

Matthew 21-07-18b

We're ready now to resume our study in the Gospel of Matthew. Once again, we are talking here on the 18th day of July, 2021. And in Matthew chapter 18, we have just seen the section, take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones.

For I say to you that in heaven, their angels always see the face of my father who is in heaven. And that double emphasis on heaven is a reminder that we are still talking about permanent consequences in the future kingdom of heaven, which is the subject of this entire dialogue, really, what is the qualification for entrance and greatness in the kingdom? And I don't know that we've really talked about what exactly greatness in the kingdom is. What does it mean to be great in the kingdom? The disciples were saying, who will be greatest? We can imagine what they were talking about.

Well, I'll be some high factotum. I'll be sitting at the right hand and you'll be sitting at the left. Well, you won't be sitting anywhere.

We never see you do anything. You know, you're James the less, and we never hear a peep out of you. You don't say anything.

You don't do anything. You're not going to be great. Peter's going to be great.

John's going to be great. James would be great. Andrew would be semi-great.

Thomas, we don't think he's going to be anywhere. He doubts everything. He's never on board.

They were talking about probably power, control, fame, the kind of greatness that they were used to seeing in the earthly realm. But when Jesus says, those who are great here will be least, and those who are least here will be great, what does he mean by great? I would suggest, and this isn't a blinding insight, but that the opportunity to serve, if you think about angels that are great in God's heavenly realms now, why are they great? What is it they do that makes them great? Are they ruling? Are they wielding a rod of iron? Are they doing miraculous feats of ledger domain? They are serving. They are reflecting the glory of God.

Those that surround his throne and say, holy, holy, holy, the cherubim and the seraphim, they do God's bidding. They carry out his instructions. They communicate his word.

They communicate back the effect of his word and the effects and circumstances that are taking place elsewhere in the universe. They are ministers. So I think greatness in the kingdom of heaven is going to be service to God and by extension service to those who God favors, who God is pleased with.

So doesn't it make sense that to be great in the kingdom, we would need to have a, if

you will, a servant heart and a servant mindset here. How could you be great in God's kingdom as serving him and serving others if we don't learn to serve him and serve others now? There's a consistency across that that really makes sense when you think about it. Verse 11, just cross it out.

It's not there in your Bible. If you have a verse 11 in your Bible, Matthew 18, 11, just scratch it out. It has gotten displaced.

It's a good thought, but it doesn't belong in this chapter. It's actually come over from Luke. You remember the parables in Luke of the lost things.

We've covered those in great detail. This has come over from that, but it does not belong in Matthew's gospel at this point whatsoever. So just scratch it out.

We move on to verse 12. What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep and one of them goes astray, does he not leave the 99 and go to the mountains to seek the one that is straying? And if he should find it assuredly, I say to you, he rejoices more over that than over the 99 that did not go astray. You've got the song, the 99 that safely lay in the shelter of the fold, but one was lost in the hills far away, far off from the gates of gold and so on.

And this has been given an evangelistic cast over the centuries and by tradition, but that's not what it means at all. Think about our context and look at verse 14. Even so, it is not the will of your father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish.

So let's think about the 99 that safely lay in the shelter of the fold. And let's think about the one that is astray. What happened to this lost sheep? And it's a little one.

It's basically a, uh, the sheep is put for one of these little ones, which is put for the believer living the life of humility through faith and hope and love. Right? You could say that humility is really a blanket term for that triad of Christian virtues. Could someone be truly humble and not have faith? Could they be truly humble and not have hope? Could they be truly humble and not be expressing love? Humility is really, uh, a summary description for all three of those virtues functioning in harmony and in balance.

So you've got a, a humble believer. And I also like the definition of humility that it is, uh, it is power under control. We have great resources.

We have great power. We have power to do good. We have power to harm.

We have power to lay hold of righteousness and we have power to wreak havoc, sin, and cause a great deal of harm, uh, by virtue of where we are placed and how we are connected. So the self-control that is the summary and final virtue in the list of fruits of the spirit or the fruit of the spirit, if you will, self-control is intrinsic to humility. It really rolls into one, a number of Christian virtues.

So this little one is not with the group. We just saw the group has angels and they behold the face of the father constantly. This is a, this is a group effort, but now there is one of these little ones that has been driven away from the rest of the flock and is outside the group for some reason.

What would that reason be? What is our context? Someone has prevailed. Someone has succeeded in isolating or cutting off this believer. Someone through persecution, through oppression, through causing stumbling and occasions for stumbling has, has caused this separation.

It is not the will of your father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish. What is parish synonymous with here? Not being in the group, not being with the other 99. There is rejoicing in finding and restoring that sheep to its fellow sheep.

He doesn't go out there, fellow sheep, is that a good word? We enjoy the fellow sheep in our church, but the shepherd doesn't go out and say from you, I will start a whole new flock out here in the mountainside. I'm going to establish a separate fold for you. It's too much trouble to carry you back.

What is the source of joy? It is the reuniting of that sheep with the other 99. They should all be together. They should not be divided.

We saw extensive, extensive teaching about division among believers in Corinthians, didn't we? 1 Corinthians. I hear there are wars and divisions among you. I'm of Paul.

I'm of Paulus. I'm of Peter. I'm of Christ.

Paul says it shouldn't be that way. And those who are causing dissension and division are coming under harsh punishment and judgment. There should be no division in the body.

And if there is a division, the restoration of unity is a cause for celebration more so than celebrating the happy unity of those who never were separated to reunite those who have been separated by something is a source of great joy in heaven. That's the context. So look at it again.

What do you think? A man has a hundred sheep. Who is the man and who are the sheep here? This is God and the people of God. In this specific case here, this is still the old Testament people, Israel, but the principle holds for the body of Christ.

Man has a hundred sheep. One of them goes astray. Why would a sheep go astray? Typically the instinct of sheep is to stay with the flock.

What causes them to separate? They can get startled. They can be spooked. They can be attacked.

A wolf among the sheep, a bear. Remember when David killed a lion and a bear because

they were trying to attack his sheep? What happens when there is an attack from outside? The sheep can be scattered and you can round all of them up, but there's one you can't find. It really got separated by this exterior force.

This incursion from the outside could be a circumstance, could be a situation, more likely in this context, a person or persons who have scattered the sheep. God has a lot to say about shepherds who don't keep the sheep together, who don't care for the sheep, who allow the water to be muddied and they can't all drink and so on. You have those evil shepherds that are discussed in the Old Testament.

Here, something has happened and this one has gotten separated. It is astray. Does he not leave the 99 and go to the mountains to seek the one that is straying? Now, this straying in modern English sounds like, oh, maybe it's the sheep's fault.

He's done something to himself to be away. But the word here for going astray is from *planao*, P-L-A-N-A-O. It has a connotation of something external happening to it, to be spooked, to be led astray, to be caused to go astray by something.

And we have people today who are trying to deceive people, to confuse them, to cause them to stagger. This is the concomitant. If you want a simple understanding of it, *planao* basically means to be the victim of *skandalon*.

We had earlier in the chapter, if you cause one of these to stumble, this is the sheep who has stumbled. This is the result of *skandalizo*. So the literal usage of *planao*, if you go to the lexicon, it means to lead astray, to confuse or to cause to stagger.

In Deuteronomy 27, 18, it is used, write that down by the way, Deuteronomy 22, 18, it's really the only example I'm going to give you. In the Septuagint, *planao* is used to translate this statement. Cursed is the one who makes the blind to wander off the road.

All the people shall say, Amen. Cursed is the one who causes staggering, causes misleading and going astray. Deuteronomy 27, 18, that's what the word meant when these people would hear Greek.

So what are they going to think when Jesus has been talking about those who cause others to stumble? It would be better for a millstone to be put around his neck. Well, now that that person is at the bottom of the sea with a millstone, what about the one who was caused to stagger, caused to stumble, been confused and is now astray, led away or spooked away? We just have to disinvest the idea of astray that the sheep willfully went astray. This is not a willful going astray.

This is not a disobedient sheep who, you know, can I say the sheep took the bull by the horns and went their own way? Probably not. But that's not what this is talking about. This is a sheep that has been caused to scatter.

Might be the best way to translate it. It has been scattered by an outside force or an outside person. So one of them is separated by an outside force.

He goes to the mountains to seek the one who is astray. And if he should find it, this is an awkwardness going from Greek to English. When he finds it is the idea.

It's not like God can go out looking for some of his stray children and not find them. This is if in the sense of when. When he finds it, assuredly, I say to you, he rejoices more over that.

Notice *sheep* is in italics. What is he really rejoicing over? He finds it and rejoices more over finding it, reconnecting with it and reconnecting it to the rest of the sheep. The restoration of unity, community, fellowship, fellow sheep.

That's what rejoicing is in heaven. Even so, it is not the will of your father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish. This is a sort of a veiled promise.

We think, well, because of evil entering the group, someone has caused division and stumbling. You go to Corinth and say, well, these that said I'm of Paul, I'm of Apollos, I'm of Cephas, I'm of Christ. And there were wars and divisions that had cropped up in the church.

And some people don't like controversy. They don't like arguing. They don't like defugalties and debates and these kinds of divisions.

And they'll just leave. I don't want the friction. I don't like the instability.

It takes away my peace. So I'm just going to leave the group. God doesn't like disunity.

He doesn't like disharmony amongst his children, amongst his people. So there's great rejoicing when it is resolved. Why? Because continued division, continued isolation, continued separation creates a kind of death, a kind of perishing.

The whole is more than the sum of the parts. The Holy Spirit can do a lot in individual believers, but he can do even more in a fellowship of God's people, of God's children, of members of the body of Christ. There is a synergy.

There is a ministry of the Holy Spirit. There is an exchange of benefits and spiritual gifts that only happens in the group. And for the group to be united and to have any division resolved and reunited prevents a perishing on the part of those that might have been driven away, scattered, divided away.

That's what this is saying. There's no getting around it. I'm not a real touchy-feely guy, but this is what scripture says.

We perish divided. We are not designed to be lone wolf Boy Scouts. We're not designed

to be Marines separated from their unit or soldiers or sailors separated from their unit or from their ship.

If you get separated from the ship and you're floating in the sea in a life ring, there is more rejoicing over finding that sailor and bringing him back on board or an aviator, whoever has been isolated. There's great joy and rejoicing when you find them and bring them back to their fellow service members than over the ones that never fell overboard. Why? Because the consequences of that separation can be quite dire.

You don't find somebody that's been washed overboard or has survived the crash of a downed aircraft at sea or whatever. There's only a limited time they can survive alone and separate from the resources that are provided in and with and by the group. And it's the same with believers.

We cultivate fellowship. We seek out and encourage fellowship. We perish in some way spiritually without it.

That's why there is rejoicing in heaven over a sinner who repents. There's rejoicing in heaven when the result of a temporary scattering of believers is resolved. And it's a God thing.

It's the glory of God. It's the power of God. It's the provision of God.

What do we have that we did not receive? It is all of grace, but it is something that we have to seek out and try to preserve. It is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish. If we find ourselves isolated, if we find ourselves without the opportunity for fellowship by fair means or foul, you look at this mandatory shutting down of group activities and things over the past year, year and a half.

There are some things that are beyond our control. So we have to pray and look for other opportunities to connect, be connected and stay connected. That's one of the things we're doing this morning.

So now we come to one of the specific ways that this kind of division can take place. This kind of sheep out by itself can happen. Verse 15.

Moreover, if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. You see the continuity here of Jesus' thought and words.

There is a division. Now notice if your brother sins against you. We have this sort of tradition in the church that, well, you know, confess your faults one to another.

And there's, I have actually been in group services where people started standing up and

looking around and in public saying, well, you know, I've, I've treated you badly. I've done this, I've done that. And I mean, it can get real awkward.

You notice what Jesus says here. It is not the, the center that is required to go to the, to the victim of that sin. It's the other way around.

And this is very interesting when you think about it, because it is the person who receives the insult. You think about this sheep that, that was separated and the shepherd has come and found it and brought it back. The shepherd didn't send the sheep out and say, go find that sheep and let me know when you located it.

You know, your sheep, you know where a sheep would go. You sheep go find this other sheep. Who goes to the separated sheep? The shepherd.

Our first recourse when we are a victim, when we are the recipient of something that potentially divides and certainly can isolate and put us in danger of perishing. You know, we've got this hymn, rescue the perishing. Well, sorry.

No, the shepherd rescues the perishing. That's a one-on-one with the shepherd and the sheep. The shepherd goes, just remind yourself when you read this, he doesn't send the sheep out of the flock, out of the fold and say, y'all go, go find the sheep.

Let me know when you find it and bring it back. The shepherd goes to that sheep. Now that sheep, that person who has been sinned against, Jesus talks about them here in verse 15.

If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. No public confession, no talking and gossip sessions. Uh, I've been in situations, not in this church, obviously, but, uh, we're at prayer meeting and time for prayer requests, prayer requests would come up and it was a big gossip session.

Well, pray for so-and-so because, you know, their, their spouse is stepping out on them and they just lost their job because they were, you know, drinking or, I mean, you just can't believe the stuff that would be gossiped about under the guise of, this is a prayer request. People were coming to prayer meeting to catch up on all the latest, you know, social news as it were. No, this is one-on-one and I mean, one-on-one.

If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. I mean, this is, this is two people on their own. Nobody else needs to know.

If he hears you, you have gained your brother. The division has been healed. This potential for separation and potentially the perishing effect starting to take place is, is resolved.

What is the view of that from the throne of God? What is the view of that on the part of

the shepherd? What is the view? Why would this person have the ability to go and address the brother with the potential to gain them? Now, if you go and shake your finger in their face and rain all kinds of castigation and accusation and cursing down on them, you're not going to gain your brother. Implicit in this is going and telling him his fault. This has to be done.

This is one little one to another, right? Write it in the margin of your Bible. If one brother is going to go to another and say, you've, you've committed a fault and I'm the victim. This is little one to little one.

What are the conditions under which a person that qualifies as a little one is going to do this? Are they going to be hateful? Are they going to be spiteful? Are they going to demand recompense? Are they going to humiliate? Are they going to do anything that does not comport with humility, with faith, with hope, with love, with recognizing that my own sins are forgiven to the extent that I forgive the sins of those who trespass against me. Remember the Lord's prayer, forgive us our debts as we forgive those who are our debtors. Forgive us our trespasses to the extent that we forgive the trespasses of others.

This has to be done with a heart of forgiveness, with the intention of healing a breach and creating unity. You can't do that with spite and hate and cursing and vindictive accusation. Can you? The purpose of the visit is to heal a breach and the person who initiates it is the one that the shepherd has come and brought back.

Maybe one sheep issued a big alarm cry and spooked this other sheep and it fell over a cliff and rolled down a hill and the shepherd had to go find it and bring it back. Now that sheep is going to say, why did you bleat so loud? You spooked me. You scared me.

And that's why the shepherd had to come find me. Let's see if we can find a way for me to be ready the next time you bleat real loudly. Or if you can tell me why you did that, I'll be more alert next time or whatever.

You get the point here. But in the sequence that Jesus presents these ideas, the shepherd restores the sin against sheep, the sheep that was caused to stray, caused to stumble first. That takes place first.

Now that brother can go to a fellow brother and say, this is what happened. This is what spooked me. This is what caused me to stumble.

If he hears you, you have gained your brother and there is rejoicing in heaven by implication, by extension. But, verse 16, if he will not hear, take with you one or two more. One or two more what? Brothers.

One or two more little ones. This is the fellowship of little ones we're talking about here. It's only the little ones that have an angel beholding the face of the father.

It's only the little ones that the shepherd is going to go out and rescue. This applies, this whole section are those who are seeking to live in humility. We are still going to fail, but those failures should be momentary.

They should be forgiven. The shepherd can restore the flock. We are not talking about unbelievers.

We're not talking about believers who are not on the narrow road, trying to go through the straight gate. We're not talking about people who are on wildly different pages, singing out of wildly different hymnals. This is all in the realm because it's pointless.

These commands are useless and pointless and are never going to be fulfilled by anybody but little ones. You can neither give nor receive appeals for unity with people who are not humble, who are not on the faith, hope, and love road. You're wasting your breath and wasting your time.

And Jesus is addressing that here. If they will not listen because their failure, you can start out as a little one and not persist, not prevail, not continue. If he will not hear, take with you one or two more so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses, every word may be established.

This is out of Deuteronomy, two or three witnesses. Now, notice these are witnesses. These are not just random people that you pick because, well, they're likely to impress or oppress or, you know, by the weight of their personality, cudgel this person into admission or confession or whatever.

These have to be witnesses. This is, these are others who are close by who know the details of what happened. So, an argument goes bad.

Was there somebody else in earshot who knows how and why that conversation turned ugly and it really was one person's fault and things were said? Well, you would recruit that and say, you know, it wasn't just me who heard it this way. It wasn't just me who observed this. Now, what if you don't have two or one or two others to take with you? Well, you have to skip the second step.

If there are no other witnesses, you can't do this step and you have to move to the next step. Ideally, we are in a fellowship and we are not living in an isolation ward and it isn't something. Now, there are things that take place.

You know, there's stuff that takes place on dates. There's stuff that takes place when there are only two people around and you can't always get to one or two more that by the mouth of two or three witnesses, every word may be established. You have to have witnesses.

This happens in court cases. Sometimes they have to do it all with circumstantial

evidence because there are no witnesses. If you will not hear, take with you one or two more that by witnesses, the thing is established.

Well, if there are no witnesses, you skip this step. Now, are there witnesses always, even when there's only two people involved? Yes. They're just not ones that you can take with you.

It's your little one observer angel and God, the Holy Spirit, right? They will bear witness on your case in heaven. So that case better be right. You don't want to make a case and have you be one witness, but the other two witnesses, which is the Holy Spirit and the angel in the heavenly court say, well, that's not quite how the cow ate the cabbage.

We have to be on solid ground and be objective, be humble and be genuinely desirous of restoring unity. When there are others who know the situation and they don't listen to the one-on-one conversation, you ask them to come and say, you know, let's try to establish some objectivity here because more witnesses will help you understand what you're having difficulty seeing, right? That's the purpose, but the angel is not going to testify vocally and the Holy Spirit is already at work. And if they're denying your testimony and the Holy Spirit, that's two witnesses right there.

Now, verse 17, if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the assembly, scratch out church. There was no church as we understand it in the day that Jesus said this. And when you say, tell it to the church, this is one of these, I'm going to get up in the congregation and say, so-and-so committed a sin.

And this is completely bonkers. If he refuses to hear them, tell it to the assembly. What is the assembly? There has to be an assembly, right? Remember there is a flock.

We're not single sheep that are wandering the earth. And we've got a shepherd chasing us down from time to time. There is a flock.

What is that flock? In practical terms, as Jesus speaks here, there's not, he doesn't say, take it to the synagogue, which is the formal assembly of the people of God. Does he take it to the synagogue? The synagogue wasn't called the ecclesia. It was called the synagogue.

The ecclesia is the called together group. They are called together for a purpose. That's what ekkaleo means, to call forth.

Now, in the same way that there may not be witnesses, there may or may not be an assembly that is affected by this breach. The whole idea is that this is a division causer. This person has caused a division for one of the sheep, one of the brothers, and left untreated, this is going to metastasize and result in an increasing amount of division.

Think again about Corinth. Now we're talking about a church, but you think about what

happened in that church. There were people who said, well, Apollos says, and you're doing the wrong thing.

Somebody's living by the understanding they have. And someone says, well, you know, Apollos says this, or Peter says that, or Paul says this, or Christ says that. And they're using this as a wedge and splitting you off from the group with a divergent gospel and a divergent set of standards for life and dividing the flock into groups that think differently and act differently.

And if someone is doing that, you could imagine you need to go to them and say, you know this teaching that you're spreading in the church, that's a sin against me, and it's going to end up being a sin against others. You're telling me this privately, you're going to end up telling more people, and you're dividing the group. Well, the sin of gossip can do this.

If there's an extended family, I mean, now that you've got Facebook, and you've got friends, and you've got social media, and you post a picture, or you post a comment, or whatever, we have to really be careful because these things can inadvertently be hurtful, be divisive. Something can be said and be taken the wrong way. And so you go and say, did you really mean what you said? And they say, no, no, I didn't mean that at all.

You've gained your brother. That's verse 15. You understand something a certain way.

We all do this. And it's even worse with text. It's bad enough when we're trying to talk to each other face-to-face, but text, you lose body language, you lose context, you lose all kinds of things, and many times something that might have been said in a jocular fashion, or flippantly, or in jest, gets misconstrued, or the spell thing on your phone can use a different word than what you typed.

Oh, my goodness. That thing, I typically hit send and then read what I typed, and it's like, oh, no. And you're sending words afterward, and this equals that.

But we can do unconscious harm, and really that is easily resolved in verse 15. You can come and say, you know, that hurt my feelings. Do you really feel that way? Do you really think that? Is that what you intended to communicate? And they say, oh, my goodness, no, not at all.

Here's what was going on. This is why I said that. Here's some context.

Here's some background. Or, you know, I did say that, but it was impetuous. I was in the grip of failure of my own.

I apologize. That's not what I think as a routine thing. That was, you know, that was something I said I shouldn't have said.

I was in my defensiveness. I was trying to lash out and be hurtful to conceal my own shortcoming or whatever, and you gain your brother. We resolve these small things mano a mano, person to person, face to face, and there ought to be the invocation of be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.

But we need to both give and receive in that regard. We need to be humble enough to accept apology and humble enough to give apology in those kinds of situations. But there are times when there is a real obstreperous issue, and the person says, no, I'm having none of it.

Well, you can recruit a few more who are close to that situation and try again. If that fails, tell it to as many people as it pertains to. This is the called together for a purpose group.

You don't stand up in front of a church with pews and synagogues, I mean, with a baptistry and a pulpit and signage is what I was trying to say, not synagogue. They're stored next to each other in my mind. You know, they got the how many people came and how much offering and who brought their Bibles.

There are churches like that, brick and mortar churches where people will stand up and start calling out other people for their faults. And those churches never last long because it's unbiblical. It's completely a faulty understanding of this.

If he refuses to hear them, tell it to everyone to whom it pertains. So if there's something that's starting a breach in a family and the conversation, maybe there was one other person there, you take them and try again. If that fails, everybody that is touched by that, everyone for whom it is pertinent, you don't call up all your friends and post it on Facebook or whatever.

The called together group, a family is a called together group that dwell under the same roof. And even extended family members that are not under the roof, they don't count. The assembly are those who are immediately affected by this fault and them only.

Is that clear? This is not license to publish. You start personally, you can recruit one or two others who are closest to that situation. Then you can recruit everyone who is directly affected by that breach, by that situation, by that fault, but them only.

Nobody else. Ekklesia is called together for a purpose. They exist for a specific function.

This could be family, could be a few co-workers in a small division or office, something like that. But they have to be little ones. This is in a spiritual context.

This is not talking about this fellow office worker who is unknown to me, spiritually stole my work and presented it as their own. That's not what Jesus is talking about. This is in

the context of spiritual fellowship.

The called together group here is a family that's trying to walk the narrow road, a small, intimate group of believers, maybe a church or maybe within a church that are trying to do that. But this is little ones only. This is not the public at large or random people.

If he refuses even to hear those who are close to the situation and affected by it, won't listen to anybody, treat him, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector. Now, what was the attitude toward heathens and tax collectors in Israel? There was huge prejudice, discrimination, bigotry. I will walk around Samaria instead of through it because they are heathens.

Tax collectors were the off scouring of all things. But Jesus doesn't say, let him be as a tax collector or heathen in Israel. He says, let him be to you, let him be to you as a heathen and a tax collector.

How does a child of God characterized by humility, walking in faith, motivated by hope, expressing love, treat a heathen? Think Good Samaritan. The Samaritans considered the Jews to be heathens, but the Good Samaritan looked out for the interest of that injured Jew in the home. Let him be to you as a heathen.

Let him be to you as a tax collector. How should a humble, obedient, faithful child of God treat a tax collector? Do you egg his house? Is all fair because he's in a category that you can disparage? How do you treat a heathen? How do you treat a tax collector? You maintain a distance, but it is a distance of necessity, not of abuse. It's a distance of touching, not the unclean thing, not spitting on the unclean thing.

It is a distance that is maintained in kindness, in hope that it will someday be breached, be that breach will be healed, right? The key there is let him be to you. And there's an understated appeal there by the Lord Jesus. How would the disciples have treated Matthew when he joined the group? Since he was in fact a tax collector, they were followers of Jesus.

So did they keep Matthew at a distance or did they embrace him as a fellow disciple and eventually a fellow apostle and ultimately an inspired writer of scripture? Many people were tax collectors and sinners that Jesus ate with. If Jesus ate with them, what does that tell you? It's not their occupation, it's their attitude. But Jesus didn't hold tax collecting or sinning against people.

If Jesus held our sins against us, he wouldn't have died on the cross for us. So let him be to you. And that means you'll have to put as much distance as is necessary so that you and those near you do not stumble.

You're back to do not stumble. The stumbling and the lack of progress is what is in view. If that sin, that fault against you can't be fixed from your side, to the extent that it is up

to us, we are to live peaceably with all men, especially those who are of the household of faith, right? To the extent that it's up to us.

Well, I've done as much as I can do. But the fact that this person doesn't want to be reconciled doesn't provide a license for any kind of abuse. We should be just as loving and just as hopeful and just as grieved that there is a breach as ever.

But our policy is going to be different. And heathens and tax collectors were necessarily kept at a distance for purity, for avoiding stumbling and so on. Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven.

Whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. We're going to talk about that next time. I only want to point out the heaven theme that goes through this.

This binding and loosing is still a part of the little one idea. And things that happen in heaven based on what happens on earth is still a part of this little one theme. Angels are beholding the face of the Father constantly.

A little one who is functioning in humility, in faith and hope and love, who says, I forgive this sin and this fault that was committed against me. That's forgiven in heaven. That's what this passage is going on to say.

If you say this is an unmendable valley here, that this is a separation that I can't fix, that's going to be noted in heaven. If you can bind up the wound, it's bound in heaven. If you loose that person to their own way and their own course, that's written in heaven.

God is going to adjust his policies accordingly based on what faithful people here determine and choose. Calvinists just go wild if you say God is acting based on what we do. But that's what this passage says.

He doesn't say what has been bound in heaven you will bind and what is loosed in heaven you will loose. Jesus says it the other way around. Do you want to listen to a Calvinist or do you want to listen to Jesus? Jesus says if you are acting according to God's will on earth, God is going to implement that will in heaven.

Your sins will be forgiven when you forgive the sins of others. That's God responding to what we do on this earth. If I refuse to forgive someone on earth, my sins are not forgiven in heaven and that is God basing his policy on what I do.

And that's just scripture, you can't get away from it. And it's a very sobering thought because we are under observation and we are accountable. And things happen in heaven based on what we say and what we do and what we choose in this life.

It's a wonderful promise and blessing when we are on the narrow way doing what we're supposed to do. It's a great comfort and a great encouragement. We have all the

wonderful protections and blessings and opportunities and provisions that God has to offer.

If we begin to go astray, the same amplification that trends toward positive things begins to go toward negative things. It is worse for us to cause a fellow believer to stumble than it would be for an unbeliever to cause them to stumble. If a believer causes a little one to stumble, it's millstone.

By the way, the last thing I'll say this morning as we are closing is when it says a millstone, the literal term in Greek is the donkey stone. It's the donkey stone. There's an upper and a lower millstone.

The lower millstone is the platform that you scatter the grain on. The donkey stone is the one that has a stick through it with a central axis. As the donkey circles the mill and moves that stick, this donkey stone rolls and crushes the grain.

So, the donkey stone has a visible hole in it just the right size for your neck. That's the pole that goes through. The term, if you look it up, it's onkikos or something in which is donkey.

It's the donkey stone. So, the opprobrium of Balaam's donkey goes down with you to the bottom of the sea. You've got the donkey stone.

Instead of the donkey moving the stone for profit, the stone moves the donkey to the bottom of the sea. It's kind of the association guilt by association there. So, we want to be on the positive side of these things.

We want to be in humility, looking to God for grace, looking to Him for our initial restoration. Let the shepherd find us and bring us back and heal us, comfort us with his rod and his staff, lead us in green pastures and beside still waters. That's our first court of resort and that's our source of strength and blessing and healing and reunification.

With that, we then do what we can do to heal the breach horizontally. If people don't want to avail themselves of that opportunity, we step away as we would from someone who is far from God and uninterested, someone who is actively undermining the people of God by collecting confiscatory Roman taxes of which they are skimming a healthy portion for themselves. It isn't my place to judge them.

Vengeance is mine. I will repay, saith the Lord. I just need to stand away and hope that their attitude will change.

Hope that they're like Matthew and they'll stop collecting taxes and start following the Lord. Hope that they're like the Syrophoenician woman who will stop being a and my actions to be a stumbling block to those who have the potential to come and be a little one. I'll be on the wrong end of all of these sayings if the heathen and the tax collector

can't come back because I'm such a poor example of a follower of Christ that they don't want to come.

So there is that balance. Well, it's a wonderful set of truths from the Lord Jesus and we'll continue our study picking up in verse 19 next time. Father, thank you for the truth of your word.

Thank you for the blessing of fellowship that we enjoy with believers of like mind and we trust and pray that that like mind is also with the Lord Jesus and that we have the mind that he had when he emptied himself and took on the form of a servant and came in the likeness of men. Humbling himself and being obedient to every part of your will and in so doing he immeasurably benefited us and so many others and is now exalted glorified and seated at your right hand interceding for us representing us and setting the example that is ours to follow. We pray that as we reflect on these truths that God the Holy Spirit will impress them on our hearts.

We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.