

First Serve

Studies in the Gospel of Mark

Text

Mark 10:13-31

Topic

Jesus receives the little children being brought to Him
and pronounces a blessing over each one

Title

"Children of the Blessing God"

Introduction

The article was titled, *No Kidding: Children Not Welcome to Dine Here*.

It listed a few restaurants around the country that have restrictions regarding children. At *La Fisheria* in Houston, the following statement is posted on the restaurant's door: "After 7:00pm, people over eight years old only. We are a family friendly restaurant, and we also respect **all** of our customers so we introduce this new policy to the restaurant. Thanks for your understanding."

Houston seems to be ground-zero for these new policies. Another restaurant there, *Cuchara*, issues cards with rules on them, explaining how they expect children to behave.

"Children at *Cuchara* don't run or wander around the restaurant," the cards say. "They stay seated and ask their parents to take them to the restroom. They don't scream, throw tantrums or touch the walls, murals, windows or anything of the other patrons."

The cards end with this final statement about children: "They are respectful!"

On Facebook, I find it alarming that over half a million people like the page "You Need to Discipline Your Kid Before I Punch them in the Face."

In another article about what some have dubbed "The Brat Ban," the author writes,

Malaysia Airlines banned babies from many of their first class cabins, prompting other major airlines to consider similar policies. Lately, complaints about screaming kids are being taken seriously, not only by airlines, but by hotels, movie theaters, restaurants, and even grocery stores.

You most likely have a strong opinion on these policies, one way or the other. If you are on the side of kids being welcome everywhere, any time, you eventually play a card of your own - the Jesus card - and quote the Lord saying, "Let the little children come to Me, and don't forbid them..."

Of course, Jesus wasn't talking about whether or not all restaurants should be kid-friendly. The entire quote is, "Let the little children come to Me, and don't forbid them, **for of such is the Kingdom of God.**"

What do children have to do with the Kingdom of God? Plenty. I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 You Receive The Kingdom of God By Exercising Childlike Faith, and #2 You Refuse The Kingdom of God By Emphasizing Superficial Works.

#1 You Receive The Kingdom of God By Exercising Childlike Faith

(v13-16)

If I say, "Magic Kingdom," it might mean something different to you, depending upon your age. "Magic Kingdom" was originally an unofficial nickname for Disneyland in Anaheim. Then Walt Disney World in Orlando was built. In 1994, to differentiate it from Disneyland, the newer park in Florida was officially renamed "Magic Kingdom Park," and is popularly known as "Magic Kingdom."

There is a lot of talk about the Kingdom of God among Christians lately, but I'm not always sure what they mean by the phrase.

When we read "the Kingdom of God" in the Bible, it can have one of at least three very different possible meanings:

1. The Kingdom of God is the eternal rule of Almighty God over the entire universe. At all times, Psalm 103:19 is true, saying, "The LORD has established His throne in heaven, And His kingdom rules over all."
2. The Kingdom of God is also the spiritual rule over the hearts and lives of those who willingly submit to God's authority. It is entered by being born-again. Jesus said in John 3:5, "... Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God."
3. There is another sense in which the Kingdom of God is used in Scripture: It is the future, literal rule of Jesus on the earth,

also called the Millennium. In Revelation 20:4 we read, "And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them. Then I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received his mark on their foreheads or on their hands. **And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.**"

Which of these three kingdoms did Jesus have in mind? There are clues in verses twenty-nine through thirty-one.

Mar 10:29 So Jesus answered and said, "Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My sake and the gospel's,

Mar 10:30 who shall not receive a hundredfold now in this time - houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions - and in the age to come, eternal life.

Mar 10:31 But many who are first will be last, and the last first."

Jesus always assumed the eternal rule of God over the entire universe. He could not promise you that you would be rewarded in "the age to come" unless He was certain that God was the ruler of the universe, and that by His providence He would accomplish His eternal purposes.

God's eternal rule is not, however, the Kingdom of God Jesus was specifically referring to in these verses.

It's clear that He wasn't referring to the Millennium, either, because you and I will not suffer any losses, nor be subject to "persecutions," during His thousand-year reign.

The Kingdom of God, in these verses, must therefore refer to God's spiritual rule over hearts and lives.

Jesus' words are a simple but heartfelt and emotional explanation of how we receive, or refuse, the Gospel.

There are other kingdoms we should mention. One is Satan's kingdom. He is called the God of this age, and the ruler of the authorities of the air.

Jesus once said of Satan, "Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and no city or house divided against itself will stand. If Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself; how then will **his kingdom** stand?" (Matthew 12:25,26).

There are (obviously) kingdoms of men in the Bible, e.g., Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome. Within His eternal reign over the universe, God is allowing these kingdoms of the devil and of men to exist as He accomplishes His purposes.

Those of us who have willingly submitted to God's rule are in a conflict with the devil and his kingdom, for the souls of men. As we preach the Gospel, men are invited to receive the rule of God in their hearts, to come out of darkness into the light, into the Kingdom of God, and to do so requires childlike faith.

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

I think that the disciples meant well. They were undoubtedly trying to keep Jesus from being distracted, or over-burdened.

The disciples, however, were not in charge of the order of service that day. God the Holy Spirit was, and He intended these children be there, and that they be blessed.

Jesus was approachable, and children loved Him. He wasn't some kind of church curmudgeon, scaring off children.

We have a policy of discouraging kids from being in this main part of the Sanctuary. Is it wrong, in light of this passage? Is it curmudgeonly??

No. When it says that they "brought little children to" Jesus, it means that they brought them specifically to be prayed for. It was customary for Jewish parents to bring their kids to be prayed for by their rabbi, and to be blessed by him. We see the procedure for it in verse sixteen:

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

Today we call this a baby dedication, which we perform as part of our regular services here.

Jesus wasn't establishing that, any time, in any place, kids ought to be in attendance. It's up to us, therefore, to determine how to best minister to everyone - adults *and* children. We can be inclusive, or we can be exclusive - as long as we do it in love in order to best minister the Gospel.

Mar 10:14 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.

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

God the Holy Spirit was constantly orchestrating the events in the life of Jesus. There were no random encounters, certainly not during the three-and-one-half years of Jesus' public ministry.

The Holy Spirit meant for these children to be brought forth, partly so that Jesus could use them as an example. The timing was perfect, because Jesus is next going to encounter the rich young ruler, and Jesus will be able to use him as the counter example to the childlike faith of the kids. In other words, the two episodes are linked, spiritually, by the Holy Spirit.

If these children don't come for dedication, an important teaching is going to lose a powerful illustration.

What is it, exactly, about children that Jesus was commending? It cannot be the innocence of children for they have a sinful nature and are definitely not innocent.

The key is the word "receive." I think Jesus was commending their willingness to be dependent upon others for what they need.

Under average circumstances, children simply believe that their parents will take care of them. They don't worry about where their clothing or food will come from.

We are to be like that, are we not, as we grow in the Lord? Jesus once pointed to the birds, and the flowers, as illustrations of how much we ought to trust our Heavenly Father to feed us, and to clothe us.

The word "receive" stresses that the Kingdom of God must be accepted as a gift. It is not a human achievement, and it is never gained on the basis of human merit.

Just as a young child receives everything from his or her parents, so the Kingdom of God must be received as God's gift in simple, trusting faith.

You might think this is too simple a lesson for Jesus to be teaching His disciples at this late date in their training, but it is not. It was essential, *especially for them*, since they so expected the literal Kingdom of God on earth to be established. It would be, and it will be - but not until Jesus comes a second time.

Meanwhile they were to go into the world with the Gospel, inviting men to receive salvation - inviting them to submit to the rule of God over their hearts and lives.

Salvation is God's gift to receive. It is made possible by Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection from the dead. Lifted-up as He was on the Cross, Jesus draws all men to Himself. He is not willing that any should perish, but that all would come to repentance, and be saved. He is the Savior of all men - *especially* those who believe.

When the Gospel is presented, God's grace operates on your heart to free your will to believe in Him, to receive Him. Salvation by grace, through faith, is how you receive the Kingdom of God.

#2 You Refuse The Kingdom of God By Emphasizing Superficial Works

(v17-31)

The Gospel of Matthew tells us that this was a young man; the Gospel of Luke mentions that he was a ruler; and, together with Mark, we see he is rich. He is the rich young ruler.

Jesus was able to use him an example of someone who would *not* receive the Kingdom of God in childlike faith. Instead, he was all about works, which we are calling superficial since they are outward, not affecting the heart.

Mar 10:17 Now as He was going out on the road, one came running, knelt before Him, and asked Him, "Good Teacher, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?"

This seems so exciting! He came "running," and "knelt," and asked about getting saved. This is every ministers dream.

"Good teacher" was an unusual way to address a rabbi. It was so unusual that Jesus started there in His interview of this zealous young man.

Mar 10:18 So Jesus said to him, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God.

Jesus' question can only mean that either (1)He *is* God, or that (2)He is *not* good. Jesus was not denying He was "good." To the contrary - He was owning-up to it.

Since God alone can be called "good," Jesus wanted to know if the rich young ruler believed that He was God.

Jesus evidently knew that the rich young ruler was trusting in works to make him good, so He went straight to the Ten Commandments.

Mar 10:19 You know the commandments: 'DO NOT COMMIT ADULTERY,' 'DO NOT MURDER,' 'DO NOT STEAL,' 'DO NOT BEAR FALSE WITNESS,' 'Do not defraud,' 'HONOR YOUR FATHER AND YOUR MOTHER.'"

Jesus summarized the six commandments found on one of the tablets given to Moses. It was the tablet that dealt with our relationships with people. The other tablet had on it the four commandments that deal with our relationship with God.

Mar 10:20 And he answered and said to Him, "Teacher, all these things I have kept from my youth."

Notice he dropped the word "good" this time. I don't want to read too much into an omission, but it is interesting.

Did he really keep the commandments his whole life? In one sense, maybe. It's possible that he had kept them superficially.

But therein is the problem. Like all religious Jews, he thought he could be "good" by keeping certain external rules. In more theological terms, we'd say he believed he could be declared righteous by his works.

Notice, however, that he had some sense that he was lacking. He was unsatisfied, empty within. He knew he had missed the mark.

Mar 10:21 Then Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, "One thing you lack: Go your way, sell whatever you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, take up the cross, and follow Me."

The look of love was in His eyes. What must that have been like?

If you're saved, you'll know one day - when you see Jesus face-to-face.

I suppose you'll see it, too, if you remain lost. The lost will all appear at the Great White Throne, prior to being consigned to Hell for eternity. Although a Judge, I can't help but think each lost person will see in Jesus' look that He was not willing they perish.

Was Jesus teaching that philanthropy and voluntary poverty could earn you salvation? Of course not. That would contradict everything Jesus just taught about receiving the Kingdom of God in childlike faith. It would contradict the Bible's entire teaching on salvation.

So why this counsel? For two reasons. Firstly, when Jesus was asked to sum-up all God's Law, He said it was to love God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength; and to love your neighbor as yourself.

The rich young ruler had *nothing* to show for loving his neighbor. He'd done *nothing* to help others with his wealth.

Secondly, *he didn't love God*. How can I say that? Because of his response to Jesus.

Mar 10:22 But he was sad at this word, and went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

He was given a simple choice: Treasure in Heaven after a sacrificial life on earth submitted to God, or abundant treasure on earth but without a relationship with God, now or in eternity. He chose badly - choosing money over God - **because the love of money was his god**.

He had run to Jesus, claiming to have kept all the commandments, when in truth he was guilty of breaking all of them - at least breaking the spirit of all of them.

Mar 10:23 Then Jesus looked around and said to His disciples, "How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God!"

Mar 10:24 And the disciples were astonished at His words. But Jesus answered again and said to them, "Children, how hard it is for those who trust in riches to enter the kingdom of God!"

It's pretty easy to demonstrate from Scripture that Jews equated material prosperity with spiritual blessing. We still do it today, much as we hate to admit it.

Jesus isn't against wealth, but He always warned about trusting in riches. Because he trusted in his riches, the rich young ruler was, in fact, the poorest person on that road.

The story of Scrooge works because we all recognize the grip that wealth can exert. Our problem is that we never think it pertains to us, because we refuse to see ourselves as wealthy. Yet, according to *Forbes*, "the typical person in the bottom 5% of the American income distribution is still richer than 68% of the world's inhabitants."

I don't say that to make any of us feel bad. It's just that we sometimes need to hear exhortations from the Bible rather than immediately determining that they don't apply to us.

Mar 10:25 It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."

The word for "needle" describes one that you can hold in your hand. It would be a humorous illustration if it weren't for the seriousness of the discussion.

Contrary to what the Jews thought, the rich man is at a disadvantage in spiritual things because the love of money is so powerful.

Mar 10:26 And they were greatly astonished, saying among themselves, "Who then can be saved?"

After nearly three-and-one-half years with Jesus, these guys still had no idea of how someone got saved.

They grew up thinking salvation was by works of righteousness, performed externally, and that, if God were pleased with you, He'd bless you materially. It was a hard habit to break; and it is a hard habit for us to break, too, since we all think there is some "good" in us by which we can please God by our works.

Mar 10:27 But Jesus looked at them and said, "With men it is impossible, but not with God; for with God all things are possible."

Jesus had just given them the illustration of the child - of childlike faith. They should put away thoughts of self-righteous works, and come to Jesus as little children, to receive eternal life as a gift.

BTW: Salvation is "impossible" for men to achieve. Jesus is therefore not **a** way to God; He is **the** exclusive way to God.

Mar 10:28 Then Peter began to say to Him, "See, we have left all and followed You."

On the surface, Peter's statement seems accurate. They had done what Jesus recommended that the rich young ruler do.

Or had they?

- For a time after Jesus' death, *Peter went back to fishing*. He hadn't really "left all" if he could still return to it at any moment. He had it to fall back on, and he did.
- Something else to think about. Like the other disciples, Peter was expecting the brick-and-mortar Kingdom of God to be established soon, with Jesus ruling and he and the boys co-ruling. They had recently been disputing with one another over who would be the greatest in the earthly Kingdom of God. You haven't really "left all" if you think you're trading fishing for a high-ranking political position.

In the Old Testament, Elisha "left all" to follow Elijah. He burned his plow, and his oxen, and threw a farewell party, so that there'd be no possibility of turning back.

Peter's thinking was flawed in another way. **He had missed the point.** The rich young ruler wasn't being asked to give-up *anything* of value. He was being offered the gain of *everything* of value.

Peter did not see how much he and the others had gained, so Jesus explained it to him.

Mar 10:29 So Jesus answered and said, "Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My sake and the gospel's,

Mar 10:30 who shall not receive a hundredfold now in this time - houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions - and in the age to come, eternal life.

Before you get saved, what good does it do you if you gain the whole world, only to lose your soul, and perish in eternal conscious torment forever and ever? None.

When you get saved, you are rich in faith, and are promised treasure in Heaven, stored for you where nothing can corrupt it, and where no one can steal it.

You are rich in spiritual blessings *right now* as well. Here's an example: Maybe your family disowned you on account of your professing faith in Jesus. **Every other believer on planet earth is a surrogate brother, or sister, or father, or mother.**

What about "wife or children?" Yes, you have surrogates in those, too, only (obviously) it is intended *spiritually*, not *physically*.

"Houses" and "lands" are yours in abundance to share and enjoy as Christians practice hospitality.

The point is - You gain far more than you think you lose, both now and forever.

There's one other thing you gain - "persecutions." How is that a gain? Your sufferings work for you, to refine you as gold in the furnace is refined.

After Jesus rose from the dead, and after He ascended into Heaven, the disciples would count it a great blessing and privilege to suffer persecution. Identifying with Him in suffering is great riches now, and great reward later.

If I think that I've lost something by following Jesus, I'm following Him from too far a distance.

Mar 10:31 But many who are first will be last, and the last first."

One commentator said of this verse, "it is a wise warning against the self-seeking spirit which lurked behind Peter's comment. The twelve were warned that their priority in being called did not guarantee their preeminence in the future if they lacked the necessary spirit."

They had been acting childishly:

- Just recently they had been arguing about who would be the greatest in the Kingdom of God.
- They took it upon themselves to rebuke parents who were bringing their children to Jesus to be blessed.
- Peter had claimed, for all of them, that they'd sacrificed everything to follow Jesus.

They definitely needed a more childlike attitude.

Jesus is a blesser. Not just little children, but big children, too.

It's just that, sometimes, we have things in our lives that rebuke us from coming to Him to be blessed:

- It could be condemnation that is rebuking us. There is no condemnation for us, if we're saved. Run to Him.
- If it's conviction rebuking us - because we are in sin - repent, and run to Him.
- Maybe, just maybe, you're not saved. ***Run to Him.***