

Open Hands, Empty Hands

Mark 10:13-22

Dr. Jeremiah Ebeling ---- August 9, 2026

Jerry Seinfeld has some bits that I really appreciate about children and parenting. And one of my favorite jokes that Seinfeld tells is when he says that having children is like running a blender you don't have a top for. Stuff is flying out all over the place. It's a wild and crazy experience! And I think that when those little children become teenagers, that's like running that blender on high and dropping some steak knives in there. They're just launching out in every direction. You've got to duck and wear eye protection. It's wild. It's this really fun experience.

Jim Gaffigan says, "Do you know what having several children is like? It's like you're drowning, and then someone hands you a child." *Hold this! Good luck!*

One last one that I appreciate: "Raising a child is like folding a fitted sheet: nobody really knows how, and you're pretty sure you're doing it wrong." Who knows how to do it?

By the way, I couldn't have told any of those jokes last week because we had our kids in here. But now they're across the campus, so I can tell any kid jokes I want to.

But all joking aside, children are wonderful gifts from the Lord, are they not? And raising them, parenting, is one of the most fun, wildest adventures of life. It really is. And the reason we're starting here is because children are going to be at the center of our study this morning—what we're going to be learning about today in our time together. So, they're going to be right at the center of that.

Because today we're going to see two different interactions that Jesus has in the Gospel of Mark. And we're going to learn something important in both these interactions. From this first interaction we're going to understand how to be saved, how to receive salvation. And in the second interaction, the second conversation that Jesus has in the Gospel of Mark, we're going to understand what can keep you from salvation, what can keep you from being saved--or, if you are a Christian, what can keep you from enjoying the abundant life that Jesus has for us. The first interaction is about how we can enter the kingdom of God. The second interaction is about what can keep us out of the kingdom of God, either keep us from entering, or, if we're believers and

we're in God's kingdom, what can keep us from receiving and enjoying all that God has for us as His sons and daughters.

That's what we're going to be doing today. There's going to be a little bit of something for everyone here. And these two interactions are both in Mark 10.

FIRST INTERACTION IN MARK 10

And what happens right before these two conversations take place is this. Jesus has been teaching on marriage and divorce. He's had some tough things to say about marriage and divorce. And what's happened is that He and His small band of disciples are now in a living room. They're in a home where they're meeting together, and His disciples have some follow-up questions. They're looking to understand. So, Jesus is sharing some teaching about marriage and divorce just for that band of disciples, just for those men. But as they're having this conversation, outside the front door of this home you've got these families, parents with their babies and toddlers who are lining up, because they know that this great rabbi, Jesus, is in this home. And they come that He might bless their children, that He would lay His hands on them and pray for them. So, they lined up outside this front door to come and see Jesus. And their babies and toddlers are in their arms ready to go.

What happens is that the disciples open the front door, and they realize it's parents with their kids, and they say, *Okay look, you guys need to go home. First of all we're in a staff meeting in here, and we're talking about some pretty important things. And even if we weren't, Jesus does not have time for you. So, take your little kids and go on home. You're not welcome here.* They rebuke these families.

And that response by these disciples may surprise us. But that was actually a very typical response that these disciples had. This was right in line with the cultural view of children at that time. Because at this time children were seen as insignificant. They were seen as less than. They were at the bottom of the social hierarchy, some of the least important members of society. That was the perspective.

And we could see this in some of the writings at that time. There's a rabbi from the first century who is writing about how to be wise, how to stay away from becoming like the rest of the world. He says there are four things you need to avoid. And these are the four things. You

need to avoid “morning sleep, midday wine, sitting in the assemblies of the ignorant, and the chatter of children.” Children’s talk—stay away from it. Don’t be around it. Don’t expose yourself to it. It won’t be good for you.

You’ve probably heard this: “Children are to be seen and not heard.” Maybe this is where that started. But this was a common perspective.

In fact, there’s an apocryphal book called Sirach, also known as Ecclesiasticus, or the Wisdom of Ben Sira. And in this apocryphal book, we again have this perspective of how the culture at large understood children. This book is written by a Jewish author. Again, it’s part of the Apocrypha, so it’s not in our Bibles. It’s not divinely inspired, so it’s not part of the Bible. But it helps give us an even better understanding of what the view of children was at that time.

And this is what that writer says: “He who loves his son will whip him often in order that he may rejoice at the way he turns out. Pamper a child, and he will frighten you; play with him, and he will give you grief. Do not laugh with him, lest you have sorrow with him, and in the end, you will gnash your teeth. Bow down his neck in his youth, and beat his sides while he is young, lest he become stubborn and disobey you, and you have sorrow of soul from him.”

Have you read any parenting books with this advice in it? *Don’t laugh with your children, don’t play with them, or it will go horribly with you.* No! We don’t see that. That is not our perspective on what good parenting looks like. But there was this harshness to how children were viewed and treated.

And the Greco-Roman view was even more calloused. That view was that when a child was born, the father had the power to make a decision. Will this infant live, or will this infant die? And whatever the father said is what would happen. And if the decision was that the infant would die, that little one was left out in the elements and exposed and would eventually pass away. And if it was a female or a little one with a disability, the higher the chance that the father would decide that. There was this callousness in the way that children were viewed and treated.

What about Jesus? What will Jesus do? What was His view? What will He do in response to this cultural view and to His disciples and how they’re responding to these families that are there to have their children blessed by Jesus?

What we see in Jesus’ response is what we often see—how He brings in the values of the kingdom. And He’s going to show us what God’s perspective is on children, and the perspective that Jesus’ followers are to have, that we’re to have, that His disciples are to have. And this is

what we discover about Jesus' view, His response. When He sees that the disciples are rebuking these families, this is what Mark writes: **"But when Jesus saw it, He was indignant." (Mark 10:14a)**

Jesus is angry. He is beside Himself at the way His disciples have treated these parents and their young children, these babies and these toddlers that have come to see Him. He is indignant. This is a word here that is only used a couple of times in the gospels for Jesus' response. But this is one of those moments reserved for how Jesus responds indignantly, angrily.

What is God's value? What is the kingdom value that children have? We find out immediately. Jesus says, **" 'Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God. Truly, I say to you ...'"** Whenever Jesus is saying "truly," He's saying, *Listen to what I'm about to say. This is important.* He says, **" 'Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.' And he took then in his arms and blessed them, laying His hands on them."** (Mark 10:14b-16)

This is Jesus' response. What Jesus does is to dignify children. He says that they are the recipients of God's great love; they're these tiny, little image-bearers of their Creator. And therefore, they have inherent worth. They have infinite value. They're not insignificant. They're not nuisances. No, they're treasured by the Lord. They're deeply loved by Jesus Christ. That's His response.

And He says something important here. He says, **"To such belongs the kingdom of God."** What does He mean by that? There are a couple of things He means by that.

First, what He means is that there is nobody who is insignificant. He says that no one is excluded from the invitation to be saved. You've never met someone, you've never laid your eyes on someone, who is insignificant and excluded from the invitation that God has given us to be saved, to receive salvation. That's the first thing He means by **"to such belongs the kingdom of God."**

A second reality He's referring to is that salvation is wide open to even the smallest person who puts their faith in Christ. So, if you have a four-year-old who doesn't know how to read and doesn't even know how to tie his shoes, and that little four-year-old knows that he's a sinner and that he can't help himself—he can't save himself and he needs someone to do that—then if that little four-year-old puts his faith in Jesus Christ, do you know what Jesus says to that

four-year-old? He says, *Welcome. Come on in. You're part of my kingdom now. You're my child.* And He welcomes that little one in.

So, when you think about our Grace Kids ministry that is across our campus, that meets in those two buildings across our courtyard, that is such an incredibly important ministry here at Grace. And this is why: **"to such belongs the kingdom of God."** We have seven amazing staff that work and oversee and serve in our children's ministry. And what happens across our campus every Sunday and during that week is not childcare. It's not babysitting. What happens over there is discipleship. We are introducing children to their Savior, introducing them to a relationship with God. If they put their faith in Christ, then it's helping them take those next steps as believers and mature in their faith, no matter what age they are. That's what is happening across our campus. I just want you to know, if you have served in our Grace Kids Ministry in the past or you're doing that now or maybe continuing to do it or for the first time—if you stepped your toes into that—if you hear this passage, what I hope you're hearing is that you are totally aligned with the heart of Jesus in that way. You are expressing the heart of the Savior, and He must be thrilled by that in the way that you're loving the children of our church. And so, I just want to say thank you from the bottom of my heart. I thank you that you've chosen to be a part of that. Jesus Christ Himself, if He were here, would say that too. He would have a deep appreciation and thankfulness that you would choose to do that.

And so, because this is true—**"to such belongs the kingdom of God"**—what does Jesus do? What's the next thing in this interaction? He receives each one of those children, each one of those babies and toddlers. And He takes them in His arms, and He puts His hand on their heads and blesses them. He prays to His heavenly Father for each one of those children. And He takes the time to do that. You know what this was? This was the mother of all baby dedication services, right? I mean, pun intended. This was incredible. Imagine if in our next baby dedication service Jesus Himself were up here, and He was the one dedicating our children here at Grace. We'd have a line across this campus, and it would be a continuum. We wouldn't just bring our kids here; we'd bring our teenagers too. *Here, Jesus, hold my sixteen-year-old and bless him. Exorcise his demons, help us out.* It would be incredible. That's what these families got to experience from Jesus that day. That's what they got to enjoy.

Jesus is working to change His disciples' perspective, to give them the kingdom perspective on children. And once He's done that, He has something even more important to

teach them. He teaches them what we can learn from children about how to be saved. What does it look like to receive salvation? That's what He's going to help us understand next, through children and the way they act. That's what He says in verse 15: **"Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it." (Mark 10:15)**

And so, how are you saved? How do you receive salvation? What do children teach us about this? They teach us this: that salvation is something that we simply receive. Salvation is something that you simply receive. Jesus wants us to understand something important about how we're saved. And what He's going to do is talk about a toddler. Think about a little toddler with her parents. What does that toddler do? What does that toddler experience? Everything that little three-year-old girl needs she receives from her parents. She brings nothing. She contributes nothing. Everything she receives—home, food, love, attention, affection—all of that is given to her by her parents.

We don't come to a three-year-old in our home and say, *You know what? Okay, it's time you get a job. It's time you start pulling your weight around here and contributing something around here.* We don't do that. No, toddlers just take and receive everything that they need. Everything is given to them.

And it's the same with salvation. That's true with salvation too. The way salvation works is that we come like a toddler, and we receive from the Lord. See, salvation isn't something that comes from within. It's not something that comes from here. Salvation comes from above. It's given to us if we'll receive it. It can't be earned. It could never be earned. We just receive it like a toddler who receives from her parents. That's a reality that Jesus wants us to see.

And so, do you know what you do in order to be saved, in order to receive salvation? Do you know what you do? Just do this. You put your hands out, hands open, ready to receive. That's how you're saved. That's how salvation works. Everything we need in salvation comes from the Lord. We bring nothing. We contribute nothing. We just open our hands and receive what the Lord wants to give us—salvation.

You know, this is a really helpful metaphor for what it means to be saved. But the Bible uses other metaphors too for what salvation looks like so that we can understand it. It gives us different perspectives so that we can understand what it means to put your faith in Christ and to be saved, to enter the kingdom of God. Another really helpful metaphor that corresponds closely with this one of a little child receiving is that salvation is a knock at your front door. And you

don't know who it is and you aren't expecting anyone, but you walk to your front door. And you do something that you never do in real life. You open your door to a stranger. Nobody does that.

But you open your door, and it's Jesus, the Son of God who is standing there. He asks if He can come in, and you say, "Oh, please, yes, come in!" And you realize that it's dinner time. And so, you start frantically looking through the refrigerator and your pantry for the best that you have to offer Jesus, the Son of God who's in your home. And as you're frantically looking, He says, "No, that's not necessary. You don't need to do that. I brought everything that we need for this meal. I've brought it all. You don't have to provide anything." And He invites you over, and He pulls out a chair, and He lets you sit down. And He sets the table in front of you. And He lays out the meal that He brought. And He sits across the table from you. And you get to enjoy a meal. You get to dine with Jesus.

That's another metaphor for what it looks to be saved and receive salvation. And the reality is that to receive salvation, all you do is open the door. You let Him in. You allow Him to serve you. And then, you partake of the meal that He's brought, and you enjoy that with Him. That's another really helpful picture of what it means to be saved.

And so, in both of these examples, as a little child or as one who has Jesus in his home, being served a meal, this is what you do. You just open your hands. You receive. That's what it looks like to be saved. That's what it looks like to enter the kingdom of God—just receive everything that God has for you, that Jesus has for you.

And so, I wonder, have you done that yet? Have you gotten to a place where you've said, "You know what, God, I can't save myself. So, I need to receive. And my hands are open."

And I want to invite you, if you have not done that before, that today could be that day for you. This morning could be that morning when you put your hands out and you receive what Jesus has to give you, that you might enjoy salvation and dine with the Savior, and, like a little child, receive what He has to give you.

If you want to do that today, if that's something you're ready to do, I want to help you with a guide for how that looks. What is the conversation that you could have with the Lord even right now in the quietness of your soul, between you and Him. Here's a guide for you.

Step one would be to admit, **I'm a sinner. I'm a sinner and I can't save myself.** That's step one. If you want to be saved, if you want to enjoy this gift of salvation, you admit that you're a sinner.

What do you do next? **You believe. And what do you believe? This: that Jesus died and He was resurrected.** If you indeed believe that, you can say that to the Lord: “I believe that Jesus is the Son of God, that He died to pay for my sins; that He was resurrected to give me eternal life. And I believe that in my soul. I believe that, Lord.” You can tell that to the Lord right now.

And then, the third thing is to confess. What do you confess? That Jesus is your Lord and Savior. It’s not just Jesus is THE Lord and Savior, but that He is YOUR Lord and Savior. He is Lord. He made you, so He is in charge of you. He made everything. He’s in charge of everything. But He’s your Lord. He is ruler of your life now. And then, He’s your Savior. He has fully accepted you, He has fully forgiven you through His work on the cross, and through nothing you’ve done. It’s all from Him. I’ve got open hands. I’m just receiving.

This is a guide for what you could say to the Lord even right now if you’re ready to receive salvation and enjoy eternal life that starts now. There are two passages. One I’ll just tell you that encapsulates this idea of what it is you’re receiving in salvation. **Ephesians 2:8-9** (write that down) is an awesome passage that talks about it. It is a gift of God, not from us. We’re just opening our hands and receiving it. Another one is up here on the board, in Romans 10. **“If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.” (Romans 10:9)** It’s a promise, amen and indeed. It’s a promise that you can receive, that if you confess and believe that, then you have received salvation and you are now a son or daughter of the King and get to enjoy His kingdom.

And that’s the invitation that you have today. And I want you to know that if that’s the decision that you made this morning or a decision that you made recently, I encourage you to share that with a Christian. Share that with a fellow believer. You could do that with a family member who knows the Lord, or with the person who brought you if you’re visiting. You can go out in the lobby after the service, and our pastors and ministry directors will be out there. They’ll probably have a nametag on. And share that with one of us out there. We’d love to celebrate that with you and help you in figuring out the next step to begin walking with the Lord. What does it look like to follow Jesus now as a believer?

And if you’re considering that, but you’re not ready to make that decision, I love that you’re here. And if you have questions about the Christian faith, talk to any one of those people

that I just mentioned—a pastor or a ministry director out in the lobby. We’d love to help you with the questions that you have and talk through that with you.

But I want you to know, this is what we see and understand. Dining with Jesus and being a little child with your parents—it is this reality that salvation is opening your hands and receiving what Jesus has to give us, what He promises to us.

SECOND INTERACTION IN MARK 10

Now, that’s our first interaction and what we learn from it about how to be saved. How about that second conversation that Jesus has? The very next moment after this experience of Jesus blessing these children in Mark 10, we discover what can keep you out of the kingdom of God? Or, if you’re part of the kingdom and you’re a Christian, what can keep you from experiencing the abundant life, from experiencing all that God has for you? And that’s what we’re going to learn in this second interaction.

There’s a young man, and he runs up to Jesus. And this young man has his stuff together. He is wealthy, he is in charge. He’s a ruler, a leader. And he’s young. He’s in the prime of his life. And he runs up to Jesus and asks the most important question that has ever been asked in the history of the world. He asks, **“Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” (Mark 10:17)** He’s asking, “How do I enter the kingdom of God? How am I saved? What do I do? What do I need to know about that?” And it’s this question that Jesus has just answered with His disciples.

After a brief exchange, Mark tells us that Jesus looks at this young man and He loves him. He loves him deeply. And He responds to that question about how he can inherit eternal life. And this is what Jesus says to Him: **“You lack one thing: Go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.” (Mark 10:21)**

And the young man hears that. And in the very next verse we see his response: **“Disheartened by the saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.” (Mark 10:22)** He hears this invitation of Jesus, and he says, *No thank you.*

It is one of the saddest stories in all Scripture. Think about everything that this young man had going for him. He had an audience with the Savior. He’s asking the most important question that could ever be asked. We know that he’s eager, that he runs up to Jesus. He is

excited and ready to hear the answer to this question. We know that he's humble, because when he runs up to Jesus, he kneels out of respect to honor Jesus in the way he comes to Him. We know he comes with almost everything that he needs to receive salvation, to receive what Jesus is going to give to him.

But the one thing he lacked was this: he didn't have open hands. He didn't have empty hands. His hands were already full of something he was unwilling to let go of. His hands were full of the possessions, the wealth, that he wouldn't let go of. And the wealth wasn't the problem; the problem was that his trust was in that wealth, in those possessions. And so, he goes away sorrowful. He goes away sad, disheartened. And he says, *No thank you* in response.

You see, friends, these handfuls of something else, anything else, is all that it takes to keep us from entering the kingdom of God, from receiving the salvation that God offers to us. And it doesn't matter what our hands are full of. If they're full of anything besides trusting in Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior, it will keep us from putting our faith in Jesus, because our trust and our dependence are in something or someone else. We never run out of options of what we will hold onto that will keep us back from Jesus.

I told you, this doesn't just apply to those who are maybe considering salvation. This also applies to those of us who are believers, who are in the kingdom of God. Because the reality is that you can live like this as God's child, too. You can be a believer and be holding onto something else that is not Jesus, something else in which you trust, in which you depend. We can live like this. And when we do that, we give up everything that God wants to be doing in our lives. Because this is the way we live the Christian life: with hands open, ready to receive.

In 2 Peter, it says this. This is an incredible passage. **"His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and goodness." (2 Peter 1:3)**

We have everything we need from the Lord to be able to live a godly life, to enjoy life in His kingdom, to see the fruit of the Spirit and godly character be formed in us. God gives us everything we need to be able to enjoy that. Do you know what we have to do, though? We just put our hands out, hands open, ready to receive what God has for us. And the one thing that can keep us back from that is if our hands are full of anything else.

And so, I want to ask you this morning: Are your hands full of something else that's keeping you back as a Christian, as a believer ... that's keeping you back from enjoying and

receiving all that God has for you as His son or His daughter? Is there something that you're holding onto that you've decided you're not going to let go of? Because look, if your hands are full of possessions, if that's where your trust and your dependence are, then you won't have open, empty hands ready to receive the joy and contentment and peace that God has for you.

If your hands are full of reputation and what other people say about you and their opinions, their acceptance or not of you; if your hands are full of that, then that's where your dependence is. We won't have open hands to receive the full acceptance, the full love that God has already given to us that He says is ours as believers. We won't be able to accept that and enjoy that and rest in that.

If your hands are full of a grudge or anger or bitterness toward someone else, you won't have open hands to enjoy the freedom, the joy God would have you enjoy, that He would want for you as one of His children.

And so, what if today was the day? What if today was the day that whatever you've been holding onto, you decide, *You know what? I'm ready to release this.* Today is Sunday, August 9, 2026. It is twelve o'clock. What if this was the moment when you decided that whatever that is, whatever you've been holding onto in the kingdom of God that's keeping you back from everything that God has for you—what if you decided to do this? Just say, *Lord, You can have it. I'm done holding onto that. I'm ready to receive all that You have for me. I'm Yours. I'm all Yours.* You could do that right now.

In fact, what I would like you to do is take a moment between you and the Lord. And whatever is on your heart, why don't you share that with Him? If there's something you need to confess, if there's a release that needs to happen in your life, then talk to the Lord about that.

And if you want to, as a physical expression of where your soul and heart are, as you talk to the Lord you could even hold out your hands. Hold them open, ready to receive what God has for you. Why don't you do that now? I'll give you a little time to do that, and then I'll close us in prayer.

Heavenly Father, our heart's desire as a church body, as a church family, is to come before You this morning, not with hands clenched. Lord, we want to be free from that. We know that You can help us with that, that we might have open hands, empty hands, ready to receive all that You have for us. Because You've given us everything that we need to live a godly life, to

walk in faith, to follow You wholeheartedly. And that's what we want. We want the freedom of being able to do that and to enjoy You fully. So, would You give us everything that we need to be able to release anything that we've been grasping, something we've been holding onto, that we could have open hands, empty hands, ready for what You have for us?

Lord, I pray that in Your Son's name. Amen.