

# A Surprising Obstacle to Eternal Life

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[ 0 : 00 ] For those of you who are observing this morning would probably notice that the sermon, which is going to be projected in a little while, is different from what you have in your bulletin.

And here's what happens. I've explained this sometimes, but I think it's worth explaining again. When I do the planning for sermon preparation, I really try to take some time towards the end of the year, get away, pray, and really seek the Lord.

And so when we were looking at the Gospel of Mark for this year, all of these sermons were planned out back in October.

In Freeport last year. And when I'm doing the planning, I look at the text and I try to determine what the title is. But what I find is sometimes when I'm preparing to preach, the title that I selected, say, months ago, just doesn't seem to fit what I'm seeing in the text.

And that's the reason that this title is different. I believe that the title that we have this morning more faithfully represents what this text is about that we're going to be considering.

[ 1 : 31 ] So please turn your Bible to the Gospel of Mark, chapter 10. And this morning, our attention is going to be directed to verses 13 through 16.

Four short verses. Matthew, chapter 10, verses 13 through 16. Please follow along as I read.

I'm going to be reading from the English Standard Version. Matthew, chapter 10, beginning. Mark.

Thank you, Timothy. Why am I saying Matthew? Mark, chapter 10. Mark, chapter 10, verses 13 through 16. 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.

[ 2 : 37 ] 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. Let's bow a word of prayer with me. Father, we thank you this morning for the privilege we now have to sit under the preaching of your word.

Lord, we all need to hear from you, myself included. And so we pray that you would speak. Lord, help us to hear your word this morning as we ought to hear.

And we ask that you would posture us in such a way that we might truly hear. I ask that you would help me to be faithful to your word that I might serve.

Lord, these who are assembled people I love and want to serve. But people I know that you love even more and want to serve even more. So Lord, would you speak to all of us now from your word.

[ 3 : 49 ] We pray in Jesus' name. Amen. I think many of you know that here at the church for the last seven years, we've been running a course called Christianity Explored.

It's a seven-week course, and it focuses on the Gospel of Mark. It takes the participants in the course through the Gospel of Mark over seven weeks.

And no one class is the same. I mean, they're all different. No two are the same. They're all very different. But one of the common features about every class that we have done to date is that people in the class would often remark that they saw something in the Gospel of Mark that they either had never seen before or they were able to see in a surprising way.

It kind of surprised them that they would see it. It's one of the common features that we have found in Christianity Explored. The passage that we have come to this morning is one of those surprising accounts.

And it actually contains three surprises. The first surprise is to see the conduct of the disciples of Jesus. These men who lived with Jesus, walked with Jesus, heard the teachings of Jesus.

[ 5 : 15 ] It is surprising to see how they treated children who were being brought to them and their parents who were bringing them, evidently their parents, who were bringing them to Jesus that he might touch them.

So they came for a touch. They got a rebuke from the disciples. That's quite surprising. Now, why would the disciples do that? Why would they rebuke children whose parents made great effort, no doubt?

I mean, this is no day of driving your car. These people walked long distances, no doubt, to bring their children to Jesus that he would bless them and the disciples rebuked them and were turning them away.

The second surprise is the anger of Jesus. Mark tells us in verse 14 that Jesus was indignant, or to put it another way, he was simply angry.

Now, this is not a real surprise. But it is a surprise to some people who do not believe that Jesus got angry. There are some people who have a view of Jesus that is not rooted in the Bible and they have what we would call a gentle Jesus, meek and mild view of Jesus.

[ 6 : 29 ] And so they're surprised when they see Jesus showing anger. But what we see in this passage is that the real surprise is not that Jesus got angry.

That's really not the real surprise. The real surprise is even not that he got angry at the disciples' bad behavior.

The real surprise is why Jesus really got angry. He got angry not for their behavior, but what was behind their behavior. And I hope to show that in a little while as to why Jesus really was angry. We would think it's because they were embarrassing him, they were turning children away, they were rebuking the people bringing them. But that's not why Jesus got angry. He was angry for another reason.

And then the third surprise we find in verses 14 and 15. And actually, it's more than a surprise, it's actually a shock.

[ 7 : 42 ] What Jesus says in verses 14 and 15 is absolutely shocking, not surprising. He said to the disciples, 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.

Now I want to say to you this morning that if you're not surprised by that, or even shocked by that, it's a very good chance you don't understand what Jesus is saying.

And that's very possible. Jesus is saying something that is absolutely earth-shattering in terms of our outlook on life.

And what's very important for us to see is that this is not a statement that we are to be observing to say Jesus is speaking to his disciples, because really, this is a statement that Jesus addresses to all of us.

[ 8 : 49 ] It's a universal statement. We know that from verse 15. Because he says, Truly I say to you, whoever, whoever, that includes you and me.

This applies to us. He says, Whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it. Those are shocking words.

Those are surprising words. And perhaps very surprising to the disciples, because here they are turning these children away, and Jesus says, Whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like these little children will not enter it.

So here's the question I want to seek to answer in the remainder of the sermon this morning. How do we receive the kingdom of God like a child?

How do we receive the kingdom of God like a child? I want you to notice again that Mark is not just giving us some random things in the life of Jesus.

[ 9 : 58 ] Mark is giving us a carefully put together argument. He's making a case that Jesus is the Messiah, and he is the one that we must put our trust in for salvation.

Last week we considered what Jesus had to say about marriage and divorce. And naturally now we come to what he's saying about children. It just seems like a natural progression that these children are being brought to him, and we see how the disciples have treated them.

But what we see in these verses, in verses 13 through 16, is two very different views of children. We see the disciples' view, and we see the Lord's view.

And I want to take our remaining time to consider these two different views of children. As we answer this question, how do we receive the kingdom of God like a child?

So first, the disciples' view. Now it's very clear from this account that the disciples didn't think much of children. They had a very low view of children. But they were not alone.

[11:08] This was the view of children in society as a whole in that day. Children were not regarded as much.

They were considered to be insignificant. They had no status. It's not like today where a lot of parents idolize their children, and in many ways you could say worship their children.

Children had no regard, and they had no status in the day of Jesus. And the disciples demonstrated this by being indifferent and just chasing them away, shooing them off from Jesus.

Now Mark doesn't tell us specifically why they did that, why they rebuked the parents for bringing these children, but perhaps they saw the children as a burden and a distraction to Jesus.

Jesus had more important things to do. Heal people, preach. Why would he be taking time to lay hands on these little children?

[12:10] Nothing was wrong with them. They were sick people who he could be healing with the same time that he takes to bless these little children. But what we see is in a sense the disciples really set themselves up as the ones who have exclusive claim to Jesus.

And these little children had no claim at all. And you remember, we look back at this in chapter 9, where there was this man who was casting out demons.

The disciples went to him. They tried to stop him because they said he wasn't in our group. And Jesus corrected them for their view of that. So now we see them taking it upon themselves to turn these children away from Jesus.

Now in the day of Jesus, children would have been considered to be those who were between the ages of like this infancy, a child on the breast, up to about 12 years old.

Today we know children is legally defined at age 18. If you're under 18, that's the legal definition of being a child.

[13:29] But in the day of Jesus, being a child would have been from about being a newborn up to 12 years old.

And we know this because in an earlier account that we looked at in chapter 4, where Jairus, the synagogue ruler, had a daughter who was sick, Mark uses the same root word to refer to that girl as a child.

And we're told that she was 12 years old. So we know the range was up there. So some of you who would be considered children today, you would have been considered a child in that particular day.

But as far as they were concerned, Jesus had no time for these children. Children were not important at all. I think the disciples' treatment of these children, the view that they had of these children, should cause all of us to think about our own view of children.

And as I was preparing this message, it worked out that this is such an appropriate message for this morning because we're all together, the children are part of our gathering this morning, and I was thinking about the first Sunday of the month.

[14:46] And you know what? My favorite day of the week is Sundays. I can honestly say that. I look forward to Sundays. And of all the Sundays, my favorite Sunday of the month is the first Sunday of the month because we get to come to the Lord's table and we get to be reminded of our Savior's great sacrifice on our behalf.

But the second reason I like Sundays, the first Sunday of the month, is that our children are with us. I thought about that as I was reminiscing about my enjoyment of seeing the children with us on the first Sunday of the month.

And I would be honest and say, I don't think everyone likes the children in the first Sunday of the month because they sometimes are distracted. The attention span is not as long as ours.

Sometimes they go to the bathroom rather frequently. Sometimes they talk or they cry. And some adults would find that to be distracting.

But it's a blessing, I believe, that we have children with us and we need to think about our own view of children. Our children's church workers this morning are getting a break.

[16:00] But you know what? Week in and week out, they are serving our children in children's church. We all need to be grateful for the work that they do. And we all need to be considering how we are engaged in helping children to come to Jesus as opposed to pushing them away, thinking

that they can get serious about God at some later date.

But we need to see the worth and the value of even now, not hindering them, but helping them to actually come to Jesus. But that's the disciples' view of these children.

They had little regard for them because they had little status. They had no time for them. Mark tells us in verse 14 that Jesus saw their conduct.

Jesus saw what they were doing. And Jesus was indignant. He was angry. And what we have in verses 14 through 16 is the view that Jesus has of children, the view that he demonstrated in face of the view that his disciples had.

So the second point this morning is the Lord's view of children. First in verse 14, Jesus told the disciples to let the children come to him and not hinder them.

[17:20] In other words, he said to them, welcome the children. You're to welcome them. Now, was Jesus just giving them a lesson in hospitality and being welcoming to the children?

Was he angry because of their bad behavior? I don't think so. Though their behavior was bad, and though their behavior ought to be corrected, I don't believe, when we look at the text, that the reason that Jesus was angry was that the disciples' conduct towards the children was unbecoming. That's not the reason that Jesus told them to welcome these children and not hinder them. The reason Jesus told the disciples that they are to welcome the children and not hinder them, and the reason he got angry, is what he saw behind the conduct of the disciples' bad treatment of these children.

What Jesus saw was their sense of self-importance. What Jesus saw was their spiritual pride that was on display as they treated these children.

Now, remember, this would not be the first time that Jesus used a little child to teach them. We saw earlier in chapter 9 where he did that when the disciples were arguing about who was the greatest.

[18:54] And Jesus, again, used a child to teach them what it means to be humble. And he's essentially saying to them, why are you chasing these children away?

Why are you chasing them away? These children represent what it takes to receive the kingdom of God.

The very things you dislike about them are the very things you need to learn from so that you might receive the kingdom of God. The disciples had this sense of self-sufficiency and self-importance. And so they had no regard for the children. And the irony is that Jesus is saying, the very ones that you are pushing away are the very ones you need to help you in the area that you think you have no need and you need no help.

Jesus is saying to them, the kingdom belongs to those who are like these little children whom you despise. And so rather than chasing them away, you should be welcoming them and you should be learning from them.

[20:09] their bad behavior was bad. But what Jesus saw was something in them that was hindering them from receiving the life that was being offered.

Notice what he says in verse 15. He essentially says the same thing twice. In verse 14, he says, Let the children come to me.

Do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God. Then in verse 15, he says, Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.

Jesus is saying the same thing twice for emphasis. He's repeating it for emphasis. But again, I want to point out to you that what he says is very solemn in verse 15.

He says it solemnly. Truly I say to you, verily, verily, the King James would say, truly I say to you. And then he makes that universal statement.

[21:20] Whoever does not, whoever, whoever, no exceptions here. this includes all of us. If we are going to receive the kingdom of God, we are going to receive the kingdom of God as a little child.

No other way. Now there are two important things that I think we need to understand from what Jesus is saying. First, what does it mean to receive the kingdom of God?

This is another way of saying the kingdom belongs to you. Now notice in verse 14, he says, let the children come to me, do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God.

But in verse 15, he talks about receiving the kingdom of God. So what you receive actually belongs to you. Who's the youngest child we have here this morning?

I want to give an illustration. Who's the, is that, is that dairy? Is that dairy? Come here. I want to give an illustration to show you.

[ 22 : 33 ] Man, you came quickly. You must know what I'm going to do. There's a dollar. That's for you. You're welcome. Now, he received it.

That belongs to him. That's his. When Jesus talks about belonging to the kingdom or the kingdom belonging to you and receiving the kingdom, it's one and the same.

Now, I wonder if I called one of the adults this morning and I said, come, I want to give you a dollar. See, Calvin, Calvin just pushed that away.

It doesn't have the same effect. It doesn't have the same effect, but I will tell you what, he is excited that he just got a dollar. But, for those of us who are self-sufficient, and who may not even be self-sufficient, but who may just say, I ain't coming up for no dollar, you give it to me on the side, but I ain't coming up in front of all the people to get a dollar.

I'll take it on the side, but not that way. But that's the difference between children and self-sufficient and self-important adults like us.

[ 23 : 58 ] We tend to think we don't really need anything. And so, when we think about this whole idea of belonging, the kingdom belonging to you, or receiving the kingdom of God, it's one and the same.

But now, what I want us to think about is what does Jesus mean by saying the kingdom belongs to you or you receive the kingdom?

What is he talking about? There are some people today who are making much of the kingdom of God. And they've taken the kingdom of God and they've politicized it and they've tried to make it seem like a spiritual equivalent of the physical kingdoms that we have.

and they get into a serious error when they do that. Jesus simply means by this term, kingdom of God, in context here, he means eternal life.

That's what he's talking about. He's talking about eternal life, he's talking about salvation, he's talking about receiving salvation or salvation belonging to you. Now, to show you that, let's look at verse 14 again, and notice how we would substitute eternal life for kingdom of God.

[ 25 : 17 ] So, he would be saying to them, let the children come to me, do not hinder them, for to such belongs eternal life. Or in verse 15, I say to you, whoever does not receive eternal life or salvation like a child shall not receive it.

won't have it. Now, let me help you to see that I'm not making this up. You may remember the account that John records for us in chapter 3, the account of Nicodemus where Jesus said to Nicodemus, he said, unless someone is born again, he cannot enter the kingdom of God, cannot receive eternal life, can't receive salvation.

That's what it means to enter the kingdom of God. It means to have eternal life. But right in this same section of Mark's gospel, a little later, we'll look at this next week, there's this rich man who comes to Jesus, and look at verse 17.

It says, 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?

That was the question. What do I do to inherit eternal life? It's interesting how Jesus answers him.

In the end, Jesus says to him, well, if you look at verse 21, 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.

[ 26 : 55 ] Disheartened by the saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions. Now notice what Jesus says in verse 23. Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, how difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God.

Now notice, he asked them about eternal life, but Jesus is now talking about the kingdom of God. Jesus could have said, how difficult it will be for those who have wealth to receive eternal life.

It's all this to say, that when Jesus talks about eternal life to his disciples, when he says to them, when he talks with the kingdom of God, sorry, to his disciples two different times, he is simply referring to eternal life.

And his point is, you must become like a child in order to receive eternal life. That's the point that Jesus is making to his disciples, but it is easy for us to overlook that.

Now, clearly, Jesus is not saying that all children have eternal life. He's not saying that at all. He's saying we must learn from these children and we must become like them.

[ 28 : 20 ] children. So, the important thing about becoming like a child is what is the most obvious characteristic of children?

The most obvious characteristic of children, especially young children, is they're helpless. helpless. They're absolutely helpless and dependent on others to do for them every single thing that they need.

It's one of the reasons that sometimes you'll apply for a job and they will say how many, they don't say how many children you have, they say how many dependents you have.

And they're thinking in terms of children because children are absolutely dependent upon their parents or they're dependent upon others to do for them the things that they could never do for themselves.

And Jesus is getting at one point, he's getting at one thing, and he's saying that in the same way that children are helpless and they can do nothing for themselves, the only ones who will receive eternal life are those who recognize that they really, in truth, are just like children as it relates to receiving eternal life.

[ 29 : 54 ] And they are helpless and cannot do anything to achieve eternal life, to obtain eternal life on their own.

The same way that children are utterly dependent on their parents, we must be utterly dependent on God if we are going to receive eternal life. Jesus says, if you don't become as a little child helpless and totally unable to help yourself, you will not receive eternal life.

Now that's surprising. shocking. And it's shocking. And Mark is making a point, we'll see this next week, because right on the heels of this account, he has this young man who is going to come to Jesus, and what does he say to Jesus?

He says to him, good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life? What must I do? That's not being childlike. Because children can't do anything other than hold their hands and other than cry and say, give me this and give me that, and they could care less about how you get it, because as far as they're concerned, they can't get it for themselves.

All they do is they trustingly receive whatever their parents give them, and Jesus is saying that this must be the attitude that we must have. And to answer the question, when this man comes to Jesus and says, what must I do?

[ 31 : 27 ] What can I do to inherit eternal life? The answer is nothing. Because eternal life cannot be obtained by anything that we do.

It cannot be achieved by any work that we do. Eternal life comes to us in the same way that the care of a parent comes to a child.

The child doesn't earn it. The child does not merit it. the child receives it. Because that child belongs to that parent. One of the things we think about children, and I believe the best picture that we could have of what it is like to become like a child, to receive eternal life, is an infant, one on the breast, one who is just helpless, one who can't do anything for himself, has no awareness of other people, would they think about him or not, or her, has no real status, has no sense of self- importance, not worried about anything, just totally dependent on that mother, or perhaps even a father, to care and to provide.

It's the best picture of what it is like to become like a child, a helpless child who can get nothing without it being given to them. And this is what troubled Jesus as he watched his self-sufficient disciples just shooing off these children, seeing no worth in them, no value in them, and not recognizing that there's a great lesson they could learn from these children about what it means to position yourself as a helpless person who will only receive what is given to you, and that is eternal life.

He says, unless you become like these little children, you will not, you shall not enter the kingdom of God.

[ 33 : 41 ] You won't get eternal life. you see, the reason a little child would receive a dollar is it's a big thing to them.

That's a big gift to them. But to us, we are self-sufficient, and we would consider that as really, really nothing. And we approach salvation the same way, and it is an obstacle for us.

we naturally come to God thinking we need God less than we really need him. We think we need God so much because maybe this is wrong in my life, and I don't need God as much as that other person who has so many things wrong in their life.

But Jesus says to all of us, it doesn't matter what degree you may feel you don't need God or whatever, he says you all need to become like little children. children. You all need to get to the place where you recognize that you can bring nothing and give yourself nothing that you need. You open your hands like a little child, and you receive from God the Father the way a little child receives from his parents.

[ 35 : 00 ] You know, there's nothing in us as adults that naturally desires to want to be dependent on others.

We naturally want to be self-sufficient. We naturally want to be self-dependent. We naturally have pride. We oftentimes would not share our needs because that's just the way we are as adults. Children don't do that. I'm sure that, I'm sure, but I know certainly one of the things that we were taught early on was not to beg.

You know, you go to someone's house, don't you ask them for anything. And sometimes before you go to the person's house, if my mother's taking us out, she's saying, you all go, I don't want you to ask me anything.

And you go there and you see something you want and you itch in to ask for it. But don't you dare ask for it, even though you want it. See, that's the way adults are. We feel self-sufficient.

[ 36 : 13 ] Jesus says, if you're like that, he says, you're not going to receive the kingdom. You're not going to receive eternal life. Because you won't acknowledge your need and you think you need less than you actually need.

And this is part of our dilemma, that we aren't able to acknowledge or even see how much we need God in this way.

And we need God's help to enable us to see the great need that we have. And so this is a surprising obstacle to eternal life.

Eternal life can't be earned, can't be achieved. It is given. And again, this is our problem because we are self-important, we are self-aware, we are self-sufficient, and it's hard to humble ourselves and to receive what God offers to us.

There's one word that describes what it means to become like children receiving what we could never earn or obtain on our own.

[ 37 : 31 ] And that one word is grace. That one word is grace. Salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, separate and apart from the world.

It's not salvation plus church attendance, though church attendance is good. it's not by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, plus water baptism, although water baptism shows our obedience and our commitment to follow Christ.

It's by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. Martin Luther said, the only thing that we bring to our salvation, the only thing we bring in our hands, is the sin that God freely forgives.

It's the only thing we bring. We bring nothing. We bring nothing. And so my prayer for us this morning is that we would consider these words of Jesus and take them very seriously.

He says, unless we posture ourselves in this way, unless we see our emptiness, our neediness, our helplessness to help ourselves as it relates to salvation, we're not going to receive it.

[ 38 : 59 ] We're not going to receive it. And these little children who sometimes could maybe get on our nerves because they run around, because they do other things, he says to us, welcome them and learn from them.

They represent a humility that is required of all those who would receive eternal life. And so as I close this morning, I want to ask us, have you come to the place where you have received God's salvation as a little child?

Have you come to that place? Or are you just thinking that what you need from God is just a little help? As opposed to you need absolute and total help.

And you're helpless without the help that only he can offer. As I thought of the illustration of how a child needs parents, you know, it kind of breaks down after a while.

Because I imagine, and we have seen this happen, where children are abandoned. Just a few weeks ago, I read about a child who was left in a garbage bin, a newborn child, umbilical cord, still left, not here, but in the States.

[ 40 : 21 ] And the child was found. And see, that happens when children who, unless somebody goes to help them, they will be totally lost. See, the analogy breaks down when we consider what Jesus says, that we must become like little children if we're going to receive salvation.

Because there's no one else to help us. See, when a child is abandoned, there may be some kind-hearted person who could just come and rescue them and give them food or so forth. But in our case, as it relates to salvation, there's no substitute. We can't push Jesus aside and the salvation that he offers and find that salvation in anyone else.

Scripture says, there's no other name given unto heaven whereby we must be saved. No other name. And so he is the only way, he is the only one, and he says to us, humble yourself, become like a little child with open hands and a trusting heart and receive the salvation that I offer that you can do nothing to earn and you can do nothing to deserve.

And so I pray this morning that we've come to that place. But if you haven't, the good news is that you can. The good news is that you can cry out to God to help you to see your deep need, help you to see your need to humble yourself and receive his salvation and cry out to him to enable you to do that and he will.

[ 41 : 56 ] He promises that all who come to him, he will never turn away. Let's pray. Oh Lord, we ask this morning that you would help us to see the necessity of becoming like little children who in and of ourselves cannot help ourselves as it relates to salvation.

And like little children with open hands and a trusting heart, we receive the salvation that only you can give. Lord, I do pray that you would help us to be aware of our own pride, our own sense of importance, our own sense of self-sufficiency.

Help us instead to see our neediness, that we are absolutely dependent upon you for salvation. We would humble ourselves, we would turn to you, repent of our sins, and receive eternal life so that we may truly be the children of the kingdom of God.

We pray and ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.