

LSB Matthew 18:1 - 7

At that time the disciples came to Jesus and said, "Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" 2 And He called a child to Himself and set him before them, 3 and said, "Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. 4 Whoever therefore will humble 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; 6 but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it is better for him that a heavy millstone be hung around his neck, and that he 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; nevertheless, woe to that man through whom the stumbling block comes!"

I'm going to take some time this morning away from our usual verse by verse walk through Ephesians. It's been a busy week at our house. Miss Pam is doing very well and she is thankful for all of the prayers and the kind thoughtfulness of those who reached out to help with meals.

So, with things a little bit crazy at our house, I decided to do something a little bit different this week, and I hope it will be helpful and positive to do a little extra Bible study this morning on a slightly different topic.

And this morning will be kind of a two for one price combination. We'll review some principles we need to use in order to study our Bibles. And at the same time we'll apply those principles to a specific example.

In the VP debate last Tuesday I was amused to hear the governor Mr. Walz quote from the Bible. Did any of you catch that? He had taken the defensive posture, talking about the devastation caused to our nation by illegal immigration and he said; quote

"I don't talk about my faith a lot, But Matthew 25:40 talks about *to the least*

amongst us you do unto me" Gov. Walz

Does that verse require American tax payers to welcome, feed, clothe and care for the world's poor? Does Jesus require us to care for people who break our nations laws entering our borders illegally? Is that what Jesus meant?

If our government takes money from it's citizens, illegally and under duress, breaking it's own laws, and gives it away to non citizens who have come here against our laws, does that make Jesus happy?

In fact, the Old Testament does have some references to how the nation of Israel was to treat sojourners and strangers inside their borders with kindness and justice and decency. Hospitality.

There's nothing similar in the new testament because the old testament is about Israel as a nation under law, and the new testament is about a brotherhood drawn out of all nations unto Jesus. Everyone is welcome to come. From all nations. In fact we are sent as missionaries into all nations. Christians are to treat all peoples everywhere with courtesy and decency.

But what did Jesus say, and to whom did He say it in the passage that the governor Mr. Walz quoted as an argument allowing anyone at any time to flood into our nation and then somehow be requisite of taxpayer care.

Again, the quote he used; "I don't talk about my faith a lot, But Matthew 25:40 talks about *to the least amongst us you do unto me"* Gov. Walz

We need to understand, because ultimately, those who do not do whatever Jesus is requiring here in the full context of the quoted scripture, suffer the judgement of hell. In the context of that full passage, heaven and hell hang in the balance. There's nothing more important to understand and get it right.

When I graduated elementary school, in those days it was 6th grade

graduation before you entered middle school, my father gave me, as a graduation present, a Bible. Everything was King James in those days. And in the fly leaf he wrote 2 Tim. 2:15.

So I turned to 2 Tim. 2:15 and it says, in the King's english; *Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.*

We work hard in the scriptures, studying, hermeneutically. That means we get down and deep into the word structures and tenses. We use what we call the historical grammatical method of study.

We want to know what the words meant to the original hearers. How did they understand what was said. What did it mean to them. We work hard at it. What is the continuing unchanging principle that applies to us today. What does it require of us today. Rightly dividing the Word of truth takes effort.

What happens when people get it wrong? If you can rightly divide it, obviously the possibility looms of getting it wrong. We get this argument thrown at us all the time. Every word in the book can be interpreted a thousand different ways by a thousand different people, therefore it means nothing. Ever get that thrown at you. Billions of possible interpretations, therefore, zero authority. That's a cop out.

The Bible means something by what it says. It isn't Magic 8 ball where you turn the 8 ball over and the answer floats to the top. There is one correct interpretation. Somebody's right and somebody's wrong. We want to be the people who are right. So we work hard at interpretation.

In my Bible, in the last page, I have a little piece of paper, taped in there, just about exactly 41 years ago with the title; Hermeneutics.

Hermeneutics is a big word and it means principles of interpretation. How do we interpret what Matthew 25, or a thousand other places for that

matter, means. I've never added to or changed these brief principles because they have served me perfectly for 54 years that I have used them. Simple enough and short enough to share them just now.

Some of you have listened to me before go through these, but we're going to have a little refresher course in principles of interpretation this morning. Here they are; From small print at the back leaf of my Bible, printed by an Apple GS printer in 1983. Brand new leading edge technology.

Hermeneutics: Principles of interpretation;

1. The Literal Principle

a. the scripture is to be understood in it's natural normal sense.
(The basic customary meaning of the words.)

2. Historical Principle

a. re-create the historical setting in which the passage was penned. (where was the first guy that read it, and what was going on around him.)

3. Grammar Principle

a. let it really say what it says in terms of the words and grammar.

b. words – what do they mean?

c. sentence order and structure

d. word tenses

e. context. (It only means something in relation to what else the writer has said before, and what he will say after.)

4. Synthesis Principle

a. no one part of the Bible contradicts any other part of the Bible.

5. Practical Principle

a. So What?? How does it apply to me? What does it say to us

here and now?

6. Illuminating Holy Spirit Principle

a. Even with the first 5 principles in practice, no one can properly interpret the Bible without God's help through the Holy Spirit's teaching ministry to Christians. That's why the world can work on it for years and come up with nothing but wrong answers.

Was it last week or two weeks ago that I quoted Peter saying that what Paul says, is to be received with all of the other scriptures. And Peter said that in a funny way because he was making the statement that people take what Paul says and they twist it to mean something it didn't mean, which is what they also do to all the scriptures, to their own destruction.

Serious stuff. Twisting scriptures to make it mean what you want it to mean, apart from what it actually means, is deadly. Here's Peter's quote;

2 Peter 3:14 Therefore, beloved, since you are looking for these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless, 15 and consider the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you, 16 as also in all his letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction.

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Peter says false teachers distort the scriptures, to the end which is destruction.

Paul says, study hard so that you rightly divide the scripture. We study in depth to get it right. We are careful not to be shamed with those who distort the scripture.

So then, with those two possibilities, let's read what Jesus said in the full

context of the passage which Mr. Walz quoted as argument for caring for illegal immigrants. It's a very powerful warning in it's full context. The power of heaven and hell depend on understanding what Jesus said. It's the wrong place to trifle and distort what God is telling us. Warning us.

Matthew 25:

31 "But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne. 32 And all the nations will be gathered before Him; and He will separate them from one another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats; 33 and He will put the sheep on His right, and the goats on the left. 34 "Then the King will say to those on His right, 'Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom, which has been prepared for you from the foundation of the world. 35 For I was hungry, and you gave Me something to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me something to drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in; 36 naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me.' 37 Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry, and feed You, or thirsty, and give You something to drink? 38 And when did we see You a stranger, and invite You in, or naked, and clothe You? 39 And when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?' 40 And the King will answer and say to them, 'Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me.' 41 "Then He will also say to those on His left, 'Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels; 42 for I was hungry, and you gave Me nothing to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me nothing to drink; 43 I was a stranger, and you did not invite Me in; naked, and you did not clothe Me; sick, and in prison, and you did not visit Me.' 44 Then they themselves also will answer, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not take care of You?' 45 Then He will answer them, saying, 'Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.' 46 And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

The passage talks about a distinct judgement after which, those who are not among the righteous, are sent to eternal flames, but the righteous enter into eternal glory. Two groups. Sheep and goats.

And like many of Jesus parables and metaphors and stories, there's a surprise. The ones who thought they would enter do not, and some who had no hope of a righteousness of their own, find themselves entering into glory.

And the surprise here is that the group that enters, are praised for aiding Jesus when He was hungry and thirsty, or naked or sick or strangers or in prison.

And the group who are welcomed into the glorious kingdom have questions.

Lord, when did we see You hungry, and feed You, or thirsty, and give You something to drink? 38 And when did we see You a stranger, and invite You in, or naked, and clothe You? 39 And when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You? '

Now to Mr. Walz credit he gets right to the key verse with the answer and he misquotes it right at the crux of the matter. He said;

*"I don't talk about my faith a lot, But Matthew 25:40 talks about *to the least amongst us you do unto me*"*

Here's what Jesus actually said. Heaven and hell hang in the balance of correctly understanding Jesus words.

*40 And the King will answer and say to them, 'Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these **brothers of Mine**, even **the least of them**, you did it to Me.'*

There's a qualifier here. The righteous brought aid to who? Brothers of Jesus. And Jesus uses a possessive pronoun. **These** brothers of mine. This

is a group of brothers and Jesus is a brother also in their midst among them.

Who are the these in the context of the passage. They are the sheep who are entering into glory. Brothers of Jesus who are in the heaven bound group. These brothers of mine.

Now in the context of the parable one group is oppressed. Naked, hungry, thirsty, strangers, sick and in prison, who are brethren of Jesus.

The first thing we need to understand is the qualifying word, brothers. Who is it that are brethren of Jesus? Is that all inclusive of all fallen humanity, or does that qualifier indicate a select group?

The world mistreating the world is simply the order of the day for fallen sinful greedy mankind. That's the default of sinful humanity. But Jesus is specific. My brothers were oppressed and you reached out and helped them, and that was in effect helping me. Who are Jesus' brothers? We need to get that right in order to rightly divide what is being said here.

Jesus himself tells us who His brothers are in Matthew chapter 12. All 3 synoptic gospels repeat this same event. It's also recorded in Mark 3 and Luke 8. We'll read the Matthew 12 version. Who is it that are brothers of Jesus?

*Mt. 12:46 While He was still speaking to the crowds, behold, His mother and brothers were standing outside, seeking to speak to Him. 47 Now someone said to Him, "Behold, Your mother and Your brothers are standing outside seeking to speak to You." 48 But Jesus answered the one who was telling Him and said, "Who is My mother and who are My brothers?" 49 And stretching out His hand toward **His disciples**, He said, "Behold My mother and My brothers! 50 For whoever does the will of My Father who is in heaven, he is My brother and sister and mother." Matt. 12:46 - 50*

Jesus brethren are those who belong to and obey God the Father. Believers

who believe in such a way that they render themselves slaves to the authority of God as revealed in His word.

Two kingdoms are at war with each other. Satan is ruler of this world and when he can get away with it, Satan oppresses those who are outside of his rule, those who belong to God, those who are adopted brothers of Jesus.

Time immemorial, since the fall, Satan hates those who are redeemed. When he can, he hunts them down and kills them. The book of Revelation pictures horrific persecutions, yet future, of all who will not bow down to AntiChrist, and as it were, Satan himself who empowers antichrist.

Listen to Paul describing this category of those who belong to God. This is the description of an inclusive brotherhood of believers and followers of Jesus. Who is it that He recognizes as His brothers?

Romans 8:16 *The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. 17And if we are children, then we are heirs: heirs of God and fellow-heirs with Christ— if indeed we suffer with Him, so that we may also be glorified with Him.*

Brothers of Jesus, fellow heirs with Jesus, all share in kind an intimate spiritual relationship with Jesus. His Holy Spirit testifies intimately and directly with my spirit. I am in Him. He is in me. God's adopted children have an intimate connection with Him once sin is removed by the finished work of Christ at the cross. Before we were enemies. Now we are friends.

So the qualifying group in the context are suffering destitute christians, not illegal immigrants. I believe there's always been a broad context, any time those who belong to Christ have been mistreated by Satan's world. Old testament and new.

People in Holland who hid jews in closets and holes in the walls and protected them during the holocaust may find themselves included here perhaps. This has always been true. Satan wants to slaughter those who

have been chosen out of this world, who belong to God.

Always true in every era. Satan oppresses those who no longer belong to him but who belong to God. But I believe the truest real time group who are being described here may be the tribulation saints who are fleeing for their lives from city to city, town to town being chased to their death by antichrist and his forces during the tribulation period when God removes all restraints from Satan and the antichrist pursues every believer to his death.

Jesus expands on the idea of inclusion and exclusion, brethren and enemies, the forces that belong to God in conflict with the forces that belong to Satan. This is an important passage because it not only defines two opposing sides in a conflict but it also introduces to us God's care and interest, and indeed His fury at the opposing sides tactic of harming the weakest amongst us first.

*Mark 9:38 John said to Him, "Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in Your name, and we tried to hinder him because he was not following us." 39 But Jesus said, "Do not hinder him, for there is no one who will perform a miracle in My name, and be able soon afterward to speak evil of Me. 40 For he who is not against us is for us. 41 For whoever gives you a cup of water to drink in My name because you are of Christ, truly I say to you, he will not lose his reward. 42 "And whoever causes one of these **little ones** who believe to stumble, it would be better for him if, with a heavy millstone hung around his neck, he had been cast into the sea.*

There's a second qualifier, not a qualifier but a magnifier. Jesus says this was done to my brothers, even to the least. If you do a word study of the greek word Jesus used to describe what the translators translated little ones, it's the greek word mikros.

We get our word micron. Tiny. Figuratively, the least important. The least dignified. But literally, the smallest, tiniest brothers. Hold that thought.

Last week we talked about a hierarchy in creation. From the weakest and

most helpless up the ladder to the strongest men. Satan goes after the weakest among us first. Those whom Jesus calls the least.

He slaughters babies in the womb. He harms little ones who are believing, filling their little minds with error and confusion. Then older children, then teens, then women, then the elderly, right up to the strongest amongst us. An ordered heirarchy from the weakest to the strongest.

Who in that hierarchy qualifies by default as brethren? Babies. Both unborn and born. Toddlers. Little ones who don't know they have a right hand or a left. Little ones who believe everything they are told about Jesus. The weakest are brethren by default, because of their helplessness. I think that default group includes infants, toddlers, and perhaps mentally incapacitated.

Jesus did in fact say, the kingdom belongs to such as these.

Luke 18:16 But Jesus called the children to Him and said, "Let the little children come to Me, and do not hinder them! For the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.

The kingdom of God belongs to infants and toddlers. They are the least and Jesus includes them. They are brethren, by default.

And so Mr. Walz, beware. If your policies are promoting the slaughtering of little ones, the *mikros*, who belong to Jesus by default, who are His tiny brethren, you are in fact the person who is in danger of eternal hell.

If your policies harm children, you are the one oppressing Jesus brethren.

If you're going to throw scripture around, you need to get it right. Those who stand for the slaughter of tiny image-of-God bearers are, according to the scripture quoted, first in line for hell. If you do it to infants, alive or still inside the womb, tiny brethren of Jesus, you did it to Jesus.

Now the other guys are imperfect too. We're all sinners. But I haven't heard them quoting scripture incorrectly for their own illicit gain. If they do, I'll give them equal time.

*Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, **rightly dividing the word of truth.*** 2 Tim. 2:15