

Enter the Kingdom with Childlike Abandonment

The Gospel of Mark: Mighty and Mild / Mark 10:13-31 / March 3, 2024

Introduction:

What do you value the most in life? Maybe it is your family or home. Maybe it's vacations or hobbies. Maybe it is your health or talents. Now consider where these things stand in comparison to Christ. Would you be willing to lose any of them for the sake of Christ and His kingdom? Our passage today, in Mark 10:13-31, encourages us to examine our hearts to see if there is anything we unwilling to leave behind in order to gain eternal life with Christ. It teaches us how we must enter the kingdom of God with childlike abandonment and holds out the rewards promised for all who follow Christ in this way. We have a lot of ground to cover today, so we will dive right into our passage. I see three things this passage reveals. First, in verses 13-16,

The Kingdom Belongs to Those Who Come to Christ Like a Child

In verses 13-16 we're drawn into a short scene that reveals Jesus' love for children while teaching an important truth about how anyone enters the kingdom of God. Look at verse 13, "And they were bringing children to him that he might touch them, and the disciples rebuked them." The scene opens with a striking response of the disciples to children being brought to Jesus. The term for children that Mark employs means very young children, infants, or babies, as Luke says in his account. The desire for Jesus' touch is probably a desire to have Jesus bless the lives of these children. The disciples' response is shocking, as we see them either rebuke those bringing the children to Jesus or the children themselves. What causes this reaction? As we saw a few weeks ago, children didn't hold a high value in society at that time. The Romans actually had trash piles next to their homes where you could leave unwanted children, who were sometimes picked up to become slaves. At best, children were viewed as a liability by societal standards. So, the disciples likely felt they were wasting Jesus' time, once again, responding according to societal standards, not kingdom standards. The devaluing of children continues today. Often, what is behind the atrocities we see in abortion, sex trafficking, abuse, and neglect is a lack of value placed on the lives of children. So, Jesus' treatment of children shines as an example for us as well. Notice Jesus' response in verses 14-16, "But when Jesus saw it, he was indignant and said to them, 'Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God.'" When He sees the disciples' actions, He is filled with righteous anger and commands them to let the children come to him and not to hinder them. No one should ever hinder children from coming to Jesus and should instead seek to guide them there. Danny Akin gives some helpful questions to consider as an implication from these verses, saying, "Are you like those who want to love children to Jesus, or are you like the disciples who have no time for babysitting? Will you work in the nursery, with preschoolers, with schoolchildren, at VBS, or with children in sports? Will you stand up and be heard on the evils of abortion, sex-trafficking, and child poverty? Will you love children toward Christ?" (Daniel L. Akin, *Exalting Jesus in Mark*, 213-214). Family, we should value children and seek to bring them to Jesus. Yet, that is not the primary focus of our passage. Look at the reason for Jesus' commands and His teaching, and actions, that follow in verses 14-16, "'Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God. Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.' And he took them in his arms and blessed them, laying his hands on them." Jesus' reason for letting children come to him is because the kingdom of God belongs to people like them. And his teaching, in verse 15, shows what that means. Note the focus isn't on any quality within children, it is on the way they receive. Only those who "receive the kingdom of God like a child" will enter the kingdom of God. Young children are powerless and helpless with no credentials or claims to anything. They are completely dependent on their care takers to receive whatever is given to them, and they receive what is given with open arms. Verse 16 shows this kind of receiving as Jesus takes them "in his arms and blessed them, laying his hands on them," likely giving a common Hebrew blessing that would speak of a special future and commitment to the Lord ("Trent and Smalley, *The Blessing*, passim", Daniel L. Akin, *Exalting Jesus in Mark*, 215).

The children represent a true posture of humility before Christ, ready to receive what God freely gives, and the act that follows points to how grace extends to those who receive Christ in this way, teaching us that the kingdom of God belongs to those who come to Christ like a child. Yes, Jesus shows incredible value of children in this moment, but His primary purpose is to have them show the kingdom of God is not something you earn but receive through complete dependence on someone else. This sets the stage for the next interaction, in verses 17-27, where we find several connections to this teaching, revealing that,

True Faith in Christ is Childlike Abandonment

The details in verse 17 connect these two scenes together. Look at how Mark keeps our attention on what we have already seen in verse 17, “And as he was setting out on his journey, a man ran up and knelt before him and asked him, ‘Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?’” First, we see a man running up to Jesus, “as Jesus was setting out on his journey.” This places this scene immediately following Jesus’ teaching. Second, his kneeling before Jesus suggests a posture of humility when coming to Jesus. Yet, look closely at the question again, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” On this question, William Lane says, “The form of the question... implies piety of achievement which stands in contrast to Jesus’ teaching that a man must receive the Kingdom (or life) as a gift from God in his helplessness (Ch. 10:15)” (William Lane, *The Gospel according to Mark*, p. 365). The man approaches Jesus wondering what he can do to earn eternal life, showing he isn’t coming to receive in childlike faith. But Jesus will lead him to see the gospel is never about what we can do but what has been done. Pay attention to the continued interaction in verses 18-20, “And Jesus said to him, ‘Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone. You know the commandments: “Do not murder, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honor your father and mother.”’ And he said to him, ‘Teacher, all these I have kept from my youth.’” Jesus starts by setting his mind on God alone as his hope, pointing out how only God is categorically good. In doing this, He encourages this man to consider his focus. Then, He leads the man down a series of questions about keeping the law. The questions focus on the last six commandments, directed towards human relationships. His inclusion of “do not defraud” possibly sums up the final two commandments, or connects to this man’s status in life, which we will discover later. Happy to hear this, he tells Jesus how he has kept these from his youth. Yet, look at how Jesus exposes his heart in verse 21, “And Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, ‘You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.’” Note the way verse 21 speaks of Jesus’ care for this man. When saying Jesus “loved him,” Mark uses the highest form of love in Greek, *agape* love. This term is most often used in scripture to speak of God’s love for us in salvation. Notice also that Jesus doesn’t combat whether he has kept the final six commandments, but, in love, exposes how he’s lost sight of the first. Jesus invites him to consider the place God really holds in his heart by calling him to give everything away and “come, follow Him,” holding up treasure in God that is far greater than anything he has. Does he truly love the Lord above everything else? Or is there an idol that he can’t let go of? Notice the man’s response in verse 22, “Disheartened by the saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.” We learn something important about this man, “he had great possessions.” Matthew calls him young and Luke says he is a ruler, which is why this is called the story of the rich young ruler. He was a man of great wealth and power. Because of that, his heart sinks at the thought of giving that away and he leaves Jesus full of sorrow. His response is a living example of the seed spread among the thorns from Jesus’ parable in Mark 4:19, showing how, “the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other things” really can “enter in and choke the word,” so “it proves unfruitful.” This man wanted to inherit eternal life until it impacted this life. When Jesus calls him to find true treasure and follow Him, it exposes that his wealth and possessions were the idol of his heart. Family, notice how his right living isn’t denied by Jesus. You could live a life full of doing the right things and not be saved if Christ is not the treasure of your heart. God calls us to childlike faith that is willing to abandon everything else for the sake of receiving the treasure of Christ.

Notice what happens next in verses 23-25, “And Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, ‘How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!’ And the disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said to them again, ‘Children, how difficult it is to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.’” The man has left but Jesus isn’t done calling for true faith. He turns to his disciples to drive the truth home with teaching connected to the interaction they have just seen, showing how dangerous wealth is to faith. Do you see the focus on entering the kingdom of God, connecting this to childlike faith? Jesus isn’t condemning having wealth, but He is showing how easy it is for wealth to become an idol and keep us from true faith. Wealth can easily become our definition of blessing, what we trust in, and the treasure our hearts. When the disciples are amazed at His teaching, Jesus buckles down and uses an illustration of a camel trying to go through the eye of a sewing needle to give the impression that it is impossible for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God. Don’t bypass the strength of Jesus’ teaching. His goal isn’t to make you think you just have to be willing give away your money and possessions. His goal is to bring you to the point where you understand it is impossible for you to do anything in order to lead you to come to Him like a child. We know this because of verses 26-27. Look there with me, “And they were exceedingly astonished, and said to him, ‘Then who can be saved?’ Jesus looked at them and said, ‘With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God.’” The disciples astonishment grows because, like today, Judaism had come to view wealth and possessions as an evidence of God’s favor. So they rightfully ask, “Then who can be saved.” That is the question of the day, and Jesus’ answer speaks life, “With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God.” We cannot do anything to save ourselves. We are completely dependent on God, just like a helpless baby. We need to come to Christ in childlike abandonment asking God to do the work we could not do. As James Edwards says, “The word of Jesus makes evident within the disciples what it should have made evident within the rich man—their deficiency. But the deficiency that appears as inability, even futility, appears to Jesus as openness to the potential of God. It is not they who will do something for God or accomplish his word, but God who will accomplish his word within them. What God commands, he also gives” (James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, 315). Family, true faith is seeing the cross of Jesus as your only hope. It is seeing His life, His righteousness, and His death as the only thing sufficient enough to cover your sin and provide you with eternal life. True faith is knowing everything comes through God’s grace alone, outside of any effort in yourself, and following Christ because He is your greatest love. That is childlike abandonment. That is the kind of faith we need. Is that the faith you have? There is one more truth that is vital to see in verses 28-31, that,

True Faith Brings Great Rewards

You might expect for this scene to be over, but Peter provides the opportunity for one more truth. Look at verse 28, “Peter began to say to him, ‘See, we have left everything and followed you.’” Peter is looking a “that a boy” for the disciples because of their commitment to follow Him. Notice how Jesus responds in verses 29-30, “Jesus said, ‘Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, who will 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.’” Note the things Jesus speaks of leaving. These are the most essential relationships and possessions in our lives. Are you willing to follow Christ if He calls you to leave your homes, families, or lands? Jesus is asking to take priority over these things. Yet, how often do we let these kinds of things come in the way of following Jesus? How often do our families take priority over our relationship with Christ? How often do our homes occupy all our time to purchase or repair, keeping us from spending time in worship and prayer? Has our attachment to the place we’ve grown up kept us from a call to the mission field? Family, I think sometimes we think Christ will only ask us to give up things that are harmful for us. But sometimes He will ask us to leave essential things behind for His sake and for the gospel. If He asked that of you, would you leave them behind?

If your immediate answer is no, they may be an idol of your heart. Yet, look at the rewards Jesus holds out to those who follow Him in true faith like this. He promises these things a hundredfold in this life and eternal life in the age to come. Family, I hope you have found this to be true. I know I have. My daughters both have an aunt and an uncle who are so close with me and Holly that they are family. I have dear family around the world now from following Jesus. God has proven this to be true time and time again as I have stepped out in faith, and my heart continues to grow in anticipation of what eternal life with Him will be like. These things are promised to those who follow Christ in childlike abandonment. Do you see the rewards set before you? Yet, there is one thing to note in these rewards. Notice how Jesus says, “with persecutions.” He isn’t sugarcoating things. There are great rewards, but there is also a reality of suffering. Following Christ doesn’t mean everything will be sunshine and daisies. It will include hardships and even persecutions, but the rewards will always outweigh those things. The missionary David Livingstone once said to his students, “I have never ceased to rejoice that God has appointed me to such an office. People talk of the sacrifice I have made in spending so much of my life in Africa. . . Away with the word in such a view, and with such a thought! It is emphatically no sacrifice. Say rather it is a privilege. Anxiety, sickness, suffering, or danger, now and then, with a foregoing of the common conveniences and charities of this life, may make us pause, and cause the spirit to waver, and the soul to sink; but let this only be for a moment. All these are nothing when compared with the glory which shall be revealed in and for us. I never made a sacrifice” (Perspectives on the World Christian Movement, 1981, 259). He is not the only missionary to think this way because they understood the final words of Jesus in verse 31. Look there with me, “But many who are first will be last, and the last first.” This is a constant theme in this section of Mark’s gospel. Those who appear to be first in this life will be last in the life to come, but those who give everything to follow Jesus will be first. In this statement, Jesus continues to redefine a successful life, showing how following Christ in childlike abandonment brings true and lasting rewards. Family, when we can grasp this, we will learn to think like David Livingstone, and recognize it is no sacrifice to whole follow Jesus.

Conclusion:

As the worship team is coming to lead us in a time of response, let me give two simple take aways from this passage. First,

1) Come to Jesus in Childlike Abandonment

Run to Jesus like this man, kneeling before Him, but do so with complete abandonment recognizing your dependence on Him to do that which is impossible for you to do. If you don’t know Christ as your savior, run to Him for salvation, trusting in His death on the cross for the forgiveness of your sin. If you are already following Jesus, humbly ask him to expose any idol in your heart and reveal himself as the treasure that He is. Receive the kingdom in childlike abandonment, as it belongs to those who come to Christ like this.

Second,

2) Trust in Jesus to Provide Greater Rewards than this World has to Offer

This passage deals with one of the strongest temptations we face as Americans. Family, don’t treasure riches. Don’t trust in wealth. Find your treasure in Christ and the rewards He provides. In Matthew 13:44, Jesus says, “The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.” Jesus Christ holds out true riches that would cause us to joyfully want to sell everything to obtain if we are able to fully comprehend it. Here is the beauty, we do nothing to earn them. We simply trust and receive. Family, press in to respond to the Lord today and receive His abundant grace. Sit and reflect, or stand and sing. You can come and kneel before Him, or come receive prayer for our prayer team ready to pray with you and for you who will be worshipping on the front rows or the bottom of the stairs in the back. Would you pray with me as we receive the Lord’s grace?