

Little Ones 6-19-05

Matthew 18:10-14 (NIV)

¹⁰ "See that you do not look down on one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven. ¹² "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 to look for the one that wandered off? ¹³ And if he finds it, I tell you the truth, he is happier about that one sheep than about the ninety-nine that did not wander off. ¹⁴ In the same way your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should be lost.

We pick up where we left off last week. The disciples asked who would be greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Jesus called a little child to Him as an illustration, and said unless they were changed to be humble like a little child, they would not even get in. The one that humbled himself like a child would be great in heaven. Did you allow God to renew the way you think about greatness? That was your challenge last week. Then Jesus warned against offending a child or causing them to sin. Our passage today continues with that theme. The little child was probably still standing in their midst as Jesus spoke these words.

This passage is obviously about little children. This is Father's Day. Have you heard the four stages we go through in relating to our Father? As a baby we call him da-da. Around 5 to 7 years old we begin to call him Daddy. Then around the time of puberty we call him Dad. After leaving home we call him collect.

No matter what kind of earthly Father you have had, you can have a great relationship with your heavenly Father. We have godincidenatly come to this passage on Father's Day in which we see the Father's heart. It reveals how much He cares about each of us not so innocent children, for all mankind is born into sin. (Psalm 51:5) We have all inherited Adam's sin nature. Little children are about as selfish as you can get. Have you heard the rules of possession for three-year-olds? If it is in my hand, it is mine. If it is near me, or if I played with it before, it is mine. If it is in your hand but I want it, it is mine. If I set it down, it is still mine. If you are having fun with it, it is mine. If it is broke, it is yours.

You see, you do not have to teach children to be selfish or demanding, it comes naturally. However, there is still a kind of innocence that children have. They have not yet reached the age where they have chosen to accept or reject Christ. They are still utterly dependent on mommy and daddy, and they know it. There is a vulnerability that is precious. They are like a canvas with only the background color painted. There is so much potential and possibility. God intends a beautiful painting on each canvas, a work of incredible beauty. (Jeremiah 29:11) And so He tells us, ¹⁰ "See that you do not look down on one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven.

Children often annoy us. They do not understand that we are in the midst of something important like worship when they scream out or demand our attention.

Commented [notes1]: ⁵ Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me. Psalms 51:5 (NIV)

Commented [notes2]: ¹¹ For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Jeremiah 29:11 (NIV)

We could give them a harsh look or even a stern word when they do not even understand that they are doing something wrong. A dash of black paint splashes across their canvass. The word translated look down is literally to think down. Do not “despise” as the NASB puts it.

The entire passage can relate to the high regard that God places on little children, but it also speaks of the believer in Jesus. If you will notice back in verse 4, Jesus likens the humble believer to this child. (Matthew 18:4) The passage speaks to both physical and spiritual children. Both are vulnerable. Both are precious to God. We can call ourselves “little ones” too. Therefore, we can see the passage is also telling us not to look down on our brother or sister in Christ.

Jesus does not just leave it as a stern warning. He goes on to tell you why. He has already said how detrimental it is for those who would cause one of them to sin, but now He is going to tell us why we should not despise them. Their angels always stand in view of the face of the Father. Some think that this is referring to guardian angels. It does not say exactly that, though you might read that into it. What it does say is that little ones have angels that always behold the face of the Father.

We are in a spiritual battle for the souls of men. Lucifer and his legions are determined to see that when that child is big enough to choose, he or she chooses evil. (John 10:10) He is determined to stop every believer in Jesus from becoming yielded to the Holy Spirit. A believer full of the Spirit and power is the Devil’s nightmare. So we find that we are in a constant battle that takes place mostly in our mind and will. (Ephesians 6:10; Deuteronomy 20:4) We should thank God that we have unseen help.

There are godly angels that give us an advantage. They are constantly watching the Father for His instruction. God is a spirit (John 4:24) and does not have a face so to speak, but beholding His face means attentive to His instruction. His eye is upon them. His ear is open to their reports. His mouth speaks instruction to them. (2 Chronicles 7:15) Nothing gets by God, and since our angels are always waiting for God’s instruction, nothing escapes them either. (Hebrews 1:14) What is happening in your life is not out of control. (Psalm 94:19)

Since that is true of our brothers and sisters in Christ, we better be careful or we might find ourselves on the receiving end of angelic interference. (Psalm 91:11) If something I am about to do or say is going to stumble my brother, because of my lack of humility, I had better look out. God is aware that one of His little ones is about to step on the toes of another one of His little ones, and He might have to deal with it. The Apostle Paul tells us several times in His letters how important it is to walk in humility. (Ephesians 4:2) He warns us not to stumble our weaker brothers by doing something they think is wrong. Even if we know it is okay, for their conscience sake, we should give up our right to do that thing. (Romans 14:13) It is so easy to look down on others, but Jesus says we better not!

Verse 11 is not in the older and best manuscripts. It is a very Biblical statement. *The Son of Man came to save what was lost.* We have a very similar expression in

Commented [notes3]: ⁴ Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.
Matthew 18:4 (NIV)

Commented [notes4]: ¹⁰ The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.
John 10:10 (NIV)

Commented [notes5]: ¹⁰ Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.
Ephesians 6:10 (NIV)

Commented [notes6]: For the LORD your God is the one who goes with you to fight for you against your enemies to give you victory."
Deuteronomy 20:4 (NIV)

Commented [notes7]: ²⁴ God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth."
John 4:24 (NIV)

Commented [notes8]: ¹⁵ Now my eyes will be open and my ears attentive to the prayers offered in this place.
2 Chronicles 7:15 (NIV)

Commented [notes9]: ¹⁴ Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?
Hebrews 1:14 (NIV)

Commented [notes10]: ¹⁹ When anxiety was great within me, your consolation brought joy to my soul.
Psalms 94:19 (NIV)

Commented [notes11]: ¹¹ For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways;
Psalms 91:11 (NIV)

Commented [notes12]: ² Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.
Ephesians 4:2 (NIV)

Commented [notes13]: ¹³ Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother’s way.
Romans 14:13 (NIV)

Luke. *For the Son of Man came to seek and save what was lost.* Luke 19:10 (NIV) It may have been added as an attempt to help us understand the following parable. ¹² *"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 to look for the one that wandered off?"* Jesus is the Shepherd. (John 10:11) We have this same parable in Luke, but there it is related to lost souls. (Luke 15:4-7) Here in Matthew we find it related to a lost "little one", the one that has humbly received the kingdom but wandered off.

In Jesus' day, many of the villages had communal herds. Three or four boys would watch the whole community's flocks. If a sheep were missing, one of the boys would track it down while the others stayed with the flock. In the evening, they would bring the flock back to the village for safety. The villagers would ask about the missing shepherd and inquire as to whose sheep had wandered off. They would watch the horizon hoping to see the shepherd returning. Just as dusk settled in, they could make out the outline of a boy jogging down the trail toward the village. That was cause for joy, but what made that joy complete was to also see the outline of the sheep on his shoulders. (Psalm 40:2)

What is Jesus trying to tell them? Not only do angels watch over the little ones, but also Jesus, Himself, values each little one. You had better not look down on your brother or sister in Christ because He values them. If they are precious in His sight, what are you doing despising them? (Romans 14:10) If it is bad to have an angel on your case, what kind of trouble have you gotten into when Jesus is dealing with you? Every sheep is precious to Him. He would leave the 99 to go track you down and bring you home.

When He finds you, there is no rebuke because you stupidly wandered off. There is not even discipline, unless you do it persistently. He is just thankful the wolf did not eat you. That is the danger in wandering away from the flock. You may have seen a little green grass over there and wandered a bit, and then seen another, and another, until you did not know where the flock was. You may have to suffer some of the consequences or injuries you sustained in getting out on your own. Little one, sheep do not hang out in flocks of one! (Hebrews 10:25) Your protection is your numbers and your shepherd watching over you. Wandering can get you wounded or even killed. Do you understand what our Great Shepherd is telling us?

Sometimes I hear people say something along these lines, "I do not need to stay in the flock. I am a mature sheep. In fact, I do not even need a shepherd. I have the Great Shepherd watching over me from above. Besides, these sheep stink! You know it is true. So I am going to greener pastures and I will be alright." Baaaaa. Have you ever heard that? Some of us have even said something similar at some time in our life. The enemy tempts us all with that one. It is hard to be in close proximity with others like me. It is difficult but it is best, safest, and most effective.

Commented [notes14]: ¹¹ "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. John 10:11 (NIV)

Commented [notes15]: ⁴ "Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Does he not leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? ⁵ And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders ⁶ and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.'⁷ I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent. Luke 15:4-7 (NIV)

Commented [notes16]: ² He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire; he set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand. Psalms 40:2 (NIV)

Commented [notes17]: ¹⁰ You, then, why do you judge your brother? Or why do you look down on your brother? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat. Romans 14:10 (NIV)

Commented [notes18]: ²⁵ Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another--and all the more as you see the Day approaching. Hebrews 10:25 (NIV)

When the shepherd has to chase the same sheep repeatedly, he will finally break the leg of that sheep. Then he has to carry it until the leg mends and feed it by hand. It is a lot of work, but it may be the only way to save that sheep. Then that sheep will never leave the shepherd's side. It becomes the shepherd's bellwether. A bell is placed on its neck so the other sheep will know where the shepherd is. Do you still like hanging out by yourself? A word to the wise, it is easier to follow the Shepherd and a lot less painful! (Psalm 119:176)

¹³ *And if he finds it, I tell you the truth, he is happier about that one sheep than about the ninety-nine that did not wander off.* "If?" Yes, the sad thing is that some sheep are devoured. Some fall off into a ravine and break their neck. Some just keep going thinking they are going the right direction and die of thirst. When you are found safe and whole, the shepherd is so thankful. What could have happened did not. He brings news of great joy as he jogs back into town with the wayward sheep on his shoulders. (Luke 15:5-6)

Sometimes when we have been rebellious and wandered off, we think the Lord is coming with a rod to break our leg and our head and end up in the shepherd's lunch. We are just sure He is going to be so mad when we face Him that we might as well keep going. The truth is He will be overjoyed to have you back safe and sound. Others will be glad too. Have you been wandering in the wilderness? Do not believe the lie that He is going to beat you if you go back. That is the wolf talking. He wants you to hang out there until He can catch you. Jesus would be overjoyed to have you back. You probably will not even face a rebuke, because He knows you will rebuke yourself enough. He just wants you to know how thrilled He is to have you back safe, before it was too late. (Jeremiah 3:22)

Do you see how important it is not to look down on a brother or sister, a fellow little one? Their angels behold the face of the Father. Jesus values them and tracks them down to save them. And last but not least, the Father is not willing that any of them be lost. ¹⁴ *In the same way your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should be lost.* He does not want the wolf to prevail. He wants you safe in the sheep pen. Almighty God wills that the little one you are tempted to look down on be brought safely into the pen. Your actions or words that would cause them to stumble are contrary to the will of Almighty God. (Matthew 18:7) *So see that you do not look down on one of these little ones.*

Since Jesus is using the term Father, let us look at it from another parable. If you have a family with 12 children, do you love one of them more than another? You would love them all uniquely. What if one of the children began to look down on one of the other ones? What if that child disappeared after his brother gave him a hard time? First, you would go and find the child. You would look everywhere and stop at nothing to find that lost child. When you find him, you do not rebuke him for running off. If anything you are going to rebuke the child that despised him and caused him to feel unwanted. You are so joyful that he is safe! You are more joyful about that child than the other 11 safe at home.

Commented [notes19]: ¹⁷⁶ I have strayed like a lost sheep. Seek your servant, for I have not forgotten your commands.
Psalms 119:176 (NIV)

Commented [notes20]: ⁵ And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing. ⁶ And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost.
Luke 15:5-6 (KJV)

Commented [notes21]: ²² Return, ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings. Behold, we come unto thee; for thou art the LORD our God.
Jeremiah 3:22 (KJV)

Commented [notes22]: ⁷ "Woe to the world because of the things that cause people to sin! Such things must come, but woe to the man through whom they come!
Matthew 18:7 (NIV)

In Luke 15, Jesus told three parables about the lost. In that case, it was a lost soul that needed salvation. He started with the same parable of the one sheep in a fold one hundred. Then He told of one coin in a necklace of ten. The last parable was of one of two sons. Do you see the increasing value? (1-100, 1-10, 1-2) Jesus wants us to know how precious every soul is to Him. In that story of the prodigal, the older son despised his younger brother, just as Jesus was warning us not do in our passage today. (Luke 15:28-30)

I hope it is crystal clear to you that Jesus is telling us to value one another in love. We may differ in conviction about the non-essentials. We may disagree about programs, methods, style and taste. We may be moved by different things, but we should forever value one another as precious to God. We are commanded to love one another. (John 15:17)

It might help us to remember this important lesson if we called each other "little one". Look at the person next to you and say, "Hi little one." "Your angels are looking at the Father." "Jesus highly values you." This story is telling us that the Father does not want to lose any of you, so we had better not despise one another. Can we remember that by the grace of God?

In our passage for next week, Jesus is going to make this extra clear and give us some more warnings about getting crosswise with one another. This godly way of thinking takes a concerted effort on our part. We have to remind ourselves that greatness is childlike humility and dependency on God. We have to remind ourselves that our brother and sister in Christ are God's little ones, whose angels always look upon the face of God. We especially have to remind ourselves when our toes are stepped on, or we feel that our rights have been violated. However, if we can take this mindset of heaven, imagine how much stress you are going to avoid in your life. If there is no more ladder to climb, no need to impress, or rights to assert, just a simple childlike faith in our loving heavenly Father who meets all our needs, imagine the peace that can fill your heart and mind.

Then go a step further and imagine that we all actually treat one another as one of our Father's little ones. Imagine that when we are about to offend some brother or sister in Christ, we first think of the angels that watch over them standing before Almighty God. Wouldn't we treat one another with a more tender touch? This is heaven's perspective. It is reality in the spiritual realm. If we are wise, we will see the world with the same perspective. We will redefine greatness. We will think first of the value to God of the lives that are wayward, and we will certainly stay close to our Shepherd. Let us allow the words of Jesus to shape the way we think, and affect the way we treat one another. You will find it not only makes this life more joyful, and our witness more effective, but one day we will see the eternal effects of a life transformed by faith in the words of Jesus.

Commented [notes23]: ²⁸ "The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. ²⁹ But he answered his father, 'Look! All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. ³⁰ But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!' Luke 15:28-30 (NIV)

Commented [notes24]: ¹⁷ This is my command: Love each other. John 15:17 (NIV)