

Jesus Loves to Bless Little Children

Mark 10:13-16

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Introduction

Last week we began chapter 10 and I pointed out to you that Jesus was continuing to instruct His disciples about His kingdom—His kingdom which they so little understood.

- It all started when they confessed that Him as King (as the Christ—or the anointed one) and He told them that now He was going to Jerusalem to suffer and die and rise again.
- He rebuked Peter (and really all of them) for speaking against this plan and told them that as His followers, they would also have to suffer for His sake.
- He surprised them by telling them that they will not have important seats of authority in this present world as they suppose, but that in His kingdom the greatest one is the one who serves the lowly ones in His kingdom.
- He has continued to reiterate this in various ways as they make their way to Jerusalem for the last time with Him.

Last week, we saw how He insisted that in His kingdom, men are not permitted to divorce their wives for just any reason, but are to respect God's institution of marriage, where they are united as one.

- This week, the narrative moves from marriage to children, and once again we see confused disciples receiving instruction about the status of children in the kingdom.
 - Jesus has already told them that children are to be received and cared for, and here He brings that lesson home by His example in receiving them.

Listen as I read it to you—Mark 10:13-16.

- Pay careful attention because this is the very word of God.

Mark 10:13-16: Then they brought little children to Him, that He might touch them; but the disciples rebuked those who brought *them*. ¹⁴ But 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. ¹⁵ Assuredly, I say to you, whoever

does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it.” ¹⁶ And He took them up in His arms, put *His* hands on them, and blessed them.

May the Lord add His blessing to the reading and to the exposition of His Word.

In looking at this passage today,

- we want to consider what we can learn from it, the Holy Spirit enabling us.

First, we should learn from this passage that Jesus blesses our little children.

Second, learn here how much Jesus wants us to bring them to Him for His blessing.

Third, learn that nobody can enter His kingdom unless they receive it like a little child.

Let's take up each of these lessons.

I. Learn here that Jesus blesses our little children.

A. Mark describes what Jesus was doing with these children that were brought to Him.

1. In ver. 13, it says that the parents brought them to Jesus that He might touch them.
 - We have seen a great emphasis on touching Jesus (or being touched by Him).
 - It was by touching that multitudes of people were healed.
 - However, there is no indication that these children were being brought for physical healing.
2. Mark tells us in verse 16 that Jesus was blessing these little children.
 - **Mark 10:16: And He took them up in His arms, put *His* hands on them, and blessed them.**
 - We can see that they are little children because they are children that Jesus takes up in His arms.
 - You see here that Jesus is putting His hands on them to bless them.
 - So the parents were bringing their children for Him to touch them in order to bless them.

B. What is it for Him to bless them? What does this mean?

1. One thing is for certain.
 - Since Jesus was doing this, it was not some kind of empty ritual.
 - When He blesses, it is not a mere wish.
 - J. A. Alexander mentions that Jesus blesses them in a two-fold manner because He is both God and man.
 - As man, He prays for a blessing...
 - As God, He answers His own prayer.
 - So the result is that a blessing is transmitted—the child or the person that is blessed receives some benefit from Him.
2. We can learn something about blessings from the Old Testament.
 - When God calls Abraham, He promises that He will bless him and his children, and He also tells him that through his seed (that is, Christ), all the families of the earth will be blessed.
 - Armed with this assurance, we find Abraham's son Isaac blessing his sons, Jacob and Esau (though Esau's blessing was diminished).
 - And then you have Jacob blessing all twelve of his sons including Joseph whose two sons are blessed by him.
 - There is a clear sense in these blessings that something real is being given.
 - The blessings are official and relate to the passing along of one's name and inheritance to his children.
 - This can be seen in the blessing of Joseph's sons by their grandfather Jacob:

- **Gen 48:15-16: And he blessed Joseph, and said: “God, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, the God who has fed me all my life long to this day, ¹⁶ the Angel who has redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads; let my name be named upon them, and the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac; and let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth.”**
 - Clearly, he is conveying to them the inheritance that God had promised to him and to his fathers.
3. But what is this blessing of Abraham that is passed on to his children?
- The blessing of Abraham is the inheritance of God’s kingdom.
 - The essence of it is in God’s covenant promise in which He says, “I will be God to you and to your descendants, and you shall be my people.”
 - Along with this, God promises them a city in which they will dwell before Him as His people forever.
 - In the Old Testament, it is Canaan, but it is much more than Canaan.
 - Ultimately, it is the inheritance of the whole earth, renewed, where Jesus will reign over us in righteousness forever and ever.
 - Abraham and Jacob and Moses and the rest of them understood this, else they would have felt cheated since they did not receive anything during their lifetime.
 - In the New Testament, we are told that blessing of Abraham is the same that is given to all who come to Christ in faith, not only from the Jews, who are his physical offspring, but also from the Gentiles.
 - Gal 3:7-8 says: **Therefore know that *only* those who are of faith are sons of Abraham. ⁸ And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, *saying*, “In you all the nations shall be blessed.”**
 - Paul goes on to speak of the fulfillment of this in Christ:
 - In Gal 3:13, he says: **Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, “Cursed *is* everyone who hangs on a tree”), ¹⁴ that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit [the Spirit who seals us to eternal life] through faith.**
 - And in Galatians 3:26-29, he speaks of this as an inheritance that we have in Christ:
 - Gal 3:26-29: **For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. ²⁷ For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. ²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹ And if you *are* Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.**

- You can see that the blessing, now more fully revealed in Christ, is that we are heirs of the kingdom of God, the eternal city that God promised to Abraham. It belongs to all of us who believe.

C. How marvellous it is to see Jesus bless these little children who are brought to Him!

1. He was bestowing His name and His inheritance on them—on these little children who were too little to understand what it meant or to ask for it.
 - The blessing conveys the idea that they are counted with His people who will receive His inheritance—they are His adopted children.
 - They have full acceptance, full forgiveness through Christ even though they have done nothing to obtain it.
 - They have fellowship with Christ in name (sons of God), in title (as heirs and co-heirs with Christ), in likeness (as being made like Him), in honour (as those He is not ashamed to call His brethren), in sufferings (learning obedience through suffering), in His kingdom (as those who reign with Him).
 - With all this they have liberty as the sons of God who can freely render their service to Him in love—they delight in pleasing Him—they are taught to serve as those who are already accepted rather than to gain acceptance.
 - They have free access to Him for help and protection...
 - They have the hope of everlasting blessing and joy in His house.
2. The whole idea of God putting His name on His people by the pronouncement of a blessing is found in Numbers 6:22-27 where God commands Aaron and his sons to represent Him by pronouncing His blessing... and then look at what says happens when this is done:
 - **Num 6:22-27: And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: ²³ “Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying, ‘This is the way you shall bless the children of Israel. Say to them: ²⁴ “The LORD bless you and keep you; ²⁵ the LORD make His face shine upon you, and be gracious to you; ²⁶ the LORD lift up His countenance upon you, and give you peace.” ’ ²⁷ So they shall put My name on the children of Israel, and I will bless them.”**
 - Do you see?
 - When they pronounce this blessing, they put God’s name upon His people, identifying them as His sons and daughters who are blessed by Him.
 - Jesus is the LORD from whom this blessing comes, the seed of Abraham in whom all the nations are blessed.
 - In the New Testament, we see the ministers of the New Covenant pronouncing God’s blessing upon His people as Aaron did.
 - That is why we continue this practice in the church today—where ministers put God’s name on us and our children when they pronounce the blessing or the benediction.
 - Each time that is done, you and your children are being identified as His heirs.

- Does this mean that they are all elect?
 - No. Just as it is with adults, there are some who will apostatise because they don't have faith and the blessing of the Spirit.
 - But those who profess together with their children are counted as the seed. They will be sorted out on the day of judgment if not before.
 - But the little children are counted as heirs just as much as professing adults.

TRANS> Jesus blesses our little children—that is the first thing we ought to learn here.

- Now let's look at the second thing we learn in this passage.

II. Second, learn here how much Jesus wants you to bring your children to Him for His blessing.

A. These parents set an example for us.

- Verse 13 begins, **Then they brought little children to Him, that He might touch them.**
 1. These parents did this because they had faith—faith that Jesus would touch them and that when He did, their children would be blessed.
 - They had seen how He blessed adults who came to Him, and they believed that He would also bless little children that were brought to Him.
 - And they believed it would benefit their children—otherwise it was foolish for them to do this.
 2. You need to learn from their example.
 - Don't suppose that you have to wait for your children to be old enough to ask for the blessing of Christ in their lives.
 - He has called parents who believe to look to Him to bless their children before the children can even speak.
 - He does not leave them in the sinful unclean state in which we are all conceived.
 - In 1 Cor 7:14, Paul testifies that even if only one parent believes, that parent's children are not unclean, but holy.
 - They belong to God in His covenant with His people, just as Israel did, as heirs to His promises rather than as the children of unbelievers who are without hope and without God in the world.
 3. The standing of little children in the covenant is tied to their parent's standing until they are of age, ability, and maturity to make a credible profession of faith.
 - a. If a parent professes, the children are holy. If not, they are unclean.
 - Just as the sons of believers in the Old Covenant were given the covenant sign of inclusion (circumcision) on the basis of their parent's standing,
 - so the children of believers under the New Covenant are given the sign of baptism.
 - Their standing with God is on the basis of their parent's standing.

- When Peter called for baptism of the first converts after Jesus rose, he testified that the promise was ‘to you and to your children.’
 - The children are counted with their parents.
- b. When they are of age and maturity to profess—and this need not be rushed—
- they are examined, and then admitted to the Lord’s Supper.
 - The Lord’s Supper is different than baptism because it requires us to understand what we are doing each time we come—
 - It’s part of the very action of coming that we not only eat the bread and drink the wine, but that we discern that we are symbolically receiving the body and blood of Christ crucified by which we are reconciled to God and by which we are strengthened.
 - Each time we come, it requires a personal engagement with Christ in which we are consciously receiving Him as crucified.
 - It requires a credible profession, not a standing that is tied to one’s parents, but one that is based on one’s own understanding and present walk.
 - Each time we come, we are to examine ourselves and before we come for the first time, we are to be examined by the elders—not to see if we are an heir of Christ’s kingdom and have His blessing, but to see if we are ready to come with understanding and are of sufficient maturity to examine ourselves.
 - It is like coming to offer a sacrifice at the altar in the OT.
 - You had to examine yourself before you did that.
 - Each time you came, you had to examine yourself and make sure that you were clean—if not, you could not partake.
 - Jesus also taught that you were not to come if you had wronged your brother and not made things right with him.
 - You have to be of age and maturity to examine yourself.
 - Children you are still heirs of God’s blessing just as much as adults are, and you are learning to be responsible and to examine yourselves.
 - But until you are admitted to the Lord’s Supper, you have a wonderful blessing—you have parents that are taking responsibility for you.
 - They brought you to church from when you were young or you wouldn’t be here.
 - You are heirs of Christ kingdom because they are heirs of His kingdom.
 - And you are being trained up by God’s Spirit through the means of grace so that when you are of age and maturity, you can take responsibility to look after your own soul.
 - You should be doing that more and more as you grow up.
 - I was reading Peter Leithart’s book on baptism a couple of weeks ago, and he made the case that children ought to be treated as heirs of Christ’s kingdom who have His blessing.

- He used the illustration of a president who is sworn into the office and how that means nothing unless the people he governs recognise him as president and treat him as president.
- I totally agreed until he said that that meant that children must be given the Lord's Supper or you were treating them as if they are not the people of God. That is just not so!
 - Even the very sign that God appointed for the supper is not suited for babies—eating bread and drinking wine.
 - Babies are not cut off from God's blessing because they are too little to eat and drink—the supper is not intended for babies or children until they are of sufficient maturity.
 - God does not ask children to do what belongs to adults. Eating the bread and drinking the wine requires physical ability, but it also requires mature spiritual understanding.
- He used the wrong illustration.
 - He should have spoken of a crown prince.
 - The heir to the throne is treated as royalty from the day of his birth.
 - But he is not given the responsibilities of the throne until the day of his coronation.
 - As a child, he is being prepared for those responsibilities, but he is not expected to assume those responsibilities until he is ready to take the throne.

B. Jesus shows that He is zealous to bless little children.

1. He was indignant with His disciples who tried to stop them.
 - We don't know why they did, but verse 13 tells us that they did.
 - They seemed to think that Jesus should not be bothered with these little ones that were mere children.
 - And of course all along the way to Jerusalem the theme is that they don't understand about Christ and the ways of His kingdom.
 - Jesus continues to express disapproval with them for their superior attitude... and here is angry.
 - Verse 14 says: **But when Jesus saw it, He was greatly displeased...**
 - "Greatly displeased" could be translated *indignant*.
 - Mark is the only one who tells us that Jesus was angry about this.
 - He is the one of the four evangelists who tells us about Jesus' emotional reactions—Matthew, Luke, and John don't do this so much.
 - And this is helpful to see—Jesus was angry about this—it was important to Him. He was passionate about it.
 - He had come to bless His people AND their children—that had been God's way from the beginning.

- What did His disciples mean—hindering these children from receiving His blessing?
2. He declares on no uncertain terms that his disciples must not stand in the way of these little people being brought to Him for blessing!
 - Verse 14 goes on to add that He: **said to them, “Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God.”**
 - These little people are heirs of His kingdom just as much as their parents.
 - They should not be hindered because “of such is the kingdom.”
 - It is true, they may not all be elect—we know that there are many both adults and children who are in His kingdom but are not elect.
 - Some of them have stony hearts of unbelief.
 - But the children of His people as a class—as a category of His people—are just as much His people as adults or seniors or anybody else—and He is eager to bless them.
 - The adults can have stony hearts of unbelief too.
- But isn't wonderful to see how eager Jesus is to bless our little ones.
- He loves them and delights to bless them.
- C. Parents, this ought to encourage you to bring your children to Christ for His blessing!
1. Pray for them from before they are even born.
 - Not just for their health, but that they will be partakers of the Holy Spirit and of the new life that Jesus gives when He blesses us—of their spiritual inheritance.
 - Pray that they will respond to correction, learn from their trials, receive the love of God even as expressed by their parents, learn to trust God...
 - Pray that they will delight in the praises of God as they see and hear you parents praising Him and see you listening to and receiving God's word.
 - Pray that they will benefit from the word as they hear it and so be trained up to make their own profession by the gracious working of the Lord.
 2. And bring them under the sound of God's word and the praises of God, daily in your home as you daily sit at the gates of wisdom and bless the Lord.
 - And as you bring them to church each Sunday to join in the worship of the Lord... and yes, to receive the benediction with you when it is pronounced.
 3. And be sure that you bring them to Christ in baptism, marking them out as the heirs of His kingdom that they are—children of the covenant.
 - Indeed, treat them as those who are heirs of His promises.
 - Tell them of His forgiveness and teach them to seek it when they sin.
 - Tell them of the Spirit and how He works in us to convince us of the truth.
 - Teach them to pray.
 - Catechise them in the great truths of our faith that they might be rooted and grounded in the faith.

4. Do all this, knowing that Jesus delights to bless them because “of such is the kingdom of God.”
 - Do not hinder Christ as a parent by failure to bring them to Him for all of these blessings—
 - He has provided all this for them because He loves them and wants to bless them. He will be indignant with you if you hinder them.
 - And don’t let anyone else hinder you from bringing them to Christ for His blessing.

TRANS> What a Saviour we have—so eager to bless our children that He is angry with anyone that stands in His way!

- You might say, how could anyone stand in HIS way?
 - That is true, if He wishes to bless them, He will.
 - But His manner of blessing the little children of His people is ordinarily to so work in their parents that they bring their children to Him for blessing.
 - Knowing that, what kind of parent are you if you neglect this privilege when He has promised that He will bless them if you bring them?
 - They are the heirs of His kingdom and you must treat them as such.
- Now let’s turn to the third thing that Jesus teaches us in this account.

III. Learn here that you cannot receive His kingdom unless you receive it like a little child.

A. Let’s be clear about what Jesus actually says here.

- Look at verse 15: **Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it.**
- 1. He is not telling us here that we must become like little children.
 - Sometimes when people read this they talk about the innocence of children or about their humility,
 - but the truth is, if someone tells you that you are behaving like a child, it’s usually not a compliment.
 - Often it means that you are whining or being self-centred or perhaps unreasonable.
 - Our Psalm of Focus, Psalm 131, does talk about quieting ourselves like a weaned child,
 - but that is a child that has come to accept that he is no longer on the breast and who is good with that.
- But Jesus is not saying that we should become like little children here,
- 2. He is telling us that we must receive the kingdom of God like a little child does.
 - So what does that mean?
 - How does a little child receive the kingdom of God?

- A little child receives the kingdom of God the same way they receive their parent's name and inheritance.
 - They do not purchase it.
 - They do not try to do something to earn it.
 - They do not use manipulation or deception to get it
 - They do not strive with others for it.
- They simply receive it.
 - They have nothing to bring to the table... no power, no merit, nothing, no clever schemes or appeals.
 - They simply take their parent's name and receive their inheritance.
- We do injustice to this passage and turn it on its head if we try to introduce something wonderful in a child's character that we must have.
 - The point is that we have nothing to bring to the LORD.
 - A child is naked when they come into the world.
 - We simply receive our Lord's gracious gift—we simply trust Him who has promised—and He gives us this most marvellous inheritance.
 - As soon as we try to bring something of our own, we go wrong.

TRANS> Paul Tripp has a wonderful illustration that I heard this week. He said:

B. If you are going to receive the kingdom of God, you need to stop being the dad.

1. Paul Tripp said that he often advises parents to tell that children that they have to stop trying to be the dad.
 - Tell them, "If you are the daddy or the mommy then you don't have a daddy or a mommy anymore."
 - That is a terrifying thought.
 - A little child in arms does not do well without his parents.
 - He does best as a receiver, not as a provider.
 - He does best as a follower, not as a leader.
 - The only inheritance the little child has is an inheritance that has been given to him.
2. This is how you must be to receive God's kingdom.
 - It is a free gift that you must receive by faith.
 - And then, having received it, you continue to trust in Him to provide for you and to guide you.
 - You look to Him to take care of you.
3. Take the coronavirus or the shootings.
 - Instead of fretting about these things and turning to whatever idols you turn to when you are uneasy (food, drink, anger, blame-shifting, anxiety, entertainment, social media, gossip, fretful labour, vegging out), whatever—
 - Why not turn to the Lord in prayer?
 - Why not call up friends and pray with them?

- Why not go to God's word and remember that He is in control and that He is bringing about His purpose for the sake of the church in all this, and that your life and that of your loved ones are in His hands.
- Don't try to take responsibility for things that you are not responsible for.
 - Be a child. Still yourself like a weaned child.
 - You are not the mommy. You are not the daddy.
 - God is your Father. If He is not, then it is all up to you.
- That was a bit of a digression, but a very important one!

TRANS> The point is—you cannot obtain God's kingdom by your own efforts.

- You can only receive your inheritance from God the same way a child receives his inheritance from God—with nothing in your hand.

C. Of course, bringing nothing to receive the kingdom does not mean that you don't obey your heavenly Father... and serve Him... and follow Him.

- You should do these things... but these are not what you do to obtain your Father's kingdom and to take His name.
1. His kingdom is given freely, but so is your obedience and service if you are His child!
 - You love your Father and you want to please Him.
 - You see how wise He is and you want Him to guide you and train you.
 - You want to live the way Jesus lives—with such love and such service freely given for others—so beautiful.
 2. You can't help but do this when you are His child.
 - If you are truly His heir, you are sealed with His Spirit.
 - His law is written on your heart.
 - You yearn to obey Him—obedience is not in slavish fear to gain acceptance, but in loving response to the one who accepts you freely.
 - I don't mean that you don't struggle with sin—of course you do—but it troubles you and it is not what you want to do.
 - You come to your Father and you ask Him to forgive and you and to deliver you—like Paul, you cry out to be delivered from “this body of death.”
 - You know the reality that the flesh wars against the spirit so that you cannot do what you want to do.
 - But you also know that your Father will deliver you and bring you into His kingdom because the Spirit bears witness with your spirit that He is your Father and that you are His heir.
 3. You obey because you have received the kingdom, not in order to receive it.
 - Isn't it wonderful to live in the house of such a gracious and wise Father who trains you in the beautiful ways of His house?

- Isn't it grand that you don't have to be the father who provides all these things, but that you are the child who freely receives them?

Conclusion: Jesus is very clear—if you don't receive the kingdom of God as a little child, you will never receive it.

- Hear verse 15 again: **Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it.**
 - Take these words to heart.
 - There is no way to receive the kingdom of God but the way of a little child.

It is hard for us to accept that He receives sinners like us when we bring nothing.

- Perhaps this is the very thing that makes it hard for us to accept that He blesses little children.
 - Surely they must be required to bring *something* to the Lord.
 - Surely it can't be that He just gives His kingdom to them for nothing.
 - But it is just that.

Bring your children and come as a child yourself.

- Then both you and your children will be blessed.