

Sunday A.M.
April 15, 2007

Jesus Loves the Little Children
A Synoptic Survey

The Synoptic Parallels

Matthew 19:13-15	Matthew 18:1-6
Mark 10:13-16	Mark 9:33-37
Luke 18:15-17	Luke 9:46-48

How to Read the Synoptic Gospels

- *We must read the Synoptic Gospels vertically:* each writer has arranged his *pericopes* (individual literary units, whether stories or sermons) in such a way as to convey a message. They are not necessarily a strict chronological timeline. Read the Gospels in their immediate context. Notice what precedes and follows each unit.
- *We must read the Synoptic Gospels horizontally:* each of the writers brings his own person into his writing. One writer might emphasize a certain detail over the other two. Read the gospels in comparison to the other Synoptic parallels. Take notice of the differences.

Let's follow these two rules here and establish a proper view of Jesus and children.

Luke 18:15-17

The place of children in 1st Century Jewish culture (male-hierarchical society) was just above that of a servant or a slave.

Jesus does not say that the kingdom of heaven belongs to children (compare with the language of Matt.5:3 – “theirs is the kingdom of heaven”)

Jesus is using the children as a prop to paint a picture – a real-life object lesson – for the nature of saving faith. (“to such” and “like a child”) Jesus is pressing the point that real childlikeness is necessary before one can enter the kingdom of heaven.

What is the essence of childlikeness?

Is it *innocence*?

Contrary to Luke 5:32 – Jesus came to call sinners, not righteous people.

Children are not innocent (Romans 5:12f)

Is it *humility*?

Contrary to reality – children are naturally self-centered.

Is it *trustworthiness*? (Gullible)

Jesus is not here extolling any virtue in children. There is not some subjective disposition that we need to find but, rather, an objective condition we need to see.

Interpretive clue #1 is found in v.15 (unique to Luke) with the use of the word “infants.” Babies are by nature helpless. That is the condition in which they enter the world. Everything must be done for them. They can do nothing of themselves. So we are speaking here of small children not school-aged children.

Interpretive clue #2 is found in the context – all of the synoptic accounts are followed by the story of the rich, young – shall we say self-sufficient – ruler. There’s the point. Salvation belongs to those who, like little children, are completely unable to contribute a thing to their spiritual existence. We are absolutely dependent.

Matthew 11:25-30

Matthew 18:1-6 → Mark 9:33-37 (what’s missing? No humbling) → Luke 9:46-48

The key phrase in these parallel accounts is about receiving children in his name. What are we to make of this? Go back to Matthew 18:1-14.

Let’s ask – who are Jesus’ “little ones”? Matt. 10:40-42 (context is the sending them out on their maiden voyage, cf. 10:1-5). “Little ones” = “disciples” / believers

Back to Mark 9:33-42

Luke 17:1-2

Jesus will reward the good treatment of his disciples and he will ferociously punish the ill-treatment.

“Little ones” is a term of endearment for Jesus’ disciples – those who have been rescued like helpless infants.