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Children, Rich Young Ruler (Part 1)



The Life and Teachings of Christ - Steve Gregg

Steve Gregg discusses Jesus' interaction with children and the rich young ruler in Matthew 19. Gregg explains that Jesus rebuked his disciples for preventing the children from coming to him and used the opportunity to teach them about the kingdom of God. He also discusses the difficult question about the salvation of infants who die before they have the opportunity to choose belief in Christ. Gregg explains the rich young ruler's interaction with Jesus and the underlying message about recognizing Jesus as God.

Transcript

Let's turn now to Matthew chapter 19. There are two stories that we need to look at today in this material. We're going to start at verse 13, so we're at Matthew 19, 13, and study the rest of the chapter from this point.

Matthew 19, 13 says, Then little children were brought to him, that he might put his hands on them and pray. But his disciples rebuked them. But Jesus said, Let the little children come to me, and do not forbid them, for of such is the kingdom of heaven.

And he laid his hands on them and departed from there. This is one of the more familiar stories about Jesus, although it's extremely brief, and in some respects, unclear. It's not clear exactly why the disciples were wishing to turn people away from bringing their children.

It's not even clear exactly what Jesus was being asked to do for these children. It says, People brought their little children to him, that he might put his hands on them and pray. I don't know if this is a generic prayer, if these children, any of them, were sick and needed healing, or what.

Now, in Mark's parallel to it, in Mark 10, 16, when it describes what Jesus did to them, it says, He laid his hands on them and blessed them. So, here we have Jesus laying his hands on these children and blessing them. But again, blessing is kind of a generic term.

Whenever you do something kind for someone, there's a sense in which you have blessed them. Although, it seems possible that what they were bringing the children to

Jesus for was that he might bless them in the manner of the patriarchs of the Old Testament. You may recall that Jacob on his deathbed, and even Isaac before him, brought his sons before him and blessed them.

He laid hands on them. And the laying on of hands was part of the patriarchal means of blessing. Now, that blessing which, for instance, Isaac uttered over Jacob and Esau, or the blessings that Jacob uttered over his sons, really what they amounted to was prophecies.

And it's not at all clear whether the prophetic words that were spoken by these dying patriarchs over their sons were intended to be descriptive or prescriptive of their future. What I mean by that is, it's not clear when Jacob said that the scepter will come from Judah, for example, or that Levi would be scattered among his brethren, whether that was just a prophetic insight he had into the future, or if he was declaring that he willed it to be so, and therefore it would be. In other words, whether he's prescribing that this should be the case.

If that is the case, then it would suggest that the patriarch was given power by God to define the later destinies of his sons, and to determine them by decree at his death. Now, part of what was done with patriarchal blessings was a decree. It was a bestowal, for example, of birthright.

We know that the blessing that Jacob received from his father Isaac was the conferring of the birthright. And that was, while of course we could say the father was obligated to do what God wanted him to do, nonetheless, the actual wording was that this son was going to get the birthright, it was the will of the father that it be so, and of course if the father bestowed it, it was bestowed. Which is why Jacob wanted to deceive his father, and pretend to be Isaac, because he knew that his father wanted to give the birthright to Isaac.

And apparently had he given it to Isaac, it would have been his, even though God didn't want it that way. The father apparently had the right to legally describe who was going to get the birthright, and once the father had done so, that blessing conferred upon him. In other words, that part of the blessing of the Old Testament patriarchs was prescriptive, not just descriptive, that it actually prescribed a certain thing to be so.

Whether all the things in the blessing were the same or not, I don't know. When Isaac predicted over Jacob that his brother would bow to him, that his brother would serve him, and so forth, whether this was just a prophecy, or whether he was basically calling the shots, and saying this is how it's going to be, and because I say so, it's got to be that way. Not clear, not clear at all.

But when you read these prophetic blessings, they at least are prophetic, they do talk about the future. And I'm not sure, but that might be the sense in which the word is used

here. When it says Jesus laid his hands on the children and blessed them.

I mean, did he say bless you? In which case, what does that mean? What is a blessing? Make them feel good for a second? Give them a charge, give them goosebumps or something? I mean, what is a blessing? Well, in the context of the Old Testament, at least, it was something more like a prophecy, a prophetic blessing. Which kind of is an interesting thing to consider, that Jesus may have prophesied over these children, might have even, if these kinds of blessings were prescriptive and not just descriptive of the future, he may have even determined the destinies of some of these children by what he said, but no specifics are told of what he did say. It says, of course, that the parents brought the children to Jesus so that he might lay his hand on them and pray for them.

But what he ended up doing was lay his hand on them and bless them, whether that's what they had in mind or not, I don't know. That's why I say there's some things unclear about the passage. There are few passages, however, that have been remembered with more sentimental appeal than this story of Jesus blessing the children.

There are not, in fact, very many times in the Gospels that Jesus interacted with little children. That doesn't mean that he rarely interacted with them in his life, it's just that the record doesn't tell of many cases. We have a case, another case elsewhere, where Jesus sat a little child on his lap, as he sat in Peter's house, probably one of Peter's own children, and used the child as an object lesson for his disciples of how they needed to be humbled to enter the kingdom of God.

And he makes pretty much the same point here when he speaks to his disciples. But anyway, this is one of the few occasions we see Jesus having any contact with children in his ministry. And it says in verse 13, Then little children were brought to him that he might put his hands on them and pray.

But the disciples rebuked them. Apparently he didn't rebuke the children. The reason I say they didn't rebuke the children but the parents is because Luke tells us in Luke 18, 15, the parallel, that these were infants.

It says they brought infants to him. The word child can refer to a wide range of ages, but Luke is more specific. These were little infants.

The word infant in the Greek refers to a child prior to the age of being able to speak. It actually comes from a Greek word that means an inability to speak. And so these were children too young to speak, little infants.

And the disciples therefore would not have rebuked the infants, but would have rebuked the parents. Now, Matthew only tells us what Jesus said. However, Mark tells us in his parallel in Mark 10, 14, when Jesus saw it, he was greatly displeased and said, Let the children come to me.

Do not forbid them. So we're not told of Jesus' displeasure in so many words here in Matthew's version. Mark spells it out.

It's also Mark who tells us on another occasion that Jesus looked on the Pharisees in the synagogue with anger. The same story is found in other Gospels, but without mentioning the anger of Jesus. Now, Mark's Gospel, of course, was Mark's rendering of Peter's preaching.

And Peter was quite close to Jesus. And we may deduce from the fact that Mark sometimes adds these notes of the personal emotion that was in Jesus, that Peter was close enough to Jesus to observe these things memorably, enough so that they came out in his preaching for Mark to make reference to. Peter must have remembered that on this occasion, when probably Peter and the others were rebuking the parents for bringing the children to Jesus, Jesus was greatly displeased.

That's how Mark puts it in Mark 10, 14. Jesus, when Jesus saw this, he was greatly displeased and he rebuked the disciples. Excuse me.

Now, being pleasing to the Lord, no doubt, was one of the things most important to the disciples. And I would suggest it's probably the thing most important to all disciples ever since. There are few things in the Christian's life where perfection can be expected immediately upon conversion, as much as this point.

What I'm saying is that when a person becomes a Christian, you don't expect him to immediately be perfect in every virtue. Perfect in patience, perfect in attitude, perfect in love or even in behavior. I mean, there are flaws that have to be overcome, habits to break.

But one area where I think there is an immediate change and a high degree of perfection in it at conversion is the reorientation of the life, is what repentance means. You've changed the orientation of your thinking. You've changed your mind.

And the principle change is simply this, that before, you wanted to please yourself. Now that you've changed, you want to please the Lord. And while Christians often fall short of pleasing the Lord, I take it as part of the essential definition of a Christian, that they want to please the Lord.

Paul in Romans 7 talks about how I do the things I hate. He says, if I'm doing things I hate, it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells in me. He says, the fact that I hate these things shows that my heart really does want to please the Lord.

The fact that I don't do the right thing shows that I'm weak and imperfect in my performance, but my performance is not what I judge by. I judge by what my heart wants. Do I want to please the Lord? Is that really what I want? If so, then when I do wrong things, I hate it.

And the fact that I hate it proves what I really want to do. Not what I did, but something else, something better, something more pleasing to God. And so the disciples probably were a bit cut to the heart to see Jesus' clear displeasure with their behavior.

It's probable that the disciples had acted themselves in good intentions. They probably wanted to preserve Jesus' privacy to a certain extent. Perhaps they felt like they had to be like his personal secretaries and help prioritize his contacts and his appointments, and little children just didn't have much to offer to the movement.

I mean, after all, they couldn't join the army against the Romans, and they couldn't contribute financially to the kingdom and so forth. I mean, the disciples didn't know what the kingdom was all about anyway. That's why Jesus had to correct them on this very point.

These children couldn't do anything for the kingdom of God that Jesus and his disciples were promoting, they thought. Therefore, they, no doubt, based on this assumption, felt they should herd the children away, and those who had no greater purpose in coming to Jesus than wanting him to pray for their little children, so that Jesus could deal with more important people who could make some kind of a contribution, who could be important supporters in the future. And Jesus has to correct them about that.

He says, let the little children come to me, and do not forbid them for of such, meaning of this kind of person, these little children, these infants, of such is the kingdom of heaven. Now, here's a very good example, and there are many in the Bible, where we can see that the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God are synonymous terms, not different. Both Mark and Luke record this statement also in this context, but both of them have Jesus saying, for of such is the kingdom of God.

In Mark 10.14 and Luke 18.16, it has the parallel statements. Where Matthew has kingdom of heaven, Mark and Luke have kingdom of God. And the reason they do so, of course, is because they always use that term instead of kingdom of heaven.

Kingdom of heaven is only found in Matthew. It's Matthew's own way of rendering what Jesus said. But, one thing I find important about this statement of Jesus, is it gives us probably better than most passages that we could hope for, some inkling as to what is the state of little children, perhaps who die.

There's always been a concern, especially on the part of parents, but even on the part of others, just out of curiosity, what happens to an infant who dies. Is that infant saved, or is he lost? Now, on the one hand, we're told that, by some at least, that children are born guilty of Adam's sin. That from the moment of birth, they were born condemned.

Because Adam sinned, and we sinned in Adam, therefore, whatever punishment belongs to Adam, belongs to us from the moment we're conceived, I suppose. Such people would

believe, it would appear, that even an unborn child aborted would go to hell. Because, from the point of conception, that person has the nature of Adam, and Adam's sin imputed to them, and therefore, they're lost.

Now, this view, of course, has gone against the sensitivities of a great number of Christian people, and non-Christian people too. The idea that an infant, or an unborn child, when killed unjustly, or through no fault of its own, would go to hell, has been a very serious problem to the sensitivities of the people. And so, there's a number of ways that some have tried to explain it a little more tolerably.

There are the Calvinists, for example, who believe, at least some of them do, I think they differ on this. Some Calvinists believe that the fact that an infant dies proves that that infant was not one of the elect. Because, had they been of the elect, God would have sovereignly allowed them to live long enough to get saved.

In Calvinism, the fact that somebody in their lifetime never gets saved just shows that they were never of the elect. The elect are irresistibly drawn. The elect are guaranteed to get saved.

And therefore, to a Calvinist, the fact that God sovereignly allowed a child to die, rather than allowing the child to grow up to become a Christian, is not any different in principle than God letting them grow up and die a non-Christian. They were not elect. Had they not died in infancy, they would have gone to hell anyway.

And it doesn't make any difference whether they go as infants or as old men or old women. They're going to go to hell anyway, and that's what it's all about. They're not elect.

And if they died, that's proof that they weren't elect. I know Calvinists who believe that this is the soundest way to describe this phenomenon in terms of their theology. Other Calvinists have taken a slightly different approach.

Their approach has been, well, if an infant dies, that infant either was elect or was not elect. If they were elect, then presumably, had they not died, they would certainly have gotten saved. God knowing that they were elect, he lets them go to heaven if they die in infancy, even though they did not have opportunity to demonstrate their election by being converted later.

But God also knows that they weren't elect. An infant that dies was either elect or not, and therefore, if an infant died and was not elect, it goes to hell. But that's not any great injustice with God, they would say, because had the infant lived its entire lifetime, it would have still ended up in hell because it was not elect and would have gotten saved.

So they would say God, based on his election or non-election, either - there's two ways that Calvinists take this. One is God just sends an infant who dies to his fate, either

heaven or hell, based on their prior election, or else the fact that they've died and never got to become Christians, never had opportunity, proves that they weren't of the elect, or else God, having elected them, would have sovereignly kept them alive and brought them to himself and so forth. But since they never had that experience of conversion, they clearly were not of the elect.

These are the two Calvinist possibilities. Now, Arminians, which is what I would have to be classified as, I guess - I don't like labels like that, but as far as theologies go, I guess I'm pegged that way - believe various ways about this. Some Arminians believe that a child is born with the guilt of Adam's sin, and some do not.

I stand unconvinced of the proposition that children are born guilty of Adam's sin. I do believe that the Bible says that children are born with a propensity to sin. This we have gotten from Adam.

I believe that it is in the nature of the human race, ever since Adam's fall, to be inclined toward selfish gratification rather than toward humble obedience of God. In other words, to be inclined toward sin. And this sinful propensity is what I would call the sinful nature, and what I think most do.

But there are others, of course, even among Arminians, I think, who believe that in addition to being born inclined toward sin, you're born already guilty of sin. And I don't find that to be a clear teaching of Scripture at all, and I find it very difficult. What I find more a clear and frequent teaching of Scripture is that people are condemned because of their rejection of life.

You can take that from a number of places. Let me show you something that Jesus said in John chapter 3. In John chapter 3, verses 17 through 21, For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved. He who believes in him is not condemned, but he who does not believe is condemned already because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

And this is the condemnation, that light has come into the world, and men love darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light, and does not come to the light lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does the truth comes to the light, and his deeds may be clearly seen that they have been done in God.

Now, it says that Jesus came not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved. However, some are not saved. Some are condemned.

Some are already condemned. Why? Well, he says, because of this, because light came into the world and they loved the darkness rather than the light. What it sounds like is that it is their choice to reject life and to choose darkness.

That is their condemnation. Now, an infant who dies at infancy has never had an opportunity to make such a choice. Therefore, where do they stand? Well, they stand as persons, human beings, with a sinful propensity, but without having had an opportunity to make a choice as to whether they will exercise that propensity in rebellion against God or whether they will seek to follow whatever light God may give them.

And I personally believe from this and other passages, like Paul's statement in Romans 18, that the wrath of God is against those who suppress the truth in their unrighteousness. God's anger is not toward those who have never had an opportunity to know anything of truth, which infants are in that category, but those who have suppressed whatever truth they knew because they preferred something else, namely unrighteousness or sin. Now, this does not mean that everyone who has not heard the gospel is saved, in case you might want to leap to that invalid conclusion.

I do not believe that people are saved just because they haven't heard the gospel or anything like that. That's not my position. But, you see, people can die and go to hell without having heard the gospel, but not without having had any life.

Because even people who have never heard the gospel have had some life, at least most have. They have their conscience, they have the conviction of the Holy Spirit, it may be, even though they may have never heard the gospel, the Holy Spirit is universally present throughout the universe and can convict people of sin. They may not know the way of salvation, but they darn well know that some of the things they're doing are not right and not everyone chooses to avoid what's wrong.

And as soon as a person willingly does a wrong thing, that he knows to be wrong, that person has chosen to rebel against his conscience and against God and deserves to go to hell. The only person that could be truly said to have absolutely no life whatsoever would be an infant, and someone who dies an infant. Because you don't live very long before you start getting a feeling about what's right and what's wrong.

And it doesn't take very long into your life, probably well in, not much beyond, you know, one of your very first years, that you begin to willfully choose the wrong on certain occasions instead of the right. And that is a sin against life, that is a sin against knowledge. But an infant who has no knowledge, I personally think, the Bible doesn't pronounce any condemnation on him.

Now, I said the passage before us in Matthew 19 is significant because these were infants. Matthew doesn't tell us they were infants, but Luke does. And Jesus said, don't forbid these ones come to you because they belong to me.

They belong to the kingdom. The kingdom of God is made up of just this, just such as these. Now, it's, you know, it's strained in the extreme to try to say that Jesus meant the kingdom was made up only of people who are like infants but not of infants themselves.

If infants themselves are not in the kingdom, then how can being like them in any sense put you into the kingdom if they themselves don't qualify? It's obvious that Jesus is saying that people who want to come to the kingdom must be like these infants. But if being like them brings someone in the kingdom but they aren't in the kingdom, that doesn't make an awful lot of sense. To say of such, meaning of infants like these, of this kind of little children, of such is the kingdom.

It's to suggest that the kingdom is made up of just this kind of person. And it seems to me to strongly suggest that infants already have a place in the kingdom of God until, at least, they reach a point where they rebel against light. And they may do so at a very young age.

As soon as they know what's good and evil and turn against the good to the evil, then, of course, that's a different situation. They have chosen not to surrender to the king and they have chosen to be in the kingdom of darkness instead. But it looks to me like Jesus taught and the rest of scripture, I think, would imply that a newborn infant who knows nothing is given the benefit of the doubt, as it were.

That doesn't mean they don't have a sin nature. They do. But they can't help that.

They didn't ask for that. It's not until they ask for it, it's not until they determine that they choose to act upon their sinful impulses rather than holiness and the light they have, that I think condemnation applies according to what Jesus said in John 3 and what Paul said in Romans 1.18 and some other places. Now, in addition to this, there is evidence along these lines from Jesus' statement that children, infants, have guardian angels.

Now, the Bible indicates in Hebrews 1.14 that angels are ministering spirits sent to those who are the heirs of salvation. Hebrews 1.14. Hebrews 1.14 says that angels are ministering spirits sent to minister to those who are heirs of salvation. In the Old Testament, the Bible says the angel of the Lord encamps around about those who fear him and delivers them.

That's Psalm 34, something, 7 or 8 or something like that. And, therefore, the angels seem to be associated with saved persons. There is nothing in the Bible that suggests for a moment that an unsaved individual has a guardian angel or has the protection of angels or anything like that.

And yet, if you look one chapter earlier than the passage we're looking at, over in Matthew 18, notice what Jesus said in Matthew 18.10. He says, Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that in heaven their angels always see the face of my Father who is in heaven. It's a mysterious statement. There has been much conjecture as to what it means.

But I would say, for my money, it looks like he's saying that there are interceding angels assigned to children. They are their angels. These little ones have angels who intercede or behold the face of God on their behalf.

And if angels are sent to minister to those who are heirs of salvation, I personally think that this would suggest strongly that these little ones are, in fact, saved. At least until they have had a chance to exercise their rebellious nature against God, at which time they have made a choice to be other than saved. Now, this I realize is... I'll just tell you this.

This is different than the Christian training I was brought up with. I was raised a Calvinist and a Baptist. And to me it would have sounded like anathema heresy to suggest that a child was born saved, you know, and that they only became unsaved at some point later in life.

And I have to say that there's not a statement of Scripture that says it just that plainly. And my view could be wrong on this. But the data that I'm showing with you, along with some other considerations we don't have time to look at, have inclined me to the view that it is correct to talk about an age of accountability.

Before which time a child is covered, you know. God's winking. In times of ignorance, God winked, Paul said, about a different situation in Acts 17 on Mars Hill.

He said, in times of ignorance, God winked. But now, he commands everyone to repent. Now, in contrast to the times of ignorance.

In ignorant times, God doesn't command repentance, if the ignorance is absolute. But now, as soon as there's no more ignorance, when a person knows something, they're commanded to repent. So anyway, that's my thoughts on the matter.

Of course, this has been called the age of accountability. And I've often been asked where it is in the Bible that it talks about the age of accountability. And frankly, it doesn't.

So I just want you to know this. When we talk about the age of accountability, we're using an extra-biblical term. It's not found in the Bible.

It might not even be a biblical concept. I think it is, but there's dispute over that. There's dispute over that, and I want you to know that.

It's not something that all Christians at all agree about. It's just my interpretation. But it occurs to me that although a child is born sinful in nature, the child is not held as culpable of selfish and sinful acts until there is a certain awareness of moral issues that they reach.

And we've talked before about this issue, and I've even speculated. I've given a whole bunch of different possible theories about what the age of accountability is. I don't know what it is.

I don't pretend to know what it is. All I would say is that I think God knows what it is. And because I believe God knows what the age of accountability is, He can judge.

Righteous judgment. And what this means, of course, is we never have to worry about some innocent baby getting a raw deal from God. If babies are in fact innocent, God knows it, and God would never punish the innocent.

It's interesting that in the book of Jeremiah a couple of times, and Deuteronomy also, God refers to those who sacrifice their children, their infants to Molech, as being those who shed innocent blood. They've shed the blood of innocence. So, I mean, it's like the prophet is saying that these infants who've been sacrificed are innocent in the sight of God, though they certainly haven't become old enough to make a decision for or against Jehovah God.

They're babies. But He calls their blood innocent blood. Now, in all fairness, of course, the prophets could speak of shedding innocent blood even when you kill an adult, if that person has done no crime worthy of death.

I mean, if you just attack somebody on the street and kill them, you've shed innocent blood, relatively speaking. But the actual babies whose blood was shed and whom the prophet Jeremiah complains about are called the innocents. That is, the ones who are innocent.

And, I don't know, I personally think that the innocence of infants is taken for granted throughout the Scripture. Calvinism doesn't take it for granted. But I think it is strongly argued from a number of these considerations.

And Jesus' statement here, speaking about the infants that are brought to Him, He said, don't forbid them to come to Me because of such is the kingdom of heaven or of such is the kingdom of God, suggesting that these are citizens of the kingdom. These are those who belong to the kingdom, at least so far. Who knows what happened to those infants when they grew older, whether they joined with the infant church in Jerusalem later on or whether they rebelled like many of the Jews did against Christ.

We don't know. How many of these babies died in the Holocaust of 70 A.D. and how many of them escaped as converts to Christianity is, to me, an interesting and intriguing point, one that we can never answer. But the fact that Jesus laid hands on them, prayed for them, blessed them, I wonder if that guaranteed their salvation.

I wonder if His blessing upon them kind of put them in a position where they were almost destined, doomed, if you will, to be saved. Because it seems awfully hard to imagine

having Jesus lay hands on you and pronounce a blessing over you and have that not come true. I just wonder what kinds of things He may have said in blessing them.

Anyway, we have had our children blessed by godly men many times, and by the Lord, we hope. We've committed our children to the Lord, but also my wife has availed herself of every opportunity she could to get godly men to lay hands on... I remember when Benjamin was little, we were in Honolulu. I was teaching for the DTS there, and Lorne Cunningham was just flying through.

He just had to change planes in Honolulu. He was going to be there for an hour or less, or maybe two hours. The YWAM staff dragged him over to the base from the airport to speak a few words.

He had 15 minutes or something before he had to leave and catch a flight. Kristen was there, and when Lorne was... they were hustling him off to the car, Kristen intercepted him and said, "'Excuse me, Lorne, would you mind praying for my son, Aaron?' So he laid his hands on Benjamin and prayed briefly for him. And then later she did the same kind of thing with Jack Hayford once when we were speaking in church.

Whenever we can get a godly man to do that kind of thing, we always try, even if it inconveniences them." The disciples thought this would inconvenience Jesus, but Jesus said, "'Let them come, let them come. They belong to the kingdom too.'" By the way, Matthew leaves out a saying of Jesus that both Mark and Luke include at this point. In Matthew, in verse 14 here, where it says, "'For of such is the kingdom of heaven.'" The very next words of Jesus, according to Luke and Mark, were, "'Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it.'" If you want the references to that, I don't have them.

I just have Mark and Luke. Of course, it's in Luke 18 and Mark 10. I just don't know the verse numbers.

18, 16, and 17. Luke 18, 16, and 17. And Mark 10, 15, and all likelihood.

So, in addition to saying what Matthew records here, Jesus also went on to say, "'Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it.'" Now, what does that mean? You know, when I was younger, a lot younger, and I read this, when I was no longer a child, but I was also not very understanding of the Scriptures, probably in my mid-teens, I read this and it concerned me. I mean, I had received Christ as a child, but I knew a lot of people hadn't. I thought, boy, what if I hadn't become a Christian as a child? You know, if you don't receive the kingdom as a child, then you won't enter it at all.

I misunderstood the wording to be saying that you've got to get saved in childhood, or else there's no hope for you. You know, you have to do it as a child, you know, meaning

while you're a child. But of course, that's obvious probably to everyone here now, which wasn't obvious to me at the time, that that's not what it means.

It means like a child. It doesn't mean in childhood, but it means in childlikeness. As a child would mean that you have to resemble a child in some measure to enter the kingdom of God.

Now, he says if you don't receive the kingdom of God like or as a little child, you will by no means enter it. The only way in is through childhood or through childlikeness. Now, if you look at the previous chapter, chapter 18, very similar statement in chapter 18, the opening verses say, at that time the disciples came to Jesus saying, who then is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? Jesus called a little child to him and set him in the midst of them.

This was in Peter's house, probably Peter's child, as I said earlier. And said, Surely I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

And whoever receives one little child like this in my name receives me. So, Jesus said here also that you can't come into the kingdom of heaven except as a child. And here in Matthew 18, verse 3, it says you have to be converted.

The word converted means changed. You have to be changed and become like little children. And you have to be humble like a little child.

Now, we know, we as evangelicals are acquainted with the concept of being born again. What this just points out is that if a person is born again, just like when they're born the first time, they're a little child. You're a spiritual baby when you're born again.

Just like when you're born the first time, you're a baby. Being born again is a return to childhood. And it is appropriate to the state of childliness that one be humble, that one be teachable.

A child who pretends like he knows everything is offensive because everybody knows that he doesn't know as much as he thinks he does. But when a child humbly, well, there's all kinds of things about the humility of a child. A child realizes that he needs the mercy of his parents.

He can't do anything for himself. He can't support his own life. He can't make decisions for himself.

He hardly knows anything about the world. He has everything to learn. That's a state in which humility is appropriate.

And when a person becomes a Christian, they have to come to that place where they no longer trust in their own strength, their own virtue, their own good works, but they trust, as a child trusts in a parent, they trust fully in the mercy of God and the strength that God gives them to carry them as they need to be carried and to feed them and to provide for them all things necessary for life and godliness. And until someone is willing to humble himself and admit that he needs God to do that for him, of course, he's not childlike enough to really be in the kingdom. And so we're told in verse 15, Matthew 19, 15, Jesus laid his hands on them and departed from there.

And I mentioned earlier Mark 10, 16 adds, and he blessed them, laid his hands on them and blessed them. Okay, now we have another story, also fairly well known. We're in some pretty well known stuff here today in this passage.

At verse 16, Now behold, one came and said to him, Good teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life? And he said to him, Why do you call me good? No one is good but one, that is, God. But if you want to enter life, keep the commandments. He said to him, Which ones? Jesus said, You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not bear false witness.

Honor your father and your mother, and you shall love your neighbor as yourself. The young man said to him, All these things I have kept from my youth. What do I still lack? Jesus said to him, If you want to be perfect, go sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven.

And come, follow me. But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions. Okay, I'm turning, hang on here.

This is the story, of course, as we usually call it, of the rich young ruler. I was looking for the parallel over in Luke, to give you a verse number where it mentions that he was a young ruler. Verse 18, yeah.

Luke 18, 18 says, Now a certain ruler asked him, saying, I'm not sure why we call him the rich young ruler, I don't see it saying he was young there, but he was a certain ruler. And he was rich, we're told that, that's why he went away sorrowful, because he had great riches, he had great possessions. So we can at least call him the rich ruler.

Whether he was a rich young ruler or not, I don't know. Anyway, this man came running to Jesus. First of all, we better identify what kind of a ruler he was.

He's almost certainly a ruler of a synagogue, rather than the ruler of a country. Okay, yeah. Where does it say that? Oh yeah, thank you, thank you, very good.

You just got to look at all the different verses to get it all, okay. It doesn't say it anywhere, all in one place, but you got that right. Matthew 19, 22 does mention he was young.

So we can stick with the tradition. He's the rich young ruler, it's got biblical support. Thank you.

Now, by ruler, almost certainly what is meant is a ruler of the synagogue. I say that because in Israel, there were not rulers on the political level, except for the Sanhedrin, and they were called by something other than rulers. They were chief priests, they were counselors, members of the counselor.

But the term for the president of the synagogue was ruler, ruler of the synagogue. Now, it's almost certain this man was a Jew, since when Jesus said, keep the commandments, and he lifted them, the man said, I've done this all from my youth. The man clearly was a Jew.

He practiced the Jewish law. And so we could say he was a lesser official in Israel. He was not some mighty potentator thing.

He was a tin horn leader of a local synagogue somewhere. That didn't give him great political clout or anything like that, but he happened to be a rich man as well. I don't know that people became rich by being rulers in synagogues.

It might not have even been a paid position, and his riches might have been coincidental to his being a young ruler. But I guess the reason I point this out is because we usually think of a ruler as a king. And we think of all this living in a palace and luxury and so forth, where this guy was probably an ordinary citizen who happened to have a lot of money.

Happened to be a volunteer spokesperson in the synagogue on Sabbath. And he came running to Jesus, which suggests either that he only had a short lunch break, or else he was eager to know the answer to his question. I don't know why he came running, but all the accounts mention that he came running to Jesus.

I should say Mark and Luke mention he came running to Jesus. And he said, Good teacher, what good thing shall I do to have eternal life? The other Gospels both say to inherit eternal life, but there's hardly any difference. So there's only a point of interest.

Now, he was apparently breathless. As I said, he could have been just in a hurry because he had to do something else, but I doubt it. I imagine that his coming running to Jesus was a sign that he was concerned about his soul.

He was concerned about his soul, even though, as it turns out, he was quite sure he'd kept the Jewish law very well. Because when Jesus listed out the most important commandments that he had to be concerned about, the man said, Well, I've done all that. He didn't have to even bat an eye.

He didn't regard himself to be a great sinner. And yet he had no assurance of salvation.

He wasn't sure if he had done the thing necessary to have eternal life.

Now, what he had done was not commit adultery, not murder, not steal, honor his father and mother, but there was some good thing he felt must be necessary more than this to have eternal life. In this respect, the man was somewhat more spiritually enlightened, probably, than even most of the Pharisees and chief priests, who no doubt assumed that their rigorous observation of the law qualified them for eternal life without question. This man, in fact, was a very moral, God-fearing, religious leader.

Yet he had absolutely no assurance that he was good enough to be saved. And so he came begging Jesus to clarify this in a single word. What good thing? Just give it to me and I'll go do it.

Tell me what it is. Okay? Now, in all likelihood, Jesus knew instantly what the one thing was this guy was neglecting. Probably without any of the other ado that went on between them, Jesus could have just said, Well, here's the one thing you lack.

Go sell what you haven't given to the poor. But he didn't do that at first. He first wanted to underscore something to the man.

Namely, that the man saw himself as one keeping the law. And he said, Well, what you got to do to have life is keep the commandments. Now, I skipped over something I shouldn't.

Jesus' first statement was, Why do you call me good? The man had said, Good master. Now, it almost sounds like Jesus is rebuking him for calling him good. That doesn't seem to be something worthy of rebuke.

After all, Jesus himself called himself the good shepherd and so forth. What's wrong with calling him good master? Well, Jesus at first appears to be rebuking him. Why do you call me good? Some translations say, Why is it you ask me about what concerns good? Or something like that.

Why do you ask me about what is good? But that is, that's another manuscript actually that says that. I personally have favored the Texas Receptive so I'll live with what we have here before us. Why do you call me good? There's no one good but God.

Now, what is Jesus trying to say here? Let's take the Texas Receptive version first and then consider the Alexandrian case. The Texas Receptive has him saying, Why do you call me good? There's none good but God. There's only two ways that could be understood.

Either Jesus is saying, I'm not good or I'm God. Those are only two possibilities. If this is the correct reading of what Jesus said, then Jesus was either saying, I'm not good or I'm God.

Now, no matter what standard you use to measure goodness, Jesus was good. Whether you say he's a good teacher which means he's a skilled teacher, well, he was that. He was good in that respect.

Whether you say he was a moral man and didn't break the laws, well, he was good in that respect too. Even if you wanted to say goodness requires absolute perfection, well, Jesus had that too. He was good on those terms.

Besides which, Jesus used the very word good to speak of himself on other occasions. Therefore, Jesus could not be saying, I'm not good. And if we have the correct reading here in the New King James, which is a possibility, then Jesus was obviously saying, I'm God.

The reason for his making this statement would be, therefore, that the man had not recognized that Jesus was God and that the man was curious about goodness and so forth and thought Jesus was good. They had not put two and two together. If Jesus was as good as he appeared to be, then he was really God.

Now, one might think the man could be forgiven for not making that connection. There have been many good men in history who were not God. A lot of people around town were saying that Jesus was a good man.

In Jerusalem, we read of that in the Gospels of John. Some are saying he's a good man. Others said, no, he's deceiving the people.

Lots of people are perceived as good men. So, I mean, it seems not very fault-worthy or blame-worthy of this guy to recognize Jesus as good but still not put two and two together that Jesus was God. But Jesus may have wanted him to put that together and said, well, I want you to know there's no one really good but God.

So that goodness that you're speaking of, seeing in me, is really the proof to you that I'm God. Now, if the Alexandrian text is true, then it's a lot easier. Now, usually when you have to decide between two readings and two different texts, one of the rules that is often followed and rightly so is that the more difficult text is the more authentic.

And I'll tell you why. You might instinctively know why. If you've got two different readings, the more difficult reading is more likely to be the correct one.

Why would that be? Anyone know? Yeah, because if the simpler reading was the original one, it's hard to imagine why anyone would take that and make it more difficult. Whereas if the difficult reading was the original, it's not too hard to hear. Someone might try to make it more easy to understand and clarify it and produce the easier reading.

And therefore, textual critics usually say that the more difficult reading is the more accurate. I don't know whether they would say that in this case. In my opinion, the

textus receptus has the more difficult reading.

Because Jesus' words...