

The Gospel of Matthew 18

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Introduction:

1. Jesus had explained in detail that He was going to be killed and on the third day be raised from the dead:

(17:22) After they gathered again in Galilee, Jesus told them, "The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of His enemies. He will be killed, but on the third day He will be raised from the dead." And the disciples were filled with grief.

2. His disciples simply blocked out this coming event. It didn't make sense to them. Returning from the dead was impossible. But they could understand that Jesus was going to rule in His Kingdom. Hence, their question about rank in that Kingdom.

WHO IS THE GREATEST?

(18:1) About that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Who is greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven?"

- **The disciples** had been preaching about the coming **Kingdom**. These were orders from Jesus.

Go and announce to them that the Kingdom of Heaven is near. Matthew 10:7 NLT

- **The disciples** hoped for leading roles in the unfolding **Kingdom**. This would be far better than fishing or

collecting taxes for a living. They had the understanding that a physical **Kingdom** would unfold on earth.

(2) Jesus called a little child to Him and put the child among them.

- Better than using words, **Jesus** introduced a living illustration of His answer.

GREATNESS DEMONSTRATED

(3) Then He said, "I tell you the truth, unless you turn from your sins and become like little children, you will never get into the Kingdom of Heaven.

- Perhaps turn from **sins** of self-aggrandizement. They were looking ahead to becoming great in the **Kingdom of Heaven**. Jesus redirects His disciples from being *childish* to being *childlike*.

(4) So anyone who becomes as humble as this little child is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven.

- The opposite of being **great** (verse 1) was to be **like a little child**. **Barclay** states it this way:

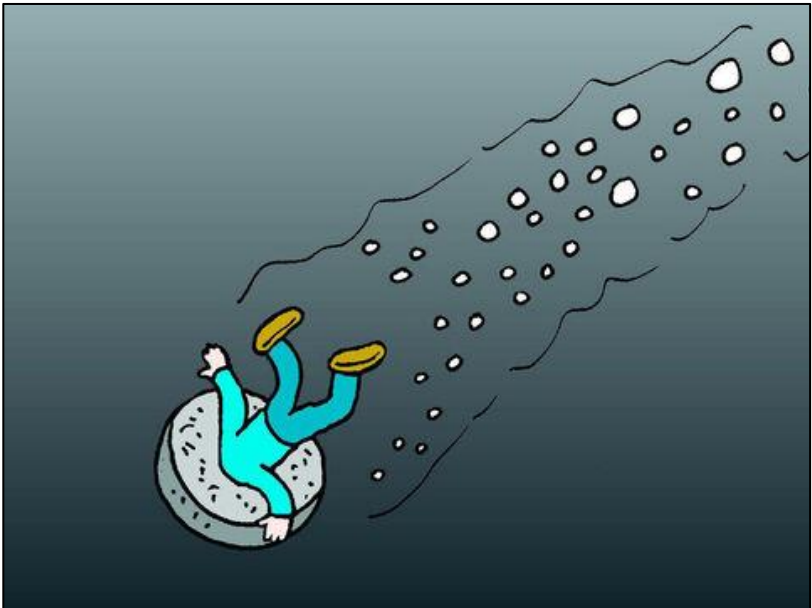
Only the person who has the humility of the child is a citizen of the Kingdom of Heaven. Personal ambition, personal prestige, personal publicity, personal profit are motives which can find no place in the life of the Christian. The Christian is the man who forgets self in his devotion to Jesus Christ and in his service of his fellow-men.

(5) "And anyone who welcomes a little child like this on My behalf is welcoming Me.

- Beyond *becoming like* a **child**, disciples must be willing to **welcome** those who are *childlike*, as well. This is **welcoming** Jesus.

(6) But if you cause one of these little ones who trusts in Me to fall into sin, it would be better for you to have a large millstone tied around your neck and be drowned in the depths of the sea.

- Furthermore, **causing** a **trusting** believer to **sin** is worse than having a **millstone** tied around one's **neck** and then tossed into the **sea**. This was a **millstone** turned by a donkey. **Barclay** says this was a mode of capital punishment among Greeks, Syrians, Romans and some other nations.



GREATNESS: NOT TEMPTING OTHERS

(7) "What sorrow awaits the world, because it tempts people to sin. Temptations are inevitable, but what sorrow awaits the person who does the tempting.

- Nearly all other translations that we consulted renders **"What sorrow"** as "woe" in both cases. The point is to call attention to the punishment that will follow individuals who **tempt** others to **sin**.
- Headline from Apnews:
A mother who claims teachers secretly manipulated her 11-year-old daughter into changing her gender identity and name filed a legal case against a tiny California school district. . . .

(8) So if your hand or foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It's better to enter eternal life with only one hand or one foot than to be thrown into eternal fire with both of your hands and feet. (9) And if your eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It's better to enter eternal life with only one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into the fire of hell.

- Jesus changes to a powerful metaphor. It cannot be taken literally because there is no way that it can function when taken literally. **Cutting off a hand or foot** still doesn't solve the problem because there is still another **hand or foot** left in place. **Gouging out an eye** doesn't solve a problem either. Rather, Jesus is teaching the ultra importance of preparing for **eternal life** and avoiding **hell**.
- The *Message Paraphrase* reads:

You are better off one-eyed and alive than exercising your twenty-vision from inside the fire of hell.

We can understand that Jesus is showing the importance of ridding ourselves of anything that would send us to **hell**.

HEAVENLY FATHER PORTRAYS GREATNESS

(10) "Beware that you don't look down on any of these little ones. For I tell you that in heaven their angels are always in the presence of My heavenly Father. (11) [And the Son of Man came to save those who are lost.]

- The Twelve were attempting to learn who was the greatest (verse 1). Jesus has turned this around. Rather, He points to the most vulnerable. **Looking down on** others is a common human activity. It always involves judging them. Jesus Himself did not judge those around Him.

You judge Me by human standards, but I do not judge anyone. (John 8:15 NLT)

Jesus heard all kinds of conversations that were not true, but said little.

- Jesus says that these **little ones** have an **angel** representing them **before the Heavenly Father**. The **Father** makes special provisions for the **little ones**, so we should treat them carefully. Now for a story:

(12) "If a man has a hundred sheep and one of them wanders away, what will he do? Won't he leave the ninety-nine others on the hills and go out to search for the one that is lost? (13) And if he finds it, I tell you the truth, he will rejoice over it more than over the ninety-nine that didn't wander away! (14) In the same way, it is not My heavenly Father's will that even one of these little ones should perish.

- Jesus used this story twice. In Luke it was used for a different purpose and is better known. Here, Jesus points to the extreme that the **Father** will go to to retrieve a **sheep** who is lost and the **joy** that is produced. The search should not be about who is the greatest, but who can be retrieved.

EXERCISING GREATNESS WITH THOSE WHO OFFEND US

(15) "If another believer sins against you, go privately and point out the offense. If the other person listens and confesses it, you have won that person back.

- Jesus has defined how the Heavenly Father views a strayed sheep. Now let's apply the rules to relations between **believers**. **Step #1** is to go to them privately and point out the **offense**. This is the step that gives the offender the best opportunity to reverse himself or herself.
- This means that we do not tell others about the offense or publish it any place. It is not embedded as a sermon illustration or used as a dinner-time story or released for the world to see on FaceBook.

(16) But if you are unsuccessful, take one or two others with you and go back again, so that everything you say may be confirmed by two or three witnesses.

- If Step #1 fails, then try **Step #2**. Gather **two or three witnesses** and try again. The **witnesses** may help with negotiations and their presence makes it clear that the person complaining is serious about a resolution of the offense.

(17) If the person still refuses to listen, take your case to the church. Then if he or she won't accept the church's decision, treat that person as a pagan or a corrupt tax collector.

- **Step #3** is to take the case to the **church** and if no change comes about, the offender is to be considered as a **pagan** or **a corrupt tax collector**. (Matthew, the writer, knew some from his former work associates.)
- Jesus circulated among **pagans** and **tax collectors**, so He was not requiring to have no connection with the offender, but they were not to be a part of the **church**.
- The **church** was not formed until Acts 2, so this instruction was really prophetic.

(18) "I tell you the truth, whatever you forbid on earth will be forbidden in heaven, and whatever you permit on earth will be permitted in heaven.

- After following the prescribed steps and the person still refuses to listen to the church, then church's decision will be synchronized in heaven. There is no work-around for the slow-of-hearing.

(19) "I also tell you this: If two of you agree here on earth concerning anything you ask, My Father in heaven will do

it for you. (20) For where two or three gather together as My followers, I am there among them."

- Heaven is not a million years away. Imagine the unmatched power when we learn that God has the hairs on our heads numbered. (Matthew 10:30) How many people are there on earth now and how many have lived previously? The knowledge of God cannot be fathomed.
- The **Father** is paying close attention to what His children are asking for. In fact, Jesus is in their midst even if the group is small.
- Jesus is among His followers and the Heavenly **Father** is working with the Son. Note the unity between the Father and the Son.

THE LIMITS OF BEING GREAT

(21) Then Peter came to Him and asked, "Lord, how often should I forgive someone who sins against me? Seven times?"

- **Peter** suggested keeping a mental spreadsheet listing the times that he has been **sinned against**. **Seven** was his maximum to exercise forgiveness per person. **Burton Coffman** claims the rabbis taught that one should forgive a maximum of four times. Peter had gone beyond the local teachers of the law when he proposed **forgiving seven times**.

(22) "No, not seven times," Jesus replied, "but seventy times seven!"

- Forgiveness is difficult to grasp. Once this writer was the preacher in a country church. Many of the members had been members of a city church but had left because of various petty issues. I was friends with the city church

preacher and we wanted to see peace between the two groups. Both groups wanted peace, so we met at a restaurant where everyone present signed an agreement to quit bringing up past grievances and look forward. I'm convinced that all present were sincere.

The next Sunday several men from the country church shared dinner after our morning church meeting. Very shortly the old complaints became the conversation. I interrupted and pointed out that if we have forgiven the city church men, we should not be discussing these matter. The silence was long and uncomfortable. But the group did not dispute my point. They just had to find some new conversation subject. Talking about the failures of others was a habit they had to break.

- **Jesus** raises the forgiveness number to 490 times. Peter would need a bigger spreadsheet. This calls forth another story from **Jesus**:

THE DEBT THAT MERITED SLAVERY

(23) "Therefore, the Kingdom of Heaven can be compared to a king who decided to bring his accounts up to date with servants who had borrowed money from him. (24) In the process, one of his debtors was brought in who owed him millions of dollars. (25) He couldn't pay, so his master ordered that he be sold -- along with his wife, his children, and everything he owned -- to pay the debt. (26) "But the man fell down before his master and begged him, 'Please, be patient with me, and I will pay it all.'

- It does not seem reasonable that the huge **debt** could ever be paid out of income so the **master** showed him pity and forgave the debt and released the **debtor** from the **debt** as we see next.

THE FORGIVEN DEBTOR SHOWED NO MERCY TO ANOTHER

(27) Then his master was filled with pity for him, and he released him and forgave his debt. (28) "But when the man left the king, he went to a fellow servant who owed him a few thousand dollars. He grabbed him by the throat and demanded instant payment.

- The forgiven man then turned to a debtor who owed him a very payable **debt**. After having received *huge mercy* himself, he showed *no mercy* to the one who owed him.

(29) "His fellow servant fell down before him and begged for a little more time. 'Be patient with me, and I will pay it,' he pleaded. (30) But his creditor wouldn't wait. He had the man arrested and put in prison until the debt could be paid in full.

- The man forgiven of the huge debt begins legal action right away by having his own debtor thrown in **prison** until the little debt was **paid in full**.

THE COST OF NOT SHOWING MERCY

(31) "When some of the other servants saw this, they were very upset. They went to the king and told him everything that had happened. (32) Then the king called in the man he had forgiven and said, 'You evil servant! I forgave you that tremendous debt because you pleaded with me. (33) Shouldn't you have mercy on your fellow servant, just as I had mercy on you?'

- The king relabeled his **servant** to being an **evil servant**.

(34) Then the angry king sent the man to prison to be tortured until he had paid his entire debt. (35) "That's what My heavenly Father will do to you if you refuse to forgive your brothers and sisters from your heart."

- Our Heavenly Father is not like an **angry king**, but He demands justice in His family. If we have been forgiven our enormous sin package that we cannot ever pay, we must be willing to forgive those who have sinned against us in some small way. We must look forgiveness in the face.
- Let's look at the biggest picture possible. Paul wrote in Ephesians:

Even before He made the world, God loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy and without fault in His eyes. God decided in advance to adopt us into His own family by bringing us to Himself through Jesus Christ. This is what He wanted to do, and it gave Him great pleasure. Ephesians 1:4-5 NLT

Plans for our salvation did not begin with Jesus on the cross or David as King or Abraham as a man of faith or even Adam and Eve in the Garden. Those plans were laid before the world was made. Each of us can say that God loved *me* and had a plan that could save *me* if I would accept *my* adoption through Jesus Christ. God took great pleasure in adopting *me* into His family.

God's plan for *my* salvation from *my* sin is absolutely beyond comprehension.

What offense against us can compare? Any offense against us is so minuscule by comparison. Peter needed to get the

big picture of his own forgiveness from God when talking about forgiving others people seven times.