



Sermon Growth Guide

May 8, 2022

Awake to Children



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Mark 10:13-16

Key Verse: Mark 10:14 When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.”

Foundations

This week we continue our *Awake* series as we see how Jesus is “Awake to Children.” And there are a few ways for us to veer off course as we consider this passage. First is to think that this passage is *ONLY* about children. It is tempting to make this passage sentimental, but there is nothing sentimental regarding the Kingdom of God.

The second way we can ruin it is thinking it is not about children. To receive the kingdom like a child and ignore the child being held in front of you is missing the point.

In our text this week, there is something Jesus wants us to communicate. We see Him rebuking and we see Him welcoming. But more specifically, there is something He wants us to see about the Kingdom of God. It is not that God so much wants us to know something, though He does, or love something, though He does, or be something, though He does. In this passage Jesus speaks of belonging. The means He uses to communicate about belonging is children. And there is belonging not because of how much they can do. There is belonging because of who made them and the image they bear.

Understanding God’s Word

Together, read Matthew 18:1-5. When reading Matthew 18 and Mark 10, the verse “To receive the kingdom like a child” could mean either that you “receive the kingdom like a child would receive the kingdom,” or “receive the kingdom like you receive this child.” Host a conversation on if it means one, the other, or both.

Applying God’s Word

Pastor Tim said, “We force kids to act like little adults, but Jesus forces adults to learn to enter the Kingdom like little kids.” This means we are always beginners in the Kingdom of God.

Karl Barth says the Christian life is “the work of beginners..What Christians do becomes a self-contradiction when it takes the form of a trained and mastered routine, of a learned and practiced art. They may and can be masters and even virtuoso in many things, but never in what makes them Christians, God’s children.”

In what ways are we still beginners in the Kingdom of God?

Witnessing God’s Word

It is when you are a child of God that you are free to welcome other children of God. When you are a child of God you can receive the refugee, receive tax collector, receive the person you avoid eye contact with at the grocery store, receive the squawking child sitting in front of you in the service. Where have you witnessed receiving the free grace of God, not because of anything you have done, but because you are God’s child?

Happy Mothers Day! Jesus and his disciples were crossing a lake in a boat when a huge storm rose up. The disciples were frantically bailing water, the nets and rigging were all bouncing around, people were crying and screaming and clawing all over one another thinking the boat was going down. Jesus stood up and said, “Guys, this is what it is like to be a mom in May. Only one of you would be asking what’s for dinner.” For those of you in the thick of it, we just want to say, we see you. The struggle is real! Know that Jesus can and does stand up and say what He actually said, “Peace! Be still.” Peace. We are grateful for mothers today. It is a high calling and responsibility. We are with you.

Well, we are in a series called **Awake**. “Pastor, I thought this was a hot topics series. You just read one of the sweetest and non-controversial texts in the New Testament! Jesus loves children. Wow. Big controversy.” Actually, what Jesus did with children was radical. It was controversial. It changed western civilization forever. In the ancient world, children were treated more like domesticated animals than humans. The head of a household had the legal and moral right to tell any member of the household whether their infant would be kept after it was born. Exposure was a common practice. If a child was born to a mother with no means to care for it, born with a disability, or often just born female, it would be put out on the dung heap outside of the city and left to die or thrown into the sewers to drown. Roman laws have been discovered ordering the disposal of weak or “deformed” boys. An archeological dig in Alexandria, Egypt, once found evidence of over 100 infants who had been tossed into a sewer. Even in situations of decent care infant mortality was very high and many societies waited days or

even months just to give a newborn a name, uncertain if it was worth the trouble. It was a hard world to be a little child.

This is the world Jesus entered, the world Jesus entered as a baby. The Son of God stepped down from the throne room and said, “I’ll take that place, that position right there.” It was a hard world Jesus entered as an infant. It was a world that valued power and capacity. It was a world that measured dignity by how much you can do, how many you can influence, how strong you could be to dominate others. It was Herod’s world. Remember King Herod? When Herod felt threatened by the prophetic announcement of the birth of the King of the Jews, what did He do? He ordered the slaughter of all boys in Bethlehem. Scholars debate the authenticity of this event because they find little mention of it outside of the gospels, but the truth is it isn’t mentioned because this sort of thing was normal; there were no remarks because it was sadly not remarkable. Kids were next to stray cats in importance. But what if, what if even little children are image-bearers?

One day, children were being brought to Jesus. “Being brought.” That’s important. They were so little, so vulnerable, they were not yet running around on their own but being brought places by others. “People were bringing little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them, but the disciples rebuked them.” (Mark 10:13) Why did the disciples rebuke them? What business does their honored master have with kids? They are not important enough to merit Jesus’ time in their eyes. “When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, ‘Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as



these.” (Mark 10:14) The Kingdom of God belongs, says Jesus, to such as these. “Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.” (Mark 10:15) We force kids to act like little adults, but Jesus forces adults to learn to enter the Kingdom like little kids. Huh. And how small are these little ones to whom the Kingdom of God belongs? Small enough to be cradled in the arms of Jesus. “And he took the children in his arms, placed his hands on them and blessed them.” (Mark 10:16)

What’s so radical? What is so controversial? We return again to the image of God. In the ancient world, and in various ways even in our world today, dignity is measured by power—so kids are seen as only potentially important. Maybe they will be important. If we mold and shape them into the society we want to see, the social landscape we are trying desperately to engineer to match our own devices and interests, maybe they will eventually have value. What does Jesus see? The eyes of Jesus. Jesus sees them as image-bearers. The infant, the toddler, the preschooler...image bearers. Worthy of dignity. Worthy of honor. Worthy of respect, just the way they are. “Then God said, ‘Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness...’ So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.” (Genesis 1:26-27) Children are image bearers, coequal with adults, coequal with kings like Herod. Not to be discarded or disrespected. And that image-bearing, when does it begin? When did you begin to bear the image of God? Age six? Six months? Six days? No. You began to bear the image of God before you were even born. It begins in the womb where God stitched you together. “For

you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. ...My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place, when I was woven together in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.” (Psalms 139:13,15-16) They eyes saw you. The eyes of Jesus looked up on you as worthy.

So we celebrate kids today. We are grateful for moms on Mothers Day, but we also take this day each year to celebrate how we are raising kids in the Lord in this church. Preschoolers graduate! Second-graders receive Bibles. And we celebrate our older kids, nearer to young men and women, who graduate High School this year. We also celebrate our older graduates and others taking next steps in their lives toward adulthood and maturity in the world. This is a day to celebrate that First Pres is a great place to raise kids in the Lord, and to renew our commitment to helping every parent who is trying to carry their child to Jesus find their way and receive their welcome and land that blessing as best we possibly can. Let nothing stand in the way of a mom or dad trying to bring their child to be blessed by Jesus.

Jesus saw children as worthy of his attention, and also worthy of protection. I think Jesus was talking about children when He said, “If anyone causes one of these little ones—those who believe in me—to stumble, it would be better for them if a large millstone were hung around their neck and they were thrown into the sea.” (Mark 9:42) That’s fairly clear. “How do you really feel, Jesus?” Image bearers. You mess with me,



you mess with my king, whose image I bear. Jesus sees kids as worthy of attention, worthy of protection, but probably the most profound thing Jesus says in this passage is that kids are worthy of imitation. The Kingdom belongs to such as these little children, says Jesus. You can't come into the Kingdom unless you are like them. Is Jesus saying we should be childish? No. There is a difference between childishness and childlikeness. Childlike faith, what is that? But, what? We should imitate children in vulnerability. In wonder. In humble dependence on others. In simple celebration of bearing the image of God. A child is trusting. A child is hopeful. A child knows that no amount of working harder or trying more or running at it faster is going to bring the next meal. They can't cook! Children live in simple, trusting dependence on those who care for them. Like a nest of little birds with open beaks to the sky, that's a picture of you and me before Jesus. Unless you come as a child, you don't come.

I tell you, this changed our civilization. Orphanages. Adoptions. Schools. Camps. Clubs. Pediatricians and NICU wards. Kids. Worthy of honor and dignity and love. Not because of how much they can do; just because of who made them and the image they bear. Kids. Queen Victoria is said to have visited England's Royal Society and asked, "Where on earth do all these learned men come from?" Her prime minister replied, "From babies, your Majesty. From babies." In every boy or girl who has the seed planted in his or her heart, the Kingdom of God grows. Jesus didn't look away from children. Jesus was awake to children. We come to Him like a child, in need, in vulnerability, in wonder, in hope that our lives will be sustained and blessed and rescued by him, or we do not come to Him at all.

