

Matthew 21-07-18a

Good morning, welcome to the Sunday morning services at Grace and Truth Bible Church. We're once again joining together in fellowship at the church here. Whether you're near or whether you're far, you can be with us and it's a privilege to have everyone who's able to join us this morning.

This is the 18th of July 2021 and we're continuing our study in the Gospel of Matthew. We're in chapter 18 and we have a great section here. If you think back to the overall structure of the Gospel of Matthew, there is a symmetry, if you will, that defines this book.

We saw that we had the prologue in chapters 1 and 2 that gave the birth narrative and introduced the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. Then we saw in chapters 3 and 4 the narrative of the baptism and the temptation and early response to the Lord Jesus followed by a teaching section. If you remember, we're going to have five great sections in the Gospel of Matthew that begin with narrative and usually that narrative will have three parts and then there is a teaching section.

So that first narrative in chapters 3 and 4 had the baptism scene, the temptation scene, and then the beginning of Jesus' public ministry followed by the Sermon on the Mount in chapters 5 through 7. Then we had a second great section in Matthew and this was chapters 8 and 9. If you remember, we had three sets of three miracles and a call to discipleship between the first and second and between the second and the third. Then the teaching section was descending out of the twelve in chapter 10. We had a third great section which had a narrative portion in chapters 11 and 12 with confrontation.

This is where there begins to be a build-up of resistance to the message that Jesus brings. Jesus rebuking that opposition and ultimately withdrawing with his disciples in chapter 12. Then in chapter 13 we saw those parables about the kingdom.

That was the teaching section in that third section, chapter 13 parables of the kingdom. We are now about to finish the fourth great section which began in chapter 13, the end of chapter 13, and extended through chapter 18. Chapter 14-17 was the narrative section where you have Jesus speaking about faith and who do men say that I am, Peter's great confession.

Then the section that we finished up earlier with a lot of red ink in chapter 17 with the casting out of the demon, the prediction of his betrayal, and the dealing with the tax collectors. That was the narrative section. Now in chapter 18 we have this teaching section that is going to conclude the fourth block in Mark.

So narrative in verses 3 and 4, teaching in chapters 5-7. That is the first great section. The second section is narrative in chapters 8 and 9 and teaching in chapter 10.

Third section was narrative in chapters 11 and 12 followed by parables of the kingdom in chapter 13. The first chunk of chapter 13 up through chapter 52. Then beginning in chapter 53, that is kind of an unfortunate chapter break there.

I would have probably broken that chapter after verse 52 of chapter 13. Then the rejection at Nazareth that begins in 1353 through chapter 17. That is a narrative section followed by this section that we are in now which is the teaching section of that fourth great block.

You could call this greatness in the kingdom. You could call this God's care for his children. There are several different ways you could label this teaching block in chapter 18.

Just to finish out the symmetry, we are going to have a final section. The fifth section of the gospel will be coming up in the next chapter, chapter 19 through chapter 23. This is going to be more narrative where there will be increasing opposition and calling out of the pharisaical religion and hypocrites who are coming and facing Jesus followed by chapters 24 and 25, that prophetic judgment section that deals with the tribulation and second coming.

Then after chapter 25 you have the outside bracket to the prologue we saw in chapters 1 and 2 where in chapters 26 through 28 we have the climax and denouement of the book which is of course the upper room, the crucifixion, the resurrection, and the final words of the Lord Jesus before his ascension. So that is the structure of the Gospel of Matthew. It being addressed to Israel is very well organized in terms of its five-fold internal message bracketed by the birth narrative and the death and resurrection narrative and the wonderful balance of story and circumstance that is given to us coupled with Jesus teaching.

It just makes it a wonderfully beautiful and symmetrical gospel. So again we find ourselves in chapter 18. It has been a couple of weeks since we looked at it but you will remember that there was this discussion about who will be greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

If you look at the parallel in Mark chapter 9, their discussion on the road to Capernaum was just who is the greatest. Who will be is all in italics there. It is just who greatest in Mark.

Matthew expands this a bit. Jesus had a lot to say on this subject and both in Matthew, Mark, and Luke we have a distillation of the circumstance, the event, and the teaching that was done on this occasion. So you will find slightly different things being said depending on that particular gospel's emphasis, perspective, and what under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit God chose to reveal to us in that story.

So here in Matthew, the focus is on the kingdom because of course Matthew presents Jesus as the son of David. He is the Messiah to Israel. So the focus on the coming kingdom and pulling out those remarks by the Lord Jesus and that emphasis makes sense.

So who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven? Jesus called a little child to him, set him in the midst, and said, Assuredly, I say to you, verily, verily, unless you are converted, unless you turn and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. And you remember this tells us a couple of things. First of all, the kingdom is not synonymous with salvation.

It is possible to be saved and not enter the kingdom unless you turn and become like this little child. That's not unless you place your faith in Jesus. This is unless you cultivate humility and the unconscious dependence that a child has.

So the little child here and one such child becomes a symbol for that follower of the Lord Jesus that is in the deny yourself, take up your cross and follow mode. That's what it means. From then on, when he's talking about these little ones, he is talking about those who by faith are pursuing the plan of God.

Right? So whoever receives one little child like this in my name receives me in verse five is looking at not children, but the believer who is adopting the humility of a child. Then we pick up in verse six, whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a millstone hung around his neck, drowned in the depths of the sea. So if you are going to stop looking out for yourself and look out for others, now God is looking out for the person of faith.

And there's a message in that for us in terms of the attitude with which we approach our provision, our defense, our position in society and culture against opposition. God basically says, I am going to look out for you. And the consequences for someone who abuses one of these little ones is, will be quite dire.

How dire? Very. I can't think of a time when I would want to have a giant rock put on my neck and be sent down into the sea. But God says, you don't need to worry about those who oppose you.

This has application in terms of students in school. It has application in terms of employees. It has application in terms of family situations, even marriage situations.

There are a number of cases where the wisdom of the world is to look out for oneself. This encourages us to trust God and rely on Him to take care of our protection and our provision and our defense in that area. So having taken that on board, you say, okay, God is looking out for us.

He goes on to say, if your hand or foot causes you to sin. Now, did this sound at all

familiar? When we covered this last time, we've run across this passage before, but do you remember that we ran across it in Matthew? Jesus has already said this in Matthew once before. Keep your finger here and turn back to Matthew chapter 5. Jesus has talked about this hand and foot idea.

And back here, He separated those two that He combines in verse 28. Whoever looks at a woman to lust after her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. Verse 29, if your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you.

It is more profitable for you that one of your members perish than for your whole body to be cast into Gehenna. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you. It is more profitable for you that one of your members perish than for your whole body to be cast into Gehenna.

So we had the eye and the hand back in the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5-7. Jesus repeats that here, but we have a fresh context because the context here of that which offends or gives offense are people. And those who do such a thing are going to be judged and punished by God.

And the outcome of that is very severe. So we look at this from two different perspectives. One from the persecutee, if someone is causing us to stumble, we have the assurance that God is going to deal with them and deal with them very severely.

On the other hand, we want to be sure that we are not someone causing others to stumble because the consequences are dire. So it is one of those double-edged passages that cuts both ways. It both comforts the victim and warns the perpetrator.

It's doubly applicable. We might be a perpetrator. We might be a victim.

In different areas of life, we can be both. There are those that owe debts and there are those that are owed a debt, as we will see in our upcoming context. So which side are we on? In this case, we can be on either one.

So, if your hand offends you or your foot, if your eye offends you, and what this speaks of is similar to the priestly dedication that you find back in Exodus. Remember the blood of the ram that was applied to the earlobe and to the thumb and to the toe of the sons of Aaron as priests to remind them that what they take in and accept as a world view, what they do with their hands and where they go with their feet are sanctified and should be dedicated to God, marked with the blood of that sacrificial ram. In the same way, here you have eyes rather than ears, hands, and feet.

Jesus is going to talk about that which is spoken and heard in a different format, but here he says if the eye, the hand, or the foot, i.e. someone who is so closely associated and so valuable in what we perceive, what we do, or how we behave, where we go, our walk in life, but they are integral to us and yet they are causing us to stumble, it will sometimes

come down to a choice between being able to pursue our life before God without sin, without being enmeshed in sin, entangled in sin, caused to stumble into sin, and we will have to sacrifice even very close valued relationships in that cause. I think in this context, unlike Matthew chapter 5, it is specifically referring to those who cause us to stumble. We may rely on people for our worldview and they are the eye that we have to pluck out.

There may be somebody that we watch, that we look to, it could be anything from media to local influence, it could be a bad pastor who constantly sows discord among the brethren with faulty teaching or bad applications or wrong interpretations, but this is someone who is looked at or looked to for guidance and yet that guidance leaves us powerless or directly enveigled into sin. So we have to examine not just ourselves to see if we are in the faith, but we examine those who are close to us and ensure that association with them is not leading us down a bad road, causing us to stumble. And if there is a stumbling associated with that relationship, it is most commonly, I think in our day, being led into gossip, being led into dark perspectives, being dragged into a downward spiral, sometimes depressed people, if you talk to them for very long, you are not able to cheer them up, they depress you.

They leave you burdened with dark thoughts and bad perspectives and subjects to think of that are the opposite of what scripture says. Whatsoever things are good to the extent that things are good and noble and lovely and honest and of good report, think on these things. And sometimes there are relationships that prevent us from doing that and we inevitably fall and stumble.

So we cut those off and cast them from us. It is better to enter into life. And when you look at the parallels here, Matthew likes this phrase, enter into life.

If you look at the parallels in Luke or in Mark, it will say enter into the kingdom. And we see that eternal life and life in the future is synonymous with the kingdom in the sense of its fullness and its opportunity and its reward and blessing, not the simple fact of resurrection and moving forward into the future kingdom ages, but residence in the kingdom itself. Jesus says the basic criterion for entry, even entry at all, is humility, not faith.

Humility. And therefore it is not are you going to the lake of fire or are you going into the eternal future, but where will you be in the eternal future? And there are those who will be in the kingdom and those who will be out unless you turn yourself and become like a little child in humility and in lack of concern about status, social standing, approbation, having that pride of place and so on. If you don't turn yourself and become like a child who is oblivious to such things, we won't enter that kingdom.

We'll be there, be viewing it, but not in it. So he concludes here and we sort of picked up in Matthew 18 with verse 15. Now, moreover, if your brother sins against you, no, I'm

sorry, I've jumped too far ahead.

Verse 10, take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones because they're in heaven. Their angels always see the face of my father who is in heaven and you have heaven repeated there twice. He's talking about greatness in the kingdom of heaven.

We saw that in verse three, right? Greatness in the kingdom of heaven, entrance into the kingdom of heaven. That was verse four. Now in verse 10 in heaven, the angels of these little ones constantly behold the face of my father in heaven.

What is the connection here? What do you think? There is the future kingdom and there is the present beholding of the face of God, the father by angels associated with these little ones. This has been the basis, this verse and others have been the basis for the widely held opinion that believers have a guardian angel. I would suggest to you that based on this passage, well, let me ask you, what would you draw from this passage? Leaving aside all of the tradition, leaving aside any notion of a guardian angel, we understand that the little ones are believers operating in humility who are qualifying themselves to enter the future kingdom of God by humility, by denying themselves, taking up their cross and following Christ, right? We're all on board with that.

So what does this mean? What is Jesus saying? Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones. What was the original argument about on the road? What is the original question? Greatness in the kingdom. You might think someone's not going to be great because they're very humble.

You don't know a lot about their struggles or their sacrifices or their faith victories that were done in secret. And then the father who sees in secret is going to reward them openly later, but it's not seen and it's not known. Their battles and struggles may be not visible or not visible to many.

And so what does it mean to despise? What does it mean to think a little of someone? Well, if you look at this in Greek, the word despise is composed of phoneo, which is to think, and kata, which means according to. This is what a lot of people are talking about in the modern day about, you know, your intersectionality and are you judged by your gender? Are you judged by your race? Are you judged by your economic status? Are you judged by your ethnicity or your wellness or lack thereof? And I think everybody can say, well, I've got a combination of things. I am some kind of a race.

I'm one of two genders. I am from a particular background. I occupy a particular economic stratum.

I have a particular IQ. I've got a particular hair color. I am of a particular age.

You know, there's age-ism that people are worried about now that discrimination because you're too old. So kata phoneo means to think of someone with something else

in mind. Kata means according to, and the Bible actually comes out against discrimination based on some superficial criteria.

It could be a spiritual criteria. I don't see you witnessing. I don't see you giving.

I don't see you fill in the blank. There's some criterion that people establish as a notion of spirituality. The Pharisees thought praying long prayers on the street corner and dropping big bags of money into the treasury visible to all was a way to let people know how spiritual they were.

And they would judge those who didn't. Someone might despise the widow who drops in only two mites. So Jesus says, take care that you do not kata phoneo.

You do not think according to something superficial about these little ones. Now he does not say anything about isms or prejudices about in the world at large. What is his concern and what is his subject here? God pays attention to discrimination against his humble ones, his obedient and faithful children who are doing what they are supposed to do and are not looking out for themselves.

They're seeking to look out for others. That's the essence of humility, sacrificial to self beneficial to others. It's the expression of love.

It is fueled by faith. It is motivated by hope. This is your standard faith, hope, and love trilogy.

Believers that are working that life, living that life, manifesting that life. Jesus says, take heed that you do not judge them falsely on some other criteria. Why? I say to you that there are two things going on in heaven right now that are going to affect the kingdom of heaven in the future.

They have angels in heaven. Now, if I happen to be a humble one, if you happen to be a little one, is your angel down here fending off wild beasts and stray cars and meteorites and accidents and falling branches and germs and dangerous people? Is that what your assigned angel is doing according to what Jesus says here? No. Can't be two places at once.

Where is the angel? Angel is in heaven. How much of the time is the angel in heaven? Well, Jesus says always. This is the phrase *dia pontos*.

You know, when you have pandemic, it means it's everywhere. *Pon* means all. And this actually means through everything.

Dia is through. Diameter is the measurement through the center of the circle. *Dia* means through.

Pontos means all. So it literally means they're angels. And notice that this is in the plural.

These little ones, plural. And he doesn't say one of these little ones. He says these little ones.

And they seem to be in groups. They seem to be in a fellowship. They're angels, plural, through everything, are seeing the face of my Father.

And this is blepo as a present active indicative, which means it's always happening. They are always looking at the Father's face. Who is in heaven.

Their angels are always seeing the face of my Father who is in heaven. And I would take this to mean regular reports. Remember Jacob's ladder? Jesus said you will see angels ascending and descending on the Son of Man, which I would say is for his sake and in his service and on behalf of his body.

So I think these angels are observing and reporting. I think they're not guardian angels so much as observing angels because the angels are not operating on their own recognizance. The Holy Spirit doesn't even speak from his own will.

These angels are reporting to God. God dictates what's going to happen. God will arbitrate.

God will judge. God will protect. But to believe that I should be thankful to my guardian angel for his hard work on my behalf is in danger of missing the point.

You remember the telephone aspect of the angel of the Lord in the Old Testament speaking in God's first person? The Old Testament is very careful to not mix up the messenger and God by making that messenger so transparent that it sounds like it's God talking. And people have mixed that up. But the intention of the narrative was to be sure that when the angel of the Lord is speaking, it's all the same as God himself.

With this angel constantly observing the face, this is the means by which God is constantly aware of what is going on in our lives. And if someone is despising us, if someone is judging us, if someone is causing us problems and impeding us, I don't need a social program. I don't need a movement.

I don't need a change in the laws. There is an angel reporting what is happening to me to the Father. That bypasses all of the intermediary, limited, misguided, misapplied human solutions.

Believers shouldn't worry about discrimination here on earth and seek to remedy it by human means. There is an angel in heaven reporting what is going on with us if we are obedient. And if we're not, well now that's all you've got left.

Good luck with your anti-discrimination program or your human solution to your problem. The little ones have the angels constantly reporting. We have an advocate with the

Father, the Lord Jesus Christ himself sitting at the Father's right hand.

Now this is an example problem. This is someone despising us or doing us despot, oppressing us, slowing us down, hindering us, bad-mouthing us, opposing us in some way. But this is representative of any problem in life.

God says I don't just have a symbolic representative of the human race at my right hand in the form of my son who died for all. But for those believers that are doing what they are supposed to do, there is a direct observation delegated angel who is watching just you, just me. The angels, and you know why I think that this is not hard for God to do? I don't know that there are that many believers who qualify for an angelic observer, a watcher.

Remember they're called watchers in the Old Testament, the watchers. That's what they do. They watch and they report.

God decides. God allocates resources. God defends.

God puts up a wall of fire. God will allow his three witnesses to prevail. Then he will allow his two witnesses for three days.

He will allow them to prevail. He will allow them to be overcome. And then he will raise them up.

He knows exactly what is going on with those two witnesses in Revelation. He knows when their mission is most effectively accomplished by prevailing. He knows when their mission is most effectively accomplished by being overcome, as was the Lord Jesus himself.

He couldn't have done his mission if God did not allow him to be arrested, tried, and crucified. There are times when we feel like the world has prevailed, like circumstances overcome. We are oppressed.

We are pushed down. We are Jonah in the belly of the fish. This should be a great comfort to us.

There is a designated, specific, angelic observer who is constantly reporting to the Father on our status. There is God the Holy Spirit translating our prayers and carrying them before the Father. There is the Lord Jesus Christ, our High Priest, sitting at the Father's right hand interceding for us.

In the mouth of two or three witnesses, a thing is established. How many witnesses are letting the Father know about our status? Two divine and one angelic. If that doesn't comfort us, I don't know what can.

The Lord Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, and a specific angel are keeping God the Father

fully apprised of what goes on with us. I like that better than a poor, raggedy guardian angel trying to keep me safe in traffic. This is God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit, and their designated angelic representative looking out for you and looking out for me when we meet the condition.

All I've got to do is concentrate on making sure that I am turned and becoming as a little child, qualifying myself for that relationship with God which will lead to that same relationship enhanced and manifold in the future kingdom of God. So it's a wonderful hope, it's a wonderful truth that Jesus expresses here. We're going to pause here and take our break.

We'll just have a time of fellowship. You can turn your microphone and your camera on and chat. It is by my watch about 9 40.

We will resume at 0 9 50.