



# HICKORY GROVE

BAPTIST CHURCH

The One Thing That Matters

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Mark 10:13-16

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*<sup>13</sup> And they were bringing children to him that he might touch them, and the disciples rebuked them. <sup>14</sup> But when Jesus saw it, he was indignant and said to them, "Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God. <sup>15</sup> Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it." <sup>16</sup> And he took them in his arms and blessed them, laying his hands on them.*

*(Pastor prays)*

I just have read to you one of the most famous stories in the Bible. In fact, the story of Jesus walking on the water has become a little bit of a cultural idiom. When you say that somebody walks on water, you are saying that they're perfect. You are saying that they have great power. You're saying that you are somehow so sure of their holiness that they walked on water. It's because the concept of walking on water is so foreign to all of us. It's inconceivable. This past week, when the rains fell on Thursday morning, it was a torrential flood here, this campus gets stuff washed every which way. Thursday was one of those days when I wished I could walk on water.

When I go into the water, I need something to keep me up. I need something

to float upon. We're familiar with that. We're familiar with needing a boat—or maybe skiing or tubing or paddle boarding, for those of you with balance. I cannot do that. You can get in the water, you can swim across the water. If you have had swimming lessons, you can stay up in the water, you can sit there and tread water. You can dive into the water. But walking on water—what does this story mean for me?

School starts, work begins, or retirement might stretch out in front of you. You might have hopes of marriage, or to live a single life. The kids grow up under your care, or you spend your life never having kids. What does this story mean to you? What does it mean in the world you face? I keep asking these questions to you because I've been asking these questions all week long. What does this mean? I mean, beyond Christ being with us in the storm. It's very common to talk about Jesus being with you in the storm. That's a good thing to have. But what else is here?

Do you know the word *sovereignty*? Do you understand the word *sovereignty*, and what it means for God to actually be sovereign? What does it mean for Jesus, His Son and our Lord, to be sovereign? I hope today to help you with that. Here is the theme of the message:

### **Knowing Jesus Is the One Thing That Matters**

The most basic form of government and the keystone of any healthy society is the family. The family. If you back up a little bit in chapter 10 of Mark, we talked about verses 1-12. It's a long passage. And if you read it for the first pass, you might think it is about divorce. But really, when you hear what Jesus says, He talks about the goodness of God in creating people, male and female, and bringing a man and a woman together from creation in marriage. Jesus talks about how marriage is a creation of God. It is given to us for human flourishing. He talks about the coming together of a man and a woman. It makes sense then, that after that conversation, He then turns His attention to children and the attention that should be given to getting those children into

the Kingdom of God. And in this passage, what Jesus does is He takes a real-life event, something that happened, and He turns that event into a teaching moment. He doesn't just teach about children. Don't stop there. In this passage, Jesus teaches us what it means to actually have saving faith. What it means to put your faith in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus and trust that He alone will save you. That means that this story is true on two levels. One level has to do with the children and the priority of doing everything that we can to get those who you are responsible for to the Lord Jesus. That is one rail of this story. There is another rail or level. The second level has to do with saving faith. What does it look like? What is the faith necessary to actually become a Christian? Now this is a really well-known passage. You don't have to be much of a Christian to know this passage. You know the song, "Jesus loves the little children, all the little children of the world," probably comes from this passage. And Jesus indeed does love the little children, but there's got to be more to it than that.

I've been trying to get at it all week long. If you're a Sunday school teacher or preacher, or you deal with teaching the Bible, you understand that sometimes the most familiar passages hold these truths that are just really hard to get to. So I started looking at the people in it. Who are the people in this passage? In verses 13-16, there are four major players in this drama. And we're all here in this drama. It opens up and there are the parents. So the parents have the responsibility. They're trying to get their kids to Jesus. Then you've got the disciples. They are sort of the boneheads in the story. They're trying to keep the parents from getting the kids to Jesus. And then, of course, there is Jesus, who is at the center of this. And finally, there are the children. And what we want to do is make sure that we keep Jesus right in the middle where He belongs, and then build a sermon that reflects the passage.

When Mark is telling us about children trying to get to Jesus...What does it actually mean to get to Jesus? What does it mean to be welcomed into the Kingdom of God? And what are the lessons that we will walk away with today? Here's what I want you to know: knowing Jesus is the one thing that

really matters. Let's start with the parents in verse 13. I'll try to make it as plain as possible. Here's the first point, number one:

### Parents Get Your Kids to Jesus

Look what Mark tells us in verse 13: *And they were bringing children to him that he might touch them, and the disciples rebuked them.* Who is the "they?" The "they" are the moms and dads, or could be a single mom. It could be a single dad, or it could be the two together. It could be aunts and uncles. It could be an older brother or a sister. It could be the grandparents. Basically, anyone who has responsibility for—or maybe you don't have direct responsibility—or anyone who has influence over a child, taking that child to Jesus.

Let's set the scene. What is going on in the scene? The scene seems to be that they know that there is a great man that has come into the village and this great man might be able to depart a blessing. So let's get the kids, let's gather them up and get the kids close to this great man, so that at least this great man can touch the children. Because it's been rumored that this man, when He touches people, they are healed or there's some sort of power or they receive a blessing. And the kids can't get there themselves. Somebody has to take them. Somebody has to have the wherewithal to get up or to sacrifice what you would rather be doing and get the kids to Jesus. Also, verse 13 is written in the perfect tense. What that means is this is not a one-off event, not a one-time thing. You could read it like this: they kept on bringing the kids to Jesus.

Let's see if we can make some applications. So you read it, talk about it, how does it apply? Maybe you have a child that likes sports and you take that child to a sporting event and there you get to meet a famous athlete. By some miracle, when you meet that athlete, that athlete signs a jersey and gives it to the child. Or maybe yours is not into athletics. Maybe you're reading books and you go to some *Harry Potter* event, or *Star Wars*, or that purgatory called Disney. Maybe that's where you go, whatever the vacation you go on. What

do you do? You save and you plan and you put it on the calendar and you make arrangements to make sure the pets are taken care of. You do all you can because you know it's gonna be something great. It becomes a big event. Brothers and sisters, someone 10 million times greater than any athlete or actor or Taylor Swift is here. Get your kids to Jesus. If it means changing your job, if it means rearranging your schedule, if it means missing a recital, or skipping a ball game, get your kids to Jesus. Look at me. The world is harsh. The Devil is real. Dangers are looming. Time is short. Get your kids to Jesus. They can't get there on their own. For a lot of you, you feel that God has given you a heart to do it. God has given you the means to accomplish it. God has given you the opportunity to bring your grandkids to Jesus. You won't have to wait in line. He will not sign a jersey. He's gonna do something infinitely better—10,000 times greater.

Do you know the phrase “the great exchange?” I would write that down in the margin somewhere. Let me explain it to you just briefly. It's the gospel. The Bible says that our righteousness, what we do even on our best day, is filthy rags. The problem of being covered with filthy rags, our own righteousness, is that God is a great King and He doesn't receive people covered in filthy rags. He only receives those with the right garments, and there's only One who has the right garment; His name is Jesus. The way He got it is that He lived perfectly. Let's not go to the cross yet. Jesus lived perfectly, keeping all of God's laws. He did that as a human, as a man, and when He goes to the cross, what He does is not only keep God's law earning righteousness as a man at the cross, but He then took the wrath of God. So all the sins of every sinner that will ever be saved, Jesus paid for them. He takes the punishment, and the exchange is that He takes your punishment and gives you His righteousness. So now you're not covered in your filthy rags, you are covered with the righteousness of Jesus. It's better than any signed jersey you'll ever get. And our responsibility is to get the kids to Jesus who you have influence over. Our responsibility isn't to save people. Look, for those of you who have wayward children, I want you to listen. You tried hard. You've been praying for them. You've loved them. And every chance you could, you made sure they heard

the gospel. You did it at home. You had devotions, you prayed for them at night. You got them to church so they could be under Bible preaching and in student programs. And they're still gone. That's not your job. Your job is like these parents right here. Get them to Jesus. You get them there, the touching, God will do that. The touching Christ will do that in His own time. What verse 13 tells us is that they were bringing their children to Him. What for? That He might touch them. You leave the saving to the kind mercy of Jesus. You just get your kids to Jesus. Who do you have influence over? Directly or indirectly, who is it that God has put in your mind and heart that you need to get them to Jesus? So that's the first point. Parents, get your kids to Jesus. Let me make the second point. It's very similar to the first. Here's the second one, number two:

### **Church Get the Kids to Jesus**

We looked at the parents, now let's look at the disciples. Join me there in verse 13. When you read it this time, look at the disciples and look what they did. What are they thinking? *And they were bringing children to him that he might touch them, and the disciples rebuked them.* Quit that, get those nasty kids out of here. They rebuked them. It's like they said, "What are y'all doing? Kids don't belong here." And when Jesus saw it, in verse 14, He was indignant. We'll come back to that. So we get to see the parents are trying to get their kids to Jesus, and the disciples, of all people—they follow Jesus—they're the ones that rebuke the parents. Now, let's pause here and give them the benefit of the doubt. That's something rare these days. Typically we'll automatically assume the worst. Let's not assume the worst. Let's assume the best; they are the disciples. Jesus has chosen them. They are following Him. What could they have been thinking? Why were they keeping the kids from Jesus? Maybe they've been traveling. They know that Jesus needs some time by Himself. They walk along the road and He's having all of these discussions and arguments with the Pharisees. Let's just give Him a break. Give Him time to rest. Kids, get out of there. Leave Him alone. Let Him rest. Or maybe they felt like Jesus needed His privacy. You know, He's always around a bunch of people. There's a throng around Him and He just needs a couple of minutes to

breathe. So you kids, leave Him alone. Or maybe the disciples have been with Him and they have seen how His popularity has grown. They've watched as He has healed people. They know that this is not an ordinary man, this is somebody special. Maybe they think He's so important that they need to put Him over here in the green room. Let's put Him over here like a celebrity. Let's put Him over in the green room, get Him something good to drink and to eat, and leave Him there. When He passes by, don't look Him in the face. Maybe they have Him in such high regard that they don't think the kids ought to be close to Him. Maybe they're doing something that they feel is serving Jesus, but it turns out that they are missing the whole point. Be careful—even solid motives can be behind colossal mistakes. Even good intentions become a pavement for the highway to hell.

Let's make sure as a church—just as individuals, disciples here at Hickory Grove—let's make sure that we don't put it over here in good motives. We have some good motives that overrun the ministry of getting kids to Jesus. I'll give you a for instance. By God's grace, we have a school here at Hickory Grove that's a ministry of the church; it's connected to it. It does not stand alone, it's connected to the church. We have 700 students here and the faculty. The leaders of that school believe in the gospel. They love the Bible. They not only preach and teach the gospel, the gospel invades everything they do. It's a genuinely, inherently Christian school. But it will run a facility into the ground with 700 kids walking through it every single day. They show up around 7 AM and don't get out of here till about 3 PM. And this morning, as I was coming down the steps, I stepped on a piece of gum that I know some rotten kid spit on the floor. And I saw it there and I thought, this is how dumb I am, I thought, "Is that gum? Let me just drag my foot across it to see." Well, yeah, it's gum, now it's on my shoe. And that's before I even got to church this morning. We have a Student Ministry that's going to participate in CLT WKND. So we have our Student Ministry down in the basement. And we have our AWANA Ministry, where we are seeking to get the Bible into kids. It's a whole lot of effort. Or we may be standing here in this auditorium, and oftentimes there will be crying babies. Somebody passed out balloons today

in the Children's Ministry. Don't do that anymore. In our church, we have kids going on to camp with resources and money being allocated for it. Is that all worth it? Look, do you understand that the overwhelming majority of people who will ever come to Jesus Christ, put their faith in Jesus before they turn 18? And if the kids don't find love, find acceptance and find truth here, they will find it in a devil's world. I'm not saying to condone sin. That is not what I'm saying at all. What I'm saying is that we need to show them, somehow, that Jesus is better than the deranged, fleeting entertainment of a hellish culture. That's what we do. We point to the goodness of God and Jesus. We stay late and we put up with headaches. We're flexible. Spend resources and are patient. And we make sure that we make a way for children and their families to get to Jesus. Otherwise, what is all this for?

Sunday rolls around, we call that the Lord's Day. We worship on Sunday because, on the third day, God raised Jesus from the dead. The day of resurrection is Sunday. Worship is not a performance. Worship is something you participate in when you come together. Brothers and sisters of all walks of life, of every part of this city and beyond who are redeemed by the blood of Jesus, we come together to sing, to be ministered to, to have our hearts knitted together. We come to be strengthened by the law. So if you walk in discouraged, you walk out with just enough to get you through again as we worship together. We learn things in our Community Groups, in AWANA, and in Student Ministry. We call that discipleship. That is learning what the Bible teaches about how we live and who God is and why we need Christ. As you grow as a disciple, you find out you ought to be looking out and doing something. After worship and discipleship, you learn that you want to be on mission. Not just on mission trips, which of course you want to do, but you want to be living on mission, and that mission is centered, oftentimes, around the children.

When you read this passage, you can't help but think that parents need to get their kids to Jesus. When you think about the disciples and how they get rebuked, you can't help but think about the church. Get the kids to Jesus.



Why? I'll give you the third point. Here's why; number three:

### There Is Hope In Jesus

Because there is hope in Jesus. There is hope for you in Jesus now. We've looked at the parents. We looked at the disciples and the mistakes they made. Now, let's look at Jesus. There are several things to notice about what Jesus did before we get into the lesson that He taught. So let's look at what He does first, before we look at what He taught down in verse 15. What do you see in verse 13? What did He do? What does Jesus do? *And they were bringing children to him that he might touch them.* Maybe Jesus touched the children with healing, maybe with blessing, maybe with warmth, possibly with assurance. Maybe He was providing confidence, giving strength, or calming.

A nonverbal touch can mean so much. I mean, it's too bad we live in a world that has gotten so foul that we have forgotten the power of human touch. Connie and I can be sitting together somewhere and she can sense that I am getting ready to say something that is a career-ending thing for me to say. She doesn't have to speak. She reaches and just touches. It's a reminder. It's calming. They bring their children to Jesus and the first thing that they want is just a touch. There's just something assuring about that. He does more than that, though. He touches the children and rebukes the disciples. And in verse 14 notice what happened: *But when Jesus saw it, he was indignant and said to them, "Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God."* Look at that word *indignant*. You're not going to see it anywhere else in the New Testament. So when you're trying to decipher words, and what they might mean, you really need to look at their usages. When you find a word in a certain verse, this is when you might use a concordance. You go find it in the other verses to see how is it used in other places. But you're not going to find this anywhere else, so you go outside of the New Testament into the culture of the day. You go to the Greek literature of the day, and you bring the word back from there. Then we find that we've never seen Jesus like this. He's not mad or sad...What is He? Frustrated. That's what the word means, *frustrated*. He's irritated at the disciples. He's annoyed

at them. Why? Because they are preventing children from coming to Him. So, if Jesus is annoyed at that, flip that coin over. Then the opposite must be true. If Jesus is annoyed when we keep children from Him, then He must be pleased when we bring children to Him. We want to please God, so bring the children to Jesus. Because His anger—and this is related to anger—His anger is reserved for anyone who will keep the kids from Him. Remember what Jesus said earlier in Mark 9:42: *“Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him if a great millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea.”* So Jesus rebukes the disciples, and the opposite is what He wants us to do. This is Jesus teaching. Bring them here. There’s something beautiful about verse 16. But before you look at it, if you’ve had a child die, if you have lost a child you loved, or if you’ve had an infant die or you suffered a miscarriage, I want you to look at and circle verse 16. There is healing in verse 16. Look what happens: *And he took them in his arms and blessed them, laying his hands on them.* What a beautiful picture of Jesus holding your child. What a beautiful picture of Jesus holding the children close. If that pain keeps you up at night, if you feel like the pain is not going away, verse 16 for you. This is here for you today. Or maybe that’s not your story. Maybe your story is the fact that, as a child, you were just unloved. You didn’t have people taking care of you. Or maybe you were taken for granted, possibly you were mistreated in some way. God forbid, you were abused and that has distorted in your mind what love is. Verse 16 is here for your soul. Run to the arms of Jesus. You’ll find love there. Why? Because there is real hope in Jesus.

So we’ve looked at the parents. Let’s go through what we’ve learned so far. Parents, get your kids to Jesus. We’ve looked at the disciples, they will become the church. Church, get the kids to Jesus. Then we looked at Jesus and we’ve heard what He says. We’ve just watched what He did and we see that there is hope in Jesus. Now, for a moment, let’s look at the children and make point number four:

**Take the Right Approach to Jesus**

Here's the teaching of Jesus. In this text, what Jesus does is He takes an event and turns it into a teaching moment and He says, "This is really not all about the children. This is about saving faith." Look at verses 14 and 15: *But when Jesus saw it, he was indignant and said to them, "Let the children come to me; I would circle that. 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."* There are a couple of things to see here. The first thing I want you to see is a parallel. There's a parallel in verse 14 and verse 15. There's a phrase Jesus says, "come to me," in verse 14 and then in verse 15, "receive the kingdom of God." They are parallels. Let the kids come to me and receive the Kingdom of God. So you make the sentence like this: to come to Jesus is to become part of the Kingdom of God.

How do you come to Jesus? Let me see if I can explain the gospel. I tried to explain it with the great exchange. Let me try again with the categories. We say it like this: The Bible teaches that God created us in His image. You have been created in the image of God. The image of God in you, however, has been disfigured by sin. That sin is a crime against the holiness of God. That crime deserves punishment. That means we're under condemnation. But that's not the end of the story. God is merciful. He has given us Jesus. Who is the God-Man. Jesus did what we were supposed to do—He kept the law and was in complete, unbroken fellowship with God. He did that as a human for us as our representative. And then as our representative or substitute, He goes to the cross. Why do we have the cross as a symbol? Because at the cross, Jesus took the wrath of God that we deserve and gave us His righteousness. So the promise of the gospel is what you receive: His righteousness. Christ did that for you. When you trust that He has done that for you, you receive the kingdom of God.

There's another lesson here about believing in verse 15. In verse 15 you find Jesus talking about childlike faith. Now look, don't sentimentalize this verse, we're shifting here. *"Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it."* Now, don't read that and think

that like a child means with wonder and awe and innocence. Look, that's not the Bible, that's *Hallmark*. That's not what Jesus is saying. Be careful when you ascribe innocence to a child. Presbyterian ministers, before they would baptize an infant, oftentimes would say to the congregation that the child is a viper in a diaper, because no one is innocent. If you have an 18-month-old, a two-year-old or you have a toddler, you know when they get old enough to actually choose, they choose some really wrong things. You don't have to teach that child how to sin. You didn't have to teach that child how to say, "No, it's mine." So what does Jesus mean when He says to have childlike faith? Children in that day and time would be insignificant. They would be weak and helpless, and they would be dependent. If you have a two-year-old toddler now, that toddler is dependent. She might be able to walk, but she's still dependent on you. The child is dependent, without the ability to actually make a contribution. Some adult children are like that. So to have childlike faith is to be entirely dependent, devoid of a real agenda, and to have total trust. What does the song say? "Nothing in my hands I bring, only to the cross I cling." What is saving faith? Saving faith is the insignificant, the weak, the dependent. This is you putting your complete trust in the gift of God that's found in Jesus Christ and receiving His life for yours. It's you receiving His substitute on the cross for your deserved punishment. It's you receiving His perfection as your clothing. Jesus says, "*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.*"

Knowing Jesus is the one thing that matters. Won't you today? Come to Jesus.

*(Pastor prays)*