

The value of children

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[0 : 0 0] the Word today. We're going to look at a very familiar passage, and we're actually going to read two passages, one in Matthew and one in Mark, and it's the same record. But before we get there, we live in a society where, largely speaking, we value children. That wasn't too long ago where we would have been able to say, children should be seen and not.

And children weren't really valued to that extent, but we do value children now. We love them, we care for them, and as a whole, we want them to succeed. We want them to do the best, and we want the best for them. And there are parents who would do anything for your children. If you have a teenager, you may have sympathy with this. I know when I was a teenager, my parents were more like a taxi service and a bank. And whenever I was growing up, they drove me somewhere. They would have sat outside for an hour and a half, reading a book or whatever, and then they would have drove me home. And then I think they were very happy whenever I started driving, because they didn't have to do that, and somehow I got bundled with my brother. I was his taxi service then, as is the case. But we sacrifice things for our children, especially sleep. You put yourself out for your kids. You spend sleepless nights if they're sick. You make sure that they're well. You'd be really worried if you heard of someone who just left their kid to be sick and didn't really care too much about them.

But on the other side of things, we've got people who perhaps spoil their children, and they give their child everything they want and teach them to expect it. There's obviously dangers there, but as nice as children are, we want them to grow up and leave home. And we hope that they will someday leave, and they'll go off to be responsible, well-rounded people in society. So what we teach our children now has a bearing on them later in life. And so it's important to us this morning to consider the value of children. Last time I was here, we spoke on 1 John, and it was instructions for children. But we're going to look at the value of children this morning, and especially how do we in the church go with that? Does God value children? How does he value them? And if so, what does that tell us about God?

What does that tell us about ourselves? And so we're going to turn to the very familiar passage in Matthew chapter 19. Matthew chapter 19 and verse 13. And then if you can have another finger, put it in Mark chapter 10. And it's exactly the same account, but we want to just look across both of those. So Matthew chapter 19, firstly, and verse 13, and then we're going to go into Mark chapter 10 and verse 13 there as well. So Matthew chapter 19, verse 13.

Then children were brought to him that he may lay his hands on them and pray. The disciples rebuked the people, but Jesus said, let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven. And he laid his hands on them and went away.

[3 : 3 9] And then turn over to Mark chapter 10 and verse 13 again. 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 little children, 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 we'll finish there. We're going to be primarily in the passage in Matthew. So if you want to turn back, we'll read in Matthew. If you were to flick through the whole Bible, you'll find that children are valued. What we've read today from Deuteronomy chapter 6 during the dedication, we're told to teach our children. We have an entire book in the Bible about a man teaching his son wisdom in Proverbs. And in the New Testament, we have examples and instructions for us as parents and as children. And I spoke on that last time. So 1 John is where that's at. But what do we learn from this passage? What does it teach us? How do we need to be like children to inherit the kingdom? And we want to, I'm going to do things slightly Irish.

We're going to actually start at verse 14 and work our way back a little bit. So, but we'll get there in a minute. And the first thing that I want us to note is that as children, we're to be dependent upon Jesus. Now verse 13 gives us the context for all this. The children are being brought to him and to lay his hands on them. And the disciples rebuke the people. And people are bringing their kids to Jesus. Why? Why would you bring your child to Jesus? Well, it tells us handily enough that he might lay his hands on them and pray. They wanted Jesus to pray for their children.

They wanted Jesus to bless their children. And it wasn't as if it was some sort of celebrity status, you know, where they brought their child to Jesus and got some sort of selfie or anything like that.

[6 : 03] It was a specific reason. The whole idea of celebrity culture here is not in view. Although Jesus is drawing great crowds to himself, they bring their children for him to pray for them and to bless them.

And here, no other religious leader will do. It has to be Jesus. There's a need here for Jesus. That's who they want. And we're going to be covering this tonight when we go to a different passage. But what better person could you have to pray for you?

If you want, you know, outside of Jesus, who are you going to pray for? The person you want to be praying for you is Jesus. And so they're bringing their kids to Jesus. And so often the disciples just don't get it. The whole way through the Gospels, they don't understand who Jesus is, why he would do this.

And they try to, they're like Jesus' entourage. You know, don't get near, you can't, children cannot get near Jesus. Can't be having it. And of course, Jesus is not too keen on this. They treat him like some sort of VIP and the kids are like a waste of time to him. But Jesus turns that completely on its head. In verse 14, then he tells the disciples off and tells them to let the little children through.

Don't stop them. Don't hinder them. Why? Because the kingdom of heaven belongs to people like this. Now, what does that mean? Is Jesus saying that we have to be of a certain age, a certain height, to be part of the kingdom of God? Is heaven made up of children? No. Is he talking about the qualities of a child that are good? Well, we have to understand how children were met or what people thought about children at that time in society. They weren't valued that much in terms of society. For Jesus to even think about talking to a child was unheard of. Who would want to talk to them? They were just children. They cannot make reasoned arguments. You know, you know this. A child wants something.

[8 : 10] They cannot tell you why. They want it. They will make you know that they want it. And woe betide if you take it off them. They want things. They cannot, but they can't give a reasoned logical argument.

They can't take up a position of authority. They can't buy anything for themselves. They can't get jobs. They're completely dependent upon their parents for everything. Everything they have, everything they did, they were dependent upon their parents. Now, we have had, we've dedicated Jonah this morning and with a great little boy. He is energetic. He is enthusiastic and I'm sure a blessing to Daniel and to Susan. But you and I know that we do not hear of Jonah or any of his siblings, for that matter, going home, sorting out the dinner, opening the meal, paying a few bills, doing the washing, sending themselves off to bed and getting ready for the next day ahead. We wish that was the case, but that's not. They don't do that. I think we would all love that if our kids developed a sense of independence and responsibility. But it doesn't happen like that, does it? They are dependent upon us for everything. Their food, their clothes, dressing them, doing their laces, taking them places, teaching them how to act, how to speak, all of those things. They are dependent upon us as parents. And this is what Jesus is saying about the kingdom of God. It's made up of people who are dependent upon God for everything. We've referenced that even this morning. It's made up of people who know they cannot do things by themselves and that we need

God to help us. We need God for everything. Colossians, a book written to the church, writes this in chapter 1, in him all things hold together. Colossians 1 17. That's all things. That's me, that's you, that's everybody, everything on this planet is held together by God. We are dependent upon him. Now that might be something that you do not want to hear. That might be something that's kind of offensive to you.

How dare you say that I'm dependent upon God? This is what the Bible teaches, that if God is the creator of the universe, how can we not be dependent upon him? Children show us and remind us that the kingdom of God, what the kingdom of God is like, and remind us to be dependent on the one who holds all things together. He holds all things together. We are dependent on him for everything.

Apostle Paul wrote that in Acts 17 as well. Nor is he served by human hands, as God, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and bread, breath and everything. We are dependent upon him. Dependent upon him. Dependent upon him. We go on, Ephesians 2, and it's not us, it is God's work, so that no man may boast. So we're to be dependent upon God. But secondly then, we're to bring people to Jesus. Have a look at verse 13. We're going sort of back again. Verse 13, the children were brought to him, and the parents were bringing their children to Jesus. They recognized that need, and it was a good thing to bring people to Jesus. Our world would have us believe that we should not bother with religion. Religion is from the dark ages. Why would you need that? We have people like

[11 : 44] Richard Dawkins who would have us believe that we're wasting our time and chasing something that does not exist. I like movies. I like lines from movies. I'm not going to be stupid enough to quote the famous line from Braveheart that William Wallace never said. I love those lines that clinch a part of a movie.

They just give you insight, or it's a memorable part of the movie, or a memorable speech. Here's a line from a movie. Top points if you can remember which movie it's from. But it was originally quoted by a French poet. And here's the line. The greatest trick the devil ever pulled was convincing the world he didn't exist. If you can tell me what it is in French, even more marks.

Let me give you it again. The greatest trick the devil ever pulled was convincing the world he didn't exist. We are told today that people don't need Jesus. If there's no devil, there's no evil, there's no God, and so on and so forth.

They've been fooled into thinking that they don't need him. The problem is this passage and the entire Bible begs to differ. We see children, we see people with a need for Jesus, and we see adults throughout the entire Bible with a need for Jesus. People need to be brought to Jesus, and we want to bring people to Jesus.

We want to share our faith with others. We want to be people who talk about Jesus to others. I saw a headline this week for an article. You don't need a man to be happy.

[13 : 26] You don't need a man to be happy, and that might very well be the case. There are countless people who are happy people who do not have a man. I am one of them.

But you do not. Exactly. Exactly. I am one of them. But let me tell you this.

I can see my invitation for tonight being hurriedly removed. Let me tell you this. You may not need a man to be happy, but you do need a man to have your sins forgiven.

You do need a man to have a relationship with God, and not just any man will do. Not just any man will do. Acts 4, 12. There is no other way.

There is no other way. And that's a challenge to us. To know that people need to be brought to Jesus. They don't need to be brought to some other person who's going to tell them something random.

[14 : 37] They need to be brought to Jesus because there is no other way. Going any other way is a waste of time. A waste of time, a waste of effort, and dare I say it, a waste of life.

People need to be brought to Jesus. And I'm sure you know people that don't know Jesus. And what's your job? Your job is to introduce them to Jesus. Now, I'm not saying that you have to give some sort of theological discourse on the sufficiency of Scripture.

You don't have... But we do have a role to play. 1 Peter 3 reminds us to always be prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for the reason for the hope that is in you.

If you have Jesus, you have hope, and you should be able to give the reason for that. We don't necessarily ram it down people's throat. We do it with gentleness. We do it with respect. And we each play a part.

I'm not saying some people will probably give a theological discourse on certain things. But as a church, we're made up of different people with different gifts and different abilities.

[15 : 45] And the church have those people, and people will interact and bring people to Jesus with those gifts and with those abilities. We're to be...

If we can turn in your Bibles to 1 Thessalonians 2. 1 Thessalonians 2. This is a bit of a key verse for us down in Grantham. And of course, if you can find Thessalonians, you're going well.

1 Thessalonians 2. 1 Thessalonians 2. And verse 8. So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God, but also our own selves, because you have become very dear to us.

I'm sure you have family members. I'm sure you have close, close friends. And we share our lives with them. We have folks in the estate where we share our lives with them.

They're in and out of my front door. Sometimes they're going to put one of those revolving ones in. It might be easier. But we share the gospel with those people who have become dear to us. There's a need to bring people to Jesus.

[17 : 02] And this is a different sermon altogether, but it requires proximity. You need to be close to them. And it requires presence. You need to be there with them in the good times and the bad. And that's how we share the gospel with people.

So, we've got to be dependent upon God. We're to bring people to Jesus. But we want to come to a God who wants to bless. We want to come to a God who wants to bless. I'm sure if you have kids, you will know what it's like to be plagued for things.

If you're like me, you dread going into the toy shop. Or worse, still, the sweet shop. And in all those cases, they walk into the shop and their eyes widen.

Look at all the things that mommy and daddy could buy for me. And it's absolute torture. They think it's paradise. And yet they want you to buy everything.

I have a friend who used to go to, it was a garden center and it had an aquarium. And you could buy the fish. But he never told his child that.

[18 : 05] So, the child thought they were going to the zoo. It was a fantastic ploy. So, if you need to use it, go ahead. But our kids love it when we provide things for them without spoiling them, obviously.

And we do treat our kids from time to time. And we do not give our kids rubbish. I hope not anyway. We want them to be pleased with the good gifts that we give them.

Matthew 7. Turn to the Bible to Matthew 7. God knows this. And this is what Jesus says about people who give gifts. Matthew 7, verse 7. It says, Ask, and it will be given to you.

Seek, and you will find. Knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds. And to the one who knocks, it will be opened. Verse 9. Or which one of you, if your son asks him for bread, will give him a stone?

Or if he asks for fish, will give him a serpent? If you then who are evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him?

[19 : 16] We know how to give good gifts. Christmas is a distant memory, I'm sure. And I'm sure a lot of you got good gifts, the things that you appreciate.

But if we know how to give good gifts, then how much more do you think God is able to give good gifts? The Bible talks about every good and perfect gift coming from above in James.

He is the one that provides those things. So when we look at our children, we look at how we provide for them, we're reminded that God is the one who provides for us.

And he gives even though we don't deserve it. He gives even though we don't deserve it. Jesus here in the passage wanted to bless the children.

They hadn't done anything to deserve it. They hadn't done anything to deserve it. And neither of you. Now we've been through Christmas a month ago.

[20 : 12] And you can't escape that time of year without being bombarded with images. Back home, we have this running joke that Christmas doesn't start until you see the Coca-Cola truck on TV.

You can't even start to think about it until that happens. But there's no other image apart from Coca-Cola that seems to bombard us than that of Father Christmas. And apparently as it goes, he works from two lists.

One that is, if you're on the nice list, you get a present. And if you're on the naughty list, you get a thing of coal. I don't know. I've always been on the nice list. But with God, God doesn't work in that way.

It's not based on what we do from one year to the next. God's gifts, God's giving is not dependent upon us, but upon his love, his grace, and his mercy.

It's not based upon our merit. It's not how good looking, thankfully, or how clever you are. It's not a postcode lottery, and it's not some sort of stingy giving. The Bible says that God gives to all men liberally.

[21 : 25] He gives in abundance. So how do we know that God gives good gifts? It's one thing for me to say that. You might say, well, hold on here, Andrew. You're saying this. Give me an example.

Give me an example. What has God given me? I'm not driving around in a new car. I don't have a huge bank balance. What has God given me? Well, God perhaps hasn't given you a new car, a fancy house, a massive bank balance.

I don't think he tends to give those out too much. But what God has given us is his son. That is his best. That is his best.

And you might think, well, hold on, Andrew. What do I do with that? What do I do with his son? It's not tangible. He's not tangible. I can't exchange him for money. I can't sell him.

What do I do with his son? Where is he now? And we know we're celebrating today Jesus coming in through Jerusalem. He lived that time.

[22 : 20] He healed the sick. He blessed children. He made the lame walk. He made the blind see and the deaf hear. He performed miracles. He taught the people how to live. And at the end, they took him. They crucified him on a cross, even though the governor couldn't find any fault with them.

And Jesus went there on the cross to die for me and for you. He gave himself. Daniel's already mentioned it. He died the death that we should have died.

And he took that punishment that was due us for our sin. The Bible tells us we've all sinned. We've all missed that mark. And that's what separates us from God.

That sin needs punished. And it's there on the cross where that sin is taken care of. And we all need Jesus.

God gives us his best and his son when we're at our worst. Romans 5.8. When we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

[23 : 24] When we're at our worst, God gives us his best. God gives us his best. We're to trust in him. We're to ask him for forgiveness. The Bible reminds us that if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all our righteousness.

1 John 1.9. That's what God has given us. Jesus does not say no. He does not leave us high and dry. It's not that Jesus is available between the hours of 12 and 5.

Jesus is available continually. He will forgive us if we come to him, if we're asking him for forgiveness. He wants to bless us and he always gives us his best. He always gives us his best.

Lastly then, lastly, we're to be dependent upon God. We're to bring people to Jesus. We're to come to a God who blesses. Lastly, don't let anything keep you from Jesus.

There's a lot of things that can stop you from coming to Jesus. It could be fear. It could be fear of rejection.

[24 : 36] It could be not wanting to seem like one of these weird Christians. It could be something else that's putting you off. Maybe you don't want to tell your family. Maybe you think you can put it off.

I'll do it when I'm older. Maybe you do know Jesus and you're far from today. Maybe the world has been distractions.

Martin Luther called our hearts idol factories. Our hearts can generate all manner of things to distract us from God. Continually. But don't let complacency put it off.

I was listening. This does not often happen. I was listening to Radio 1. I thought I'm too old now for Radio 1. More of a Radio 2. Even version of Radio 4, would you believe? Here's the help that was given on this show on Radio 1.

Just be kind. Be yourself. Be yourself. And everything will be okay. Be kind. Be yourself. And everything will be alright. Like I say, don't let complacency, excuses, or rubbish advice like that keep you from Jesus.

[25 : 56] There's one man that we need. We've talked about it already. When Peter got up in front of the crowds, he didn't say, everybody, just be kind and everything will be alright.

Just be yourselves. No. What does Peter get up? Peter gets up and says, The promise is still there.

The promise is still there. It wasn't something that was given 2,000 years ago and some sort of faded. You know, it's not really kept these days. It's not relevant now.

No, the promise is for us and for our children and for all who are far off. All whom God will call to himself. And that promise, the promise of forgiveness is for me and for you. If you don't know Jesus, the promise is for you.

If you're far off from Jesus, the promise is for you. It's for our children. It's for our nephews, our nieces, our grandchildren, their children, and so on. And it stands.

[27 : 04] It stood for 2,000 years. And let me tell you, God always keeps his promises. And that's one thing you'll find. If you read your Bible from start to finish, God always keeps his promises. You don't have to work up the forgiveness.

It's a gift of grace from God. Why would you delay? Why would you like to keep those things that are keeping you from Jesus?

You might have in your mind already what those things are that are keeping you from him. You might have in your mind already the distractions that are stopping you from following him.

God's promise is always there. It stands. So here's a little passage in the book of Matthew, in the book of Mark.

It gives us a lot to consider about how children act. How we're to be dependent. How we're to bring people to Jesus. How we're to come to a God who wants to bless.

[28 : 10] But it challenges us not to put it off. Don't let anything stand in your way. There's things that can hinder us. In Hebrews, the writer of the Hebrews says for us to throw off every weight and burden and the sin that so easily entangles.

And let us fix our eyes on Jesus. The finisher and perfecter of our faith. If we come here today to the world, we fix our eyes on Jesus.

Take your eyes off yourself. Fix your eyes on him. Because being kind, being good to yourself and everything will be okay. That's not going to happen. Fix your eyes on him.

Trust in him. And live for him. Amen. We're going to sing.