

Mark 10:13-16

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 09 August 2009

Preacher: David MacPherson

[0 : 00] When was the last time that you annoyed at Jesus?

When was the last time that Jesus was grieved or vexed or displeased by you? I want to read a passage this morning.

It's really just the parallel passage that we've already read in Matthew's Gospel. And on this occasion, we'll be focusing our attention on the same incident as it's related in Mark's Gospel in chapter 10 and verses 13 to 16.

And as we read this very short passage, let's focus in on and identify and notice what it was that on this occasion annoyed Jesus, vexed him, made him indignant.

So let's read in Mark's Gospel chapter 10 and verses 13 to 16. People were bringing little children to Jesus to have him touch them, but the disciples rebuked them.

[1 : 10] When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He was vexed. He was grieved. He was annoyed. 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. I tell you the truth. Anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.

And he took the children in his arms, put his hands on them and blessed them. Now this is a very, very familiar passage.

Suffer the little children to come unto me as we are familiar with it in the older version. And I want us to consider it this morning as an aid to taking stock at the start of a new school year that is imminent.

And I beg forgiveness of those who are not looking forward to that happy occasion, a week Tuesday, but it's the reality. So as it approaches, it's a good moment to take stock of our attitude to children and the ministry that we seek to provide for them and among them as a congregation.

[2 : 32] And to ask ourselves and to consider if we see them and value them as Jesus did and indeed does. Now what is going on here in the passage before us?

Well, children are being brought to Jesus. We're not told by whom. It's reasonable to presume their parents and perhaps also reasonable to presume more likely their mothers.

And the intention of those who were bringing the children is, as we read before us, is that Jesus would touch them. People were bringing little children to Jesus to have him touch them.

Now, a greater insight into what is involved here or what is the intention of those who bring the children is given to us in the passage that we read in Matthew's Gospel where it's clearer.

In Matthew chapter 19 and verse 13, we read, In Mark, it simply says for Jesus to touch them.

[3 : 38] But there, Matthew gives us more information that Jesus would place his hands on them and pray for them. Now, I wonder why this was being done.

Why was it that parents, mothers, fathers perhaps, were bringing their children to Jesus with this intention? Was there a sense that Jesus himself could somehow, by his simply touching the children, bless them and grant them some spiritual benefit?

Did they regard Jesus as a man of God, a rabbi, a teacher, and someone who, as he prayed for their children, he would bring upon their children the blessing of God?

And perhaps there was a variety of hopes and expectations. Dare we even suggest that in some, perhaps even superstitions, as to what benefit there might be from bringing their children to Jesus?

We can't know for sure what the parents had in mind as they brought their children to Jesus. But I think we can safely say and fairly say that the action of those who brought their children, these parents, mothers perhaps, and this action gives evidence of a commendable concern for their spiritual welfare, for the spiritual welfare of their children.

[5 : 07] This, I think, we can certainly say lies behind their doing what they were doing, bringing these little children to Jesus. And that is a good thing that they should have had that concern.

Not simply to identify a little what is going on. But what we want to do this morning is to look at this incident as it develops. And we can see three stages of this very brief incident before us.

And we can look at each stage in turn. First of all, I want to consider the rebuke of the disciples. The disciples, as we very well know, rebuke these parents for bringing the children to Jesus, for bothering Jesus.

And so we have the rebuke of the disciples. And I just want to notice that very, very briefly. But then spend a little bit more time considering the response of Jesus to the attitude, to the rebuke of the disciples.

How does Jesus respond to them? How does He address them? And what does that teach us? And then finally, and again just more briefly, Jesus grants an explanation for why He has the attitude that He has.

[6 : 22] And all of that we find in simply the two verses that we have before us, verses 13 and 14. And then we'll mention only very briefly the following two verses.

Let's look at each of these things in turn then. First of all, we have the rebuke of the disciples. The disciples rebuke those who are bringing their children to Jesus.

But the disciples, we're told, rebuke them. They rebuke them. Why did the disciples do that? Did the disciples hate children?

I'm sure they didn't hate children. I'm sure, like the rest of us, they would have had, many of them, a very high regard for children. Maybe some of them loved children. Some more, some less.

They were a representative group of men. I don't think they hated children at all. Rather, what lies behind this rebuke of the parents is a well-meaning concern to shield Jesus.

[7 : 23] That is what lies behind their rebuke. They want to protect Jesus from the crowds, from the multitudes. They know that He's tired, that He has much to do, that there is so much on His plate.

And they want to shield Him. They want to protect Him from all these people who are coming round Him. And it would seem, or their concern, bothering Him.

And it's worth noting that when this takes place, Jesus had begun a very deep and transcendental journey.

His final journey, we read in verse 17 of Mark's Gospel, as the passage continued, as Jesus started on His way. And it begs the question, on His way, where?

And as we continue reading the chapter in verse 32, we're given the answer to that question. They were on their way up to Jerusalem. Up to Jerusalem.

[8 : 26] And we only need to turn a couple of pages, or just one page in our Bibles, to find that here Jesus is very close to His final journey to Jerusalem and His death. This is the context, the occasion on which Jesus deals in this way with His disciples and with the children.

He is heading to His death. Now, the disciples perhaps didn't fully understand that. But nonetheless, they're conscious that Jesus has much on His mind. He has much to do.

And there is, in their rebuke, a well-meaning concern to protect Him and to shield Him. Now that, in and of itself, is something that we would do well to ponder on.

The disciples meant well. They're not horrible people. They're not nasty men. No, they meant well. But they were wrong. They were very wrong in what they did.

Though they meant well. Though their intentions were laudable. They were very, very wrong. And not only were they very, very wrong. But they were very much without excuse in their attitude and in their actions.

[9 : 34] In Matthew's Gospel and chapter 18 and verses 4 and 5. And you'll remember we've already read in Matthew's Gospel and chapter 19. And so, these verses that we are going to read, it would seem, had been spoken by Jesus very soon before the incident that we're considering.

And what do we read in Matthew chapter 18 verses 4 and 5? Jesus is teaching His disciples and we read, And then He goes on to speak in very somber and solemn terms concerning His attitude to those who would harm children.

But if we simply focus on verse 5, Whoever welcomes a little child like this in my name welcomes me. This is teaching that Jesus had brought to the disciples very soon before the incident we're considering.

And so, the disciples were without excuse in their rebuking of the parents. And of forbidding these children to be brought to Jesus.

They meant well. They meant well. But they were very, very wrong. And of course, that truth can be applied in a multiplicity of ways. Good intentions are not good enough.

[10 : 55] In so many areas of our life, we should, by all means, examine our heart. But we must also examine the Word of God. Examine the Bible. You see, you might say, No, but my heart tells me to do this.

Yes, I mean well. But you may be very, very wrong. Even if you are very, very well-meaning. And that is true in many areas of life. But particularly, it's worth considering in this concern that is our concern this morning.

How we deal with, how we treat, what attitude we have to children. And particularly within the community of faith and our own congregation.

So, we have the rebuke of the disciples. Their concern is a laudable one. They are well-meaning. But they are very, very wrong. But then, secondly, and spending a little bit more time, consider the response of Jesus.

How does Jesus respond to what the disciples do? The disciples rebuked those who brought the children. And then we read immediately following when Jesus saw this. When He saw this rebuke.

[12 : 00] When He saw this effort to forbid the children. To hold them back. When Jesus saw this, He was indignant. He was indignant. And He goes on to speak to and rebuke the disciples.

So, in His response, we have, first of all, to consider His emotional response. How does He respond emotionally? But then also, the content of the words that He speaks.

First of all, His emotional response. He is, we are told, indignant. He is annoyed. He is pained. He is vexed by what He sees. It would seem that the word that is being used should not be understood to express deep and profound anger.

But there is an indignation. There is an annoyance. He is vexed. Perhaps even an element of frustration, if we can use that word.

At the disciples not knowing better. He has spoken to them so soon before. And yet, here, they are taking this attitude. They don't seem to have got it.

[13 : 10] And so, there is indignation, frustration, annoyance in Jesus. And what that tells us, very importantly, and we might say solemnly, that anything or anyone who gets in the way of children coming to Him annoys Jesus.

That is what annoys Jesus. Anything or anyone who stands in the way, be it deliberately or be it by carelessness, that annoys Jesus.

That produces in Jesus indignation. And that is true today as it was true on the occasion that we are considering. And that's maybe something for us to just ponder on for a moment.

What about us? What about you? What annoys you? This is what annoyed Jesus, that children were being prevented from coming to Him. It produced an great indignation.

And what about you? What annoys you? Is it not true of us? And I most assuredly include myself. Is it not true that so often such trivial matters of no moment or importance annoy us and produce indignation in us?

[14 : 23] Little things that really don't matter, but they annoy us. And maybe the big things, the important things, they cause no annoyance at all. Maybe it's a football result that can annoy us greatly.

Maybe we open the fridge and there's no milk. You wanted to have your cereal and the milk's gone. And you're annoyed because what you wanted, it's not there. It really doesn't matter, but it does annoy us, doesn't it?

You go shopping and you see a pair of shoes and they're just the shoes you want. This is not me. I am annoyed by lots of really stupid things, but this isn't one of them. But maybe some of you. And that's the shoe you want and it's not in your size.

And you're annoyed. It really doesn't matter. It's really not that important. But what about this? What about Jesus being annoyed by folks holding children back?

Does that annoy you? When children are not given the place that they merit in the community of faith, when children are prevented in different ways from coming to Jesus, does that annoy you?

[15 : 30] Does that produce a new indignation? That is what we are challenged with this morning, that it would be so. So we have in the response of Jesus this emotional response.

He was a man, a real man, and he knew the full range of human emotions. And here we have one. He was annoyed. He was indignant. But then we have the content of the words that he expresses.

Again, familiar to us. Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them. For the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. There are two orders given by Jesus to the disciples.

What we have here are orders. They're imperatives. These are not simply nice words expressing some nice thought. These are orders that are given by Jesus to the disciples.

And there are two orders. Two verbs in that form. And they are verbs that complement each other. They are, in a sense, the same truth being expressed in two ways.

[16 : 32] In a positive way and in a negative way. The first order is, let the little children come to me. Allow them to come. Facilitate their coming.

Let. Allow. And then the second order is, in a sense, the same truth but expressed negatively. Do not hinder them. So, the two, in a sense, are saying the same thing.

But they go together. They complement each other. And I think as we consider them in a moment, we'll see that each has its own emphasis. Let. Allow.

And do not. Hinder. As we consider these words, let the children come to me. The idea behind it is that Jesus is saying is that the disciples not only should passively allow the children to come, but they should facilitate their coming.

They should clear the way for them. It will be more difficult for them to come. Then the way should be cleared. Any obstacles should be removed. This is the order that has been given. Allow.

[17 : 35] Let. The children come to me. And then negatively, do not hinder them. Don't stand in the way. Don't put obstacles. Rather, you should be removing the obstacles.

And certainly not putting obstacles in their way. And all of this with a purpose that may be very obvious, and yet it's worth just highlighting that they would come to Jesus.

Let the little children come to me. It doesn't just say, Jesus doesn't just say, let the little children listen to me. He doesn't say, let the little children be prayed for by me. That's what the parents want.

He doesn't say, let the little children learn about me. He doesn't say, let the little children get my autograph. No. Let the little children come to me. The implication is of a personal relationship being established, that they would come and that they would be received and treated by Jesus as individuals of great value.

Let them come to me. Let them know me. I know them and I want them to know me. Let's just think a little bit about these two orders that are given by Jesus to the disciples.

[18 : 49] Allow the children to come. Do not hinder them. And think about how we could be guilty of doing these things or of not allowing them to come or guilty of hindering children from coming.

Let's begin on the negative side. How could we be guilty of hindering children from coming to Jesus? One way in which we can do that is that we can bore them away.

That is a very effective way of hindering children from coming to Jesus. We bore them away. Everything to do with church and church activities are so boring that we bore them away from Jesus.

Scotland is full of men and women who have been bored away from Jesus. And Jesus says to us, don't do that. Don't hinder children from coming.

Don't bore them away. We can hinder children coming from Jesus by not presenting Jesus clearly to them in an age-appropriate way, in a coherent way, as we would teach them concerning Jesus, as we would bring them to Jesus, as we would enthuse concerning Jesus with them.

[20 : 05] We can hinder children from coming to Jesus by allowing them and being guilty of careless exposure to anti-Christian messages and worldviews.

If as parents particularly we are careless concerning what they see on TV and what they see on the internet, and indeed if we are indifferent or careless as to all that they are being taught at school and we don't talk with them about it and we don't discuss the ideas that are being presented to them, some of them very hostile to our faith.

And if we are careless concerning these things and do nothing, then we can be guilty of hindering children from coming to Jesus.

But perhaps the most solemn way in which we can hinder our children, and I think particularly of parents, from coming to Jesus is by not coming ourselves.

If we as parents don't come to Jesus, if we as parents don't love Jesus, if we as parents don't serve Jesus, if we as parents are not coherent in our pretension of being Christians, then that is the most effective way of hindering our children from coming to Jesus.

[21 : 27] Because, you see, a child is the one most able to identify hypocrisy and double standards. We can fool others, but we cannot pull the wool over the eyes of our children.

They see the way we live. They see what's important to us. They see what our priorities are. They know that if we have other priorities, if our car, if our house, if our football team, if our money is more important than Jesus, that is so clear to them.

That is so clear to them. And so, if we do not come to Jesus, then that is the most effective way we can hinder our children from coming to Jesus.

And again, Scotland is full of such. How can we hinder children from coming to Jesus? By parents who, though they carried the name of Christians, lived out a very different message before their children?

How can we hinder children from coming to Jesus? But there is also the encouragement here of Jesus that we would positively facilitate the coming. Let the children come to me.

[22 : 36] How can we do that? In a way, the reverse of the things we've been saying about what we shouldn't do. But how can we positively facilitate the coming of children to Jesus?

Well, we must bring them to Jesus as we would bring them before Him in prayer, as we would bring them to the Sunday school, as we would bring them together as families, to church, to worship together, as we would engage in the worship of God in our homes, in family worship.

In these ways, we bring our children to Jesus. Now, these things involve time. They require time. And time seems to be in such short supply. And yet, I would remind you of what we have already noted about Jesus on the occasion in which He gives of His time to these children.

What was He doing? Where was He going? He was heading to Jerusalem. He was heading to Calvary. If ever He could have said, well, I don't have time for these children, it would have been on this occasion. But no, He has time for them.

And so, if He had time for them, who are we particularly as parents to say that we don't have time for these things? We have to make time for that which is important.

[23 : 51] How can we positively facilitate their coming? Well, as a church community with appropriate instruction, appropriate instruction that they can enjoy.

I'm not suggesting that we simply want to entertain children. There is that pressure, even within a church life, to simply reduce our instruction to entertainment.

That they would have fun. Now, I have nothing against fun. I'm all for fun. But we're not talking simply about dumbing down the instruction that we give to our children, but that the manner in which we instruct them, the manner in which we teach them in Sunday school and in other spaces that are provided, that it would be appropriate and enjoyable for them.

We think back to our school days, those who have a very, very good memory. There were teachers who didn't entertain us, who weren't great fun, but they taught us well, and we enjoyed what they taught because of the manner in which they did so.

And so equally, it is incumbent on us as a church that the education we provide, the Christian education we provide for our children be of great quality.

[25 : 00] And I encourage and I enthuse and I honor those who are involved in that work in our own church. Those who soon will be taking on, again, their duties at Sunday school as teachers and as leaders in different children's activities.

But I would, while I congratulate you and encourage you, I would also challenge you to seek to improve the manner in which you teach, to prepare better, to make use of opportunities that there are, to learn more and to train and to be better prepared for the very important task that God has given you.

When we think of the Sunday school, we have coming up in September a training day for Sunday school teachers that we are invited to. Wouldn't it be a good thing? Wouldn't it be a good demonstration that we take this seriously?

If all who are able can spend that day, I think in Falkirk, making use of that opportunity, this is a way in which we positively facilitate the coming of our children to Jesus by teaching them well in an appropriate and an enjoyable way.

That our church would be a children-friendly church. And that is something we could maybe think about a lot, but we won't delve into in great detail now. Where children feel welcome, but where mothers also of small children feel welcome and don't have reason to feel embarrassed or uncomfortable being in church with their young children.

[26 : 29] How can we positively facilitate their coming? And there's a whole area that we would need to consider that I'm simply going to mention in the passing. It's what about all those children out there?

Really all that I've said so far has been about the children in here, those who have the privilege of being part of a covenant community. But what about all those who are out there? All those out there, we're talking what, 90, 95 percent, if not more, of the children of Aberdeen.

How can we positively facilitate for them an opportunity to come to Jesus, to know Jesus, to be loved by Jesus, and to love Jesus?

We have the holiday club this week, and all those who are involved are in a very real way seeking to respond to that need and opportunity. And let us pray for that time.

Those who perhaps won't be involved with their physical presence, let us surround this week in prayer in our homes, that God would bless all that is done, and that children would indeed hear and understand and respond to the gospel.

[27 : 36] We think of the work of campaigners that will soon be recommencing and the need for helpers and leaders to become part of that work. And you say, oh, but I don't have time. Well, remember Jesus, heading to Calvary, and yet He had time.

Maybe you need to make time. How can we positively facilitate then the coming of all children, all those certainly who are within our sphere of influence, that they might come to Jesus?

But then finally, I just want to notice very briefly that Jesus gives an explanation for His attitude, an attitude that finds expression in the words that He directs to the disciples and the instructions that He gives.

Then in verse 15, we have the explanation. Jesus says, I tell you the truth. If you want to know why I'm annoyed, if you want to know why I'm so concerned that children should come to me, well, I'm going to tell you.

I tell you the truth. Anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter. Sorry, that's not the point. It's the end of verse 14. Let the children come to me and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.

[28 : 43] That phrase there in verse 14. For the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. What is the explanation Jesus gives for His attitude? Well, it is a simple one, but a very important one.

Jesus says, children belong with Me. Children belong with Jesus. They belong in church with God's people. They are part of the kingdom of God from the very youngest.

The very passage that we have before us, the word that is translated is little children. You might wonder, well, I wonder, of what age they were, but the very passage makes it clear that they were infants because there in verse 16 we read, and He took the children in His arms.

Now, clearly, that is speaking of very small infants. The passage in Matthew, actually, we have the word babies. Babies were being brought to Jesus. So, what has been spoken is of very young children, infants.

And Jesus says, they belong in the kingdom of God. They are part of a mind. a family. They must participate actively in church life, in our church life also.

[29 : 54] That is the reason why Jesus expresses Himself in this way. The kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Now, it's true that Jesus goes on to make another point.

He goes on to make a supplementary point there in verse 15 concerning the manner in which we as grown-ups, as adults, should approach Jesus. There in verse 15 that I read before time, I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.

That's a supplementary truth. And it's an important truth. But it's not the fundamental truth that Jesus is getting across. The fundamental truth is that Jesus is saying, children, infants, these infants belong to Me.

they belong in the kingdom. And He goes on to say, now that illustrates an important truth for grown-ups as well. But that's not the fundamental truth. It's another truth. The kingdom is made up of actual children of infants.

And so, that is something that we must embrace and take into account. And so, I say to the children, and I hope I haven't bored you already, although I probably bored you at least 20 minutes ago, but if you bear with me on that front, I would say to you, to the children present, you are welcome.

[31 : 13] You belong. Jesus invites you. At the age that you have now, He can be and wants to be your friend, your Savior, your Lord now.

And I say to parents and to others, let us expect our children to trust in Jesus. Let us bring our children to Jesus. If we are Christians, and if you are a Christian, your child, your children, they're not unconverted pagans.

No, they belong in the family of God. They belong in God's family now. The work that is done with children in Sunday school, it's not simply a work of sowing seed, though that is part of what is being done.

Rather, it is a work where we would look for and expect and plead for evidences of saving trust in Jesus now in our children. And it's a well-worn cliché, and I ask your forgiveness for using it even now, but it carries truth.

Children are not the future of the church, they're the present of the church. They belong with and to Jesus and now. So then Jesus gives His explanation for His response.

[32 : 30] Why is He indignant? Why does He instruct the disciples in this way? For this truth, the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. As we close, the task before us is an important task and it is an urgent task.

We're told on the occasion in which Jesus was receiving the children that we're considering, that immediately having done so, Jesus then went on from there.

He was heading elsewhere. This was perhaps the only opportunity that these parents would have had, the final opportunity these parents would have had to bring their children to Jesus, whatever their intentions may have been.

And as we think of the task that God has given to us, we think of our own children. As parents, I think one of the things we're very conscious of is how quickly they grow up. And we think, oh, the opportunities that have gone and have been missed.

But as we think of the children round about us and our responsibility to them, the task is certainly an urgent one. It is a reality that at the age when we are young, when we are children, moving into our teenage years, but certainly when we are very young, it is at the age when we are most open to the claims of the gospel.

[33 : 55] and it is a stage when it is so important to present those claims to those who will have no other opportunity of hearing them.

So let's do everything now that we might bring children to Jesus. Let us examine ourselves individually and as a congregation and ask ourselves the question that we began with.

Are we, are you, annoying Jesus? Let us pray.