



As we consider God's restated command to Jonah to go to Nineveh and warn them of God's judgment, it is tempting to write him off as a blockhead for trying to avoid God. Nevertheless, honesty demands that we consider how often God has had to tell us the same things repeatedly until we finally get it or are willing to obey. Interestingly, when you read the gospels from the perspective of Jesus' disciples you can see their implicit admission to their own hard-headedness and ignorance.

In Matthew 18:1-6 Jesus teaches the disciples a lesson about humility and greatness by using a child as a tangible picture of humility. They are concerned with being great, but Jesus responds by saying that they should instead aspire to being humble like children, willing to do what God expects of them. Yet the key statement for our present study is verse five, where he says that "whoever welcomes a little child like this in my name welcomes me." Jesus says that how we treat the powerless and vulnerable is essentially how we treat him.

Obviously Matthew himself at least understood Jesus' teaching because he remembered it and wrote it. But if you look in the next chapter of Matthew in 19:13-15 we see the very same issue come up. As some parents are bringing children to Jesus, the disciples stop them and rebuke them for bothering Jesus despite what he had previously taught them. Jesus has to repeat what he had said, that "the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these (15)."

The lesson about humility and valuing children and the vulnerable is important, but think about Matthew writing these stories. The ink is barely dry on chapter 18 when he writes what Jesus says to correct him and the other disciples in chapter 19. The pointedness with which he writes suggests that he clearly recalls having to be corrected and reminded regularly of God's expectations by Jesus. Unflattering statements and descriptions of the disciples' words and actions are found throughout the gospels, so even in the writing of Jesus' story years later the disciples are demonstrating the humility they learned from having chance after chance to obey the commands that never changed.

As we'll see later in Jonah, the fact that Jonah gets another chance doesn't seem to impact his view of others and the forgiveness God offers everyone. For the disciples it is a very different story. Events like Peter's denial of Jesus, his restoration, and then his unvarnished preaching of the gospel in Acts provide great examples of what it means not only for us to experience second chances from God, but also to extend warnings to others like us. In the end God leaves it to us to decide whether we want to be more like Jonah or the disciples.

### Discussion Questions

How do you receive it when people warn you about problems with decisions you're making? How does it change things if you've already been told about potential consequences?

What did God last tell you to do with respect to family, friends, school, work, or anything else in life? How are you doing with these things?

In those areas where you are overwhelmed, distracted, or simply resistant are you willing to receive God's "second chance" to serve him? What do you need to do in order to take up God's last command once again?