

Receiving Children in Christ's Name

Mark 9:30-37

Mark's Gospel is known as the **Way of the Son of Man**. The idea of "the way" is central to his narrative, starting with the prophecy from Isaiah: "Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight." Throughout Mark, we see Jesus on this "way," moving immediately or "straightway" to teach, heal, and fulfill His mission. Yet, this straight way of Christ is often contrasted with the crooked way of His disciples. Their desires for greatness and glory blind them from walking the true way of the Son of Man.

This contrast is clearest in the middle of Mark's Gospel, in chapters 8, 9, and 10, where a recurring theme of **suffering, glory, and discipleship** unfolds three times. Let's take a closer look at this pattern.

In chapter 8, Jesus is walking with His disciples to Caesarea Philippi. ***On the way***, He asks his disciples, "Who do people say that I am?" After some responses, Peter declares, "You are the Christ." It is here that Jesus first teaches them that the Son of Man must suffer, be rejected, killed, and rise again—**suffering**.

Peter, however, rebukes Him, unable to accept a suffering Messiah. He envisions a glorious, conquering Christ who will crush their enemies. But Jesus responds, "Get behind me, Satan! You are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man"—**glory**.

Then, Jesus turns to the crowd and teaches about discipleship: "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross"—**discipleship**.

This pattern repeats in chapter 9. Jesus, passing through Galilee, again teaches His disciples that He will be delivered into the hands of men, killed, and rise again—**suffering**.

The disciples, however, had been arguing *on the way* about who among them was the greatest—**glory**.

Jesus, knowing their hearts, sits them down and says, “If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all.” He then places a child before them and says, “Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me”—**discipleship**.

In chapter 10, the pattern occurs one more time. As they are *on the way* to Jerusalem, Jesus tells them, in detail, what will happen to Him: He will be mocked, flogged, killed, and rise again—**suffering**.

Immediately after, James and John ask to sit at His right and left in His glory. They still misunderstand the nature of Christ’s kingdom—**glory**.

Jesus responds by teaching that true greatness is found not in power but in service: “Whoever would be great among you must be your servant. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many”—**discipleship**.

These three episodes, placed right at the heart of Mark’s Gospel, emphasize the tension between the way of true Christian discipleship and the way of the false discipleship. The disciples’

repeated desire for greatness and glory contrasts sharply with the path of humble, cross bearing, selfless service that Jesus walks. Each time, He predicts His suffering, they reveal their worldly ambitions for glory, and He corrects them by teaching about the true nature of discipleship – carry your cross, receive children in His name, and be a servant.

This pattern is important for us to understand because it mirrors our own struggles. Like the disciples, we often seek recognition, success, and glory, and pursue our petty aspirations in ways that are contrary to the way of Christ.

We think greatness comes through power or position, but Jesus consistently shows us that true greatness comes through humility, the way to glory is to down in service, and the way to maturity is found in child-like faith, and the way to strength is through weakness.

No wonder the disciples repeatedly misunderstood Jesus. But here we are 2000 years later, and we still don't understand. We mistake familiarity with the message with comprehension of the message.

In this passage, Jesus uses a child to demonstrate what true Christian discipleship looks like. In selflessly welcoming and serving those who are weakest and most dependent, we walk the way of the Son of Man. And in so doing we receive not just the child but Christ Himself, and His Father who sent Him. Jesus' message is clear: following Him means embracing a life of selfless humble service, not chasing after worldly greatness.

Receiving Children as Discipleship

How does receiving children model Christian discipleship? Children serve as profound signs and lessons for us. Do you want to know what it means to follow Jesus? Look at a child. Receive this child. Care for him.

Imagine the disciples' reaction: "But we have plans, we are striving for greatness! We don't have time for this!" Jesus gently responds: "Do you want to be my disciple or a disciple of the world? Here is a child—receive him in my name."

This teaching strikes at the heart of the disciples' pride. They had been arguing on the way about who was the greatest among them. But Jesus turns their understanding of greatness upside down. "You want greatness?" He seems to say. "Change this diaper. Teach this child to read and write. Give your life for one of these little ones. Invest your time, energy, strength, and resources in the children. Raise them to be my disciples, and in doing so, you will receive me, and not just me, but God the Father as well."

There is a deep lesson here: if we desire to be true disciples of Christ, then part of that calling is giving our lives over to the discipling of children. In raising them to know and follow Jesus, we welcome Him into our lives.

Personal Experience of Humility

Many of you can speak from your own personal experience. When I say that there is nothing more humbling or sanctifying than

raising a child, you know what I mean. Children have a unique way of revealing our selfishness, our impatience, and our pride.

When you are responsible for the care of another human being, especially one as helpless and dependent as a child, you quickly realize how much you need God's grace and forgiveness. It is in these moments of service—when we are exhausted, frustrated, and stretched to our limits—that we truly begin to understand what it means to die to ourselves and live for Christ.

Our culture, steeped in narcissism and self-worship, despises this kind of service. Many see children as burdens, as obstacles to personal success. We sterilize ourselves, we abort our unborn, and we reject children because we are obsessed with our own greatness. Children disrupt our plans for self-fulfillment. They don't fit neatly into our pursuit of worldly success, whether in education, career, or personal goals or pleasure.

This selfishness is satanic at its core. Recall when Jesus said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan," after Peter objected to the idea of suffering. The devil would have us consumed with ourselves, making decisions based primarily on what feeds our ego, boosts our pride, elevates personal achievement and aggrandizement, and multiplies worldly pleasures.

This is the repeated messaging that comes across on the TV. "Not having children will help me finish my degree. It will help me in my career. I can't be tied down by children." This is the voice of the world, and it's the voice of Satan.

But we must remember that Children are not a distraction from more important work. **Children are the most important work.**

Do you want to be a disciple of Christ? Then receive children in His name, serve them, and dedicate your life to raising them in the knowledge of the Lord, and you will bless your children, and In doing so, you will receive not only Christ the Son but also God the Father.

But Jesus' teaching goes beyond physical care for children. He also points to how we **receive** them in a broader sense. "Whoever receives one such child in My name receives Me." This reception is not only relational but also covenantal.

Children and the Covenant: A Sacred Responsibility

This call to disciple our children is not just a personal task; it is also deeply rooted in the covenant promises of God. In **covenant child baptism**, we see a beautiful expression of how children are included in God's covenant community. From the earliest days of Scripture, God made it clear that His promises were not just for individuals but for families, for generations. In the Old Testament, children were included in the covenant through the sign of circumcision. This marked them as belonging to God's people, set apart for His purposes.

In the New Testament, baptism takes on this covenantal role. When we bring our children to the waters of baptism, we are declaring that they, too, are part of God's covenant people. Baptism is not just a ceremony or a tradition—it is a profound act

of faith, an acknowledgment that God's promises extend to our children. It is a declaration that they belong to Christ and that we, as parents and as a church, are committed to raising them in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

This is not a task we undertake lightly. Baptism is a sign of God's grace, but it also comes with a responsibility. We are called to disciple our children, to teach them the ways of the Lord, and to guide them in their faith. Just as Jesus placed a child before His disciples as a model of humility, so too does He place our children in our midst and call us to disciple them faithfully.

This is why our baptismal liturgy includes a vow from the congregation:

Do you promise, with God's help, to encourage and exhort both this child and his parents to the end that he may confess Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and come at last into His eternal Kingdom?

I have had a number of people who were not members of our church ask me if they could bring their child here to be baptized. And I hope you all know, that I would absolutely love to do that. I want children to receive the sign and seal of the covenant.

But the fact of the matter is, we would have no way of fulfilling our vow to help them disciple their child. We can't make a vow that we are unable to fulfill and perform. So sadly I have to tell them I can't baptize their child.

Now, when we receiving our children into the Covenant community in baptism, we are not only receiving them into the church community but also into the very heart of the Gospel. Baptism signifies that they are united to Christ, and they are now members of Christ. And it reminds us of our sacred duty to lead them to walk the way of Christ. Baptism is a visible expression of God's covenant faithfulness, stretching from Abraham to Christ and extending to each of us and our children today, that He is our God, and we are His people.

Paedocommunion: Sustaining the Covenant Life

But baptism is only the beginning of the journey. Once a child is baptized, they are not to remain on the periphery of the church's life. They are not spectators or outsiders—they are full members of the covenant community. Just as they are welcomed into the covenant through baptism, they are to be sustained in the covenant through the sacrament of the Holy Communion. The practice of **paedocommunion**, the inclusion of baptized children in the Lord's Table, is one of the distinctive features of Christ the Redeemer Church and the CREC.

In some traditions, children are excluded from the Lord's Supper until they reach a certain age or level of understanding. But if baptism signifies and seals their inclusion into the covenant community, the Body of Christ, which is Christ himself, then why would we withhold from them the meal that Christ provides for His people, which is His very own body and blood? The Lord's Supper is a means of grace, a gift given to sustain us in our faith,

and children, as members of Christ's body, are in need of this grace just as much as adults.

Jesus' words are clear: "Let the little children come to me, and do not forbid them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God" (Mark 10:14). If children belong to the kingdom of God, if they are part of Christ's body, and united to Christ in baptism, then they belong at His table. The Lord's Supper is not a reward for the spiritual maturity; It is not meant to be a time when we embrace factions in the church in order that the proven ones may be recognized among us.

Rather, it is a means of spiritual nourishment, given to all who belong to Christ. It is time for us to discern the body of Christ, recognizing and welcoming these littlest ones as belonging to Jesus. If we exclude our children from this meal, we are denying them access to the very grace that Christ offers to sustain their faith, and worse still, we are eating and drinking judgment on ourselves, because we have not discerned who is in the body of Christ correctly, and so we excluded those for whom Christ died.

So, just as we would never deny physical nourishment to our children, we should not deny them the spiritual nourishment of the Lord's Supper. They, too, need to be fed by Christ, to experience His grace in the bread and wine. **Paedocommunion** affirms that children are full participants in the covenant community, and they are invited to share in the fullness of Christ's life.

A Tale of Two Legacies: Jonathan Edwards vs. Max Jukes

This brings us to a powerful historical illustration of the impact of raising children as disciples of Christ: the contrasting legacies of Jonathan Edwards and Max Jukes. These two men lived in the same time period, yet their lives and the lives of their descendants diverged dramatically, serving as a powerful reminder of how the way we raise our children affects generations to come.

Jonathan Edwards' Legacy

Jonathan Edwards was an American Puritan preacher in the 1700s, known for his intellect, piety, and dedication to his family. He and his wife, Sarah, had eleven children, and they prioritized family discipleship. Edwards made it a practice to spend time with his family every evening, conversing with them and praying a blessing over each of his children. He viewed the task of raising children not as a burden but as a sacred calling.

Nearly 150 years after Edwards' death, an American educator named A.E. Winship traced the descendants of Jonathan Edwards. The results were remarkable. Edwards' legacy included:

- 1 U.S. Vice President,
- 1 Dean of a law school,
- 1 Dean of a medical school,
- 3 U.S. Senators,
- 3 Governors,

- 3 Mayors,
- 13 College Presidents,
- 30 Judges,
- 60 Doctors,
- 65 Professors,
- 75 Military officers,
- 80 Public office holders,
- 100 Lawyers,
- 100 Clergymen,
- 285 College graduates.

In total, over 1,400 of Edwards' descendants were studied, and his legacy is one of immense influence, godliness, and leadership. How can we explain this? Certainly, Edwards was a man of great intellect and moral character, but much of the success and character of his descendants can be attributed to his and his wife's faithfulness in raising their children in the fear and admonition of the Lord.

Max Jukes' Legacy

Now contrast this with Max Jukes, a man from the same period whose legacy was vastly different. Jukes' descendants were studied

because of their presence in the New York prison system. Jukes' family was marked by crime, immorality, and brokenness. His descendants included:

- 7 murderers,
- 60 thieves,
- 190 prostitutes,
- 150 other convicts,
- 310 paupers,
- 440 individuals physically wrecked by alcohol.

Of Jukes' 1,200 studied descendants, 300 died prematurely. His legacy became a symbol of moral decay and societal failure.

The Five-Generation Rule

These two men's legacies serve as a striking contrast and illustrate what some have called the "five-generation rule"—the idea that how we raise our children influences not only them but also the generations to come.

If someone were to study your descendants five generations from now, what would they find? Would they see a legacy of godliness and faithful discipleship like Jonathan Edwards? Or would they find a legacy of brokenness and devastation like Max Jukes?

The way you disciple your children will have an impact that reaches far beyond your own lifetime.

Conclusion: Answering the Call to Disciple

People of God, the call to discipleship is not just a call to pursue your own personal holiness or spiritual growth. It is a call to serve, to humble ourselves, and to embrace the least among us—our children. Jesus placed a child in the midst of His disciples and told them that the path to true greatness in His kingdom was through service and humility. In the same way, He places our children before us today and calls us to receive them in His name.

In receiving them as members of Christ at the baptismal font and the Lord's table, and nourishing them in with the Word and prayers and blessings, we receive Christ and His Father, so proving ourselves to be true disciples of Christ, who walk on the way of the Son of Man. Amen.