

What Did Jesus Think About Children? Devotional #19, Mark 10:1-31

And he left there and went to the region of Judea and beyond the Jordan, and crowds gathered to him again. And again, as was his custom, he taught them.

² And Pharisees came up and in order to test him asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?" ³ He answered them, "What did Moses command you?" ⁴ They said, "Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of divorce and to send her away." ⁵ And Jesus said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment. ⁶ But from the beginning of creation, 'God made them male and female.' ⁷ 'Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, ⁸ and the two shall become one flesh.' So they are no longer two but one flesh. ⁹ What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate."

¹⁰ And in the house the disciples asked him again about this matter. ¹¹ And he said to them, "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her, ¹² and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery."

¹³ And they were bringing children to him that he might touch them, and the disciples rebuked them. ¹⁴ 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. ¹⁵ Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it." ¹⁶ And he took them in his arms and blessed them, laying his hands on them.

¹⁷ And as he was setting out on his journey, a man ran up and knelt before him and asked him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" ¹⁸ And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone. ¹⁹ You know the commandments: 'Do not murder, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honor your father and mother.'" ²⁰ And he said to him, "Teacher, all these I have kept from my youth." ²¹ And Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, "You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." ²² Disheartened by the saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

²³ And Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!" ²⁴ And the disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said to them again, "Children, how difficult it is to enter the kingdom of God! ²⁵ It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God." ²⁶ And they were exceedingly astonished, and said to him, "Then who can be saved?" ²⁷ Jesus looked at them and said, "With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God." ²⁸ Peter began to say to him, "See, we have left everything and followed you." ²⁹ Jesus said, "Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, ³⁰ who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life. ³¹ But many who are first will be last, and the last first."

- Mark 10:1-31, ESV

One of the most famous teachings of Jesus is "Let the little children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God." But what did Jesus mean by this saying? How did Jesus view children?

Some people, holding a Victorian-influenced Romantic view of children, believe that Jesus was asserting the purity and innocence of children. But if Jesus was trying to teach this, it contradicts what Scripture says about human nature and what Christians have taught for centuries in the doctrines of original sin and total depravity.

Original Sin:

"Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me." - Psalm 51:12

"The wicked are estranged from the womb; they go astray from birth, speaking lies." - Psalm 58:3

Total Depravity:

"None is righteous, no, not one;

no one understands;

no one seeks for God.

All have turned aside; together they have become worthless;

no one does good,

not even one." - Romans 3:10-12, ESV

In short, we are not born innocent, but we are born in sin and corruption. We are not just slightly sinful at times; we are sinful to the core of our being at all times. Jesus did not teach the innocence and purity of children, and any parent of a 3-year old will affirm the truth of this. As has often been said, you never have to teach children how to lie, how to disobey, how to be selfish, or how to hit when angry. You do have to teach them how to tell the truth, how to obey, how to share, and how to have self-control when angry.

So, what did Jesus mean, then? Well, Jesus' teaching on children has at least three important things for us to learn:

1. Children are real human beings with souls who are to be spiritually nurtured, even from birth. Jesus' disciples wanted these children kept from bothering Jesus, but Jesus saw them as fully human, as real people with real needs.
2. Children tend to be very trusting and accepting. They believe their parents and often think their parents are capable of doing anything. We need to approach God the way small children approach their parents, with trust and awe.
3. Children tend to be very sincere, with less guile and hypocrisy than adults. Children do lie, but they are more transparent and less prone to being two-faced and role-playing than adults, especially young children.

Jesus said we must receive the kingdom of God like a child: as real people, trusting God and rejecting hypocrisy. Thankfully, Jesus is not saying that we must do so as innocent and pure people without sin. If that were the requirement for the kingdom, none of us would have any hope.

So, in a real sense, if we overly romanticize Jesus' view of children as innocent and pure, we'll be shutting the door of the kingdom of God in their faces and our own. No one is pure except Jesus. Praise God that He wants us to come to Him, trusting Him and not hiding who we are.

