

A Child like Faith  
Mark 10:13-17

John 6:41-59

Mark 10:1-12

Responsive Romans 8:12-17

Last week we started out here in chapter 10, going through the first 12 verses. In those verses we see that Jesus lays out the biblical standard for marriage and divorce. Since chapter 9 there has been a shift in Mark's writing, where he has been focusing less on the multitudes, and Jesus ministry and has come to focus on more personal moments of teaching in Jesus ministry as they make their way to Jerusalem.

In the first chapters it was Jesus establishing his ministry here on earth, gathering his disciples to himself, but now we see that there is a change. He is still teaching to the multitudes that are continuing to gather everywhere he goes, but the focus of his teaching has been upon discipleship instead of the earlier message of repent and believe. That does not mean that the gospel message is not there of course, in our passage this morning there is a clear gospel call that we will see it is just that the focus in Mark's writing has changed to recording teaching on subjects that are more personal to the individual believer, we are seeing more of what it is like to be a disciple then how to become one.

So let us start this morning by reading Mark 10:11-17. Jesus is continuing his instruction through the life of a believer, starting with faith and trust and reliance upon God and the dangers of sin in chapter 9, to humility in service in the ministry of the word, and discipleship in marriage and the family unit here in chapter 10. What we are seeing in each of these things is really the same thing. Pretty much all of these different things can be summed up into one statement. Discipleship is putting on love, for one another. it is a preference of others over our own selfishness. Sometimes I feel like I am a broken record always coming back to this, but the reality is that those who are Christs, those who have been called according to his purpose, who have been justified by Christ's death and resurrection who have the love of Christ in them should live as one who has experienced God's unfailing, gracious love. By that I mean, it is something that should naturally flow out of each of his children.

Understanding what state we are in without God, lost and a slave to our sinful lusts and nature, destined for Hell, children of the Devil. Yet God, while we were such, while we reveled in our sin and disobedience, he loved us, loved us to the point that he died for us. That is each, and every one of his children individually. Christ did not die to make salvation and reconciliation to God possible, he died to make it sure, to guarantee it to those who have faith, to those who are his adopted sons and daughters. What a marvelous love in which he loved each and every one of us, and it is That love which flows through us, and it is this love that is central to our Christian conduct in witness, in marriage, in parenting, and it should flow outward in all that we do. To put it simply, this love is the ruling guide in the New Covenant. As we went through Galatians, as we went through the book of James, and 1<sup>st</sup> John and 2<sup>nd</sup> John, and here even in Mark it is a constant theme, the heartbeat of discipleship, is Christ like Love.

That is why things such as divorce should not be in the community of God's children. But our spirit is willing, and our flesh is weak. Sin still abides within these members, we have been saved from it, we are not longer slaves to it, bound to it as we once were, but it is still there. And it is for this reason, as we saw last week, that even something such as divorce exists because of the hardness, and remaining depravity in us.

As I said I feel like I just keep repeating myself over and over again but as we see in our passage this morning it is still no different. A Christ centered love, and humble service to God, in our witness, in the way we conduct ourselves every day, and even in marriage is carried over to the same in accepting, teaching, and raising children. But Jesus isn't just talked about small children here, but rather he uses them once again as an example, and takes this moment to teach his disciples a valuable lesson.

We must remember again that in the Jewish society, children were not viewed as we do today in America. Today children are the focus, we see children as innocent, helpless, creatures that need protection. But in Israel at the time of Jesus children were considered pretty lowly, childhood was considered an unavoidable interim between infant and adult hood, which at that time was the age of 13. Outside of accounts such as these with Jesus there is no real mention, or reference to children being treated with such sympathy in the Jewish society of Jesus time. The closest thing that we would find is some favoritism toward the son's because they were seen as a blessing from God, for male children were heirs to their father, and it was through them that the family line would continue.

So when we read the disciples response to the parents bringing their children to Jesus it may seem overly harsh, rude, and mean but we must understand the mindset of that time, and not interject our own ideas and sensitivities of today on them. Children were not deemed to be all that important, and certainly not important enough to waste the messiah's time on. You would have thought that the Disciples would have gotten the message by now, because this very thing happened not to long previously but as usual they were not yet able to understand and see the larger picture of Jesus teaching. They had their own ideas of who the messiah is and what he would be like and as we have seen time and time again Jesus does not really fit into these concepts.

As we see in verse 14, "When Jesus saw this he was greatly displeased" I find it interesting that more and more as the book of Mark progresses, we see that Jesus is often disappointed by his disciples, he teaches them, reveals to them and even plainly tells them his purpose, his intent, and the lesson's he has taught, yet they repeatedly seem to go unheeded, its almost like he is talking to a brick wall at times. The word that Mark uses here, *aganaktein*, which means to be aroused in anger, or to put it another way, to vent in expressed displeasure rather than simply brooding about it. This is the only place in scripture that this word is used to describe Jesus being greatly displeased. And I think rightly so, for as I said it wasn't long ago when confronting the disciples on their debate on who would be first in the kingdom of heaven, Jesus took a child, set him in the midst and proceeded to teach them a lesson in humility which they obviously did not take the heart.

Just as how Jesus answered the pharisee's saying that he did not come to save the righteous but the lost, it is the same that Jesus did not come to rescue the strong, but rather to be a refuge for the weak, helpless, and powerless. And there is not greater way to teach this truth in this Jewish society that he was teaching then to take that which was low, small children, and elevate them up to being heirs of the kingdom of God.

In verse 15 we get a hint though, that Jesus isn't really talking about these specific children in this specific case. But rather there is a bigger thing going on here, 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. Children, as he often does he uses the things that are happening as examples to teach greater things. It is not much different then what we do as parents, I have always said there is nothing wrong with taking advantage of a good teaching moment.

The issue of the disciples not allowing the parents to bring their children to be blessed by Jesus was the teaching moment that Jesus took to teach them something much greater. There are a few different things to unpack here, first off in verse 14, Let the little children come to me, and do not forbid them for of such is the kingdom of God. In chapter 9, after Jesus took the child in the midst of them to teach them about humility, and John's response about how they found someone who was casting out demons who was not in their group and they sought to silence him. It is this very lesson that Jesus is still teaching and continuing on.

This is where we have that difficult line to walk between acceptance of those who are children in the faith, and our dealing with false teachers. We must be discerning on who just may not understand or be at the level in their christian walk that you are, and those who are actively leading people astray in false faith and false belief. We should not treat these children in the faith as enemies, but as children who we patiently, carefully, lovingly instruct, seeking and rejoicing in growth and understanding not seeking to crush them in defeat, adding another victory notch in our belt standing for what we believe the bible to teach. I think that Many issues with in the church could be solved if people only understood humility, and the concept of humble service to not only God, but God's family, to each other. But often pride, and selfishness gets in the way, for we are still in the flesh and we war against such sin that is in our flesh.

It is often understood here in verse 15 that the childhood traits of innocence and humility is what Jesus is talking about when he says, "Whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will be no means enter it" But I don't think that is the full picture, we know that when we come to God, when we have been called and are convicted and confronted with our sin, innocence is the last trait that we recognize. The fact is that when faced with God's holiness, and having our eyes opened by his grace and love we don't act as innocent curious children, for we see our rebellion, and our sin as an a front to God and we seek forgiveness. So it is unlikely that those are the traits of children that Jesus is referring to when he says that we must receive the kingdom of God as children.

I think rather that he is referring to the trait of helplessness, being powerless, unable to care for ourselves, unable to enter into the kingdom of God by our own will, or desire, or good work. The word that is used here paidia, which is greek for very young, or infant. I suppose that some will take this text and attempt to use it for a justification of baby baptism, or baby dedication ceremonies, but that really is not the case. True, these parents were bringing their babies to Jesus to be blessed, but this was something that was very common in Israel, Noah blessed Shema and Japheth, Isaac blessed Jacob and Essau, and Jacob blessed his sons and grand sons. These blessings though tended to be more about the passing on of ones name, or property and not what we would think of as a spiritual blessing. The idea of laying on of hands, of a blessing was often of passing something to the one being blessed. but notice Jesus doesn't take much time, or focus on the blessing of the children but rather it is the children themselves, he is not teaching about the ritual of blessing the children, but rather he is teaching something else, he is teaching a lesson about faith, and reliance upon God.

So really, this passage has nothing to do about baby baptism, or dedications and to use it as a proof text of such practices is to completely misunderstand and miss the whole point. It is focusing on what is physically happening and not the purpose and meaning behind it.

As we have seen, these children were babies, and this fact I think only further points to the issue of their helplessness, instead of their child like virtues of innocence. If that were not the case, if it was about the virtues of these children then we must assume that these same virtues must apply to believers, and to Jesus disciples, but innocence and humility are not 2 of the traits that come to mind in Marks record of the disciples conduct and behavior. Often times they are acting brash, rude, and arrogant, they do not have these child like virtues and neither do we, but when it comes to God, and salvation we all share the powerless and helplessness of babies. We are not innocent and eager like small children, rather we are slow and disbelieving. So Jesus using these children as an example here in his teaching is not pointing to what they have, but rather what they are lacking.

They are coming just as they are, small, powerless, and not on their own accord, they are the overlooked, and dispossessed of society, having not yet attained an age of usefulness, they are not seen as having much value in that society. So to receive the kingdom of God as a child, is to receive it as one of these who have no credit, or no claim to do so. But who are like children in their faith, completely reliant upon God, bringing nothing of value earning themselves merit or grace. A child has nothing to bring, they can't even feed themselves, without the provision of it's parents a child would die. It is in this way that we too are like small children in our faith, for without Christ, and his provision, we would all die in our sins.

With this in mind, if we think about the passage of John 6 that we read this morning it sort of takes on a deeper meaning does it not? Verse 53, "Most assuredly I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is food indeed and my blood is drink indeed, and who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me and I in him." He wasn't talking cannibalism, or even the idea of transubstantiation, or the catholic idea that the Eucharist, the bread and the wine becomes transfigured into the actual flesh and blood of Christ. He was talking about our reliance, and substance being of him. Just like without food we perish, without Christ, and his death and resurrection we would perish into everlasting judgment.

All of this taken together points to the complete and total necessity of Christ, the centrality of him in salvation. A complete and total reliance upon him, for small children we are unable, yet he makes us able, we are unwilling, yet he makes us willing, and we are dying, but he feeds us his word in which is life everlasting. Jesus in his ministry focused on the needy, and as we have seen many times has laid his hands upon even the unclean, and by doing so does not become unclean himself but instead cleanses the leper, or the demon possessed of their affliction. Jesus touch brought blessings to the despised in society, brought healing to the sick, and brought hope to the hopeless. It was a tangible, real expression of God's love toward the unclean, toward gentiles, and woman and children. His personal touch of these common people became the distinguishing mark of his ministry, setting him apart from the cold, professional esoteric elitism of Judaism. This gospel is for all people, all nations, men, women, children, slaves, free, gentile, jew.

All who come to God as a small child, he will not turn away, but will take in his arms and bless, as he does this children here in Mark chapter 10. And when this happens, we are not only blessed with the ability to see and hear and understand his word, we are blessed with the holy spirit who gives us guidance and conviction when we go astray. As John says in his gospel, "But as many as receive him, to them he gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in his name, who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." We come to this faith, as babes, praise God for his grace, love and faithfulness toward us, for his care for and provision for us providing that which we need for reconciliation, for conviction, for faith, and a new life in him.