

## “Things That Made Jesus Mad” / 2: Indifference July 12, 2020 (Next Gen Sunday)

**Key Texts:** Matthew 18.1-6, 10; 19.13-14

**Key Words:** Children, Childhood, Humility, Teachability, Trust, New Testament, Anger, Mad, Jesus, Indifference

**Summary:** Jesus got angry whenever someone put an obstacle between some person and God’s grace. And that includes anything or anyone who would put an obstacle between some child and God.

Next Gen Sunday! Guys, this is a really big deal to us here at CapCity. We have 3 staff members working with our Next Genners, and several others who assist. Jessica Breidert oversees our pre-school ministry – and we see it as flat-out serious ministry. She has a team of about 70 volunteers! Incredible. Lisa Mattox oversees our elementary-school ministry, with some 40 volunteers. And Ben Jeffries works with our Middle and High School kids. Ben has 14 volunteers crazy enough to invest themselves in our teenagers. Those are our frontline ministries! That’s where the rubber hits the road! Because kids matter. They didn’t always, historically, but we’re Jesus followers!

Now, kids, I think, are pretty much the same wherever, whenever. But childhood is not. I mean, even my childhood compared to that of my grandchildren. We’re only 50 years apart or so, but the differences are incredible.

- How many of you old guys remember this thing called the “library.” Remember those, big buildings with all these books. They had these things called “card catalogues” to help you find a book, and library cards. Now they’ve got these Chromebooks. And every kid gets one! Wouldn’t that have been cool!
- And our kids also have these little smart phones. Wouldn’t that have been amazing? And it’s not just a phone: you can email, text, play games, watch videos, look stuff up. According to an ABC news report teens spend more than 7 hours a day on their phones; and tweens spend nearly 5 ... on average. Our phones, well, they were a little less mobile, and a little less versatile, and there were these things called “party lines.” Which doesn’t mean what it sounds like.
- You old guys remember our TVs? A 27” black and white maybe, encased in a box, sitting on the floor, with a pair of rabbit ears on top? Three channels and a TV Guide. My grandson, Steven, just bought a smart TV for his room, hung it on the wall. 4k; Netflix, Hulu, Amazon, Disney, Facebook, YouTube, games. Wouldn’t that have been cool! Although I probably would never have left my room!
- And do you old guys remember the first video games, and the arcades? How cool was that. My favorite was BattleZone. For others it was Asteroids or Pong. Those were just lines on a screen. Then there was Donkey Kong, and the Mario Brothers, and PacMan. Now the stories and the graphics, holy cow! Call of Duty, Minecraft. If we’d have had Madden, I’d never have left my room!

We old guys are dazzled by what our kids find common. On the other hand, imagine someone from the world of Jesus, 2000 years ago. Their minds would literally explode! Children were still pretty much the same, but childhood was very, very different.

Now a lot of people wanted kids back then, a lot of people needed kids. It was an agrarian society, and kids were cheap farm help. And if a family was in a boatload of debt, you could sell a kid or lease a kid to settle your debt. And, when you get old, kids were supposed to take care of you. But

kids weren't really valued as "kids." Their homes didn't revolve around their kids, like so many do today. In fact, at least according to their laws, if your kid was too ornery you could have them killed.

And outside of Judaism, it was even worse. If a baby was deformed, or if the man wasn't sure it was his kid, or even if it was a girl, they could take the baby out and just leave it by the side of the road. Some babies would die; some would be picked up by some family needing a kid; some would be picked up by slavers. And, in their world, people higher on the social ladder could pretty much use those lower on the social ladder, however they wanted. So there was a whole lot of sexual exploitation of children ... it would curdle your blood.

And into that world walks Jesus. Some would argue that Jesus was the one who really invented "childhood." Not only did he notice kids, he gave them a value, and a dignity, and significance that was paradigm changing. I want to look at a string of scenes in the Jesus stories that still guide us Jesus followers when it comes to our kids. Ready?

Jesus' disciples are arguing about "who's the greatest?" Now, Vern and I argue about which of us is the humblest. By the way, I am. But these dorks are arguing over which of them was the greatest Jesus follower? (*Jaxon on stage?*) Matthew says, "Jesus called a little child to him, and placed the child among them. And he said: 'Truly I tell you (don't miss this, guys, this is God's truth), unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.'" (Matthew 18.2-5)

Now, I try to play the ogre, the grinch, the troll, but actually, I adore our kids. And I love how they respond to me, and to our church, and to our God. They are so cool.

- Twice I've had 4 year olds think I was God. They figure it out by the age of 5! But one little guy was watching me up here on stage. And then I guess I went and sat down where he couldn't see me and he whispers to mom, "Where did God go!" You've got to admit, that's funny!
- Or this kid in VBS. They were acting out the story of Jesus and Zaccheus – you know, the wee little man who climbed up in the tree to see Jesus? Anyway, our teacher said, "You play the Jesus part. Tell Zaccheus to come on down." And apparently the kid said something like, "Well, what am I supposed to say?" and our teacher said, "Well, what would your mom say to you." So this little kid playing Jesus looks at Zaccheus and says, "Get the hell out of that tree!" In our VBS ... Out of the mouth of babes ... we parents are humiliated, right!
- Or the little guy who was standing right about there for their concert. And he's digging this big one out of his nose. And then he looks at it... And then he looks at the little girl in front of him with the frilly dress. And every parent in the room holds their breath ... "No!" and then he bends down and wipes it on the floor. And there is this collective sigh of relief.

I love kids! But nothing like Jesus loved kids. Such tenderness, such delight in those their world just looked past.

- Maybe it is their sense of wonder, and awe. Have you ever watched a kid be dazzled by a dandelion? They are captivated by things we take for granted. Their world is full of these "Wow God!" moments. What a great way to be!
- Or maybe it is their ... teachability. Kids listen, kids ask questions ... so many questions. They learn. They are like sponges. What a great way to be!
- Or maybe it is their ... fragility, and their humility. They know they don't know. They know they can't ... on their own. They know they need your help. They know they need your acceptance, your love. "Look at me, mom!"

- Or maybe it is their propensity for faith. I think sometimes kids see the world with less jaded eyes, and because of that are often capable of such great trust.

One guy describes the faith of kids like this. He says, “Fairy tales are more than true; not because they tell us that dragons exist, but because they tell us that dragons can be beaten.’ Every kid knows a story is supposed to have a happy ending. Why? Why do kids love fairy tales so much? Because God wrote it on our hearts. We are born knowing that our Prince really will come, that there will be a glorious wedding someday, and that the dragon will be slain. But somewhere along the way, we convinced ourselves that it was too good to be true. Life beat us down, and we forgot how to hope for a happy ending. That is, until Jesus came and reminded us. The kids actually have it right.” (Harlow)

‘Truly I tell you (Jesus says), unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. (You won’t even get in the front door! Listen, guys, what would you have to change to be childlike? What’s holding you back) Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.” Guys, don’t be hornswaggled, bamboozled, conned by those who think they are too smart for God. Don’t buy into our world’s lie that cynicism is wisdom, that those who mock the most are the enlightened ones. If you can’t look at our world with wonder, and our God with awe, like a child, you’re blind, and you’re deaf, and you’re mute. (*Send Jaxon back*)

The Gospel of Matthew just keeps going to one of the wildest things Jesus ever said. He says, “If anyone causes one of these little ones—those who believe in me—to stumble, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea.” (Matthew 18.6) Wow! Picture your sweet and gentle Jesus saying that with a smile on his face: (*read with a big smile and sweet tones*) “If anyone causes one of these little ones—those who believe in me—to stumble, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea.” That doesn’t work, does it? This is a threat; this is a warning! His eyes are boring in on somebody, and his tone is flat out icy: (*read it again, icily*) “If anyone causes one of these little ones—those who believe in me—to stumble, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea.”

Some translations word it a little differently. Here’s the NLT: “If you cause one of these little ones who trusts in me to fall into sin...” Here’s the Good News Translation: “If anyone would cause one of these little ones to lose his faith in me ...” (I like that translation the best) they’d be better off chained to a cement block and tossed into the river! Wow! Apparently this is one of the things that made Jesus mad! The key word here in the Greek is “skandalizo.” And it’s about something even more damaging than some kind of physical or emotional abuse. This is about more than just causing some kid to stumble or tempting some kid to sin. This is about pulling some kid away from God ... maybe forever! You parents, have you ever felt the frustration of some friend, or some teacher, or some twit your kid looks up to pulling your kid away from you? Imagine how God feels when someone pulls one of his precious kids away from him! You see, a child’s belief in God, their faith in God, their trust in God – that stuff is way more precious than diamonds ... to God. And when some dork puts a roadblock between one of his kids and his God?! Guys, some things make Jesus really, really mad!

Who would do such a thing? Who would pull a kid away from their God?

- A parent, maybe? Who by their hostility towards God, or even by their indifference, undermines the faith of a child ... who is God’s child first! It would be better, Jesus said, for a millstone to be hung around that parent’s neck ...

- Or a teacher, in some school, who through their cynicism, or their hostility towards God, or his church, or Jesus followers undermines the faith of a child. It would be better for a millstone to be hung around that teacher's neck ...
- Or some friend at school or in the neighborhood who pulls your kid into sin, and in that pulling your kid into sin they are simultaneously pulling your kid away from God ...
- Or some "hero" – maybe some musician, or actor, or athlete, or some other person your kid wants to be like. When that "hero" pulls God's kid away from the real hero ... Millstone ...
- Or maybe even some old grump at church, who wants what they want, no matter how many kids the church might lose.

In fact ... I know this may sound kind of mean... I actually thought about ordering a boatload of millstone necklaces.

- I think a millstone necklace would be kind of a sobering gift for a parent at a baby dedication. A reminder and a warning, that your first job as a parent is to do anything you can to connect your kid to God and nurture in them a lifetime faith. Don't you dare do anything as a parent, or a grandparent that pulls your kid away from his God!
- Or maybe as gift to a teacher. First day of school: You have the awesome responsibility to teach and influence this child of God. Don't you dare do anything that would undermine their trust in the one who holds their eternity in his hands!
- Or maybe we could pass out a few millstone necklaces to some ornery neighbors, or some grumpy church people ... as a reminder.

I know, that wouldn't work. But I kind of wish it would. And Jesus isn't quite done. Then Jesus says, "See that you do not despise one of these little ones. (I think he's still talking about the kids. Don't you dare look down on one of these little ones. Don't you dare blow them off!) For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven." (Matthew 18.10) Their angels in heaven ...?! Some people think that means every kid has some "guardian angel." I don't think it has to mean that. But I think it does mean that even the angels have this soft spot for kids. And guys, the angels are not these sweet, chubby, little babies, or these beautiful gentle ladies. They are incredibly powerful warriors. Don't tick an angel off!

One more scene. Apparently, there were some parents who wanted Jesus to bless their kids. How cool is that! And the disciples – you know, guys like Peter, and James, and John, and Andrew, and Matthew (the guy who wrote down what Jesus did) ... those guys – they started scolding the parents for bothering Jesus! You see, they didn't get it yet! It would take a while, but they'll get there. Anyway, Jesus gets mad! "Don't stop these kids! What are you guys thinking? What are you doing? The Kingdom of God belongs to these kids as much as it belongs to you!" (Matthew 19.13-14)

We have heard these words before, but we usually imagine them as gentle, and sweet. "Let the little children come to me. (Isn't Jesus sweet?) For the Kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these" ... Jesus says, with this gentle smile on his face. And everyone says, "Ahhh!" No, Jesus is ticked! "Don't you dare get between these children and me! Get out of the way! Don't make me go get a millstone! Don't make me sic the angels on you! I'm their God too, and your job is to connect them to me, not drive them away from me, you twits!" I'm pretty sure the "twits" part" is there in the Greek. ... ..

Listen, guys, we don't do "daycare" here at CapCity ... we do Next Gen Ministry ... from birth through graduation. We try to connect our 2 year olds, and 3 year olds, and 4 year olds to their God, as best we can. And when they get old enough to choose for themselves, we challenge them to choose Jesus. What ministry is bigger than that one?! Did you know ... Did you know that the vast

majority of us Jesus followers ... the vast majority of us choose to follow Jesus before the age of 18?

- One study claims that 84% of us make our decision for Jesus between the ages of 4 and 14. Another 10% will choose Jesus between the ages of 15 and 30. After that, just a handful. By then we become hardened ... usually.

In other words, if we aren't getting it done with our kids, we aren't getting it done. And in other words, you parents, and we grandparents, and all the rest of us Jesus followers who are around kids ... we have a job to do ... maybe the most important job we will ever do. By the way, we still need more volunteers in our Next Gen Ministries. It's the most important job in the world! Any of you guys ready to step up?

So, how are we going to get it done? How are we going to avoid millstones and angry angels? Or more positively, how are we going to get this one right?

- First, remember: they are his kids first. Just like your wife is God's daughter first, and your husband is God's son first, your kids are God's kids first ... entrusted to your care for a while. What a privilege, and what a responsibility – we parents and grandparents get to babysit God's kids for a while!
- Second, remember: your model is more important than your words. Who you are; how you follow Jesus ... or not; what things you value most ... those things will be way more impactful than your words. Do your kids see you doing life with God, for God, God's way? Do they see you putting God above your job, above your leisure, above sports, above whatever ... making church and your personal life with God more important than the 1000 things that vie to push God aside? Do your kids see someone who trusts God when someone gets sick or dies, when someone loses a job or their business goes under? Show them what doing life with God, for God, God's way looks like!
- Third, it's not just your model, do you actually try to teach your kids about God? Do you talk about him? Do you teach them to talk to him? Do you teach them how to spend time in his Word? Or are you just leaving all that to the church?
- Fourth, do they see you honoring the church and other Jesus followers. Sometimes it's not what they hear, it's what they overhear. Do they hear you criticizing the church, the worship service, the preacher (surely no one here at CapCity would go there, right?) Guys, did you know that a constant barrage of negativism will undermine a child's faith in God and God's people? When they hear us dogging each other, or cutting at each other ... did you know that can pull them away from the God they need to trust?

There's more. Just think about it. But listen, guys: one of the greatest honors God gives us is his permission to call him Dad ... Father. Did you know that how we father, how we dad, how we parent will shape our kid's connection to their other dad, their other Father ... their God? Let's do it right, guys!