

TEXARKANA REFORMED BAPTIST CHURCH**SERIES TITLE: MARK 10:13-16; | TITLE: HINDERING THE LEAST OF THESE****DAVE WAGNER**

Kingdoms in Conflict

Jesus is a King, so when he came he brought a kingdom. And that kingdom coming was actually a kingdom invasion. This is because Jesus' kingdom didn't arrive into a vacuum; there was already a kingdom here: The kingdom of the world.

Now the kingdom of the world has a value system. We can't blame it for that, since everyone has to have a value system and unbelievers are no different. Everyone has a morality, everyone has a standard, everyone has right and wrong. The only question is whether your right and wrong is the right one or the wrong one.

Well, the world's right and wrong is emphatically the wrong one. We saw that last week as we considered the typical Jewish position on divorce and remarriage. Generally, the Jews of Jesus' generation were extremely permissive in this area. Remember, one rabbi taught that divorce and remarriage was permissible if a husband saw a prettier woman than his wife. Talk about the wrong view of right and wrong.

And marriage wasn't the only area where their right and wrong was wrong. The kingdom of this world is also magnificently twisted when it comes to its view of children. Jesus came to bring a new value system, a right and wrong which is actually right. And this means Jesus has radical changes to make, not only to our view of divorce and remarriage, but also to our view of children.

Now our culture is so royally screwed up in its view of children, and adults, and the world, and life, and pretty much everything, that we could spend quite some time talking about it. We're not going to do that. We're just going to focus in on one aspect of how the culture of Jesus' time was messed up in their view of children. Jesus came to flip our world upside down because it was upside down when he found it; in other words, he came to turn everything right side up. So here's how he turns the world of his day right side up in today's text. He does it with a command: Do not hinder children from coming to Christ.

In other words, don't do anything that would obstruct a child from drawing near to Christ, whether for conversion or growth. Of course we should never hinder anyone from coming to Christ; but the point here is not to hinder children. But who would ever dream of hindering children from coming to Christ?

Well, the whole world, of course. We have an entire wing of our government and society devoted to keeping children from coming to Christ; it's called public school and university. But that's not our focus today. I'm talking about believers. What follower of Christ would ever dream of hindering children from coming to Christ? How about the 12 Apostles, for starters?!

Hindering the Least of These

Yes, I'm sorry to say that the church's greatest leaders, the Foundation Stones themselves, totally blew it in this area. They hindered children from coming to Christ. Now how did they do that?

Some adults were bringing their children to Jesus, probably to receive a blessing from him, and the 12 tried to turn them away. The 12 even rebuked these people with their children, as if these people were sinning. At the least, these people see Jesus as a great spiritual leader, a prophet in Israel; maybe some of them perceive more about Jesus. They want their children to benefit spiritually from him. And the disciples are hindering the kids from coming to Jesus.

Now why would they do that? We aren't told exactly, but I think we can offer a solid answer, partly from what we know of the culture and partly from one clue in the text. In short, I think the 12 were hindering these kids because they considered them to be too unimportant to approach Jesus and to take an interest in the kingdom.

First, this is likely given the culture of the day. One writer says that

"Underlying the disciple's attitude is the concept of the child as the least important member of society."

Another says

"Ancient Jewish society did not regard children with affection...Childhood was regarded as an unavoidable interim between birth and adulthood, which a boy reached at age 13. One will search Jewish and early Christian literature in vain for sympathy toward the young comparable to that shown by Jesus."

If we broaden out to the Gentile culture, the picture is worse:

"His genuine love of children, and the tenderness expressed in taking them into his arms and blessing them through prayer and laying on of hands, can only be appreciated within the context of the calloused attitudes toward children that still prevailed within Hellenistic society in the first century. A papyrus dated Alexandria, June 17, 1B.C., contains a letter of instruction from a husband to his expectant wife, whom he supposes may have had her child: 'if it was a male child, let it live; if it was a female, cast it out.'"

So it's likely the 12 were products of their culture respecting their view of children. And we can also support this idea from the teaching which Jesus' goes on to deliver. His point is that unless people become humble and lowly like children, they will not enter the kingdom. Hence, I take it the disciple's objection to the children lies in the children's unimportance, lowliness and humility as "the least important members of society".

And holding this view of children, the 12 rebuke the parents and obstruct the kids from coming to Jesus.

Well, what does Jesus think of this? Jesus is angry with the 12 for hindering the kids. He commands them to stop. He states plainly that there are children who possess the kingdom!

Now he doesn't speak here of all children; he says "such as these." This means, first, that at least some children possess the kingdom, according to Jesus. You might be wondering how old these kids are? The same word is used earlier in Mark to refer to a 12 year old.

But consider also that Jesus takes these children in his arms; it seems that would put their age somewhere below 12. And there's more. Luke's parallel account says they brought *Brephe* to Jesus; babies, infants. This word is used of Jesus just after he was born, and it is used of John the Baptist while he is still in the womb! So apparently there were not just kids, but infants involved. And Jesus says the kingdom belongs to such as these!

I think we're forced to the conclusion that there are both children and infants who possess the kingdom.

And Jesus' statement goes further than children and infants. Whoever doesn't receive the kingdom like a child will not enter it. The kingdom belongs to "such" as these; who are the "such"?

Very simply, they are the lowly, the humble, the unimportant. Unimportant in the world's valuation, I should say; to God these unimportant people, children included, are wonderfully

important. And, conversely, generally speaking, the important people of this world are not nearly as important to God.

These people, whether young or old, are the poor, the uneducated, the incompetent. They have no noble birth to brag about; they have few or no accomplishments to lean on. To be blunt, they are the losers of the world.

These are the weak and the stupid; they are unknown, unloved and undesired. The world could never take an interest in them. But God takes an interest in them, to put it mildly. The kingdom belongs to such as these. It is the Father's good pleasure to give it to them.

And that's bad news for the 12 at the moment, given their worldly attitude. Remember, these are the men who constantly argue about which of them is the greatest. Very shortly two of them are going to request that Jesus give them the highest place in the kingdom. That's pretty comical, since as long as they grasp for greatness, they are in danger of not even entering the kingdom!

And that leads to the warning Jesus gives his disciples. Unless they receive the kingdom like a child, they shouldn't even expect to enter it. They're worried about who will be the greatest and right now they should be worried about even getting in!

You know by now that receiving the kingdom like a child means receiving it humbly, with lowliness. It means receiving it as a loser, not like you were someone great. The great receive things as a reward, thinking themselves worthy; the lowly receive things as a gift, knowing themselves unworthy.

The 12 need a major reorientation in their thinking. They are using the world's value system. They need to be rid of that and adopt instead the value system of the kingdom of God. Until they do, they will continue to hinder people from coming to Christ, whether children, or infants, or the lowly, or outsiders, or anyone they deem less great and glorious than themselves.

The point of the text is that no one should hinder children from coming to Christ.

Do You Hinder?

Well, let's consider a few ways we might hinder the children of this church from coming to Christ.

Some Christians hinder kids in church from coming to Christ by simply not ministering well to them. Kids are seen as an interruption; the goal is to shuffle them off to their own room so we adults can enjoy the service in peace.

Instead, every church should have the goal of ministering to children with as much diligence and devotion as they do to adults. Children's studies should be prepared and delivered with care and attention; those who teach kids in church should understand they are dealing with eternal souls; they should teach accordingly.

I have seen churches where the children's programs were just babysitting bereft of spiritual nourishment. I thank God this church is not such a place.

Related to this is another way we prevent children from coming to Christ, and a far more serious one: We consider our kids too unimportant to disciple at home. We take no time with them; we don't apply the Word to various situations which arise. We don't pray with them or for them; we don't read and explain the Bible to them.

This was part of Robert Baxter's complaint in his sermon entitled "More fit to be called a devil than a parent." The parent who does not actively expose his child to the Word and Prayer is guilty of shocking negligence.

Now maybe someone would withhold spiritual nourishment from kids because they're kids; after all, kids are too young for religious stuff, right? Absolutely not. Every Christian should call their kids to believe and follow Christ from the earliest possible moment.

I've heard that ancient Jewish mothers would carry their babies around, whispering in their ear, "Yahweh is God, Yahweh is God." That's not a bad idea. Children should be given prayer and word from the earliest possible moment.

And remember that both of the last 2 examples concern hindering children because we think them so unimportant. They aren't worth the time. We despise them. We esteem them lowly. And whenever we do this, we show we are not always as far from the attitude of our wicked culture as we wish we were.

Another way we hinder children from coming to Christ is by despising childhood faith and repentance. We don't take it seriously when a child confesses Christ, seeks to repent, and seeks to trust in Christ. We assume it must be spurious. Surely the kid is just telling me what I want to hear.

But maybe he's not. Maybe he sees the reasonableness of the Gospel; maybe he already feels some real shame over his sin. And maybe he wants Jesus to rescue him. We are wrong to discount a kid just because he is a kid. God saves kids.

Now reformed baptists are especially nervous at this point, because on the one hand, we don't like paedobaptism, and on the other we don't like the Southern Baptist Convention with their easy-believism. This all conspires to make us very cautious when it comes to baptizing a child.

But there's a problem with that. It's just this: How cautious were the Apostles in baptizing people? How long were converts made to wait for baptism? How many new member classes were required of them? They were not overly cautious, converts waited only as long as it took to get to the riverside, and no classes were required. As far as we can tell, baptism in the Apostolic Church was instantaneous.

Now admittedly, a child is not an adult, and more caution is proper. But not too much. The NT teaches me that, so long as I think I am dealing with a person who is following or wants to follow Christ, and has basic understanding, I should not refuse baptism to them.

So while some caution with childhood faith and repentance is right, there is certainly such a thing as too much caution; and that "too much caution" may arise from a failure to take seriously childhood faith and repentance. But God brings child sinners to life just as he brings adult sinners to life. So we must not despise them, lest we be guilty of hindering them.

Then we need to consider how we hinder our kids by confusion over their special role as kids within a Christian family. Some baptists have been so zealous for their baptistic position that they refuse to let their children pray. Why? Because the prayers of the wicked are an abomination to the Lord. And since their children cannot be converted, they must be purely and simply wicked.

But there's a problem here. Is the child simply and purely wicked if, though very young, he submits to his parents' commands, attends to Scripture reading and prayer, seeks to exercise faith and repentance, and is to all appearances behaving in a Christian manner? Simply and purely wicked?

What is the position of the unregenerate child in a Christian home? Certainly they are wicked and certainly they need Christ as much as any sinner. But still they occupy a special position inasmuch as they are children of believers. No, they're not in the covenant of grace because there is no covenant of grace. Read your Bible.

Nor are they in the New Covenant since then they would have to be regenerate. But God has blessed them with unusual privileges in being born in a Christian household. And this privilege creates a special position for them even while they are unregenerate.

But we could hinder our kids from coming to Christ if all we ever communicate is that, since they aren't old enough to convert yet, they are nothing more than terrible wicked people, regardless of their attempts at faith and obedience. We should tell our kids about their depravity, certainly; but tell them also how God has chosen to place them in a Christian home with all the abundant blessings and privileges attendant. Show them how they have been favored above so many. Point out the love of God which granted them this blessing, even if they still don't believe. Otherwise, we will likely hinder them from coming to Christ.

Lastly, we will hinder our kids from Christ if our own spiritual lives are a trainwreck or a graveyard. Kids need to be told about Christ; but they also need to be shown about Christ, and that means living out a Christian life. It means allegiance to truth and love, shunning worldliness, awareness of Satan, and self-denial. It means being pious. Do your kids ever catch you praying alone? How often do they see you read your Bible?

There was a doctor once in the midst of a plague. This doctor claimed to have the cure for the plague. He urged everyone with pleading and tears to take the cure so that they would be saved. But everyone always noticed he never took the cure himself. Do you suppose many people obeyed the doctor's preaching?

Neither will your kids obey your preaching if it is not attended with action. On the contrary, nothing is so despicable, so utterly worthy of ridicule, as a preacher who doesn't do what he tells others to do. Your children live in the same house with you. They will discover your hypocrisy. If you preach Jesus to them but don't live Jesus, they will discover it. And they will draw the lesson that Christ is nothing at all, to their own peril. I suggest this is the single most powerful way to hinder kids from coming to Jesus.

So don't hinder kids from coming to Christ.

Now I've just given you a kingdom message about children. I'm happy to announce to you the good news that The Rulership of God is coming. This terrible world has used children contrary to God's Law for a very long time. Soon that will all be over. There is coming a time when children will never be misused again, when God himself will come and advocate for them and protect them. Kids will never be hindered again when the kingdom comes.

And you who have ears to hear, who submit gladly to the gracious kingship of God, that kingdom belongs to you. Those who respond meekly to the Gospel of God's Lordship will inherit the earth. There are wonderful things ahead for us.