

TEACHING ABOUT CHILDREN

Mark 10:13-16

Something is added to the beauty of this picture by the setting in which it is placed. Our Lord had just been speaking about the sanctity of the marriage tie by which the safety of the home is secured. Here He teaches the sacredness of childhood in which the home finds its completeness, its glory and its ennobling care.

It was only natural that Jewish mothers should wish their children to be blessed by a great and distinguished rabbi. Especially they brought their children to such a person on their first birthdays. In this way many were bringing their little children to Christ on the day mentioned in our lesson.

To understand and appreciate the beauty of this passage we must remember when it happened. Christ was on His way to the cross. At such a time as that He had time for the children. With all the tension which He experienced, Christ had the time to take them in His arms and the heart to smile into their faces, after which He blessed them. Apparently the apostles resented such an intrusion on their Master's time and attention. They seemed to feel that children were too insignificant to be allowed to interfere with the Master's work or to demand His care. When a group of parents came bringing their little children to Christ to receive His blessing, the disciples objected strenuously and evidently quite rudely. They reasoned that Christ was too busy to be bothered with parents and their infants. However, the disciples did not understand the spirit of their Lord. He always had time for those who sought His help and blessing, no matter how pressing the affairs of the moment were.

It was not because they were ungracious men that they sought to keep the children away from Christ. It was that they wanted to protect Him. They did not realize all that was going on, but they knew quite clearly that tragedy lay ahead, and they could see the tension under which Christ was laboring. They did not want Him to be bothered. They could not conceive that He would want the children about Him at such a time as that.

Notice that the parents brought their children to Christ. That is what all parents should do, but they cannot do so unless they themselves have first come to Him. Blessed indeed are those who thus dedicate their children to the Lord! From the dawn of intelligence no children are too young to be told about the Saviour's love. All Sunday School teachers should remember that.

The disciples were rebuking those who were bringing their little ones to Christ because they did not understand. They regarded their Lord as a teacher and a healer, and these children did not require Him in either capacity. But Christ was much more than a teacher and a healer. He was essentially the Blessor, whatever form the blessing might take.

It is not surprising that Christ was moved with indignation. Incidentally, that was the only time that the emotion of indignation was attributed to Him, and, remember, it was on behalf of the children. The indignation of Christ and His reply cast a fadeless halo about the face of every helpless child. He said, "Suffer the little children to come unto me; forbid them not: for to such belongeth the kingdom of God." If their helplessness appealed to Him, should it not affect us, and should we not feel that no work is more Christlike, and perhaps none so blessed, as the care of

children? We are true servants of Christ only as we sense the appeal of childhood, and only as we seek to supply to children their physical, mental and spiritual needs.

This incident tells us a lot about Christ. It tells us that He was the kind of person who cared for children and for whom children cared. He could not have been a stern and gloomy and joyless person. There must have been a kindly sunshine about Him. He must have smiled easily and laughed joyously. George Macdonald said that he did not believe in a man's Christianity if the children are never to be found playing around his door. This incident throws a flood of light on the kind of person Christ was.

What was it about the little children that Christ valued so highly? He liked their humility. Occasionally there is a child who is an exhibitionist, but such a child is rare and is always the product of misguided adult treatment. Ordinarily a child is embarrassed by prominence and publicity. He has not yet learned to think in terms of place and pride and prestige. He has not yet learned to discover the importance of himself. Christ liked their trustfulness. There is a time when a child thinks his father knows everything, and that his father is always right. Then, the child soon grows out of that. He is thoroughly convinced that his father doesn't know anything. He considers him the most ignorant man he ever saw. Finally, when a few years are passed, he is amazed at how much his father has learned in such a short time.

Another commendable thing in a child is its confidence in other people. A child does not expect any person to be bad. He will make friends with a perfect stranger. A child has not yet learned to suspect the world. He still believes the best about others. Sometimes that very trust leads him into danger for there are those who are totally unworthy of it and who abuse it, but that trust is a very lovely thing.

Still another thing that impresses one about a child is short memory. He has not yet learned to bear grudges and nourish bitterness. Even when he is treated unjustly he forgets, and he forgets so completely that he does not even need to forgive. Indeed, of such is the kingdom of God. Christians are thus reminded of that which becomes them.

"And he took them in his arms, and blessed them, laying his hands upon them." Mark is the only writer who adds this matchless touch to the scene. It is the complete picture we need to keep in memory. Christ is the Saviour of children; Christianity is the religion of childhood. Where our Lord is known and trusted and followed, there infancy is sacred and childhood is secure. It is the childlike in helplessness and trust who are eligible for the kingdom.