

INTRODUCTION 引言

Today is baptism Sunday. There will be four young sisters receiving baptism. Besides, one couple will dedicate their toddler son to the Lord. God loves children because He loves people of any age. Small kids enjoy a lot of privileges. Parents take care of everything for them. They are more than likely spoiled by grandparents too. Children enjoy food, clothes, money and toys. Their childhood is filled with so much fun that perhaps they want to stay young forever. The theme song of a toy store named Toys R Us reflects that mentality. Part of the lyrics say: "I don't want to grow up. I'm a Toys R Us kid. They got a million toys at Toys R Us that I can play with." Of course, kids will eventually grow up. However, God wants us to maintain a childlike faith no matter how old we have become. We should depend on Him just like young kids depend on their parents.

EXPLANATION 解釋

In our story today, some parents brought their children to Jesus for Him to touch them. The word "children" here can refer to kids of any age. Those parents did not only want Jesus to pat their kids or to hold them. We see later that Jesus blessed those little ones. In the Jewish culture, it is common for parents to ask senior people or a rabbi to bless their children. We have the same practice in our church. We call it children dedication. I need to clarify a few things. First, this ceremony is optional. Some families request it, others do not. Second, the ritual does not save the soul of a child. We can only be saved by the grace of God. Therefore, as children grow up, they must confess their sins and receive Jesus as their Savior and Lord just like the decision adults have to make. Third, we require at least one parent to be a Christian before we will bless their child. Through the ceremony, we pray for the kid. Moreover, we pray that God will give grace to the parents to raise their children based on Biblical principles.

The parents in the story took their kids to see Jesus. But they were blocked by the disciples. Perhaps they considered the request a nuisance to their teacher. They played the role of a secretary who screens phone calls for a busy boss. Any unimportant demand will be rejected. Visits must fit into his schedule too. The disciples' reaction seemed reasonable. Jesus was swarmed by people wherever He went. If He could not rest, then the disciples could not rest either. Jesus' response shows us His heart. He rebuked His twelve followers for hindering children from coming to Him. Jesus treated people of any age the same. We have to be careful too, lest we may build walls instead of bridges between God and people. Every person is born as a sinner and so everyone needs Jesus. Children ministries are as important as adult ones. They are not baby-sitting service to allow parents to attend their meetings or to run errands. Our children coworkers do a wonderful job teaching your kids. You will be surprised by how much Bible knowledge your children have. You should bring your kids to Jesus just like the parents in the story did. They need you to drive them to the church on Friday evenings and at 9:30 on Sunday mornings. Help them go to bed earlier on Saturday so that they can get up in time on Sunday. You can ask your kids what they have learned every time when you leave the church. Help them solidify Bible truths in their mind. Be their godly examples at home too.

By welcoming children, Jesus taught us two things we can learn from them. First, they believe in God with a simple faith. Look at verse 15: **“Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.”** To receive the kingdom of God and to enter it describe the same outcome. They both mean becoming a Christian. Some countries require a visa before foreigners can go in. The immigration office has the authority to approve or disapprove applicants. Similarly, Jesus has the authority to grant salvation to sinners. But Jesus does not issue travelers’ visa but permanent citizenship to His Kingdom. The first criterion is to believe what Jesus said with a childlike faith. Little kids believe their parents because of a relationship of love. They know that dad and mom love them and they have their best interests in mind. They trust their parents even when they have doubts. They may not understand why parents take them to a clinic and have a nurse poke them with a needle. They believe it is good for them, even though it hurts. People need to have such a childlike faith to believe in God. It is reasonable for them to raise various questions about the Christian faith. But all that they need to clarify are three things. First, how does God see us? The Bible says that we are lost in sin. People need to admit that they are a sinner before they will look for a Savior. Second, who is Jesus? The Bible tells us that Jesus is God. He came into the world, died for our sins on the cross but rose on the third day. Third, what does Jesus want from us? He calls us to repent of our sins and accept Him into our hearts by faith. People with a childlike faith, regardless of their age, can understand those truths and become Christians. They do not only believe in God. Secondly, they also belong to God. Jesus says in the second half of verse 14: ... **“Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God.”** We must maintain a childlike faith to show that we belong to the Kingdom of God. Jesus gives us a new life the moment we receive Him. We begin our eternal life from that point on. Eternal life does not start after a person goes to heaven. Heaven is a continuation, not the initiation, of eternal life. Many Christians live like non-believers because they are confused about this important truth. This is a good place for us to explain the purpose of baptism. The ceremony testifies the faith of a person. Baptism cannot save anyone. Only Jesus can save us. No church should baptize people who do not have a clear understanding of their relationship with Jesus. Unfortunately, many people think that mission has been accomplished after they are baptized. They think they get a ticket to heaven. Therefore, they can resume the same lifestyle. They follow the world’s standard instead of God’s standard. They seldom read their Bible. They pray to God only when they need something from Him. They come to church only when they have free time. That is not the kind of Christian life God wants from us. We belong to God. We must continue to bear a childlike faith no matter how long we have been a Christian. Let that be an encouragement to the four young sisters and the believers among us. Baptism is not the starting point nor a finish-line of our faith. But it is a major milestone. We will continue to mature as we experience more about God in our daily life. We also maintain a teachable heart and a desire to learn His Word. We love God and love His Word.

CONCLUSION 結論

God wants us to maintain a childlike faith no matter how old we have become. Jesus welcomes everyone to come to Him because everyone needs Him. The few children in the ceremony today are blessed because they grow up in a church. Let us pray for them and their families that God will use them as channels of blessing to others.

INTRODUCTION 引言

今天是浸禮主日。將有四位年輕的姐妹接受浸禮。此外，我們會為一對夫婦的小兒子獻上祝福。神愛孩子，因為祂愛任何年齡的人。小孩子享有很多特權。父母照顧他們一切的需要，他們也受到祖父母的寵愛。孩子們享受食物、衣服、零用錢和玩具。他們的童年是如此的快樂，甚至他們可能希望永遠保持年輕。玩具反斗城的廣告主題曲反映了這種心態。部份的歌詞說：「我不想長大。我是玩具反斗城的孩子。這裡有上百萬種的玩具讓我去玩。」當然，孩子最終會長大。然而，無論我們多大年紀，神都希望我們保持孩子般的信心。我們應該倚靠神，就像小孩子倚靠他們的父母一樣。

EXPLANATION 解釋

在我們今天的故事中，有些父母帶著他們的孩子來到耶穌面前，要求祂去摸他們。這裡的「小孩子」這個字可以指任何年齡的兒童。那些父母不只是希望耶穌拍拍他們的孩子或抱他們。我們稍後看到耶穌祝福那些小孩子。在猶太人的文化中，父母請長輩或拉比祝福他們的孩子是很常見的。在我們的教會裡也有同樣的做法，我們稱之為兒童祝福禮。我需要澄清幾件事。首先，這個儀式是非強制的。有些家庭會提出要求，有些則沒有要求。其次，這個儀式並不能拯救孩子的靈魂。我們只能靠神的恩典得救。因此，在小孩的成長過程中他們必須承認自己的罪，並接受耶穌作為救主和生命的主宰，就像大人需要做的同樣決定。第三，我們要求至少有一位家長是基督徒，我們才會祝福他們的小孩。通過這個儀式，我們為孩子禱告。此外，我們祈求神賜予父母恩典，讓他們根據聖經的原則養育孩子。

故事中的父母帶著孩子去找耶穌，但他們卻被門徒擋住了。也許他們認為這個請求對他們的老師來說是一種滋擾。他們扮演秘書的角色，為忙碌的老闆過濾電話。任何不重要的要求都會被拒絕，面談的預約也必須配合他的時間表。門徒的反應似乎是合理的。耶穌走到哪裡都有人蜂擁而上。如果祂不能休息，那麼門徒也不能休息。耶穌的回應顯明祂的心意。祂責備十二個弟子阻擋孩子們來到祂面前。耶穌對任何年齡的人都一視同仁。我們也必須注意，免得我們在神和人之間建造牆而不是橋樑。每個人人生來都是罪人，所以任何人都需要耶穌。兒童事工和成人事工都同樣重要。它不是托兒服務讓家長可以參加自己的聚會或出去辦事。我們兒童的同工非常盡責地教導你的孩子。你會驚訝於你的孩子有多少聖經知識。你應該像故事中的父母那樣把小孩帶到耶穌面前。他們需要你在周五晚上和周日早上 9:30 開車送來教會。幫助他們在周六早點睡覺，使他們在周日能準時起床。每次離開教會時，你可以問孩子學到了什麼。幫助他們在心中鞏固聖經真理。在家裡也成為他們敬虔的榜樣。

透過接納小孩，耶穌教導我們可以從他們身上學到的兩件事。首先，他們以單純的信心相信神。請看第 15 節：「我實在告訴你們，凡要承受神國的，若不像小孩子，斷不能進去。」承受神的國和進入神的國是指同樣的結果，意思是成為基督徒。有些國家需要簽證才能讓外國人進入。移民局有權批准或否決申請人。同樣，耶穌有權將救恩賜給罪人。但耶穌並不是簽發旅行簽證，而是賜予神國的永久居留權。首要的條件是以孩子般的信心相信耶穌的話。小孩子因為愛的關係而相信他們的父母。他們知道爸爸和媽媽愛他們，並且父母會為他們最大的利益著想。縱使他們有疑問，他們仍然相信父母。他們也許不明白為何父母會帶他們去診所並讓護士用針戳他們。他們相信這對他們有好處，雖然會使他們感到痛楚。人們需要有這種孩子般的信心才能相信神。他們提出關於基督信仰的各種問題是合理的。但他們只需要搞清楚三件基本的事情。首先，神如何看我們？聖經說我們是迷失在罪中的。人們需要先承認自己是罪人，然後才會尋找救主。第二，耶穌是誰？聖經告訴我們耶穌是神。祂來到世上，為我們的罪死在十字架上，但是祂在三天後復活。第三，耶穌對我們有什麼要求？祂呼召我們悔改，並憑信心接受祂進入我們的心中。只要有孩子般信心的人，不論年齡，都能明白這些真理，並成為基督徒。他們不僅相信神。其次，他們也屬於神。耶穌在第 14 節的後半部份說：...「讓小孩子到我這裏來，不要禁止他們；因為在神國的，正是這樣的人。」我們必須保持孩童般的信心，以表明我們是屬於神的國。耶穌在我們接受祂的那一刻就給了我們新的生命。我們從此開始了永生。永生不是等到人上天堂後才會開始。天堂是永生的延續，而不是永生的開始。許多基督徒不明白這個重要的真理，因此他們活像非信徒一樣。這是我們解釋浸禮目的的好機會。這個儀式見證一個人的信心。浸禮無法救任何人，唯有耶穌能救我們。任何教會都不應該為那些不清楚自己與耶穌的關係的人施浸。可惜，許多人認為他們受浸後就完成了任務。他們以為已經得到了一張天堂的門票。因此，他們可以維持同樣的生活方式。他們遵循世界的標準而不是神的標準。他們很少讀聖經。他們只在有需求的時候才向神禱告。他們有空時才來教會。這不是神要我們過的基督徒生活。我們屬於神。無論我們做了多久的基督徒，我們都必須保持孩子般的信心。讓我們以此鼓勵四位年輕的姐妹和各位信徒。浸禮不是我們信心的起點，也不是終點。但這是一個重要的里程碑。當我們在日常生活中更多地經歷神之時，我們便會不斷成長。我們還要保持一顆受教的心，渴望學習神的話語。我們愛神並且愛祂的話語。

CONCLUSION 結論

神希望我們無論年齡多大，都保持孩子般的信心。耶穌歡迎每一個人來到祂面前，因為每一個人都需要祂。今天儀式中的幾個孩子是有福的，因為他們是在教會中長大的。讓我們為他們和他們的家人禱告，讓神使用他們成為祝福他人的管道。