

# JESUS and CHILDREN

Little Johnny had been misbehaving and was sent to his room. He emerged a couple minutes later and informed his mother that he had thought things over and had even said a little prayer. The mother was very happy and said, "If you asked God to help you not misbehave, He will help you." To which Johnny replied, "Oh, I didn't ask Him for help with that, I asked Him to help you put up with me."

Art Linkletter would've said, "Kids say the darnedest things." Sometimes they make us laugh and sometimes they frustrate us so much it makes us want to pull what's left of our hair out. Then again I know many adults who frustrate me in much the same way. I know Jesus had to feel that kind of frustration with His disciples.

In Mark 10, we find people bringing their children to Jesus to bless them. But the Lord's disciples try to stop them from coming to Jesus. Apparently, they felt that the Master's time was too valuable to spend on small children. Jesus on the other hand rebuked His disciples for their attitude regarding these children. He told the disciples in no uncertain terms that little children were what the kingdom of Heaven was all about.

How do you see children? Some of you might see them a lot like the disciples did: children can be noisy in church; they require a lot of special attention and special programs; and they cannot contribute much to the financial burden of the church. But according to the Bible children are not a curse to be endured; they are a blessing to be enjoyed! Psalm 127:3 says, "**Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord, The fruit of the womb is a reward.**"

This passage has something to say about children, and about the Savior's kingdom. I want us to understand that Jesus has a special place in His heart and in His plans for the children. Follow along in your Bibles as I read **Mark 10:13-16**:

**13 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.**

Since kids matter to Jesus and should therefore matter to us, this passage challenges us with 3 action steps.

## **I. Let the Little Children Come**

The first thing we need to do in relation to children, is to let them come. I want you to notice in verse 13 that people were bringing little children to Jesus. The tense of the words indicate that this was something that was customary -- it happened all the time. These parents knew that kids matter to Jesus. They knew that their kids would be welcome. They knew that their kids would be prayed for and blessed by Jesus.

They didn't even think twice about it. They weren't worried about Jesus turning his back on them -- or their kids. I'm sure they had noticed how Jesus had treated children on many different occasions.

Artists love to paint this scene, and if you have any imagination you can easily picture it -- Jesus gathering the children around him, a baby in one arm, a wriggly little boy on his lap, a little girl standing shyly at his side looking up into his loving eyes, others clustering around, clamoring for his attention.

You cannot read this without seeing how attractive Jesus must have been to children. They loved Him immediately, and wanted to come to Him -- we need to let them by making sure we don't put any obstacles in their path.

But the disciples saw all this as an interruption. Acting as bodyguards and protectors, they were probably thinking, "Why can't these children just go and play? How dare they bother Jesus? He has more important things to do. After all, we are more important than a bunch of kids -- we are His chosen disciples." The disciples then turn to these adults and scold them -- they tell them off.

The word "rebuked" in verse 13 is a strong word. It's the same word that is used by Jesus when he rebuked the wind and the sea in Mark 4. It means to "be muzzled." It has the idea of strictly forbidding something with the threat of punishment if the command is not obeyed. They probably said something like this:

"Can't you control your kids? What kind of parents are you? Can't you see that this is Jesus? He doesn't have time for little brats like yours. He's busy with us -- would you quit bothering Him? They're not welcome here! Go find someone who really cares..."

What they didn't realize was that Jesus was that someone who really cares. These disciples thought that Jesus needed protection from bothersome children. But what Jesus points out is that the children needed protection from stumbling adults.

Now before we get too hard on the disciples, we need to take a look at our own hearts. We have to be careful with our own attitudes. Some of us may be a lot more like the disciples than we care to admit.

Verse 14 says that Jesus was indignant with the disciples. The word indignant comes from a compound word meaning, "to grieve much." This made Jesus both angry and extremely sad -- no one should ever think of children as unimportant. Jesus would not tolerate this attitude among His disciples -- and He doesn't tolerate it among Christ-followers today. Kids matter to Jesus and should therefore matter to us!

If you're not around children regularly, find a way to get them in your life, perhaps through friends, relatives, or a ministry to children. They have a way of cutting through adult pretension to show us the beauty of the kingdom of God. How we treat children matters so much to Jesus that mistreatment of children engenders his anger for one of the few times in the gospels.

Because of the high value Jesus places on kids, He gives a strong warning to anyone who becomes a hindrance to children. Listen to what He says in Matthew 18:5-6: **"Whoever receives one little child like this in My name receives Me. But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it**

**would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea."**

So Jesus says to them, "**Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God.**" This is highly significant, because it indicates that children were made for God. This is what Jesus is saying -- that He and children were made for each other. Jesus tells His disciples and us "**do not forbid them.**" This verse helps me to see that kids by nature want to come to Jesus - it's us adults who often stand in the way. Let's let them do what they want to do anyway - to come to Christ.

The BEST thing we can do to express our love to our children, and to the children of our church, is to lead them to a conscious commitment to Jesus Christ in their early years.

D.L. Moody once returned from a meeting and reported that there were two and a half conversions. Someone asked, "Two adults and one child?" "No," said Moody, "Two children and one adult. The children gave their whole lives. The adult only had half to give."

## **II. Learn From Children**

Why should we let children come to Jesus? Why are we told to not hinder them? There are at least two answers: #1 -- it's for their sake; and #2 - it's for our sake. Children are valued for who they are - and they also serve as living pictures of a deeply spiritual truth.

**A. What It Implies** – The fact that children are invited to come to the Savior implies that children need a Savior. Now, most folks don't like to hear this, but children are sinners too, Psa. 58:3; Psa. 51:5; Job 15:14; Pro. 22:15; Isa. 48:8; Eph. 2:3. While children may possess a kind of innocence, they still stand in need of salvation.

That is why parents and other concerned adults must do all they can to bring children face to face with the claims of the Gospel. It is not our duty to save them, but it is our duty to bring them to Jesus, to expose them to the Word of God. When children hear the Gospel preached, taught and lived out, they are far more likely to come to Jesus at an early age.

**B. What It Involves** – Whenever a discussion about childhood salvation comes up, someone always mentions "the age of accountability". When I was growing up, the magic "age of accountability" was twelve. When a child reached the age of twelve, it was time for them to get saved and join the church.

It surprises some people when they find out that the Bible does not mention a specific "age of accountability". A child becomes accountable for his or her sins when they come to place where they can understand the difference between right and wrong and when they are able to choose between right and wrong, Isa. 7:16.

The term "age of decision" might be better than the "age of accountability". When a person reaches a level of mental understanding regarding the nature of sin and its consequences and are able to make a decision for or against Jesus Christ, they have reached the "age of decision".

So, when is that age? Well, it is different for every child. I have a Pastor friend who is sure that he was saved at the age of 6. I have known other people who did not come to a realization of their condition until they were well into their teens. Some people, such as those with severe mental handicaps, may never come to that place.

When children come to you talking about salvation, you should never put them off. Take the time to ask them some pointed questions like:

- What does it mean to be saved?
- Why do you feel that you need to be saved?
- Can you explain to me how a person gets saved?
- Can you explain to me what sin is?

There are many other questions, but you get the idea. If they do not understand, keep praying for them and talking to them about Jesus. They will come back when they are ready.

What about little ones who die before they get to that age? I believe this passage and others in the Bible teach that these little ones are a part of Jesus' kingdom. As the old song says they are "safe in the arms of Jesus." When David lost an infant son in 2 Sam. 12, he was comforted by the truth that he would someday join his son, 2 Sam. 12:23. Parents who have lost children to death, miscarriage, or still birth should never fear because they will see their little ones in Heaven with the Lord Jesus.

**C. What It Illustrates** – This whole matter of children coming to Jesus was used by our Lord to illustrate the way all believers must come to Him. In verse 15 Jesus said, "**Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it.**" In this passage, Jesus says that all who come to Him must come as a little child.

Why must we come as a little child?

Children are trusting, humble and dependent. They are so trusting, that they have to be warned not to talk to strangers. They are so humble, that they will readily accept what they are told by adults. They are so dependent, that they simply rest in the ability and willingness of those around them to meet their needs. Children simply accept profound things by faith. They don't look beyond the obvious. They just believe!

Those are the requirements for a person to come to Jesus. For a person to be saved, regardless of their age, they must be willing to humble themselves before God. They must be willing to lay down their pride over the life they have lived and the achievements of that life. They must humble themselves by acknowledging their sins before God. They must be willing to admit that their works and religious activity can never save them. They must come to the place where they, like a little child, simply look to Jesus in pure faith, trusting that He will do everything He has promised to do.

God's acceptance has nothing to do with what we've accomplished with our lives - His grace is given to those who really have done nothing - children.

Contrast this image childlike faith with the very next passage. When the Rich Young Ruler came to Jesus in Mark 10:17-22, he refused to turn loose of his

pride, his money or his self-righteousness. He left with all his possessions, but he left without Jesus!

A person must look to Jesus by faith, trusting Him and His finished work on the cross completely for their soul's salvation. This requires the childlike qualities of trust, humility and dependence. This is the only way anyone ever receives salvation.

### III. Love Children Intentionally

Since kids matter to Jesus and matter to us, we need to let them come, we need to learn from them, and finally, we need to love them intentionally.

Look at verse 16: "**And He took them up in His arms, put His hands on them, and blessed them.**" Verse 13 says that children were brought to Jesus so that He could touch them. As He so often does, Jesus went beyond what was asked of Him - he bent down, picked them up, put them in his arms, put his hands on them and gave them a verbal blessing. Talk about hands-on ministry! He took the time to demonstrate His love and grace. Children hold a special place in our Lord's heart!

This scene reveals a lot about Jesus. Children cannot serve Him like those who are older. They cannot contribute as much money as those who are older. Still, He loves them and reaches out to them in grace.

This just reminds us that God is not interested in what we can do, what we can give or how old we are. He simply invited people to come to Him on the basis of pure grace! Jesus loves lost sinners and He invites them all to come to Him, Rev. 22:17, Matt. 11:28; John 3:16.

Never think for an instant that Jesus doesn't care about you. He loves you and He will not turn you away if you will come to Him. No matter where the path of life has taken you; no matter what you may have done; no matter how insignificant you may feel; Jesus Christ will save you and change your life if you will come to Him. He cares about your condition and He will take the time to touch your life if you will only come to Him by faith.

Conc: Regardless of whether you are saved or lost, young or old, Jesus cares about you. There are some children in this room who have expressed an interest in coming to Jesus. If He is calling you, today would be a great day to come to Him. While this message has been about children, it isn't only for children. If you have never been saved, regardless of your age, you need to come to Jesus today. He died on the cross to save you if you are lost.

If your life has gotten complicated by living in an adult world and you need some help from God today, you can get it. If sin has crept into your relationship with Jesus and is hindering your walk with Him, He can forgive that today. If you will come to Him, you will find that His grace will be sufficient for you. If there are needs in your life, you can come to Him like those little children did two thousand years ago and you can find the help you need!