

# The Blessing of Children

## Why was it so important to Jesus to bless children?

There are several scriptures on Jesus and children. Put them together and a picture emerges, just like doing a jigsaw puzzle.

The puzzle begins in **Mark 9:33-37**. Jesus' disciples have been in deep discussion on their way back to Capernaum, and Jesus asks them what it was all about. Response? "The silence was deafening!" (The Message) Why? Because "they'd been arguing with one another over who among them was greatest." Oops! In reply, Jesus "put a child in the middle of the room. Then, cradling the little one in his arms, he said, 'Whoever embraces one of these children as I do embraces me, and far more than me - God who sent me.'"

Who's the greatest in God's eyes? Jesus holds a child and says, "This little chap; he is." Well, imagine! But then Jesus drops another bombshell saying that valuing children is like valuing God himself.

Children are as valuable as that?! But why?

Matthew adds that piece of the puzzle in **Matthew 18:1-5** when "the disciples came to Jesus asking, 'Who gets the highest rank in God's kingdom?' For an answer Jesus called over a child, whom he stood in the middle of the room, and said, 'I'm telling you, once and for all, that unless you return to square one and start over like children, you're not even going to get a look at the kingdom, let alone get in. Whoever becomes simple and elemental again, like this child, will rank high in God's kingdom. What's more, when you receive the childlike on my account, it's the same as receiving me.'"

Ah, so this is why children are so valuable: **Children best illustrate what God loves most**. It's their childlike attitude. In a contest for top honours in God's kingdom, it's a childlike attitude that wins outright.

Well, his disciples had never heard of such a thing, but they were about to hear it again in **Matthew 19:13-15** on the day when "children were brought to Jesus in the hope that he would lay hands on them and pray over them. The disciples shooed them off. But Jesus intervened: 'Let the children alone, don't prevent them from coming to me. God's kingdom is made up of people like these.'"

Mark says "Jesus was irate" at this point. He was really angry: "Don't push these children away. Don't ever get between them and me. These children are at the very centre of life in the kingdom. Mark this: Unless you accept God's kingdom in

the simplicity of a child, you'll never get in.' Then, gathering the children up in his arms, he laid his hands of blessing on them," **Mark 10:13-16**.

But why is Jesus so incensed at his disciples' attitude to children? Because "children are the kingdom's pride and joy," he yells in **Luke 18:16-17**, so "unless you accept God's kingdom in the simplicity of a child, you'll never get in."

Couldn't his disciples see what was so wonderful about children? It was their simplicity, the ease with which they accepted Jesus and "came to him," Matthew 19:15. And it's this ease with which children accepted Jesus that made them God's "pride and joy," because "The Father loves the Son extravagantly... That is why whoever accepts and trusts the Son gets in on everything, life complete and forever!" **John 3:35-36**.

Fit all these scriptures together and a clear picture emerges: Accepting and trusting Jesus is the key to entering "life complete and forever." And who best illustrates that? Children do, and that's why Jesus blessed them.

But God made that easy to grasp by *putting* that trusting attitude in children in the first place. It's the way he created them to be.

That's made clear by another piece of the puzzle in **Matthew 21:15-16**. Jesus had been chucking the moneychangers' tables around to clear a space for the blind and crippled to get into the Temple. But "When the religious leaders saw the outrageous things he was doing, and heard all the children running and shouting through the Temple, 'Hosanna to David's Son!' they were up in arms and took him to task, 'Do you hear what these children are saying?' To which Jesus said, 'Yes, I hear them. And haven't you read in God's Word, 'From the mouths of children and babes, I'll furnish a place of praise?'"

Jesus was quoting **Psalms 8:2**, which the NIV phrases this way: "From the lips of children and infants you have *ordained praise* because of your enemies, to silence the foe and the avenger."

God "ordained" or set apart children to give praise to him. It's something God *put* in children so that it comes easily to them to accept and trust him. And the reason God ordained or "blessed" children with this easy acceptance and trust was to "silence the foe and avenger," or "silence the atheist babble" (as The Message phrases it). In a world where atheists dig up all kinds of reasons for rejecting God, children would forever stand out in their easy acceptance of him!

Children are an atheist's worst nightmare, because children respond to God just as God ordained they would. Is God real? Yes, and here's the proof of it: God made children to praise him and no amount of atheistic posturing against God can stop them. One only has to talk to a child about Jesus and there's an

immediate connection. Witness children's prayers to God. Children have no trouble accepting God's existence.

No wonder the Creator of children blessed them, because children not only show us what God loves most in us, they also put to silence those who reject him. Children are powerful tools in God's hands, for pointing the way to eternity *and* shutting the mouths of skeptics.

And the first mouths that needed shutting were those of Jesus' very own disciples. He'd already threatened to throw people in a lake with a millstone round their necks in Matthew 18:6 if they ever dared get between him and the child-like, but only one chapter later his disciples were standing between Jesus and children and shooing them away! But how many ugly adults ever since have done the same thing, who never clued in that children are born with a desire for God or that their trust in him can be easily nurtured?

Take Timothy, for instance. From infancy he was taught the scriptures (2 Timothy 3:15), probably by his mother and grandmother (1:5), and his faith flourished, to the point he became a leader in the church and Paul's most trusted companion. It's a wise parent, therefore, who understands what God has put in a child from birth, and how easily it can be nurtured. A child is born with the keys to the kingdom - and he never need lose them, either. He can continue all through his adult life with the same child-like trust in God.

But what if we lost our child-like attitude to God long ago? No problem; God sent Jesus to restore it in us, **John 1:12**. ["To those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God."](#) God births us a second time so we start off as children again, equipped once more with the gift of trust that he gave us as kids in our first birth. He returns us to square one and starts us over as children again - *and* for the same reason, to bring praise to him in a world full of atheists.

And how do we bring praise to him? By our simple, child-like acceptance of Jesus, no matter what atheists say about him. Jesus is our life, not all this other stuff people look to and believe in for life, and it comes with an undeniable result: In a world full of worry and frustration, Christians have peace and joy.

And it's that trust, with its offshoots of peace and joy, that now makes *us* the children holding the keys to the kingdom. Jesus now stands *us* up before the world, just as he stood a child in front of his disciples, as the kingdom's pride and joy. We're the ones now blessed by God to silence the atheist babble, bringing light to a dark world full of people who haven't a clue what God has in mind for them, or that he provided the clue in their children!

That clue is child-like trust in Jesus as the key to entering God's kingdom. That's the clear and wonderful picture that emerges from the jigsaw pieces of scripture on Jesus and children. And in our second birth as God's children, we have that

trust restored in us, so we too can point the way to the kingdom in *our* messed-up, blinded world.