

"As a Little Child" - Mark 10:13-16

As a pastor, sometimes I have the privilege of being with people on the very worst day of their lives. Often, it involves the diagnosis of a serious illness, or sitting with an individual after their loved one has been involved in a serious accident. It is a privilege, because I get to cry with them. And I get to share words of comfort from the Word of God. It doesn't take away all the pain, or the confusion, but scripture is a powerful tool in every circumstance.

I will always remember one of the most difficult meetings I've had. It was with a young couple whose baby had been still-born. They were devastated, and they were not believers. In fact, as we discussed the grave-site service they wanted me to conduct for their baby, the father told me, "I just don't want to hear any of that Bible stuff."

I told him, "Then you have the wrong guy."

If I do a memorial service, folks are going to hear the gospel of Jesus Christ because that is the only thing that can possibly bring healing at a time like that. And it is the one time that folks are forced to confront their own mortality.

*And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment,
(Hebrews 9:27)*

Everyone needs to hear how they can find eternal life, by admitting their sinful condition, by turning, in faith, to Jesus Christ alone, by believing He died on the cross to pay the penalty for our sins, by believing God raised Him from the dead so we can have a living relationship with the very Creator of the universe. Salvation is by God's grace alone, through faith alone, in Jesus Christ alone.

But what about that still-born infant? What about children who tragically die before they are able to understand the gospel? What about special needs people who are simply not able to develop far enough cognitively to understand their need for a Savior? What about the hundreds of thousands of babies who are aborted each year in our country alone?

I want to assure you that God will take care of those babies. It most certainly is true; Jesus loves the little children. It's not because they are innocent. There are no innocent people. We all have a sin nature. We do not become sinners the first time we sin; we sin because we are already sinners.

... all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, (Romans 3:23)

That includes little children. David tells us, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit:

*Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, **And in sin my mother conceived me.** (Psalms 51:5)*

David was a sinner from conception. That's not the only place the Bible confirms that little kids are as guilty as we adults are: In Genesis, the Lord says,

*"I will never again curse the ground for man's sake, although the imagination of man's heart is evil **from his youth**;" (Genesis 8:21)*

And the word translated "youth" is the Hebrew word that refers to children and includes infants. Or in Isaiah:

*For I knew that you would deal very treacherously, And were called a transgressor **from the womb.** (Isaiah 48:8)*

*The wicked are estranged **from the womb**; They go astray **as soon as they are born**, speaking lies. (Psalms 58:3)*

Because of Grandpa Adam's sin, we all have a sin nature, and that includes infants and little children. So that little bundle of joy is not as innocent as advertised.

And we know the wages of sin is death. (Romans 6:23)

But still, God will take care of our babies because salvation is by God's grace. We do absolutely nothing to earn it. Yes, we have to respond in faith, but the Bible teaches us that God gives us the faith to believe. He does the work of salvation; all of it. So, He certainly can save children before they are old enough to understand that they need saving!

David made an interesting statement after the first child he had with Bathsheba died.

*And he said, "While the child was alive, I fasted and wept; for I said, 'Who can tell whether the LORD will be gracious to me, that the child may live?' But now he is dead; why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? **I shall go to him**, but he shall not return to me." (2 Samuel 12:22-23)*

All right, did you catch that? "I shall go to him." What did he mean by that? The child was dead, but David knew, by the Spirit's inspiration, that he would see him in heaven. God took care of David's child and Jesus will take care of all those who cannot understand the gospel.

Furthermore, we must approach the King of the universe in the same way children do. They have nothing to offer and neither do you. You must come to Jesus understanding this, as a little child.

Let's look now to our text:

Then they brought little children to Him, that He might touch them; but the disciples rebuked those who brought them. (Mark 10:13)

Now, if you recall from a couple weeks ago, Jesus and His disciples are in the region of Perea, on the other side of the Jordan from Jericho. This was an area in which a great number of Jewish people resided, and it was also on the route that Galilean Jews would take to travel to Jerusalem. It would have been faster for them to travel through Samaria, but as we have seen, Jewish folks were quite disdainful of those "filthy Samaritans", so they typically took the long way around, down the East bank of the Jordan River through Perea.

But wherever Jesus was, people were drawn to Him. He taught as no other rabbi had taught. He healed the sick, made the lame to walk. He gave sight to the blind, cast out demons. He even raised the dead to life. So, it's not at all surprising that parents would bring their little children to Him.

We all want the very best for our kids, don't we? These parents were looking for a spiritual blessing. They wanted God to grant special favor to their children and although they probably didn't fully understand who Jesus was, they knew the power of God was displayed in Him. They wanted this very special Rabbi, this spiritually gifted Teacher to bless their children.

But Jesus' disciples tried to get in the way. The Greek word translated as "rebuke" is a very strong word. *Epitimaō* (*ἐπιτιμάω*) means to censure severely, or admonish sharply. These guys weren't being nice about it at all. "What are you people thinking? The Master is far too busy, too important to take time for a bunch of babies!" In their view, which came

from the prevailing religious system of the time, children had no place in the economy of God. The disciples thought that kids simply had to wait until they were capable of understanding and acting in an appropriately religious manner.

They were dead wrong, and Jesus responds with a rebuke of His own.

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. (Mark 10:14)

Jesus was not a happy camper! He was “greatly displeased”, *aganakteō* (ἀγανακτέω). This is another very strong word in the Greek. It indicates great indignation. He was ticked off.

“Let the little children come to Me!”

“Do not forbid them!”

Two commands – one positive and one negative. Could there be any doubt at all as to where our Lord stands on this issue?

And then He gives the reason, and it is absolutely dripping with theological importance.

... for of such is the kingdom of God.

“Of such” indicates that Jesus is talking about a class of people, the little children, in this case. *Paidion* (παιδίον) is the word for infants, toddlers, very little children. And Jesus asserts that the kingdom of God is of them. It belongs to them. And notice that He puts no conditions on the kids. The babies are too young to display saving faith. They are born with a sin nature, so they are guilty, for sure, but they are incapable of responding to the Gospel or even understanding that they are sinners in need of salvation. They are neither believers or unbelievers. And nothing is said about the spiritual condition of the parents, either, except that they want Jesus to bless their kids.

This is God’s grace and mercy. Pure and simple. This is unmerited favor granted to children who are completely incapable of earning it in any way shape or form.

Now, when it comes to divine election, or predestination, I’ve been called a hard-core Calvinist, to which I reply, “Thank you very much!” I’m guilty as charged. It is what the Bible teaches, so if you have a problem with it, take it up with the Holy Spirit.

For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified. (Romans 8:29-30)

God determined who was going to be saved even before He created the universe.

That doesn’t mean you aren’t awesomely responsible for responding to the Gospel call. Accept the gift of God’s grace and you are bound for heaven. Reject God’s gift of grace and you spend eternity in hell. But a baby has not reached a point cognitively where he or she can understand the gospel call. Until they can understand their sinful state, they seem to remain under a sort of special divine care. Jesus doesn’t say that the “elect babies” are of the kingdom of God. He says, “of such”, which certainly implies that the entire class of humans that falls under this category are in His kingdom and if they die before they are capable of responding, God is going to take care of them.

At this point, you might be saying, “Wait a minute, Pastor, that sounds like a conditional sort of election. If a child dies before he reaches a certain age, he goes to heaven. If he doesn’t die young, then he might go to hell. Is he losing his salvation?”

No, because God is completely sovereign. Before time God knew which babies would die early and every of those would be counted among the ranks of the elect.

Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it.” (Mark 10:15)

And here, Jesus goes even further. Not only do little children and infants receive the kingdom of God by grace alone, it is the only way anyone can enter the kingdom of God.

Next week, we’ll look at an individual who thought his piety would get him to God. He was so arrogant that he told Jesus that he had kept the Law perfectly from his youth. Jesus laid him low.

In Matthew, Chapter 7, Jesus talks about a class of people who call Him Lord and cite all the stuff they did in His name:

Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ (Matthew 7:22)

Yet Jesus said He never knew them. Why? Because they didn’t enter the kingdom by grace alone. If you try to add anything at all to the free gift of salvation, you diminish the gift and you disrespect Jesus. Do not try to earn what Jesus has freely given! Just accept it with child-like wonder.

Not the labor of my hands
Can fulfill Thy law’s demands;
Could my zeal no respite know,
Could my tears forever flow,
All for sin could not atone;
Thou must save, and Thou alone.

Nothing in my hand I bring,
Simply to Thy cross I cling;
Naked, come to Thee for dress;
Helpless, look to Thee for grace;
Foul, I to the fountain fly;
Wash me, Savior, or I die.

(Rock of Ages by Augustus Toplady, 1763)

If you are going to enter the kingdom of heaven, you have to do so with utter humility. No sense of entitlement, no merit, no pious achievement, utterly dependent, trusting only in Jesus as a little child; like an infant.

I love what John Calvin said about this: “This passage gives Kingdom fellowship to both children and those who are like children.” That’s it exactly. Sovereign grace is the only way anyone can get to heaven.

Do not try to qualify yourself. Just ask Jesus to save you. Pray, “Lord, I don’t deserve salvation, but would you give it to me anyway? I want you to be my Lord. I want you to be my Savior. I want to spend forever with you.”

So, Jesus rebuked the disciples for trying to drive away parents with little children. He taught that these babies were of God's kingdom, and He showed us that we need to enter the kingdom with child-like faith. Then He illustrated His love and care for children with a concrete gesture, a beautiful gesture.

And He took them up in His arms, laid His hands on them, and blessed them. (Mark 10:16)

“took them up in His arms” is a single Greek word. It means to embrace or to enfold. Jesus didn't just pick these kids up and hold them at arms length, He enfolded them to His breast. Then He laid His hands on them. This is in addition to giving them a hug. Perhaps He gently touched their heads. Finally, He blessed them. You could say He prayed for them, offered them up to God the Father, asking that they be protected and ushered into the kingdom.

Jesus loves little children. And Jesus loves you.

Run to Him, as a little child.