

**Receiving the Kingdom  
Mark 10:13-16**

It's a noted principle and even application and way of living that people love to earn or achieve things. People love to work. They love to put out their efforts for whatever it might be, the tasks that are in front of them, and they love to be rewarded and awarded for those things. They love these achievements; we, our society that kind of runs on this at times. For our little ones in school, we have student of the month, honor roll, principle's list, and there's the dean's list, and as they get older, the valedictorian and all these different ways of honoring and trying to recognize what is good work, good work that is done. In sports, we do the same thing. That's all over the map. There's championships and trophies and medals for all that. There's most valuable players, there's all conference teams or leagues or all-star teams and all-Americans that are recognized. There's (we're really good at this one, too) the participation award. We give those. If you stepped onto the field, if you got onto the court, you get a pen (right?), or an ice cream cone or something. And there's the sportsmanship, even if you lost every game, if you had the good attitude, you got the biggest trophy or something like that. We do this in work as well. For your working in your companies, and the different incentives that are offered for hard work, for good work, the employees of the month, the promotions and the rewards points programs, all of this, it's the natural way of thinking, the natural way of living. Our society is built on this. For every area, there is this tendency to work hard and expect some reward because of our efforts. And mankind, naturally, because we have eternity written on our hearts as a common grace from God, all of mankind has carried over this way of thinking with regards to rewards and their efforts and brought it into eternity, brought it into the concept of Salvation, brought it into religion. Mankind has essentially tried to attain the greatest reward of all, eternal life. And they have come up with different ways of how to reach that, different efforts that can be taken, different deeds that can be done that will then result in eternal life, the ultimate reward beyond this life.

I mean, we just think about the different religions that exist that man has come up with. You think of Islam, a religion that teaches that all people are sinners and that salvation can be attained through observing and following the five pillars of Islamic practice; the belief that Allah is the only god and

that Mohammed is his messenger, performing the five daily prayers, fasting throughout the month of Ramadan, charity in giving to the poor, the pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in a lifetime if one can afford it. By performing these works, a Muslim hopes that at judgment day, somehow the recorded good deeds that they have will outweigh the bad. They will have eternal life. Buddhism, a different kind of religion, really still has the same way of thinking. It requires practicing four noble truths in order to be released from suffering. This is the goal. This is the eternal life. If this is the end product, to be released from suffering, then one must take certain efforts. One must perform certain deeds. The nature of existence is suffering must be believed. Suffering is caused by a desire or a thirst to experience existence, and the complete cessation of desire leads to the cessation of suffering; and in order to escape suffering and attain enlightenment, one has to follow the noble eightfold path. There it is, the different things that must be done. Eight practices of self training classified in three categories, morality meditation and wisdom. Even there, you see this high emphasis on morality, of doing something, of putting forth some effort, doing some type of good, and that will bring you to the end that you desire of enlightenment. In Hinduism, a somewhat similar but also different religion, it requires significant effort until oneness with the Brahman is attained. There is discrimination of the eternal from the non-eternal; you are not allowed to be attached to things belonging to this or any other world. And the possession of the six virtues must be upheld - calmness, equanimity, turning away from sense objects, forbearance, concentration, and faith in doctrine, and longing for release – still, good things that must be done, deeds that must be performed to attain that oneness.

Think of the different offshoots of different monotheistic religions that are also out there besides Islam. Mormonism, actually straight from their website you can see; “If your friends ask, “Does your church believe you are saved by grace or works?” you could say, “We believe that we are saved by grace after all we can do. We don’t earn salvation. Heavenly Father and the Savior will bless us with eternal life, through Their grace, if we do our part. They have asked us to have faith in Jesus Christ, repent throughout our lives, be baptized and receive other ordinances, and faithfully endure to the end. If we do that, we are promised eternal life through the grace of God.” Although they say it’s really not by works, it is by works, and from their own articles, they have, “We believe that through the atonement of Christ, all mankind may be saved by obedience to the laws and ordinances of the gospel.”

There's still the effort on man's part. Even Roman Catholicism has this. They require a cooperation with God's grace to receive, to attain salvation. From Catholicism.org, "In the matter of salvation, human cooperation with God's grace is necessary. God's grace is free and unmerited, but once He gives it, we must respond. Scripture shows in many places the nature of this cooperation with grace." In fact, their formula, really if you boil it down, is faith plus works equals right standing with God and justification. Whereas we know something different from what the Bible teaches, that is faith equals right standing with God. Faith equals justification out of which works and good deeds will flow.

Christianity is different from all these manmade attempts towards God and eternal life on this very issue. Christianity requires mankind simply to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you'll be saved. Confess with your mouth Jesus is Lord. Believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, and you will be saved. "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast." And this morning, we'll find the teaching of Jesus contributes immensely to this established truth and doctrine that we uphold, the doctrine that eternal life comes as a gift, not as a result of man's efforts and good deeds and work, but as a gift a gift from God.

Last week, we saw the shock of Jesus' words regarding divorce and how destructive it is. And of course, Scripture has so much more to say on the messy subject, but for that, I leave you to study 1 Corinthians 7 and other writings of Paul in the New Testament that govern that and help us navigate the messy waters of divorce and remarriage. And in this morning's passage, we find this passage sandwiched between two greater passages highlighting the useless efforts of mankind. If you just look at what we have covered and then what will come after this, we've come from a place where Pharisees and their self-righteous upholding of the Law are coming to try and test Jesus, thinking that they have it figured out, and they are teaching the people to live by the Law, and then you will receive eternal life, and furthermore, if you were to jump down to verse 17, the classic exchange between Jesus and this rich young ruler where he is wanting to inherit eternal life, and he is relying completely upon the commandments that he's obeyed, the good things that he has done.

These efforts of mankind - and today, in our small text in Mark 10:13-16, we see Jesus throw that all out the window, completely turns their way of thinking on its head and establishes that eternal life is a gift. Let's look at our verses this morning, Mark 10:13-16; "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 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." ...this small passage that is often even overlooked but weighty in what it teaches in regard to Salvation and eternal life for mankind.

First, as we get into this passage, we see how it is all set up because of these children, these little ones, and in verse 13, we see the prevention - the prevention, at least the attempt to prevent by His disciples in verse 13; "And they were bringing children to him that he might touch them, and the disciples rebuked them." ... "...the disciples rebuked them." Here we have a transition back into the public sphere. As we saw at the beginning of our passage last time, they were in public. It was a debate about divorce. The Pharisees were there running it, and you had everyone else gathering around with Jesus as they were traveling and making their way to Judea and Jerusalem for the Passover. In verses 1-9, this was the case, but then in verses 10-12, we saw it shift, and it became private. Jesus was just talking more about the matter with His disciples in the house.

Well, now today, we obviously have a shift back because whether that was still in that context or they had actually left the house and were starting to go, we have these families coming. We have "...they were bringing children to him..." It's a kind of vague "they." We're not really sure who the "they" is, but based on the fact that we have children being brought, it's a safe assumption to say these are parents. These parents of these children are coming and bringing them to Jesus. And "children" even is a vague word. It's a more open-ended word. It's actually the same word used for the little girl that was twelve years old that had died and Jesus brought back to life, but it is also used at other places to refer to infants and babies. Well, when we actually look at the parallel account in Luke 18:15, we see that Luke uses the word for babies, literally babies, not just generic children but babies, and also, in the end of our passage in verse 16, we see that "...he took them up in

his arms...” So, what we have before us are little children, little children and babies, infants and little children that are being brought or attempted at least to be brought to Jesus.

They were bringing the children in order that, as the text says, Jesus “...might touch them...” And so, we ask what is this in reference to? If we just go back through how Mark has written his gospel, every time we have Jesus laying His hands on or touching people, it’s all in reference to healing. And so, we think, is that what the case is here? Are these parents binging their sick children to Jesus? It’s not what Mark says, and it’s not necessarily what any of the other gospels say. It’s just them bring their children “...that he might touch them...” And we find out more information, not only from our text but even other passages as we look at Matthew 19:13; “Then children were brought to him that he might lay his hands on them and pray.” It’s this form of blessing as we see in verse 16 of our own account, very typical for Jewish parents at that time; at least some of them had this practice of bringing their children to a local synagogue, a local rabbi, some holy man that could somehow pray for their child to be established in the Law, to have a healthy marriage and many kids, a good family - all these things that you kind of wanted for your kids that went beyond the spiritual expectations but really even the physical as well, so more than likely, they’re used to this habit, and here they are coming to Jesus the one that they’re identifying as rabbi and teacher.

The disciples don’t like this. Our text says, “...the disciples rebuked them.” It’s a strong word. It’s a strong word that is actually used for this, how they rebuked these parents for trying to bring children to Jesus. Notice they didn’t kindly dismiss them or say, hey, can we take a message and we’ll have Him get back to you? It’s none of that. It’s a rebuke, a rebuke to these parents and the children. How dare you try to come and interrupt Jesus’ time. How dare you try to come and get in the way of His schedule. I mean, the disciples must’ve viewed themselves as the guardians of Jesus and protector of His time and ministry since He was getting so popular, and this is what they do. They’re rebuking these parents, preventing these little ones to be brought to Jesus.

Amazing, considering what we just saw in Mark 9. I mean, literally, if you just look right back to Mark 9:35-37 and what we saw there; Jesus having a good moment with His disciples, teaching them that they “...must be last of

all and servant of all.” And in order to give a perfect illustration of how low they must go in their service, how far they must go in their ability to “ ‘...be last of all and servant of all.’ And he took a child and put him in the midst of them, and taking him in his arms, he said to them, ‘Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me...,’ ” He just taught them this. He just taught them the level at which they must be willing to serve, that they take even the most insignificant of society at that time, a child who can’t contribute to society, who wasn’t doing things that are actually good and contributing to the family or even what’s taking place. They’re helpless. They need attention often, much attention. They take more than they give. And Jesus says, yes, you even serve that one, and now, here the disciples are with an opportunity, and they rebuke the parents, trying to send away these little ones. It continues to confirm for us not just that the disciples are slow to learn and understand, but also that children were really insignificant at this time. This is the nature of the society and first century Judaism even. This is just how children were, kind of helpless, insignificant, until they could actually start to do something and contribute in some way. But Jesus takes this moment, this unfortunate moment where the disciples are acting up, and He actually uses it for another teachable opportunity like He often does.

And we see in verse 14, the permission - the permission that He goes on to state. Verse 14, the permission - we read, “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.’” As the disciples rebuked these parents and the children, now Jesus turns around and rebukes them, essentially “...he was indignant...” He’s actually filled with some anger here. The last time we saw this mention of Jesus’s anger was in Mark 3, that time when Jesus was in the synagogue on the Sabbath, and the religious leaders and the Pharisees had planted a man in the synagogue that had a withered hand to see if Jesus would do any work on the Sabbath by healing this man. They try to set traps for Him. They work on the Sabbath to try to trap someone else in the work of healing, and Jesus was filled with anger for these religious leaders for preventing the work of God. In the same way, He’s indignant, angered that there would be a prevention here, that the disciples still don’t get it. They still don’t understand the level of service that they must provide, and He says to them, “Let the children come to me; do not hinder them...” He rebukes them, first with the positive command, “Let the children come to me...” a call to permit or allow the children to come;

and then, the negative command, the prohibition, "...do not hinder them..." Don't forbid them. Don't stop them. Let them come.

But it's not just the caring and the compassion of Jesus that is coming out in this rebuke of His disciples. It's a very shocking statement that then comes next when He says, "...for to such belongs the kingdom of God." ... "...for to such belongs the kingdom of God." As Jesus is speaking of these children, what is He saying? What exactly does He mean, "...to such belongs the kingdom of God."? Well, let's think about what He's not saying. He's definitely not declaring the immediate salvation of these literal children that are right in front of Him. He's not examining these children and thinking, wow, this is really the cream of the crop right here. They'll be saved. The kingdom belongs to them. He's not looking at their parents. He's not assessing the families and sizing it up and going, wow, this is a good family that they're actually bringing their kids to Me. They know what is happening. They understand. They get it, so, too, their children belong. They get a free pass into the kingdom. That's not what He's doing. He's not speaking directly and granting salvation directly to these particular children only; instead, He seems to be speaking in a more universal and generic sense as He speaks. Also, He's not merely speaking on the level of illustration with no implication at all for the fate or destiny of children.

Some people might try to argue this. If this is all He's trying to do, just simply see a child and use it as an illustration, then, why this strong language for His disciples? Why rebuke them if He's just trying to use an illustration? And if it's only for illustrative purposes, then why does Jesus actually gather the children and infants up to pray for them and to actually bless them? Is it just because He's a nice guy? If it's only for the purposes of illustration, He would've jumped straight to what He says in verse 15. That's the illustration when He says, "Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it." That's His illustration, so what is He doing in the verse before? What is He doing here in verse 14? It's not just simply an illustration when He says, "...to such belongs the kingdom of God." He's making a pronouncement. He's making a clear statement. He's making a claim. He's saying that the kingdom of God actually belongs to children and infants. It's what He's actually saying: the kingdom of God is actually made up of such as these children and infants, children, the small insignificant and needy, children, the ones who have no social status among the people, children who can give nothing to people and

can give nothing to God at this point, yet Jesus says the kingdom belongs to this class of children.

It belongs to these little ones. It's this stunning statement, especially when you have a bunch of adults in first century Judaism who are trying to work their way to God, essentially, who are trying to uphold the Law, who are trying to get themselves into the kingdom, and here's Jesus talking of children, saying there it is. The kingdom of God belongs to these infants that can do nothing, these children that can contribute zero. It is not just a stunning and shocking statement by Jesus, but it really is, among Scripture, a comforting statement, a most comforting statement that comes from our Lord. It helps us think correctly about the eternal destiny of the countless souls who have been aborted, miscarried, stillborn, or even taken at a young age. We have all been aware of this and connected even to this tragedy as it occurs, as it did occur and continues to occur. Where are they? We're faced head on with this question. These souls, these people, that have passed at such a young age, these tragedies - according to Jesus, they're in the kingdom. They're in heaven. It's a beautiful statement that He's making, and really Jesus' words here, as clear as they are, aren't the only words of Scripture that we have on this topic. There is more that Scripture can say about this topic as it is so vital and so common.

First, consider and join me in this rabbit-trail to try and answer more of this question beyond what Jesus says. Consider what Paul says about condemnation for mankind. In Romans 1, you read how all mankind stands condemned. and they are in fact without excuse before God, and the question is how does Paul make that argument? How does he come to say such things, that mankind is without excuse before God? It's because of His creation. It's because of what God has revealed about Himself that man can plainly see and know and understand. And so, when we think about little ones, infants and little children, have they had the ability, the capacity, to observe the reality of God's creation? The obvious answer is no, they have not. So, this condemnation that Paul speaks of is not applicable to them in that particular way.

We can even dive back into the Old Testament and find an illustration of this in the life of David, the common story of David's error, and some of the sinful moments of his life. When he saw Bathsheba, and he lusted after her, and he had her, and then from that there was adultery and a child that was



born, and David in his attempts to cover up this adultery actually had Uriah the husband of Bathsheba killed in the front lines of battle - the murder that then David commits. And so, this child is born, this child of adultery, and God strikes this child with disease and sickness, and immediately, like any parent, David is broken. He's on his knees. He's crying out to God. He's fasting. He's actually removing himself from people and society, and he's just broken about this as he prays that God might deliver this child and bring this child to full health. And in this process, it comes to a point where the baby passes, is no longer able to live, and David's counselors and the people in the house are thinking, man, he's broken and crushed at the fact that this child is sick. Imagine how he's going to respond when we tell him that the child is no longer with us. And David senses this and realizes what has happened, and he does the opposite of what they would think. He stands up. He goes and he takes a shower. He starts eating. He changes his clothes. And the counselors are confused, and the people are thinking, David, how is this possible? Why were you so broken when the child was still here and sick, and yet the child is gone and you're okay? And David's response is pretty clear. He says the child may not come to me, but I may go to the child; and he's clearly referencing a hope that's beyond just the grave. He's clearly referencing a hope that is eternal in heaven - David's confidence that he would see this child again in heaven.

And what a difference that is with how David responds to and interacts with his other son Absalom the rebellious one who actually kind of splits the kingdom and makes it an insurrection of sorts, and is so rebellious and sinful that when Absalom dies, David weeps and mourns. And you think, you were weeping and mourning for Absalom, but not for your baby that died. And there's a difference because David had confidence that he would see his baby again, but not necessarily so with Absalom the rebellious one. This example of David's confidence continues to show that he believed in a gracious and merciful God, and the fact that babies, infants, and children are in the presence of God when they leave this life.

You think of even God's own character, beyond this example of David, but how God interacts and speaks to the prophets about the nations and about children, beyond even Israel. You think of how God deals with Jonah, and the end of Jonah when Jonah is so stubborn and just ready for God to decimate and destroy all of Nineveh. And yet God has compassion on Nineveh, and there's a revival and those that are saved. And Jonah's mad

because he wants God to destroy them, these pagan people, and yet God says in Jonah 4:11, “And should not I pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know their right hand from their left...” Those that “...do not know their right hand from their left...” speaking of children. When do you know that? When you’re three maybe? Little ones, these little ones in Nineveh, and God’s saying, Jonah, come on, even think of the little ones. Can’t I have mercy and compassion on them? In fact, when you have some of the darkest times for the nation of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah and how they began to give themselves over to this idolatry, and it’s so bad and so rampant that they actually by means of worshipping other god’s, they take their children and offer them up as sacrifices to these other gods, and as they adopt these pagan practices, God confronts them and calls them out. He says for you offering your babies, you’re offering the blood of innocent ones, these little babies.

And furthermore, in Ezekiel 16, God actually goes so far as to call them “...my children...,” not their children they’re offering them up, and yet God says these are “...my children...” that you’re doing this with in your sinfulness. God clearly has His heart for the little ones that He has demonstrated all along. And you even look to the end, and you look to places like Revelation chapters 5 and 7, and you see a glorious picture in the throne room of God in heaven. And who is worshipping around the throne? People from every tribe, tongue, nation, and language, people from all over the earth. And you and I can figure and we have a little bit of knowledge to know that the gospel is not necessarily everywhere. It’s not necessarily all over the earth in all the nations, and the Bible is not translated into every language. Yet, there have been babies, there have been children, that are God’s children, that have passed from this life into His presence all around the globe.

Based on these references throughout Scripture and what Jesus says here, it seems clear that God has given the kingdom to babies, children, and those who don’t have the mental capacity to process God’s creation and right from wrong. This is God’s heart. This is how God operates. Think of Jesus’ statement, and think of the challenge that it is for the people that are there, the people working so hard because they want something in return. They want that achievement. They want to say that they’ve spent their life examining the Law, memorizing and upholding it, so that they can earn it. They can earn heaven. They can earn eternal life. And yet Jesus says the

kingdom of God belongs to children who have done nothing, who have not exerted the effort that you are trying so hard. These people too were accustomed to working for and achieving things. Instead, Jesus says the kingdom of God belongs to such as babies and children.

And after stating this truth, Jesus actually expands His teaching on Salvation and the kingdom, and tells us more about the nature of eternal life and how mankind can be certain of it. And that's what we find in verse 15, the principle in verse 15. He goes on to say after stating this truth, verse 15, "Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it." This phrase, "Truly, I say to you..." indicates that an important concept or principle is coming. Jesus does this at times in His teaching; "Truly, I say to you..." Listen up. This is a fact and a truth that you must know. This is a concept that is vital to your living. Jesus explains why the kingdom of God belongs to childlike individuals. The salvation of children is not simply a truth based upon the character of God, although it is. Because of God's character, we can be confident in that. The salvation of children is also an illustration for the nature of how salvation works; that it's a gift, a gift that God gives to man. And if Jesus did not mean that children and infants are belonging in the kingdom, then His whole illustration breaks down. If He didn't actually mean it when He said it in verse 14, then His illustration here in verse 15 means nothing. But He meant it, and that's why He goes on to give this principle that whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child, shall not enter it.

The principle is a negative principle as you can tell. If you don't do this then you will not enter it. It's actually one of the strongest, it is the strongest way to present a negative statement in the Greek language as Mark writes this and as Jesus, I'm sure, spoke it in the ESV translation that I've read here. It says, "...whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it." In the NASB, as some of you might have, it says, "... whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it *at all*." Showing a little stronger there. Some propose, actually, that it should say, "...whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child [will never] enter it." And some have actually said it's probably best and actually conveys the strength of the statement to say, "...whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child [there's no way in the world that he or she will ever enter it." Okay, I think you get the point. It's a big deal. It's a huge deal. This is not saying if you really want to set yourself up for a high

probability of going into the kingdom, here's what you should do; receive it like a child. That's not what He's saying. He's saying, if you don't receive it like a child, you don't have a chance. You don't have a chance at all. It's a strong principle surrounding the concept of salvation. We have to understand this.

So, let's look at this principle, the content itself. How does one "...receive the kingdom of God like a child..."? How does that even work? What does it mean to "...receive the kingdom of God like a child..."? Though some are quick, well, you can think of children, and you know how they are. Little ones, they're innocent. You need to be innocent like little children to enter the kingdom, and the reality is that's not necessarily so or true. Other people actually go so far as to say, and this is maybe a little more common, maybe the full faith and trust that a child often displays, maybe, it's a child-like faith that is being referenced here. That is how you enter the kingdom, with this child-like faith. Unfortunately, it sounds good, but it's not really what Jesus says. He doesn't say you need faith like a child. He just says you need to receive the kingdom like a child. Additionally, do babies in your experience and small children really portray an active faith? Are they even able to do that? Can you read their mind? Do you know what they're thinking? Are they really portraying this active faith? In fact, one commentator said, "This child-likeness does not refer to any supposedly inherent quality that children are said to possess or humility or trustfulness or transparency or helpfulness, modesty or willingness to even believe. Children can also be demanding, short-tempered, sulky, stubborn, thankless, and selfish." We call it childish behavior for a reason. Children are not this child-like faith model as we so often uphold. There's also the other side of it, and not all children have a Christian family or have been born into this covenant family that honors Christ or are holy and righteous parents as some would like to say that is being referred to here. That's not at all present. Nothing is said about the parent in this passage. It's intentionally silent about the parent - nothing about them.

What is this referring to? What does it mean to "...receive the kingdom of God like a child..."? It's referring to how children receive things, without any effort or any work. Is that not how children receive things? Zero effort and zero work, that is how a baby receives things. I mean, think about it; the thought is absurd. You don't feed a baby based upon whether or not they were obedient that day. No one does that. That's a ridiculous thought. We

perish the thought from our minds. We all know that children are helpless on their own, so how do they receive things? Without doing anything. They did not earn any of it. They didn't achieve it. They didn't earn the meal. They didn't earn the nap. They didn't achieve any of those things. They are helpless. So too, the kingdom of God must be received like a child, in the way that a child receives everything, like a gift, like a gift that it is. So too, must anyone who's wishing to enter the kingdom of God or receive it, not working for it, but receiving it like a gift that it is from God. That is how you, that is how I, that is how we receive the kingdom of God, like a gift, without work on our part, without any effort to show and point to and give reason for why we accomplished it. It's a gift.

Think of what else Scripture says about this. We know this to be true. John 1:12-13; "But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God." We have been born again, not by our own efforts but by God, by Him doing it. Ephesians 2:8-9; "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, 9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast." And it's worth reflecting on this truth that when you're in heaven (you like to imagine what might be done), but there's no boasting in heaven. Please remember that. That is clear. I will not approach Paul and talk about all the amazing things that Paul did, I will not approach Peter or some of the Old Testament saints and talk about how great they were, I'm not going to even talk about anything good that I have done if I have anything to say, that's not the focus. There's none of the boasting because it was all a gift. It was all a gift, so the focus necessarily is on Christ, on the giver of that gift, on the giver of that gift, God Himself, not us.

It's as Paul states in Titus 3:4-7, "But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life." His grace, His grace, His gift, His Salvation that He gives to us in His Son. We are recipients. We are like a child. We are like children and infants. We receive this gift of salvation. Once again, think of the confrontation to His audience. Think of the confrontation to the religious leaders. Think of the

confrontation to the people themselves, the parents even. They've been brainwashed into thinking that they're good deeds would give them right standing with God. That's how they've operated. That's how they've functioned. That's what they've been told. The reality was that no one could be or ever will be right with God through the Law, through observing the Law, through obeying the Law. Instead, the Law condemns us as sinners and shows mankind's need for a Savior. That's what the Law does.

What a confrontation this is to every human being living today, to those trying to be right before God. They must stop. You cannot be right before God. You can never be right before God on your own. If you've failed at one point of God's Law, you're guilty of breaking all of it. You are a lawbreaker. You are a transgressor. You are a sinner in God's eyes, and that's what we all are. Instead, we must look to the One who knew no sin and became sin for us. Stop giving yourself so much credit. Stop trying to point to all the good things you've done. Put on the Lord Jesus Christ. Throw yourself at the foot of the cross and worship the perfect lamb who was slain for the sins of the world. Receive like a child, receive His life and death on your behalf as the only means of entering into the kingdom of God. It's not some mild offer. It's not some probability. This is an urgent mandate; failure to receive Jesus is the same as rejection. Do not put yourself in the position of rejecting God's free, good and righteous gift, His one and only Son. It's a beautiful gift. It's a wonderful message. It's good news. Don't become like all these manmade religions and try to earn it. You receive it. That's what faith is, receiving this gift.

And after addressing this very nature of Salvation, Jesus returns to address the very children that are right in front of Him. And that's where we see the prayer - the prayer in verse 16. Verse 16, we read on; "...And he took them in his arms and blessed them, laying his hands on them." ... "...he took them in his arms..." The same way as we saw back in Mark 9, when He gave the illustration of serving even children and embracing that child, so too, He embraces these little ones and these infants, "...blessed them, laying his hands on them." This is not some magical or mystical thing as some commentators have stated; "The benediction bestowed on these children did not confer upon them any special magical or spiritual virtue or quality. In keeping with Jewish rabbinical practice, Jesus was fervently invoking God's blessing upon them," Another has said, "There's no special liturgical significance in the laying on of hands. It is a natural sign of association used

often in healing but also as a traditional symbol of blessing. As we see in the Old Testament as father's do with their children, laying their hands on their children and committing them to God and praying for them at multiple times and moments in their life as they bless them by asking God to work in them." Just as Jesus continues to pray for His disciples. as we know in John 17, in the high priestly prayer, He prays for His own disciples there. He even prays for the future followers of Him, you and me. He has prayed for all of us and blessed us unto His Father.

Since Salvation is in God's hands, He gives it out as a gift. We request His mercy and grace to be extended to sinners like us. That's the plan. That's the dividing line in Christianity. That's where Christianity has set itself apart from every manmade attempt at eternal life. They all fall short because they all have a different way of trying it, but it's all based on human effort. It's the greatest misconception and lie, and it's being propagated and spread to no end. It's the way people think. It's the nature of the fall. It's how we want to think. We want to "...think of [ourselves] more highly than [we] ought to think..." rather than falling on our knees, admitting that we are helpless. We are like children; we have nothing we can give to God. How will you add to His holiness? What will you do to advance His plan on your own (like you have the ability to do that)? You are simply a child. You are simply a vessel that God uses for His plan, for His purposes. These religions of the world continue to demand man's efforts in order to make himself right with God, the higher being, or the universe itself. Fortunately, we don't have to worry about such efforts to make us righteous in God's sight; instead, we have the blessing of standing on the solid rock of Jesus Christ. We are dressed in His righteousness alone. We don't come offering anything else. There's nothing in our hands that we bring to God. We cling to the cross. We cry out to God, knowing that we have nothing in and of ourselves, but everything because of Jesus His Son. Let us be a church that reflects this attitude, this way of salvation that has not been accomplished by us. Let that be known about us, that we are people who have been lavished with peace and love and mercy, and let that motivate us to tell others this beautiful message that sets itself apart from every other attempt of man.