

Weekly Study of Sunday's Message.

Sunday September 8, 2019. "Little Things: Strain a Gnat".

I. Intro.

Welcome to the weekly devotional that gives you some specific things to work thru from the message this past Sunday. Whether you were able to attend the worship service or not, this devotional is free-standing and you can still use it to help you dig deeper into your own spiritual walk. Take as long as you need to dive into this material and feel free to share it.

II Sunday.

Ok...we jumped into it big time this past Sunday. We started our new series, "***little things***", with not just a bang, but kicking down the door and...well just not messing around. The basic premise of this worship series is that we tend to get distracted by what has become known as; "majoring in the minors". For whatever reason, we can get caught up in the little and unimportant things of life, and completely miss the larger, more important things.

Now, honestly we ALL do this, so we're not pointing fingers at anyone or any group in particular. But we drilled down into how and why this happens, and the damage it does to ourselves, society, and the church as a whole, when we become overly obsessed on the "***little things***".

And Jesus had some intensely harsh words towards the religious leaders of his day about their elevating the "***little things***" as essentials, and missing out on the more important matters. We also discovered that these "***little things***" the Pharisees elevated were scriptural. They weren't making things up. But there was just this pattern of lifting up the parts of scripture they were better at, their definition of holiness, and not following the bigger more important truths of scripture.

So, before we dive into the specific passage, let's wrestle with the church's tendency to major in the minors...straight on.

Do you believe the church elevates some things as more important than they were intended to be? What are some of these?

Why does it seem to be a natural drift for churches to fall into the pattern of elevating the "*little things***" as more important than they really are?**

III Scripture.

The scripture Sunday morning was an especially tough one. And Jesus pulled no punches when it came to his condemnation and judgment at those who major in the minors. Read **Matthew 23**, in a couple of different versions taking in the different issues he addressed. Let the weight and power of Jesus' words hit you like it most likely hit his listeners.

What jumped out to you from this passage?

What specific issues do you believe Jesus was addressing?

Where might some of those issues apply to issues of today?

In this message Kal pulled out several specific charges and behaviors Jesus leveled at the religious leaders of his day that are good tests for us to see if we're equally guilty of elevating "*little things*", (albeit scriptural but still minor), and neglecting the more important things.

A. Here are SOME warning signs you might be focusing on the "*little things*".

If these are in your life, and you may need someone to point them out, they might be a sign you're majoring in the minors.

1. Hypocrisy. Matthew 23:1-4.

Jesus starts off by saying; people who tend to get stuck in the little things, have a hypocritical side. We know our stuff. Can recite verse after verse. But we can't see our own faults and imperfections. We elevate other people's issues as more serious, and downplay our own.

How much of your belief system is built around what other people are or are not doing, rather than your own spiritual growth?

Jesus said it's **more than just believing right...it's practicing being right...in the right way.**

IF YOU FIND YOURSELF...doing a really good job at getting the rules right, it's everyone else who's missing it, you may be stuck on the "*little things*".

2. Focused on creating rigid controlling structures. Matthew 23:4.

Pharisees had built this structure around themselves. Again, Jesus didn't say what they believed was wrong. He said they were right. What he said was; their beliefs, religion, was crushing people.

We know "*little things*" don't naturally inspire. Overly focusing on trying to control people, creating a structure of controlling people's behavior, drives us to slide into smaller and smaller rule settings.

Where in your life, your faith system, how you understand God, and what it means to live for him, is as much based on your natural wiring as it is the entirety of the teachings of Jesus?

IF YOU FIND YOURSELF....just wishing people would straighten up and do what they're supposed to do, then you may be stuck on the "*little things*".

3. More concerned about image. Matthew 23:5-7, 23-32.

Jesus is saying; because a religious life is about behavior, what we appear to be, (the image of doing the right things and not doing the wrong), people who major in the "*little things*" will put on airs of doing the right things. It's not really about living for God, it's hoping others think we're living for God. The "*little things*" are those things that determine how others see us, rather than who we are.

Are we willing to roll up our sleeves, actually live 'the life', doing 'the things' that are following Jesus, more than just showing up on Sunday?

IF YOU FIND YOURSELF...making sure other people know you're doing the right things more than being the right person, then you may be stuck on the *"little things"*.

4. Pat yourself on the back for the things you do well, but judge others who are different than you. Matthew 23:23-24.

We pick and choose our own personal practices, lifestyle. Even though these are from scripture, Jesus is saying these are *"little things"* when we hold them up as how everyone else should be too. Especially when we do it at the cost of the *"more important"* things.

IF YOU FIND YOURSELF...at the center of what you consider what it means to follow Jesus, then...you may be stuck on the *"little things"*.

5. Attack, demonize people who don't see things like you do. Matthew 23:33-36.

Jesus seems to be saying, there will be others who teach and practice differently than we do. And *"little things"* are when we make our understanding of scripture, our group, as THE group. This is making your theology, understanding of who THE INFINITE GOD IS, as the center of understanding.

How else do you keep *"little things"* important?

We label and condemn people who aren't all about our *"little things"* like we are. We create artificial lists of what it means to believe the right things. And we will condemn and judge those who don't do it like we do it.

IF YOU FIND YOURSELF...placing yourself at the center of what is right, and everyone who is not you is getting it wrong...then you may be stuck on the *"little things"*.

IV Challenge.

This was a powerfully challenging passage. Jesus pulled no punches here. And as Kal pointed out, the danger is to come across just like Jesus, blasting others like Jesus did...until we realize we are not Jesus. This is for us to wrestle with, not to use as a hammer to bludgeon others.

Then Kal closed with the appeal. This is where he wants New Community Church to be. There are plenty of churches out there that have drawn a narrow line in the sand of what it means to live for God, and have also elevated the *"little things"* as more important than they really are.

Jesus said we are to do those things as part of our personal practice of holiness, but not to crush others with them. And we are to **practice and live out the more important things; *"justice, mercy, and faith."***

So...as we come to the end of this first Sunday of our *"little things"* message we have to ask.

Where might we be crushing others with our own *"little things"*?

What can and do we need to do to make our living for God more about the important things...justice, mercy, and faith?