

Children of the Kingdom

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[0 : 00] And they were bringing children to him that he might touch them. And the disciples rebuked them. 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. 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.

Thank you for your word, Father. Amen. Speak to us now in Jesus' name. Amen. Are you aware that the human body has roughly, the average human body, has roughly 100 trillion cells in it? Now I know if you look around the room you might think a few of us have more than 100 trillion cells, obviously to make up all of us. But the average body has 100 trillion cells in it. And if you were to look at just one of those cells under a microscope, you would see that it's an incredibly complicated, very well designed machine.

In the center of that cell is the nucleus. We know that in the vast majority of human beings, that in every nucleus there are 46 chromosomes. And in every chromosome there are over 25,000, on average, over 25,000 different genes that make up who we are.

[1 : 16] That determine our eye color, our hair color, our height, and all sorts of things about us. And I was thinking this week that you could spend a great deal of time studying a single human cell and learn a great deal about the person from whom that cell came.

If you were knowledgeable enough, and if our science were advanced enough, you would be able to figure out the color of their eyes, for instance. You would be able to figure out the color of their hair before they put some sort of product or chemical on it, alright?

You would be able to figure out a great deal about that person. But even if you devoted your entire life to the study of the human cell, the reality is that at the end of it all, you wouldn't really know a whole lot about what it means to be a human being.

You would know valuable information, but you wouldn't really understand humanity. You wouldn't really understand who the individual is who donated that particular cell.

We see something similar when we open up the scriptures. We, every week, tend to focus on anywhere from 4 to 10 or 12 verses. We take a very small section of scripture, and we really dig in, and we really try to analyze it.

[2 : 26] And that's a good thing that we're doing that. But what I want to do this morning is not only look through the microscope at these 4 verses, but that eventually we're going to switch gears, and we're going to try to see how what Jesus says in this passage is connected to broader themes in the Bible, and especially as they are revealed more fully in the rest of the New Testament.

But before we get to that, we need to look at the details. We need to look through the microscope. So I want you to take a look, beginning in verse 13, to see exactly what's going on here. We're told in verse 13 that they were bringing children to Him that He might touch them.

We don't know who they are. Probably, logically, you would think it's the children's parents, and that makes sense. So it's probably the parents who are bringing their children to Him so that Jesus might touch them.

They're bringing them to Him so that He might bless them. That's what it means when it says that He might touch them. Especially in the Old Testament, as you read through the Old Testament, oftentimes, not every time, but oftentimes, fathers will pass the blessing onto their sons, and therefore the inheritance onto their sons, by laying their hands on their heads and praying for them. Passing that blessing on. And in fact, when you read Matthew's version of this story, Matthew tells us not only did they want Jesus to touch them, they wanted Jesus to pray for their children.

[3 : 52] So they're bringing these children to Jesus so that He might lay His hands on them and call out to God, asking for God's blessing upon their children. So obviously, these people recognize that Jesus is someone special.

Whether or not those who are bringing their children fully understand who He is and know that He is the Messiah and the long-awaited King from the line of David and the divine Son of God, we don't know. But what we do know is they had enough confidence to know that Jesus had the power to bless these children.

Jesus demonstrates in the Gospels a kind of affinity for children. He longs to reach out to children and to bless them.

So much so that if you just turn back a page to the passage that we already covered in chapter 9 of the Gospel of Mark, Jesus says in verse 42 that whoever causes one of these little ones, a little child, whoever causes one of them who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him if a great millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea.

This is one of the great differences between God's priorities and the priorities of Satan. God blesses children. God loves children. Satan would seek to destroy children.

[5 : 12] We've seen this already as we covered other passages in the Gospel of Mark, that throughout history we see Satan at work to destroy children. We see it in Egypt as he works through Pharaoh for all the Hebrew babies to be slaughtered.

We see it in the history of Israel because when they reach the heights of wickedness, they sacrifice their children to false gods. A sin that God says He would not pardon no matter how much they pled for His forgiveness.

And then we see it even in the coming of Christ where Herod slaughters the babies in Bethlehem. All of His children under two years old, He slaughters in Bethlehem. We see Satan at work through these various wicked rulers throughout history and He attacks children.

Jesus on the other hand and God on the other hand values children. And so here we see Jesus having children brought to Him because people know that He's the kind of man, He is the kind of teacher who will bless them, who will pray for them.

And apparently His disciples haven't quite caught on to that yet. Because we are told that the disciples rebuked them. Rebuked those who were bringing the children to them.

[6 : 24] I don't know, it is quite, it is possible that they're still in the house that's mentioned in verse 10. In verse 10, the disciples went with Jesus into a house. And so they may still be in that house as Jesus is teaching.

And so you can sort of picture people trying to bring their young children in through the doors. And the disciples are saying, no, not right now. He's teaching. He's busy right now. Or He's resting right now.

He doesn't have time for you. Leave the master alone and go away. They rebuke the people and apparently they have not heard what Jesus has said. If you remember just back in chapter 9, verse 37, Jesus has said, Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me.

And whoever receives me receives not me, but him who sent me. And they're rejecting children. He said, receive a child. It's like receiving me. And they turn around only a few days or at most a few weeks after He told them that.

And they won't even let children come near Jesus. They've missed the point. They've misunderstood. And Jesus is passionate about this issue.

[7 : 34] In fact, if you begin to think about how most people come to know Christ. Now, people come to know Christ in a variety of ways.

And I know there are a number of you here because I've sat and visited with you who came to know Christ as an adult. But I bet if we were to take a survey of people who believe in Christ in most churches, you would find that most people came to understand who Jesus was because they were taught that as a child.

Because as a child, they were taken to church. Because as a child, they were taken to Sunday school or some other form of Bible study. And they were taught the gospel as a child. And at some point, they came to understand the gospel.

Understand their sin and their need for Christ. That's the primary way. Through parents bringing their children to a place where they will hear and see about Christ. And parents personally presenting the gospel.

Parents bringing their children to Jesus as best as they can. As they open the Bible for them. As they pray for them. That's the primary way in which people come to know Christ.

[8 : 35] That has not changed throughout the centuries. And these parents bring their children to Jesus. And we can learn something from that. We can either be like the disciples at this point.

Who keep children away from Jesus and keep them at a distance. Or we can be a kind of people. We can be the kind of parents and grandparents. And we can be the kind of church who does everything in our power to bring Jesus near to our children.

Now, if you look at what we do as a church right now. You might think, well, we're not doing a whole lot for that, are we? We have some kids back here in the nursery. Little bitty ones. And they get a Bible lesson.

But the rest of the kids are in here with us. And we don't have anything really during the week. So you're thinking, well, how are we obeying that? And what I can tell you is there are two things that we are doing. One that we're doing now and going to continue to do and emphasize more.

And one that we're going to begin in the future. So we're aiming right now to begin in January, if we're able to, if we have everything we need. We're aiming to begin Sunday school classes or Sunday morning Bible study classes.

[9 : 39] So that we'll have, of course, the class for the babies. And then we'll have a class for younger elementary age and then older elementary age. And then teenagers will come in with the adults as we study the Bible together.

So we are looking ahead and planning and aiming to do things so that we might teach the Bible to kids in a way where they can grasp it and understand it and come to see Jesus throughout all the pages of the scriptures.

We are going to do that. That's a part of our plan. But even now, we have something in place that I know a lot of you, a lot of us are not taking advantage of. And maybe it's because I don't mention it enough or talk to you about it enough or teach you about it enough.

But we have a catechism that we use. Now, for most Baptists, the word catechism is frightening.

Because we hear things like that and we think, oh, that sounds kind of like Roman Catholics.

And we don't want to be like Roman Catholics. But the truth of the matter is that throughout Baptist history, up until about the last hundred years or so, Baptists have used catechisms very frequently in their instructing and training of children.

[10 : 43] And they're very simple tools. It's not something complicated. It's not a legalistic kind of thing. It's a question and your kid answers the question. And they memorize the answers to the question. And as you go through there, they begin to learn good theology.

So that our catechism begins with very simple questions for kids to answer. Who made you? God made me. What else did God make? God made all things. Why did God make you in all things?

For His own glory. And on and on and on the catechism goes and walks through the essential teachings of our faith. And walks through the Ten Commandments. And helps them not only to memorize the Ten Commandments, but to understand what the Ten Commandments are about.

And so that's something that I want to encourage you to use at home. Every week we print two to three catechism questions in the bulletin. It's right there for you.

You can take it home and work on those questions for the week with your kids. They're back here.

You have the full catechism sitting back there on the table that you can grab before you leave. And all it takes is about five minutes a day sitting down and working on a question with your kids.

[11 : 47] And they can begin to learn good theology. Even if they don't fully understand what the answers mean, they begin to learn it. So that I can remember at one time one of my boys asking me about a particular animal.

Why did God make that? It was strange. And I said, oh, well, why did he make you and all things? For his glory. Okay, so that's part of all things.

Why did he make that? Oh, for his glory. And then we began a discussion. How could this strange animal glorify God? In what ways might it glorify God?

And so kids began to learn that kind of theology. And parents, as they teach the catechism, began to learn good theology as well. And so I want to encourage you.

Bring your children near to Jesus by taking advantage of everything that we're trying to offer you as a church. Use the catechism. When we begin Sunday morning Bible study, show up an hour earlier and bring your children to Bible study and come to Bible study yourself.

[12:49] Because otherwise we're not taking advantage of every opportunity to bring our children to Christ. We become more like the disciples. Who for various reasons we don't bring them as near as we can.

Because we're tired. Because we're busy. Because we're forgetful. And we have a long list of excuses and reasons why. But at the end of the day, you can either be a parent who brings their child to Jesus for his blessing.

Or you can be like the disciples here and not get it. And hold them at bay. I want you to be like the parents here. Who desperately bring their children to Jesus and they might bless them.

And these here we know are not just children of any kind. Alright? The word that Mark uses is the word child. It could describe anyone from infancy up to about 10 or 11 years old.

But in Luke's account of this same story, Luke uses a different word that narrows the range down to us. Luke uses a word that means baby. So these are not older children that the parents are bringing to Jesus.

[13:49] These are babies. Anywhere from newborn up to about 2 to 3 years old at the most.

These are very, very young children. And that matters for how Jesus responds to what the disciples are doing.

Verse 14 says that when Jesus saw what they were doing. That's why I think maybe they're in the house because Jesus is here and they're outside blocking people. And eventually Jesus sees it and he says that he became indignant.

He's angry about this. Makes him mad. He's indignant and he says to them, Let the children come to me. Do not hinder them for to such belongs the kingdom of God.

Let them come. Let them come to me. Do not stand in their way. Let children be brought to me. And then he makes a strange statement and he says, For to such or to this kind belongs the kingdom of God.

What does he mean by that? What does he mean first of all when he says that the kingdom of God belongs to them? Well, he helps us later on. He says in verse 15, he talks about those people receiving the kingdom and entering the kingdom in verse 15.

[15:00] But we still need to understand exactly what Jesus, what do you mean when you say the kingdom belongs to them? What is the kingdom? What exactly is that? And if you just read on through the next story, you can begin to see it.

Because in verse 17, there's a man, it's the story of a rich young ruler, who comes and asks Jesus a question. Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?

And then a little bit later on, Jesus says in verse 23, How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God. And then again in verse 24, how difficult it is to enter the kingdom of God.

And then when you move towards the very end of this passage, in verse 30, Jesus refers to those who in the age to come will receive eternal life.

So the kingdom of God in this passage is parallel to eternal life. It's parallel to eternal life in the age to come. This is of eternal significance here when Jesus says, To such belong the kingdom of God.

[16:12] He's talking about those who receive eternal life. To those who enter heaven. Those who enjoy fellowship with God forever.

To such as these, these are the kind that get eternal life. These are the kind in the age to come who will fully enter into my kingdom.

We know as we read through the gospels that there's a real sense in which in the ministry of Jesus, the kingdom of God is breaking into the world. In fact, at the beginning of the gospel of Mark, Jesus says, Repent for the kingdom of God is at hand.

The kingdom of God is near. So the kingdom of God is invading this world. And yet, during this age, that will not be complete.

That invasion of the kingdom of God into this world will not be complete until Jesus returns in the age to come. But on that day, the kingdom, kingdoms of this world will belong to our Lord.

[17:12] And He will rule over all the earth. He will set up a new heaven and a new earth. And He will set on His throne reigning from the new Jerusalem. And being a part of that, being in that kingdom, hinges upon whether or not you are to such as these.

Such. What kind? Verse 15 helps us. Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.

Whoever receives the kingdom like a child shall not enter it. Remember, Jesus is here holding in His arms. Jesus says in verse 16, He took them in His arms and blessed them.

He's holding in His arms babies. Not eight-year-old kids who are squirmy and might say something smart, aleck, and rude to you. Alright? Not a five-year-old who might kick you in the shin and run off. He's in little babies. And He's holding in little babies. And He says, if you believe like this one, if you receive like this one, you enter the kingdom. Well, how do babies believe?

[18 : 27] Naturally. Wholeheartedly. Completely. If you're mom or your dad and you hold your infant in your arms, they are fully trusting of you. Because if you just let them go, they're hopeless.

They can't do anything without you. If you don't fix their food, if you don't feed them, if you don't provide them with something to drink, if you don't change their diaper, if you don't help them get up out of bed, they're totally hopeless.

And so they're absolutely, utterly dependent upon their mom and their dad. And Jesus says, that's the kind of faith that He's looking for. He's not looking for people who have a back door, who have a second option, another way of escape in case the Jesus thing doesn't quite work out.

And He's not looking for people who say, well, I want to trust in Jesus, but I also am going to do all of these other things and add that to my faith to make me feel more secure that God will accept me. A baby adds nothing. They add nothing. In fact, it's not my favorite stage of child rearing, little babies, you know. I like them about three and up.

[19 : 37] I mean, my boys now are at a great stage. I like Eli's three, Calvin's almost six, Nate is eight. I mean, they're at an age where I can play with them and throw the ball with them and wrestle with them and all those sorts of things.

And babies just lay there. All right? That's it. They contribute gross things. That's about all they contribute. All right? It's not my favorite stage.

They are an example for us. They offer nothing. They bring nothing to the table. They just trust in their parents.

Jesus says, you want to enter the kingdom? Receive the kingdom like a child receives his mother and father, like an infant. That's how you enter the kingdom of God.

That's how you receive the kingdom. Because God regards as his own children those who come to him with a childlike faith.

[20 : 33] You understand that? God counts us to be his children if we trust in him with a childlike faith.

Does it strike you as strange that here in this gospel Jesus first addresses the issue of marriage in verses 1 through 12?

And then he immediately moves to address the issue of children in verses 13 through 16? Does it strike you as strange that these things should come one after another? I don't think that's an accident by any means.

Because we have seen both in the series of marriage that we went through in August and September, and also in passages here in the gospel of Mark, we have seen that marriage exists. Marriage serves as a kind of example, pointing people to Christ and his relationship with the church. That's the purpose of marriage. God created marriage so that we might have an example of how Jesus relates to his own bride.

[21 : 35] It's a type pointing to something greater. And then we also see, though, that God establishes a parent-child relationship. He establishes all the way back in Genesis chapter 1, when he says, Be fruitful and multiply.

This is his intention. He has created the family for a purpose, for husbands and wives to reflect Christ's relationship to the church, and for parents and children to reflect our dependence upon God for all things, and his loving fatherly care over us.

It's no accident that Jesus talks about marriage, and that he talks about children. They're the two most constant and most obvious images that communicate to us the love of God for us.

But, the scriptures nowhere teach us that all people are children of God. The scriptures nowhere teach us that God is the father of all humanity.

They do not teach that. They teach that he is the creator of all humanity, but he's not the father of all people. He is the father of those who trust in his son.

[22 : 51] When we, through faith, are united to Jesus, Jesus becomes our spiritual brother, and his father becomes our heavenly father. But, apart from Christ, we are not God's children.

We are separated from him. Cut off from him. In fact, I want you to turn quickly to the book of Ephesians, chapter 2. And most of you are probably familiar with verses 1 through 10, that speak of God's grace.

But the apostle Paul continues on in the verses after that. In verse 12, he says this, that he wants to Ephesians to remember that prior to their conversion, prior to having faith in Christ, that they were separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world.

That's who we are, apart from faith in Jesus. We cannot claim God as our father if we are not united to his son by faith. God has one, only begotten son, Jesus.

We are none of us his sons by birth. By birth, we are strangers. By birth, we are aliens. By birth, we are God's enemies. Not his children.

[24 : 12] But by faith, we become his children. Verse 13, But now in Christ Jesus, you who once were far off, have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one, and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing the law of commandments, express in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace.

And look at verse 17, that he came and preached peace to those who are far off, and peace to those who are near. For through him, we both have access, and one spirit to the Father.

So then, because of faith in Christ, you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints. And listen to this, members of God's own household, members of his household, counted, reckoned as his children through faith in Jesus.

There's hardly any teaching in Scripture that is more comforting, and more awe-inspiring, than the doctrine of adoption.

This is the language that the New Testament uses to describe our newfound childhood, our sonship, in Christ, with the Father.

[25 : 34] We have been adopted into his family. In fact, I want you to turn to one other place, Romans chapter 8, before we return to Mark. Because this issue of sonship is a theme that runs from Genesis all the way through the New Testament.

Adam was declared a son of God, and he forfeited that sonship in the fall. Abraham was declared his son of God. David, the king, God frequently in the Psalms refers to him as his son.

There wasn't language that was used indiscriminately of everyone. She was very specifically from members of the nation of Israel. But now, Romans chapter 8, verse 14 says, For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.

For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the spirit of adoption as sons by whom we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.

And if children, then heirs. We are heirs with Christ of all that He deserves and all that He has earned by His perfect obedience to the law of God.

[26 : 55] And because of that, listen, verse 19, the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God.

Because the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

The whole creation waits with eager expectation for the day in which God's children by adoption will be fully revealed as His own.

And when does that happen? It happens, verse 23, as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.

It happens on the day when Christ raises us from the dead and gives us new glorified bodies. Did you ever wonder why? Why is it necessary for God to give us glorified bodies?

[28 : 02] I mean, we could say, well, so that we won't die. But Adam didn't possess a glorified body in the Garden of Eden and without sin he wouldn't have died, he would have stayed alive. So why?

Why this introduction of a glorified body? Why do we need that? Why is that necessary? Why would God do that for His sons by adoption? Because these bodies, even absent of sin, these bodies do not have the capacity to handle the glory that God's going to reveal in us and to us and through us.

The entire universe longs for and waits for the day when God shines His glory through His children. Everything waits for it. And this feeble body doesn't have eyes to see that kind of glory and isn't strong enough to reflect that kind of glory to the world.

But there is coming a day when those whom God regards as His children, those whom He has adopted in His family will see unfathomable glory and will shine with that same glory for all the creation to see and marvel at.

And that will endure forever. Forever. And what determines whether or not you fall into that category or you fall into the category that Jesus describes again in Mark chapter 9 as those who will go into the unquenchable fire where the worm does not die, what determines the difference of eternal unfathomable glory and eternal unbearable torment is whether or not you come to Christ childlike, babylike, infantlike faith offering nothing of your own.

[30 : 08] But back at this last verse in our passage, verse 16 in Mark, after Jesus has rebuked His disciples, it says in verse 16 that He took them in His arms, He blessed them, laying His hands on them.

He took the children into His arms. And then it's a telling thing that when you move to the next story in verse 24 that Jesus addresses His own disciples, hard-headed as they may be, dull as they may be at this stage in their walk with Him.

Nevertheless, they have faith and He addresses them in verse 24, children. How difficult it is to enter the kingdom of God. Children.

Eternal glory, eternal torment, and the difference is whether or not you are reckoned as a child of God by childlike faith in Him. Let's pray.

Amen.