

**Family Series 2023 #1:
Let the Little Children Come
Mark 10:13-16**

Introduction

If someone were new to our church, one thing that they would quickly notice is that there are lots of kids here. And, they would also notice that the kids stay here with the adults during the service. And, they would also notice fairly soon that we baptize infants and that little children are partaking of the Lord's Supper. This is in many ways a strange place these days. Why is this? Another distinctive of our church is that, for many years, our practice has been to welcome both credo-baptist and paedo-baptist beliefs and practices. We allow for disagreement between families about whether a young child should be able to profess faith or not before the water of baptism is applied. However, we do emphasize to all families the need to believe, embrace, and teach the promises of God for your children. We should all be communicating a message to our children that says, "We follow Jesus. Come with us" (Josh. 24:15).

Brief Covenant Overview

God gave a covenant promise to Abraham to be God to him and his descendants (Gen. 17:7-11), which Paul applies to those now who belong to Christ (Gal. 3:26-29). Peter alludes to this as well in his sermon after Pentecost, connecting God's covenant promise with the promise of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:33, 38-39). Peter also reiterates that this promise is "to you and to your children." So, we and our children are recipients of this covenant promise. What is our duty in this covenant? Our duty is believe in His promise, walking by faith according to His commandments (Eph. 2:8-10, Ps. 103:17-18). To believe and stand on God's promise is not to rely on our (or our children's) ability to keep covenant with God, but rather to trust in the God who established the covenant.

Let The Little Children Come

Our emphasis on having our children with us is founded on this understanding of the covenant promises of God, but another way to come at this is to look at God's view of children. One obvious place to see this is in the gospels when Jesus rebukes His disciples for preventing the little children from coming to Him (Mark 10:13-16; cf. Matt. 19:13-15, Lk. 18:15-17). Mark tells us in addition that Jesus is greatly angered at this. Our view of children—not least in Jesus' worship service—ought to be the same as Jesus' view. Let them come, and welcome. Jesus took these children up into His arms, laid His hands on them, and blessed them. We imitate this at the end of the service when the elder up front lifts his hands for the benediction. You should see that God is placing His name on you, His children, to bless you as He sends you out (cf. Num. 6:22-27). And by "you," we mean all of you, old saints and young saints.

God also teaches us that children are a blessing (Ps. 127:3-5, 128:3-4). They are not an automatic blessing (Prov. 10:1, 17:25; e.g., Absalom), but God is willing to say generally that children in faithful, believing, covenant homes are a blessing and a reward.

Bring Them Up

Children born in covenant homes have covenant responsibilities (obeying their parents) with covenant promises (Eph. 6:1-3). Fathers have a responsibility to raise their children to be nourished in the enculturation and instruction of the Lord (*paideia* and *nouthesia*, Eph. 6:4). One primary means of doing this is by bringing them to church where they participate with us as equals before the Lord, getting on their knees with us, saying “Amen” with us, singing with us, sitting under the preaching of the Word with us, coming to the Lord’s Table with us, and lifting their hands with us. Children should see that they are invited here to worship the Lord with us, growing in their understanding that this is more of a privilege (“get to”) instead of an obligation (“got to”). They ought to be brought up, challenged, and encouraged in their walk with Christ. This view is at odds with any theology that encourages children in covenant homes to doubt their belief. When fathers and mothers teach their children that God is not so sure about their belief, they provoke those children to wrath. Instead, we should remember the grace God gave us when we first believed, and welcome them to place their trust in Jesus.

What if I doubt that my child is saved? On the one hand, that is not a problem. We cannot judge hearts, and there are times where the fruit of a person’s life does not match his baptism or profession. But Scripture teaches us that we are first and foremost responsible for our own obedience to God. If we are told to believe God’s promises, what do we call not believing them? Disobedience. So, if parents are not believing the promises of God for their children, before they worry about whether or not their children are obeying God by believing, the parents need to get right with God and obey Him by believing His promises. This does not mean you need to think your child is saved. It means you need to trust God’s promises to be that child’s God. Scripture also indicates that God regards the faith of those who bring others to Him (Mark 2:5). Believing God’s promises is evangelism to your children.

Conclusion

And so, children, we are delighted to have you here. We want you here to worship with us. This is your church, and it is your church because Jesus is your Lord. He died for your sins, and your job is to believe on Him. Look to Jesus. You know that you are a sinner because your parents have taught you. You know that you are a sinner because you feel guilty when you do bad things. You know that you even when you try really hard to be good, you fail. That does not mean that you should not follow Jesus. The fact that you are a sinner means that you are qualified to follow Jesus. Jesus explicitly said that He did not come for anyone who was good. He only came for those who fall short of God’s law. And this is good news for parents and children, old and young, fruitful and barren, rich and poor, strong and weak—this is the grace of God. Jesus Christ came for sinners. Believe on Him.