

Dealing with Sin in a Broken World

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Matthew 18:5-22 (ESV Adapted)

⁵ “Whoever receives **one such child** in my name receives me, ⁶ but whoever puts a stumbling block (*skandal-*) before **one of these little ones** who believe in me, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea.

⁷ Woe to the world for **stumbling blocks** (*skandal-*)! For it is necessary that stumbling blocks (*skandal-*) come, but woe to the one by whom the stumbling block (*skandal-*) comes!

⁸ And if **your hand or your foot** is a **stumbling block** (*skandal-*) for you, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life crippled or lame than with two hands or two feet to be thrown into the fire of the age to come. ⁹ And if **your eye is a stumbling block** (*skandal-*) for you, tear it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into the gehenna of fire.

¹⁰ See that you do not **despise one of these little ones**. For I tell you that their **angels** in heaven are always looking at the face of my Father who is in heaven. ¹¹

¹² What do you think? If a man has **a hundred sheep**, and **one of them** has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go in search of the one that went astray? ¹³ And if he finds it, truly, I say to you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine that never went astray. ¹⁴ So it is not the **will of my Father** who is in heaven that **one of these little ones** should perish.

¹⁵ If **your brother or sister sins against you**, go and tell them their fault, between you and them alone. If they listen to you, you have **gained your brother or sister**. ¹⁶ But if they do not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. ¹⁷ If they refuse to listen to them, tell it to the assembly. And if they refuse to listen even to the assembly, let them be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.

¹⁸ Truly, I say to you, **whatever you bind** on earth shall be (have been) bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. ¹⁹ Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. ²⁰ For where two or three are gathered in my name, **there am I among them.**”

²¹ Then Peter came up and said to him, “Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?”

²² Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven times.”

Matthew 16:18-20

¹⁸ “And I tell you, you are Peter, ...¹⁹ I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”

John 20:21-23

²¹ Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.”

²² ... He breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³ If you forgive the sins of any, they have been forgiven them; if you withhold from any, they have been withheld.”

Matthew 5:23-24

²³ “So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, ²⁴ leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.”

Challenging Heart and Head with Radical Words

Last week we began looking at the 4th of Jesus' discourses in Mt (ch 5-7 SoM, 10 Discipleship, 13 Parables). This one starts with a question about greatness in the Kingdom and ends with an intense treatment of forgiveness: Enigmatic, practical, radical language.

Jesus often teaches using hyperbole – “over the top” language. Images that show the great seriousness of what he's saying, but that one must not take literally. Positive / Negative. *'Gouge out eye... cut off hand.'* *'If two of you agree on earth about anything...'*

Jesus also often uses generic language: *'One of these little ones,' 'If someone sins...'* It points his teaching in a distinct direction, but leaves us a lot to think about and apply.

Jesus gives the disciples/us credit for being intelligent adults who can recognize over-the-top language or metaphors when we hear them. Jesus assumes that we're serious, sincere disciples wanting to learn, willing to think in new ways. But note that this is not the way you speak if you're wanting to be a sober law-giver. Jesus is trying to seize our imagination and change the way we see ourselves and the world, not give a list of regulations.

Even One “Little One” is Important – Even Me

The first part of the discourse (to v 14) centers around the image of one child as the *'little one'* (*mikros*). To understand God's kingdom don't start with great people or great masses. Start with one child, one *'little one.'* Jesus makes it generic: think of all the different ways people are made 'little' in our world. Poverty, age, displacement, sickness, difference, race, religion, etc. Think of all the stumbling blocks (generic) that block, distort, break them.

Every single one is important. Think about each 'little' one with an angel before God (v10).

Jesus tells the parable of the one straying sheep, with emphasis on the one rather than 99. (In Lk 15 he uses the same parable with emphasis on the lost being found.) Joy in the one.

But I need to see that I am one of the “ones” that God loves. The stumbling blocks can be right in the center of my own life. I need to self-amputate anything (hyperbole) to remove them.

What to Do when They're Clearly Guilty

Jesus begins applying this way of looking at people to personal relationships. He takes an open-and-shut case. Given: Someone sins against you. You could take them straight to public discipline. Instead, value the relationship. Deal with the wrong. Seek reconciliation. Let refusals come from them. Establish truth (you might be wrong). Bring the community. If they refuse all reconciliation with the community, let them go. They make their choice.

Even when things are totally clear about a wrong, still seek reconciliation and forgiveness.

Think of the wrong-doer as a 'little one' blocked by a stumbling block. Seek renewal.

Taking Yourselves Seriously...With Jesus

Jesus knows the apostles and all his followers are going to have to deal with serious issues:

The character of the community, including Gentiles, interaction with pagan powers, etc. He wants them to know that they are not alone. He will be with them: what they bind or loose on earth (generic) *"shall have been bound...loosed in heaven."* Enigmatic.

God does his work through the disciples and takes them very seriously (v 19, hyperbole), but Jesus' presence must always shape and define the disciples as it had challenged Peter.

How Far Do I have to Take All This?

Peter wants to follow but asks about generous limits within reason. Jesus takes that stumbling block from his path. No reasonable limits. God's grace & love are unreasonably generous.