

Mark 10:13–16 — Jesus On Children

November 3, 2019

Children. We love to see them running around the foyer with smiles on their faces. One of my favorite things to see at church is the moment new kids discover cookies at the coffee bar. They act like they won the lottery and start stuffing their pockets. Even better than watching kids stuff their pockets with cookies is watching their mothers' reactions when they catch them doing it! That is priceless.

When children are young, they keep us up late at night because they are always hungry and have diapers that need changing. As they get older, children don't just consume our time but take most of our money. There are clothes to buy, sports equipment to purchase, and athletic events where we need to support our kids. Children take a lot of time, money, and energy. What did Jesus think about them? Today, we will find the answer.

In our study in the Gospel of Mark, Jesus was close to Jerusalem. He was not far from entering Jerusalem where he would be crucified. He would die in our places for our sins, then rise from the grave to new life. We are almost to the final week of Jesus' life in this Gospel.

In this passage, Jesus was a few weeks before the triumphal entry. As we saw last week, Jesus came down from Capernaum. Mark jumped over Jesus' ministry in the area of Judea. Jesus was



now in the area of Perea as he approached Jerusalem.

Last week, in the area of Perea, Jesus was approached by a group of Pharisees. Even though the Pharisees were the most devout Jews, they treated Jesus as an enemy because they saw him as a threat to their power. When Jesus was teaching crowds in Perea, they tried to undermine him by asking him what looked like an innocent question, but it was actually a loaded question. They asked, “Can a man divorce his wife for any reason?” They wanted to hear what Jesus had to say about the topic of divorce. Last week, we studied divorce and what the Bible says about it. If you missed that message, you can find the message on our website. Since divorce is a topic that touches all of us either in our families or in our extended families, if you haven’t heard that message, I recommend you check it out.

Today, as we continue in this Gospel, we have a small section where Jesus addressed the topic of children. It is found in three Gospels. Mark 10:13-16, Matthew 19:13-15, Luke 18:15-17. As I prepared for this message, I learned most pastors skip this section because it is so small. I understand why many pastor do that. At first glance, this section appears to be lacking in substance. As I continued to study these verses, I felt differently. These verses give us some rich and practical insight into Jesus’ view of children and how we should treat them as Christians.

In addition, since all three synoptic Gospel writers felt it was important to include in their little section on children, that means it is something we should study.

Turn in your Bibles to Mark 10:13-16. We will read the verses together before we study them together.

And they were bringing children to him that he might touch them, and the disciples rebuked them. 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. Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it." And he took them in his arms and blessed them, laying his hands on them. Mark 10:13–16 (ESV)

We will work our way right through the text and divide it under the following headings: First, the background; second, Jesus loves children; third, the kingdom of God is only for those who receive it like children.

Background

And they were bringing children to him that he might touch them, and the disciples rebuked them. Mark 10:13 (ESV)

In the ancient world, there was none of the sentimentality we have toward children in our day. There was no Disney World. There was no such thing as summer camp. There were no high school sports programs. Children were considered useful as best, a burden at worst.

There was a high mortality rate for children, especially among infants. In an era without birth control, a high infant mortality rate wasn't considered all bad. Too many children meant there were too many mouths to feed. There was often not enough food to go around. While people grieved the loss of their children, less children meant it was easier on the family.

Since small families were ideal, many unwanted children were disposed of shortly after birth. The Romans were known to take the unwanted children and bring them to the woods where they were left to die from exposure to the elements. While researching this message, I ran across an interesting statistic.

From the 230 B.C. onward, the most common family size in Greece was a one-child family, and that was in an era without birth control. The other children were disposed of. Families of four or five were rare.¹

The world's view of children can be seen in an ancient letter we have by a man named Hilarion that was penned just before the birth of Christ in 1 B.C. (His name means cheerful, but after you read his letter, he doesn't sound like a cheerful guy to me.) As a soldier away from his expectant wife, he told her that when she gave birth, if their child was a male, she was to let it live. If she gave birth to a female, she was to dispose of it.²

As we turn to our text, we see Jesus' attitude toward children was shockingly different from the world around him. He loved children in a world that was quick to dispose of them. Let's examine the text.

Who were the people bringing their children to Jesus? I suspect it was parents. I suspect most of the people bringing their children to Jesus were mothers. We don't know that for sure, but it is likely. What age children were they bringing to Jesus? They were bringing little children. The Greek word for children in this text is the word *paideia*. That is a broad term for children that can be used to describe children up to 12 years of age. While the term for children is broad in this context, I believe we are talking about younger children for a number of reasons.

First, at the end of this section, it speaks of Jesus taking the children in his arms and praying over them. Try taking a 12-year-old into your arms to hug the

¹ <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevin-deyoung/jesus-loves-the-little-children/>

² <https://sententiaeantiquae.com/2018/07/15/if-it-is-a-girl-a-letter-about-child-exposure/>

child and pray over the child. It just doesn't work. Children of that age are too big. That means the children brought to Jesus in this scene must be younger. They were still at a stage where you could snuggle with them and hold them in your lap. That means they were younger children.

Second, when Luke recorded this event in his Gospel, he used a different Greek word to describe the children brought to Jesus. He used the word *brephos*. That word means a baby or newborn.

Now they were bringing even infants to him that he might touch them. And when the disciples saw it, they rebuked them. Luke 18:15 (ESV)

So people were bringing their babies to Jesus so he could touch them. They were bringing their toddlers to Jesus so he could touch them. This was Jesus running the church nursery.

The next logical question is, why were they bringing their little children to Jesus? Jesus performed miracles. Was there some kind of special diaper-changing miracle that the Bible does not describe? Why were parents in a culture where children were to be seen and not heard bringing their children to Jesus?

Some history will help. In the Old Testament, we see illustrations of fathers praying a blessing over their children. For example, we see Isaac praying a blessing over his sons, Jacob and Esau. Jacob prayed a blessing over each of his sons.

Historically, it developed in the synagogue that parents brought their children to the Jewish elder, asking that they would put a hand on their children and pray a blessing on their children. There were three things the Jewish elders prayed for in a child blessing. First, they prayed the child would grow to become

famous in the law. Second, they prayed the child would be faithful in marriage. Third, they prayed the child would become an adult abundant in good works. When the elder prayed this blessing over a child, he put his hand on the child's head. Sometimes the father of the child also placed his hand on his child's head as the elder prayed the blessing.

The Jewish Talmud tells us there was even a special day set aside for parents to bring their children to the elders for this blessing. It was the day before the Day of Atonement, also known as the day before Yom Kippur. This was the day when parents would bring their young children en-mass to the Jewish elders, who would put a hand on their heads and pray for God's hand of blessing in their lives.

In our text, it was not the day before Yom Kippur, but we have parents bringing their children to Jesus to be prayed over. Why were they doing this when this was not the special day? I think the answer is easy. They were bring their children to Jesus because they recognized him as a powerful rabbi. They wanted Jesus to pray for God's hand of blessing in their children's lives.

If we read the parallel account of this scene in the Gospel of Matthew, we can clearly see that parents wanted Jesus to put his hand on their children and for Jesus to pray for God's blessing on their children.

Then children were brought to him that he might lay his hands on them and pray... Matthew 19:13 (ESV)

This is similar to what we do at CrossWinds when it comes to child dedication. I have the privilege of placing my hand on a child, and I get to pray for God's blessing on that child's life. Here we find good precedence for child

dedication as we practice it at CrossWinds. Just as Jesus was holding children and praying for God's blessing on a little life, we hold children and pray for God's blessing on those little lives.

Historically, some people have tried to use this passage as justification for infant baptism. While I know the arguments for infant baptism are more finely nuanced than I am able to present in this limited time and I love our brothers and sisters in Christ that practice infant baptism, I see this text providing stronger support for the practice of infant dedication than for infant baptism.

People were coming to Jesus with their kids asking for a blessing. We can picture how this went down. One mother was bold enough to bring her baby to Jesus and ask him to hold her child and pray a blessing over her child. Jesus was thrilled with the opportunity. He prayed a beautiful blessing on the child while he held his hand over that little head. The proud mom left and couldn't stop telling her friends about the wonderful prayer Jesus prayed for her child. Mothers are competitive. Every mother that heard about this brought her child to Jesus asking if he would do the same thing. "Jesus, will you pray for God's blessing on my child?" I imagine that it didn't take long for women with their young children to start coming out of the woodwork. Soon, the crowd was growing around Jesus and the diapers were stinking. The mob was swelling, and the diapers were smelling.

The disciples thought this was totally inappropriate. They considered Jesus far too busy and far too important to be working with nursery-age children. They thought droves of mothers with little children all asking for Jesus' blessing

was a bad use of Jesus' time. They thought this was all a bother and a headache. The disciples thought they were protecting Jesus by sending these parents away.

It says the disciples were rebuking the parents. In the Greek, the word for rebuke is *epitimaeo*. This is a very strong word. It means to reprimand someone, to correct someone. The disciples were angry at these parents. How dare they bother Jesus by asking him to pray a blessing on these snot-faced rug rats? Thankfully, Jesus felt the opposite.

Jesus loves children.

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." Mark 10:14 (ESV)

When Jesus realized his disciples were chasing away the children and their parents, he was indignant. Indignant in Greek is a very strong verb. It means to be angry. It means to be irate. You could say Jesus was hopping mad. Jesus was steaming mad. This is the only time in the Bible that it says Jesus was indignant. Jesus was fuming mad at his disciples for sending away the children and for treating the children and their parents like they were unimportant. Jesus was angry at the disciples for thinking he didn't care about children or that he didn't love children.

The Gospel of Luke adds that as the parents were leaving, Jesus called them back.

But Jesus called them to him, saying, "Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them..." Luke 18:16 (ESV)

What we see is that Jesus loved children in a world that ignored children. Jesus considered children a blessing. As I thought about this, I realized many of Jesus' miracles involved children, especially young children. That is because he loved them so much. A few weeks ago, we saw Jesus cast a demon out of a father's son at the base of the Mount of Transfiguration. We also saw Jesus raise Jairus' young daughter from the dead. Jesus loved children.

Mark 10:16 also tells us how he loved these children.

And he took them in his arms and blessed them, laying his hands on them. Mark 10:16 (ESV)

With all of these children coming to Jesus, he could have tried to pray a mass blessing on them. He could have kept them in the audience, held his hand high and prayed for them all at once to get back to his day. That is not what he did. Jesus took time to hold each one of them. That means he prayed an individual blessing over each of them. He held each one in his arms. He placed his hand on every head. He prayed a personal blessing over each of them.

It is clear that in a society that didn't love children, Jesus did love children. In a society that saw children as an inconvenience, he made time for each one of them. He was not too busy for them. This was shocking. It was revolutionary. It was unprecedented. This is one of the reasons every synoptic Gospel writer included this little scene.

There is a simple application for all of us in this. If Jesus loved children, as his people we must love children. Historically, that is one thing that has set the church apart. As Jesus loved children in a world that didn't, the church is to be a place where children are loved even when the world doesn't love them.

Some of you remember what we learned in previous years about early Christians and adoption, when the Romans were putting their babies in the woods so they would die of exposure. One of the historical missions of the early church was to find these abandoned babies, take them home, and adopt them. Christian homes were known to be filled with large families, families in which the children didn't look like the parents because many of them were adopted by the parents. Just as Christians are literally saved by God's grace, early Christians put their faith into practice by saved abandoned children and literally being God's saving grace in their lives.

Today, as Christians, that means we are little Christs. We should treat children like Jesus treated children. We should offer saving grace to children like the early church offered saving grace to children. At the time of Jesus, people disposed of unwanted children after they were born. In our day, people dispose of children before they are born. As Christians, we must be advocates for the unborn. While so many children are done away with before birth, we must be outspoken about the fact that all children — born and unborn — are loved by Jesus and by us. We love children because Jesus loved children.

We live in a society where there is a desperate need for foster parents. There are many children who are in troubled homes. Christians couples can have a great ministry to children that are in struggling situations by being foster parents. We love children because Jesus loved children.

As Christians, we should be eager to adopt children and welcome children that are not biologically our own into our families. Just as Jesus made time in his life to bless the children, we must do the same.

This may not work for many people but a wonderful vision I have is that at CrossWinds every family would be able to open its home and adopt a child that is not biologically its own into its life. What a great way for Christ's people to put their faith into practice. What an amazing way for people who have received unmerited grace to extend unmerited grace toward the children that Jesus loves that are in desperate need of a family that loves and cares.

Another way we can love children and make time for children is by getting involved in children's and youth ministry here at CrossWinds.

As a former youth pastor for 10 years, one of the things I loved about CrossWinds the moment I came is the strong commitment of CrossWinds to teaching children about Jesus.

We have seven core values at CrossWinds. The sixth core value is about children and families.

Family — We believe in the importance of a healthy biblical family and supporting parents in their responsibility for the spiritual health of their children.

This is why we have Wednesday night AWANA programs. We are committed to having the same kind of love for children as Jesus. We are committed to blessing children with the Word of God like Jesus. We are committed to helping parents raise their children to know Jesus. This is why we want parents working with their children in their AWANA books.

This is why student ministry in junior and senior high school is important to us as CrossWinds. Jesus loved children. We love children. This is why we have CW Kids classes on Sunday mornings between services. Jesus loved children. We love children.

Today, few churches have large children's ministries because they take so much time and energy. While many churches shy away from strong children and student programs, at CrossWinds, that is something we lean into. We love children because Jesus loved children.

The kingdom of God must be received like a child.

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

This is a powerful verse. Whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child will not enter. What does this mean? How does a child trust? What can we learn about a child's trust that teaches us about the way we must trust Jesus?

A little child looks with complete trust and confidence to his or her parents to meet all of his or her needs and to save him or her from every danger. In the same way, we must look to Jesus to meet all our needs and to save us from every danger, especially the danger of hell that we justly deserve.

Like a child looks to his parent to save him in time of need, we look to Jesus to save us in our time of need. Just as a child is helpless without her parent, we are helpless without our Jesus.

Have you ever seen a child give the pick-me-up sign? He stands at his parent's feet. He holds his hands in the air and looks at his parent's face. In that

moment, a child is not asking her parent to pick her up partway and she will do the rest. A child is placing all of her faith and trust in Mom or Dad to pick her up so she lands safely in her parent's arms.

That is what Jesus said. The only way to become a Christian is to give up thinking we have anything to offer. We have to approach Jesus like a helpless child, completely and totally dependent on him to save us. We hold out our arms and say, "Jesus, I need you to save me. I need you to pick me up. I can't do anything to get myself in your arms. You need to put me there."

Hear what Jesus said,; Nobody will be in the kingdom of heaven unless they receive it this way. Nobody!

In two weeks, we will study the story of the rich young man, which is the next story in the Gospel of Mark. Let me read you his story, but as I do, I want you to notice the contrast Mark intended when he put these two stories together. The rich young man trusted in his behavior and bucks, but he struggled to be part of the kingdom. The little children brought to Jesus had never heard of the Ten Commandments. They had no money. The only thing they had to offer was complete trust and dependence. That is what qualified them for the kingdom.

And as he was setting out on his journey, a man ran up and knelt before him and asked him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone. You know the commandments: 'Do not murder, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honor your father and mother.' " And he said to him, "Teacher, all these I have kept from my youth." And Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, "You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." Disheartened by the saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions. And Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!" Mark 10:17–23 (ESV)

Here we have a rich young man who tried to behave his way into heaven. He said he kept all of the Ten Commandments, which we know he didn't. Nobody has kept all of them. We also have a guy who was wealthy, and he found more security in his wealth for his future than he found in Jesus for his future. Jesus closed by saying how difficult it was for those with wealth to enter the kingdom of God because it is so easy to trust in their money instead of him. Do you see the contrast? We have the rich guy who tried to behave his way into the kingdom and trust in his bucks to get to heaven, but he didn't make it. On the other side, we have the young children, who had no money, who did not even know the Ten Commandments, but they had the one thing that is necessary, complete trust.

Jesus said that is the only way that any one of us can be part of God's kingdom. We approach it like a child that has complete faith and trust in the king to save him and pick him up.

Another illustration of this is the parable of the tax collector and the Pharisee that Jesus told. Luke put this parable next to the story of the story of Jesus's care for the children in his Gospel so he could show a similar contrast.

He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt: "Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.' But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!' I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted." Luke 18:9–14 (ESV)

The Pharisee looked at himself and what he had done with his life and he swelled up with pride. The tax collector, like a little child who had nothing to offer, looked to God and cried out for mercy. He is the one who went home justified.

The only way for any of us to enter the kingdom of heaven is not to look at what we think makes us better than others or more deserving than others. It is not to look to our wealth or our wisdom. It is to be children that realize they have absolutely nothing to offer. As a child looks to his or her mother and father with complete trust for everything, because he or she has nothing to offer, we look to Jesus the same way. That is the only way to be part of God's kingdom.

Let me summarize what we learned.

Conclusion

1. **We love children because Jesus loved children.** In a world that treated children as an inconvenience, Jesus was different. He loved them. He blessed them. He spent time with them. As the church, who are Jesus' people, we must go out of our way to love children like Jesus, especially the ones who feel unloved in this world. As parents, we should consider foster care. We should consider adoption. We should offer to help out in youth ministry. Help in AWANA. Help in Sunday morning kids classes. We love children because Jesus loved children.
2. **The kingdom of God must be received like a child.** When we take communion, I want you to picture young children that have their hands held up to their parents asking to be picked up into their arms. There is nothing they can do to make it happen. They just look to Mom or Dad with their arms in the air and know with confidence that because their parents love them, they

will pick them up to the safety of their arms. That is a good picture of the only way to be saved by Jesus. When the communion cups are passed, I want you to ask yourself, “Is that me? Am I looking to Jesus with trust in his grace alone to save me or have I become like the rich young man? Have I become like the Pharisee? Am I trusting in my bucks and behavior to save me more than Jesus? Am I trusting in all the good things I have done so I see myself as better and more deserving than others?” If that is what we are doing, that is not the way to be part of the kingdom. The only way to be part of the kingdom is to approach Jesus and trust him save you like a little child.



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