

Matthew 18.1-14 | Humble Enough to Love

Intro | the Community Lesson

Last week, we were reminded that the three synoptic gospels tell the one story of Jesus life, death, and resurrection in relatively the same order and same way. While each writer was carried along by the Holy Spirit, they each spoke from God in their own voice. **Matthew organizes like a teacher, portrays Jesus as a teacher, and equips his readers to be teachers.** Our text in Matthew 18 is the fourth of five discourses describing the character of the Kingdom. The first was in Matthew 5-7, the Sermon on the Mount, known as the **discipleship lesson**. The second was 10, the sending out of the 12 disciples, **the mission lesson**. The third was in Matthew 13, the parables (i.e. sower, mustard seed, etc.), the **hidden lesson**. The fifth section will begin in Matthew 24, the Olivet discourse about the end times, **the last days lesson**. Each of the five sections ends with the phrase, “*When He finished saying these things,*” connecting Jesus with Moses who wrote the five books of the Pentateuch and predicted a second and better Moses would rise (Deut. 18.15ff).

The fourth is here in Matthew 18, the description of the church, the **community lesson**. Just as Moses led His people out of slavery to Egypt and established a new kind of community, so Jesus leads His people out of slavery to sin into a **new kind of community the world has never seen**. We are free in Jesus. But our freedom is not for us. Paul says in Romans 6 that we “have been set free from sin to become slaves of righteousness...you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God (6.18;22). When Jesus told Peter “sons were free”, Peter understood this to mean: **1 Peter 1.16 ¹⁶ Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God.** The only reason that doesn’t sound like *freedom* to most people is that they don’t view it through the lens of love. In Reason for God Tim Keller writes: “*Love is the most liberating freedom-loss of all.*” The intimacy, joy, fulfillment, and growth that a genuine love relationship brings requires the *denial of self* and the *giving up of personal autonomy*. In many ways, this kind of surrender of liberty is not where freedom is lost, but where it is found. This is not only true for personal relationships, but for communal ones—**for the church**.

V. 4 We Serve one Another | as Jesus served us

In this discourse, Jesus intends to give us a picture of these kinds of Kingdom relationships. Entering into these kinds of relationships requires a radical conversion. Jesus says: “**Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. ⁴ Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.**”

According to the gospel of Mark, after his private exchange about taxes in the house, Jesus inquired about the conversation they had on their walk to town. His disciples “kept silent” for they had been arguing who was going to be the “greatest”—Jesus reads their minds. The world have a very different definition of greatness. Greatness is winning. Greatness is power. Greatness is wealth. Greatness is position. Greatness is influence. Greatness is intelligence. Greatness is virtue. Even though the world’s understanding of greatness differs slightly from man to man, one thing is identical: every *definition focuses on increasing the greatness of man*. In Mark, Jesus tells them “**if anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all.**” Jesus declares greatness to be something completely counter-cultural and counter-intuitive—**to be great we must become small and others must become great to us**.

In Matthew here, Jesus says the same thing but a different way. He beckons a young child over to him and tells them that they must become like children. Becoming a Christians is not a charge to be childish in our thinking (i.e. simple-minded, naïve, immature, goofy, etc.). Jesus charges us to assume a lower position and

embrace a particular disposition toward God and men. Becoming a Christians means turning from self-trust and toward a Fatherly trust. Children need to be fed, chased, provided for, taught, protected, even disciplined. To become a child is to realize something about yourself: I NEED GOD in every interaction, in every situation, in every moment of life. Entering the Kingdom requires a fundamental change, not of the mind, but of the heart. **“Jesus calls his disciples to humility of heart, not childishness of thought.” D.Platt**

We do not need more knowledge, virtue, or accomplishment to enter the Kingdom of God. We need more humility. The smartest, wealthiest, most skilled, most successful, most spiritual, most virtuous, most gifted, need to become like children. Conversion occurs when the spirits reveals our utter need for God and we, by grace, turn to trust the Father completely. **The Son of God became a child...literally.** Jesus made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. **And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted... (Phil. 2.7-11).** **WE MUST BE HUMBLE; NOT A DECISION A DISPOSITION.**

V. 5 We receive one another | as Jesus received us

When our disposition toward God is changed, our disposition toward men is transformed. The Spirit of Christ comes to dwell in us and we receive the heart and mind of Jesus. And a family of such spirit-filled “children” **creates a community unlike anything the world has seen. We receive one another as Jesus received us.** Jesus says: ⁵ **“Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me.** Jesus is not talking about children, but about Christians. Jesus says, therefore, that a decision to embrace the LITTLE Christian, is a decision to embrace Jesus himself. We will naturally celebrate the big, loud, or strong Christian—those great by the world’s standards. Jesus reminds us to also embrace the small, quiet, and humble servants among us who are often ignored. **Jesus is not calling us to simply tolerate one another, sit next to one another, or even respect one another, he wants us to RECEIVE one another.** Paul writes: ¹⁹ **So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God,** ²⁰ **built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone,** ²¹ **in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord.** ²² **In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit. Ephesians 2.18-22. (Ephesians 4.16 says built up in love)** **WE MUST BE HUMBLE ENOUGH TO EMBRACE AS FAMILY.**

V. 6-9 We protect one another | as Jesus protected us

We are all children...in the same family. When we begin to truly receive one another, we will be compelled **to protect one another.** **but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea.** Being as part of the same spiritual family means that we protect one another from sin and temptation...that comes from within. **Christians are often concerned too much with sin outside the church and too little concerned for sin inside the church.** If we are in the same family, then I know I am responsible. If you are a child, then I know you are vulnerable. My first priority is to protect YOU from me—I am constantly aware that all of my choices, good or bad, have the power to influence others for good or bad. We do not want another brother or sister to sin as a result of us. **WE MUST BE HUMBLE ENOUGH TO BE PROTECT LIKE FAMILY.**

If you are a child, I KNOW YOU ARE VULNERABLE. But I only know that because I am a child...I KNOW I AM VULNERABLE....you can cause me to sin. **When we are zealous about holiness in our own lives, we will be zealous about protecting one another from sin.’** – D. Platt. Jesus warns about temptations that will come, in fact, he calls them necessary—James says to produce a stronger faith. ⁷ **“Woe to the world for**

temptations to sin! For it is necessary that temptations come, but woe to the one by whom the temptation comes! ⁸ And if your hand or your foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life crippled or lame than with two hands or two feet to be thrown into the eternal fire. ⁹ And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into the hell of fire. The health of your family and our community is dependent upon how seriously you take sin. We do not minimize it, manage it, or otherwise convince ourselves we can handle it. We kill sin. We do not KILL Sin as much as we kill the portals through which it comes. If we are devoted to the protection of others, we must be ruthless about protecting our own hearts. That means we must choose to LOVE GOD so much we are willing to REMOVE whatever might hinder that love. **A commitment to another's holiness requires a willingness to lay down a liberty for a moment; commitment to our own holiness requires a willingness to lay down a liberty for a lifetime.** Entering life is worth any sacrifice. Avoiding hell is worth any price. **WE MUST BE HUMBLE ENOUGH TO ADMIT WE ARE WEAK AND NEED FAMILY.**

V. 10-14 We shepherd one another | as Jesus shepherded us

Finally, the community that Jesus builds is a community that shepherds one another. ¹⁰ “See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that in heaven their angels always see the face of my Father who is in heaven. ¹² What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go in search of the one that went astray? ¹³ And if he finds it, truly, I say to you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine that never went astray.

Jesus says we shouldn't DESPISE, meaning, we should not look down or treat even the littlest of Christians with contempt. In fact, we are to pay particular attention to sheep who wander from the flock. Jesus wants us concerned for the “LOST”, not meaning those in the world, but his little children who are tempted to walk away from gospel community—the church. **We are commanded to love sheep that are different than us. We are commanded to love sheep that are difficult for us. We are commanded to love sheep that are distant from us (not just the pastor – if we are a priesthood, not only shepherd searching)**

Easy to value nice sheep, calm sheep, sheep like me...but what about the wandering sheep? What about the unruly sheep? **John 21.15** ¹⁵ When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” He said to him, “Feed my lambs.” It is easy to feed the nice sheep that don't bite and the sheep that are close by, or easy to be with. There are sheep who wander out of pride, pain, or even pleasure. **We must fight the temptation to relinquish our responsibility to pursue.** We are to have care for the “sheep” like we would our own child. A sheep who, when returns, regardless of the pain it has caused—the shepherd rejoices (not that they left but found). **WE MUST BE HUMBLE ENOUGH TO GO OUTWARD TO FIND THE WAYARD.**

CONCLUSION: HOW DO I HUMBLE MYSELF?

Jesus wraps it all up to reveal that He has not been talking about us at all, primarily ¹⁴ **So it is not the will of my Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish.** Jesus does not give us a list of actions that please the Father, as much as he gives us a list of appropriate responses to the Father who acted first. **God's family acts like this because they know they have become His children.** It is only possible to find, enter, and live in the Kingdom of Heaven through humility. But Humility is only possible when we behold the humility of Christ and believe it was out of love for us. **Jesus served us. Jesus received us. Jesus protected us. Jesus pursued us so that I can do the same.** ⁴

But where do I begin? **HOW DO I BECOME HUMBLE ENOUGH?** Start living as if you are...

- First, start looking at Jesus and stop looking at yourself.
- Second, start relating to God as a child and stop relying on yourself
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- Third, start viewing the church as family and stop living by yourself.
- Fourth, start knowing others and stop talking about yourself.
- Fifth, start admitting weakness and repenting together and stop lying to yourself.
- Sixth, start selflessly serving others and stop waiting to be served yourself.
- Seventh, start pursuing the wayward and stop caring for yourself.

BE HUMBLE ENOUGH TO LOSE YOUR “SELF” SO THAT JESUS CAN LIVE THROUGH YOU. The Lord’s Table is where we come to experience the love from the one who died for us. The Lord’s Table is where we learn the definition true love is. The Lord’s Table is where we receive the power to love.