

Mark 10: 13-16; “Let the Little Children Come” Sermon # 82 in the series – “Astonished at His Teaching”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on January 30th, 2011, in the Afternoon Worship Service.

This beautiful and brief incident in the life of our Lord Jesus takes in, in short compass, the whole subject of little children coming to know Jesus Christ. Can a little child be saved? Should little children be evangelized with the gospel? Should they become members of the church? How should their desires to come to know Christ be handled by their parents? These are the subjects that we want to look at briefly, this morning. I believe that these verses show us the loving heart of our Lord Jesus Christ. They show us not only His attitude then, but they show us His attitude now, toward all the little children who want to know more about Him and the way to eternal life. This text is not just speaking about Jesus' love for the little children of righteous parents, or Jewish parents, or Christian parents. This text is much more generic than that. I believe that it is saying that Jesus has a love for all little children, in general. We are, of course, speaking of this in terms of His willingness to receive any little child to Himself; a child who wants to know more about Him; what He is like, and what He can do for them in terms of His grace. God is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. (2 Peter 2: 9) There are 3 truths, then, that we need to consider this morning in relation to ourselves and little children. 1st - It is a very good thing when parents attempt to bring their children to Christ. 2nd - It is very displeasing to the Lord Jesus when both parents and little children are hindered from coming to Him. And 3rd - We want to see that the blessing of the Lord Jesus upon the lives of little children is what will turn them in the right and God-honoring direction in their lives, so that they might be useful servants of His all their days.

1st of all – It is very good when parents attempt to bring their children to Jesus. (Verse 13 and 14)

“Then they brought little children to Him, that He might touch them; but the disciples rebuked those who brought them.” “But when Jesus saw it, He was greatly displeased and said to them, “Let the little children come to me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God.” We see from the way that it is worded here, that the parents who brought these little children to Jesus, that He might touch them, definitely had the right idea. If Jesus is the Messiah; the One sent from God; if He is the Christ, the Son of the Living God; if it is by His power and by His touch and through His teaching that God can forgive our sins, take away our diseases, and direct us into the right path so that we will end up going to heaven; then, they said to themselves, we will by all means bring our children to Him. They want the best of things for their children. And they knew that the best things in this life are given by God Himself. And the best of the best is the gift of salvation which only comes through Jesus Christ our Lord. Some parents do not

see this blessed truth. If you were to tell them that there was a great bargain on a certain bicycle down at the department store; and they knew that their son or their daughter was interested in having that particular bike; they would stand in a line outside of the store at the hour in which the store opened, just so that they could have a chance at getting that bike for their child. I know that this is true, because this is exactly what my own dear father did for me when I was about 10 years old. When the doors opened of that old Sears and Roebuck department store, he ran like the wind to the bicycle that he knew that I was interested in; and because he got there first, he was able to buy it. Somehow, most parents know how to give good gifts to their children. They know where to go to get the best things in this life for them; but when it comes to Christ, many do not attempt to bring their children to Christ, because they are spiritually blind to eternal and spiritual things. But these parents did know where to bring their children and they brought them. They are to be commended. Parents, you are to be commended for bringing your children to church that they might find Christ. You are to be commended when you bring them before the throne of God in prayer for their salvation. You are to be commended when you speak to them and tell them that it is your intention to bring them to the only One who can save them from their sins and give them eternal life.

People usually know where to go to get what they want in this life. They know where to go, or they will ask. They know where to go to get food. They know where to go to get clothing. They know where to go to find anything that they are looking for in this life. But there are many who do not know where to go to find eternal and everlasting life. They should go to church. They should come and listen to the pastor preach the gospel. And then they should talk to him afterward about their own soul and their children. They should bring their children with them. They should go to speak with their saved friends and relatives, and ask the question of questions: "What must I do to be saved?" But then we must note further, something that is even worse; sometimes they do know where to go to find Christ, but they are unwilling to come to Christ that they might have life. Why is this? It is because their heart does not desire Christ and His righteousness. They do not think that they need His righteousness and strength. It is because it takes grace to come to Jesus Christ, and to bring others unto Him. And they, sadly, do not think that this is necessary. The unfortunate truth is that the hearts of many parents in our day are not inclined to think that they either need Christ or want Him for themselves. And so they do not think that their children need Him either. They will let their children go to hundreds of sports events and extra-curricular events at the school. But they will not bring their children to church. They may let their children go on the church bus to Sunday School, so that they could be helped in manners and morals. But they believe it would be a terrible thing if one of their little ones were converted to Christ. The child, himself, is stumbled. "Why doesn't dad or mom want to come to church with me?" they think. "They must not

believe that they need Christ.” “Therefore, I do not think that I need Christ either.” Christ is highly displeased when children are stumbled or hindered from coming to him, when he sees this casual attitude about not coming to church, on the part of the parents.

Many people in our day think that the world and all of their worldly pursuits are enough to satisfy their heart. All that they want out of this life is to have fun pursuing the many games of life; the many personal interests of this life; that when they are young there is just too much to do and to see and experience; and when they are old, they believe that they will be able to rest in their earthly comforts in retirement and have no worry for the future. They do not realize that God expected them to love and serve Him with their whole life. They did not realize their great duty as a parent. Psalm 145, verse 4 – “One generation shall praise Your works to another, and shall declare Your mighty acts.” They lived their life to themselves, and all the way to the grave they were trusting in the things which they had provided materially for themselves in this present life. They somehow foolishly hope to believe that if they die they will go immediately to heaven, even though they have never trusted in Christ; never come to Christ; never thought that they were sinful enough that God might turn them away at the gates, from the Celestial City. But the Bible is plain that God and Christ and all the holy angels will prevent it. How good it is when parents realize their own need of Christ and salvation, and that they will also do everything that they can to bring their children to Jesus. Dear parent; are you thinking of how you can bring your children to Christ?

2ndly – It is very displeasing to the Lord Jesus when both parents and little children are hindered from coming to Him. (Verses 14 and 15)

“But when Jesus saw it, He was greatly displeased and said to them, ‘Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God.’ “Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it.” Being saved is receiving the kingdom of God as a child. It is not having someone performing a ceremony over you; like being baptized at church. It is receiving Jesus and His kingdom with the willingness and readiness of a child. It is not as though little children are innocent and pure as the driven snow. That is not the case. They have the guilt of Adam’s sin upon them, and they have his sinful likeness working in their hearts. But there is something that Jesus is commending here in the little child. The little child will readily and willingly receive what it is told about people; whether they are a good person or a bad person; whether they should receive a person at all, if their parents tell them that they should not. They will readily believe the report of their parents and the other people around them who their parents respect and love. This is how we who are old enough to understand, should receive the report about Christ. He is a great and a good man. He is even more than that; He is the God-man, and the One who has come into this world to save your fallen, sinful, and guilty soul. The kingdom

of God is received and entered by faith in Jesus Christ. We as parents must, ourselves, receive the report of Christ, and enter in. And this is also the report that we should give about Christ to our children. Salvation and knowing God come through sincerely and straightforwardly believing the report of the gospel and the truth of the Bible. Anything else added or taken away will stumble both adults and children. Parents do you have a testimony of how you came to Jesus Christ? Then then need to hear it. They need to hear and to know that you were once a lost and hell-bound sinner; but you changed when you believed the gospel and received Christ and His kingdom to your heart.

It is truly amazing to me that so many godly men and divines of the past have considered this passage to be a warrant for them to baptize the infants and little children of believers; even if they have no faith, or no ability to exercise it. There is not a word in this text which would allow us to think that Jesus was teaching that the little children should be baptized, or that his disciples should baptize them. The disciples were trying to keep them away from Jesus. That is how they were hindering them; they were being forbidden to come. The Master is too busy to see these little ones. He has more important things to be doing than babysitting children. I wonder if they thought that the little children could not understand the things that Jesus was saying? After all, they were not understanding everything that Jesus was saying. But Jesus did not at all approve of their thinking this way. Jesus touched them; He took them up in His arms, and He blessed them. But He did not say to them, "Can any forbid water, that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit, just as we have?" That would have been a greater stumbling block yet, for the young child to overcome; thinking that he had salvation sacramentally in baptism. If ever there was a place where infant baptism could have been asserted to be necessary, either to a little child's entering into the kingdom of heaven or into the Church; this would have been the place. But Jesus does not say a word about it.

I believe that Jesus would be very displeased by those who infer from this text that infant baptism is a legitimate practice, to be performed in all of His churches. He has not commanded to bring children to the font. He is desirous that children be brought to Himself. Since it is written in this way we need to stop worrying about the salvation of little children who cannot understand the gospel, and start being very concerned about the children and adults who can. "Knowing the terror of the Lord, we persuade men." (2 Corinthians Chapter 5, verse 11) You don't persuade little children and infants who cannot grasp what you are saying. You persuade little children and adults who can grasp what you are saying. And so, parents are right to attempt to bring their children to Jesus. They are right to bring them to the worship services of a church which is preaching the Biblical gospel of Christ. Let no disciple ever hinder their coming. Parents you have a responsibility to bring them. Members of the church; you have a responsibility to

encourage parents to bring their children, not only to hear the gospel, but also to believe and be saved.

But let me pause, now, and attempt to deal with the mental difficulties of those who wonder if infant baptism should be performed in case the little child or infant dies. In reflecting upon the inference of the things that Jesus is saying here, I believe that it is perfectly reasonable to conclude that infants who die in infancy, and little children who cannot understand the gospel, are saved by the same means as any adult is, who comes to saving faith in Jesus Christ. They are saved by the efficacy, the merit, the blood, and the righteousness of our Savior and Redeemer, which are sovereignly applied to them by God in accordance with His eternal purpose to save an Elect people. God in His great mercy saves them by regenerating their little spirits, even though they know nothing of what is going on. Ask yourself now; what comes first; faith, or the New Birth. According to the Scriptures, it is the New Birth. "Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God." (that person who believes has already been born of God) (1 John 5: 1) And God gives this sovereignly according to His everlasting love and mercy. The person who receives the gift of the New Birth is perfectly passive in relation to it. It is only after they receive the gift of grace from God; that those who are little children or adults who can understand the gospel; can then come to exercise faith and be justified by that faith, and be converted to Christ by that faith. So too, the infant or little child who dies before they can ever understand the gospel; is, I believe, regenerated according to the mercy and love of God in relation to what Christ has done for all such, by His finished work on the cross. He sovereignly chooses to give life their eternal spirit; to give them grace, in the moment of their death. He shows them this mercy and shows them this compassion in their dying moments, so that they who are helpless and uncomprehending of the necessity of the obedience of faith, might have eternal life. This is my belief, and I believe it is in accordance with the Scriptures. The Scriptures say nothing about the sprinkling of infants by ministers. You say to me, "But what about the children of wicked people?" "Are they saved if they die in infancy or before they can understand? I believe that they are, and I will tell you why I think so. Every person is a sinner before they come to faith in Christ. But those are not able to exercise faith; who have not that capacity; I believe God deals with their situation by giving them what they are not capable of choosing for themselves.

If ever a child might have been justly deprived of going to heaven, it was the little infant that was conceived and born by David and Bathsheba, as a result of their adulterous relationship. This child was under a double judgment. Not only was it born into the world with Adam's sin in its nature, but it was a child conceived in adultery. 2 Samuel 12: 15 says, "And the Lord struck the child that Uriah's wife bore to David, and it became ill." And "David therefore pleaded with God for the child, and David fasted and went in and lay all night on the ground." Several verses later it says, "Then on the seventh day it came to pass that the child

died.” When this came to pass and David knew that the child was dead, he stopped his weeping and his fasting and “went into the house of the Lord and worshiped.” Afterward he then went into his own house and requested food, and he ate. And his servants questioned him about this. He said, “While the child was alive, I fasted and wept; for I said, ‘Who can tell whether the Lord will be gracious to me, that the child may live?’” “But now he is dead; why should I fast?” “Can I bring him back again?” “I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me.” Now, David would never have presumed to say this, had the child went to hell, or was separated from God; not being regenerated at its death. But David’s statement was a statement of faith; that even though the child’s earthly and physical life was taken away as a judicial consequence of David’s sin; nevertheless, God gave eternal life to that child at its death; so that David had the sure and certain hope that he would see the child again. David conceived the child in the sin of adultery; but God saved the child in His infinite mercy. Will the child die eternally because of the father’s sins? No, each person who dies eternally will die for their own sins, not their parent’s sins. (It says so in Jeremiah 31: 30 in the context of the giving of the New Covenant) If this is so, then why cannot it be possible that the infant children, born of wicked parents, and yet dying in their infancy, would also live forever, because of the greatness of the sacrifice of Christ? Would the God the Father and the Lord Jesus really consign little children to hell; those who die in infancy or who are so very young that they cannot understand? It is true that they have Adam’s sin and the consequences of that sin lying upon their heart. But the thought that our God, the God of such great compassion and righteousness would do nothing for them? The thought is intolerable to me. And it is intolerable to me, based on this passage of Scripture. “Of such is the kingdom of heaven”. Perhaps I will need to be corrected in the Day when I see Christ face to face. And I will receive that correction with all humility; His telling me so. But I believe that God loves all the little children of the world.

I think that there are indeed many people in the world today who need to be rebuked in relation to their hindering, even forbidding that their children, or other people’s children, should not be brought to Jesus. And here is the rebuke. Little children can feel a true sense of sorrow over their sins. They can, by the grace of God, come to have “an apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ”, as the famous Shorter Catechism calls it. They can understand that Jesus Christ so loves sinners of all kinds and all ages, that He gave His life for them. They can receive Him and believe in Him and come to know Him at any age, where there is understanding. Should they then be baptized and brought into the church? Yes, if they understand, they should. As it says in Acts Chapter 2, verses 38 and 39 – “And Peter said to them, ‘Repent and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.’” “For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call.” Listen to Charles Spurgeon on this. “Thus

in these days certain brethren would hardly like to receive many children into the church, lest it should become a society of boys and girls.” “Surely, if these come into the church in any great numbers, the church may be spoken of in terms of reproach!” “The outside world will call it a mere Sunday-school.” “I remember that when a fallen woman had been converted in one of our county-towns, there was an objection among certain professors, to her being received into the church, and certain lewd fellows of the baser sort even went the length of advertising upon the walls the fact that the Baptist minister had baptized a harlot.” “I told my friend to regard it as an honor.” “Even so, if any reproach us with receiving young children into the church, we will wear the reproach as a badge of honor.” “Holy children cannot possibly do us any harm.” “God will send us sufficient of age and experience to steer the church prudently.” “We will receive none who fail to yield evidence of the new birth, however old they may be; but we will shut out no believers, however young they may be.” “God forbid that we should condemn our cautious brethren, but at the same time we wish their caution would show itself where it is more required.” “Jesus will not be dishonored by the children: we have far more cause to fear the adults.” (Vol. 32 P. 568) Well, there it is my friends; the truth is the truth. And Jesus is displeased when little children feel that they cannot come to Christ, or be received into the church; both of which the Scriptures urge them to do, if they have believed. Are they not to be obedient to Christ because someone in the church does not think that they are old enough? No, I think that these great delays in baptism and church membership which some pastors practice are unbiblical, and they can positively hinder the child’s faith and assurance of the forgiveness of sins if that child cannot come and simply declare his faith publicly. This does not mean that he should not be examined by pastor or parents to see whether he does understand the truth of the gospel, and knows the reality of the change which the Spirit brings to his heart. All this can be carefully and gently done in inquiry, by the pastor, in connection with the parents of the child. This is bringing them to Jesus. Anything less is hindering them, if they desire to come.

And then 3rdly - The blessing of the Lord Jesus upon the lives of little children is what will turn them in the right and God-honoring direction in their lives, so that they might be saved and become useful servants of their Savior and Lord. (Verse 16)

It now ought to be obvious from this text that those whom we really ought to be worried about, in regard to their being saved from their sins, are those children and adults that have reached the age where they can understand the gospel, and yet they have not come to Him. They are then responsible for their acceptance or rejection of Christ. They do, then, need to come to terms with God over their sins. John 3: 18 and 19 – “He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.” “And this is the condemnation, that the light has come

into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.” If this is the case, that even little children need to have dealings with God and Christ; what a good thing it is when parents desire to bring their children to Jesus that He might touch them, and bless them. Let us not preach and share the gospel in simply a decisional way. Let us rather bring them to behold Jesus by faith, so that they know his spiritual touch, and have the assurance of their being taken into His arms spiritually speaking. This is what the Scriptures teach. You must not only make a decision, but you must be born again. Can’t a little child come to realize the love of Jesus and His great concern for them; His will of desire, that they come to believe in Him and trust in Him? I think that each parent here, today, with unconverted children who can understand the gospel, should pray that Jesus would touch their child’s heart spiritually; that He would take them up in His arms spiritually; that He would lay His hands upon them spiritually. For should He do so; they will most definitely be saved.

And there is a further sense in which all parents ought to pray for their children and bring them before the throne of grace. Even when a child or young person does come to faith in Christ, they still need to be brought to Jesus that He might touch them. Some of these children who came to Jesus may have already been believers. And even though the whole course and direction of their life had been changed by grace; still each and every young believer needs to be led and guided by their Savior and Lord into all the truth of what it will mean to serve Him. Surely this will require many touches of the Lord’s loving and mighty hand. Will you not, then, parents and friends of the young person, pray for the Lord to touch them; to guard them and guide them so that they will become useful servants of His in righteousness and zeal for the truth?