

Sunday 7th June 2020 10 am

“The Kingdom, beckoned – or barred?”

Online service sheet during the coronavirus.

Reading Psalm 99,100

Reading Mark 10:13-16

(see also Matthew 19:13-15 and Luke 18:18-25)

Sermon Title: “The Kingdom, beckoned – or barred?”

Listen to today’s sermon by clicking on the link at www.knbc.org.The audio file is **20_05_07.mp3** in the sermons directory

Reflective prayer what does this mean for me Lord.....

Close -----

Welcome

Again welcome to you as you join with us this Sunday morning at KNBC. In our sermon series we continue to look at those Jesus met, today we see children brought to him. Have you read Mark 10:13-16? If not then press the ‘pause key’ now, stop the tape at this point and read it. Now let us pray.

- You are stunned, you’ve lost colour, It’s been a shock that’s left you numbed. How could it have happened? As you slowly walk away from the door you mutter to yourself “How could I be refused entry? Why couldn’t I go in?”
- You have been invited to a special event. You’ve paid the fee, ordered the tickets and can’t wait for the day to come. Dressed in your best outfit you arrive full of excitement for the time has come. You walk confidently up to the entrance with ticket in hand. There is a moment of waiting while the doorman glances down at your ticket, then another glance. He looks up at you and in the clearest of terms says “you cannot come in here”. You do not have the right ticket. That ticket did not come from us, it’s a forgery. You remonstrate but it’s to no avail, the man is adamant, the way is barred, you won’t be going in. Eventually you turn away, and walk off despairingly.

You may be thinking what has this to do with Jesus welcoming the little children? Quite, the sermon title is: “beckoned - or barred? The K of G B/B?

Why do the gospel writers include this short section? Was it just an event worthy of a few lines at most, as a newspaper editor fills a space in the paper designed for other ‘less important news’, the “news in brief” column. This account of Jesus and young children has a serious message about entry into the Kingdom of God. Jesus holds up to you and I the STOP/GO sign.

✚ So here’s the main point. It’s a small section – but it has a big point!

Firstly, when Jesus wants to underline something he says: “**I tell you the truth**”. Jesus always tells the truth so he doesn’t need to say it. No here is something that is really important. He wants you, the listener, to listen carefully. Words can fly away, He is saying, “think about it, make sure you understand what I am saying, consider it seriously, - for it affects you”.

15 I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.” (in Mk and Lk)

He has children all around him, his hands are on their heads, he is picking them up in his arms, but all this is the visual aid to reinforce the message about how to enter into the Kingdom of God.

✚ It’s a memorable scene - for a memorable message!

Background

You ask “Just how old are the children? Mt and Mk speak of **little children**, Lk has a different word translated **infants**, so we are talking about pre-school, playgroup age, 0-1,2 - for they are in his arms.

So Jesus’ words are not directed towards them for they are still young.

Nor is it, as often happens in many countries, you walk down the street and find yourself surrounded by young children, no, here they are brought by ‘people’ presumably parents or older brothers or sisters.

We read from Mark who says v10 **they were in the house again** - So was this an impromptu desire to seek the Master’s blessing on the children now he was with them? **People were bringing little children to Jesus** suggests more.

Children are precious to Jesus; in Matthew’s account this section starts with ‘**then**’ In other words this follows on from the time just before when Jesus is talking with the Pharisees about marriage. God’s purpose in marriage is about the joy, and responsibility, of the bringing up of Godly children. In Malachi we read: **Has not the LORD made them one? In flesh and spirit they are his. And why one? Because he was seeking godly offspring. So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith with the wife of your youth.** 2:15

However, I wonder if there's another simpler, more immediate reason? Maybe "**People were bringing little children to Jesus to have him touch them,** because they had seen how he could heal by touching or laying his hands on the sick.

Remember the leper? **Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!" Immediately he was cured of his leprosy.** Mt 8:3
Or **When the sun was setting, the people brought to Jesus all who had various kinds of sickness, and laying his hands on each one, he healed them.** Lu 4:40
There's Peter's mother-in-law: Jesus **touched her hand and the fever left her,** Mt 8:15

Well these children are not sick are far as we can tell, but these parents believe Christ has power to transform, - and they want Christ's blessing on their children. *It's a good thing for a mother to want!*

Yet as Jews I suspect they had something else in mind, - the passing on of a blessing. Isaac did so with Jacob and Esau, so also at the end of Jacob's life he administered his blessing by placing his hands on the sons of Joseph.

Surely the lesser is blessed by the greater. Here little children are brought to Christ as needing blessings from him.

✚ **We cannot do better than seek this for our children. x2**

Jesus takes up the children and blesses them, what a delightful picture it is. It is strongly conveyed by the word in Greek (*kateulogei*), occurring nowhere else in the NT: *'He blessed them fervently, again and again.'*

Where you brought as a child to Jesus? Have you brought your children?

If only more parents would bring their children to Jesus. How good it is to bring them to Him. How important to be concerned for these young lives, do you give attention to the state of your children's soul?

■ **I quite often receive phone calls from mums enquiring for their children. They have the wrong number of course; They want the parish office. Why are they ringing? To 'Have them done'.**

Is there a real care for the spiritual life of their children? Mostly not.

Did they expect that a blessing could and would be imparted as the minister takes them in his arms touches their forehead, perhaps with water, and pronounces a blessing?

Jesus can impart grace, early on the Apostles could also impart grace in the giving of the Spirit – which is the same thing. Salvation is a gift from God – and He gives - it not man.

But can a minister today impart grace? No. I can place my hands on them & I can pray for them, - and so can you. But the gifts come from God - not us.

Some people ask me to bless their children, or have a service to bless their children. They think there is some transmission of grace, some working of God that pronounces them eternally secure. No. We cannot effect grace to babies, young children - or anyone else!

At KNBC we don't christen or baptize babies or infants. However, we will have a service of blessing. - And what is the blessing? The commitment of the parents – and also those present - to bring up children in a godly way.

■ **Do you have God parents? – For me it was Tom Rogers who spent his life in south America I never met (except that once!) and Anne Little only known because her nephew rang up out of the blue 3 weeks ago to say she had died. Who? Who? I had no idea.**

✚ **The way children are blessed is through them having Godly parents. x2**

It is good to bring children to Jesus, but don't forget yourself! - you must bring yourself!

■ **On an aeroplane when the cabin pressure drops the Oxygen masks fall from the console – you all know who has it first? Don't you? You do, the adult, you put the mask on yourself first, it is not an act motivated by selfishness, No rather we are then able to help put the Oxygen mask onto others.**

So you want to see children blessed? Make sure you have it first yourself, then you can lead them well, there are enough blind guides already - don't you be one!

Obstacles

Well there are obstacles. Indifferent parents are obstacles, but there are others. People brought children to Jesus and in his love for them he welcomed them - and welcomes them today - **but the disciples rebuked them.** Why? Did they think he is unconcerned for them as not important, or he's just too busy?

Not with Christ, He is never 'too busy' nor is he unconcerned, but receives anyone who comes, saying **whoever comes to me I will never turn away**

✚ **What a wonderful promise!**

A wonderful promise to children - who in many societies have little value. Here children are treated like little gods – as if the world revolves around them! Instead of children following their parents - parents follow children.

However so often it is the opposite extreme, where children are left to their own devices and barely considered to be part of society at large until they grow up to take their place as adults.

Jesus was **indignant, do not hinder them, let them come to me**. How precious they are to him. He would have none of it and calls out "**Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.**"

His willingness to receive them - is a picture of how he is willing to receive you - If you will learn this lesson and become like a child.

Yes that's right - it's a message to the adult listener!

What is Jesus saying? **the kingdom of God belongs to such as these**. To be received into the Kingdom of God you must come **like a little child** - ¹⁵ **anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.**" (in Mk and Lk)

The main message is not directed to children, No Jesus is taking to the 'anyone'. **Anyone** and everyone. So this passage is not about them - but about those there watching and listening, it is about you and I now.

The kingdom of God

- Where were you born? For me it was Spain, I was told to keep away from Spain when I was 18 or I might be enlisted in the Army! I am not Spanish but English. What is your nationality? Whatever you are, you and I are all born into one kingdom, the kingdom of this world.

We soon discover it is not such a good place, there is sorrow, misery and death. No-one escapes these. It also has a pull, an appeal, a way which many like to **follow**, to follow this is to follow **the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient**. Eph 2:2. - It's a wicked world with a wicked ruler behind it.

For all its glitz and promise, it is devoid of hope it. For all it's supposed progress – it won't last. It will all go, everything seen will go, it will all be destroyed - and we too with it.

But Jesus spoke of another kingdom, "**My kingdom is not of this world. .. my kingdom is from another place.**" Joh 18:36 the Kingdom of God, His kingdom is an eternal kingdom, a kingdom of light and eternal life etc.,

One day there will not be two kingdoms - but only one "**The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever.**" Re 11:15

Now is the time to flee this kingdom of evil and impending judgment, to jump ship, to run, make good your escape just as Lot did, get out before God's anger overtakes you. Make sure you are in the right Kingdom.

How can I enter this Kingdom? Run to King Jesus, He is the way into God's eternal kingdom.

God made a way. God in his love, who **loved this world sent his son into this world that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life**. You know it, surely you know it, but have you entered? Have you crossed over from one to the other?

Through Christ's perfect life, though His law keeping when you and I haven't, through His full obedience to God when you and I have lived a life of sin and disobedience, through his giving up of that life in my place so that through his broken body and his precious blood shed on my behalf, in my place, I may now freely receive forgiveness for all my many sins.

Now a door is put in place where there was none before. Now there's a way.

.. And now Jesus says "**enter in**", enter in, make every effort to enter in. make every effort because it is not easy. It might appear easy but it is not.

Why? Because it is a straight gate, it's small and narrow, and so few enter it. It is for everyone, everyone is called, there is no-one excluded on the basis of colour, race etc., and yet it is for a few only.

Why do I say that? what do you need to enter? A soft heart - like a young child – and only a few are willing to change. That is the key - **anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.**"

So what is it about little children, what do they have that, I don't have.

There are some things that we try to quickly shed as we grow older, as any teenager will show you, "I'm no longer a child", you can see how much effort is put into distancing themselves from anything 'childish' "No I want to be seen as an adult, to do adult things and he treated like an adult."

✚ **No, don't stay a child, or remain childish, but instead become child-like**

What are the characteristics of a young child?

Firstly infants and young children are extremely dependant on others. And they are happy to be so, Indeed they are at their happiest when they are.

They are other centered. They want to be with you, They feel lost without you. Picture them in a shop they look to you, they are always looking for

you and are quickly disorientated if they can't see you. Knowing you are there is everything.

They sleep easily, leaving a light on is a way of saying them saying "I know you are there, not far, the darkness means fear - the light gives comfort for you are there.

In the same way God made each of us to look to him as a child to a father.

While they don't say it like this children know everything they have comes to them from the parents. They are not self-reliant, not proud of themselves, or proud in themselves.

Not like proud King Belshazzar - **Instead, you have set yourself up against the Lord of heaven. .. You praised the gods of silver and gold, of bronze, iron, wood and stone, which cannot see or hear or understand. But you did not honour the God who holds in his hand your life and all your ways.** Da 5:23

No the truth is, - it is in Him "we live and move and have our being"

Also children have soft hearts which are; malleable, teachable, willing to learn, trusting. They quickly pick up the family way and families values and trust them as being the right ones.

They are uncomplicated, children do not build arguments against God.

Some listening to this have yet to enter the Kingdom of God. *Why not?* What is your reason? What is your argument? What is your excuse?

I have heard every excuse - so has the Lord. What are you saying? God's not fair, He's mean, He causes the innocent to suffer, he is not fair on women, or on the sexually immoral, or he doesn't care for the poor, or he has taken my husband from me. He's done this, or done that...

Or maybe you have other arguments you marshal in defense of your independence: science has disproved God, Man is improving all of the time and doesn't need a crutch,

To think all of this is not to be like a child, no they trust, they simply trust, they believe what he says without making it complicated

- Leaving some money on a stool with a sign "Free take one".

- The CEX handing out leaflets with the offer of a free £5 note.

That requires a soft trusting heart, the Pharisees would not come on those terms. Straight after this Jesus then meets the rich young ruler keen to enter the Kingdom of God but he went away sad, he would not come on those terms, he was unwilling to change.

But there needs to be a change: "I tell you the truth, **unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.**" Mt 18:3

Has that happened to you? Is there a softening? a brokenness?

- ✚ It's true what has been said: 'Our brokenness is a bridge, not a barrier.'

Not to do so means you will **never enter** and the phrase '**Never enter**' is very emphatic = never, certainly not, not at all, by no means

So beware, the longer you leave it, the harder it will be, for the harder you will be.

Are you like those parents that will bring children to Sunday School.

- Sometimes I go into a flat and there is a group sat around. They know why I am there and one says to me pointing to another "he needs saving, she needs saving"

- ✚ They do, but I think, and sometimes say, how about you, are you better?

So how about you? Have you yourself entered? If not will you? Maybe you have been brought to the door by the influence of someone, - but to enter is for you alone to do, no-one else can bring you through.

- Coming to church or being interested in Christian things is like buying a platform ticket - remember them? You can come onto the platform where the train is, you can see it, even touch it, but you cannot board it. When it goes you are left behind.

There are many who come to the door as it were and do not enter.

Maybe they have been brought to the door by someone, by that loving friend or family member, but they cannot enable you to enter. It's up to you.

Keep your excuses, make up problems, stand by your independence and the door is closed to you. All that is left is the shock in thinking you had all that was necessary to enter.

Stay as you are and when the time comes you will find yourself barred.

But you can enter, you can change your attitude and become as a child is.

The Lord's invitation was not 'let them be brought' but *Let the children come*

Come as a child and trust Him and you will not be barred but beckoned.

Come as a child and you will be welcomed into the Kingdom, Christ will take you up in his arms and you will receive the blessing of the father.

- ✚ Then you will become a child of a wonderful father in heaven.