

Children Brought to Christ

A Sermon Excerpt Delivered on Sunday Morning, July 24th, 1864, by the
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"And they brought young children to him, that he should touch them: and his disciples rebuked those that brought them. But when Jesus saw it, he was much displeased, and said unto them, "Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God. Verily I say unto you, whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein. And he took them up in his arms, put his hands upon them, and blessed them"—Mark 10:13-16.

HOW can we bring children to Jesus Christ to be blessed? We cannot do it in a corporeal sense, for Jesus is not here, "he is risen;" but we can bring our children in a true, real, and spiritual sense. We take them up in the arms of our *prayer*. I hope many of us, so soon as our children saw the light, if not before, presented them to God with this anxious prayer, that they might sooner die than live to disgrace their father's God. We only desired children that we might in them live over again another life of service to God; and when we looked into their young faces, we never asked wealth for them, nor fame, nor anything else, but that they might be dear unto God, and that their names might be written in the Lamb's Book of Life. We did then bring our children to Christ as far as we could do it, by presenting them before God, by earnest prayer on their behalf. And have we ceased to bring them to Christ? Nay, I hope we seldom bow the knee without praying for our children. Our daily cry is, "O, that they might live before thee!" God knows that nothing would give us more joy than to see evidence of their conversion; our souls would almost leap out of our bodies with joy, if we should but know that they were the children of the living God. Nor has this privilege been denied to us, for there are some here who can rejoice in a converted household. Truly we can say with the apostle Paul, "I have no greater joy than this, that my children walk in the truth." We continue, therefore, to bring them to Christ by daily, constant, earnest prayer on their behalf. So soon as they become of years capable of understanding the things of God, we endeavour to bring them to Christ by *teaching them the truth*. Hence our Sabbath schools, hence the use of the Bible and family prayer, and catechizing at home. Any person who shall forbid us to pray for our children, will incur Christ's high displeasure; and any who shall say, "Do not teach your children; they will be converted in God's own time if it be his purpose, therefore leave them to run wild in the streets," will certainly both "sin against the child" and the Lord Jesus. We might as well say, "If that piece of ground is to grow a harvest, it will do so if it be God's good pleasure; therefore leave it, and let the weeds spring up and cover it; do not endeavour for a moment to kill the weeds, or to sow the good seed." Why, such reasoning as this would be not only cruel to our children, but grievously displeasing to Christ. Parents! I do hope you are all endeavouring to bring your children to Christ by teaching them the things of God. Let them not be strangers to the plan of salvation. Never let it be said that a child of yours reached years in which his conscience could act, and he could judge between good and evil, without knowing the doctrine of the atonement, without understanding the great substitutionary work of Christ. Set before your child life

and death, hell and heaven, judgment and mercy, his own sin, and Christ's most precious blood; and as you set these before him, labour with him, persuade him, as the apostle did his congregation, with tears and weeping, to turn unto the Lord; and your prayers and supplications shall be heard so that the Spirit of God shall bring them to Jesus...

I cannot tell you how much I owe to the solemn words of my good mother. It was the custom on Sunday evenings, while we were yet little children, for her to stay at home with us, and then we sat round the table and read verse by verse, and she explained the Scripture to us. After that was done, then came the time of pleading; there was a little piece of "Alley's Alarm," or of Baxter's "Call to the Unconverted," and this was read with pointed observations made to each of us as we sat round the table; and the question was asked how long it would be before we would think about our state, how long before we would seek the Lord. Then came a mother's prayer, and some of the words of a mother's prayer we shall never forget, even when our hair is gray. I remember on one occasion her praying thus: "Now, Lord, if my children go on in their sins, it will not be from ignorance that they perish, and my soul must bear a swift witness against them at the day of judgment if they lay not hold of Christ." That thought of a mother's bearing swift witness against me, pierced my conscience and stirred my heart. This pleading with them for God and with God for them is the true way to bring children to Christ. Sunday-school teachers! you have a high and noble work, press forward in it. In our schools you do not try to bring children to the baptistry for regeneration, you point them away from ceremonies; if I know the teachers of this school aright, I know you are trying to bring your classes to Christ. Let Christ be the sum and substance of your teaching in the school. Young men and young women, in your classes lift up Christ, lift him up on high; and if anybody shall say to you, "Why do you thus talk to the children?" you can say, "Because my soul yearns towards them, and I pant for their conversion;" and if any should afterwards object, you can remember that Jesus is greatly displeased with *them*, and not with you, for you only obey the injunction, "Feed my lambs."

Coming to Christ means laying hold upon Christ with the hand of faith; looking to him for my life, my pardon, my salvation, my everything. If there be a poor little child here who is saying in her little heart, or his little heart, "I would like to come to Christ, O that I might be pardoned while I am yet a little one"—come, little lamb; come, and welcome. Did I hear your cry? Was it this?

"Gentle Jesus, meek and mild,
Look upon a little child;
Pity my simplicity,
Suffer me to come to thee."

Dear little one, Jesus will not despise your lisps, nor will his servant keep you back. Jesus calls you, come and receive his blessing. If any of you say a word to keep the young heart back, Jesus will be displeased with you. Now I am afraid some do that, those, for instance, who think that the gospel is not for little children. Many of my brethren, I am sorry to say, preach in such a way that there is no hope of children ever getting any good by their preaching. I cannot glory in learning or eloquence, but in this one thing I may rejoice, that there is always a number of happy children here, who are quite as attentive as any of my audience. I do love to think that the gospel is suitable to little children. There are boys and girls in many of our Sabbath-school classes down below stairs who are as truly converted to God as any of us. Nay, and if you were to speak with

them about the things of God, though you should get to the knotty points of election and predestination, you would find those boys and girls well taught in the things of the kingdom: they know free will from free grace, and you cannot puzzle them when you come to talk about the work of Jesus and the work of the Spirit, for they can discern between things which differ. But a minister who preaches as though he never wanted to bring children to Christ, and shoots right over the little one's heads, I do think Jesus is displeased with him.

Then there are others who doubt whether children ever will be converted. They do not look upon it as a thing likely to happen, and whenever they hear of a believing child, they hold up their hands at the prodigy, and say, "What a wonder of grace!" It ought to be, and in those Churches where the gospel is simply preached, it is as common a thing for children to be converted as for grown-up people to be brought to Christ. Others begin to doubt the truth of juvenile conversions. They say, "They are very young, can they understand the gospel? Is it not merely an infantile emotion, a mere profession?" My brethren, you have no more right to suspect the sincerity of the young, than to mistrust the gray-headed; you ought to receive them with the same open-breasted confidence with which you receive others when they profess to have found the Saviour. Do, I pray you, whenever you see the faintest desire in your children, go down on your knees, as your servant does, when the fire is almost out, and blow the spark with your own breath—seek by prayer to fan that spark to a flame. Do not despise any godly remark the child may make. Do not puff the child up on account of the goodness of the remark, lest you make him vain and so injure him, but do encourage him; let his first little prayers be noticed by you; though you may not like to teach him a form of prayer—I shall not care if you do not—yet teach him what prayer is; tell him to express his desires in his own words, and when he does so, join ye in it and plead with God on his behalf, that your little one may speedily find true peace in a Saviour's blood. You must not, unless you would displease my Master, keep back the smallest child that longs to come to Christ.

Here let us observe that the principle is of general application; you must not hinder any awakened soul from seeking the Saviour. O my brethren and sisters, I hope we have such a love for souls, such an instinct within us to desire to see the travail of Christ's soul, that instead of putting stumbling blocks in the way, we would do the best we could to gather out the stones. On Sabbath days I have laboured to clear up the doubts and fears which afflict coming sinners; I have entreated God the Holy Spirit to enable me so to speak, that those things which hindered you from coming to the Saviour might be removed; but how sad must be the case of those who delight themselves in putting stumbling-blocks in men's way. The doctrine of election, for instance, a great and glorious truth, full of comfort to God's people; how often is that made to frighten sinners from Jesus! There is a way of preaching that with a drawn sword, and say, "You must not come unless you know you are one of God's elect." That is not the way to preach the doctrine. The true way of preaching it is, "God has a chosen people, and I hope you are one of them; come, lay hold on Jesus, put your trust in him." Then there be others who preach up frames and feelings as a preparation for Christ. They do in effect say, "Unless you have felt so much depression of spirit, or experienced a certain quantity of brokenness of heart, you must not come to Christ," instead of declaring, that whosoever will is permitted to come, and that the true way of coming to Christ is not with a qualification of frames and feeling and mental depressions, but just as you are. Oh! it is my soul's delight to preach a gospel

which has an open door to it, to preach a mercy-seat which has no veil before it; the veil is rent in twain, and now the biggest sinner out of hell who desires to come, is welcome. You who are eighty years of age, and have hated Christ all the time, if now the Spirit of God makes you willing to come, Christ seems to say, "Suffer the gray-headed to come unto me, and forbid them not:" while to you little children, he stretches out his arms in the same manner, "Suffer the little children to come unto me." O my beloved, see to it that your heart longs to come to Christ, and not to ceremonies! I stand here this day to cry, "Come ye to the cross, not to the font." When I forget to lift up the Lord Jesus, and to cast down the forms of man's devising, "let my right hand forget her cunning," and "let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth"—

None but Jesus, none but Jesus,
Can do helpless sinners good;"

The font is a mockery and an imposition if it be put before Christ. If you have baptism after you have come to Christ, well and good, but to point you to it either as being Christ, or as being inevitably connected with Christ, or as being the place to find Christ, is nothing better than to go back to the beggarly elements of the old Romish harlot, instead of standing in the "liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free," and bidding the sinner to come as a sinner to Christ Jesus, and to Christ Jesus alone.

Let us also gather from our text, that **WHEN WE DISCOURAGE ANY, WE ALWAYS GO UPON WRONG GROUNDS**. Here was the case of children. I suppose that the grounds upon which the apostles kept back the children would be one of these—either that the children could not receive a blessing, or else that they could not receive it worthily.

Did they imagine that these little children could not receive the blessing? Perhaps so, for they thought them too young. Now, brethren, that was a wrong ground to go upon, for these children could receive the blessing and they did receive it, for Jesus took them in his arms and blessed them. If I keep back a child from coming to Christ on the ground that he is too young, I do it in the face of facts; because there have been children brought to Christ at an extremely early period. You who are acquainted with Janeway's "Tokens for Children" have noticed very many beautiful instances of early conversion. Our dear friend, Mrs. Rogers, in that book of hers, "The Folded Lamb," gave a very sweet picture of a little son of hers, soon folded in the Saviour's bosom above, who, as early as two or three years of age, rejoiced and knew the Saviour. I do not doubt at all, I cannot doubt it, because one has seen such cases, that children of two or three years of age may have precocity of knowledge, and of grace; a forwardness which in almost every case has betokened early death, but which has been perfectly marvellous to those who have talked with them. The fact is that we do not all at the same age arrive at that degree of mental stature that is necessary for understanding the things of God. Children have been reported as reading Latin, Greek, and other languages, at five or six years of age. I do not know that such early scholarship is any great blessing, it is better not to reach that point so soon; but some children are all that their minds ever will be at three or four, and then they go home to heaven; and so long as the mind has been brought up to such a condition that it is capable of understanding, it is also capable of faith, if the Holy Spirit shall implant it. To suppose that he ever did give faith to an unconscious babe is ridiculous; that there can be any faith in a child that knows nothing whatever I must always take ground to doubt, for "How shall they believe without a preacher?" And yet they are brought up to make a

profession in their long-clothes, when they have never heard a sermon in their lives. But those dear children to whom I have before referred, have understood the preacher, have understood the truth, have rejoiced in the truth, and their first young lisplings have been as full of grace as those glorious expressions of aged saints in their triumphant departures. Children are capable, then, of receiving the grace of God. Do mark by the way, that all those champions who have come out against me so valiantly, have made a mistake; they have said that we deny that little infants may be regenerated; we do not deny that God can regenerate them if he pleases; we do not know anything about what may or may not happen to unconscious babes; but we did say that little children were not regenerated by their godparents telling lies at a font—we did say that, and we say it again, that little children are not regenerated, nor made members of Christ, nor children of God, nor inheritors of the kingdom of heaven, by solemn mockery, in which godfathers and godmothers promise to do for them what they cannot do for themselves, much less for their children. That is the point; and if they will please to meet it, we will answer them again, but till such time as that, we shall probably let them talk on till God gives them grace to know better.

The other ground upon which the apostles put back the children would be, that although the children might receive the blessing, *they might not be able to receive it worthily*. The Lord Jesus in effect assures them that so far from the way in which a little child enters into the kingdom of heaven being exceptional, it is the rule; and the very way in which a child enters the kingdom, is the way in which everybody must enter it. How does a child enter the kingdom of heaven? Why, its faith is very simple; it does not understand mysteries and controversies, but it believes what it is told upon the authority of God's Word, and it comes to God's Word without previous prejudice. It has its natural sinfulness, but grace overcomes it, and the child receives the Word as it finds it. You will notice in boyish and girlish conversions, a peculiar simplicity of belief: they believe just what Christ says, exactly what he says. If they pray, they believe Christ will hear them: if they talk about Jesus, it is as of a person near at hand. They do not, as we do, get into the making of these things into mysteries and shadows, but little children have a realizing power. Then they have great rejoicing. The most cheerful Christians we have are young believers; and the most cheerful old Christians are those who were converted when they were young. Why, see the joy of a child that finds a Saviour! "Mother," he says, "I have sought Jesus Christ, and I have trusted him, and I am saved." He does not say, "I hope," and "I trust," but "I am;" and then he is ready to leap for joy because he is saved. Of the many boys and girls whom we have received into Church-fellowship, I can say of them all, they have all gladdened my heart, and I have never received any with greater confidence than I have these: this I have noticed about them, they have greater joy and rejoicing than any others; and I take it, it is because they do not ask so many questions as others do, but take Jesus Christ's word as they find it, and believe in it. Well now, just the very way in which a child receives Christ is the way in which you must receive Christ if you would be saved. You who know so much that you know *too* much; you who have big brains; you who are always thinking, and have tendency to criticism, and perhaps to scepticism, you must come and receive the gospel as a little child. You will never get a hold of my Lord and Master while you are wearing that quizzing cap; no, you must take it off, and by the power of the Holy Spirit you must come trusting Jesus, simply trusting him, for this is the right way to receive the kingdom.

But here, let me say, the principle which holds good in little children holds good in all other cases as well. Take for instance the case of very great sinners, men who have been gross offenders against the laws of their country. Some would say they cannot be saved; they can be for some of them have been. Others would say they never receive the truth as it is in Jesus in the right manner; ay, but they do. How do great sinners receive Christ? There are some here who have been reclaimed from drunkenness, and I know not what. My brethren, how did you receive Christ? Why in this way. You said, "All unholy, all unclean, I am nothing else but sin; but if I am saved, it will be grace, grace, grace." Why, when you and I stood up, black, and foul, and filthy, and yet dared to believe in Christ, we said, "If we are saved, we shall be prodigies of divine mercy, and we will sing of his love for ever." Well but, my dear friends, you must all receive Jesus Christ in that very way. That which would raise an objection to the salvation of the big sinner is thrown back upon you, for Christ might well say, "Except ye receive these things as the chief of sinners, ye cannot enter the kingdom." I will prove my point by the instance of the apostle Paul. He has been held by some to be an exception to the rule, but Paul did not think so, for he says that God in him showed forth all longsuffering for a pattern to them that believe, and made him as it were a type of all conversions; so that instead of being an exception his was to be the rule. You see what I am driving at. The case of the children looks exceptional, but it is not; it has, on the contrary, all the features about it that must be found in every true conversion. It is of such that the kingdom of heaven is composed, and if we are not such we cannot enter it. Let this induce all of us who love the Lord, to pray for the conversion both of children and of all sorts of men. Let our compassion expand, let us shut out none from the plea of our heart; in prayer and in faith let us bring all who come under our range, hoping and believing that some of them will be found in the election of grace, that some of them will be washed in the Saviour's blood, and that some of them will shine as stars in the firmament of God for ever. Let us, on no consideration, believe that the salvation of any man or child is beyond the range of possibility, for the Lord saveth whom he wills. Let no difficulties which seem to surround the case hinder our efforts; let us, on the contrary, push with greater eagerness forward, believing that where there seems to be some special difficulty, there will be manifested, as in the children's case, some special privilege. O labour for souls, my dear friends! I beseech you live to win souls. This is the best rampart against error, a rampart built of living stones—converted men and women. This is the way to push back the advances of Popery, by imploring the Lord to work conversions. I do not think that mere controversial preaching will do much, though it must be used; it is grace-work we want; it is bringing you to Christ, it is getting you to lay hold of him—it is this which shall put the devil to a nonplus and expand the kingdom of Christ. O that my God would bring some of you to Jesus! If he is displeased with those who would keep you back, then see how willing he is to receive you. Is there in your soul any desire towards him? Come and welcome, sinner, come. Do you feel now that you must have Christ or die? Come and have him, he is to be had for the asking. Has the Lord taught you your need of Jesus? Ye thirsty ones, come and drink; ye hungry ones, come and eat. Yea, this is the proclamation of the gospel today, "The Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." I do trust there may be encouragement in this to some of you. I pray my Master make you feel it. If he be angry with those who keep you back, then he must be willing to receive you,

glad to receive you; and if you come to him he will in no wise cast you out. May the Lord add his blessing on these words for Jesus' sake. Amen.

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