

1) Welcome to chapter 18 – here we go...

Matthew 18:1–6(ESV)

Who Is the Greatest?

**18** At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” <sup>2</sup> And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them <sup>3</sup> and said, “Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. <sup>4</sup> Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

<sup>5</sup> “Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, <sup>6</sup> 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.

2) The phrase “At that time” ties us back to the situation we were just in.

a) The disciples are processing the idea of Jesus departing, John the Baptist’s part in the ministry, and, what is going to happen after Jesus’ departure.

3) Now at first glance, the answer to that question should be obvious to the disciples – God then the angels.

a) When Jesus departs, he will be greater than the angels being part of the Trinity.

4) However, that is not the real question they are asking.

5) In the Jewish mindset, rank was very important.

a) So obviously, it is very important to the disciples to know who the greatest would be.

b) Probably, each was hoping that it might be him – after all, they were the special chosen disciples.

6) Jesus sees the question in this situation to be much more complicated.

a) He sees the motives in the hearts of these men and again brings the answer – not to the question they asked but to the question they were really asking.

b) And that is, who will lead when Jesus is gone?

c) Now, I thought of an interesting side note to consider here.

i) If indeed Peter had, as some think, been defined as the de facto leader, then this would not be a question that they would be asking.

ii) If actually they were not behind that decision were they looking for a different answer?

iii) – just food for thought

7) Jesus uses the child as an example of humility.

8) In Aramaic the same word is used for “child” and “servant.”

a) When Jesus takes a little child into his arms, he made the explanation of greatness even more distinct, in other words, to be great, one must serve.

b) Jesus wanted them to become like children to change their idea of what greatness really was.

- c) The disciples had become so preoccupied with the organization of Jesus' earthly kingdom that they had lost sight of its divine purpose.
  - d) Instead of seeking a place of service, they were seeking positions of advantage (who was going to be in charge) .
  - e) Jesus used a child to help his self-centered disciples get the point.
  - f) Instead of self-centered, they were to have servant attitudes.
  - g) They were not to be “childish” (arguing over petty issues) but “childlike,” with humble and sincere hearts.
  - h) As children depend on their parents, so people who come to God must be willing to wholly depend on him.<sup>40</sup>
  - i) The obvious difference being that as we grow and mature as human beings our dependence on our parents lessens.
  - j) However, as we grow and mature as Christians, our dependence on God increases.
- 9) We are probably not prone to asking the question who is the greatest in the Kingdom but ...

**Do we need to exhibit more dependance on God and less on being in charge of our own selves – “I’ve got this God” attitude?**

**How do we accomplish that?**

10) As we proceed on, we will definitely see that the disciples do not get this message completely.

1) A world full of temptations ...

**Matthew 18:7–9(ESV)**

**Temptations to Sin**

<sup>7</sup>“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! <sup>8</sup>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. <sup>9</sup>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.

2) I have a little issue with verse 7 in the ESV.

**Matthew 18:7 (NASB 2020)**

**Stumbling Blocks**

<sup>7</sup>“Woe to the world because of *its* stumbling blocks! For it is inevitable that stumbling blocks come; but woe to the person through whom the stumbling block comes!

- a) The NASB is a little more faithful to the actual Greek.
  - b) Not a lot of difference but definitely gets more to the focus, I think.
- 3) There is a mental picture drawn by the word translated here as stumbling block.

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<sup>40</sup> Bruce B. Barton, [Matthew](#), Life Application Bible Commentary (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1996), 352.

## Matthew – Teachings, Messiahship, and Ministry of Jesus Christ – NOTES

- a) The word can obviously mean temptation to sin but there is a vivid point to be made – when one stumbles, it may be followed by a fall.
- 4) What Jesus is saying here is that the world – the life we lead and our environment – inevitably presents stumbling blocks to us.
  - a) These are the things that we see in the world that look good but we know they are not.
  - b) We all deal with these every day.
- 5) However, there are also people we know and perhaps even love as family or friends that provide stumbling blocks.
  - a) Some are intentional, some are not, but they are temptations to do what God does not approve.
  - b) The bottom line is the same regardless – woe to that person who places that stumbling block in front of us.
- 6) When we put this together with verses 8 and 9, I think what Jesus is saying is that we must step over or around these stumbling blocks no matter the cost.
  - a) If it involves confrontation of a friend or family member about what they are doing then we have the responsibility to do that.
    - i) Jesus’ statement in the last half of verse 7 should be scary – “Woe to the one through whom the stumbling blocks comes!”
    - ii) This will apply to those we love as friends and family and us, just as it does for those in the world who set these stumbling blocks before us.
  - b) If it means cutting ties with them to get around that stumbling block we must.
  - c) The same goes for the world – we must flee from, step over, or step around all these temptations (stumbling blocks) that the world throws at us every day.
- 7) Having said all that, here’s a question that may bring some further clarity to all this.
- 8) James says:

### James 1:14–15 (ESV)

<sup>14</sup> But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. <sup>15</sup> Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.

### How does what Jesus says and what James says fit together?

- 9) “**See – Desire – Take**” is an expression that can be associated with basically all sin from Adam and Eve to me and you.

1) Continuing on then ...

### Matthew 18:10,12–14(ESV)

#### The Parable of the Lost Sheep

<sup>10</sup> “**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.**”

- 2) This verse provides a bridge from the concept of leading the *little ones* astray to seeking them when they do go astray – we will get to that in just a bit.

- 3) You may have a translation that does not have a verse 11.
- 4) The verse reads “**For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost.**”
- 5) This is another of those textual variances and is not found in the earliest and best manuscripts; therefore, it is not included in most modern versions.<sup>41</sup>
- 6) “Little ones” can refer to both children and disciples.
  - a) The words “do not despise” are pointed directly at the pious religious leaders who showed nothing but contempt for those below them on the “spiritual ladder.”
  - b) The reason the “little ones” should not be despised is because *their angels continually see the face of my Father in heaven.*
    - i) Some have seen the concept of guardian angels in these verses.
    - ii) These words neither prove nor condemn the concept.
    - iii) Seeing God’s face means having access to God, so these angels are ministering angels.
    - iv) Hebrews 1:14 says, “Are they not all ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation?”
    - v) Having said all that, any investigation of angels should keep in mind that it is God’s care that they administer, so the focus should be on God, not merely angels.
    - vi) In fact, the Greek word angelos “angels” has an alternate meaning of “messenger.”
- 1) Now we get to the actual parable that was mentioned in the inserted title for the last passage...  
The Parable of the Lost Sheep

**Matthew 18:12–14(ESV)**

<sup>12</sup> **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? <sup>13</sup> And if he finds it, truly, I say to you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine that never went astray. <sup>14</sup> So it is not the will of my Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish.**

- 2) Jesus opens with the question “**What do you think?**”
  - a) This was a typical way in which a Jewish Rabi would get his students to begin dealing with a mental problem he was presenting.
  - b) The same is true here – that was Jesus’ purpose as well.
- 3) The parable of the one lost sheep focuses attention on the lost sheep over the ninety-nine who stayed in place.
  - a) Jesus’ purpose was to correct the misconception that the believer who sinned was less valuable in the Father’s eyes than the rest.
  - b) In reality, the Father values all of his believers equally. Jesus made it a point to emphasize the value of the one straying sheep.
  - c) This also draws attention to the Father’s grace.

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<sup>41</sup> Bruce B. Barton, [Matthew](#), Life Application Bible Commentary (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1996), 357.

- i) God pursues his own and rescues even those who rebel against him.
- d) One way Jesus emphasized the Father's love for a straying believer was by highlighting the trouble to which the Father (the Shepherd) went to restore the sinning believer:
  - i) He left the ninety-nine behind;
  - ii) he searched through dangerous "mountain" terrain;
  - iii) he continually searched until the lost sheep was found.
- e) There is also an uncertainty expressed in the phrase "and if he finds."
- f) The idea of all of this is not that the shepherd (God) values or cares for the 99 that were not lost any less but, that he rejoices greatly over the one that is found.

**Now, how can God fail in his pursuit of us when we stray?**

- a) Simply free will and rebellion.
  - b) We can refuse to be found by placing our wants and desires in front of what God wants.
  - c) God's disappointment in that case must be as great as his joy is when we do return.
- 4) Jesus concludes this parable with the statement that we must never lose sight of.
- <sup>14</sup> So it is not the will of my Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish.**

- a) Paul echoes this same thought in his 1<sup>st</sup> letter to Timothy:

**1 Timothy 2:3–4 (ESV)**

<sup>3</sup>This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, <sup>4</sup>who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.