

Hermeneutics of Luke 18:16-17 in the Course of the Gaza Crisis

Amirali R. Davoudpour

Iranian Canon of Medicine and Law, Administrative Wing of Law and Healing Association, Iranian Watchdog of Medicine and Law, Tehran-Iran

Email of the corresponding author: davoudpour@canmedlaw.org

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Abstract

Luke 18:16-17 contributes to a great teaching of Jesus with regards to the general acceptance of the children in the so-called kingdom of God. In these narratives from Jesus the terms of religion and ethnicity do not play a role or leave a place for the judgment of the children. In the course of the Gaza crisis so far more than 40,000 (October, 2023-August, 2024) civilians are reported to be killed and among them, around 70 percent are children or women. To understand the hermeneutics of these casualties in one of the worst massacres against children in history, we acknowledge that the kingdom of God in Luke 18:16-17 shall play a role in a Christian or religious approach towards this crisis and separate the truth from falsehood in the background.

Keywords: Gaza, Luke 18:6-17, Children, Bible

Introduction

Luke 18:16-17 contributes to a profound teaching of Jesus regarding the universal acceptance of children in the Kingdom of God. In these verses, Jesus emphasizes the importance of children, symbolizing their innocence, humility, and vulnerability. He instructs His followers to "let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these" (Luke 18:16, NIV). Jesus' teaching is clear—no distinctions based on religion, ethnicity, or social status should prevent children from being received into God's embrace. In this context, Jesus' message is devoid of judgment and exclusion, demonstrating that God's Kingdom transcends human boundaries and limitations (Green, 1997; Bock, 1994).

This teaching becomes especially relevant in light of the ongoing Gaza crisis, where over 40,000 civilian casualties have been reported, with approximately 70 percent being women and children. Such numbers highlight the devastating impact of this conflict on the most vulnerable members of society—those who, according to Jesus, are to be cherished and protected as recipients of God's Kingdom. The loss of innocent lives in one of the worst massacres against children in modern history raises ethical and theological questions that call for a Christian response grounded in the hermeneutics of Luke 18:16-17.

Through this lens, the casualties of the Gaza conflict can be understood as a tragedy that not only defies moral principles but also contradicts the teachings of Jesus. His call for the acceptance of children and their protection as part of the Kingdom of God demands a response that upholds justice, compassion, and truth. Christians are therefore called to separate the truth from falsehood in this crisis by recognizing the inherent worth and dignity of each child affected by the conflict. The hermeneutics of Luke 18:16-17 challenge believers to advocate for peace and to stand against violence, particularly when it is directed at the innocent and vulnerable (Marshall, 1978; Morris, 1988).

In conclusion, Jesus' words in Luke 18:16-17 provide a foundation for understanding the immense moral weight of civilian casualties, particularly children, in the Gaza conflict. His teaching compels Christians to reject violence and to work towards a world where the innocent, regardless of their ethnicity or religion, are protected and welcomed into the peace of God's Kingdom.

Munter Issac¹ the lead Christina pastor in Gaza describes such devastating war on Gaza as an annihilation and prays for the mercy of The Lord.² He states “ *History books will record that the US Congress hosted a war criminal (Netanyahu) and gave him and outrageous number of standing ovations.*”³

We previously tried to acknowledge the relatedness of the conflict to the Islamic hermeneutics separately using the interconnectedness of the events in the hypothesis of so called Matrix (Davoudpour, A.R., 2024b)

Context and Literary Setting

The context of Luke 18 not only highlights Jesus’ teachings on humility, self-righteousness, and the nature of faith but also the acceptance of children in the kingdom of God. Those teaching not only emphasizes of the faith as recorded in most literary articles, but also on the children. Earlier in the chapter, Jesus contrasts the self-righteousness of the Pharisee with the humility of the tax collector (Luke 18:9-14). Following this, Jesus turns His attention to children, symbolizing their purity and innocence as a model for how people should approach God.

At the time, children were considered insignificant in social and religious hierarchies, so for Jesus to affirm their place in God’s Kingdom was radical. It challenged prevailing cultural norms and pointed to a deeper truth about God’s value system. Rather than strength, status, or intellect, God desires a posture of humility and trust—qualities often found in children (Green, 1997).

Key Themes and Theological Implications

1. Childlike Faith and Humility

Jesus’ invitation for the children to come to Him (v. 16) highlights His compassion and acceptance of those deemed lowly in society. The children represent humility, vulnerability, and an openness to receiving love and care from others. Jesus’ admonition that “the

¹ Palestinian Christian Theologian. Evangelical Lutheran Pastor in Bethlehem. Academic Dean of Beth Bible College. Retrieved from X (Former Twitter): <https://x.com/muntherisaac>

² <https://x.com/MuntherIsaac/status/1764538524148048215>

³ <https://x.com/MuntherIsaac/status/1816177713637642718>

Kingdom of God belongs to them” implies that these qualities are essential for anyone who wishes to enter God’s Kingdom.

According to biblical scholars, the idea of "childlike" faith does not imply naivety but a dependence on God’s grace, akin to how children rely on their parents. Stein (1992) notes that Jesus' teaching here advocates a faith that is unpretentious and sincere—marked by a wholehearted trust in God’s provision and guidance.

2. Reception of the Kingdom

Jesus’ statement in verse 17, "If anyone does not receive the kingdom of God like a child, he will never enter it," introduces a strong condition for entrance into the Kingdom of God. To "receive" the Kingdom like a child means to accept it with the same innocence, trust, and lack of pretension that a child would show when receiving a gift. The childlike reception is not passive but active in its trust and surrender to God’s will (Marshall, 1978).

Theologically, this points to the necessity of approaching God with humility and recognizing our own spiritual poverty. Just as a child depends on their parents, so must believers depend fully on God’s grace and mercy for salvation (Bock, 1994).

3. The Kingdom Belongs to Children

Jesus' radical redefinition of worth in God’s Kingdom suggests that God’s rule overturns societal structures and values. While the world often celebrates power, wealth, and prestige, the Kingdom of God is for those who embody simplicity and trust. As Morris (1988) explains, Jesus’ teaching here challenges the adult preoccupation with control, autonomy, and self-sufficiency—characteristics that can hinder one's relationship with God. Children are free beings whose food and necessities are provided or shall be provided by their parents, therefore no greed or tyranny for monetary wealth and occupations are among them. The teachings which emphasize on the children financial learning and their greed are thus considered against the natural freedom of children.

This emphasis on the lowly and humble is a consistent theme in Luke's Gospel. The Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55), for example, celebrates God’s exaltation of the humble and the bringing down of the proud. Jesus’ association with the marginalized, including

children, lepers, and sinners, reiterates the values of God's Kingdom as being in opposition to worldly standards of worth.

Conclusion

Luke 18:16-17 serves as a critical teaching in the Christian faith, illustrating the importance of childlike receptivity to the Kingdom of God. In addition to its reference to faith, the importance and acceptance of children are embodied in the text calling God as the master and king of the children. In the current Gaza crisis where an immense war against children has been unfolded, with any excuses the children are sacrificed against the teachings of Jesus. We already explained that the context of wisdom, religion and science are diverged in the course of immense conflicts like the ongoing crisis in Gaza (Davoudpour, A.R., 2024) and religious teachings find their meaning in the course of such events. The true faith shall be found in the pragmatic acceptance of the teachings and not through empty words or repetitions. Through this passage, Jesus conveys that humility, trust, and dependence of children on God as essential qualities for those who wish to enter His Kingdom. The challenge to approach God without pretense or self-righteousness, like a child, reflects the broader theme of humility found throughout Luke's Gospel.

By embracing this childlike faith, believers can experience the fullness of God's Kingdom, which is not based on human merit but on God's grace. This teaching remains a vital reminder for Christians to cultivate humility and reliance on God in their spiritual journey.

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