

Jason Upchurch - Mark 10:13-16 - The Good News Is For Children

This is a wonderful passage on so many levels but really I think we can all agree that it is particularly engaging because it involves little children and the Lord Jesus's love for little ones. Jesus is not indifferent to little children. He loves them, he wants to see them and blesses them.

So much of Jesus's ministry is focused on healing the masses. Healing those who are hurting or unclean or tormented by demons or have some ailment.

Other times he's battling the Pharisees or Sadducees or some other religious leader over issues of theology. Much of the gospels are rightly focused on the suffering and death and resurrection of Jesus as well.

The passage before was about the weighty topic of divorce. The next passage is basically about how riches can send you to hell even if it appears on the surface that we're following Jesus.

But here we see a sweet and tender side of Jesus to the very littlest of children. And he makes it perfectly clear that His Kingdom is filled those who are like children. They have the highest honor in the entire Kingdom. We saw last chapter that our humility in the Kingdom is likened to little children who were the lowest on the social ladder in Roman culture.

But these passages stand in huge contrast to our culture that, frankly, has very little use for children and in many ways despises children. This occurs on so many levels.

We see it in obvious ways such as abortion, of course. The mass murder of millions of children.

But we also see it in the massively declining birth rates all around the world. Europe is so desperate for their citizens to have children that some countries have actually enacted laws saying if you have 4 children you will never pay income taxes again. It is an incentive for people to have children because the governments know that they can't possibly sustain themselves without the next generation. There are some countries that are so far gone they will likely never recover.

Japan is reaching existential crisis because of birth rates. South Korea, Italy, France, Germany and Britain and other places are reaching an existential crisis because the birth rate is so low they may never recover culturally.

We also see people despising children on the other end where children are sovereign over their own lives. Parents can't have, or don't want to have, any input at all. We must never question little Jimmy's ability to decide what he eats, or watches, or who he plays with or what gender he is - can't even tell parents about those conversations. We can't decide what how many sports he should play and certainly don't ever discipline kids - that's barbaric and unthinkable.

These attitudes are pervasive in our society and they are not attitudes of love for children. They are attitudes at odds with God.

We could recite many many ways in which children are hated by our culture. But what we also need to realize from this passage is that many times Christians have a wrong attitude about children as well.

The disciples and Jesus clearly have a different understanding of the the Kingdom. The disciples are inadvertently treating children as second class citizens of the Kingdom and Jesus will have none of that.

So our big takeaway this morning is that we should encourage children to follow the Lord and follow Jesus like a child would. So let's see this play out in basically 2 ways.

1) Jesus desires children. **Read 13-14a**

It pains me to say the obvious but Jesus wants children. He desires that they come to him. And many children do believe in Jesus at a very early age. I know there are many in our church who came to Jesus at a young age, maybe even so young they don't remember a specific point at which they believed.

That's okay. We don't need to know the exact time or day or hour that someone believed. I was 14 when God saved me at a Bible camp. And for years I knew that I knew that I was saved on July 14, 1996. It was a Wednesday at Bible Camp. Until 15 years later I looked at a calendar and realized July 14 was a Sunday and I really had no idea what day of the week I was saved. And then the thought occurred to me: so what? Do I believe in Jesus right now? Do I believe he died for my sins and rose for my justification right now? Yes. That's all that mattered.

The specific day or date or time isn't important. What's important is that we believe.

For Christian parents I think this is an important point: many Christian parents are so concerned that there is a single moment in time or praying of a prayer or some decision moment in their child's life that there can often be this funky pressure or awkwardness with kids.

And, although sometimes kids come to faith and pray a prayer or there's some obvious change, we don't need to pressure those situations. If your house is saturated with the Bible, the gospel and parents that desire to honor Christ in all they do your children will have a clear and constant picture of salvation.

But I do want to say this: as parents and as a church, what we should do is present Jesus as a person desirable to come to. Many times the Jesus of the Bible is watered down, but many times he's presented as a scary judge that no child would want to be near. Or God's commands are so crushing they get the idea that there's no grace. But we need to present Jesus as the compassionate, gently, loving Savior he is.

I don't about your kids, but my kids aren't always excited to be around people they've never met. I can understand. It's the rare person who is so kind and gentle that children just sort of gravitate to them. We usually have to teach them that good people are okay to be around.

When our little ones are around police officers and soldiers and firemen we tell our kids almost every time "These guys are good; they are our friends and want to keep us safe." Why do we say that? Because they can be intimidating and scary to little ones. But we train them over and over that they are good and given by God for our protection and safety.

In the same way, we need to remind our kids and others that Jesus wants the children. He made them, loves them, and wants to bless them. Wants to teach them.

Interestingly, here it says they were bringing them to him that he might touch them. And the idea here is filled out in **Vs. 16. Read**

What does he want to do? Bless them, pray for them. That idea of blessing is asking God to bestow divine favor on someone. Interestingly, if you look throughout the Bible it's common for the men of God to bless their children. It's almost like passing on a spiritual inheritance to them. And interestingly, it often comes true. You think of Jacob blessing his 12 sons - their lives were formed by the blessings he gave. We see other instances as well, but they are coming for a prayer. They are coming for a blessing from Jesus the Messiah. Who better to bless them than the Lord?

And Jesus takes individual time with each child. I think this is amazing and instructive for us as parents, grand parents and anyone who is around children: it's good to spend one on one time when we can even if it's short to encourage them in the Lord.

But he picks them up and touches them. Very intimate and gentle and personal with these little ones. Many times when we see Jesus and the disciples praying for someone they are touching them. Here Jesus is holding these little ones. They're so small he can pick them up in his arms and pray for them.

Why does that matter? Because prayer is intimate thing. And when we pray for other people I encourage you to touch them when you pray for them. Ask their permission, of course: "Can I put my hand on your shoulder?" But touch them. Why do that in our antibacterial, social bubble, Giermo phone world? Because we're brothers and sisters in the faith. There is a communal and relationship connection that we build with people when we touch them.

It doesn't have to be weird or awkward. I don't think there's any spiritual witchcraft that happens. But our corporate prayers should be brotherly or sisterly. But I encourage people to touch when they pray together. This is what Jesus is doing to every little one that comes his way.

Now, I want to take a little rabbit trail here about infant baptism. Why would we do such a thing, you ask? There's no infant baptism in this passage. Well, our presbyterian brothers will often point to this passage or passages like this to say that the children of believers are part of the covenant. Or part of the "covenant community." Which is an odd formulation but it part of the larger presbyterian teaching that children of believers are automatically saved. It's as though they receive covenant blessings - and specifically salvation - because their parents are Christian.

They point to the reality that the children of Israelites received covenant blessings simply by being the children of the Jews, so since we're in a greater covenant the children of Christians will be Christians as well.

Even here, they'd say, Jesus desires them; and the Kingdom of God belongs to them so they're headed to heaven. Even the little ones. These are children, they're paidion, infants and toddlers. And if they're part of the covenant they should be baptized. So we need to be baptizing the infants of believers.

Now, just so you know that this isn't theoretical, one of the commentaries I look at occasionally is JC Ryle's *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels*. It's an excellent devotional commentary on the four gospels. I highly commend it to you for devotional reading. But this is what he says about the passage and I want to read a little bit of a larger quote, so bear with me:

"Let us learn...from this passage, how much encouragement there is to bring young children to be baptized. Of course it is not pretended that there is any mention of baptism, or even any reference to it in the verses before us. All we mean to say is that the expressions and gestures of our Lord in this passage, are a strong indirect argument in favor of infant baptism. It is on this account that the passage occupies a prominent place in the baptismal service of the Church of England. [this is a proof text for Anglicans for infant baptism]

"The subject of infant baptism is undoubtedly a delicate and difficult one. Holy and praying men are unable to see alike upon it. Although they read the same Bible, and profess to be led by the same Spirit, they arrive at different conclusions about this sacrament.

"But the difference now referred to must not make members of the Church of England shrink from holding decided opinions on the subject. That church has declared plainly, in its Articles, that "the baptism of young children is in any wise to be retained, as most agreeable with the institution of Christ." To this opinion we need not be afraid to adhere. It is allowed on all sides that infants may be elect and chosen of God unto salvation — may be washed in Christ's blood, born again of the Spirit, have grace, be justified; sanctified, and enter heaven. If these things be so, it is hard to see why they may not receive the outward sign of baptism. It is allowed furthermore that infants are members of Christ's visible church, by virtue of their parents' Christianity. What else can we make of Paul's words, "now are they holy," (1 Cor. 7:14.) If this be so, it is difficult to understand why an infant may not receive the outward sign of admission into the church, just as the Jewish child received the outward sign of circumcision." (Kindle Location 7340/22646)

That's a lot of words to say that they base infant baptism on a passage that doesn't mention it. Also, we believe that the Bible teaches plainly that being born again, being justified, sanctified are all things that happen when a person believes in Jesus.

Are some children elect? Of course. But we don't know who, until they profess faith and repent from sin. And it's then that we happily baptize them.

But specifically to this passage Jesus does not say that children belong to the Kingdom. This is an important distinction. Jesus says specifically "**to such** like these." That word **such** is carrying a lot of freight. Jesus said the same basic thing in the last chapter as well. **Read 9:33-37**

The issue here is not that the disciples need to be welcoming children, per se. It's that they need to welcome people *like* children. That is, low on the social ladder. Humble people. Children are given as the example of people they should welcome.

Back in Chap 10 Jesus is saying the same basic thing about who can come to him. He's not saying the Kingdom does in fact belong to children, as though it's their's automatically. That would mean that everyone is born into the Kingdom of God, that everyone is saved. Or at least the children of believers are saved. But then at some point they lose that status, and then upon personal profession of faith they regain it.

Even our presbyterian brothers have a difficult time reconciling what to make of their children who deny Jesus or walk away from the faith. Many of them actually believe that their children are still somehow part of the New Covenant, covered by grace. But that's just not a thing.

To such...means to ones like them. Ones that have their characteristics and properties. What does that mean? We saw this in the last chapter. That children are held up as models of the Kingdom because they are the lowest in the social order. They are entirely dependent on others. They are "small and insignificant and needy in complete dependence on God" (Strauss, Note on 10:14-15a). No one would look to them as having any place of status or importance. But those kinds of people are exactly what God says are the characteristics of citizens of the Kingdom.

Now, having said that - that children are not automatically entered into the Kingdom. Let me say this: Jesus wants kids. And we would do well to honor little children and teach them.

Eph. 6:4: Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.

Mom and Dad, but dads specifically are called to not irritate and frustrate our kids. But we teach them. Over and over, patiently, diligently, humbly, prayerfully,

Deut 6:6-7: And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart and you shall teach them occasionally to your children. Is that what it says? No. Shall teach them diligently to your children and talk of them when you sit in your house and when you way by the way and when you lie down and when you rise.

We teach them all the time and everywhere, intentionally, diligently. Why? Because wants our children to know him.

J.C. Ryle: "Let us learn...how much attention the souls of children should receive from the Church of Christ. The Great Head of the Church found time to take special notice of children. Although His time on earth was precious, and grown-up men and women were perishing on every side for lack of knowledge, He did not think little boys and girls of small importance. He had room in His mighty heart even for them. He declared by His outward gesture and deed, His good will toward them. And not least, He has left on record words concerning them, which His Church should never forget, "Of such is the kingdom of God." (Expository Thoughts on the Gospels, note on 10:13-16)

Amen. So Jesus desires to bless children.

2) True disciples are often a hindrance to ministry to children. Read 13-14

The contrast here is amazing. The crowds are bringing children to Jesus. "Please just touch them and pray for them and bless my child!"

And the disciples are acting exactly contrary. Three descriptions are given. First the disciples rebuked the parents. The word used here is not a gentle rebuke. It's not "hey, Jesus is really busy healing people and I'm so sorry but he just doesn't have time." No the word is related giving a command. Ordering someone to do something. And if they don't do what you want there's an implied threat.

We don't know exactly what this looked like. But this is very strong language. The second description adds to the flavor. **Read 14**

Do not hinder them. We often us hinder as something like a nuisance obstacle. When I want to get some ice cream out of the freezer but there's other stuff in the way I'm hindered from getting my ice cream. That's not the word here. The idea is "Do not forbid them/deny them/refuse them." That's what Jesus's disciples were doing. Apparently some parents had made it through and the disciples were livid that Jesus was now being occupied by praying for little children. "There's adult stuff to do, Jesus! We've gotta heal and cast out demons and teach the masses."

Jesus says don't hinder them, deny them. In fact, although the disciples are mad at the parents, it's Jesus that's mad at them. He was indignant. He was livid that the disciples would ever do such a thing.

But the reality is that believers unintentionally hinder kids all the time from coming to Jesus.

Here's a few ways we do this:

1. We don't actually teach them about Jesus. They can grow up in a Christian home all their life but we never actually do the work teaching them the Bible. We assume youth leadership or Sunday morning or the church will. Or we assume they're reading their Bibles or somehow learning doctrine elsewhere. But we actually refuse them when we don't intentionally and proactively teach them.

2. We hinder them when we're not an encouragement to their faith. They want to ask us questions or share some insight with us about God or the Bible and we shut them down or don't fan their hearts into flame. Do we encourage our children in their pursuit of Jesus? Do we pray for them?

3. I think we hinder them when we don't let them be involved in serving the people in the church. It's good for kids to see how we serve other people. I know it's hard to involve them or bring them along or find tasks they can do. But that's ground zero for training them for kingdom work.

We can encourage them to pray for others. We can encourage them to serve others - moving, cleaning, cooking, drawing pictures, writing out Bible verses.

We can encourage them in their music pursuits to use those gifts to encourage the hearts of the saints in singing.

4. I think we also hinder them when we just assume they'll grow up to be pagans. This is sort of the opposite notion of our presbyterian brothers who think their children will automatically be saved. Especially among baptists there's almost this idea that our children are on the outside of any grace at all. And it's not true. Think about how amazing it is that our kids grow up in a household that fears the Lord.

And how we have an amazing opportunity to disciple these little ones for a short season of their lives. I heard the gospel for the first time when I was 14 and I didn't know much about the Bible until I was 18-20 when I went to Bible college. Most of my kids have a better understanding of the Bible and theology at 6 years old than I did when I was 18. A little bit of teaching here and there for years goes a long way. That's grace, you guys. Our kids - even if they don't profess faith in Jesus - have a huge head start in following the Lord.

5. One last way I think we hinder our kids is that we're hypocrites. We see this primarily in our homes because our homes are the most intimate setting. But it's true no matter the setting. Kids see whether or not our Christian faith is really lived out in our lives. And if we're not living lives that honor Jesus kids see that.

I would love to tell you that I'm perfectly patient with my kids or that I never get angry but my kids would tell you a different story. They see the real me. They see the real you. Which means that they see our sin.

Which gives us an opportunity to do one thing that's super important: teach our kids how to repent by practicing it ourselves. The way to counter the problem of hypocrisy is to not only put sin to death, but when we sin apologize and ask forgiveness.

A hypocrite isn't someone who sins. A hypocrite is someone who sins and refuses to acknowledge that it is sin.

Jesus does want to bless children but he wants us to be like them and wants us to accept and encourage them. And all those that are humble like them.

Jesus loves the little children,
All the children of the world.
Red, brown, yellow, black and white,
They are precious in his sight.
Jesus loves the little children of the world.

And...such who are like them.

Pray