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We are in a societal and cultural tug of war. Everybody's fighting for their piece of the proverbial pie.

Dana Milbank, an opinion writer for the Washington Post in a piece dated March 29th says;

You can have your Coke with a smile today.

On Monday, Georgia Gov. Nathan Deal, a conservative Republican, said he would veto a bill that would have legalized discrimination against gay people, responding to an outcry from corporate interests including Coca-Cola, Home Depot, UPS, Walt Disney, Delta, Time Warner, Comcast, Netflix, Apple and the National Football League. As state legislators pushed the "religious liberty" bill through, Deal told them: "I hope that we can all just take a deep breath, recognize that the world is changing around us."

That doesn't make me smile. So, in order for 3% of the population to wipe out religious freedom of conscience in America, these corporations will strong arm our laws into their position which is blatantly and obviously against what God's book says.

Let me re-define terrorism. Terrorism is when the supreme court siding with evil isn't quite enough, now all the money in America will also join sides, evil against good, and strong arm any hope of a discussion about decency, morality, and religious conscience.

The rule book is getting re-written, as we speak.

New York Times, April fools day; I know, I know, I'm not supposed to say the O word . . .

WASHINGTON — The Obama administration is considering whether North

Carolina's new law on gay and transgender rights makes the state ineligible for billions of dollars in federal aid for schools, highways and housing, officials said Friday.

Cutting off any federal money — or even simply threatening to do so — would put major new pressure on North Carolina to repeal the law,

If the money pressure from the corporate strong arm isn't enough, The Federal government will join in and consider the possibility of cutting off the flow of tax dollars that they've extorted from . . . us.

This must be an important fuss. Right? What is all the fuss about? It's about authority. The authority of the book you hold in your hands.

If you believe this book says you may not celebrate and fund the murdering of the unborn, you're in harms way.

If you believe this book says that homosexuality and indeed, all sexual promiscuity outside the bounds of one man married to one women, is a sin, and you cannot with good conscience join in any celebration that promotes that sin, you are in harms way.

Right about now, you're wondering, how is Jim going to tie this political diatribe into what we read this morning. A story about Jesus that's supposed to be charming and happy. How did we get from there, to here?

I'll start over. We are in a societal and cultural tug of war. Everybody's fighting for their piece of the proverbial pie.

Guess who's at the very bottom of the ladder. The last person to get a crumb. No voice. No strong arm. No money to leverage. Children.

Children, in this nation, are a liability. A nuisance. A drain. A bummer. A big negative on the pie chart. People with no rights.

Type into google, how much does it cost to raise a child, and you'll find out it will cost you about 1 million dollars to raise 3 children. About

\$300,000 each. To age 18. But nobody leaves home at 18 any more, so it keeps going.

Any millennial can tell you that. And it's easily avoided. The kid problem and the expense. The government just made morning after abortion pills easier than ever to get. You don't even need a clinic. And it's free. The taxpayers will pick up that tab. Happily! Just think of the money that saves. Less jeeters. More pie for us.

Here's where I'm going with all of this. In our nation, children are not welcome. Those are incredibly sad words to write and say! Children are NOT welcome in America. Neither is it a safe place for them to be.

I remember well, the first time I held a baby girl who was upset about some little thing and rocked and rocked and rocked until she was asleep, and thinking to myself, there's nothing in the world more precious than this child. I would do anything to keep her safe.

That wasn't just because I'm such a fine person. That reaction is grace. God does that in His people.

So, let's talk about that. We are wicked sinful people, damaged by sin that we've inherited from our father Adam. We don't think right. Without this book to tell us right from wrong we would be left to ourselves to grope around and try to discover truth. We cannot find it. Our reasoning powers are even affected by the fall.

That's called the noetic affect of the fall. A future theology lesson. We won't tackle that this morning. Suffice to say, sin, has compromised our thinking processes.

That's why everything gets twisted around backwards. Only something as drastic as I've described would end up with children rather than being the most precious people in our midst, to children being held in such low esteem we murder them in the womb so the selfish people won't be burdened with them.

I was talking about this with a workmate this week out at work. He

said, you're the selfish one. You people who want children are selfish. The world doesn't need any more people. You just want them for your own selfish gratification. It isn't the people without kids who are selfish, it's the one with kids. You bring kids into this world that use up it's resources, for your own pleasure. That's selfish.

Welcoming and caring for children and their needs is selfish. Wow.

As our fallen world sinks deeper and deeper into it's own logic as the old judeo christian morality is set aside, children, the helpless among us, are in ever increasing jeopardy.

Now, I don't want to paint too frightening a picture, we see many unsaved people who care for their little ones and treasure them. There is what we call "common grace". God's gifts given to the unsaved as well as the saved.

But more and more in our culture we're troubled by the fact that the ones who are the most helpless among us, are living in danger. The world has always been a dangerous place for children. But that is increasing exponentially as the world sinks deeper and deeper into unbridled wickedness.

Let's look again at a passage from a few weeks back that touches on how Jesus and His Father feel about harming little ones.

Matt. 18:2 - 7 *And He called a child to Himself and set him before them, 3and said, "Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. 4 "Whoever then humbles himself as this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. 5 "And whoever receives one such child in My name receives Me; 6but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him to have a heavy millstone hung around his neck, and to be drowned in the depth of the sea.*

7 "Woe to the world because of its stumbling blocks! For it is inevitable that stumbling blocks come; but woe to that man through whom the stumbling block comes!

Jesus says children, in their helplessness, in their humility, and their sincerity, are pictures of what God's kingdom looks like. We all come in, helpless on our own, believing with a child like faith.

Is it any wonder at all, that the enemy, Satan, would level his most vicious attack on those who God says we should treasure most.

And when the world carries that out, we could argue that perhaps there's nothing that makes God more angry. Hurting children. Killing children.

Children are not welcome in America. There's no place in this culture with everybody scrambling for every last crumb of the pie, no place for children. That should make us incredibly sad. How telling that is.

Our passage this morning is a simple one. There aren't any big interpretive boy scout knots to try to untie. Let's go through them, quickly. Just 3 verses.

13Then some children were brought to Him so that He might lay His hands on them and pray; and the disciples rebuked them.

The story is important enough that all 3 synoptic gospels have it included. Mark 10 and Luke 18.

Matthew just has the word for children. Luke's account has a different word. The one for little babies in arms. Luke uses the same word in the story about when Mary the mother of Jesus visited Elizabeth, that at the sound of Mary's voice, the baby leaped in Elizabeth's womb.

Same word. The inspired inerrant word of God calls babies in the womb the same word as the babies that the people brought to Jesus.

We who know and love the Lord still do this. No matter where we were, or which church we were a part of, we brought our babies and dedicated them to the Lord. That's what these parents were doing.

A blessing. A touch. They run to Him. Somehow the little ones know. Jesus is the polar opposite of our culture. He welcomes all children. His arms are open to all children.

He was laying His hands on them and praying for them. Blessing them.

Luke says; *People were also bringing babies to Jesus for him to place his hands on them.*

The verb tense there is such that they were bringing them continually. Like a line of people with their babies. It wasn't a one time deal. It was ongoing.

and the disciples rebuked them. The disciples stepped in and **rebuked**, is a strong word. They squashed the baby session. We've got a lot more important stuff to do. No more babies. Rebuked is like, they were mean about it. Knock it off, people.

Matthew just says, But Jesus said . . . , but Mark adds something here that is very very telling. Mark says; *But when Jesus saw it, He was greatly displeased.* And the word used for displeased is angry.

One of the very rare times in scripture where Jesus was really mad. This incident made Him angry at the disciples. Want to make Jesus mad. Be mean to kids. But it goes deeper than that, I think.

14But Jesus said, "Let the children alone, and do not hinder them from coming to Me;

Suffer the little children to come unto me,

There's no redundance there in the original language. I'm not an original language expert. I just listen to what smarter people than me who are, have said.

There are two different verb tenses used in the dual command.

Permit -Verb - aorist imperative active. Do It Now!

You! let them come to me, immediately.

and forbid them not! Present imperative active. 2nd person plural

And do not ever forbid them or anyone else, from coming to me, ever, ever, again.

He deals with a couple of things.

First, babies are welcome! Children are welcome. Always!

Jesus loves me, this I know.

For the bible tells me so.

Little ones to Him belong.

They are weak but He is strong.

Second, the disciples, and the rest of the church, right on down to today, never, ever, ever, pre-qualify who can go to Jesus. That wasn't their job. It's not our job.

In March I had the privilege of attending the shepherds conference with 3500 other shepherds at Grace Community Church.

It is a banquet spread out, with so much spiritual food, you can only sample maybe 20%. But what you do, is after you get back home, all of the seminars that were concurrent that you couldn't get to, are posted on line as mp3's, and they're free for the taking.

So I've been downloading them and listening, sometimes 2 or 3 times.

How do the shepherds of a giant church work with and love their people. Stories. Questions. Answers. From the premier shepherds God has gifted His church with, right now. What a privilege.

What you learn is, even the greatest and most gifted elders the church universal can boast, the folks at that conference, sometimes get it wrong.

We booger it up. Just like these shepherds in training did this day. They got it terribly wrong, and Jesus screached everything to a halt and set them straight. He's still in that business today.

The disciples were like, this is a huge waste of time. These babies have no value to the kingdom. We need to prioritize the time. Maximize the kingdom. We'll do some triage. Take your babies and beat it.

Look down to the next paragraph. The rich young ruler. Now there's a guy with potential for the kingdom. We'll get rid of the babies and move the rich young ruler up to the front. He's someone with potential. Baby people, beat it. Rich people with connections; front of the line.

for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.” Who? The rich young ruler? No. No. The kingdom of heaven belongs to people who exhibit the same qualities as babies. Toddlers.

3“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

4“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

5“Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth.

6“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

7“Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.

8“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

9“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

When's the last time you saw a toddler strut around like Donald Trump? They are polar opposite. And Jesus loves them. All of them.

for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.”

I am not alone in my belief that little ones, like these, are under the

special care of their father in heaven. When babies die, I believe they go to Him.

for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.”

Such a simple statement, but Oh, so profound. Such as these means that kingdom people, God's people exhibit many of the same qualities that little ones do.

I used to love to hear Pam talk about pre-schoolers. The little ones whose hearts are open. They just believe everything you tell them about Jesus. They can't get enough. They never question. They believe as if it's the most natural thing in the world.

Ask Pam how many 3 year old's said, "What, or who, is Jesus, and what does that have to do with me?"

They are a picture of how we are supposed to be. Open hearts. Submissive to the Saviour. We are weak. He is strong. We are helpless, He cares for us. That's how we come to Jesus. Like little children.

15After laying His hands on them, He departed from there.

Just 3 verses, but what a powerful image.

In the world, this ruthless kingdom of Satan, children are unwanted. children are forgotten and hungry and harmed. Children are not welcome.

In the Kingdom of God, children are precious. They are a gift. They are welcome. We enjoy them. We love them. They have exceeding great value.

Years ago, when we had the Sears Catalog store in town here, we had a commander board and a box full of letters to put different signs up.

One day I took the ladder and the boxes of letters out, and on one side I

put up; **Children are an heritage from the Lord.** and on the other side I put up: **Blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them.** That stayed up for quite a while.

It's worth looking at the source of those commander board slogans.
Psalms 127: 3*Behold, children are a gift of the LORD,
The fruit of the womb is a reward.*

*4Like arrows in the hand of a warrior,
So are the children of one's youth.*

*5How blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them;
They will not be ashamed
When they speak with their enemies in the gate.*

Children are a heritage. The word meant a windfall inheritance. A bonus! A great uncle you never heard of left you a house on the Columbia River. That's a windfall. Especially if it has apricot trees.

God says, that's the category for children. They aren't a liability, they're a windfall.

*4Like arrows in the hand of a warrior,
So are the children of one's youth.*

5How blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them
How blessed!

It pictures a man sitting in the gates, and he is recognized by all the other heads of family as one who has power and might, because of his many children. The man with many children is like a warrior and his kids are the arrows he shoots. They accomplish much for him.

God's book is unique. It treasures women, and it treasures children. It protects them and gives them dignity. No other religious book does that. Search it out. This book does.

Well, there's a lot more we could say about that. MacArthur always

laughs and says, that's what the preacher says when he just ran out of things to say.

I have a little more to say. We have a stewardship. Both as parents, and as a church.

I think God lends us a few little ones, just to see if we're going to get serious about that stewardship, or not.

I couldn't be any more thrilled than I am about what Mary-Ann is trying to do for our children. I love seeing them file into the church house.

I'm dreaming of blessings though. My hearts desire is to have a half dozen young comitted families in this church with kids running around everywhere.

We're extremely limited in our facilities. But we've got enough possibility here to be faithful with whatever God would graciously bring us and challenge us with.

We've got a new TV DVD player with a whole set of little lessons. Theo. Theology on wee people level. Theo is the professor and he's got all kinds of mice and rats and animals that help him tell the Bible stories.

The other thing we've invested in is one of the best Sunday School curriculum's available. We've got Teachers books and craft books and activity books and coloring books that will take the kids from Genesis 1:1 right through the old testament.

So here's what the Lord has laid on my heart. Probably not a perfect plan, but maybe we can get the bus rolling.

I'm going to ask the Thursday night Bible study ladies to take maybe 4 weeks off from their normal adult study and dig into the Generations of Grace curriculum.

Do the first 4 lessons as an exercise. All of it. Make the activity. Color

the pictures. The whole deal, just like someone would do on a Sunday morning, but with no kids. Training. And I'm praying that between the bunch of them, that Mary-Ann will be encouraged, and that several of them will commit to forming a Sunday School department.

4 weeks. Dig into that curriculum. Teach it to the other ladies just as if they were kids. Do the craft. Color the pictures. See what God will do with that.

So, I'm tasking everyone here to pray for this. I've already thrown the idea at Pam and she's willing. She'll go first. Maybe Donna can do one of them, and then Debbie Baca? Team up. Have some fun with it.

By the time you've studied and taught the first four lessons, everybody will begin to get familiar with how it works. Study. Presentation. Application. A craft that supports. Make sure we throw in some fun.

Let's see what God will do if we're faithful in the little things. We know from this passage this morning, He's got a real soft spot for these. Let's see if HE will meet us there. Ladies, get on board. Everybody else, support them in prayer. Much prayer.