

Jesus Messiah: Seeing Christ In The Gospel Of Mark

*“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.”
(Mark 1:15 ESV)*

*And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said,
“Truly this man was the Son of God!”
(Mark 15:38–39 ESV)*

Let The Children Come To Me

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Mark 10:13-16

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Introduction:

Good morning. I want to invite you to open your Bibles this morning to Mark 10:13; that's on page 846 in your pew Bibles. This morning we are starting a new section in Mark's Gospel. You remember that things had been getting pretty heated for Jesus in Israel and so he had taken the disciples on a bit of a strategic retreat. They spent some time outside of Jewish territory and Jesus was able to pour into them and to begin preparing them for his eventual death and departure. Coming back into Galilee Jesus again predicted his death and resurrection but the disciples didn't get it – they thought he was speaking metaphorically and they began to talk amongst themselves about who would be the greatest and the most important person in the soon to be formed Kingdom of God.

They totally missed it.

They were thinking about privilege and position and preferment while Jesus was preparing to serve and to sacrifice and to give his life as a ransom for many.

They were trapped in the thinking, assumptions and values of their culture.

And so in this new section – from chapter 10:1-31, Jesus begins to explain to them how radically

different things are going to be in the Kingdom of God – he begins to say to them that “OUR WAYS must be totally different than the ways of the culture that you grew up in”. R.T. France puts it this way, he says:

“The dominant emphasis of this next phase of teaching, leading up to the third passion prediction in 10:33-34, is the radical difference between the conventional values hitherto espoused by the disciples (and by the society to which they belong) and the new perspective of the kingdom of God.”¹

You could give this whole section the title: WE DO IT DIFFERENTLY. The job of the church is not to be as like the world as possible – no, salt that has lost its saltiness is good for nothing and is thrown out and trampled under foot – the church has to be different! The church has to be distinctive – we have our own way of doing things, and it is the way of life.

That’s what Jesus is saying. He begins to talk to them first about marriage. Look quickly at chapter 10:1.

And he left there and went to the region of Judea and beyond the Jordan, and crowds gathered to him again. And again, as was his custom, he taught them. (Mark 10:1 ESV)

So they left Capernaum – you remember that the last time we saw Jesus he was in Peter’s house in Capernaum talking to them about children – about the little ones and how if anyone makes them stumble it would be better to be cast into the sea with a mill stone tied around your neck. Jesus makes a BOLD statement about the value of children, which obviously as we will see went right over their heads.

Then, apparently, they left the house and began travelling southward into Judea. Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem where he will be betrayed, condemned, mocked and crucified – but along the way – because he is Jesus – he is teaching.

He teaches them first about marriage and divorce. Remember – the theme of the section is – WE DO IT DIFFERENT. The concern here is that the disciples are thinking too much like Jews and too little like Jesus. The Jews had a very casual attitude toward divorce. Consider these words by one of the most famous Jews of the first century – the man known to many of us as Josephus. He

¹ R.T. France, *The Gospel Of Mark*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2002), 386.

says:

“About which time I divorced my wife also, as not pleased with her behaviour, though not till she had been the mother of three children ... after this I married a wife who had lived at Crete.”²

Ho hum! I divorced my wife – the mother of my three children – because I was displeased with her behaviour and I married another woman who pleased me better. That’s what Josephus said in his autobiography. And Josephus was a Levite! His father was of the priestly line – he was the sort of Jew who was supposed to set an example – he was a TEACHER and a leader among the Jewish people and he divorced his wife because her behaviour was not to his liking.

That was the attitude of the culture that the disciples were raised in – BUT WE HAVE OUR OWN WAY – Jesus said. We’re going to do it different. Our marriages are going to be permanent. We are going to forgive. We are going to change. And we are going to grow and we are going to go the distance – that is going to be our way.

We need to think differently on the matter of marriage and divorce. And secondly, we need to think differently about children. That’s the second thing he taught about and that brings us to our passage for this morning. Hear now the Word of the Lord, beginning at verse 13:

And they were bringing children to him that he might touch them, and the disciples rebuked them. 14 But when Jesus saw it, he was indignant and said to them, “Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God. 15 Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.” 16 And he took them in his arms and blessed them, laying his hands on them. (Mark 10:13–16 ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God.

This is one of those passages that is not terribly hard to understand – though we need to think carefully about how we apply it. The meaning is not difficult to discern. Apparently the news got out that Jesus was in town and parents began bringing their children to Jesus so that they might be blessed by him. The disciples – because they are apparently as dumb as a bag of hammers – rebuked them. That’s a strong word. That’s the word used when Jesus rebukes demons – this is a very negative reaction towards people that Jesus had just told them to be GREATLY CONCERNED ABOUT. Just a few verses ago we were told, Jesus:

² Josephus, *The Life Of Josephus* in *The Works of Flavius Josephus*. (London: The London Printing And Publishing Company, c.1850), xx.

took a child and put him in the midst of them, and taking him in his arms, he said to them, 37 “Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me, receives not me but him who sent me.” (Mark 9:36–37 ESV)

So it sounds like children are really important – but again the disciples are not getting it. And it isn’t really that they were stupid, it is in fact more the case that they were simply thinking like their culture.

James Edwards says here:

Ancient Jewish society, however, did not regard children with the same affection. Children, like women, derived their position in society primarily from their relationship to adult males.³

In Jewish culture women and children were not important. Men were important. And the disciples were men and so they were irritated that they were not receiving priority attention from Jesus because of these snot nosed little kids. And so they rebuked the little demons and they were in turn rebuked by Jesus.

Jesus says, ‘We will not ADOPT the first century Jewish view of children’. We will look at them very differently. We will see them as extraordinarily valuable to God and we will do everything we can to help them come unto Jesus so as to be saved. That’s how we will do it. Jesus says.

And then he doubles down. He says not only must the disciples look at the children as precious in God’s sight, they must also see them as an example of what real faith looks like.

Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.” (Mark 10:15 ESV)

These children are precious and they are closer to the Kingdom of God than you are right now, Jesus says.

So help them and learn from them – that’s what this passage is saying.

³James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, Pillar New Testament Commentary. Accordance electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 306.

Now, in terms of responding to that, I actually think it's a little easier to work our way backwards through the text. Meaning I think it will be easier for us to help them if we take a minute first in order to observe and understand them – does that make sense?

Its hard to help people you don't understand – so let's begin with the question:

What Is The Essence Of Child Like Faith?

Jesus points at the kids and says that there is something we ought to learn from these kids – well what is that? I don't think he is telling us to be childish – not everything about childhood is commendable. Children are cranky and smelly and selfish and I don't think Jesus is commending those things. So what are we talking about here? C.S. Lewis wrestled with this and he said helpfully:

“The sooner we cease to be as fickle, as boastful, as jealous, as cruel, as ignorant, and as easily frightened as most children are, the better for us and for our neighbours. But who in his senses would not keep, if he could, that tireless curiosity, that intensity of imagination, that facility of suspending disbelief, that unspoiled appetite, that readiness to wonder, to pity, and to admire? The process of growing up is to be valued for what we gain, not for what we lose.”⁴

So there is something about childhood that we should be eager not to lose – I think that is what Jesus is talking about here. Child-like faith HAS something at its heart that we often LOSE as we grow older. What is that?

What is the essence of child like faith? Well based on the context I think the first thing we would say is that it must include some mention of:

1. Humility

As I mentioned, in Jewish society children were peripheral, they were unimportant, they were marginalized and they were at risk. Children were basically disposable and they knew it. William Lane writes here:

“The ground of Jesus' surprising statement is not to be found in any subjective quality possessed by children but rather in their objective humbleness and in the startling character of the grace of God who wills to give the Kingdom

⁴ C.S. Lewis, *An Experiment In Criticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 71-72.

to those who have no claim upon it.”⁵

Do you hear that? Lane says that it wasn't so much about how they thought or how they behaved it was more about who they WERE. They were vulnerable. They were helpless. They were at the bottom – according to the culture. Those are the people who have always been closest to the Kingdom of God.

Jesus said:

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 5:3 ESV)

Jesus says that, actually, it's a good thing if life has knocked you down. It's a good thing if you don't feel well received or successful or strong or established in this culture. It's a good thing to feel like you have been completely run over by life. Because as you lie there on the ground with your nose pressed into the dirt you are exactly where you need to be to see the doggy door of heaven. People who are standing upright, who are climbing the ladder and achieving great success – they tend to miss it entirely.

Jesus said that also, in fact he said it next. He said:

“How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!” (Mark 10:23 ESV)

Being successful, making lots of money, climbing the ladder – that stuff makes you feel proud and secure and self reliant – that puts you VERY FAR INDEED from the entrance of the Kingdom of God. How sad for you. WOE unto those who are rich. But blessed are those who are poor in spirit – who are like children. Those who are at the very bottom of the ladder – and those who know it. Because that's where you have to get to anyway in order to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.

That seems to be what Jesus means when he talks about receiving the kingdom of God like a child.

⁵ William Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1974), 360.

Secondly, and again based on the context I think we would want to say that the essence of child like faith involves a certain sort of:

2. Receptiveness

There is an obvious contrast in the story. The children are hoping to receive – the disciples are stubbornly RESISTING everything Jesus has been trying to give them. The children are soft and open and the disciples are hard and closed. I think that is very close to the heart of what Jesus is saying here. Dennis Nineham for example says:

“children are unselfconscious, receptive, and content to be dependent upon others’ care and bounty; it is in such a spirit that the kingdom must be received – it is a gift of God and not an achievement on the part of man; it must be simply accepted, inasmuch as it can never be deserved.”⁶

Yes! I think that is it exactly.

So what we are talking about here, when we talk about child like faith is a certain humility and a certain receptivity. You see, as we get older we tend to become very proud of our achievements and we tend to want to be self reliant – we want to be self made men and women, we want to be the captains of our own destiny, we want to be true to ourselves, we want to trust our own instincts, we want to build our own kingdom – and all of that, Jesus is saying, puts us very far away from the Kingdom of God.

Because the Kingdom of God is a GIFT that is given only to people who know they don’t deserve it. The kingdom of God is not something we build or make or pursue – it is ultimately something that we receive.

Jesus said this sort of stuff all the time! He said:

Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits.
(Matthew 21:43 ESV)

“To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside everything is in parables (Mark 4:11 ESV)

⁶ Dennis Nineham, *Saint Mark*, The Penguin New Testament Commentaries. (London: Penguin Group, 1992), 268.

“I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. (Matthew 11:25–26 ESV)

And then if this one wasn't part of the mix, I think we would despair; Jesus says:

“Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. (Luke 12:32 ESV)

That's a good one! God is not trying to hide the Kingdom, he's not trying to trick us you of it – his will is to give it to you, but to receive it, you are going to have to become like little children. You are going to have to become humble. God might have to knock you down and trip you up, but that's ok. God knows how to do that. And then when you are on your knees or better yet on your face and you are small again and humble again like a child then you will see and you will receive that which you could never earn for yourself.

That's what Jesus is saying.

That's what it means to have faith like a child.

And that takes us to our second question:

What Can We Do To Help The Little Ones On Their Way To Jesus?

Now, you might say, “Wait a second! I want to talk more about me! You just scared me by telling me that I might be too crusty and too proud and too self reliant to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. So you need to help me figure out how to have faith like a child!” And that's a fair point, but that's not the emphasis of the text. The text is about Jesus telling the disciples not to hinder the little children as they come to him. They're supposed to HELP NOT HINDER the little children as they make their way toward Jesus – that's the main point. And then he doubles down and he says, “And anyway, you can learn something from these kids. You ought to have faith like a child”.

So actually what he does to help them is to point them towards the kids. So maybe the implication is this; maybe the best thing you can do for your own soul is to focus your ministry more on the little ones. Maybe serving in the nursery will help you DECRUSTIFY. Maybe

wrestling with some Jr. High kids – metaphorically speaking – will help you remember what really matters in life. Maybe volunteering at Family Circle or reCOVER and spending some time with some “spiritual little ones” - some baby believers – will remind you – will remind me - that there but for the grace of God go I.

So maybe helping the little ones will be helpful for you and for me and for us. That’s the help that Jesus offers in this passage for the big ones. He tells them – he tells us - to help the little ones.

So what does that look like?

What can we do to help the little ones make their way to Jesus? Four things come to mind from this passage.

1. Make Space

Right? That’s the most obvious. The disciples got in the way – they were hindering the little ones on their way to Jesus and Jesus told them to get out of the way. I think the application of that principle to our time is not very complicated. As a church we need to make sure that we are prioritizing the space and budget and staff resources that are being targeted toward children. Children’s Ministry needs to have priority access to our building, our budget and our people. That seems like the obvious place to start. We need to do everything we can to help the little ones in this city find, meet and love Jesus.

Secondly I think we need to work very hard to:

2. Preserve Marriage

I take that from the wider context. Jesus has just finished talking about marriage and he moves on from that to talk about kids – I struggle to imagine that this was a coincidence and I find it impossible believe that Mark saw it as such when he presented this material in this arrangement. I think the implication is obvious: if you care about kids then do whatever you need to do to protect and preserve marriage.

Divorce hurts kids – there is NO CREDIBLE ARGUMENT against that proposition. Divorce hurts kids. There are tons of studies that document the damage done by divorce on a whole host of childhood health and wellness indicators, but our concern is a little narrower this morning. We are just asking what helps and what hinders little ones on their way to Jesus and on that score there is no doubt. In an article titled: “Divorce Major Reason Millennials Are Leaving The Church” a new report is cited by the Public Religion Research Institute which says that:

“Americans who were raised by divorced parents are less likely than children whose parents were married during most of their childhood to report attending religious services at least once per week (21% vs. 34%, respectively). This childhood divorce gap is also evident even among Americans who continue to be religiously affiliated.”⁷

Meaning that whether your parents went to church or not, if they got divorced during your childhood it is far less likely that you ever will. Divorce hinders the little ones on their way to Jesus, therefore preserving and protecting and growing and nurturing our marriages is one of the best ways that we can help the little ones come to saving faith in Christ.

Thirdly, we need to:

3. Teach The Word

It doesn't matter how old you are:

faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ. (Romans 10:17 ESV)

The children in our story came to Jesus in the flesh – physically – they gathered around him and were touched and taught by him – obviously on the other side of the cross, empty tomb and ascension – it will happen differently. Children come to Jesus by hearing about him from their parents, from their Sunday School teachers, from their Jr. High sponsors and of course, first and foremost by reading their Bibles.

Children need to hear the Word of Christ. They need to hear the full Gospel from the whole Word of God. They need to know that they are created things – that they are creatures made by a

⁷ <https://www.christianheadlines.com/blog/study-divorce-major-reason-millennials-are-leaving-the-church.html>

Creator to whom they must give an account. They need to know about sin and about how sin puts a gap between us and our Holy Creator God. And they need to know about how that gap is closed and crossed by the person and work of Christ. And they need to know what God has planned for them – in this life and in the life to come. All of that is in the Bible. That’s the story of Jesus from start to finish. **TEACH IT TO THEM** – the Bible commands all of the **BIG PEOPLE** to be teaching this to the **LITTLE PEOPLE**.

You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. 8 You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. 9 You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. (Deuteronomy 6:7–9 ESV)

Teach the Word! Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of Christ.

And then lastly:

4. Get Serious

We talked about this a couple of weeks ago. Jesus already told the disciples to get serious in their efforts to reach the little ones and to get serious about making sure they don’t hinder the little ones. He said:

“Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him if a great millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea.” (Mark 9:42 ESV)

This is super serious business folks! This isn’t a game of fill in the blanks on your bulletin and then you stick that in your Bible, zip up the cover and you go home and forget about it.

No! Heaven and hell are on the line here today. We’re talking about our kids! We’re talking about why so many of our kids aren’t walking with Jesus today. We’re talking about what we can do better going forward so that doesn’t happen again – is there anything more important for us to be talking about today?

Focus on the Family did a study in 2013 on the issue of young people walking away from the faith. A summary of that study says this:

"Parents who provide a home where faith is vibrantly practiced — even imperfectly — are remarkably likely to create young adults who remain serious Christians, even as they sometimes go through bumpy spots in the road," the study said. "[N]ot surprisingly, homes modeling lukewarm faith do not create enduring faith in children."⁸

If you aren't serious then your kids won't be serious. If you are lukewarm, then your kids will be lukewarm – and given the cultural headwinds they are facing – lukewarm will not get it done. They will be blown away.

So we need to get serious, friends.

We need to go deeper. I said two weeks ago that the best gift you can give to your marriage is your own sanctification – well let me double down on that. The best gift you can give to the spiritual lives of your little ones is your own sanctification. Your growth. Your repentance. Your increase of faith.

When a dad wanted Jesus to help his kid in the Bible he said:

"I believe; help my unbelief!" (Mark 9:24 ESV)

I think that's a good prayer again for us today. We need to confess that we have blown it. We need to confess that we have become proud and cold and closed and stunted and we need to repent and we need to receive.

We need help from Jesus to grow in our faith so as not to hinder in any way the faith of the little ones in our care.

We need to fall on our faces. We need to ask, beg and plead. And we need to receive; just like a child would. Just like these children DID.

Thanks be to God.

Let's pray together.

⁸[http://www.christianexaminer.com/Web%20News/Webnews_Headlines05.html?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed:+delicious/gqlf+\(Christian+Headlines+Top+Headlines\)%23.UoOSEvmsj5x](http://www.christianexaminer.com/Web%20News/Webnews_Headlines05.html?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed:+delicious/gqlf+(Christian+Headlines+Top+Headlines)%23.UoOSEvmsj5x)