’: **believe on me.**” Jesus *could* have given the rich young ruler a simple answer just like this. However, Jesus knew that this young man needed a different approach.

First of all, Jesus knew that this young man needed to be confronted about the matter of *who He is*. You see, this young man had addressed Jesus as “**Good Master** (or “Teacher”)”; but what he *needed* to acknowledge is that Jesus is *God*. Jesus was challenging him to consider what the word “**good**” really means. *God* is the only One who is truly good, and all men are liars; therefore, if *Jesus* be “**good,**” then He is not just an ordinary man: He is also *God*—God in human flesh. Did the young man truly believe this? Clearly, he didn’t. He thought of Jesus merely as a great teacher, a step or two above the rest—but not as God. Jesus was telling this young man that in order to have eternal life, he must first believe and confess that He is *God*!

With this in mind, Jesus now directly addressed this young man’s question—the question of what he must “do” in order to inherit eternal life. Now, at first, Jesus’ answer was probably a bit confusing, and troubling, to His true followers. *They* had come to Jesus in simple, childlike faith and repentance, just as Jesus had invited them to do; yet, here was Jesus telling this young ruler that he must *keep the commandments* in order to be saved. Was Jesus contradicting His own word? No! Jesus was simply challenging this young man to consider whether he really *could* keep the commandments. He was saying, “All right: since you think you must keep the commandments to be saved, then go ahead and *keep* them.”

Now, at this point, the young man was frustrated. Deep inside, he must have realised that he had *not* kept the commandments perfectly. This is exactly why he had come to Jesus: his conscience was bothering him. He surely realised that he *had* broken God’s laws: and therefore, he was looking for some extraordinary deed that he could do to “make up” for all the laws he had broken. Yet, Jesus wouldn’t give him any such deed to do. Instead, He simply threw the Law, with all its lofty, impossible requirements, right back in his lap.

Hardly knowing how to respond to this, the young man said, “**Which?** Which ones must I keep, Master?” Apparently, he was hoping that Jesus would tell him that as long as he didn’t break “the big ones,” he would be all right. But again, Jesus wouldn’t give him the answer he

wanted. Instead, Jesus simply began to name the commandments: ***“Thou shalt do no murder, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness,”*** and ***“Honour thy father and thy mother.”*** Jesus then summed up all these laws by quoting from **Leviticus 19:18: *“Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.”*** That law alone condemns us all! Who has *always* loved his neighbour as himself? I know *I* haven’t: and if this young man had any operating conscience at all, then he surely realised that *he* hadn’t always loved his neighbour, either. You see, Jesus was using **the Law** in order to awaken this man’s conscience. His pride had to be broken. Jesus was using the Law in order to convict him of the fact that he was a sinner in need of repentance. This is what the Law does. The Law shines the “spotlight” of God’s perfect holiness down on us, and exposes our ugly sin, and declares us all to be “guilty.” The Law shows us that we have fallen short of God’s glory—and that we therefore need a Saviour, whose name is Jesus Christ! *He is* our Righteousness!

Read Romans 3:9-24.

As we read this account of the rich young ruler, I am reminded of a conversation that I had this past week with a young man, while my son and I were in the waiting room at the A&E. During the conversation, the young man told me, “I’ve never been tempted with wrong or blasphemous thoughts.” I said, *“Really?”*; and he confidently said, “Yes.” He *actually* thought that he was “good,” and that he hadn’t done or thought anything truly bad. So it was with this rich young ruler. Even after Jesus had thrown all these heavy laws back at him, he still stubbornly dug in his heels, and insisted, ***“All these things have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet?”*** He was blinded by his own self-righteousness. He didn’t stop to think that perhaps he had murdered people in his *heart* (though not outwardly). He didn’t stop to think that he had committed adultery in his *heart* (though not outwardly). He didn’t stop to think that he *had* told “little white lies,” and that he *hadn’t* always honoured his father and mother. He refused to see or acknowledge that he was a dirty, rotten sinner, just like everyone else. Yet, Jesus didn’t argue with him. He didn’t say, “No, you’re wrong: you *have* broken this law, or that law.” No, He simply put His finger right on the one, big, outstanding sin in his life—the sin of covetousness. **(Read Matthew 19:21 again.)**

It was at *this* point that this young man’s self-confidence began to crumble. It was at this point that he began to realise that he *had* broken at least one of God’s commandments—the tenth one (***“Thou shalt not covet”***). He knew that he had been guilty of loving his possessions; and he was grieved at the realisation that he was in trouble with God. He now knew that he had a decision to make—whether to confess his sin, and come to Christ for eternal life; or to keep on clinging to his sin and his love of the world, and continue under God’s condemnation. He *could* have made the right choice: and Jesus was ready to help him through the “needle’s eye” of salvation. In **Mark 10**, Mark tells us that Jesus, ***“beholding him loved him.”*** Jesus didn’t want this man to go to hell: He wanted to *save* him. However, Christ doesn’t *make* anyone

receive Him; and, tragically, this man chose to walk away from Christ...and from eternal life. As far as we know, he never believed on Jesus, and received Him into his life.

Now, how did the disciples react to all this? Let's read **verses 23-26** again, and see; and then we will compare it to the parallel passage in **Mark 10**. (Read **Matthew 19:23-26**.)

Read Mark 10:23-27.

In **Matthew**, **Mark**, and **Luke**, all three writers record Jesus' words, "***How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God!***" However, here in **Mark**, Mark includes one little clause that **Matthew** and **Luke** didn't. Jesus' *full* statement was, "***How hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God!***" That phrase "***for them that trust in riches***" is extremely important. You see, the thing that keeps many people from getting saved is not the fact that they *have* riches; it is the fact that they *trust* in riches. Salvation always comes down to the question "***In what are you trusting?***" Many people go through life trusting in their hard work and self-reliance. Many trust in false religious systems. Many trust in their physical strength, or in their education and skills, or in their friends and family, or in the "escape hatch" of drugs and alcohol, or in "science" (falsely so called). Still others trust in money and material possessions. Love of money keeps *many* people from coming to Christ for salvation; and this was the trouble with the rich young ruler.

Read 1 Timothy 6:1-10.

The rich young ruler *thought* that he had kept all the Law. However, Jesus knew that he needed to pinpoint only one particular sin in order to show him that he had *not* kept the Law: and that was the sin of covetousness. The thing that barred the rich young ruler from salvation was not that he *had* riches, but rather that he *loved* riches, and was not willing to *stop trusting in his riches*, and trust instead in Christ.

By the way, you'll notice that even the disciples were deeply affected by what Jesus said. In astonishment (and, apparently, with fear), they said, "***Who then can be saved?***" Even they were feeling the sting of conviction. In fact, it seems that they were having a moment of doubt about their *own* salvation. They knew that even though they were poor men, they, too, had the sinful tendency to rely on their *possessions*, rather than on the Lord. It's as though they were asking, "*We are saved....right, Lord? We know that we've been guilty of falling back on our money, and not trusting you to meet our needs; but we did come to you with childlike faith, just as you said. You *do* still accept us, right?*" They realised, based on what Jesus had just said, that salvation is *impossible* for *anyone* (whether they be rich or poor).

However, Jesus was ready with words of reassurance. Jesus assured them that what is impossible with men is possible with God. Yes, it *is* impossible for sinful people like us to be saved—just as impossible as it is for a camel to go through the eye of a needle! First of all, a holy God cannot accept us in our sin—which means that we are *all* barred from God’s presence in Heaven. Secondly, we, in the blindness of our hearts, don’t even have the *desire* to humble ourselves, repent of our sin, and come to Him. However, God has a remedy to both these problems. Through His death on the cross for our sins, He has paid sin’s penalty *for us*, and has purchased our salvation in full. This means that if we will simply receive this free gift by faith, God will “justify” us (declare us righteous), and give us eternal life! As for the second problem, God has a solution to that, too. Through the Word of God, the Holy Spirit opens our spiritual eyes; shows us our sin problem; convicts us of our sin; and woos and draws us to Christ. He will actually *help* you to repent and believe, if you will only let Him! If you will respond to the Spirit’s call, and come to Christ, He *will* save you, for time and eternity!

Conclusion: Have *you* received God’s gift of salvation? If not, I urge you to do so today! The gate of salvation is impossibly narrow for you to enter, **if** you are trying to get through it by your *own* righteousness; but if you will place your trust in *Christ*, and in *His* righteousness, *He* will get you through that needle’s eye! *You* are not worthy of Heaven; but *Christ is*. When you trust in His saving blood, you are placed in *Him*; and He will get you through the pearly gates. Believe on Him and be saved today!

Should you be saved already, I would ask, “Are you doing all in your power to clear the way for children (perhaps even your own children) to come to Christ?” Don’t think they can’t be saved. On the contrary, children are the *most likely* to be saved, because they are not nearly as loaded down with phony intellectual pride. Suffer them to come to Jesus! Talk with them about Jesus constantly, and encourage them to come to Him in simple faith and repentance. As for those children who *are* already saved, do all you can to encourage them to serve the Lord Jesus with all their heart, soul, and mind.

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Corrie_ten_Boom

² *Ibid.*

³ Corrie Ten Boom, *In My Father’s House* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1976), p. 24.

⁴ *Ibid.*