

## Blessing the Children -- Mark 10:13-16

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August 6, 2011

Please bow your heads with me for prayer:

*Lord, we are about to open Your Word. And we do so realizing that we are stepping on holy ground. We lay aside our self-confidence and preconceived ideas and come to Your Word as little children. In Jesus' name, amen.*

As our story today is about children, we will begin by considering the life of children in Jewish society in Jesus' day. The Greek word that is translated, "children", in our story is the word, "paidion". It refers to young children in particular. Most scholars believe that "paidion" can refer to children from infancy up to 12 years old. And the idea given in the meaning of this word is that children are "under training". The first twelve years of a Jewish child's life was spent being trained by their parents and in many cases by the religious leaders. There are several different Hebrew and Greek words for "child" in both the Old and New Testaments. And often these words are translated, not as child, but as "servant". So not only were Jewish children being trained, but they were serving the adults. The children would shadow the older more experienced ones, living the life of a servant.

Most of the religious training was given to boys. When a boy in the Jewish culture turned 3 years old (according to Jewish calculations, after completing his third year of life), he was given a tassled garment. According to Numbers 15:37-41 these tassels were made of blue thread. These tassels were intended to remind them of the Lord's commandments and hopefully keep them from wandering away from Him and His ways. When a Jewish boy reached the age of 5 years old (completed his fifth year), he was expected to memorize portions of the Law of Moses. When a boy in Jewish culture turned 12 years old (end of his 12<sup>th</sup> year), he was personally responsible for keeping ordinances in the Law of Moses. Many scholars believe this year marked the end of a boy's childhood and commenced his years as a Jewish youth. This may explain why Jesus' first visit to Jerusalem for the Passover was when He was twelve years old. In fact, the Greek word used to describe Jesus as a 12 year old boy is "pais". The word in our story, "paidion", is a diminutive form of "pais". So, "pais" would be what we would call a teenager.

Hopefully this helps us understand a little better the setting for our story today, as children are brought to Jesus. Let's now consider a summary of our story:

*Some women attempted to bring their children to Jesus, but were turned away by His disciples. Jesus was very offended by this and scolded His disciples, declaring that these children illustrated the only kind of people who would enter His kingdom. Jesus then welcomed the children into His arms and blessed them.*

Let's now consider what Jesus experienced in this story. First of all, He experienced an effort to alienate. This is interesting because we have seen already in the book of Mark other efforts to alienate people from Jesus. The scribes and Pharisees have in these cases been the perpetrators. In one instance they tried to turn John's disciples against Jesus. At another time they were trying to separate Jesus from His own disciples. But in today's story Jesus' own disciples are the ones responsible Mark 6:13 is not specific about who brought the children to Jesus. But the word, "they", culturally would most likely refer to their mothers. In fact a background picture is painted of this story in the book [Desire of Ages](#). There Ellen White describes how one mother left home one morning with her children, seeking Jesus' blessing. While she was on her way, she told one of her friends about her plan. This friend decided to join her, bringing her children along as well. And by the time they reached Jesus, there were several mothers wanting Jesus to bless their children.

Mark 6:13 says the reason they brought their children was actually so that Jesus might "touch them". We have considered in previous stories in Mark how people were healed by Jesus' touch. So, perhaps they were seeking

healing for their children – spiritual and perhaps physical healing. However, it was also a tradition in the Jewish culture for a mother to bring her one year old child to a rabbi for a blessing. In fact, in Luke 18:15, the Greek word Luke uses to describe the children in the story means “infant” or “unborn child”. So, perhaps several of the children present were one year old. We also find in Mark 6:13 that the disciples were offended by these mothers’ request. In their estimation Jesus was too busy teaching and ministering to adults. To have these little children take up His time seemed offensive to them. Perhaps they scolded the mothers and told them to bring their children back when they were old enough to understand the things of God.

According to Mark 6:14 Jesus has been watching all of this. And He is offended. He gets very upset with His disciples, who are trying to keep these children away from Him.

Second, Jesus experienced revealing a major offense. The wording Mark uses in verse 14 makes it clear that Jesus really let His disciples have it. He didn’t hold back at all. In essence He told them, “Leave them alone! Hands off guys! Stop keeping My children from coming to Me!” He is livid and continues by revealing what a major offense the disciples have committed. In verse 14 He declares, “These children are what My kingdom is made up of! You are working against Me and the growth of My kingdom!” Jesus then pays these children a tribute in verse 15. In essence He says, “If you don’t receive My kingdom as a little child, there is absolutely no way you’ll ever get make it in.” Some of you understand the ways of a child. You’ve seen how a child receives. I’ve witnessed it many times in with our children. Let’s say my son, Elijah, is playing with a ball and he sees me holding a new train set. I can pretty well describe what his response would be. First, he will be filled with a great desire for the train. Second, he will drop the ball. And third, he will grab the train with great enthusiasm. He won’t try to pay for it. And in his heart, he will mark me as his friend. Jesus says that if anyone tries to receive His kingdom in any other way, he or she will never get in.

Third, Jesus experienced blessing the children. Mark 10:16 gives us a pretty vivid picture of how Jesus welcomed the children, whom His disciples had tried to run off. The first action of Jesus, “took them up in His arms”, is one word in the Greek. It is used only twice in the Bible, both times being in the book of Mark. The word comes from a preposition meaning, “in”, and a root word meaning, “a bent arm”. It gives the picture of someone cradling something in their arms. Verse 16 then describes Jesus as putting His hands on them and “blessing them”. The first two actions here are participles, while “blessed” is the only active verb. “Blessed” is also in the imperfect tense, which we have learned, describes ongoing action. So, a possible translation might be, “After Jesus cradled them in His arms, as He was putting His hands on them, He was blessing them.” Clearly the emphasis is on Jesus’ repeated action of calling a blessing on these children. The rest was simply body language that revealed what He was feeling in His heart.

So, how does this story reveal Jesus as our Example? This story has been recorded not only to reveal what Jesus experienced, but to reveal what our experience can be. Jesus shows us in this story what it means to be a Christian. As we have been going through the book of Mark, we have been seeing how a Christian is someone who is healthy in every way – physically, emotionally, socially, and spiritually. We have also learned that a Christian is someone who is dangerous to the enemy our souls, Satan himself. It’s someone who counteracts all the evil in this world.

And so, in today’s story Jesus is revealed as our Example in that He valued children. Children were very important to Him. They awakened strong emotions in His heart. As He watched His own disciples chase them away from Him, His heart became filled with jealousy. He would not let anyone, not even His own disciples, keep these children from coming to Him. And once He had the children in His arms, He no doubt experienced great pleasure. Jesus also revealed how important children were to Him when He paid them a tribute. He set them up as an example to the adults, saying, “These children are why I came. They are the very ones I want in My kingdom.”

And so Jesus reveals in our story that a healthy Christian is someone who values children. How many times I have seen children ignored by adults. It’s not just in America. I’ve seen it in other cultures. But according to the way Jesus acted towards children in our story, He would have just as much to say to the children as He would to their parents. He shows that a true Christian lets children know how important they are. When was

the last time you spent as much time with the children at church as you did with the adults? Going by how Jesus acted towards children in our story, He would be on the playground with the children as much as He would be visiting with the adults in the foyer. Jesus shows in our story that a healthy Christian is someone who organizes Sabbath School and church in such a way that the children realize how important they are. What would this look like? First, their Sabbath School classrooms would be just as nice, if not nicer, than the adults' classrooms. The church service would be just as meaningful to a child as it would be to an adult. The children's story would not be the only part of the service that a child could understand. In the book Desire of Ages by Ellen White page 515 notice how Jesus caught the attention of the children when He taught:

*"In His teaching He came down to their level. He, the Majesty of heaven, did not disdain to answer their questions, and simplify His important lessons to meet their childish understanding. He planted in their minds the seeds of truth...."*

Surely, Jesus valued children, and a healthy Christian is someone who follows His example.

Second, Jesus is revealed as our Example in that He blessed the young. Mark 6:41 and 8:7 are the only other times the word, "bless", has been used so far in the book of Mark. On both of these occasions Jesus blessed the loaves and fish when He fed the multitudes. So the first time Mark records Jesus blessing a person is in our story today. Clearly Jesus saw the importance of blessing the young, the little children. The word that is translated, "blessed", is "eulogeo", which literally means "to speak well of" or "to say something good". Mark doesn't record exactly what Jesus said to those children. Perhaps He assured them of how what God thought of them: "God thinks a lot of you." Maybe He revealed His confidence in their future: "You're going to accomplish some great things in your lifetime." Or perhaps He spoke on them a typical Hebrew blessing: "May peace and prosperity follow you your whole life." Whatever Jesus might have said to them, one thing is clear – He was intentional about blessing people while they were still young.

And so Jesus reveals that a healthy Christian is someone who invests in a child's life for good. Notice what Ecclesiastes 12:1 says. The great and wise King Solomon is summarizing his thoughts: "If you forget everything else I've said, remember this...." (Read) Solomon realized the early years are when we need to remember our Creator. And in the same way a healthy Christian realizes that young children are the ones in whom we need to be investing our time and prayers.

As I look back on my life as a child, there are some who stand out in my mind as someone who took the time to invest themselves in me. They are those who have made me who I am. They are the ones who introduced me to my Creator. First and foremost would be my parents, who instilled in me the values of integrity and hard work. Two other people who were very influential in my life as a child were recently here in Lancaster visiting my family - my aunt and uncle, who lived just up the hill from us. They were like my second parents and spent a lot of time investing in me as a child. Our family would often go up to their house and have Friday night supper and vespers with them. I'm not sure there is anything my uncle can't do. He is an expert in many areas - auto mechanics, construction, gardening, computers, and most recently, as a medical doctor, the field of medicine. One thing I haven't ever seen him do is cook. And that's ok, because my aunt is an expert in that. And so today, the times spent with my aunt and uncle remain as treasured memories in my mind.

And so, following the example of these influential people in my life as well as the example of Jesus Himself, I want to be this type of person to the children in my circle of influence. That is the life of a healthy Christian.

So, I've wondered, "Where did the children in our story today end up? What kind of adults did they actually become?" Well, again, the book, Desire of Ages has an interesting perspective on this. This is from page 514:

*"In the children who were brought in contact with Him, Jesus saw the men and women who should be heirs of His grace and subjects of His kingdom, and some of whom would become martyrs for His sake."*

These children, who sat on Jesus' lap, left His presence that day never to be the same again. The course of their life was forever changed. The words and attention Jesus gave them were never forgotten. Some of those children chose to die an early death, rather than disown the One who cradled them in His arms. You never know what influence you might have on a child. Only when we stand on the sea of glass before the throne of God will we realize the results of taking time to invest in a child's life.