

Matthew 21-07-04a

Good morning, welcome to the July 4th Sunday morning services at Grace and Truth Bible Church. It is a privilege to have everyone joining us this morning. We're going to continue our study in the Gospel of Matthew this morning, and you can be turning to Matthew chapter 18, Matthew chapter 18.

As is our custom, we'll take a moment to ask God's blessing on our fellowship and on our study, and then we'll get started. Father, it is such a privilege and a wonderful opportunity for us to delve into the truth of your Word, to receive the ministry of your Holy Spirit, to enjoy the fellowship of believers of like mind, and receive the benefits, and hopefully be a part of the benefits that you extend to us through that association. We pray that as we look at this portion of your Word together, that your Spirit will illuminate the truth for us, help us to understand it, to remember it, and most importantly, to put it into practice and have it energize and affect all of our thinking and actions in the time that remains to us in this life.

We pray it in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, in Matthew chapter 18, the disciples have been arguing about who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven, who will be the greatest.

I would imagine that Jesus had mixed feelings about this in the sense that he had some encouragement that they are thinking ahead and realizing that there really is a kingdom, and he is the king of it, and it is real enough to them that they are wondering about how it will be. What will the conditions be? And most importantly for them, where will they be? Will they be at his right and left hands? Will they be high up in the administration? Will they wear kingly crowns and strut about in fine robes? What exactly will it be? So the good news is the kingdom is real to them, and they really do think it is near. The bad news is that the use of that knowledge in their minds is tacky, tacky, tacky.

Instead of thinking about the glory of God, whose glory are they thinking of? It is, of course, their own. And there are times as we contemplate the rapture and the events that will ensue after we lose gravitation here and head for the skies to ever be with the Lord, our thoughts revolve around, well, what will my experience be? Who will I see? How soon will I see them? Uh, will I be, uh, pretty? Will I be rich? Okay, Sarah, Sarah. Uh, and this would be a disappointment to the Lord Jesus, particularly coming from the lips of his disciples because he has been endeavoring to impress upon them the principle of humility, humility in its proper sphere, humility in its proper, uh, balance and operation within us looks to God for leading, for guidance, for priorities, for timing and for assignment of function and service.

So to look around at fellow believers and say, well, I wonder if I will be higher up than you. I wonder if I'll have a bigger mansion than you. I wonder if I'll be near you.

Will we be able to get together and do the things we do here Uh, is not what Jesus has

been endeavoring to impress upon them. So I thought about doing a study, but it's July the 4th and this is supposed to be an uplifting, happy, patriotic day, but there is a study and we may do it, uh, soon. Uh, we'll, we will do it when we get to the upper room.

Uh, it, it occurs here in Matthew, but we'll save it. It occurs in the other Gospels a bit later, but the study is this notion of arguing about who will be the greatest. This is not the only time it happens.

And to compare those and put them together and then see what Jesus says afterward is very instructive. We'll just note that this is an ongoing problem among the disciples in having a sense of competition. You put 12 men together, there's going to be some competition there somewhere.

It's just part of human nature. So we saw last time that, uh, going over to Mark that, uh, this happens along the road and Jesus asks them, what were you arguing about on the road? And they're too embarrassed to say, and he brings this out. So, uh, Jesus called a little child to him, set him in the midst of them and said, surely I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.

Uh, therefore, whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the heaven. Whoever receives one little child like this in my name receives me. We began our look at this last time in noticing the, uh, the tacit rebuke that is found in this.

What I want to look at this morning is what this passage does by way of teaching us how to understand what Jesus says. Especially as we move forward. And this is a, a beautiful divinely inspired, perfect order of material in this chapter.

And it is necessary to cover it in order, uh, because we're heading for some really rough water a little further down in the chapter. So first of all, let's think about this as trainees for Bible interpretation. We want to be able to look at our Bible and understand it for ourselves a little bit more fully.

We, we want to rightly divide the word of truth. We're all on board for that, right? So what is the subject? They're arguing about who would be the greatest. And Jesus says, you should be focused on humility here that will assure opportunity there.

So the key here is, uh, in verse four, whoever humbles himself, when you're arguing about who's going to be the greatest, you have any one of these disciples had 11 other guys to humble him and say, what do you mean, Peter? You think you're going to be great in the kingdom. Look at your mistakes. Look at your faux pas.

Look at the things you've said out of turn. And, uh, the rebuke you just got from the Lord a few days ago. Uh, we have people who are more than willing to humble us.

But what Jesus says is whoever humbles himself, this is the key. This is the theme. And it's important to note that theme to understand the way it is said and what is said about it.

So our topic here is not greatness in the kingdom. The topic is humility. Greatness in the kingdom is a result.

It is a concomitant. It is a reward and an opportunity for those who are humble. But the topic here is not, Hey, let's go to Matthew 18.

I can find out how to be great in the kingdom. That's the very thinking that disciples are engaged in when Jesus gently rebukes them here. If we're thinking about, boy, I sure want to feather my nest in the kingdom.

I sure. How can I assure that I rise up and that I'm going to be great? This is Pharisee thinking. This is scribe thinking.

It's, uh, the opposite of what Jesus wants with that in mind. Now, verse three, we saw how emphatic this is. Amen.

I say to you, amen. I say to you, truly, truly, I say to you, unless you are converted, unless you turn, and this is from strefo. It's the word that means to turn around, to change a and go in a different direction and become as little children.

This is key change from what right now they're arguing like men in competition. Jesus says, you've got to be changed in your thinking and become as little children. And these are little children.

This is before they become the little terrible Hellions that they turn into in the late single digits, before they have a sense of self and, uh, you know, competition and ugliness and so on. These are little children. This pie Don that's used for child here is a small child, a toddler, and just beyond toddler age, the, you know, the famously cute years where they're selfless, they're unselfconscious.

Uh, they're just little, happy, barefoot things, padding around. That's the little child Jesus is talking about. Innocent of ambition, innocent of competition, innocent of comparison and, uh, the kind of, uh, cruelty that we inflict on each other in later years.

Turn and become as little children, as little children. So this is a simile. You remember from English class, a simile is when you say you are like this, you are like that metaphor.

You just put the thing right out there. Jesus gives the key to his metaphorical use of things in the context in so many cases, and this is one of them. So humility is associated with little child.

This is not hard, right? Everybody's with me, but watch what he does because this is key

to understanding what he's going to say. A few verses. Hence.

Therefore, whoever humbles himself as this little child, Jesus gives the key again. When I say little child, I mean one who humbles himself. So if you're taking notes, put it in your note, it seems obvious, but trust me, little child equals one who humbles himself.

Verse four, one who humbles himself equals little child. That one is greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Now look at verse five.

Whoever receives one little child like this in my name receives me. Now this seems simple. Maybe it is simple, but it's important.

Really important. What does verse five say? Is this whoever receives little children or is it, what is Jesus really saying here? Whoever receives the one who humbles himself, the little child is now moved from simile to metaphor. You're not going to have a great place in the kingdom of heaven simply because you like little children.

Whoever receives one of these little child, a little child like this, one of these little children in my name, important condition, receives me. So people who work in child training, child rearing, don't have an automatic pass and don't automatically become great in the kingdom. This is not really talking about children at all.

Whoever in the circle of the people of God, Old Testament would be Israel, New Testament, it's the church, looks out for, takes care of humble believers. Those who don't put on airs, who aren't ambitious spiritually in the sense of wanting authority, power, recognition, to suck all the air out of the room when they come in. And we all know people like this.

Selfless, the humility here is basically selflessness. It is a single word that describes love that is sacrificial to self and beneficial toward others. Humility, this is the word *typeno* in Greek, if you're interested, t-a-i-p-e-i-n-o.

There's a compound word that Paul uses called *typeno-phrosyne*. And *phrosyne* has the idea of thinking, but *typeno* is humility. *Typeno-phrosyne* is a humble pattern of thought.

Your thoughts just run this way through training, through discipline, and through changing ourselves and humbling ourselves. This requires perspective. It requires the presence of the Holy Spirit and the power of the word of God because we are naturally self-interested.

We are naturally self-gratifying. We are naturally inclined to look out for number one. And it is a mark of transformation to be humble and to have the ability to humble ourselves.

Now, can you get up from here in an hour and a half or so, go off in a room by yourself

and say, okay, I get the message of Matthew 18. I am going to humble myself. Let's see.

Let me sit in this chair. Let me consciously divest myself of my pride, my self-interest, my desire to gratify myself. I had some things I wanted to do this afternoon that I thought would be fun.

I'll just not do those. Is this what Jesus is talking about when he says, humble yourself? Is this the thing we can sit down and do by force of will or by decision? This is a present tense activity. It is an ongoing episodic process.

So I can't just go around the corner here, concentrate real hard for five minutes and come back having humbled myself. What does it mean? The center of this, remember, we circled the theme, whoever humbles himself as this little child. Okay, great.

I get the picture. How do I do that? Well, it is in the present tense. This is iterative.

This is durative. And this is situation after situation, circumstance after circumstance, opportunity after opportunity. What's going to happen after church? Well, we're going to have a meal.

So I smell that good food. I grab my plate and I head for the biggest pot and the nicest whatever it is. And I can say, here's my opportunity to humble myself.

Let me just stop in mid-stride here and look around. Remember, Paul gets onto the Corinthians for not paying attention to the people around them at a meal. This sounds like a ridiculously small example, but that's what humbling ourselves is.

It is slowing down and looking around and considering others' interests ahead of our own in every little situation. It's a process. And it is something we do to and for ourselves in the light of the word, in the power of the spirit, but we do it ourselves.

I examine myself to see if I'm in the faith. I examine myself to see if I am being considerate or inconsiderate. Am I interested in the wellbeing of those around me, or am I doing that as a kind of concomitant? I don't want to get in trouble.

I don't want to be ill thought of. But do I genuinely say, the Lord is near? The Lord is watching. I am walking down the road right now.

Am I talking to my companions about how great I'm going to be or how great things are going to be for me? Or can you imagine how gratified the Lord Jesus would have been if he had overheard his disciples talking on the road and they were all interested in the least and less often named disciples? Well, what about Bartholomew? I wonder what the Lord can have him do in the kingdom. What about James the Less? James the Less has got some really fine qualities. I wonder how the Lord is going to use him in the kingdom.

Well, I think he's going to use James the Less to minister to short people because he's a

short guy. I think he'll honor this one. Were they thinking about their fellow disciples and how God might bless and use and honor and exploit the gifts that they have? Or were they looking at themselves? So the first thing we notice here is, and I remember seeing a little child one time, there were a bunch of children playing out in this pasture outside the church.

And it was a hot day and everybody got thirsty and a little overheated. And so one child came running down the hill and came because we had some ice pops, popsicles in the refrigerator. And it has stuck with me to this day out of all of the summer days you could think of over decades.

This one incident really stuck with me because the little child came in and said, can I have some popsicles for X, Y, and Z out in the pasture? It's really hot. Didn't come in and say, may I have a popsicle? Can I have a popsicle? Ran all the way in from the middle of the pasture to ask for popsicles for companion children. That's the selflessness Jesus is talking about when he says as a little child, not selfish, not me first.

And if there's any leftover, I'll take some to my companions, but concerned, thoughtful, ready to put oneself out on behalf of others. This is genuine humility. This is what Jesus is talking about.

So when he gets to verse five and he says, whoever receives one little child like this, he's not talking about chronological age or developmental stage. He's talking about believers in the family of God who are exercising their opportunity to be humble, to look out for the interests of others. And Jesus says, whoever receives one of all of the things he could have said about humility, when he moves on and says, whoever receives this child in my name, what does it mean to receive? This is just the simple word in Greek for receive.

We don't get any particular illumination from it. What does it mean to receive a little child in Jesus name? When you receive someone, let's say you're receiving guests, the people that are of high station or in the hospital, either one, they'll say, well, they're receiving guests or they're not receiving guests right now. To receive is to bring in and exercise hospitality, right? If you receive someone socially, you make preparations.

You want them to be comfortable. If they're going to stay for a while, you try to make food they like, offer them a beverage that they enjoy or are able to drink. Some people can't drink some things.

Some people can't drink others. And you think ahead and you make, what does it mean to receive? To think about, to make provision for and to seek the benefit of. You think ahead, make provision and look for their benefit, their comfort, their encouragement, their refreshment.

That's what it means to receive. So Jesus talks about a second idea here. Those who

humble themselves are now vulnerable because they have stopped looking out for their own interests.

Jesus says, I'm sure your immediate question is, well, if I stop looking out for number one, I'm just going to be trampled in the stampede. I can't afford to not take some care for myself and look to myself first. And then if there's anything left over, look to them.

I'll never survive otherwise. Jesus addresses that question before it's even asked by saying, not only are those who humble themselves blessed, but those who look out for the humble to think about and serve the best interests of these people who humble themselves is all the same as thinking about and serving the best interests of the Lord Jesus himself. And there is an implied reward.

There is implied benefit and honor in that. Who would not want to receive the Lord Jesus? So this is a very useful piece of thought. You can be doing a chore and thinking, well, you know, if I just get the minimum of this chore done, that'll be good enough.

But then you ask yourself, well, if this was Jesus' sink I was scrubbing, how clean would I get it? If this was Jesus' piano, I was tuning. If it was Jesus' lawn, I was mowing. If it was Jesus' laundry, I was washing.

If it was Jesus' food, I was preparing. If Jesus was my guest and I was receiving him, imagine this. Look around wherever you are right now, unless you're here in church.

If you knew Jesus was coming this afternoon to break bread and share a meal, would you be listening to me or would you be fussing about the house and trying to figure out, have I got the same kind of tilapia that swims in the Sea of Galilee? I know he likes that. Where is he going to sit? What am I going to offer him to drink? Will he be comfortable? Will he not find a huge state of disorganization and dilapidation? If you knew that the Lord Jesus was coming next week, this entire week would be occupied with preparation, right? Jesus says, this is the kind of attitude that should prevail within us and among us all the time. We should think of each other and receive each other the way we would receive the Lord Jesus.

And Jesus says, I'm watching. And when you receive one of your fellow believers with support and love and attention and effort and self-denial and humility, it is recognized just as though you did it for the Lord himself. That's a powerful motivation.

I can fix a glass of tea for somebody who's working outside. And if I do it in his name, I can't just be a naturally generous person. And there are such people.

They're just naturally hospitable. They're naturally outgoing. They're naturally thoughtful, courteous, kind, loving.

That's not what Jesus says. Notice the condition in my name. My motivation, my

conscious thought is not, well, I don't want people to think that I'm lazy or that I'm inattentive or that I don't know how to host or how to provide.

This action is motivated specifically by the thought that we have right here. If this was the Lord Jesus, how would I do it? If this person were the Lord Jesus, what would my attitude be? What would my effort be? How far would I extend myself? That thought is doing it in Jesus' name. When I was a little, little boy and we had come out of the Methodist church and my dad had a few more ritualistic elements in his spiritual practice, I remember him praying at the close of his prayer.

He would say, we pray these things in Jesus' name and for his sake, in Jesus' name and for his sake. Amen. And that phrase has stuck with me because almost anything we do affects other people, whether they are present or not.

There's a lot of things that, particularly people who are involved in the upkeep of household and supporting fellow family members and so on. Same thing is true in the workplace. Same thing is true if you have customers or clients.

The same thing is true if you're just out and about and circulating. And if you stand up and give place to someone who needs a seat, anybody can do that. Just polite, generous people in this part of the country will do that almost instinctively.

The key is remembering who we are, who the Lord Jesus is, and having the conscious thought, I represent the Lord Jesus. I'm his body. What would Jesus do is not a bad question to ask.

It got a little hackneyed years ago when they made bracelets and people have to commercialize everything, but it's a good question to ask. Not only what would Jesus do, but what would I do if this were Jesus? See if you can fit that on a bracelet. W-W-I-D-I-T-W-J.

What would I do if this were Jesus? And you want to talk about an elevation in the joy and happiness in fellowship, that would guarantee it. And that's what he's talking about here. But what I specifically want to point out is that Jesus starts out with a physical example.

He takes this little child and puts it in his lap. We know this from other passages. This little child, he puts an image in their mind of little child, but he's not talking about little children specifically.

This is the means to an end. He is talking about this attitude of selflessness and humility that is an essential part of genuine love. That's critical.

When we cross into the next section here, verse six, whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, et cetera, we need to know within this warning and

danger passage, we have the blessing and opportunity passage. If you receive one of these little ones, you should try to be one of these little ones. A, you should look around and receive little ones like this.

B, and C, here's what happens if you cause one of these little ones to stumble. So it's important to know not only what the blessings and potential hazards are, but to understand who the little one is. And many, many times commentators and pastors and teachers come to this passage.

Sunday school comes to this passage and uses it to justify children's ministries and child evangelism and all kinds of things. Nothing wrong with those, but that's not what Jesus is talking about. He's not encouraging his disciples to get into children's ministry as wonderful as that is.

That's not what he's talking about. So we're going to pause here and take our break. And when we come back, we're going to tease this out a little bit and look at the meaning because this intermediate step is equally essential to interpreting this very famous passage that begins in verse eight.

You look at verse eight and cutting off body parts, and it is often misunderstood. Even when we think we understand it, I'm not sure we totally do. But walking these stepping stones, climbing these rungs of the ladder that Jesus provides here in terms of interpreting what he says is the key to catching the meaning in verse eight and verse nine in particular.

So we'll see that when we come back from the break.