

Let the Children Come

Mark 10:13-16



Justin Deeter – July 2, 2017

As a child, summer is the best time of year. While school is out, children have the free time to play and soak up the sun's rays. If you can remember thinking back to when you were a kid, there is a simplicity to life during those summer months. Some of our fondest childhood memories occur during the summer. However, it has not always a great time to be a kid. Children who aren't blessed with godly homes often go through severe trials as they try to figure out their place in the world. Many children find their lives in chaos, and instability cripples them.

As we consider our passage today, we will see that Jesus loves children. He never saw them as a burden to be pushed away, but a gift to be gathered into his arms. In our text, we learn a simple but important lesson from Jesus: we must value children and encourage them to come to Jesus. However basic this truth may seem, we are prone to forget Jesus' words. As we unpack Mark 10:13-16, we will see that we must (first) recognize the personhood of children, (second) recognize the priority of children, and (third) recognize the example of children.

1. The Personhood of Children

In the gentile and Roman world of Jesus' day, children were not valued by society. Long before the invention of abortion, where the life of the baby is killed

in the womb, the Romans practiced infanticide. If a child was not found suitable or not the wanted gender, the baby would be cast out and tossed with the trash. The baby would die of exposure, abandoned by the parents. This practice of infanticide wasn't outlawed in the Roman Empire until AD 375. The Romans mockingly called the early Christians "baby-lovers" because they protested the practice of infanticide, and often took the exposed infants and adopted them as their own. As you can see, the sanctity of human life and the worth of children has been a priority of the church from the beginning.

Traces of the vicious onslaught against children can be seen in the Gospel's themselves. We are told in Matthew 2:16-20, that in order to try to kill the Messiah, Herod order the slaughter of every baby boy under the age of two. We often read that and move on quickly, but fail to imagine the pile of infant corpses that such a slaughter would leave behind.

Before we get any further, we must be so very careful to cast judgment on those Romans, because the same slaughter goes on today. The only difference is that now it's behind the closed door of a surgical room. Abortion is the secret holocaust that indicates the culture we live in is just as vile and evil as the pagan Romans. The 59 million babies that have been aborted in the United States sense *Roe vs. Wade*, indicates that we live in a world to Rome. The indignation Jesus had for his disciples for rebuking the children is nothing compared to the indignation Jesus has upon this country for the millions of lives killed in the name of woman's rights. Children are not discarded burdens to be dismembered and thrown away, but valuable human beings, created in the image of God, with a right to life and protection.

Perhaps one of the most despicable ethicist currently working in our country, is the Princeton University professor Peter Singer, who has openly urged the practice of infanticide. He argues quote, "Newborn human babies have no sense of their own existence over time. So killing a newborn baby is never equivalent to killing a person, that is, a being who wants to go on living." He goes on to advocate for infanticide, particularly in the case of disabled children. His reasoning is so reprehensible, that he goes on to justify his position by saying bluntly: "I don't want my health insurance premiums to be higher so that infants

who can experience zero quality of life can have expensive treatments.”¹ Now, Peter Singer is on the fringe, however his moral reasoning is the logical conclusion of all those who justify abortion. The great question in the abortion debate isn’t “is it wrong to kill a baby?”, but rather, “when is a baby a person with a right to life?” For Singer and others like him, personhood is a sliding scale. A person must meet certain qualifications, including the ability to think and have emotions. So for Singer, high functioning animals (like a Gorilla) have more of a claim to personhood than a newborn baby.

In light of these attacks on human dignity, we must affirm the personhood of every human being from conception to the grave. Every human life is valuable and deserving of protection. This is why Jesus’ words here are so important, he bucks the expectations of his own culture and affirms the worth, value, and dignity of children.

The disciples displayed great concern for Jesus. They had seen his pace of ministry. His fame expanded throughout the region. Hundreds of people flocked to him and wanted to speak to him. Families brought their children in order for Jesus to bless them, and before long a scene unfolded. Jesus is there with babies in his arms, toddlers jumping on his shoulders, and children sitting by his feet. When the disciples saw that these parents were bringing their children to Jesus, they boiled in anger. Jesus isn’t a jungle gym! He has more important things to do than hold babies! He has important people to speak to, and adults he needs to teach. The disciples believed these children were an intrusion into Jesus’ ministry, a pointless distraction that needed to be pushed aside. Feeling protective, they begin rebuking these families for bothering this important rabbi with their children.

Jesus, seeing his disciples shooing away the parents and kids, fills with indignation. He is angry and grieved over his disciples’ actions. Why? Because, they still don’t understand the kingdom. Jesus didn’t come for the elite of society, he came for the lowly. He rejoices in spending time with the marginalized. He rejoiced in spending time with children. As we read the Gospel, children are all over the place. Earlier, in Mark 9:36, we see Jesus take a child

¹ <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2015/jun/16/peter-singer-princeton-bioethics-professor-faces-c/>

and set him on his lap. Jesus repeatedly heals children who are sick. Children loved Jesus, and Jesus loved children!

So Jesus, filled with indignation rebukes his disciples. "Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God." The disciples fail to see the kingdom as Jesus sees the kingdom. Children are not a burden or a curse, but a gift. We cannot feel like disciples, where we kick the kids out of the way.

In so many ways, community groups were such a huge blessing this last year. However, in the community group I lead, we are one of the few groups with young children in our families. Each Sunday night, we had a six year old, a four-year old, and two two-year olds. As you might have imagined our house was hopping with kids laughing, giggling, running, and playing. With that also came the whining, crying, and interrupting. Though some of the teenage girls in our group would take them to play during our discussion time, occasionally a crying kid would interrupt our meeting needing mommy or daddy. I found myself sinfully thinking, "Man, these kids make our community groups much more burdensome!" However, I'd remember Jesus' words and feel convicted. "Let the little children come to me."

I pray you would join me in being on guard against these sorts of attitudes. Even as our children are here in worship today, I pray that you wouldn't look with disgust when a kid is a bit squirmy or noisy as he joins us for worship.

We must listen to our savior's words and love children as he loved them. This means that we value them and cherish our own children as a "heritage from the Lord."² These leads us to our second point, we must recognize the personhood of children, but also we must recognize the priority of children.

² Psalm 127:3

2. The Priority of Children

Jesus says, “Let the little children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God.” Churches, and the Christians within those churches, have a priority of encouraging children to come to Jesus. We must not put any obstacle in their way. In our ministry as a church, we must prioritize our children with our energy, time, and money.

Children are a priority, because there is great opportunity for the seeds of the Gospel to be cultivated. Children can be converted, and put their saving faith in Jesus. In fact, as statistics have shown, the majority of people who become Christian while they are young, before their hearts become hardened by sin and the false philosophies of the world. One Gallup study tells us that nineteen out of twenty people who became Christian did so before the age of twenty five. At age twenty-five, one in 10,000 will become believers; at thirty-five, one in 50,000; at forty-five, one in 200,000; at fifty-five, one in 300,000; at seventy five, one in 700,000.³ What this indicates is that as one gets older, their conversion isn’t impossible, but increasingly less likely. Thus, children from the nursery to college students provide a strategic window for the church. We must make the most of this window and make sure we prioritize evangelism and discipleship amongst the young. Children’s ministry, youth ministry, and college ministry must be a priority for the church.

Forest Hills has done an excellent job in our recent past of doing just that, and it’s something we must continue to do. As someone who was the student pastor at this church, I still have a strong affinity for our young people, and seem to be unable to stay away from the youth room on Wednesday nights. Not only do we want to continue to prioritize these ministries, we want to continually improve them and make them better. We want to think carefully in how we organize and structure these ministries, so that we can make a maximum impact in these crucial years.

Since this provides a great opportunity to do so, I want to share some ways we have tried to improve these ministries in our recent past and some vision for the continuation of these ministries in the years to come.

First, we wish to assist and equip parents for the work of discipleship in the home. One of our core values at our church is “healthy families.” We believe that the home is to be the primary school of Christ. The ministries of the church will never replace the duty of Christian parents in the evangelism and discipleship of their children. Parents can’t abdicate their role and outsource the spiritual development of the children to “paid-professionals.” Any discipleship done here at the church is intended to be supplemental to what’s taking place at home, not a replacement for it.

Second, we wish to equip kids in God’s word and teach them to see the world through the lens of Scripture. We want to develop a comprehensively Christian worldview. The starts in the preschool and moves all the way to high school. Over the last few years, your pastors and the Sunday school council has implemented a new curriculum for our Sunday School for preschool-youth. The curriculum, called Children’s Desiring God,” is designed to nurture and train children in the Scriptures. From the preschool age, children are encouraged to memorize scripture as they learn some basic truths about God. As they grow up in our church, the hope is that by the time the graduate high school they’ve received a thoroughly Christian education. Just in the last few years, our high school students have studied biblical manhood and womanhood, and now are currently learning how to interpret and read the Bible on their own. The goal is not to make them like church by simply providing a buffet of fun and games. Rather the goal is to convince them to love God, love his word, and love his world. We want our children to come to treasure Christ and live their entire lives for his glory. Any children’s or youth ministry that becomes a baby sitting service hinders children from coming to Christ. Instead, we must encourage them to faith and once they put their faith in Christ, cultivate them to holiness and obedience in Christ.

We still have and always will have a long ways to grow in those areas. There is always room for improvement, and may we never be so arrogant to say “we’ve arrive and are ministering to our children perfectly.” Because of how important children are, we must always be thinking through how we can be more effective in reaching their hearts for Christ. In addition, each generation of

young people requires new approaches to engage them with the Gospel. Therefore methods that worked five or ten years ago may not be effective for the generation today. Therefore, these ministries require careful thinking and vision to be successful.

Because these ministries are such a priority, this is one of the reasons why the church established a children's ministry directory position, so a staff person can be dedicated on focusing on this ministry. The personnel committee has been actively looking to fill this position, and we hope that position will be filled soon by someone who can help us put this vision into practice. In addition, we want to pray for and encourage Grayson Gibson, our interim youth director, for his work with our teenagers. He's already doing an excellent job discipling these students. We must make sure these ministries have everything they need to be successful, however they need more than just money. They need you! Unfortunately, one of the hardest areas of our church to find volunteers for is the children's ministry. It's a scramble every year to find someone who is gifted and willing to teach Sunday school to our children or volunteer in some way. I pray that many of you will pray about greater areas of service in these vital ministry areas. It doesn't matter if you are eighty years old or twenty-five years old, we can use your help ministering to our children and youth.

For those of you who have been active in serving in these ministries in recent years, thank you! Your investment is not in vein, and you follow Jesus words in encouraging the children to come to him! As the son of a pastor's kid, I've grown up in the church. Though I've forgotten many of my teacher's names. I've had many Christians invest in me and teach me the Bible. Though they might have felt they were completely wasting their time teaching Sunday each week, God used the seeds they planted to make me into the man I am today. When working in children's and youth ministry you often wonder if you are really making a difference. Often times you rarely see the fruit of your ministry. However, your work is not in vein! Keep encouraging children to come to Christ, for to such belongs the kingdom of God! So we must prioritize our ministry to children, however thirdly we see that children also are an example to us!

3. The Example of Children

Jesus tells us that we must be like a child! He says, "Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it." That's pretty strong words! If we hope to receive the kingdom of God, we must learn to be like children. It's not optional. If we hope to be saved, we must learn this lesson from our kids. What does that mean?

Well it doesn't mean that we become immature and childish, like a spoiled brat that throws a temper tantrum. Nor, does it mean that we must be innocent like a child. Anyone whose had a two year old in the house knows that there is no such thing as an innocent child! The sin nature reveals itself almost immediately! So what does Jesus mean when he says we must be like a child? Put simply, just as children are completely helpless and dependent on their parents, so too must we be dependent on God. If we hope to enter the kingdom of God, we must be helplessly dependent on Jesus. This is what our children can teach us, to be utterly reliant upon God our father.

We are at the stage of life in our home, where our kids are needy. There is very little they can do for themselves. As their dad, I'm regularly doing the menial things they cannot do for themselves. I get them food to eat. I make sure they have something to drink. I make sure diapers are changed and wipe their bottoms. I make sure they are bathed and dressed. In fact, just this morning I was up at 4 am to change the sheets of a kid who wet the bed. For their life, they depend upon their mom and dad for everything! How humbling it is to need help with your basic bodily functions and personal hygiene! However, Jesus says that's what it means to be in the kingdom.

This is what Jesus means when he tells us we must be child-like. We must cast off any pretense of self-sufficiency and fling ourselves in desperation upon the cross of Christ. We must become aware of our sinfulness and our helplessness. We must realize that we have no power or strength to save ourselves. So we, in faith, fling ourselves upon the mercies of God. We cast ourselves upon the savior as helpless children, knowing that he alone can meet our need. Only he can save us from condemnation and death.

Salvation comes to us when we realize that we are helpless children in desperate need of a Heavenly Father. It is only when the spirit cuts through our own pride, that we can see our helplessness. This morning, if you've yet to put your faith in Christ, I pray that you would realize your helplessness and throw yourself upon Christ this day. You can't do anything without him. Learn from the children and be like them. Humble yourself and beg Christ for mercy. God is gracious and abounding and steadfast love, and rejoices in answering the call of desperate sinners.

Final Thoughts

In our passage today, we see Jesus the savior, hanging out, snuggling, and playing with children. He prayed for them and blessed them. Surely, he loves the little children! As we listen to our savior's words and watch his example, we have seen that children are persons, with the full rights, privileges, and protection of anyone made in the image of God. We must see children as a wonderful blessing and do everything within our power to care for them. We have also seen that in our ministry, we must make children a priority. We should encourage the children to come to Jesus, and must not put any obstacle in their way from making a profession of faith! Finally, we've learned that we must become like children if we hope to be saved. We must repent of self-reliance and throw ourselves in desperation upon Christ. "Whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it."

God may be leading you to respond in a variety of ways. He might be leading you to be an advocate for children, through working in pro-life ministries like the Wilson Pregnancy Center or caring for the orphans through adoption and foster care. Perhaps, you've felt convicted about neglecting the children in your family or in our church. You want to make them a priority by committing to volunteer in our children or youth ministries. If so, come find a pastor or contact one of us this week, and we'd be happy to get you connected in serving in these important ministries. However, perhaps the Lord is leading you to become like a child. Your pride has laced your heart for so long, and you've never fully thrown yourself on Christ like a needy child. This day, may you turn from your sin and trust in Christ for the salvation of your soul. Today, become like a child and go to Jesus. When

you do, you will find he is eager to pick you up and embrace you as his own. In his embrace, you will feel the security of his love and the joy of heaven.