

Like a child

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[0 : 00] Good morning. My name is Matthew Capone, and I'm the pastor here at Cheyenne Mountain Presbyterian Church, and it's my joy to bring God's Word to you today. A special welcome if you're new or visiting with us. We're glad that you're here, and we're glad that you're here not because we're trying to fill seats, but because we're following Jesus together as one community.

And as we follow Jesus together, we become convinced there's no one so good, they don't need God's grace, and no one so bad that they can't have it, which is why we come back week after week to hear what God has to say to us in His Word.

We're continuing our series in the Gospel of Mark. You'll remember that the Gospels tell the story of Jesus and His life and His death and His resurrection. And there's a theme that connects our passage last week and this week, which is Jesus reminding His disciples of how God actually meant the world to be different than what they believe or expect.

Last week, we talked about the fact that marriage is different than what perhaps the disciples realized or understood. This week, we're going to see that children are also different than what the disciples believed or understood.

And as we dive in, we're going to look at two things. First of all, the importance of children. And second, the importance of being childlike, not childish. One, the importance of children. Two, the importance of being childlike.

[1 : 32] And so it's with that that I invite you to turn with me to God's Word. You can turn in your worship guide. You can turn in your phone. You can turn in your Bible. No matter where you go, remember that this is God's Word.

And Proverbs chapter 30 tells us that God's Word is a shield to those who take refuge in Him. Every word of God proves true. And so that's why we read now together, starting at verse 13.

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.

And I invite you to pray with me as we come to this portion of God's Word. Our Father in Heaven, we praise You and thank You again that You haven't abandoned us as orphans, but You speak to us.

[2 : 45] And You instruct us like a loving and caring Father in Your Word. And so we ask for Your help this morning, that You would help us by Your Spirit to be attentive and to hear and to understand.

And that most of all, You would show us Jesus Christ in His beauty and glory and love and majesty. And that You would grow our love and affection and reverence and awe for Him.

We thank You that we don't have to worry about whether we've earned these things or deserve them. But instead, we simply ask them in the mighty name of Jesus Christ. Amen. Amen. In 2015, a man named Paul Offit came out with a book titled *Bad Faith, When Religious Belief Undermines Modern Medicine*.

Now, Paul is an Ivy League professor of pediatrics, and he's also a physician. And so he had become frustrated with religious people who refused to give modern medicine to their children. And so he thought, you know what I'm going to do? I'm going to write a book about how terrible religion is. One of the things he writes about in his book, for example, is the fact that Jehovah's Witnesses often refuse blood transfusions when they're necessary.

[4 : 00] But something unexpected happened to Paul as he began to dig in to his research and his writing of this book. And so it became newsworthy. The Washington Post ran a profile on him and what he experienced as he dug in.

It tells us, Offit began to read the Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament and the New Testament, and look into the history of Christians' work in the areas of child welfare and health care.

He said he found himself largely embracing religious teachings. Offit told me he was surprised by his reaction to faith. Asked what particularly changed his mind about religion, he said, I read the New Testament.

Reading slowly and carefully in context, I came to feel that independent of Jesus' divinity, independent of questions about the gospel's accuracy, you have to be impressed with Jesus.

He said that Jesus' advocacy on behalf of children who were treated as property in the ancient Greco-Roman context moved him, quote, to the point of tears, unquote.

[5 : 08] He referred to Christianity as, quote, the single greatest breakthrough against child abuse in history. In her book, *Confronting Christianity*, Rebecca McLaughlin notes that Offit ended up changing the title of his book based on his learnings.

He had originally meant to title it, *How Religious Belief Undermines Modern Medicine to When Religious Belief Undermines Modern Medicine*, acknowledging the massive impact Christianity has had on medicine and ethics.

And the point is this. You may disagree with Christianity in its foundation. You cannot deny its fruit. You may disagree with Christianity in its foundation. You cannot deny its fruit. What Paul Offit did was trace what he sees as our honor and respect and care for children in the modern world.

And he saw that it found its root, its foundation in the Judeo-Christian tradition that's affirmed here by Jesus. When we happen on Jesus in verse 13, the disciples rebuke the folks who are bringing their children to receive a blessing from Jesus.

[6 : 25] And they do this because they recognize that Jesus has more important things to do than interact with children. Jesus has all these things that are pressing in on him.

He is a great teacher. And so, of course, Jesus has no time to be distracted by these small individuals who have nothing to offer to him.

This would be similar, by the way, to someone coming to Cheyenne Mountain Presbyterian Church and complaining about the fact that we have squirming and crying kids here with us in worship.

Now, I've been meaning to say this for a while as a non sequitur, but today it actually makes sense. We love having crying children in church.

It is such a beautiful thing. It is a gift. And praise God that we already had some of it this morning.

[7 : 28] Okay? What a great thing. By the way, we have folks in our church who have come to us and said, man, we're so delighted to finally be in a church that has children.

We missed that at our previous church. So, are there children screaming in worship? Praise God. Verse 14, Jesus says, don't hinder the children. Are there children squirming in your pew? Praise God.

Jesus says, do not hinder the children. In fact, we see in verse 14 this strong word that apparently appears only here in the New Testament, that Jesus was indignant, which helps us understand how seriously Jesus takes this offense and how much he loves children.

Now, we might be surprised at how the disciples act in this episode, but it actually makes sense when we understand that they are captive to the thought patterns of the culture in which they live.

[8 : 42] Children in ancient Rome were not seen in the way that we see them today. There was not a category for understanding them to be cute and adorable.

A church historian wrote a book called, *When Children Became People, The Birth of Children in Early Christianity*, and he asked this simple question, Did Christianity make a difference in the ancient world?

And the answer, very long and complicated, was yes. The ancients, for them, it was common to have abortion exposure, infanticide, abuse, and violence in school.

And he has this quote on page 7 of your worship guide. Another way of putting it is this.

It was Christianity that changed the view of children in the world.

[10 : 05] It is not an overstatement to say that Jesus' teaching here in this passage led to and affects the world that you exist in right now in 2022.

It's because of Jesus' teaching that the Western world views children the way it does. Jesus' words here changed the course of history.

It is countercultural. It's revolutionary to speak of children as people that actually matter. Christian, that is your ethical, your theological, your moral heritage as someone who follows Jesus.

It is not as unique and as self-evident as you might initially think. Jesus' comments here might sound boilerplate now, and they were mind-blowing at the time.

Not radical to us, if only because we live in a world that's been shaped by this teaching, this passage. And so if you hear someone talking about how important it is to care and value children, whether they're a Christian or not, you can think or say, oh yeah, that's because of Jesus.

[11 : 23] That's why that seems normal now, today. In fact, the same thing is true of many things in our world. Now, I didn't plan this at all, but if you were in Sunday school this morning, Jim Franks quoted this man named Tom Holland, who's a historian, and wrote a book called Dominion about Christianity.

Tom happens to be an atheist, but you'll see a quote from him on the back of your worship guide. He recognizes the fact that so many of the ethical, moral imperatives of our age that we believe are self-evident and take for granted are unique inheritances from Christianity.

In other words, once you remove the belief that all people are made in the image of God, you quickly lose any real basis or foundation for saying that children have the same rights as adults.

It is Christianity and only Christianity that offers that solid, moral, and ethical foundation. And so it should not surprise us that as we become unhinged, untethered from the heritage that we have in the West of the Christian tradition, that we will see that go down more and more.

In other words, it will become a greater contrast between the church and the world in our view and care of and concern for young children. And so this, brothers and sisters, is our heritage.

[12 : 51] Let's continue. Praise God for our Sunday school teachers. When we were making the invite cards that are out in our narthex for church, it said initially, Sunday school for all ages.

And I asked the question, I said, isn't that, shouldn't we actually say, Sunday school for ages four and up, nursery through ages zero through three? And Kathy, our church secretary, very gently corrected me and pointed out, no, in our nursery, we teach children about Jesus and the Bible.

Even in our nursery, there is discipleship and instruction. And so in a real and true sense, we do have Sunday school for all ages.

And we do it because of what Jesus says here. We believe that the very youngest children in this world are spiritually alive. They are capable, even in our nursery, of understanding and grasping truths about God.

Jesus teaches us here that small children are disciples that belong to him, not people that belong to us. We are just stewards of what God has given us.

[14 : 06] This is our heritage from the very beginning of the church. There was a lot of slander that went around earlier this summer when Roe v. Wade was overturned.

People accusing the pro-life movement of only caring about birth and not about life. There was slander that the church did not care about pro-life issues until very recently.

The only problem is this. The church fathers wrote about it in the early centuries of the church.

Okay? The church has cared about these issues from its very earliest years.

Now, you all know I'm a millennial, and millennials used to be comfortable and accustomed to being the youngest people around. We've now been replaced by Gen Z.

Love Gen Z. One of my favorite things about Gen Z is they have amazing phrases for everything.

And I think my favorite is when Gen Z says, we have the receipts.

[15 : 10] Which is their way of saying, we've got proof. Come at us. When it comes to the church's care for children from the earliest centuries and its concern, not just for birth but for life, I have the receipts.

The church fathers do not stutter. Care for children is a uniquely Christian heritage.

Others have borrowed it from us. Let's keep living it out. Let's keep teaching our children about the faith, seeing them as essential, not peripheral.

Let's continue caring for children who have nothing of earthly value to offer us. That is the teaching and the heritage of Jesus.

Now, I've established, hopefully, that for most of world history, it was really hard to be a kid. The reality is this.

[16:16] No matter how good a time you live in, it is always hard to be a kid. Now, I'll tell you a story. As I've entered my 30s, I've become more and more nostalgic.

Now, as long as I can remember, I have always loved the color blue. That's always been my favorite color. I recently realized what my earliest memory was of the color blue and when I began to fall in love with it.

And it came from this children's book called Happy Birthday, Sam. Now, as you can see, Sam's got some legit 1970s blue pants. Okay?

Now, it's Happy Birthday, Sam. Sam has a birthday. We're not told how old he turns. But Sam has these great expectations because he knows he's a year older. And so Sam thinks on his birthday, all these things are going to radically change for him.

And suddenly, things that were not true in the past will become true. So he wants to know, now that he has another birthday, is he going to be able to turn on the bedroom light?

[17:23] No. So he tries again. He goes to his wardrobe. Sam wants to know, can I finally reach my clothes? No.

Sam hasn't given up. He decides he wants to see if he can wash his hands by himself and get to the sink. No. Sam then receives a Christmas present, a birthday present, downstairs that his parents give him a beautiful boat.

He wants to get to the sink so that he can sail that boat in water. But he can't reach it. Now, as a young child, I want to tell you all that I felt that.

You can't turn on the lights. You can't reach the sink. I am grateful to report to you all this morning that I have finally reached the height I need to to turn on the lights by myself.

And that's really, that's really big for me. You guys laugh. It's really big for me because I live by myself right now. So there's no one to help me turn on the lights.

[18:34] But, that has not done me any favors spiritually. Being able to turn on the lights has not done me any favors in terms of my relationship to God.

Now, Sam does find a solution. I'm not going to ruin it for you. You're going to have to find your own copy. Normally, I'm very generous in loaning out books. This one's not up for alone because it's just such a critical foundational piece of my library.

But the point is this. Jesus is saying here, spiritually, you can't turn on the lights. Spiritually, you can't reach the sink.

Spiritually, you are a child. You are helpless and dependent. And unless you embrace that and realize that, you cannot receive the kingdom.

Need is the price of admission. And there is an undeniable neediness that comes with being a child.

[19:57] It is impossible for children to curate and arrange their lives in such a way that they can pretend to be strong and independent.

And if they do, it is laughable. Right? We can see right through it. And so, in verse 13 here, the disciples say, Get these kids out of here.

And Jesus says, You could learn a thing or two from them. The disciples realize they have nothing to offer the world, and so they must have nothing to offer Jesus.

And that's the point. They have nothing to offer. Brothers and sisters, when you come to God, you have nothing to offer.

You must realize and embrace that if you want to receive the kingdom. Spiritually, you are not as independent or powerful as you think.

[21:22] In fact, it is possible to be too independent for your own good. Remember last week, I told you, when we were talking about marriage and divorce, that it is not a badge of honor to have never been to marriage counseling.

Need is the price of admission. I've told you before that the opposite of addiction is not sobriety, but connection.

You cannot heal yourself. And, of course, our most foundational need of all is our need for the gospel.

We've already had a reminder of this this morning. When Jenny joined, we heard our membership questions all over again, as we do frequently. And question one is this. Do you acknowledge yourself to be a sinner in the sight of God, justly deserving his displeasure and without hope, save in his sovereign mercy?

You're so helpless and needy. God's mercy is the only thing that can save you. Question two. Do you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as the Son of God and Savior of sinners?

[22 : 41] And do you receive and rest upon him alone for salvation? In other words, Jesus is not coming in to pay 70% of what needs to be paid, and you bring along the 30% that you've saved.

No, there is nothing that you can bring to the table. In fact, Jesus reminds us of this explicitly. Verse 15, we're told you have to receive the kingdom.

Notice what Jesus doesn't say. He doesn't say, unless you earn the kingdom like a little child.

Unless you're impressive enough like a little child. Unless you are cute enough like a little child.

Unless you deliver the goods like a little child does. No, he says, unless you receive the kingdom.

All you can do is receive it as a gift.

And of course, that's the good news of the gospel. That God actually does give us what we do not deserve and cannot earn. And he does it because he can.

[23 : 51] Because of the wealth that he has. When Jesus died the death that we should have died, and took the punishment that we deserved, he made it possible for us to receive like children.

And so that's why Jesus tells us, Mark 2, verse 17, those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.

And so it's that need that we're going to confess together in our final hymn. In verse 3, we're going to sing this. Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to thy cross I cling.

Which is a verse of childlike need. Jesus loves children. We love children. Jesus loves children, which means Jesus loves us.

Let the little 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.

[25 : 02] Let's pray. Our Father in heaven, we thank you for the good news that we don't have to bring anything to you, that we just have to receive.

And we confess that it's a challenge because we want to be powerful and strong and independent.

We ask that you would send your spirit to us now, that you continue to remind us of our great and tremendous need for the gospel, and you'd encourage us with the grace that you give to us to meet us at that very same point of need.

We thank you that even as we pray, we're relying and trusting on you because we have nothing to offer you except for Christ. And so we pray all of these things in his mighty name. Amen.

I invite you to stand for our closing hymn.