

Week 19

Matthew series: Ministry of Jesus (Who is the greatest)

Matthew 18: Humble like children

I can see it so clearly. We look at this book of Matthew like a story and teachings. There are famous verses and famous theological points. In school they wanted me to know these points. Yet, the point of the book was ignored. It's not like I have found some mystical answers in Matthew. I just think I see what he was driving at. This book is a warning on bad Christianity. Matthew gives us foundation and story, yet there is so much more.

In most sermons there are three points. They say that a three-point argument is a good one. Matthew uses three-fold themes all through this book. If we hear Jesus say Blessed are the pure at heart, we think "oh how profound." Later Jesus is telling us here in Matthew 18 to come to God like little ones. The disciples wanted to know who runs heaven. Will they run heaven? I'm not so sure the disciples ever really got Jesus. A warning? Yes, we should take this book seriously. It's profound strictly because we want to master this book. To know it's great verses and deep theology. This book wants us to be humbled so that the message within masters us. Makes us Christian in the truest sense like little ones.

I have met so many children that grew up in church circles. Most of them would not touch church as they pasted into their adult years. Why? Was church so bad? I doubt it, but something is wrong in how we invite children to worship. I believe it's because they watch us. They see bad Christianity. The word hypocrite is strong in these adults. Because, we have stressed certain verses? Because, we stress to be like Jesus? The stumbling block to believing is massive. We weren't meant to be perfect, but humble before the perfect God. This chapter is nasty. I say this with a smile. Don't just read it once. Do you highlight and proof read? Be honest with skimming. Allow yourself to come to God like a child?

Matthew 18:3 "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."

Proverbs 22:6 "Train children in the right way, and when old, they will not stray."

It could be easy to get hung up on words. I truly believe that Matthew chose lofty words at times to trip people up. That sounds weird for the Bible. Does it? People have accused Jesus of using parables to trip people up. The prophets were accused of using prophesy to trip people up. What trips people? It's making the stories so interesting that you forget the book. It's looking for more than is

there. It's making the Bible story fit your point. In the end, you forget why your reading. You forget the message. A message that says its God's way. It's God's plan. It's not about what we should take but what God is saying.

Great themes in the Bible. Who is greatest in the Kingdom asks the disciples? Bring back one sheep. Forgive 70 times or 70 times 7. It's important to memorize these verses. It's important to know your Bible. There are so many famous verses. Forgive like your heavenly father. Train a child is ringing in my ears. I like memory verses. Knowing your Bible is good. Yet, we have lost something in that. They say to never take a verse out of context. I am wondering if skipping to famous verses just to memorize them does just that. In the end, we argue over how many times to forgive. We argue over saving one sheep and ignoring the 99. We argue over how to be humble before God. What verses are you stuck on?

Matthew 18:35 "So my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart."

Isaiah 55:11 "so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it."

I am a broken record. I feel Matthew repeats themes in this book because he is beating us over the head until we get it. Three-point sermons, get it. In the end, I feel Jesus is doing just that in his ministry. He keeps repeating be humble. Listen to me. Look for what God is doing. There are probably more. Yet, there it is. In his time with Jesus, I think Matthew silently got it. Christianity was never meant to rule. It was meant to change us. This book is a training manual because of that. Remember where you came from. Remember Jesus words. Remember your place among the people. Like the little ones.

Matthew 21:15-16 "But when the chief priests and the teachers of the law saw the wonderful things he did and the children shouting in the temple courts, "Hosanna to the Son of David," they were indignant. 16 "Do you hear what these children are saying?" they asked him. "Yes," replied Jesus, "have you never read, "'From the lips of children and infants you, Lord, have called forth your praise?'"

Psalm 8:2 "Through the praise of children and infants you have established a stronghold against your enemies, to silence the foe and the avenger."

For next week read Matthew 18. Also read 1 Peter 2.

1. The little ones. There it is in black and white. There is no messing around here. Jesus gathered the little ones and looked the disciples in the eye. Who is the greatest? Ironically, who is rejected by society: the disciples? It's you, fishermen. It's you, tax collectors. It's you prostitutes and sinners. Yet, there is Jesus standing in the mist of them and not the authorities. Jesus is with naive and stupid

children. Stare at this chapter. Jesus is in the middle of the ignored. What Matthew is saying is don't ignore those you feel are the least in the kingdom.

Who is at fault at church? Who is at fault at work? Stare at this chapter again. Come to church or work like a little one. See people as people. They are not jerks or villains. They are little children lost in this world. We are called to point out sin, not to rebuke it like a baseball bat Bible. It's to train a child in the way they should go. I got duped at church over a girl. It was a mess. The pastor rebuked me, but he gave me a book on being a Jesus man. It changed and trained me. Don't come in authority. Come in humility because we've all been there. Come with compassion to train rather than rebuke. Like little ones.

Yes, the curators of the Bible thought it smart to make chapter 18 from a scroll. They put in chapters to help us read these scriptures better. The lines could move at times, yet forgiveness should be part of this theme on the little ones. The children are not mentioned, but their spirit is. Children forgive better than any adult. Children look at others through innocent eyes. It's good and bad that we have headings and chapters. Yet, they should remind us of different ways we could be humble. Different ways we can forgive. There are also different ways we can be stumbling blocks to little ones.

Matthew 18:33" Should you not have had mercy on your fellow slave, as I had mercy on you?"

Exodus 21:2 ""If you buy a Hebrew slave, he may serve for no more than six years. Set him free in the seventh year, and he will owe you nothing for his freedom."

2. Hmm... How to enter heaven? I knew a man that believed he will enter heaven strictly because he believed he was forgiven by God. Yet, there was something else. He believed he did not willfully sin anymore. It's amazing were not friends. He was concerned that I had a stumbling block to heaven. He was not concerned with helping me past sin. He was more concerned about associating with likeminded people. I might infect him. Is that the message we want to give people trying to find God in heaven?

At times Jesus like to use the 'woe' word. He used it in Matthew 11 for not repenting. He uses it in Matthew 18 for creating stumbling blocks. He uses it in Matthew 23 for false teaching and bad religion. It's all bad Christianity. How to enter heaven? The answer? Is not found in creating stumbling blocks. It's not found in rejecting people. It's not found in saying you forgive. Ironically church is not great at this. They are far more concerned with the 99-paying sheep than the one who walked away.

Christians and Bible readers set up rules to enter heaven. Different denominations have different rules. Different religions have different rules and names for heaven. Yet, it's not our heaven. We don't make the rules. I am stunned by Noah building the ark for a hundred years. On the day the doors closed, I could see all those people banging to get in. I also think about the end of times. When the church is taken from earth, where will the people go to bang on the shut door? Maybe our door should be open before that happens?

Matthew 18:22 "Jesus said to him, "Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times."

Genesis 18:26 **“The Lord said, “If I find fifty righteous people in the city of Sodom, I will spare the whole place for their sake.”**

3. What is God like? I thought this chapter was about the little ones. I thought it was about forgiveness and getting into heaven? The character of God is in full display here. It's Jesus. If he is God then there it is. God the Father on display through his Son. We are so concerned with what the Bible teaches that we miss the important stuff. How many times to forgive? Who is the greatest? Rules for approaching behavior in church. Yet, there is God's character fully exposed and we missed it. The Christian template missed in the mist of famous verses.

God is humble. Wait a minute, God does not humble himself. Really? He came to earth as a man and not as a God. He humbled himself to be honoring of his children. He has compassion for the ignorant. Make no stumbling blocks for the small. He shows compassion and concern for the lost. He has faith in the saved 99. Time after time God will return to sinners offering them a way through. He came himself in the Old Testament in several ways (Sodom and Gomorrah). He asks us to approach with two to make things right in a disagreement. God says forgive until you forgive. God will do right with those who do right.

God's character? Do what is right, just, and honorable. Be humble to the weak, poor, children, and lost. Never give up on anyone. Put himself in harms way for others. Those are the Christian attributes. Sure, we can memorize scripture. It's good. Yet, we are to be the template of Jesus on others. Why don't Christian children remain in church? The numbers say the majority don't. Again, this is the warning. Train a child by coming to Christ like a child yourself. Be humble like children. Be curious and forgiving like the little ones. Be God like character in all you do. That is the Christian template we are to pass on.

Matthew 18:27 **“And out of pity for him, the lord of that slave released him and forgave him the debt.”**

Matthew 5:9 **“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.”**

4. Let's take a quick look at three big daddies in the Bible. The first is verses 6-9. People take Jesus literally and they should. I could say I'm so hungry I could die. Literally? Of course, I'm not going to die. It's an expression. Yet, I have described how hungry I was. Jesus says that we should put a millstone around our necks if we cause people to stumble. That stone is massively heavy. It's pointing out how bad it would be to cause children to stumble. Should we cut off our hands and feet if they sin? Should we gouge our eyes if we've seen sinful things? Jesus is saying it's better not to sin than needing to cut out the things we need like eyes and feet. It's a deep description and should not be taken lightly or literally.

Secondly, I know a person who said they would try and make you a Christian two or three times but that's it. After that, they would disown you. They used verses 15-20 to make their case. The problem is they missed the one sheep story before these verses. We are to talk about sin. yet, it should be more about being unified in our morals than casting people aside. We should be more concerned about the one who walked away than those who stayed.

Lastly, is it best to forgive once, seventy times, or seventy times seven? Believe it or not, there have been hundreds of books devoted to the right answer, yet it's right here. Hear me wisely. Jesus is saying forgive until you forgive. That is a terribly hard pill to swallow. Forgiveness takes time. Those that go publicly on TV to forgive right after a murder have not forgiven. It takes time. That is why it's seventy times seven or eternity. Forgive until you forgive.

Matthew 18:26 "So the slave fell on his knees before him, saying, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.'"

Matthew 6:14-15 "For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. 15 But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins."

What it means?

This is the beginning of a series I would call "who is the greatest." Jesus is going to tell us parables of what the kingdom is like. He is going to teach us about God's character. We can miss this sometimes. I have taken time to remind you that we can't just skim the parables, stories, and famous verses. There is a message within these verses that is not hidden. Take the time to write down character traits of all the characters. What is Jesus saying in his teaching? Do you see repeats from other chapters?

Above in part 4 I placed two verses at the end. I do it a lot. Matthew is repeating themes. In reality, it's Jesus ministry on display. What is Jesus repeating in three years of ministry. Be nice. Be kind. Be compassionate. How about be humble. There are plenty more. Treat this book as a warning but also a guide. This is Christianity on display. The good and bad.

What it means is that to be Christian is hard work. The disciples blew it for three years and beyond. In Galatians 2 Paul finds Peter playing politics and church. Paul rebukes him. I find this interesting. We all can get carried away with pride, power, status, importance, and position. I have seen a discussion at church about parking. Really? The pastors, ministry leaders, and servers had to be told not to park closest to the doors. That's what's wrong with Christian leadership today. We are not training children to walk like Jesus. Matthew 18 is tough. Remember, if children get it then we can too. It's about the character and message of God that's truly important.

Matthew 18:29 "His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay it back.'"

Romans 13:8 "Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law."