



### **RECEIVING – Christmas Traditions Message (Dec. 21, 2014)**

**Main Idea:** We miss out on the richness of Christmas if we don't receive the one gift that matters – God's Son, Jesus.

**Snapshot:** Watching kids open gifts on Christmas can remind us of the joy that ought to accompany receiving. As we get older, however, the message of Christmas – one that we hear year after year – can begin to feel less and less like a gift. Rather than receiving the message of God's love and grace for the world (made tangibly known through the incarnation of Christ) with joy and gratitude, we are quick to run through the Christmas motions. In our main text, Mark 10:13-16, Jesus tells the disciples and onlookers that "anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it." In the middle of the hustle and bustle that surrounds the Christmas season, it's easy for us to miss out on the king of that kingdom – Jesus, Himself. In this message, we consider what we can learn from how children receive and contrast it with the childish ways that grown adults interact with Jesus in Mark 10:27-45.

#### **P.A.S.S. Questions**

**1.) Participation** - What was the most memorable Christmas gift you ever received? Do you remember who gave it to you, how you opened, what you did with it, how long you had it, etc.?

**2.) Application** – How can you personally seek to receive the message of Christmas in a way that is childlike but not childish?

**3.) Scripture** – Have you ever considered that the Gospel accounts are written with overarching themes that carry the narratives? For instance, have you ever considered that Mark's account of Jesus and the children was perhaps written to culminate with Bartimaeus, the man with a childlike faith?

Pick one of these three interactions (Jesus and the rich man, Jesus and Peter, Jesus and James and John), read the corresponding section, and then talk about it in light of Jesus with the children and Jesus and Bartimaeus.

**4.) Sharing** – Receiving and giving are not mutually exclusive, but sometimes we're too quick to dismiss our role in receiving God's gift because we want to immediately give back to Him or to people around us. Why is it important for us to consider how we can receive God's gift? Why can it be difficult for us to take time to receive it?



### Notes:

Britt and I brainstormed some ways that children (on their best behavior) open gifts on Christmas:

- They open the gifts with joy, expectation, and excitement
- They tear the wrapping paper off
- They cherish the gift and the moment
- They can be incredibly grateful, but they aren't thinking about how to pay back the one(s) who gifted them

If God is a giver, is it possible that He desires for us to receive the gift of His Son in a similar fashion – with joy, gratitude, unashamedly, and without trying to pay back?

“People were bringing little children to Jesus to have him touch them, but the disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, ‘Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.’ And he took the children in his arms, put his hands on them and blessed them.” – Mark 10:13-16

- Jesus' topic of conversation in this passage (like many of his teachings) is on the kingdom of God.
- We don't live in a kingdom-society, so even though we know what kingdoms are, this isn't our modern language.
- To those Jesus was talking to, however, they lived in the empire of Rome, and kingdoms were very much a part of their common language, understanding, and lives.
- To the Jewish people, the kingdom was, then, not just a concept, but a literal kingdom that they expected to eventually be restored by the Messiah.
- The fixation that many people have with Jesus is their wonderings about whether or not Jesus is the King that will overthrow Roman rule and reestablish a kingdom for the Jews. The problem with Jesus is that he talks about the kingdom and people accordingly wonder if he's attempting to make a run for the throne, but he doesn't act like a king.
- Thus, what we need to understand is what the first-century hearers and witnesses could not have understood – Jesus is not establishing a first-century, geo-political kingdom;



rather, his arrival on the scene is a fulfillment of God's promises, a gift of priceless proportions that is for all peoples, for ages to come.

- When Jesus talks about receiving the kingdom as children, he is saying that an acknowledgement of God's faithfulness, His love, His grace, and His everlasting commitment to his promises (covenant faithfulness) ought to be received as a child receives – with wonder, joy, trust, hope, gratitude, and an unadulterated excitement.

While we are encouraged to receive the kingdom in a childlike manner, perhaps it's easier for us to see how we shouldn't receive it. In the verses and stories that follow Mark 10:13-16, we see several interactions that Jesus has with adults who act in contrast to receiving like a child, and, instead, act childish.

### **1. Jesus and the Rich Man (Mark 10:17-27)**

- A well-intended, and seemingly 'good' rich man runs up to Jesus and asks how he can inherit eternal life.
- Jesus tells him that he lacks one thing – to sell and give all he has to the poor – before coming to follow him.
- Many have interpreted this passage to say that Jesus wants all of us to do as he commanded the rich man, but that misses out on what Jesus is really getting at. It's not about just selling and giving; it is about the trust that is needed to follow Jesus. Jesus doesn't tell him that selling and giving to the poor equals eternal life; rather, he tells the man to do that with the expectation that he will then follow him.
- This is essentially how I read the man's response to Jesus: "This isn't what I was expecting."
- For many of us, we don't receive the gift of God's grace and love appropriately because, like the rich man, we are caught off by the trust and faith that God wants from us. Rather than accepting the invitation to the adventure, we are more concerned with the security of how we've structured our lives.

### **2. Jesus and Peter (Mark 10:28-31)**

- The rich man leaves and Jesus remarks at the difficulty of a rich person entering the kingdom.



- The irony, nonetheless, is God's grace and ability to save whomever God desires to save: "with man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God."

- Peter has been watching all of this unfold and can't take it anymore. He boldly speaks up, "We have left everything to follow you!" In the Greek, the language indicates a harsh outburst. Peter is essentially saying, "Look, we've done what this rich man couldn't do. When are we going to get anything out of this?"

- This is how I read Peter's response to Jesus: "This isn't what I asked for."

- For some of us, we are frustrated at our lives and even more frustrated by the fact that we believe God's presence in our lives should translate to things going as we want them to.

- Jesus responds by saying that though the cost is great, the rewards are greater and aren't just rewards we receive after this life, but in this life: "No one who has left mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times more in this present age: homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children, and fields – along with persecutions – and in the age to come eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last first." When I read these verses, I am reminded of the family that God invites us to be a part of. So many of the relationships I have are only possible because of my relationship with Christ and the adoption I've received into the Father's family. Jesus also reminds us of the reality of persecutions. In other words, we can't escape the reality of goodness and difficulty that accompanies life with Christ.

### **3. Jesus and James and John (Mark 10:32-45)**

- In Mark 10:32-34, Jesus predicts his death. It's incredibly poignant and forthright. It's a delivery of terrible news. You'd expect the disciples to be somber, perhaps lacking words to say in response.

- Instead, James and John are quick to change subjects.

- This is what James and John essentially say: "This is what you should get us."

- James and John aren't complaining, but they're conniving. They're acting like spoiled kids. They completely disregard the seriousness of what Jesus has just told them, and they're more concerned about getting what they want – positions of authority and prestige in this geo-political kingdom that they mistakenly think Jesus is soon to be establishing.

- For some of us, the gift of God's grace and love isn't 'enough'. Jesus is our Savior, but we would rather have a genie.



### 4. Jesus and Bartimaeus (Mark 10:46-52)

- Bartimaeus is not out looking for anything particular. He is probably just at his regular spot. But when he hears that Jesus is near, he begins crying and screaming out. People tell him to shut up. Jesus calls him.
- And notice what happens here: Jesus asks Bartimaeus what he wants. Out of all the previous interactions, this is the first where Jesus does as such.
- Bartimaeus wants to see. There's something subtle here that not all translations catch, however. In the Greek, the word for "let me see" more correctly means, "let me see again."
- This may not appear to mean much, but we can infer that Bartimaeus lost his sight. As a child, he could see! It brings us full circle. He regained his sight!
- Bartimaeus' response essentially communicates, "This is all I've ever wanted."

And for many of us, this is what we need. We have lost sight of why Christmas is so significant, rich, and deep in meaning. It reminds us that God is the one who makes right what we, as sinners, made wrong. The gift of right relationship with God was the way it was supposed to be.

- The things that are lost, the things that are broken, the things that seem hopeless – when those are found, restored, and redeemed, it tends to mean the most to us! This is the beauty of the Gospel message. We receive new life through Christ, and it's the gift that we were created by God to experience from the very beginning.

In light of Bartimaeus, I think our prayer, this Christmas season, can be something like this: "Father, give me eyes to see and a heart to trust that you have given us the greatest gift. Give me a perspective that is eternal, not one that is temporary and fleeting. I want to know you as you've chosen to reveal yourself in and through Your Son, Jesus. Thank you for the perfect gift of your grace, love, forgiveness, and reconciliation, given to us through Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. May I receive this in a fresh new way, as one of your grateful children. Amen."

The above prayer reminds me of Paul's prayer for the churches in Ephesus. You can find those in Ephesians 1:15-2:10 and 3:14-21!