Matthew 19:13-15; Little Children, Welcome! I. The Context for this Invite II. The Nature of this Invite III. The Basis for this Invite

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, why are children so important to the family? Well, the family only has a future if children can carry on their name. Why are children so important to the church? Well, I would say that the children of believers are in many ways the future of the church. But why are children so important to Jesus? That is what we will see today. The fact is, our culture has a very low estimation of children today. Kids are seen as an inconvenience- something that stands in the way of my own personal happiness. Children cost a lot of money. Parents can expect to dish out around 20K per child per year on average- not counting Christian education. 20K a year per child according to INTUIT. The Sato family now has more diapers to buy to be sure! Added to that, if you have children your vacations you go on and the cars you drive will be significantly different. One of the reasons that people give for choosing to not have children today is that children would cramp my lifestyle- using up my disposable income. But having children is an act of faith in many ways! God’s people see children differently from the world because we desire to see children as God does! Children are a heritage and a gift- a reward from the LORD as Psalm 127. As such, we are to view them and raise them in the way that they should go. So today we consider Mt. 19 with this theme: Jesus Christ welcomes His little children into His presence.

**I. The Context for this Invite**

In our first point, we consider the context for this invitation that Jesus gives. Our text begins in v. 13 where these little children are being brought to Jesus. Now little kids here could include infants and toddlers, and the emphasis is on the parents that are bringing the little ones to Jesus. The parents were motivated by a godly desire- to bring their little ones to Jesus Christ. As you know, you cannot change the hearts of your children. You cannot make your children believe- that is not in your power. But you can bring your children to Jesus- you can place them on His knee if you will! Much of the work of parents is to teach and instruct- to lead and place your children in the context of faithful teaching and instruction. And we pray that the LORD would use these situations and opportunities to open hearts and renew minds. As these parents had a godly desire- they wanted a good thing! They wanted Jesus to bless them and pray for them! Normally placing your hands on the heads of your children would be an act of parental blessing. Laying your hands on the head of another is a sign of identification and acceptance. Many of the patriarchs placed their hands on their children’s head as they pronounced the covenantal blessings upon them. But the blessing of a parent on their child is nothing compared to blessing that Jesus can give our children! We may be able to pass on a little bit of earthly wisdom or riches- but Jesus is the one who can and does truly bless! He is able to open His arms and embrace them- making them sons and daughters of the living God! And it is Jesus who is invited to pray over these little ones. We do often pray for our children- I am sure that all of our parents often pray for their little ones. But Jesus intercedes for them at the Father’s right hand! Jesus is the one who secures and pours out blessings from on high- His grace and Spirit are granted to all those who ask! But as these parents come forward with their godly request, the disciples stand in the way. As v. 13 concludes, the disciples rebuked them. The disciples are acting like spiritual bouncers- only the powerful and important can have access to Jesus. These disciples hindered the children from coming forth. They frowned upon this imposition. Jesus was a very important and very busy man. So they scolded the parents- and tried to drive the sheep away from the Good Shepherd. Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem- the triumphal entry is right around the corner. The disciples believed that they knew best- Jesus’ time is better spent teaching and healing- not playing with children. As you know, children can make things complicated. From what you see of others- it is easy to be annoyed by little ones- from their crying on the plane- to the extra time it takes to go anywhere. They are an investment to be sure. But Jesus steps in right away- and He responds to His disciples with a gracious invite.

**II. The Nature of this Invite**

Now this invite comes in two parts. First the positive, let the little children come to me. Suffer the little children unto me. In other words, leave these parents alone. Allow them to come to me! I am giving full access to these children. And then the negative- hinder them not! Do not stand in the way of these children. Do not forbid them. Do not rebuke these parents. To not refuse them or deny their access. One thing we learn from the ministry of Jesus is that He is willing to associate with the lowly. He even delights to have dinner with tax collectors and prostitutes. No one is too low for Him to associate with. In fact, Jesus will warn us in Matthew 18 by saying, see to it that you do not despises one of these little ones. It is not the will of my Father in heaven that one of these little ones should perish. So if Jesus is so keen on welcoming and embracing these little ones, what should be the place of children in the church. In our world there are extremes to be sure. Some couples avoid children at all costs, while others idolize their children. But what about within the church? Should children be seen and not heard- or readily embraced? Well, if Jesus would welcome and embrace children, would we do any less? We want to and expect to see the children of believers here. Granted, nursery is a helpful aid to parents of really young children. But the fact remains that the church should be a place that is welcoming to children! That delights to see the next generation present and participating in worship! But we can take this principle and apply it to the welcoming aspect of the church as a whole. In other words, there is something that we can learn when it comes to evangelism as well. Not only should we avoid hindering people- we should actively invite and welcome people to come to Jesus! The church is not a social club reserved for a select few-where only the well-dressed and wealthy can come in- where you need to know the special handshake to be in the right crowd. Rather the doors are wide open- and we want everyone to come! So we could say- bring your children here- but also bring your neighbors! Let the little lost sheep come to me! There is still more room at the table- empty seats that can be filled! Not only filled with our children, but filled by any who are lost! The warm, inviting nature of Jesus cannot be missed here!

**III. The Basis for this Invite**

Now why would Jesus invite children to come unto Him? Why this reprimand of His disciples for standing in the way? Well, the basis for this invite is found at the end of v. 14. Let the children come to me for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven. Now what does Jesus mean when He says that these little ones are the heirs of the kingdom of heaven. There are two main ways in which this verse is applied. First of all, the identity of these children is that covenant offspring. These are the children of believers. These are not the children of the rebellious but rather the children of those who have heard to voice of Jesus and believe that Jesus can and will bless them and their children. Just as the covenantal blessing is passed on from parent to child by way of the hand placed upon their heads, Jesus is linking these little ones to the kingdom of heaven. We know that the children of believers are holy- as I Cor. 7 clarifies. We also know that God is seeking godly offspring from a Christian marriage as Malachi 2 puts it. So there is a clear thread in Scripture that links children of believers to the covenant. As we have witnessed today, not only has the Sato family received a daughter but our church has also received another member by way of baptism. So we rejoice in the blessing of seeing Jesus embrace our little ones as well. But there is another aspect to this invite. In Matthew 18 and 19 Jesus has been uses little ones as a metaphor for needy and weak of humanity. So in Mt. 18:2, Jesus says that we need to turn and become like a child. Only then will we enter the kingdom of heaven. So we must be like a child- or have a child like faith. We all- not just our children- but all humanity must turn from their sins in humanity and embrace Jesus with a heart of faith! Depending on Him and looking to Him completely- as a child looks to their parents for every need. The fact is, we are all dependents here when it comes to our spiritual need. We all need to be placed on Jesus’ knee- we all need Him to bless us and pray for us! The reality is this- we like children cannot take care of ourselves. We cannot save ourselves- we cannot even muster up the energy to climb up on Jesus’ knee! But praise God, He looks down on the lowly! He resists the proud but gives grace to the lowly- pouring out His blessing and praying for us in our need!

To conclude; Jesus was known for His association with the lowly and humble. As He said in Matthew 11, come to me all you who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest! For I am gentle and lowly in heart! Jesus Christ welcomes His little children into His presence. He takes up the little lambs on His shoulders and brings them home! He takes up little children on His knees and blesses them! Praise God for our compassionate savior- that He would look on our lowly estate! That He would embrace us and call us His own!