

“Jesus Loves the Little Children”
The Gospel According to Mark 10:13-16
July 22nd, 2018

One day a little girl noticed that her mother had several strands of white hair sticking out in contrast to her brunette head.

She looked at her mother and inquisitively asked, “Why are some of your hairs white, Mom?”

Her mother replied, “Well, every time that you do something to make me cry or be unhappy, one of my hairs turns white.”

The little girl thought about this for a moment then asked, “Momma, how come *all* of Grandma’s hairs are white?”

You gotta love kids! After all, *we all were kids once, right?* And some of us still are!

I want to be six again.

I want to go to McDonald's and think it's the best place in the world to eat; I want to think M&Ms are better than money, because you can eat them.

I want to be six again. I want to be happy, because I don't know what should make me upset.

I want to be naive enough to think that if I'm happy, so is everyone else.

I want to be six again. I want to spend my afternoons climbing trees and riding my bike, letting the grownups worry about time, the dentist, and how to find the money to fix the car.

I long for the days when life was simple. When all you knew were your colors, the addition tables, and simple nursery rhymes, but it didn't bother you, because you didn't know what you didn't know, and you didn't care.

I want to be six again.

As we continue our weekly study of Mark’s gospel account, we’re in the midst of the 10th chapter, having examined the first 12 verses over the course of the last two Sundays. Today’s passage comes right on the heels of the topic of divorce. As we saw last Sunday, divorce is hard on everyone it impacts, but especially so for children of divorcing parents. This is true whether the divorce has biblical grounds or not. Divorce, while necessary in some instances, always leaves pain and suffering in its wake.

Today, the emphasis is children; to have a faith like theirs. If we look further back to the previous chapter – **Chapter 9** – we remember that Jesus twice discussed children there.

* **Mark 9:36-37** – “Then (Jesus) took a little child and set him in the midst of them. And when He had taken him in His arms, He said to them, ³⁷“Whoever receives one of these little children in My name receives Me; and whoever receives Me, receives not Me but Him who sent Me.”

* **Mark 9:42** – "...whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown into the sea."

Before we get to our passage for today (**Mark 10:13-16**), Jesus begins two other teaching points with the word "Whoever." Those two:

* **Mark 9:41** – "... whoever gives you a cup of water to drink in My name, because you belong to Christ, assuredly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward."

* **Mark 10:11** – "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her."

With today's passage, we come to the 6th time in the span of 17 verses that Jesus begins a teaching point with the word, "Whoever..."

The Gospel According to Mark 10:13-16:

"¹³Then they brought little children to Him (Jesus) that He might touch them; but the disciples rebuked those who brought *them*. ¹⁴But when Jesus saw *it*, He was greatly displeased and said to them, "Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God. ¹⁵Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it." ¹⁶And He took them up in His arms, laid *His* hands on them, and blessed them."

After three consecutive Sundays of heavy teaching (hell, marriage, divorce), we come to the topic of children. Typically, Jesus has something to teach us, and His point goes beyond the words on the surface. For the balance of this message, I'll be addressing some questions of the text, and then I'll share some outcomes/applications to our lives today.

The first question is – ***Why did people bring little children to Jesus?*** Verse 13 says that "He (Jesus) might touch them." As we've seen in Mark to this point, Jesus' touch brought healing to the sick and diseased; He healed even when people touched Him! But, there's no indication here in this instance that the "little children" were sick.

There's something important for us to understand about these children. If we look to **Luke 18:15**, we see that these "little children" were babies. The verse reads, "Then they also brought infants to Him that He might touch them; but when the disciples saw *it*, they rebuked them." This surely implies that it was *parents* who were bringing their *infant* children to Jesus.

In the Old Testament dispensation, parents brought their male children to the priest to receive circumcision, the mark of belonging to the family of God. God established circumcision with Abraham as a sign of one's inclusion in the covenant God made with His people. Here are God's words in **Genesis 17:10-12** – "This *is* My covenant which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you: Every male child among you shall be circumcised; ¹¹and you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between Me and you. He who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised, every male child in your generations, he who is born in your house or bought with money from any foreigner who is not your descendant."

This continued on into the New Testament. John the Baptizer's parents took him to be circumcised on the 8th day (**Luke 1:59**). Even Jesus was taken for circumcision on the 8th day (**Luke 2:21**). Yet, that covenant sign changed with Jesus' sacrifice on the cross at Calvary. Circumcision no longer served its purpose because Jesus' shed blood (as to the blood of infant

boys upon being circumcised) cleansed the sins of the elect ones He came to earth to save. The waters of baptism, the New Covenant sign of the covenant, symbolize the cleansing of sin.

Then, in **Acts Chapter 15**, Judaizers came to churches with the teaching that Gentile followers of Jesus had to first become Jews (circumcised) in order to be saved from their sins. The leaders of the church gathered in Jerusalem for what is known as the Jerusalem Council (the first General Assembly or Presbytery meeting!) There, these leaders decreed that receiving circumcision was not necessary for a person to be a follower of Jesus Christ. But, the practice of placing the mark of the covenant on infant children continued, so from that point, many Christian parents have brought their children to receive the New Testament mark of belonging to the covenant – baptism.

Jesus' expressions and gestures in today's passage are a strong indirect argument in favor of infant baptism. For sure, blessing these babies could have included baptism, though not specifically mentioned, even as Jesus' praying for the children is not mentioned here, but could have happened. However, it is plausible, if not likely, that both prayer and baptism took place.

It is good for parents to bring their kids to Jesus. He gathers with His people every Sunday!

The second question is this – *Why did the disciples rebuke the parents who brought their parents to Jesus?*

The disciples probably thought they were protecting Jesus by heading off the parents who brought their children to Him. After all, these men saw firsthand how busy the Lord was with healing, casting out demons, teaching, and conducting miracles. To pinpoint the reason why they rebuked the parents more closely, Jesus' disciples didn't think He should waste His time on children; they didn't think children were important to Jesus because children weren't important to them!

Jesus wasn't pleased with the disciples. His words from verse 14 - "Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God." Jesus was angry with the disciples because they were doing the very thing for which Jesus so consistently opposed the Pharisees. "They misrepresented the character of God. They distorted His grace and they diluted His holiness. By their actions (the disciples) were saying, 'This is what Jesus is like. He has no time for you or your children!'" (Ferguson, 161)

God was similarly angered with His servant Moses in **Exodus 4:24-25** for not taking his son to have the sign of the covenant placed on him. "And it came to pass on the way, at the encampment, that the LORD met him and sought to kill him. Then Zipporah took a sharp stone and cut off the foreskin of her son and cast it at Moses' feet, and said, 'Surely you *are* a husband of blood to me!'" As Christian parents, we can actually be a hindrance by forbidding our children from receiving the New Testament sign of the covenant – baptism.

The third question is – *What did Jesus mean when He said we must receive the kingdom of God like a little child?*

Child-like faith is a little boy who ties a rope swing onto a tiny sapling's branch. Then, noticing that the seat of the swing rests on the ground, he goes to get the garden hose and begins to water the sapling.

Commentator William Lane notes, "Unlike adults, who do not want anything to be given to them, children are comparatively modest and unspoiled. This Kingdom belongs to such as these because they receive it as a gift. God wills to give the Kingdom to those who have no claim on it." (Lane, 360)

A little girl whose father had just died asked her mother where her father had gone. "To be with Jesus," the mom replied.

A few days later, talking to a friend, the mother said, "I am torn to pieces to have lost my husband." The little girl, remembering what her mom had previously said asked, "Momma, is a thing lost when you know where it is?"

Her mother said, "No, of course not." "Well, then, how can Daddy be lost when He has gone to be with Jesus?"

Receiving the Kingdom of God is to receive the gospel message and Jesus Himself. This is a gift of God, not a right; it is given by grace, not earned by qualifications. As Augustus Toplady put it in his great hymn "Rock of Ages" – *"Not the labors of my hands can fulfill Thy law's demands; nothing in my hand I bring, simply to Thy cross I cling."*

As we seek to further apply this message, how can we ensure that we are not forbidding our children from coming to Jesus? A vow that Christian parents take when they bring their children for baptism provides answers – this is a question I pose to Christian parents before sprinkling the water of baptism on their child's head:

"Do you...promise, in humble reliance upon divine grace, that you will endeavor to set before (your child) a godly example, that you will pray with and for (your child), that you will teach (your child) the doctrines of our holy religion, and that you will strive, by all the means of God's appointment, to bring (your child) up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord?" (PCA Book of Church Order paragraph 56-5)

What does the vow mean when it says "all the means of God's appointment"? It means parents mustn't take short-cuts in raising their children to trust in Jesus. They can't leave such an important task as evangelizing their kids to someone else. Parents love their children more than anyone else does; they should, therefore, do all the Bible teaches them to do, or not to do, when training up their children to believe in Jesus Christ as Lord. To that end, parents should strongly consider taking advantage of the ministries of the Lord's Church in assisting them to show Jesus to their children. After all, the Church is who Jesus entrusted with the keys to the kingdom (**Matthew 16:18-19**); the leaders of God's Church give account to Him (**Hebrews 13:17**).

The following article appeared in a local newspaper as an "Open Letter to My Parents":

I am your child. You have brought me into this world and raised me to what I am today. If I am not what I should be, please do not be too harsh with me, for I am your product, and by my actions I advertise the quality standard of home. Do not point at one of my playmates as an example of how I should behave, for by doing so you are admitting that his parents are doing a better job than you.

You say that you love me, and yet it has been years since you put your arms around me at bedtime and with tears in your eyes asked God to watch over me as I slept. You seem to be more interested in my school grades or sports statistics than in the condition of my eternal soul. You give me the impression that it is better to be popular than to be pure; better to be attractive on the outside than to have that “inner beauty” that comes to one who loves the Lord.

So the next time you feel like throwing up your hands and saying, “I just can’t do a thing with you,” please remember you have had the opportunity to influence me since I was born, and that the Bible says, “Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.” (**Proverbs 22:6**)

Come to Jesus without pretension or ill motive, friend. Become His child – He loves His children who are His by faith in Him alone.