

Open to Jesus

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[0:00] He wanted to surprise his dad by washing his car for him. He told his mom about it and his mom told him just to make sure! that he used a sponge. And about halfway through the job, his dad came out and was surprised. His biggest surprise was to find out that his son didn't know the difference in a sponge and a Brillo pad. The boy had good intentions, but it didn't come out right. Well, I thought about that when I read this passage about the disciples, the disciples are like that little boy. They mean well, but they're trying to take care of Jesus, but they just didn't get it right. And their mistake led to a couple of valuable spiritual lessons taught by, of all people, children along with Jesus. It's found in Mark chapter 10, beginning in verse 13. And it says this, and they were bringing children to him that he might touch them. And the disciples rebuked him. But when Jesus saw it, he was indignant. And he 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.

Let's pray together. Lord Jesus, I am thankful for the lessons that you allow us to learn through your word, especially when it comes to approaching Christ and the things of Christ. And God, I pray right now that Lord, you will make clear in our hearts and lives how we need to be open to you. Whatever that may mean for each one of us individually, I pray that your Holy Spirit will make that clear today through a convicting power that you'll give us the wisdom and the strength and the obedience to follow as you lead. In Jesus' precious name. Amen.

When it comes to Jesus, we need to have open arms. Sometimes people that love Jesus dearly, they love Jesus dearly, but they can become obstacles to others who are trying to get close to Jesus. And that's what the disciples did here. I mean, they meant well. They're following Jesus. They're learning from Jesus. They're watching people's lives change by the touch of the Lord. They're trying to help him along the way. And sometimes they're successful in that. And sometimes they're not successful in that. And in this passage, people are bringing their children to Jesus. And I don't know if the disciples were jealous, were protective, or simply trying to help him move on to what they thought were more important things. But whatever the reason, they were trying to keep kids from Jesus. And they were wrong. They didn't decide who could come to Jesus. And we can't decide who should come to Jesus. As a matter of fact, Jesus says, let them come. Don't hinder them. And he calls them out. Friend, listen, if we hinder people from coming to Christ, we're doing what made

Christ, the Scripture says, indignant. In other words, it made him very angry. It should be the desire of God's people to welcome with open arms those who are interested in approaching Christ.

We should want them to know of him. We should want them to hear from him. We should want them to follow him. We should want them to know him personally, to obey him, to serve him, to love him, to grow in him, and to grow with his people. And we're not to hinder anyone from coming to Christ, especially children. We ought to guide children to Christ. And I believe we ought to do all that we can to to welcome them to hear of Jesus, to experience Jesus, to protect them from anything that would hinder them from coming to him.

[5:04] And I'll just tell you, that's why I believe the event that we do on October 31st is so important, that it really has to do not so much with us giving back to our community of sorts, although I hope that it does that. It really has to do with allowing people to feel welcome to hear of Jesus, to experience Jesus, to protect them from anything that may hinder them from coming to him.

In a previous church that I pastored, our children's choir had a singing Christmas tree. And it was quite a venture. We would change the whole choir loft and build a stair-step Christmas tree that

covered up most of the baptismal pool. Sunday before Thanksgiving, we would come in that afternoon and take out of a warehouse huge pieces of wood that were built and put together and like puzzle pieces put together. And then we would have our Thanksgiving meal together. But the guys knew that, and a lot of the ladies that did the decorating, they knew that you better enjoy your meal and you better hurry up because we got work to do and we ain't leaving until it's done. And by the time, just a couple of days later, the thing would have all kinds of lights that went along with the music and tasks. I mean, it was quite an enterprise. It would be up for a couple of weeks for the kids to be able to practice in and to be able to do their performances in. And the fourth and fifth and sixth graders, the terrorist group would get up in that tree and God knows what all went on up in that tree. It's all under the blood if they'll confess it. But the first, second, and third graders and the preschoolers would be on the floor down below that tree. I mean, it was quite an enterprise. It was the big

Christmas presentation in that church each year. And as most children's prayers, it was absolute chaos until right at the last moment. And then God has a way of putting those things together. A couple of weeks later, it would be taken down and then the Christmas decorations would come up. The trees would be placed and all that kind of stuff. Now listen, if you've been in a Baptist church for a while, you know what I just said. If you haven't been in a Baptist church for a while, don't listen to this part, okay? But you have two different parties doing two different things in the same space in a tight window. And both are very passionate about what they're doing.

It's a wonderful outreach. Throughout the year, that Christmas tree was a wonderful outreach. We picked up kids from school and brought them to church on Wednesday afternoons and kept them too long that day. To prepare for all of that throughout the school year is a wonderful ministry. But they loved to also decorate the sides of the stage with poinsettias, those that you give in honor and memory of those that you love.

And I remember suggesting to the main flower lady one day, we might want to wait until the terrorists leave before we put the flowers out. Because you're going to practice with the core team on Thursday night. On Friday night, you got the mayhem of the real dress rehearsal practice. On Saturday night, they do a presentation. On Sunday night, they do a presentation.

[8:49] There's a lot of little hands going around a lot of little flowers. And you might just be best to hold off on putting those out before that. That was not her plan. And she got mad and said, it's always about the children. Why does it always have to be about the children? And she walked out. And I thought, hmm, some people don't like children.

Don't be like some people. Don't be. Whether you love children or not, Jesus said, you better not hinder them from coming to Jesus. He opened his arms to them. And we ought to do everything we can do to help children get to him. Now, how do we do that?

Well, we talk about Jesus. And I use this passage a lot. I don't apologize for that. I think it's a key passage. I know the Jews did. In Deuteronomy chapter 6, it tells us that we ought to talk about Jesus when we get up, when we walk at the house, when we're in the car, when we're in our outings, when we're settling in in the evening as we lay down at night. We ought to talk about Jesus. We ought to show them Jesus. We have kids worship during this hour. And when we set that up to do that each week, I ask that it would be to prepare them for them to come to what they call big church.

Let's teach them what to listen for. Let's teach them why we do what we do. Let's teach them what it means to respond to Christ. We prepare them. Not only that, but we point them to Jesus.

I want to be clear. We don't do the saving. I've never saved anybody. Only Christ does the saving. The Spirit of God draws them, causes the interest to come. We put the truth before them, and God does the work. Jesus compared it to fishing. He said, bait them, let God lead them to bite, and when they do, you bring them in. But He's the Lord of the harvest. He compared it to farming.

[11:16] Prepare the soil. Sow the seed. Water it. And even with all of that, we can't control the seed. The germination that's taking place in a heart to bring them to Christ, to allow them to bud out in their faith, that is God working in little hearts. However, we pray for the harvest, and when God brings the harvest, we gather it. And our text tells us that we do that with open arms, folks.

This ain't our church. It's God's church, and He's allowed us to be a part of it. We must have open arms to let people come to Christ. But not only that, but it also speaks of open hearts.

I want you to notice that Jesus not only welcomed the children, but He said we need to learn from them. He says in verse 15, He says, truly I say to you, and when He says truly there, what that

means is, A, listen. That's what that means. Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it. You must come like these children do and receive the kingdom.

Now, how does a child receive? Well, there's a variety of ways that he could have been speaking of. And I want to share two traits that children have that we need to have spiritually.

For one, children have a humble dependence. Until we have taught them differently, children come without a concern about status.

[13:16] They're dependent. They know they're dependent. And they don't try to prove their qualifications. And they don't look at their record.

They don't have a resume, spiritually or otherwise. They just come as they are. And as we grow older, we fight for independence.

We go through those middle school years when everything in life is changing. On everybody that we're around, the body is changing. The stair steps of status become important.

The effort to control one's world. And then high school comes and brings on more responsibility. It brings on some more independence.

Students are still dependent, but they ain't dare going to admit it. And then sometimes, sometime after those days in college or when we begin a career, full independence arrives.

[14:22] And over time, as we do adulting, we become callous to the things of God. It is much more difficult for an adult to acknowledge his or her need for the Lord than it is for a child.

That is until crisis comes. Crisis often brings a change. Or maybe it's difficulty comes. Or maybe there's just this mature realization that, you know what?

I'm not enough. I'm really not. Now, that's not easy to admit. It's not easy to admit that we need something. Children know they need your help, and they know they need what you have to offer. And they're not afraid to take it. And we can learn from them. They also have a trusting receptivity. And what I mean by that is, not only are children empty-handed with nothing to offer, but they also are willing to receive what we offer them.

And their willingness to receive is a distinctive difference between children and adults. Even when adults know that they don't have all they need, even when they see their deficiencies in their lives, it can be so difficult to be willing to receive what others may offer.

[15:52] Because we have our pride. Because we have our status. Because we have our accomplishments. Because we have our skepticism.

I got an email last night that said that I had a \$51.23 credit from a company that I hadn't even bought anything from.

And that it was only good if I hit this particular link. Well, I didn't hit the link. But if you tell a kid you'll give them \$50, son, they'll hit a link.

I promise you that. I walked across the parking lot the other day and Dawn looked down and said, there's a \$5 bill. And I reached down and picked it up. And she said, you probably shouldn't touch that. And I said, well, honey, it's been touched.

It has. If this takes me out, well, whatever. And then I passed it on to the waitress that we went to the restaurant. I hope she's all right.

[17:02] We have our skepticism. We have our sense of obligation. I mean, is anything truly free?

There always seems to be a hook. What will I offer someone if I take what they offer? What am I going to owe them if I take what they offer?

But a child comes humbly. He comes dependently. She comes trustfully, openheartedly to Christ. It's something that the rest of us must learn from.

But I want you to pick up on what the passage says. The passage did not say that the children came to Jesus. It says that people brought the children to Jesus.

And that's key. I want you to see one more aspect. It's in the following verses. It's in verse 17. It may look disconnected, but it's not at all, quite honestly.

[18:11] It says in Mark 10, verse 17, it says, And as he was setting out on his journey, speaking of Christ, a man ran up and knelt before him and asked him, Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?

And Jesus said to him, Why do you call me good? No one's good except God alone. You know the commandments. Do not murder. Do not commit adultery.

Do not steal. Do not bear false witness. Do not be fraud. Honor your father and mother. And he said to him, Teacher, all these I've kept for my youth. And Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said to him, You lack one thing.

Go sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you'll have treasure in heaven. And come and follow me. Disheartened by the saying, He went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions. These may seem to be two accounts that just bump into each other. But in reality, what Mark wants us to see, I believe, is it's all about being open to Jesus.

[19:34] This man walked away from Christ because he had great wealth. He walked away because it would cost him too much.

And Christ commanded him to do something that he commanded no one else to ever do in Scripture. So why did he ask so much from this man?

I'll tell you why. Because he knew the man had to make a choice. He was the kind of man that could not have both. To open his hands to Christ means that he has to let go of what meant the most to him.

And although not the same, there are similar conversations that take place in Scripture. In Genesis chapter 22, the Lord told Abraham to take his only son and take him up on the mountain, offer him as a burnt sacrifice.

And he took his son up there. But did he lose his son? In a sense, he did. But yet he didn't at all. Because in one sense, God provided the ram and the thicket and they came down together.

[20:46] But in another sense, when they came down, Isaac was no longer Abraham's. Isaac's was God's. But Abraham never lost him.

When Zacchaeus, the wee little man of Luke chapter 19, came out of the tree to come to Jesus, he gave half of what he had to the poor. There's no indication that Christ ever told him to do that.

And he said that if he had taken too much from somebody, that he would pay them back four times the amount. Even with the great wealth of Zacchaeus, he had never forgotten.

He had never found happiness in all that. But with Christ, he found contentment with significantly less financially. We so often believe that happiness can come through what we have to hold on to. And sometimes that's things. Sometimes it's not things. Sometimes it's compromising choices. I mean, there's parts of our life that we're just holding on to.

[21:49] And the reality is the only way the Lord can be the Lord of our life is for us to let go of those things. To have open hands. To give those things over to God. It could be our status.

Harold Krushner wrote a book called Who Needs God? And he wrote about a very bright, driven pre-med student at a very competitive college. And while this student was traveling in the East during a summer before his junior year, he met a guru who said to him, Don't you see you're poisoning your soul with this success-oriented way of life?

I mean, your idea of happiness is to stay up all night studying for an exam so you can get a better grade than your best friend. Your idea of a good marriage is not to find the woman who matches your soul, but to win the girl everybody else wants.

And that's not how people are supposed to live. And as only a guru could say, Why don't you come join us in an atmosphere where we all share and love one another?

Well, this wore-out pre-med student was ripe for that man. And he called his parents and he told them he was dropping out of school. And he was going to live in an ashram with other spiritual hermits.

[23:13] And six months later, they received a letter from him. And it said this, Dear Mom and Dad, I know you weren't happy about my decision, but I want to tell you it's changed me.

For the first time in my life, I have peace. Here there's no competing. There's no trying to get ahead of anyone. The way of life is so at harmony with my inner soul that it only took me six months to become the number two disciple in the entire community.

And I think I'll be number one by June. Friend, status is in us. Being number one, having what we want, reaching a social level or a level of ease, that will saturate us.

We'll compromise ourselves for that. I mean, we cling to it. And too many times it's in us. It's so thick within us that we just cling to it.

And sometimes it leaves us walking away sad. Why just settle? Larry Walker wasn't willing to settle.

[24:24] He had always wanted to fly, but he had poor eyesight that would not allow him to, so he had an idea. He tied 45 helium-filled weather balloons to his lawn chair.

He strapped himself in with sandwiches, a pellet gun, and a six-pack of light beer. That tells us a fair amount about Larry right there. His plan was to hover for about 30 feet above his backyard for just a few hours.

Then he was just going to shoot enough balloons down to come on down. But 45 weather balloons holding 33 cubic feet of helium apiece don't settle at 30 feet.

When his friends cut the cord anchoring his lawn chair to the ground, Larry didn't level off at 30 feet. He didn't level off at 100 feet.

He didn't level off at 1,000 feet. He stopped climbing at 16,000 feet. And at this height, he was reluctant to shoot anything.

[25 : 39] He just drifted with his beer and his sandwiches into the airspace of LAX. And pilots could be heard over the radio saying, you're not going to believe this.

But after several hours, Larry decided to risk shooting a few balloons. And eventually, he descended enough to get tangled up in some power lines where he was rescued.

And the FAA spokesman said, we know he broke some part of the Federal Aviation Act. And as soon as we figure out which part it is, we'll charge him with it.

As they led Larry away in handcuffs, a reporter asked him, why did you do it? And Larry replied, a man can't just sit there.

He's right about one thing. Don't just sit there. Be open to Jesus. Open your arms to receive people that are trying to make a connection with the Lord.

[26 : 51] As they ask you questions. As they walk through these doors. As God ventures them across your path in life.

Remember the children were brought to Jesus. Bring folks to Jesus. Open your arms and welcome others to Jesus.

Open your hearts and come to Christ with a humble dependence. Depend upon him daily. Trust his word. Be receptive to hear what he'd have to say to you.

And open your hands. Whatever it is that you're clinging to today. That's outside of Christ.

Release your grip. Quit holding on so tight to what matters to you. But it's contrary to what God has for you.

[28 : 00] I like the way the old hymn writer put it. It said, nothing in my hand I bring. Simply to the cross I cling.

Rock of ages. Cleft for me. Let me hide myself in thee. Are you open today to Jesus?

Whenever he had bowed and whenever I closed. I'm going to ask you this morning. If there's ever been a time when you become open to the Lord Jesus.

Jesus, you've ever confessed that you're a sinner and asked him to cleanse you and to come into your life and to save you. I'm thankful today that because of what Christ did on the cross for us, we can come as we are.

And say, Lord, I need you to forgive me. I need you to cleanse me. I need you to empower me and strengthen me to live for you.

[29 : 06] And from this day forward, I commit my life to live for your cause. If you've never been saved, I encourage you today to be open to the Lord Jesus.

You come. We'll guide you in that process. Maybe there's things in your life that you're clinging to. And you're a Christian, but the reality is your life is not reflected. At least in some areas.

And you need to give those things over to God. You need to open that tight grip. And let God have his will and his way in your heart and life.

I don't know what that may be. But I know he does. And I've asked him before I ever came in this place today to speak individually to each one of us and help us to know what it is that we may be holding on to too tight.

That we need to let go of. To let God have his will and his way. Maybe today you need to be open to follow a commitment that God is telling you to do.

[30 : 18] Maybe that's making a commitment for salvation. Maybe that's making a commitment to publicly profess that through baptism. It might be that God's leading you to be a part of Pickens First Baptist Church.

Don't cling any longer. Open up to follow the Lord Jesus and what he'd have you to do. And if when we stand in just a moment and sing, if you'll come down this aisle and say, Pastor, this is what God's leading me to do.

I'll be happy to guide you in that. Maybe you need to lay something at this altar today. You need to lay a burden down before him. You need to open your hands to things that you're clinging to. Lay them down before him. Whatever it is that God would have you to do, I encourage you to just follow him. Just trust him. He'll never leave you astray. Lord Jesus, I love you and I thank you for the love that you have for us.

And I ask right now that you'll lead us to do exactly what you'd have us to do. Nothing more, nothing less. In Jesus' precious name, amen.