

## Children Matter

- Mark 10:13-16
- Jesus is on the way through Judea, and as we saw last week, his heart at this point is to disciple his disciples. To lay a foundation that will give them a place to stand and to serve in the difficult days ahead. The first lesson came because the Pharisees wanted to test him with a question of divorce. Jesus laid a foundation for the sanctity of marriage. Today's lesson comes when the disciples are rebuking parents who are bringing their children to Jesus. Jesus laid a foundation for the sanctity of children while also illustrating the Gospel. Let's look at this passage under three main points: Children, Kingdom, and Blessing.
- **Children (verses 13-14)**
- It's just like Mark to leave out contextual details so he can simply focus on what Jesus said and did. Where does this take place? We don't know. Who are these people? We don't know. What is important is these people, presumably parents, wanted Jesus to touch their children. We might look at that and say, "Well of course! They just wanted what was best for their children!" But that would be to look at this text from a western mindset, and from the lens of a child-centered culture. It was not so in the first century. You did not see politicians kissing babies to try and win votes in Palestine. Children were not regarded with sympathy and affection, and childhood was seen as a necessary passage of time between birth and adulthood, which for Jewish boys began at 12 or 13. That's not to say that mothers, especially, did not love their children! But in that society, children, like women, had no status except that which they derived from the adult males in their lives. Jesus is about to show his disciples a different way.
- The disciples had imbibed the teaching of the culture when it came to children. Even though they had walked with Jesus for a while by this time, their attitude toward children was still more influenced by society than by the Savior. It's a good question to ask ourselves, isn't it? Not just with regard to children but to everything else: is my attitude more influenced by the world or by the Word, by society or by the Savior, when it comes to...marriage, children, money, friendships, business, church...?
- The disciples rebuked the parents, and the word there means to issue a rebuke that has no effect on the one rebuked. The parents didn't turn away. The repentant thief on the cross issued a rebuke to the other thief, but it had no effect on him. Why would the disciples rebuke the parents? Maybe they were just trying to "protect" Jesus. How many of you know that we don't need to protect the Lord? Perhaps they were trying to protect themselves because they didn't want to be bothered with the needs of those they considered beneath them. Their rebuke had no effect on the parents. But did it have an effect on Jesus? **Oh, yes!**
- Verse 14: When Jesus saw it, he was indignant. This is the only time in the Gospels when Jesus was said to be indignant. It's a Greek word, "aganakteo," and it literally means "very much pain, or grief," and usually results in expressed displeasure. The disciples' action caused Jesus pain and grief, because he had compassion on the helpless, the vulnerable, the least, last and the lowest. What is it that makes us indignant? It reveals a lot, doesn't it? We will see in this same chapter the disciples getting indignant at James

and John. Why? Because James and John ask Jesus if they can be his wing men in the kingdom. I think I am right when I say that the other ten were NOT indignant at James and John out of compassion for the Lord or anyone else. In chapter 14 we will read where the disciples (and one Gospel says specifically, Judas) were indignant about a woman pouring out costly ointment on Jesus, anointing him with it, because they said it could have been sold and the money given to the poor. John tells us that Judas was the disciple who voiced his indignation, the others probably agreeing with him, not because he cared about the poor but because he wanted that money for himself. When was the last time you were indignant and what was the reason? I know there's such a thing as righteous indignation, but how often does that happen? It is a good habit to get into, to search our hearts when we feel indignation rise up and ask, "Why am I feeling this way? Is it my heart of compassion that has been aroused, or am I indignant because I didn't get what I wanted, or because someone disagreed with me, or because I want everybody else to do and believe exactly as I think they should?" Jesus was indignant perhaps because, to quote JT English, "There's no such thing as conditional dignity," and that's what the disciples were showing to the child.

- What does Jesus do when he is indignant at his disciples? He did what was needed. Still does. He corrected his disciples by telling them what to do and what to stop doing. Do this: let the little children come to me. Don't do this: Do not hinder them. That word is for all of his disciples, right? Whatever we are doing that allows and encourages children to come to Jesus and grow in Him, especially our own children, let's do that. And whatever we are doing that hinders children from coming to the Lord, and growing in the Lord, let's stop doing that. Then Jesus says something we need to understand: "for to such belongs the kingdom of God."
- **Kingdom (verses 14b-15)**
- What is he not saying in verse 14? That a child, by the very fact that he or she is a child, is part of the kingdom of God. We know that Paul says in Ephesians 2:3 that all of us "were by nature children of wrath." That means we were born that way. Sinners, one and all. So, he is not saying that these children belong to the kingdom simply because they are young. He will explain in verse 15 what he means. But what he IS saying in verse 14 is that he is the King in the kingdom of God, and as Edwards writes, "In coming to Jesus, these children are coming to the one in whom God's present reign is made manifest." I am the King, Jesus says, and I belong to such as these.
- **Ask a child under 10 to come up and receive a gift.** "Did you do anything to earn this?" "Did you work for this?" "What did you do to receive this?" Right, you simply came to the one who was calling, and received what was placed in your hand.
- In verse 15, Jesus illustrates the Gospel. He says, "Whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it." What does it mean to receive the kingdom like a child? Some talk about a child's innocence, humility, or maybe even their honesty because they do or say whatever comes naturally without thinking. A little girl named Debbie prayed, "Dear God, please send Mommy a new baby. The one you sent last week cries too much." Another little girl prayed, "Jesus, please give my brother some brains. So far he doesn't have any." Ok, honest prayers but a bit insensitive. Jesus is not pointing to this humility or honesty and saying, "That is how someone gets into

the kingdom.” If we believe that is what is required, then we just need to work really hard to add those qualities to our lives and we will be saved. No. Jesus is not talking about anything that relates to what children **do**. In fact, the word used here for child means “little child,” even infants, as Luke says in his account. Jesus was holding a baby in his arms, according to Luke 18. Little babies can’t humble themselves and look to others’ needs ahead of their own. So, what IS Jesus saying? That the children are welcomed by the Lord because of their helplessness. They are held up as an example not because of what they have, but because of what they lack. They have no status, no power, and no position. James Edwards writes, “To receive the kingdom of God as a child is to receive it as one who has no credits, no clout, no claims.” As JT English says, “The gospel is not attained by merit; it is received by mercy.” Paul said that in his flesh, he had more reason than anyone on earth to be confident about his own goodness, his own merit. He said, “As to righteousness under the law, I was blameless.” But then he met Jesus. Jesus held him in his arms, so to speak, and in his blindness Paul saw himself with new eyes. He saw the glory of the One who was truly righteous, and understood for the first time that salvation is only from God’s mercy. Paul said, “Whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ...Indeed I count everything as loss for the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.” (Philippians 3:4-8)

- In his weakness and neediness, a little child is a picture of a true disciple, because only empty hands can be filled. What was the door into the beatitudes in Matthew 5? “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” Poor in spirit, helpless, needy, having no confidence in the flesh...like a little child. That’s where the blessings start, where our joy is found. That leads to the final verse.
- **Blessing (verse 16)**
- Jesus took the little children one at a time, in his arms. You get a picture of Jesus holding the baby in the crook of his left arm and placing his right hand on the baby’s head. The parents had brought their children that he might touch them, but he did more than that. He blessed them. By the way, some in the church down through the centuries have made an argument for infant baptism from this passage. We don’t need to get into that, but I will simply say that Jesus blessed them. He did not baptize them.
- Why did he bless them? We are not told, but we know the Bible is filled with examples of those in authority speaking blessing over their children or over God’s people. Isaac gave his blessing to Jacob and Esau, Jacob laid hands on and blessed his grandsons, Ephraim and Manasseh, and blessed his 12 children before he died. The elders here will sometimes speak the Aaronic blessing over you as we close the service: “The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.” (Number 6:24-26) God told Moses to have Aaron and his sons bless the people that way, and he said, “So shall they put my name upon the people of Israel, and I will bless them.” I spoke that over my children many times when they were growing up. And many other times I would simply give them a hug, still do, and tell them that I love them. I tell my daughters, and especially my sons that I am proud of them, because that’s what a young man wants more than anything from his father. Want to bless your children? Look them in the eyes and tell them sincerely that you love them. That you are proud of them. Do the same for

the person you are married to. Teach them to answer when you ask, “Who are you?”, “I am a child of God, able to do hard things and trust in the goodness of Christ.”

- The disciples were being discipled by Jesus, and so are we. Jesus touched people, loved them, prayed for them, blessed them, and took care of them. He calls us to do the same. That certainly starts in the home, but it must not end there.
- Prayer
- **COMMUNION**