

It's a Small World After All!

Mark 10:13-16

I don't believe it's accidental that a story about children follows a teaching on marriage and divorce. Could it be that when Jesus holds a high view of the sanctity of marriage that He also has a high view of the family?

Our text in Mark 10:13-16 is one of two stories, describing two separate but related incidents. The first paragraph, verses 13-16, contains Mark's description of Jesus' response to the disciples' attempt to hinder parents bringing their children to Jesus so that He could bless them. The second paragraph, which Pastor Mike will be preaching on next week, contains the incident of the "rich young ruler" who came to Jesus to learn what he must do in order to obtain eternal life.

I believe the clear connection between these two stories is that both of them deal with how people enter into the kingdom of God. My goal is to give you a clue on what verses 13-16 teach us are essential elements to entering the kingdom of God.

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

Who is the "they" in this passage? Perhaps the image you have in your mind is of a group of mothers taking their children on a play date to see this man called Jesus. That is an image that our cultural context might lay over top of these verses, the idea that dads are busy bringing home the bacon, absent and disconnected from child rearing. But from the way the passage is written in the Greek, the truth is actually very different. What we learn from the way this sentence is phrased is that, actually, it was fathers who were bringing the children, not mothers.

Now why is this important? It's because in the culture of the day, fathers had the responsibility of taking their children to a Rabbi to be blessed and dedicated to God. And that's what's happening here. The word 'bringing' is not the usual one used but is, in fact, the word used to bring a sacrifice to God as a way of dedicating oneself or that sacrifice to God.

So this was an intensely spiritual activity that was going on here. This wasn't parents taking their kids on a day out in the same way that we might take our children to see Santa Claus at Christmas. It was parents bringing their children to Jesus so that they could be blessed and dedicated to a life of discipleship.

When we put these elements together, the fathers bringing the child to be blessed, and the dedication on the part of the fathers, we see a very important principle. ***It's the family that is primarily responsible for the spiritual well-being and growth of their children. Parents, take your children to Jesus!***

Deuteronomy 6:4-7 "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. 5 You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. 6 And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. 7 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.

God has ordained two contexts or “gardens”, if you will, in which he grows children: the home and the church in partnership together. The home is where kids see the gospel lived out and learn to believe in its power. Our kids will learn to believe the gospel by how we communicate it and by how we live it out. Do our children see in us the unconditional love, graciousness, faithfulness, forgiveness, and gentleness that we say God has for them in the gospel?

Kids also need someone besides their parents to speak into their lives and reinforce what’s being said in the home. Reggie Joiner in *Parenting Beyond Your Capacity* writes, “Children need more than just a family that gives them unconditional acceptance and love; they need a tribe that gives them a sense of belonging and significance.”

Children become like their community, so we need to raise them in the larger community of faith. There are three significant things in helping our kids produce sticky faith...faith that transitions from childhood to adulthood. 1. Parents who model Biblical Christianity, 2. Other non-related adults who have an interest in spiritual growth of children and youth, 3. Multiple spiritual experiences that help children and youth put faith into action.

But as we return to our text, we see that not everyone was happy with the children coming to Jesus. And, amazingly, the people who most resented it the most were the disciples - those who had spent the longest time with him – and who, quite frankly, should have known better. Now they are openly rebuking the parents in a way that would have been both public and embarrassing.

Why did they do this? Who knows? Perhaps they were trying to protect Jesus’ time and space. Perhaps they didn’t like the chaos of having so many children around. Perhaps they resented having to share their space with children and wanted to keep Jesus all to themselves in a nice, tidy, quiet way. I think it had more to do with conforming to the pattern of the culture that reduced children to insignificant possessions. Whatever their motivation, these long-time followers of Jesus should have known better...

They had already forgotten something Jesus said just a few days before, recorded in Mark 9: Jesus had taken a child into his arms and said this: “Whoever receives one child like this in my name receives me.” And yet here they are rebuking the parents and trying to get rid of the children.

Mark 10:14 “But when Jesus saw it, he was indignant and said to them, “Let the children come to me; do not hinder them...”

He became angry with them because they were misrepresenting His value system. Jesus gives two quick commands to his disciples; one positive and one negative. Jesus uses the opportunity to proclaim once more to the disciples that He's willing to accept the nothings in society, the ones who have no social status and standing.

All through the Scripture, we see God's heart for children; especially those who had no one to care for them:

Exodus 22:22-24 "You shall not mistreat any widow or fatherless child. 23 If you do mistreat them, and they cry out to me, I will surely hear their cry, 24 and my wrath will burn, and I will kill you with the sword, and your wives shall become widows and your children fatherless."

Deuteronomy 10:17-18 "For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who is not partial and takes no bribe. 18 He executes justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the sojourner, giving him food and clothing."

James 1:27 "Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world."

Jesus cares for children, especially those who have no one to care for them. If He cares for children, shouldn't we? Aren't we to be like Him? ***The Church must serve as an advocate for families and especially for children.***

Let me take just a moment to give you some troubling statistics on children. If you leave out the miscarriages and the genocide of abortion, the statistics are painful. Fourteen million children who reach the age of birth die each year before the age of five. Of these fourteen million, about ten million die from five conditions: about five million from diarrhea; about three million from measles, tetanus, and whooping cough; and about two million from respiratory infections, mainly pneumonia. Most of these could be saved by simple oral rehydration therapies for the diarrhea; a five-dollar injection for the measles, tetanus, and whooping cough; and a \$.50 antibiotic for the respiratory problems. But of course, the vast majority of these children are among the desperately poor, far from the medical blessings we take for granted.

Would you believe that America is one of the most violent countries in the world against its children? Not only do we kill a million pre-born children a year, but 21% of the children in America live in poverty; 25% of girls under eighteen have been sexually abused by someone close to them; possibly as high as 30% of all mental handicap may be linked to fetal alcohol syndrome; one study of 36 hospitals showed that in 10% of the pregnancies mothers used illegal drugs during pregnancy; and 89% of school teachers surveyed report that abuse and neglect of children are a problem in their schools. The American home is increasingly an unsafe place for children to be. And there is no better place.

Do you show kindness to the children you encounter in your neighborhood, home, and church? What can you do to help the children who are sick and needy? If we want to reflect the heart of Jesus in our church, we must constantly be striving to find new and creative ways to encourage children to come to him and we must be constantly striving to dismantle the barriers that prevent them from finding Jesus.

Mark 10:14-15 ...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."

What is the characteristic of a child that models what we need to be in order to enter the kingdom of God? He is welcoming the children, but it also serves as a metaphor in that He is saying there are characteristics of a child that model how we should come to him, even as adults. Jesus did not say that men had to become children, but rather that they must become child-like, in some way, in order to enter the kingdom of God. The question that we must answer, then, is: In what sense must we become child-like in order to enter the kingdom of God?

There are two answers which are most frequently proposed, both of which, in my opinion, fall short of biblical teaching. The first child-like characteristic is that of **humility**. Are children humble? We must understand that children, all children, are born sinners. This is the clear teaching of Scripture:

Romans 5:12 "Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned"

Committing sin does not make us a sinner. We are sinners, we were born that way, and that is why we sin. Every human being born is born a sinner

Proverbs speaks often of the foolish, wayward way of the child which necessitates correction and warning (Proverbs 22:15; 23:13-14). A child is not naturally humble. In fact, children, from the very beginning, are demanding; they expect our attention, now! And if we fail to give it to them, they let us know. Children often interrupt conversations, because they fail to have a sense of humility. Discipline is not intended to remove child-likeness but child"ish"ness.

The second "virtue" of a child, according to many, is that of **faith**. We are told that children are naturally trusting by nature. I believe that the book of Proverbs tells us that children are naturally gullible, and this is not the same as faith. So I don't see receiving the kingdom of God as a child to be referring to humility or faith.

The characteristics of children that I believe Jesus is referring to here, and fits the context given the next story, are **helplessness** and **dependence**. We must come to Christ with a realization of our helplessness. If we would come to Jesus for a blessing, we must not come in our own strength, our own understanding, our own wisdom, our own good works. We can only come to Christ in our helplessness, looking to Him and to His grace alone. ***The thing which commends children to Christ is their helplessness, not their goodness. And this is precisely what must characterize every person who comes into the kingdom--they come as those who are helpless and undeserving, entering into His blessings because of God's goodness and grace, not due to their own merits.***

We must also come with a realization of **dependence**. From helplessness comes the need to depend upon one who is able. This dependence is what Jesus referred to in the Sermon on the Mount: when He said:

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

Two words are used in the New Testament for the word “poor.” The first word refers to someone who was barely able to maintain a living from their wages. The second word refers to someone reduced to begging for a living...most often connected with being crippled, blind, or deaf. They couldn't function in society and had to plead for grace and mercy from others. They had no resource in themselves.

The person who is blessed is the person who is the second word for poor...absolutely incapable of improving his condition, and totally dependent on others. A person who is poor in spirit has no sense of self-sufficiency. He recognizes that he is spiritually bankrupt.

Romans 3:10-12 “None is righteous, no, not one; 11 no one understands; no one seeks for God. 12 All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.”

This is spiritual bankruptcy. We have no assets, nothing we can turn over as partial payment for our debts. Mankind owes God a debt that he has no means whatsoever to pay. Man, every man, is spiritually bankrupt. Salvation is a declaration of bankruptcy. But what kind of bankruptcy did we declare? In the business world there are two options, popularly known as Chapter 7 and Chapter 11. Chapter 11 deals with what we could call a temporary bankruptcy. This option gives you time to work through your financial problems. It gives you time to pay your debts, to work yourself back into a position of good standing. Chapter 7 is for the person or company that has reached the end of their financial rope. You are forced to liquidate your assets and pay your creditors what you can. This is the, "I'm broke and can never pay off my debts" type of bankruptcy. Here's the beauty of the Gospel, plain and clear...

Colossians 2:13-14 “And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, 14 by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross.”

No one can enter the Kingdom of God on the basis of what they have done. Poverty of spirit is the only way in. As long as you are not poor in spirit, you can't receive grace. You can't become a Christian unless you realize your bankruptcy and are totally dependent on Christ.

Helplessness and dependence...two essential characteristics of any who would follow Jesus.

Believe it or not, self-reliance ultimately ends in defeat because there are only two possible outcomes for self. You can either "deny yourself" (Matt. 16:24) as you hand over control of your life to Jesus Christ, or you can wait until you face Jesus on Judgment Day and discover that self did nothing to provide for your eternal well-being. Self makes a very poor savior because self is unable to forgive your sins or bring you into a relationship with your Creator. You need the cross of Christ and the blood of

Jesus to wash away your sins, and you need the power of the Holy Spirit to convert your soul through repentance and faith. Apart from spiritual conversion, all you have to rely upon is self. And self won't "pay the bills" so to speak when it comes to having your sins forgiven and your name written in "the Lamb's book of life."

A self-sufficient attitude is detrimental to our relationship with God. So, to keep us from self-sufficiency, He brings trials and problems that remind us how much we need Him. Trials keep us from trusting in ourselves. They show us how weak we are and how much we need to be dependent upon God and the sufficiency of His grace.

John Calvin said, "For men have no taste for it (God's power) till they are convinced of their need of it, and they immediately forget its value unless they are continually reminded by awareness of their own weakness."

Paul's attitude toward his weakness was quite different from what our usual response is to weakness. Paul said:

2 Corinthians 12:10 "For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong."

We hate our weaknesses, but Paul took pleasure in his. Why? Paul took pleasure in his weaknesses because they were opportunities for him to trust the all sufficiency of God's grace.

Philip Hughes said, "Every believer must learn that human weakness and divine grace go hand in hand together." Paul learned this, have you?

Think about your own life. When things are going well and you are having no problems in your life, how much are you dependent upon God? Let me put it this way: When do you pray more, when things are going well, or when you are in the midst of a difficult situation? If you are anything like me, it is the difficult times of life that cause you to depend upon the Lord, to trust in His strength, to lean on His grace.

The characteristic that Jesus wants the disciples--and us--to learn from these children is that of helplessness and dependence. The issue is one of dependence over self-reliance. The kingdom of God belongs to those who depend on God rather than the self-reliant.

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

Children are examples of individuals who cannot do very much for you and me. When you receive children, they do not help your social status, your prestige, your power, or your ego. As a matter of fact, children require something from you. Children represent the poor, the needy, the downtrodden, the ordinary - just plain human beings. Believers, we must always remember that how we receive and treat others is how we treat Christ. So how are you treating Christ these days?

MAP Points:

1. It's the family that is primarily responsible for the spiritual well-being and growth of their children. Parents, take your children to Jesus!
2. The Church must serve as an advocate for families and especially for children.
3. The thing which commends children to Christ is their helplessness, not their goodness. And this is precisely what must characterize every person who comes into the kingdom--they come as those who are helpless and undeserving, entering into His blessings because of God's goodness and grace, not due to their own merits.