

# Matthew Chapter 18 v 1 - 14

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Preacher: Frederick Hodgson

[ 0 : 00 ]

The Holy Son, to make the wretch his treasure. How great the pain of searing loss, the Father turns his face away, as good to his mother's chosen Lord.

Break heavy sounds to glory. Revolve the man upon a cross, and sit upon his shoulders, and shake the ear by mocking voice, all out among the scoffers.

It was my sin that dealt in love, until it was a conflict.

His dying breath has brought me high, I know that it is finished.

[ 2 : 01 ]

I have no trust in anything, no wisdom, no wisdom, the time who must see Jesus Christ, his death and resurrection.

Why should I gain from his reward? I cannot give an answer.

Now this is where you'll be, oh my God, his wounds that make my ransom.

Let us pray.

Almighty, Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, we come to you this morning to worship you, on your day, the Lord's Day.

[ 3 : 31 ]

We thank you that it's called the Lord's Day, because Jesus rose from the dead on this day, and he's alive today. We thank you it's the Lord's Day, because the Holy Spirit came to those gathered in the upper room.

And we read in the book of the Revelation, about John being in the Spirit on the Isle of Patmos, on the Lord's Day. The early Christians worshipped on the Lord's Day, and we do so this morning.

We worship you, as we have sung in that hymn, how deep the Father's love for us. Oh, just so thankful we are, Lord God, because of your love for us.

We don't deserve it. We are sinful and fallen people. But, oh Lord God, we thank you that you do love us with an everlasting love, a love which will never end, which, when this life is over, will be with us for eternity.

Everlasting love. Now abideth faith, hope, and love, and the greatest of these is love. Because it's everlasting. Oh, Lord God, we pray and worship you this morning.

[ 4 : 40 ]

And we pray, oh Lord God, for any who would have been here, but are not well. And there are several in our congregation, in our families. Bless them, Lord God, this day. Make them aware of your love and presence for them.

And be with them and restore them, if it's your will. And we also pray, Lord God, that wherever your people are meeting, in this town, at other churches, or throughout the country, or even the world, that you will bless your people.

We all have loved ones, and family and friends, worshipping at other places. And we pray that you will richly bless them this day. So, Father, we thank you that we can come here.

But this week, we've gone again in this nation through a difficult week. And we do come, Lord God, asking you for your help to sustain this nation, and to turn us back to you.

Oh, Lord God, bless and help all those, and comfort those who have been affected by this terrible fire. And we pray, oh Father, that your children, the Christian church there, might be salt and light in that society, in that area.

[ 5 : 51 ] And oh Lord God, we pray for those that have been bereaved, those that have suffered loss, or those that have been affected, that you will draw close to them, and that you will draw them close to you.

So again, bless us, Lord God, as we meet today. We don't deserve your blessing, but you are a God of love, a Father of compassion. So be with us now.

Help us, Lord God, to sing these hymns, and to worship you, and to pray to you. And we pray that when we hear the word, that you will feed us. And we pray that when we leave this place, we will go out rejoicing in the God of our salvation.

For Jesus Christ's sake. Amen. Amen. Well, firstly, let me thank John for standing in at very short notice, I think within the last an hour and a half.

So I'm very grateful that John was able to respond to that emergency call for help. Now, our reading is Matthew chapter 18, verses 1 to 20.

[ 7 : 05 ] In a sense, it's continuing our theme of fathers, children, family, and that sort of thing.

So, Matthew chapter 18, reading from verse 1, at that time, the disciples came to Jesus and asked, who then is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?

He called a little child to him and placed the child among them, and he said, truly, I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven, and whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.

If anyone causes one of these little ones, those who believe in me, to stumble, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea.

[ 8 : 49 ] Woe to the world because of the things that cause people to stumble such things must come, but woe to the person through whom they come.

If your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away, it's better for you to enter life maimed or crippled than to have two hands or two feet and be thrown into eternal fire.

And if your eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away, it's better for you to enter life with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into the fire of hell.

See that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I tell you, their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven.

what do you think? If a man owns a hundred sheep and one of them wanders away, will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hills and go and look for the one that wandered off?

[ 10 : 10 ] If he finds it, truly I tell you, he is happier about that one sheep than about the ninety-nine that did not wander off.

In the same way, your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should perish. So we'll look at that passage a little bit later on.

I'm grateful for whoever put the water out.

I've got two glasses and a jug. I probably won't get through it all. now it's probably true to say that most people in the world are horrified to hear about vulnerable small children being abused or exploited or hurt in any way.

And constantly we're reminded of this sort of thing on the TV, the newspapers and so on. And there's always shock and anger when the newspapers report these sorts of things, when they report a stranger or a teacher or a parent injuring a child in any way.

[ 11 : 40 ] and sadly even small children are abused and bullied even in the supposed safety of the home.

And you are certainly disturbed by that sort of thing and sickened by news reports of that nature. And you say, how could they possibly treat little children in that sort of way?

And you're distressed for the sake of the child. And there's something within you that demands that justice might fall on those who lack that sort of natural affection, pity and care for vulnerable children.

It would be most inhuman of you if you didn't have strong thoughts about such things. And you think that the courts cannot be and must not be lenient towards such offenders.

But is it only strangers and strange parents or other adults that abuse children? The guilty party could even be a jealous brother or sister.

[ 12 : 56 ] That reading that John brought to us earlier, if you read it at home, Luke 15, you'll see that the elder brother was absolutely rotten towards that younger brother who came back to the father.

And great distress and family division is caused by one sibling insisting that they should be the center of attention in the home. And so that brings us to our reading, Matthew chapter 18 and verse 6.

And there we read this, if anyone causes one of these little ones, those who believe in me, to stumble, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea.

me. And Jesus went on and said, woe to the world because of the things that cause people to stumble. Such things must come, but woe to the person through whom they come.

And perhaps you think, yes, and those who offend children and cause them to stumble deserve everything they get. And the words of Jesus probably resonate with everyone here about those who lack pity and compassion towards children.

[ 14 : 25 ] But is Jesus talking about children in this passage? There have always been, of course, those who mistreat children, and it is a great wickedness to damage vulnerable children.

And Jesus himself was kind and considerate towards children, but is he actually talking about children in this verse? in chapter 18 and verse 6.

Notice this, that Jesus talks of the little ones and then he defines them, those who believe in me. And it's crucial to note that in understanding that verse.

The particular verse is meant to be shocking, and it is shocking, shocking, that someone should have a millstone thrown around their neck and thrown into the depths of the sea.

It's really meant to shock us. And we think, yes, in terms of children, they deserve that, that sort of thing. But it's not actually talking about little children in this passage, principally.

[ 15 : 39 ] It's concentrating on how Christians should treat one another. Verse 2 emphasizes that members of the kingdom of Christ, true Christians in other words, are well described like being like little children.

Do you read in verse 2, Jesus called a little child to him, placed the child among them and said, truly, I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

The apostle John, later in his life, clearly remembered the words of Jesus and he wrote in his letter, his first letter, chapter 2, verse 28, and now little children, he's talking to Christians, he's talking to believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, and now little children continue in him so that when he appears we may be confident and unashamed before him at his coming.

So we should think of ourselves if we're Christians as being like little children. Little, notice that emphasis, little not great, little bit like grains of sand on the sea, on the seashore, little grains.

Each Christian in the church is like a little grain in that vast number that no one can number across history, across time, across the world, that church of Jesus Christ, each one of us are just little grains of sand, little children, in other words.

[ 17 : 27 ] Now, little children are aware of their weakness and their need to depend upon others. Don't often get children running away from home.

No, they're dependent upon someone else and very quickly even if they do run away from home they're going to find someone to look after them because it's the nature of a child that the child is dependent upon someone else.

The child feels its vulnerability, its weakness and it looks to someone else to care for them. And so if you're one of Christ's little child, you're one of those who believe in him, trust in him, have confidence in him, you're one of those who believe in me there in chapter 18 and verse 6.

So if you become a genuine, true Christian, a child of God, you are dependent upon God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

But in the first instance, your dependence comes to the Lord Jesus Christ. How does it work? Well, you've seen yourself as someone who has fallen short of the glory of God, someone who has sinned against God, and also you've probably seen that you're thoroughly wrong, thoroughly in need of God's help, God's renewal, of being born again.

[ 19 : 05 ] You're dependent upon Father, Son, and Spirit, as John mentioned right at the beginning. That's the one that we worship, and you've renounced your proud self-sufficiency, your self-righteousness, which the apostle Paul calls filthy rags, and you've trusted in the Lord Jesus Christ.

You've turned to him, you've looked to his cross, to that one who died to take away your sin, that sin that offends a holy God, and you've depended upon him, you've believed on him, you've trusted in him, you've visited Calvary, and you've put your trust in that crucified saviour.

Actually, you've got a much clearer picture of the goodness of God, and your need of depending upon him than the disciples did there in Matthew 18, because you've seen the Lord Jesus Christ crucified for you, you've seen the Lord Jesus Christ raised from the dead, glorified there in heaven, interceding for you as a heavenly priest, a heavenly king, and so of course you've come to him, you've believed in him, because you've seen how great he is, and how it is that he gives your righteousness, no charge, and you simply trust in him, you depend upon him.

That's what it means by being a Christian, that's what it means for you and myself, if we're one of those little ones that Jesus Christ refers to. So are you one of those little ones?

Those little ones who've seen one who is much greater, much mightier, much more powerful, so gracious, so kind, so tender, and you put your trust in the Lord Jesus Christ.

[ 21 : 02 ] But there's a problem, and the problem is this, we don't always act consistently with what we are. So in verse 4, Jesus said, therefore, the therefore referring to previous verses, therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

The teaching of Jesus was the response to what the disciples asked in verse 1. Notice their question. Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?

In one sense, the question seems to be missing the point. The greatest in the kingdom of heaven is clearly the king. But they didn't have the king in mind.

They were thinking about themselves. They were self-centered. They were proud. Their lives revolved around themselves. It's helpful for us to look at the same incident described in Mark's Gospel, chapter 9, and verse 31.

And there, in Mark's Gospel, chapter 9, Jesus had just told the disciples that he would be delivered into the hands of men. They will kill him, and after three days, he will rise from the dead.

[ 22 : 32 ] So how did they respond to those words of Jesus which spoke of his passion, of Jesus when he spoke of his sufferings? How did they respond? And immediately afterwards, we read this, Mark, chapter 9, and verse 34.

they ignored what he said and had argued about who was the greatest. They'd heard the deepest and most amazing mystery about the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross, and they argued, who is the greatest?

Obviously thinking, perhaps it's me. So is it possible to hear the Gospel of Jesus Christ crucified, or preach that Gospel or take communion and immediately be taken up with, who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?

Who is the greatest in the church? Sadly, the answer found in Mark, chapter 9, is the wrong sort of answer.

They were taken up with themselves. disciples. And Paul, not just those disciples, but Paul wrote to the Christians at Philippi, Christians who are undoubtedly believing, hard-working Christians, and he said to them in chapter 2, verse 1, if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, any comfort from his love, any common sharing in the Spirit, any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of mind.

[ 24 : 23 ] Do nothing, he said, to those Christians who knew the love, the kindness, the compassion of Christ. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit.

Rather, in humility, value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests, but each of you to the interests of others.

So Paul was writing to these Christians, no doubt about the fact that they knew the blessing of Father, Son, and Spirit. He was writing to those who knew the grace and kindness of the Lord, and he challenged them about their attitudes which were essentially proud and selfish.

He was writing to those genuine Christians who are ambitious to be most prominent, who are not content to serve others but desired to rise in the order of importance within the church.

Perhaps it was that they felt that they really were the most godly and the most important people in Philippi. So here's the question, here's the challenge.

[ 25 : 41 ] Has God called you by his grace, given you a saviour in his own son, given you the spirit and imparted new life to you, and are you still taken up with your own ambitions, your service, your gifts?

perhaps out of pride, conceit, jealousy, you've thought badly or spoken badly of those who are described as Christ's little ones.

So Matthew chapter 18 verse 6, Jesus said, if anyone causes one of these little ones, those who believe in me, to stumble, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck.

Now those words are shocking, are they not? Are you shocked by them? We should be shocked by them. We should be shocked when we or others offend one of those little ones that believe in Christ.

If you involve yourself in ranking Christians and putting yourself somewhere in that ranking order, working out how you can rise in the ranks, you'll inevitably hurt others.

[ 26 : 57 ] You'll inevitably offend others. You'll inevitably even hurt yourself. And if you look to your own self interest, you've lost the plot.

That's what Jesus is saying. And the immature disciples thought of themselves as great and that everything should revolve around them. They ruled over their little kingdom of one and failed to see that they were part of a much greater kingdom, Christ's kingdom.

It's a very, very sad thing when families fall out and when siblings go their separate ways, when they cause each other to be offended. A self-centered sibling who expects the whole world, including his family, to revolve around him, causes offense to others and eventually pain to himself or others.

Perhaps your thoughts go to Joseph, who had those dreams of his father, his mother bowing down before him, his brothers bowing down before him. And look what happened to Joseph.

Where was he taken? Well, he was taken into slavery in Egypt eventually. And yes, the Lord had to deal with him most severely. So it's a very serious thing to fall out among siblings within the church of God.

[ 28 : 23 ] It's a desperately sad thing when this happens to the children of God. But sometimes it's someone outside the true family that causes the offense and puts stress on the family.

Look at verse seven. Woe to the world. Woe to the world because such things must come, but woe to the person through whom they come.

Really interesting to go back over church history, the history of the world, and see how it is that Christians have been damaged by others.

there was a king in French history called Louis XIV. He was sometimes called the Sun King because his courtiers revolved around him like the planets around the sun.

He was the king who said, the state, the state it is I. He insisted upon the whole nation having one religion, one set of values, peculiar French values at that time.

[ 29 : 35 ] he weeded out those who did not share his opinions. He closed down schools and colleges that failed to submit to his view of state and religion.

And many of the citizens of France were forced to flee to countries like Holland and Germany or England. What happened was this. Crude, cruel soldiers were billeted in the houses of evangelical Christians to spy on them, to put pressure on them, to conform to the king's wishes and accept his views, his values.

And so the proud, self-centered, controlling king caused offense to many and the persecution led to an extinguishing of gospel preaching in France for years, for decades.

just over a hundred years later, his descendants reaped a whirlwind during the French Revolution.

Woe to the world, said Jesus, because of offenses. Woe to the world that insists on its way. But sadly, sometimes the world gets into the church.

[ 30 : 51 ] church. It's interesting, Louis XIV regarded himself as being a zealous Christian. He thought of himself as being a Christian leader whose role in life was to unite the state and the church.

He enjoyed a form of religion, but a form of religion that fell far short of the kingdom of God, far short of the power of godliness.

And so we need to be aware, lest we think that we've got a superior wisdom compared to others and force our way upon those who are described by the Lord as his little children.

It's not just political power that can make a person proud and big in their own eyes. Knowledge can have exactly the same effect. We've been studying Paul's letter to the Corinthians on Sunday evenings and in 1 Corinthians chapter 8, Paul chastened his readers.

How did he chasten them? Well, they're very proud. They knew so much. And Paul said this, knowledge puffs up while love builds up.

[ 32 : 04 ] And there were some there in Corinth who were puffed up in their own eyes and they didn't behave like Christ's little ones. They discovered that believing in Christ had liberated them from being bound by religious rules devised by men.

And they looked down on others that didn't have that knowledge. They were the sort of people that did just what they wanted, went where they wanted, ate the food that they wanted, even food sacrificed to idols, although it was an offense to Christ's little ones, to their fellow believers.

believers. And if they're around today, they might very well have been the sort of person who insisted on watching something on the TV that was an offense to other believers in the house.

And they lived their lives indifferent to the feelings and the conscience of others. Later in Paul's letter to the Corinthians, verse 9, he said, be careful however, that the exercise of your rights does not become a stumbling block to the weak.

Now, you might feel that you've got a right to eat anything, anywhere, drink anything, anywhere, wear anything, anywhere, watch or listen to anything, anywhere, go anywhere, or not, as you please yourself, as you live your own selfish life.

[ 33 : 39 ] and you couldn't care less what effect it has on others. You might even insist and force others to do your sort of thing, even though they feel uneasy about it. Their conscience is troubled.

They might be discouraged because of you. They might be discouraged because you live your own life in the way that you think you're free to do so, and you cause offense and discouragement to other Christians because you're enjoying your freedoms.

And you fail to remember that you're one of those little ones, and they're one of those little ones that Jesus speaks about. Now, it's good to have a strong, resolute character, but do you throw your weight around?

So much depends on how we view ourselves. Do you view yourself as one of Christ's little ones? things. So do you, by your behavior or speech, put a stumbling block in the way of someone who's interested in the gospel, simply because you want your own way and do those things which are precious to you?

Do you simply insist on expressing yourself even though you bring tears and heartache to others? are you actually failing as a Christian and causing others to stumble?

[ 35 : 11 ] In a game of skittles, sometimes you see one skittle falling and it knocks all the others over. Are you that sort of skittle within the church?

Paul, the writer of the first letter to the Corinthian church, would say that you are. Jesus warned his disciples in Matthew 18, verse 8, if your hand, undoubtedly precious to you, if your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away.

It's better for you to enter life maimed or crippled, rather than have two hands or two feet and be thrown into eternal fire. And if your eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away.

It's better for you to enter life with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into the fire of hell. See how serious Jesus regards it when we think little of his little ones.

It's costly to forgive those who sin against us. It means swallowing our pride and not hanging on to our rights, those rights of withholding forgiveness, and it causes discouragement and offence to others.

[ 36 : 33 ] So do you insist that you're totally right and the other person is totally wrong and you hang on to your rights, those things which are precious to you and insist that others grovel at your feet?

Are you prepared to humble yourself and come off your high horse? Is someone always causing you to be offended? how often should you forgive them? Verse 21 says this, Peter came to Jesus and said, Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me?

Up to seven times. That seemed a lot to Peter. And you know the famous answer that Jesus gave, I tell you not seven times but 77 times. He said, go on forgiving.

If you don't give up those things that offend the little children of Matthew 18, it's because you've forgotten who the little children are.

So do you recognize how precious Christ's little ones are to him? This is really important. Do you see how God views his little children?

[ 37 : 48 ] verse 10, see that you do not despise one of these little ones for I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my father in heaven.

Now we're told very little about angels in the Bible but we do know one function that they have is to serve the interests of those little ones who believe in Christ.

In the letter to the Hebrews chapter 1 verse 14 they're described as ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation.

If you're one of Christ's little ones you've got angels in heaven who are ministering on your behalf. You might not know, you might not experience it but they are. They're there ministering for you.

That's who the angels are. You're so precious in God's sight that he's given angels to look after you. Sometimes they're called guardian angels aren't they? It's a common day speech.

[ 38 : 57 ] Now in the following chapter in Hebrews 2.13 those who inherit salvation are described as the children who have been given to the Lord Jesus Christ.

These children are exceedingly precious to the Saviour. angels do you not realize that not just a few of these mighty angels look after the little ones who believe in Christ.

Way back in the Old Testament there was a very important incident which revealed the innumerable number of those who serve us. 2 Corinthians chapter 6 the king of Aram was probably certain that he caught the Lord's prophet Elisha in a trap.

Elisha was in the city of Dothan and was surrounded by horses and chariots of a great army. His servant was absolutely alarmed by this.

He was terrified. He said this, Alas my master, what shall we do? Elisha sought to reassure him with the words, Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them.

[ 40 : 08 ] I wonder if those were reassured at the servant. Are you reassured by the thought that you have angel guardians like that and innumerable hosts?

But then Elisha prayed, Open his eyes, open the servant's eyes that he may see. Then the Lord opened the servant's eyes and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all round Elisha.



And the enemy came down towards him. Elisha prayed to the Lord, strike this army with blindness. So he struck them with blindness as Elisha had asked.

Woe to the world from whom offences come. It's not a good idea to despise the Lord's little ones. So do you live and act and speak in the light of the teaching that those who trust in Jesus have angels that see the face of their father in heaven.

How precious are those little ones? How precious are you to the Lord if you're one of those little ones that believe in him?

[ 41 : 25 ] Now if you are a believer you know just how lost you were at one time in your life. You didn't know what your purpose in life was.

You were separated from God. You had no hope of eternal life. You were lost. As lost as that young man that John was telling us about earlier, the prodigal son.

And you didn't know that the Lord loved you. You'd wandered far, far from his plan and his purpose from you. In verses 12 to 13, Jesus likened you to a lost sheep.

In ancient times in Israel, sheep could be a prey to sheep thieves, a prey to wild animals, and lost sheep needed a shepherd to go and find them.

Notice the words of the Lord Jesus Christ. What do you think? If a man owns a hundred sheep and one of them wanders away, just one, will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hills and go and look for the one that wandered off?

[ 42 : 44 ] And if he finds it, truly I tell you, he's happier about that one sheep than about the ninety-nine that did not wander off. And we all know that Jesus came to seek and to save that which was lost.

He's the good shepherd that laid down his life for his sheep. His little ones are exceedingly, exceedingly precious to him. Verse fourteen, even so it's not the will of your father in heaven that one of these little ones should perish.

Can you see the love of God towards his little ones? If you despise, mistreat, or refuse to receive one of those little ones that Jesus talks about, or even one of those insignificant ones that believes in Jesus, you cross purposes with the son of man who came to save his sheep.

Do notice verse five, whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me. Do you see the close connection between Jesus and the children that belong to him?

there's a non-dissolvable link between Jesus and those who are his. If you offend them, you offend Jesus. And if you offend Jesus, you offend them.

[ 44 : 15 ] The passage challenges us as to how we receive his children when they come to us in trouble, whatever that trouble might be. it challenges us when his children come to us and ask forgiveness.

Do you receive them? If you worked for the royalty in one of their palaces, you would treat the royal children with respect, wouldn't you?

If you're a Christian, you work for the king of kings. So, shouldn't we treat the children of the king of kings with respect, courtesy, care, love, self-denial?

That's what the passage is teaching us. We should pray about that because I'm sure each one of us is aware of our failures in this area.

Let's pray. God, we thank you that we can come to you as those that belong to you, those that have been redeemed by you, and that you regard us as being exceedingly precious, that we confess that so often, so very many times, we forget what we are, and we sin against you, and we sin against our fellow believers.

[ 45 : 48 ] So we pray that the lessons of this passage might go deeply into all our hearts, and that we might truly love one another. We ask in our Saviour's name.

Amen.