

Education Sermon (April/May 2024)

Let the Children Come

Mark 10: 13 – 27

The story of Jesus is always exciting. It is so interesting and important that there are four books in the Bible that just focus on the life of Christ. We call them the Gospels. They tell us of His life and ministry, His death, burial, resurrection and ascension, and that He is coming back one day to take us home to live with Him. The Gospels all tell the same story, but they each emphasize different things and sometimes tell the same incidents in different order. Some stories that are found in one Gospel are not included in another, and the order in which they come is sometimes different. That is one reason that our scripture passage is so fascinating. It tells about three separate issues, and they are mentioned in the same order, in three different Gospels: **St. Mark chapter 10, Matthew 19, and Luke 18.**

The passages deal first with Jesus blessing the children, then with the Rich Young Ruler, and finally with Jesus telling His disciples about the power of God and the reward of those who put their trust in Him. These are three separate and apparently unrelated matters. Why do the three Gospel writers consider these incidents important enough to be included in all three Gospels? Why are they in the same order, and in some cases written almost word for word? The fact is, that these three messages are indeed related, and they have important lessons for you and me today.

While Jesus was on earth, He was a preacher, a healer, a counselor, a mentor; but most of all, He was a teacher. He was such a wise person, so warm and friendly, so understanding, that everyone wanted to be near Him and to hear Him. That is why that day when the mothers brought their little children to Him, they had problems getting close to Him because of the crowds. The disciples and the multitude knew that Jesus was doing important work. They wanted to see more miracles and hear new sermons. They also wanted Him to impress the scribes, Pharisees and lawyers, important people who were watching everything that Jesus did. As far as they were concerned, these parents just picked a bad time to bring those children. Jesus was busy with more important things. He couldn't deal with that now. So, the disciples stood in the way of those parents and turned them back. The passage says they 'rebuked' them.

But listen! Jesus saw what was happening and He rebuked the disciples. “Let the children come to Me!”, He said. How could they turn away His VIP’s, His Very Important Persons? That is what the children are to Him. Very important persons.

We do not know who those mothers were. We are not told their names, if they were from Capernaum or Jericho, or if they were rich or poor; but there is one thing that we know about them. They were wise mothers. How do we know? They brought the children to Jesus! They knew that the best thing they could do to guarantee the future of their children for time and for eternity was to bring them to Jesus to receive His blessing.

It was true for them and it is also true for parents here and now. In **Rev. 12: 17** and in **1 Peter 5: 8** we are warned that the devil is a dangerous and angry enemy with a strong determination to destroy God’s children. At this time, he is especially targeting the children and youth. I hardly need to point out to you how relentlessly he is attacking them through the television and internet, social media, electronic games and music. He also tries to destroy their lives by leading them to drugs and alcohol, sexual experimentation and the attraction of worldly styles and fashions.

What is perhaps more dangerous and more effective is the way he introduces false ideas through the people and institutions we trust and look up to – our educators and the education system. Many parents will take steps to protect their children from destructive media, drugs and so on, but will never stop to think about the dangers they are facing in the supposed safety of the school. Yet, it is here that Satan seeks to commit his biggest crime against them: to steal their minds. This is where they spend 7 to 8 hours every day, five days per week, listening to, and being influenced by people they admire and look up to – a situation that is supported by their parents, relatives and society in general. But think about this.

In Geography, History, and the sciences, the theory of evolution is presented in respected textbooks as a fact that all intelligent and well-educated persons are expected to accept. In Health and Family Life Education, counselling and other social sciences, they present New Age ideas, and ungodly, perverted principles regarding family life and sexual behaviour. Persons who disagree with these immoral ideas are accused of being hateful and intolerant. The principles of the Bible are undermined and false religious ideas are introduced through Religious Education in the schools. All of this is happening with the permission and support of Christian – yes, even Adventist Christian – parents!

Favourite teachers sometimes have a stronger influence on students than even their parents do, and even if they do not completely win the minds of students over to evil ideas, they at least succeed in making them more tolerant and less likely to take an active stand against evil. God's ambition for His children is not just that they be well-behaved, decent, church-going youth, but that they are active in the fight against evil. Remember that famous quotation from Ellen White:

The greatest want of the world is the want of men [and women] who will not be bought or sold, who in their inmost souls are true and honest, who do not fear to call sin by its right name, whose conscience is as true to duty as the needle to the pole, who will stand for the right though the heavens fall

Education p. 57

If there was ever a time we needed to train our sons and daughters to be people of principle, to take a stand against evil, it is now!

God, in His love and wisdom, warned us through His prophets of the dangers of the days in which we live. In **2 Tim. 3: 1**, we are told that these would be perilous times (extremely dangerous). In **verse 13**, we are explicitly told that “evil men and imposters will grow worse and worse”, wicked people who are deceiving others, while they, themselves are deceived. In **verses 14 and 15**, the Apostle Paul points to the only protection that we and our children have against this attack: we must rely heavily on “the holy scriptures which are able to make you wise unto salvation” through faith in Jesus. We are advised that “all [our] children should be taught of the Lord” (**Is. 54: 13**). In other words, all our children should get a Christian education.

God did not just leave it there. Continuing to speak through His prophets, He sent clear words through Ellen White to the SDA church, instructing the church to build schools and to avoid, as much as possible, the corrupting influences of these worldly institutions (PH 131). He further gave instructions as to the type of teachers, the content and quality of the curriculum, the management of the plant and other details (CPTS). He is serious that the children must come unto Him because they belong to Him, they must become citizens of His kingdom and live with Him forever. Jesus died to give them that right.

“Forbid them not”. “Do not prevent them”, Jesus said. Do not prevent them by making the wrong choices for them. Do not prevent them by failing to equip our

schools to deliver the kind of education He prescribes. Do not prevent them by considering so many things as being more important than their Christian education. Jesus was so serious about this that He said, “*Whosoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck and he were drowned in the depth of the sea*” (Matt. 18: 5, 6). In other words, before you contribute in any way, whether actively or passively, to let one of them be lost, it is better to go drown yourself! Ouch!!! We need to be careful. Jesus doesn’t often make threats.

But notice that what these children needed was not just to see Jesus. The mothers could have left those children at home and simply asked Jesus to pray for them. He had to “speak the word only” and the children would be blessed. But no; they needed more than that. They needed His touch (Luke 18: 15) – to make personal contact with Him. It is not enough for the child to be near Jesus in the home, in family worship, at church in Sabbath School, or even in the church school. Each child must be brought to have a personal encounter - a personal relationship with Jesus. He must get a personal “touch”. The fact that he/she is in church, not smoking or drinking, being active in AY or the children’s choir is not enough. They need to come to the point where they know Jesus, love Him, and claim Him as their personal Friend.

One of the main objectives of the Adventist school is to create the environment, and to give the encouragement to our children to establish their own personal relationships with Christ. They must experience the personal touch of Christ in their lives and Jesus Himself demonstrated that this is a matter of priority! This is even more important than the academic programme or the passing of external exams, and the Adventist school should not apologize for this priority. This is the factor that prepares the student for eternal life beyond this present life and it is what defines the difference between Adventist education and the education delivered by other schools. It also ensures that in this life the student is blessed and is a blessing to others.

[You may choose to ask for a testimony at this point: *Is there any student or former student from an Adventist institution present at this time who can testify to the spiritual blessings you have received there?*]

Right after the story of Jesus blessing the children, we find the story of the rich young ruler. Here is a young man who had all the evidences of success in his life. He had wealth, social status, respectability. Perhaps even more importantly, he was

a very religious young man. Obviously, his parents had trained him well and church was an important part of his life. He was able to say that he kept all the commandments from his childhood. Clearly, he was a good guy. But he recognized that something was still missing in his life and he came running to Jesus, desperate to find what was missing.

Mark 10:21 says that Jesus looked at him and loved him. Jesus wanted so much to save him, just as He wants to save your children and every young person listening to these words at this moment. However, He realized that in spite of all the advantages that this young man had, in spite of all the success he had experienced in life, the most important thing was missing. He had not experienced *the touch*. He did not have a personal relationship with the Lord. His education had prepared him to advance socially, economically, and even religiously, but he needed to advance spiritually, to commit to Christ and receive the infilling of the Holy Spirit. That is the only way he could find real peace and fulfilment and the only way he was guaranteed of a place in God's eternal kingdom. He needed to learn to value the things of God above money, possessions, position; above brand-name schools and academic achievement.

As Jesus said, "What does it profit a man if he should gain the whole world and lose his soul (**Mark 8: 36**)?" Is the soul salvation of your child the most important thing to you right now? What would you be willing to sacrifice if you knew that it would guarantee that your son, your daughter, would be in the kingdom of God? What this young man had learned to see as success was standing in the way of the most important thing in his life – his salvation. His loving parents had ensured that He got an education that met the highest expectations of society, but they had deprived him of the most important part of his heritage.

Jesus pointed this out. "Go and get rid of all that stuff", Jesus said, "then come and follow me. Come and have a real relationship with Me. Let Me help you experience real joy and happiness". But the effect of his early education was too strong. He could not let go what he had been taught to love and to hold on to. He went away with his pockets full and his heart empty.

The rich young ruler's choice seemed so logical and sensible. It makes so much sense to look at the education that the world respects, to go for the fine-looking buildings, the well-equipped labs, the high-quality sports programmes, and the wide range of subject offerings. These are very important, but if the most important thing – a commitment to the principles of God – is missing, the choice is wrong.

As the Apostle Paul put it in **1 Cor. 1: 25**, the wise things of God look foolish to the world and the really foolish thing look smart to them.

So, suppose the school really lacks some essential equipment and facilities, what should we do? Well, if it is our school developed in response to God's prophetic word, then find a way to supply whatever it lacks. Suppose it is short of teachers in essential areas, then what? Persuade some of the outstanding teachers who find the grass greener elsewhere to give of their time and expertise for the salvation of our children. And if the salaries are not where they should be? Re-allocate from the church's resources to improve the finances of the school. At the same time, trust God to supply the needs of His faithful workers. You whom God has blessed with intelligence, opened doors for you, enabled you to be educated and qualified, is it too much to ask for you to give your service to the Lord's work, even if the pay does not seem as attractive as elsewhere?

In the last part of our scripture passage, **Mark 10: 29, 30**, Jesus assures us that there is no-one who has sacrificed and given up what is precious to them for the sake of the Gospel who will not wind up having more than they gave up, plus eternal life. Yes, the three passages fit together and provide a message today for you and for me – a message that should not be ignored.

Christian education, God's ideal for His children, and an important part of the Advent movement, has long been under-supported and criticized by a backsliding church. Some have considered that the high principles of God are too much, that they will never be attained, but Jesus Himself has said, the things which are impossible with men, are possible with God (**verse 27**). This is why even when the schools have been under-resourced and poorly supported, they have turned out excellent students and public servants. Schools with almost no lab facilities have turned out brilliant scientists and medical doctors. In the meantime, thousands of students are surrendering their lives to Christ, faithful teachers and other education workers are laboring and thriving amidst the challenges, and the schools are growing, buildings are improving, labs and classrooms are better equipped and the students are doing well. ***Nothing is impossible with God***, and His blessings are always with those who seek to do His will.

Today, our Lord and Saviour, our miracle-working God is again moving among His people. He is moving in His church, present at our crusades and working through our evangelists, guiding in our board meetings and helping us to make the right decisions, protecting and keeping our missionaries in dangerous countries,

watching over His church around the world; but in the midst of all these things, His voice still echoes over the centuries, “**Let the children come to Me**”. They are still His VIP’s, are still His priority and in their education, their preparation for life, they must still first and foremost be brought to know and love the One who made them, who loves them, and who will save them. If we love them as He expects us to, we will make His will for their lives our priority too and educate them as He instructs us to.

So, tell me, do you truly love your child, the children that God has placed in our care? Do you believe that God’s instruction for their education is what is best for them – better than your own wisdom? Can you honestly say that you are doing your very best to comply with God’s instruction for His children; that by faithful obedience you are letting the children come to Him? If you were not able to answer yes to all those questions, maybe it is time to make a new commitment to God and to His way.

A lot can be achieved if we believe together and work together to put God’s plan into action. Step out in faith and watch Him make a way of blessing for your children. By God’s grace, let us do the Saviour’s will and let the children come to Him.

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