

A Sermon for the DaySpring Baptist Church

By Burt L. Burleson

"Kids of the Kingdom"

Mark 10: 13-16

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Are you aware of the impact our children make on our experience in worship? Jesus says that the Kingdom belongs to them and I believe it because they usher it in here every Sunday. They bring it to church.

What's it do to you to watch them walk down here and sit and listen during the children's sermon? Think for a moment... you like it don't you?

What about when one of them chimes the hour? Isn't there something taking place that's really good for you?

Or when you hear one of them reading some litany down the aisle from you?

Or singing?

Or taking communion?

I'm aware that they change something in the worship experience for me... I'd never want them off in some children's church because the Kingdom belongs to them and I'm afraid we'd miss too much of it if they were off in some other room.

Jesus knew that. He never wanted kids to be seen and not heard... he knew that they bring something essential and so, unlike Paul, Jesus never encouraged us to put anything childlike away but seems to call us to draw nearer to it.

Do you? Do you ever find moments where you stop hindering the child likeness that we need so much to know in life? Do you ever stop blocking that?

Where your response to life isn't so self aware and so calculated. Do you ever quit watching yourself? That is in part what makes for adulthood, you know. You can see yourself... and see yourself seeing yourself. Like one of those clothing store mirrors where you can watch yourself watching yourself... watch yourself.

It's like right now. It's this way every Sunday morning. I'm preaching and there's another me... standing right over there... watching me do this. And I'm talking to myself. "There's someone falling asleep on the pew five, you better do something quick." "They didn't get the joke, what are you going to do now?" You see... I'm self aware in this moment. I'm wondering about the moments where we somehow stop that.

They're there, I know they are... and they're probably moments that catch us by surprise. You're cheering for your team and the shot at the buzzer goes through or the "Hail Mary" pass connects... and you go bonkers.

When does it happen for you?

* Anyone here admit to singing in the shower? (I'll bet Gene Evans sings in the shower) Shower singing... like your on stage or in the choir... in a moment of unselfconsciousness.

* How about when you hit your thumb with the hammer in the garage? The spontaneous response that follows, is so real, isn't it. ...Uncalculated.

* Or how about when you laugh at a great joke or cry at a movie that touches you deep down? Or nap? Or color outside the lines?

Does the child likeness of your life ever get expressed?

A number of years ago now, back when I was a youth minister, I took a group of seventh and eight graders to Galveston. It was an annual thing and most of my annual things looked similar from year to year. When we got there, after checking into the condos, we'd go eat and

then, take a sunset stroll along the beach.

We'll this year, just as we got to the beach for our walk, it started raining. Of course, being the sensible, chaperone-type that I was, I figured the beach walk would be canceled. No such luck. These were middle teenagers. "The rain will make it more fun." And so before I could lock the van doors, they're all walking on the beach in the rain.

And as you might guess, it wasn't long before the walk turned into a swim. And I'm watching them from the van and they're swimming and dancing and jumping. They were holding hands and doing the "Nestea plunge" backwards... it was a group plunge there in the ocean, in the rain, in their clothes.

Now, there is this battle raging within me. A part of me is saying (what some of you are thinking), "They're gonna get sick." "This is ridiculous." "Their parents are going to kill me." "Surely there's an ordinance or something." The other part of me is jealous. A dry van can't compare, so it wasn't long before I was swimming and dancing and jumping and plunging backwards in the ocean, in the rain, in my clothes.

I think maybe I practiced my baptism technique. It was great fun. Of course, there's a price for everything. After the episode in the water, we had to go by the grocery store to let the kids buy some snacks and breakfast foods. So, we're walking around in Krogers wet and I'll guarantee you that the Burritos weren't the only thing frozen in the frozen food section.

There is ironically, a serious connection between our child likeness and the Kingdom. Jesus says that you can't have one without the other. Jesus says, **“Receive the kingdom this way... there’s no receiving it at all.”**

The setting for morning's story sets up the teaching. Jesus is talking with his disciples... he's debriefing, as it were, with his friends after having just debated the Pharisees on the matter of divorce.

They're into some pretty heavy duty theologizing when some parents start dragging their kids into the discussion to get a blessing from Jesus. It was a custom to have a prophet bless your child on his or her birthday. Which is pretty neat. By the time I was born that custom was reduced to playing pin the tail on the Donkey.

It's a great picture really.

And an important thing to do...

taking your children to Jesus.

Parents ought to.... they ought to take their children to Jesus... Here to the community of faith and in their own hearts and minds... and in their prayers.

And these folks did. It's not hard to imagine because parents with little kids don't go anywhere easily. This is an annoying scene. The disciples are having small group time with Jesus... they're into some heavy concepts and ideas and then here comes this parade of preschoolers. This isn't like the picture you saw in your kindergarten Sunday School class, where all the parents are standing peacefully and placidly while Jesus talks to their kids like Santa Claus does at the mall.

No this is messy and noisy.

"Mamma, I don't want to talk to the preacher." "I don't care, it's like eatin' spinach, it's supposed to be good for you and if you throw a fit here it's no Sesame Street tonight."

One baby is crying and one toddler's pulling at Jesus' beard.

There's a brother and sister fighting. **“Daddy, sister bit me.”**

Bottles... bags... diapers... it's anarchy!!!!

So, the disciples come to the rescue. They're going to save the moment from chaos and ruin. Simon Peter, whom I've always pictured as a sort of Barney Fife type guy, takes over.

Now ladies and gentlemen... if you'll just follow me down the trail here, I'm sure the folks in extended session will be happy to take care of your little ones. The Messiah is very busy....

We're talking about some pretty important things here. If you'll just calm down and head over to Mt. Pilot, I'm sure you'll find a prophet over there who'll be more than happy to bless your baby.....

Jesus, you have to nip these kinds of things in the bud. Most of your Old Testament prophets were in favor of bud nipping.

I suppose that it's possible that they weren't so much trying to protect the moment or their time but Jesus himself. They'd sensed the direction... the tone of things. They knew the stress level and he had just had another run in with the Pharisees. **“Surely, he's not up to playing Mr. Rogers.”**

So they rush in to protect Jesus. Which, I must say, is kind of funny. The truth of the matter is that Jesus doesn't need our protection. I remember a few years back when The Last Temptation of Christ came out... so many in the church were up in arms, protesting, boycotting, praying... And I remember thinking at the time that Jesus really doesn't need our protection.

The disciples didn't agree, so they tried to keep the children away and Jesus is indignant. The word literally means, "madder than 'usual'." And so through clenched teeth, he tells them, **“Don't hinder the children, let them come, for the kingdom of God belongs to them.”**

Of course everyone's scratching their heads and trying to figure out what children and kingdoms have to do with one another because kingdoms are generally about power and wealth and influence and children aren't.

And we scratch our heads too. We hear Jesus say, **“receive this like a child”** and we wish that we knew how. We can't sprinkle fairy dust or wish on a star or clap like we did for Tinker Bell and make it happen.

What's Jesus after here? I think Mark hints to us by the way he's surrounded these children and this story with grown ups and passages that have a very different feel. The other encounters are the clues to understanding this one.

In the story just prior to this one, Jesus is discussing divorce with the Pharisees. They had come to test him... to judge him... debate him. The tape recorders were going hoping he would incriminate himself somehow. Divorce was a hot topic at the time because Herod was divorced. It was the homosexuality issue of the day.

What a contrast these guys make to the kids. They're so hung up with knowing and evaluating. They're emphasis is on having the doctrine correct and behavior precise. And they're missing the kingdom because of that.

Theirs is a propositional faith, where the question is **“what do you know?”** These guys would never sing the hymn My Jesus I Love Thee. They'd change it to My Jesus, I love What I Know About Thee. They know, but only at arms length.

I know we're to love God with all of who we are and that includes our minds. But if you use your knowing to objectify God so that you really have no relationship to God, you'll miss the kingdom.... And they were (missing it).

So... you have the Pharisees debating... and we've already mentioned we had the disciples doing. Theirs is a busy faith, where the question is **“how hard are you working?”** They love that hymn, **“We'll work, till Jesus comes.”** Blessed are the busy, for theirs is the

place on many a committee. But theirs isn't the kingdom.

Well, if knowing and if doing can cause you to miss the kingdom... so can doing and having. Just on the other side of our kids story, we have the story of the Rich Young Ruler.

His faith? He believes he can acquire it like everything else. **"How can I inherit it?"** It's an acquisitional faith. One minute he's asking Jesus about eternal life but when Jesus tells him he'll have to let go of all that he has, he goes away sad and he misses out on the kingdom.

He can't receive it... his hands are already full. All his having is standing in the way of his being.

So, you have these kids in the lap of Jesus... and all around that you have these adults... who know so much

and who do so much

and who have so much.

But they can't enter the kingdom because they have forgotten what it's like to receive something. To be gifted... like a child is gift. Wide eyes... excited... so happy to be getting what they most want.

Good children's sermons always involve something visual and this story from Mark is no exception. It's a sermon that needs to be seen. Mark says that Jesus took the children in his arms, ("folded them," literally) and blessed them.

They got the gift we all want.

We want to be there.

In the arms of God with an unquestioned blessing.

I'm not sure how to get there but I suspect it has more to do with trusting and less to do with trying... More to do with being with and less to do with doing for... More "how come?" and less "hum bug!" And maybe some wishing and believing even when wishing and believing don't make sense.

When Abby was almost four years old, she and I were on the way home from church one day just a few weeks after her grandmother, Julie's mom, had passed away. And we were talking about it.

"Where's Granny?" she asked me.

"Well, Granny's in heaven, with Jesus." And she is.

Abby's sitting in her car seat, which was in the front seat, and she's straining to see out the front window. Finally she turns and asks, **"Daddy, how do you get there from here?"**

Well, there was much I need to teach her along the way about that... And I hope I have. But really... I think she had much more to teach me... and she has.

Our children will teach us.

A little child will lead us.

Right into the lap of Jesus if we'll follow.

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