

Little Children Mark 10

Today starting a new series on children in the Bible. When you look through the Bible you realise, if you pay close attention that children play some crucial parts. Some of the time these parts are obvious but at other times it feels like their role has been diminished or hidden. Maybe there's a sense that no one could believe a child did what they did and assume it must have been an adult instead.

Through this series, my prayer is that we'll learn some important lessons from these children and also come to realise that the smallest can sometimes be the mightiest in the kingdom of God.

Today we're starting off with a very familiar passage but I think it's one that's underplayed and when we truly get to grips with what it says, it should radically alter the whole culture of church.

But, lets think. If you need to learn something new, what do you do?

DIY – book, youtube

Play a new game

Drive a car?

Build a lego model?

To do something new, you need to learn from someone or something that knows.

Our story starts with parents bringing their children to Jesus. Can he bless them, please?

The response from the disciples, no! Go away! The disciples were simply reflecting the opinions of the time, children are worthless. Legally a child had no status. Infanticide was perfectly fine and not uncommon. Only adults had a legal status and value. A slave had a price, a child didn't.

A barrier goes up. You are not welcome!

But Jesus gets wind of this and tells off the disciples, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it."

And he takes the children in his arms and blesses them. He gives value to those who were considered worthless. But he actually goes further and says, if you want to learn about faith. If you're not like a child, then forget about being part of God's kingdom.

Now, he's not saying we should all be childish. Much as I love being childish, that's not what it says. He means we need to be like children in one crucial way.

The relationship of a child to a parent is the perfect illustration of our relationship to God. A baby is utterly reliant on the parents. They need them for food, shelter, protection; they need a parent to calm them, to sooth them; when they need something they cry out, when they want attention, they cry out, when they're happy they let their parents know! As they grow a bit and are able to talk they want to tell their parents everything, every little detail of life. It is not an overstatement to say that a child's parents are the centre of their universe.

Is this not how our relationship with God should be like? God should be the centre of our universe and we should be utterly trusting of him for everything!

But as you watch a child grow, you notice something. Slowly the parent becomes less of the centre. The child becomes more self-reliant, they start to push the boundaries a bit more.

And isn't that exactly how we are with God? We become like that stroppy, know-it-all, grumpy teenager. We sometimes wonder why God is so unfair and why can't God just leave us alone to do what we want to do.

And this is why we need children and young people in church among us, not pushed to the side. We need to learn from them just as much as they need to learn from us. As adults we have a responsibility to pass on the stories of faith, the teaching we've received and the lessons we've learnt from life. But if we want to enter the kingdom of God, we need to learn from people who know about trust and faith!

Over the years I've seen both good and bad attitudes towards children in church. I've seen the churches that have welcomed children and allowed them to thrive. But I've also seen churches that have knowingly and unknowingly pushed children to the side.

I remember one church. I hadn't been there that long and a man who was very senior in the church suddenly asked very forcefully – are children allowed to come to the morning service now? In their mind, church was a place for adults and children disrupted that and so they should know their place – which wasn't near him.

But that adult centeredness creeps in in other ways. The churches that welcome children – into a Sunday school but not the main service. The assumption is that children need to learn from adults. But Jesus says, we adults need to learn from the children. And if you have no children, how can you learn. And if you don't learn, then how can you ever be part of the kingdom of God?

Children should know their place – and that place is bang in the middle of the church family. If the church needs to change how it does things to make that work, then it needs to change because the most crucial thing of all is at stake, entry to the kingdom of God.

When you see a child in church, celebrate and make them welcome.

When you hear a baby cry, remember that you need to cry out to God.

When you hear the excited chatter of little voices, remember that you need to excitedly chatter to your heavenly father.

When you see a child pushing the boundaries that little bit too much, take it as a chance to repent for all the times you've pushed the boundaries set by God.

When you see the grumpy teenager, reflect on your relationship with God and ponder whether you need to draw closer to God.

When you see no children in church, mourn for how we have got things wrong and ask God to help us change our ways.