

Permit the Children  
 Mark 10:13-16  
 ABC 11/12/23

Kids – what do you think of them? Better yet, what does Jesus think of them? Children occupied a precarious position in the Hellenistic society of the 1<sup>st</sup> century. Sometimes they were loved, other times they were exploited, depending on how they could benefit the family. For example, a letter written by a man to his pregnant wife on June 17, 1 BC, instructs her, *if it was a male child let it live; if it was female, cast it out.*<sup>1</sup> Father's had the power of life & death over their kids. Thankfully, Jewish society was not this way. Our text today continues the theme of the nature & cost of discipleship developed throughout this part of Mark's gospel (8:31–10:52). Following Jesus' 2<sup>nd</sup> passion prediction (9:30–32), Jesus has already taught about the humility & sacrifice necessary for true discipleship by using a child as an illustration. In Mk 9 we read,

**They came to Capernaum; & when He was in the house, He *began* to question them, "What were you discussing on the way?" But they kept silent, for on the way they had discussed with one another which *of them was* the greatest. Sitting down, He called the twelve & said to them, "If anyone wants to be first, he shall be last of all & servant of all." Taking a child, He set him before them, & taking him in His arms, He said to them, "Whoever receives one child like this in My name receives Me; & whoever receives Me does not receive Me, but Him who sent Me" (33–37).**

In Jewish society, while not as bad as others, children were seen as the least of all. Therefore, Jesus returns to this theme in our text today returning to the topic of children. Open to Mk 10:13-16. This text follows naturally on the discussion of marriage & divorce we looked at last week (10:1–12). Today's passage also introduces requirements for entrance into the kingdom of God, a key theme in the episode of the rich man that immediately follows (10:17–31). The man there seemed to have the inside track to the kingdom. He was extremely wealthy (Lk 18:23), fastidiously self-righteous (Mk 10:20), & deeply religious (Lk 18:18). Yet he remained outside of the kingdom (Mt 19:23), while these children we see today were in it.<sup>2</sup> As we look at these 4 vss, we need to remember that Jesus' encounter with the children stands in contrast to the story of the rich young ruler that follows. We won't grasp the fullness of either story without the other. Jesus is placing the faith of children in contrast to the religion, riches, & the pursuit of wealth highlighted by the rich young

<sup>1</sup> *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri*, IV. No. 744, cited by Adolf Deissmann, *Light From the Ancient East*, pp 154-155

<sup>2</sup> John MacArthur, *Mark 9–16*, p 64

ruler's lifestyle. We see in these vss that the kingdom belongs to those who come to Him with nothing but dependent faith while power & riches are obstacles to those wanting to enter it. **13-16**

**1. Setting** (13a) The text doesn't state who brought the children, but it's probably their parents. There's a continual, ongoing stream of people bringing children to Jesus. The age of the **children** isn't given but the word is a general one & was used of Jairus's 12-year old daughter (5:41-42) & of an 8-day-old infant (Gen 17:12, LXX). But very young children are likely intended since Luke's account calls them **babies** or **infants** (18:15). Matthew gives us their intention. **Then some children were brought to Him so that He might lay His hands on them & pray** (19:13). Why're they doing this? It has roots all the way back to the patriarchal period in Genesis. Noah, Isaac, & Jacob all blessed their sons with a fatherly benediction pronounced on the heads of their children. The Jewish elders taught when you pray a blessing on your child, the father should lay his hands on the child's head & pray that his child would be strong in the Law, faithful in marriage, & abundant in good works. In Jesus' day, parents would bring their babies or young children to the leaders of their synagogue, & they would pray that way. This was their form of baby or parent dedication. It was a prayer for the future spiritual health of that child. Parents brought their children to Jesus, who took them in His arms where they snuggled close. He placed His hand on their warm little heads &, lifting his eyes to Heaven, pronounced a blessing. This wasn't some sort of magical or mystical thing but a touch of compassion & love. Jesus touched people all the time, which the Pharisees never did. They wouldn't touch people, because then they'd be defiled. But Jesus the Creator knows He designed touch to express compassion. So the parents' purpose in bringing Jesus their children was so He might lay His hands on them, touch them, & pray for blessing.

**2. Disciples' Rebuke** What did the disciples think of this? **The disciples rebuked them** (13b). They weren't on board with the parents' desire to have Jesus bless their children. The disciples apparently saw the children as little more than unnecessary interruptions to Jesus' ministry, & sharply **rebuked** the parents for disturbing Him. What were they thinking? Why would they stop this? Why do the disciples rebuke those bringing the kids? Mark doesn't say. Children were generally viewed as without social status & possibly the disciples don't consider them worthy of

Jesus' time. I think their attitude was that Jesus' time is too important to waste on kids. They were trying to protect Jesus but in doing so, they exposed their hearts. They **rebuked**, reprimanded, & stopped the parents from bringing their kids to Jesus. The disciples' response should be surprising because of Jesus' previous teaching about welcoming children (9:36–37) & not causing **one of these little ones** to fall (9:42). But it's not surprising in light of the disciples' pride, spiritual insensitivity, & being slow to comprehend what Jesus was all about.<sup>4</sup> The disciples viewed these children as unimportant to their ministry & to their Master. These parents want Jesus to bless their babies but the disciples shooed them away. They're convinced this baby blessing stuff is an unnecessary interruption. The problem with the disciples isn't their view of children. The problem with the disciples is their view of themselves. If the disciples understand what Jesus had been teaching them, they would know that they were no more deserving of the acceptance of Jesus than these children were. The disciples get it wrong. They don't see themselves as needy. They don't see themselves as unworthy. They don't see that their only hope is that, apart from anything they could ever achieve, deserve, or earn, that the Messiah would accept them. When you think you're deserving, it's all too easy to look down on, to condemn people who you don't think deserve what you deserve. If the disciples have this attitude toward children, they're probably going to extend it to anybody who can't further their own selfish agenda. You know how the rulers of the Gentiles lorded over others, & the disciples are tempted in the same ways. Paul tells us, **God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, & God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong** (1 Cor 1:30). Jesus has to deal with this or they're going to have an arrogant, lofty attitude toward anyone that they despise, that they think is unworthy of their time. Jesus has to address this attitude because the disciples couldn't have been more wrong.

### **3. Jesus' Indignation (14-15) 14**

Jesus responds to the disciples' action with indignation, anger, or outrage. The word translated **indignant** occurs only here in the NT & is a combination of 2 words: *much* & *to grieve*. Jesus was

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<sup>4</sup> See 4:13, 40; 6:52; 7:18; 8:17–18, 21, 32; 9:5–6, 19, 32; 10:35–45.

*much grieved*<sup>3</sup> over the disciples attitude. Only a short time earlier, they'd seen Jesus scoop up a child & say, **Whoever receives one child like this in My name receives Me; & whoever receives Me does not receive Me, but Him who sent Me** (Mk 9:37). They'd watched Jesus teach & heal the weakest & sickest in society with the most tender compassion. They knew of the practice of parents bringing their children to the rabbis for blessings & prayer. But they didn't catch Jesus' compassion for kids. It's their pride, exclusivity, & lack of spiritual discernment that's at issue. It's similar to when the disciples seek to **prevent** an unknown exorcist from casting out demons, **because he was not following us** (9:38–39). Jesus was agitated at the disciples because of the way they were treating the children & their parents. He was angry with His disciples because He loved kids so deeply & tenderly along with the ones who brought them.<sup>4</sup> Don't get me wrong. Jesus wasn't overly sentimental about children. He didn't think they were little angels sent from heaven. Kids don't always act like little angels sent from heaven, do they? Jesus knows they're children of Adam. He knows they come into the world fanatically committed to their own self-interest. He understood babies & young children are sin-infested humans. Yes, kids can surprise us away with their innocence & insights. But they also remind us just how sinful we all are. One of my favorite reminders of this is the 10 property laws of a toddler; the rules toddlers follow when playing with toys. All kids follow these laws:

1. If I like it, it's mine
2. If it's in my hand, it's mine
3. If I can take it from you, it's mine
4. If I had it a little while ago, it's mine
5. If it's mine, it must never appear to be yours in any way
6. If I'm building something, all the pieces are mine
7. If it looks just like mine, it's mine
8. If I saw it first, it's mine
9. If you're playing with something & you put it down, it automatically becomes mine
10. If it's broken, it's yours

Ever seen that in your kids or grandkids? David says in Ps 51:5, **Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, & in sin my mother conceived me.** Rom 3:10 tells us, **There is none righteous, not even one.**

All those precious little babies are raving maniacs of sin & fully corrupt examples of fallen

<sup>3</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *Mark: Jesus, Servant & Savior*, vol. 2p 56

<sup>4</sup> William Hendriksen & Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Gospel According to Mark*, p 383

humanity. The principle of sin is imbedded in them. The idea that children are born as morally neutral isn't true. They're morally corrupt & uncontrollably bent toward sin. It takes some time for them to reach the place where they can make the choices that show that sinful corruption but they aren't morally neutral. How do we know that? Did you have to teach your kids to sin? To be selfish? To demand their way? No, they were born with a sin nature just as we all were. Sinfulness isn't a condition that comes on people once they choose to do evil. Sinfulness is a condition they're born in that leads them to choose evil. People aren't sinners because they sin; they sin because they're sinners. So babies & young children are in God's kingdom solely by an act of His grace.<sup>5</sup> Though kids are sinful to the core, this passage reminds us of the very special place they have in God's plan. George MacDonald once said that he doubted a man's Christianity if children were never found playing around his door.<sup>6</sup> Since Jesus was a lover of children, & since His Spirit dwells in us, we are very near the heart of Christ when we love children.<sup>7</sup>

Jesus gives 2 commands, the only commands in this passage. 1<sup>st</sup>, **permit** the kids to come to Me. In other words, *Guys, walk-back your rebuke & restrictions. Let them come.* 2<sup>nd</sup>, **do not hinder them** from coming to Jesus. Don't stop, restrain, or forbid them to come. Don't keep them away. Jesus has a sincere passion for children. Why? Because **the kingdom of God belongs to such as these**. The kingdom of God is a focal point of Mark's gospel. Remember how it begins? **The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God** (1:1). That's the good news. Then a few vss later, as Jesus begins His public preaching ministry, He says, **The time is fulfilled, & the kingdom of God is at hand; repent & believe in the gospel** (1:15). People must enter the kingdom of God by repentance & faith. Jesus says, **the kingdom of God belongs to such as these**. This means the kingdom of God is made up of those who are like infants or little children in God's sight. As we saw in 9:37-38, this doesn't mean innocent, gentle, or pure. It means small, insignificant, needy, without social status, & without any redeeming quality. These are those who come in complete dependence on God. The

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<sup>5</sup> John MacArthur, *Mark 9-16*, pp 67-68

<sup>6</sup> William Barclay, *The Gospel of Mark*, p 250

<sup>7</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *Mark: Jesus, Servant & Savior*, vol. 2, p 57

next sentence makes this clear. **For the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.** Jesus then explains why the kingdom of God belongs to those who are child-like. **15**

This statement is doubly emphatic. Jesus begins with His solemn introduction, **Truly I say to you** & ends with an emphatic negative: **Whoever does not receive the kingdom like a child will not enter it at all.** This captures the essence of salvation & the gospel. The dependence of children is an analogy that demonstrates that salvation is entirely by grace. It's a deathblow to any form of legalism, since such children obviously can do nothing to merit salvation.<sup>8</sup> To receive the kingdom like a child means by faith & in complete dependence on God.<sup>9</sup> What Jesus has in mind here is the state of every child who has ever lived, regardless of race, culture, or background: Their helpless dependence. Every single child in the world is absolutely, completely, totally, objectively, subjectively helpless. & so it is with every child who is born into the Kingdom of God. Children of the Kingdom, no matter the age, enter it helpless, ones for whom everything must be done. As the hymn *Rock of Ages* puts it:

*Nothing in my hand I bring,  
Simply to Thy cross I cling;  
Naked, come to Thee for dress:  
Helpless, look to Thee for grace.*<sup>10</sup>

There is no other fundamental meaning for vs 15. Have you come to Jesus like this? Is it His grace plus your nothingness?<sup>11</sup> Jesus is appealing to a quality possessed by little children that is essential for entering God's kingdom. That quality is to come to Him with an attitude of helpless dependence, like an infant or small child who lacks everything & therefore can make no claim on God (cf Lk 18:9-14; Mt 18:4). You have to come the way children come: simple, open, weak, trusting, unpretentious, dependent, & lacking achievement. The teaching of Scripture is we all come to Christ with nothing. We have nothing to offer. Just like a baby, we make no contribution. & if you don't come like that, you'll never enter God's kingdom. Little children are the illustration of how everybody enters God's kingdom. All come by God's sovereign grace, not because of their

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<sup>8</sup> John MacArthur, *Mark 9-16*, p 71

<sup>9</sup> Mark L. Strauss, *Mark*, p 433

<sup>10</sup> Augustus Toplady, *Rock of Ages*, #209 in our hymnal

<sup>11</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *Mark: Jesus, Servant & Savior*, vol. 2, p 59

achievements. You have achieved nothing more than a baby could achieve in your salvation. True salvation is always a gift of God's grace. God is sovereign, but you're responsible to **come** to Him. He calls you to turn from your proud, selfish nature & your rebellious choices of sin & humbly follow Him. Believe He is God who was your Substitute on the cross, dying for your sins, then rising from the dead to give you new life.

All of this is a severe blow to the Pharisees & anyone who embraces a system of works. The only possible way these children could ever be in God's kingdom is by God's grace. You come with nothing, you have nothing to offer, you deserve nothing, & you earn nothing. Salvation is a gift from God to you, a gift of grace. & to make certain you don't miss Jesus' love for His children...

#### **4. Blessing the Children 16**

The reason the parents were bringing their children to Jesus is now made explicit as He blesses them. In a wonderful gesture, Jesus shows the special place these children have in His kingdom. Mark is the only one who shows us this beautiful picture. Jesus didn't view children as unimportant. No, **He took them in His arms**, which is a beautiful word meaning to enfold them in your arms. Jesus held & hugged them & **began blessing them**. Their Creator, the only Savior, the Lord of all hugged them & held them close & **began blessing them**. In a steady, ongoing process, one-by-one, Jesus prayed for & blessed them. He blessed them by praying for each one of them, one at a time, as He laid His hands on them.

Children are to be welcomed into the kingdom because they epitomize trust & dependence on God. As in 9:36, Jesus' taking them in His arms, embracing, or hugging the children shows authentic care & affection. **Laying His hands on them** expresses the manner in which He blessed them. This isn't a formal liturgical ritual, but a symbol of identification & a traditional manner of bestowing a blessing in Judaism (Gen 48:14–18).<sup>12</sup> Wouldn't we love to have Jesus hug our kids & pray for them & bless them?

This passage's point is our need to be like a child, fully dependent on God, in order to enter His kingdom. The same issue drives the next passage, where the rich man must give up his love for &

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<sup>12</sup> RT France, *Mark*, p 398

dependence on earthly possessions in order to inherit the kingdom of God. God is trying to change the way you think about yourself; to take away your arrogance, your trust of your own wisdom, your own strength, & you're being convinced of your own righteousness. You are a child who is dependent, who must run to your Father for His help because you need Him. That's what God is trying to do in your heart.

Jesus' initial announcement of the kingdom is to **repent & believe in the gospel** (1:15). *Repentance* means recognizing one's unworthiness, acknowledging sin, & turning from it. *Believing* the good news means trusting in God's provision for salvation, not in our own works & efforts. At the home of Levi, Jesus tells the religious leaders that He hasn't come to call righteous people but sinners, that is, those who're ready to acknowledge their sinfulness & express their need of the Great Physician (2:17). This theme is common throughout Scripture, where it's those who are lowly, broken, humble, & contrite who receive God's grace (Ps 147:6; Prov 3:34; Zeph 2:3; Lk 1:51–52; 5:8; 14:11; Phil 2:3; 1 Pt 5:5). This passage reminds us that we come to God empty & hopeless, having no wealth, power, or position through which to succeed. We are completely in need of God's grace.

This passage continues to develop the theme of discipleship, where the 12 demonstrate pride & fail to grasp Jesus' mission & purpose. In contrast to the children, who come to Jesus in humble dependence, the disciples act with pride & superiority. They still haven't learned the lesson Jesus taught in 9:36–37, that to welcome a child means to welcome Him, & to welcome Him is to welcome God who sent Him. The irony is that they see themselves as protecting Jesus, preventing distracting rug-rats, those with no standing or significance, from monopolizing His time. Yet by rejecting these children they are rejecting Him & failing to understand the nature & power of the gospel. Jesus will continue to instruct them that if they want to be 1<sup>st</sup>, they must become last & the servant of all (9:33; cf. 8:34–37; 10:43–44). Jesus Himself is the model, the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, & to give Himself as a ransom for many (10:45).

What applications can we take from this? How do we put this into practice? 1<sup>st</sup>, we need to be like little children as we approach God, coming to Him as those who are helpless without Him & who



are completely open to the reception of the gift of salvation & His continued grace in our lives. Become like a little child & come to Jesus. Humble yourself. See your need for a Savior. See your need for forgiveness. Don't be proud & arrogant. Become like a child, bring nothing with you & Jesus will save you. Unless you're converted & become like a little child, you'll never enter the kingdom of God. But then, even if that's happened for you years ago, you have to keep humbling yourself like a little child. This is an ongoing part of our Christian faith. For those of us who already know Jesus as our Lord & Savior, let us repent of any of the ways in which we've failed to accept & love children as Jesus did. Let us pray for a renewal of child-like, dependent faith in our own hearts.

2<sup>nd</sup>, we should be continually bringing our children to Jesus. How do we do this? Thank God for your children. Realize they're infinitely more His than they are yours. He has given you stewardship over them. Love them deeply. Be willing to make sacrifices for them cheerfully. Yearn for the best for them, especially spiritually. Understand that they're made in the image of God. They have immense value & potential. But also realize they are sinners. They're fanatically committed to their own self-interest. They have rebellion against God in their hearts. Therefore, teach them constantly. God says in Dt 6, **These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your sons & shall talk of them when you sit in your house & when you walk by the way & when you lie down & when you rise up (6-7).** Saturate their minds in the Word of God. Surround them with the gospel. Make sure they know they're sinners who break the commands of God. Make sure they know who Jesus is. He, being God, was born human & lived a sinless life. Make sure they know the gospel stories. Pour the gospel into them, model it in front of them, & let them know they need to repent & believe in Jesus just as you do. We must cultivate their spiritual awareness & sensitivity. Pray fervently for them.

In other words, be Christ-centered daily. Make Jesus the center of your talk as their parent. Talk about sin, repentance, & forgiveness in Jesus. Model Christ for your kids. Involve them in church early & consistently. Show by your actions where your priorities are. None of us can calculate the value of 18 years of weekly teaching, preaching, worshiping, & fellowshiping with other Christians

can be. Bring them to church & encourage them along the way. Your children's salvation is a sovereign work of God, but you are to be the primary agents by which that divine work is accomplished. You are the primary missionaries in the lives of your kids. Maybe your kids are grown & gone. You still have a responsibility to the children of the church. Don't forget Jesus' example recorded for us in this passage.

Finally, a word to those who work with kids in our church in any capacity, including simply talking with them & praying for them. Thank you for your service. Thank you for what you do. Many hands makes light work, so ask if the Lord would have you involved in children ministry. It's a vital ministry. Thank you for what you do & what you're going to do in the lives of the children God has given us in this church.