

October 11, 2026
“Oh, the Children”
Matthew 19:13-15

Intro:

Given that we have already participated in a child dedication this morning, I thought it might be fitting to spend the sermon time exploring some of what the Bible has to say to us about children.

You should not be surprised to learn that children and the topic of children are found throughout the whole of Scripture. You should also not be surprised to hear me say that it is an important theme for all of us as we all are, or have been, children. Even as adults, we will always be our parent’s child no matter how old we, or they, are.

In the Bible, we have stories about children – Adam and Eve’s children (although by the time we read of Cain and Abel they would have been of adult age). We have the story of Isaac and his father Abraham nearly sacrificing him. We have the boy Samuel going to live at the Temple. There is the famous friendship between the young adults David and Jonathon. We are even given a brief glimpse into the childhood of Jesus.

In addition to the many references to specific children, there are more general Biblical passages about how children are blessings – look to the Psalms for some of those; how they are to be parented and taught – see Deuteronomy and Proverbs for examples; and even instruction around the area of discipline – Proverbs 13:24: “Those who spare the rod of discipline hate their children. Those who love their children care enough to discipline them.”

The Ten Commandments give specific instruction to children to obey their parents, and this is echoed again in Ephesians. In several places, Paul writes to parents, fathers specifically, to make sure to not frustrate their children.

Yes, children and related themes seem to be significant in God's ordering of the world.

Jesus and Children:

Then we come to Jesus and what he tells us about children.

We begin in Matthew 19, which we read a few moments ago. The account begins rather ordinarily with "one day". At some point during the time that Jesus was teaching in the region of Judea, east of the river Jordan, parents from the region brought their children to Jesus so he could pray over them and bless them. Note what this tells us already – parents think children are important. They are so important, in fact, that getting someone of Jesus' reputation to bless them was a top priority. These parents want the best for their children – not the best of material items, but the best spiritual upbringing. I don't think it would be too far a stretch (even though the account doesn't mention it) to assume that these same parents were disciplined and focused in making sure that their children learned the lessons of the Scriptures. From their perspective, children are important.

The disciples, on the other hand, don't see children as important. They try to dissuade the parents from bothering Jesus with their request. In their minds, children aren't important and don't merit any of Jesus' valuable time – or maybe they were just thinking of their own inconvenience. Whatever their motives, Jesus puts a stop to it. Mark's account even says that Jesus was angry with the disciples.

"The kingdom of Heaven belongs to those who are like these children." Jesus says. What is it about those children that they have earned possession of the Kingdom of Heaven? Some would suggest it is the innocence of children that makes the distinction, or the honesty, or the vulnerability. Those could all be part of what Jesus was trying to convey, but I have seen a fair number of children in my time and they are not all innocent, honest or even as vulnerable (in some ways) as people make them out to be.

But there is something about children that is missing in adults. Something that Jesus is saying adults need to re-find in themselves. Perhaps it is the innocence. Not the “guilt-free” meaning of innocence, but the innocence of a person whose heart is still soft and open to experiencing the goodness of the Kingdom of Heaven in a real and personal way. Children haven’t been jaded by the world around them. There is still wonder and awe in their being. Adults have had their hearts hardened by what they have observed in the world and in people – the harsh struggle for power and position, the back-stabbing, the violence, the grudges, broken relationships, and more, that make adults not wonder at God, but wonder if there even is a God.

In this statement, Jesus is reminding his disciples of something they already know, something they have already heard from His mouth.

For this, we go back into chapter 18, where we find another scene where a child features prominently. Here, the context is about greatness and who is more important. In response to that question, Jesus calls a little child forward and uses that child to illustrate the lesson he teaches. Greatness and power will not get you into heaven. Popularity counts for nothing in God’s economy. But if we adults become like that little child, then there is hope for us.

The disciples must have forgotten that lesson, because their motivation for telling the parents in chapter 19 to not bother Jesus with their children likely wasn’t some pressing engagement, but the attitude that children were not worth his time. Children, says Jesus, are always worth the time. In fact, how we treat them is a direct reflection of our attitude towards Jesus.

Conclusion:

There is something about children that makes it easier for them to embrace Kingdom values and to embrace Jesus. Some argue that because children do not know as much as adults (unless they are teen-agers, when all bets are off), they are forced to rely more on God to provide what they need. In this line of thinking, we adults could do with less thinking that we have all the answers. Others argue

that because children are weaker and more reliant on adults for their needs, they possess a humility that makes submitting their lives to Jesus easier. As adults, we do tend to think that we can do things ourselves and we only need to turn to God in dire circumstances as a last resort. Most adults don't like being told they can't do something, or feeling like they can't look after themselves just fine. Faith in Jesus requires submitting to His will over our own, and Jesus seems to say that children have an easier job of that than adults do. Still others suggest that the humility of a child is nothing more than the openness to sharing their lives with others. Kids (for the most part) get along with other kids – you only have to take a young child to the park and watch them instantly make new best friends with people they have never met.

Child: "I made a new best friend today!"

Parent: "Oh, what is his name?"

Child: "I don't know, but I invited him over to our house so we could play later."

A final example comes even earlier in Matthew, and in fact is in all four of the gospels. In Matthew 14, we find the miracle of the feeding of the 5,000. There are lots of great sermons that can come from this account, but what I want to suggest this morning is that the child in the story is an example of the kind of lived humility and innocence that Jesus is trying to get the disciples, and us, to understand when it comes to the Christian faith.

We know the story. A crowd has gathered and Jesus wants to feed them. All the food that can be found is two fish and five loaves of bread, and Jesus multiplies it to provide enough for all the people there. John's gospel includes the information that the food is donated by a child.

Here's the thing. I find it hard to believe that in a crowd of 5,000 men, plus women and children, that there was only one child who had a packed lunch with him. I can see men not bothering to pack a lunch, but I really find it hard to believe that the wives and mothers would have not made sure their families were out the door with something to eat. So, all those adults who likely had something, even it wasn't much, were not willing to make that known. Only a child was

willing to share what little he had if it would help. This is humility. This is selflessness. This is what Jesus says trumps any effort through power or position to get into heaven. This is what Jesus says God's economy is all about, and unless we are to become (again) like children in this regard, we could very well miss out on the blessing that Jesus has for us.

So, let the little children come to Jesus and may you each find yourself in that company.

Let's pray.