

## Matt ch 18 vs 1-14

We left off having read vs 24-27 of ch 17 with out really making comment on them for the sake of time and to be quite honest they're pretty self-explanatory. Let's read these vs together (vs 24-27)

Now the receiving of the temple tax was implemented back in Ex ch 30 vs 11-16 and we read in Neh 10:32 that they made ordinances for themselves, to exact from themselves yearly one-third of a shekel for the service of the house of our God. and So it seems that in Jesus' time the Jews followed Nehemiah's annual plan, but charged at Moses' rate.(From The Wycliffe Bible Commentary, Electronic Database. Copyright (c) 1962 by Moody Press)Any way the point remains the same and that's that those who were in charge of receiving the temple tax had come (apparently to Peter's house to collect their taxes) and by the way what about your teacher, He pays taxes to doesn't He? and So Peter takes the defensive position and says of course He does, not really knowing for sure whether He did or not. So when Peter was coming back into the house (Jesus possibly having heard the conversation that was taking place outside) or maybe just because He knew all things had a lesson for Peter before he even got a chance to ask Jesus about what they had just cornered him on.

He said to Peter (vs 25-26) In other words Peter do kings build their kingdoms off of their own families finances, or do they tax everyone else? Which is of course a no brainer, they don't tax their own family, they tax everyone else.Well, the temple tax was Gods tax, for the building of the temple and then for the service and support of it thereafter. and Who is it that they're asking to pay it? God's Son, the emphasis here is obvious; God's Son is not obligated to pay the tax, because the temple is God's building. However He's willing to pay it because He doesn't want to stumble anyone or offend them because they can't comprehend the fullness of who He is or the privilege that He has the right to assert.

So in that we find another lesson and that's that sometimes there's things we might do even though we're not obligated to, nor do we feel as though even need to simply to avoid a contention or to avoid stumbling other people. Just because it's not worth drawing the battle line over it, you remember in Daniel ch 1 there were 3 things that the king required of Daniel as captive in Babylon. #1 he had to take a Babylonian education, #2 he had to take a Babylonian name, and #3 he had to eat the Babylonian food. and I'm certain that Daniel, being a Jew (and one of God's people) didn't appreciate being called by a Babylonian name (Belteshazzar).

I doubt that he enjoyed having to learn all the Babylonian literature and having to learn of all their false gods that they worshipped, but he didn't complain or object to those things did he? Where was it the Daniel drew the line, at point #3, he refused to eat the king's food because the foods that they were expected to eat was an obvious violation of the clear teaching of the word of God. But the other things, even though I'm certain that they made his skin crawl, he didn't make a big fuss over, that's what Jesus is saying here. Hey it's not worth offending these guys over, just go to the sea cast in a hook and the 1<sup>st</sup> fish that comes up look in its mouth and you'll find a piece of money, just take that and pay our tax. Which really that miracle in itself was a clear display of the deity of Jesus Christ. Because it demonstrated "Jesus' omniscience in knowing which fish had the shekel, and his omnipotence in causing it to be the first one caught." (From The Wycliffe Bible Commentary, Electronic Database. Copyright (c) 1962 by Moody Press)

But again an important principal for us to apply to our own lives, it's just another aspect of dying to self, not using your freedom to cause other's to stumble it's just not worth it. and We'll get into that thought more as we continue on in our study this morning, let's look at Matt 18 (this morning the 1<sup>st</sup> 14 vs. read)

Vs1

There's a certain poem that goes "To live above, with the saints we love will certainly be glory. To live below, with the saints we know—well, that's another story! You see in Mark and Luke's account of this same event we glean a little piece of information that Matt leaves out and that's that they were actually disputing and arguing over this point. They were all fighting with each other over who was going to be the greatest in the kingdom. and The Lord of course knowing it said hey what was it that you guys were fighting about?

It says that at 1<sup>st</sup> they kept silent because they were ashamed, you know they had just been busted, but finally since Jesus already knew what they were fighting about, they just asked Him. Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? In specific regards to one of them and we're not told what brought the topic up and it would be pure speculation on my part, but I would imagine it was spurred on by one or two of the 9 disciples that didn't get to go with Jesus up the Mt when Jesus was transfigured.

They were probably upset and a little jealous over the fact that Jesus always seemed to take Peter James, and John aside apart from them. and Jesus seems to do an awful lot for ol' Peter, He called him out to walk on the water, acknowledged his divine revelation and blessed him because of it, called him up on the Mt with Him and even paid his taxes for him! So what are you trying to show us Lord, who is it that's the greatest in the kingdom, we're not seeing pure motives here at all, these disciples all wanted the place of prominence in the kingdom. Maybe Andrew said hey, He called me 1<sup>st</sup>, that gives me rank over you, and John and James said, hey blood runs thicker we're His cousins. and Peter was all excuse me but how many of you have walked on water, it's obvious that the Lord is showing me favor, and they were just back and forth. and So finally after Jesus having prompted them they just came out and asked Him, Lord who's the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?

Vs2

Now just real quick here, this little glimpse of this child's readiness to come to Jesus shows me something of the personality and character of Jesus. If you go to the mall about this time next month and watch as the parents line up their children to sit on Santa's lap, you will invariably see tears and terror striking the hearts and faces of the children. "Go sit on Santa's lap" and There all "NOOOO!!" as they scream out in horror because their folks want them to set on the lap of a man with a great big beard and big black boots, gee whiz it's no wonder they're all terrified. But there is never so much as even an indication of fear in kids when it came to coming to Jesus, to the contrary kids were always wanting to be around Jesus and the adults were trying to keep them from bugging Him. But Jesus would always say hey, you let them come to me and do not forbid them, they aren't a bother, if any thing they have a thing or two teach you, just as He's getting ready to explain again here.

Vs3

You see they were expecting that Jesus would say something like well, if things keep going like they are then Peter will be 1<sup>st</sup>, and then James, then John and so on down the line. But notice what Jesus does, He completely bypasses their question and says you know what guys. Let's not worry so much about who's going to be the greatest, let's focus 1<sup>st</sup> of all on what it takes to get there period. Because the reality of the matter is that you couldn't be headed in more the opposite direction of that in your thinking. and We shouldn't understand this word "converted" to imply that they weren't already saved, but it does imply that a change is needed, that at the very least their way of thinking was way off base. The word "converted" means literally "to turn" and not just outwardly but an inward change of the heart. It points to a whole new out look and understanding, it's a principal that He is setting forth as a minimum requirement to enter the kingdom.

Much like in John ch 3 when Jesus told Nicodemus *“Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”* Here Jesus is saying that unless you become as this little child, you’ll by no means enter the kingdom much less be great once you get there. and What He’s basically telling these guys is that, unless they turned from exalted opinions of themselves, their problem wouldn’t be one of relative greatness in the kingdom, but of entrance into the kingdom period. What He’s saying very clearly here is that the possibility of even gaining access into the kingdom is snuffed out by ones ambitions to seek great things for themselves as it pertains to the kingdom. He just told them that at the very least in order for them to be where He was that they were going to have to *deny themselves, pick up their crosses and walk the path He walked.*

Already they are all consumed with their places of prominence in the kingdom, which has absolutely nothing to do with denying yourself, but rather to the contrary is completely self centered. And how can you live for Christ and live for self at the same time? How can you seek to honor and glorify God, and exalt your self at the same time? It can’t be done, to seek to exalt yourself reeks with pride, and God hates pride. The bible is full of scriptures concerning the Gods detest of pride, Prov 8:13, 11:2, 16:18, 29:23, Amos 6:8 and on and on it goes. But to glorify God means that you have to humble yourself and lower yourself giving the place of honor to one other than yourself, namely God. and Humility God loves, and honors.

Vs4

So what is Jesus teaching? That the true path to greatness is always the pathway of humility, Jesus said, *“whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”* James said, *“Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up.”* In Gods economy the way up is down, and the quickest way down is to seek to lift yourself up. Prov 18:12, says, *“Before destruction the heart of a man is haughty, And before honor is humility.”* Someone has accurately defined humility as “ that grace that, when you know you have it, you’ve lost it!” Another has said that “true humility is not thinking meanly of oneself; it is simply not thinking of oneself at all.” and I’ve spoken before of the servants attitude of a child, how no task is to base for a child, they’ll do anything you ask of them as long as they get to help.

Now it doesn’t take too long for them to grow out of that attitude but it exists none the less in small children. We’ve spoken before of the unwavering faith that exists in a child, they don’t have to see it to believe it, if you tell them it’s true that’s all the proof they need. No doubt there’s a certain purity and innocence that exists in a child, and there’s the fact of a child’s contentment. They don’t feel as though they need to be superstars, they’re content in being who they are.

You see we all want to be celebrities instead of servants, we want to be served by all, instead of being the servant of all. Children don't have an ache for fame, or this drive to feel as though they need to be somebody and make their mark in this world, they don't care if their friends are rich or poor, they're content with who they are.

Even though these are all legitimate qualities that we could spend some time on each One of them individually, the Lord doesn't mention any of these attributes. He speaks exclusively here of humility. Which intrigues me because most children are far from humble in the sense that we think of when we think of humility. To the contrary most children are proud, selfish, and have a bad temper. and So it's important that we keep in mind the flow that Jesus is sharing in, these guys were just speaking of self exultation and Jesus says hey put the brakes on and turn around, it's not about being served, it's about serving, it's not in receiving, it's in giving. One commentator said, "What makes the child a symbol of humility isn't the fact that a child is humble, (because quite frankly most of them aren't) but because a child has no status in society.

That's what Jesus is saying here, it's not about trying to be somebody, it's about humbling yourself and serving somebody. In another Gospel He put it like this, *"When you are invited by anyone to a wedding feast, do not sit down in the best place, lest one more honorable than you be invited by him; and he who invited you and him come and say to you, 'Give place to this man,' and then you begin with shame to take the lowest place. But when you are invited, go and sit down in the lowest place, so that when he who invited you comes he may say to you, 'Friend, go up higher.' Then you will have glory in the presence of those who sit at the table with you. For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."*

We sort of have this natural tendency to want to assert ourselves and rely on our own strength, but that doesn't cut it when it comes to the kingdom. Our stature in the kingdom has nothing to do with the things that we do as though we have something to offer God therefore He owes us a prominent position. We come to God washed up and at the end of us; and all we can do is say God here is my life, I humbly submit it to You and if You can make something of it to your glory go for it, and just help me not to get in the way.

You see this type of humility relies upon the love and grace and mercy of God, and though Jesus doesn't mention that fact it's surely implied. A little child can't do anything to bring about his status, everything that he is, and everything that he has comes from someone else. A child is a dependent, and they have no pride problem with that, they joyfully receive from the one who provides for them and they have no question concerning their provisions, even though they have no clue where it comes from or what it cost. Even so the followers of Jesus aren't these great self-achievers who carve out for themselves a place of prominence in the kingdom based upon their own doings. But rather for all that they have and all that they are, they depend completely upon the Father.

Vs5

Now no doubt Jesus is still in reference to the child, but most commentators agree that He also just opened up the door to not only the literal children but also the children of God with those 2 little words "like this." In other words whoever receives anyone of the children of God who display these qualities (which would bear them witness of the fact that they are children of the kingdom) then they receive Me. You see whoever humbles themselves "like this" will be the greatest, and whoever receives one "like this" receives me. and He very easily could be referring to that.

Vs6

I agree with Jon Courson, I believe that this vs should be on the desk of every schoolteacher on the planet. and It should quicken us as parents as well to be careful not to stumble our children concerning their faith in Jesus Christ But again not only does this apply directly to children, but also to those who are the children of God no matter how old they are. To take a child, or any individual as far as that is concerned and to try to intentionally set out to destroy their faith, or cause them to stumble is to have the wrath of God abiding on you. This phrase "to sin" means literally to stumble or to offend. and Jesus says here that for that person a fate worse than death awaits them. He says death by drowning out in the open sea with a 3-400 pound millstone tied around your neck would be a more favorable option for the person who jeopardizes or destroys the faith of someone that trusts and believes on Him.

So 1<sup>st</sup> Jesus speaks of the privilege in receiving one who believes and trusts in Him and then He issues the warning concerning acting against the one who places their trust and faith in Him. 1 brings about a reward, the other severe punishment. Again this verb that means "to stumble" has the idea of entrapment, which indicates that the individual responsible for their stumble purposefully deceived the believer into committing sin, which separates us from God, and the person that's responsible for that will find themselves in a serious predicament before God. Again we're not told exactly what that will be, only that the worst punishment that man can infringe upon you (which would be a heinous form of capital punishment) would be a much preferred thing compare to Gods penalty.

## Vs7

The 1<sup>st</sup> woe is one of lamentation; the 2<sup>nd</sup> woe is of condemnation, for a quick commentary on this vs, Jesus is saying, you know it's a bummer that offenses have to come. Because knowing the nature of man, it's inevitable that they come, you just make sure that you're not the vehicle through which they come. If people no matter how young no matter how old, are being derailed in their faith on account of your cynicism and your unbelief and ignorance, woe unto you. Your shoes my friend, are not to be envied as you stand before God to give an account of every idle word you've spoke and all the things you've said which have destroyed the faith of those who had such innocent trust and faith in Jesus Christ

## V8-9

Now we went over this particular concept a few months back when we were studying the sermon on the Mt, because Jesus say this same thing almost verbatim in ch 5:29,30 The whole concept is meant to be shocking and intensely extreme and the fact that He repeats Himself also emphasizes the importance of what He's trying to get a crossed. and Don't be mislead, one thing is for certain, what Jesus is not teaching here is the literal act of self-mutilation. But the emphasis lies in the importance of entering the kingdom of heaven, and the fact that there is no comparison to the temporal sacrifices that I may make when it comes to the things that deal with the eternal.

Whatever it is that's causing you to stumble, cut it off. Jesus is saying don't coddle sin, don't entertain those things that entice you to sin, cut it off. I couldn't tell you how many times people tell me that they were only trying to win their non-believing friends to the Lord and one thing led to another and the next thing you know they were all partying together. and Not just once but over and over, hey cut it off, if you struggle with pornography on the web, terminate your subscription to your server, cut it off, cancel your movie channels. If the place you buy gas has all the pornographic material behind the counter there, quit buying gas there and go down the road. But it's a nickel cheaper there, well come to me next time you need gas and I'll spot you the extra \$.50, it's not worth it to jeopardize your relationship with Christ, how much is that worth to you. Surely more than the \$.50 you're going to save at the gas station.

You see to literally pluck out your eye or cut off your hand doesn't go far enough, because the problem lies with in my mind and with in my heart. But if I can make a means by which I don't enter into an atmosphere by which I know that I'll be tempted, then wisdom dictates that that's what I should do. If you struggle with alcohol don't go witnessing in a bar, and anyone else needs to seriously pray about it anyway because the bible says you're to live blamelessly shunning the very appearance of evil.

There's plenty of people that need Jesus that aren't in the bars, but Jesus is saying here, you're not going to make any temporal sacrifice that out ways it's eternal rewards. It's better to enter into life never have having cable, then to stumble into hell never have being able to escape the clutches of pornography and becoming enslaved to it and severing your relationship with God. That's the point here, do what you need to do to make sure your right with God, not outwardly, but as it pertains to the heart.

#### Vs10

Are there such things as guardian angels? That's what this seems to allude to, Ps 34:7 says, "*The angel of the LORD encamps all around those who fear Him, and delivers them.*" Heb 1:14 says in regards to angels, "*Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation?*" Jesus is saying here that hey, don't think even for a second that any act of detriment towards these little ones who believes on Me goes unnoticed, because they have immediate access to My Father at will. Which means that the one who's stumbling the child is brought to God's attention and it's not in a way that's favorable to that individual. It's kind of a capsulization of vs 6-7.

#### Vs11

Which is each and everyone of us apart from receiving Jesus Christ into our hearts as our personal Lord and Savior and I would refer you to our studies of the parables of the hidden treasure and the pearl of great price back in ch 13 for further commentary on that. Just grab those studies in the back, those parables are both quite fascinating. Now Jesus expounds on that concept

#### Vs12-14

So vs 14 is the explanation of vs 12-13 even as the good shepherd is not willing that any of his sheep should be lost, even so it's not the will of the Father that any who believe on Jesus should perish. This little parable teaches us at least 3 bits of insight into the heart of God.

#1 It shows us how unconditional His love is, notice in vs 12 that it's the sheep that goes astray, the shepherd didn't boot it out of the flock, the sheep wandered off from the safety of the sheepfold and of the shepherd. But the shepherd didn't say man what is up with that dumb sheep, off wandering where it shouldn't be, doesn't he/she have the sense to stay in the sheepfold, well maybe he'll learn a lesson or 2 out there. He didn't say that did He? Instead his entire routine was altered because out of concern for the safety and well being of the sheep he went out searching for the sheep.

Out of God's love for you and out of His love for me He searches us out and chastens us when we stray, the rod of the shepherd wasn't only for protection, it was also for correction and whom the Lord loves He chastens. When these sheep would wander off like this what would happen is when the shepherd would find the sheep; he would break its legs and throw it over his shoulders. and Over its healing process that sheep would become so dependent upon the shepherd that it would never leave his side again. Many times out of Gods love for us He has to "break our legs" so to speak so that we might become dependent on Him and quit wandering from the sheepfold.

2ndly, this displays God's love for us individually, He could've said oh well, you win some you lose some at least I've still got the 99. But He didn't, He placed as much value on the sheep that was straying as He did the one who's never caused an ounce of problems. God loves us equally and individually.

Finally His love for us is emotional, when you or I've strayed from our good shepherd and he comes after us and finds us, there is an emotional outburst that follows, not of anger, but of Joy. He rejoices over the fact that you've been brought safely back into the sheepfold and haven't been consumed out there by that roaring lion whose seeking to devour you. It's kind of reminiscent of the prodigal, the Father of that boy wasn't mad at him, He rejoiced that he was a live and had returned home, having once been lost but now was found.

If you've been wandering off from the sheep fold or you've left your heavenly Father to squander your life in the world and you just find yourself here this morning and maybe you don't even know why, know that God is wanting to draw you back in this morning. God just loves you so much and He's not willing that any of His little ones should perish, and so I encourage you to forget that which is behind you and start over fresh with Jesus Christ today.