

Luke 8/19-21: JESUS' MOTHER AND BROTHERS

[This text will be a difficult/insufficient basis for a preach for most of us. We are thus using its reference to Jesus and his family (his attitude toward them), and by implication to Jesus and *our* family, as a basis for a topical preach on Jesus and children (with a view to the Uptown Conference today) and/or Jesus and family.]

I: JESUS AND CHILDREN

Some texts...

Jesus was a child (2/40-52) and understands them (He 2/11-18 – can relate to children just as much as to adults)

Many of his miracles involved children (e.g. widow's son raised, father's son delivered)

He used what children gave him to perform wonders and glorify God (the boy's two fish and five loaves)

When his disciples were arguing about which of them would be the greatest, "Jesus took a little child and made him stand beside him. Then he said to them, 'Whoever welcomes this little child in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. For he who is least among you all – he is the greatest.'" (9/46-48) Jesus is encouraging us to be 'least' – to be the humble servant of all – for that (in the kingdom) is how to be greatest. But in (implicitly) likening this attitude to that of the child alongside him, he gives dignity and worth to children – indeed, holds them up as a model for us. Further, children were not even acknowledged in that culture, let alone welcomed. By instructing us to welcome them he further underlined their worth (and the humility we need to be willing to do so), and to indicate that they could be welcomed in his name even more so! And they are never too young to have this worth: twice we read this was a "little child".

In another famous incident, Jesus was happily 'touching' (blessing?) babies (even younger!) being brought to him. When the disciples rebuked those bringing them, "Jesus called the children to him and said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it." (18/15-17) The disciples rebuked the people because in their eyes children did not have the status to justify troubling their master with. But again Jesus gives children acceptance and worth by not just being willing to be amongst them but calling them to him and touching them. And again he even holds them up as a model for us: the kingdom of God belongs to "such as these" (i.e. not necessarily those specific children but people, child or adult, like them) because we can only enter it by having the humility, dependence, trust and simple faith of a child.

Jesus accepted children's excited worship of him ("the children shouting in the temple area, 'Hosanna to the Son of David'") and answered the Pharisees complaint with: God's ordains infants' praise. (Mw 21/15f)

Some thoughts...

- As human beings and as individuals, children have the same dignity and worth to God as adults
- Children have an advantage over adults: aspects of their childlikeness make it easier for them to enter the Kingdom (we have to become like them to enter the kingdom and be like them to be 'great' in the kingdom)
- Jesus fully understands and is able to relate to children
- Jesus loves children; he welcomes them and loves to be with them
- Jesus works miracles (serves and glorifies the Father) both for children and through children
- Jesus loves to receive excited worship from children

Over half of our society (and the world's population) is below the age of 20

- Statistics show that well over half of those who are Christians get saved before the age of 18
- We know that infants/children/adolescents are able to absorb much more information/transformation than adults

It is thus both biblical *and* strategic to minister to children – in evangelism and discipleship

Nothing less than our best quantity and quality in this ministry will adequately reflect the heart of Jesus

II: JESUS AND FAMILY

Some texts...

Jesus referenced family several times in the Gospels – and his references seem to fall into two clear groups:

[A] Jesus endorses 5th commandment (honour yr parents) & rebukes Pharisees for nullifying it (Mw 15/3-6)

"Dear woman, here is your son...Here is your mother" (Jn 19/26f) – endorses loving care for parents

[B] "Why were you searching for me?" he asked. 'Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?'"

"Dear woman, why do you involve me...My time has not yet come." (Jn 2/4)
(Lk 2/49) "they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him"

(Mk 1/18)

"And everyone who has left houses [or wife] or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life."

(Mw 19/29 || Mk 10/29, Lk 18/29)

“For I have come to turn a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law...a man’s enemies will be the members of his own household” (Mw 10/35f; cf. Lk 12/52f: “one family divided against each other”).

“Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.” (Mw 10/37) “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters, he cannot be my disciple.” (Lk 14/26)

“Who is my mother and who are my brothers?” Pointing to his disciples, he said, ‘Here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.’” (Mw 12/48ff || Mk 3/33ff; cf. Lk 8/21: “My mother and brothers are those who hear God’s Word and put it into practice” – such are the ones I am most closely related, to in heart/nature/DNA; cf. Jesus’ 2 families: v1ff, v19f)

“A woman in the crowd called out, ‘Blessed is the mother who gave you birth and nursed you.’ He replied, ‘Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it.’” (Lk 11/27f)

“He said to another man, ‘Follow me.’ But the man replied, ‘Lord, first let me go and bury my father.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God.’” (Lk 9/59f)

“Still another said, ‘I will follow you, Lord, but first let me go back and say goodbye to my family.’ Jesus replied, ‘No-one who puts his hand to the plough and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God

(v62f)

Some thoughts...

On the one hand we have [A] texts that affirm the natural and biblical commitments to family: that God places the lonely in families (Ps 68/6); that we are to honour our parents (Ex 20/12 cf. 21/7); that he who finds a wife finds what is good (Ge 2/18, Pr 5/18f, 18/22); that children are a blessing from the Lord (Ps 127/3ff, 128/3f). On the other hand (and in the Gospels, which have to do with following Jesus, these predominate: 10 to 2 – 5x), we have texts [B] which clearly qualify/relativize our commitment to family: if we want to follow Jesus, he is to be our first love, our first loyalty, our first priority; and his people (our spiritual family) our first family.

We need to have a complete and balanced biblical picture on family. [If we are preaching on this, we need to sound the biblical challenge to wrong attitudes to family on either side without unnecessarily alienating anyone: uphold the truth-in-tension; you don’t need to overstate the point to make the point; it’s both-and not either-or.] Certainly there are some Christians who neglect their parents/family in the name of spirituality, contrary to biblical injunction. But there are also many Christians who take on an attachment/attitude to family (and especially children) from their culture which borders on the idolatrous: they won’t do X or leave Y or go to Z because of their natural and/or (supposedly) spiritual understanding of family – against Scripture’s basic expectations of believers and/or the possible individual call of God on their life. The Bible does emphasize the importance and blessing of family and our

responsibility to them. But the Bible (and the Gospels in particular) subordinate the place and claim of family relative to Jesus and following and serving him. At the very least, Jesus is telling us that family can only be our second love/loyalty/priority/family, that we may be called to leave them, and that their claims must never override or interfere with those of serving the King and his kingdom.

Working this out in everyday life may require some skill and diligence – hearing God about *his* priorities, planning the diary carefully, being disciplined in adhering to that (with some flexibility). But it *is* possible: both the blessing *and* the kingdom are God's. He does not bless us with anything that will hinder his kingdom. So family/children need not (should not) ever conflict with serving the king and kingdom. If we will serve him *as* a family, involving the whole family in what we do for him, then we are less likely to feel torn between the 2