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## *The Gospel According to Matthew*

### *If Your Right Hand Makes You Stumble...*

*August 18, 2019*

**Sermon Text:** Matt 18:1-14 (Part 2)

**Scripture Reading:** Matthew 19:16-30

This past week a friend of ours spotted the following on a website that claims to be a Christian ministry for victims of abuse, but which has in my opinion been growing increasingly warped in the use of Scripture. In fact, I would conclude that the people there have embraced a false gospel. Here is what was published there recently:

#### Truths of Christ

- you exist because I expressed my heart and I delighted in what I saw [what does that even mean?]
- I will always love you, but you are free to love or not love me in return
- You don't have to sacrifice anything, I've already made the complete Sacrifice
- I've given you Power in the Holy Spirit
- I've given you Authority of Heaven and I alone am Lord [again, what does that even mean?]

#### If You Disobey, You'll Get

- Discipline/Training, Grace, Forgiveness, Mercy, Gentleness, Restoration, Encouragement, Unconditional love, Inheritance, Blessings

Now obviously the heretic that wrote this is including professing Christians in the people he or she is addressing,

and may even be including all people no matter what they profess. But this is plainly a false and wicked gospel, pronounced anathema by God's Word. It is filled with lies. It says that you can be and do anything and anyone you want to and you will still be given God's blessing and acceptance. You can live however you want and God expects nothing of you. And when you sin, God will forgive you and restore you even if you don't repent (there is no mention of repentance here). Following Christ will cost you nothing.

This is the kind of message that so-called pastors are using now because they know that they can gather a large following and if possible they can become famous and the leader of a mega church. They are wicked, evil wolves building their own kingdoms on the souls of others.

Anyone with even a rudimentary knowledge of Scripture can recognize that these are absolutely false statements, and our text this morning is one example of truth that refutes this nonsense.

Let's all of us this morning be warned about the times we live in. These are incredibly evil days. You are surrounded by a fusillade of the enemy's lies everyday and it is going to get worse. You MUST realize this

or you will perish along with this world. The things that so-called Christians are doing and accepting now are very, very wicked and if you are naïve then you are going to be led astray and join their ranks. I caution everyone to pray earnestly that the Lord would protect you from temptation and deception and show you anything in your life wherein you have allowed deception into your thinking.

2Ti 3:1-5 But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. (2) For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, (3) heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, (4) treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, (5) having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people.

Are you avoiding such people? You must. And where are you going to find the worst ones? Among those who have "the appearance of godliness." I would say that most of the abuse victims I have met first met their abuser *in church*.

Follow along then as we read once again the first 14 verses of Matthew 18-

Mat 18:1-14 At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?"

(2) And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them (3) and said, "Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

(4) Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. (5) "Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me,

(6) but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, 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 temptations to sin! For it is necessary that temptations come, but woe to the one by whom the temptation comes!

**(8) And if your hand or your foot causes you to sin, 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 eternal fire. (9) And if your eye causes you to sin, 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 hell of fire.**

(10) "See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that in heaven their angels always see the face of my Father who is in heaven.

(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.

I particularly wanted to focus on verses 8-9 this morning.

First of all, notice that it is sandwiched between a beginning section (vss 1-7) and an ending portion (vss 10-14) and each of those sections discuss *children/little ones*. This would lead us to conclude that vss 8-9 must also have something to do with humbling ourselves and becoming like little children. What is the connection?

When we are prideful and self-centered, we only focus upon people who can in some way further our fame and image. The disciples, you recall were arguing over which of them was greatest in the kingdom. Jesus rebuked them by bringing a little child right into the middle of their group. A little child is really someone who needs

everything and can give arrogant selfish people nothing. That is the point.

Who is greatest in the kingdom? Well, says Jesus, don't even worry about who is greatest. What you had better be concerned about *is whether you will even get in or not!!* And really THAT is the subject Jesus turns their attention to. Who gets in! They were acting like people who would be stopped at the door!

Now, if we are going to receive and direct people like little children (and widows and the poor, and the lame, etc) we must turn away from self-seeking attempts to exalt ourselves. Our job is to HELP people find Christ and enter His kingdom, not hinder them from finding Him. *Much of the visible church today is in fact hindering the little ones from finding Christ.*

And this all leads to Jesus' very stern and sobering warnings here:

(5) "Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, (6) but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, 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 temptations to sin! For it is necessary that temptations

come, but woe to the one by whom the temptation comes!

Causing children or anyone else who are at least open to believing that God *is*, or who are open to hearing about Christ...causing such people to become estranged from Him or to otherwise sin, is to invite the full wrath of God.

Notice that Jesus does not say that something like a great millstone being tied around such a person's neck and then being thrown into the sea is what will happen. NO. He says that would be BETTER than what He is going to do to them! That was meant to really shake up these arrogant disciples, and it is meant to do the same to us.

What did Jesus mean by this? –

"Woe to the world for temptations to sin! For it is necessary that temptations come, but woe to the one by whom the temptation comes!

I think He is making certain that we understand that His judgment of the wicked is going to *be personal*. The Judgment is not going to be some general judgment of some thing called "the world," but of *wicked individuals who walked in evil and caused others to sin*. Yes, this is a fallen world. Yes, that is part of God's plan for His glory.

But no one is going to be able to say “well, it’s all good. God ordained it all and it will turn out fine for me.” Nope. *Woe to the one by whom the temptation comes. Woe to the ONE.*

Now, let’s look at verses 8-9 –

(8) And if your hand or your foot causes you to sin, 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 eternal fire. (9) And if your eye causes you to sin, 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 hell of fire.

And then this statement is followed by this one:

(10) “See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that in heaven their angels always see the face of my Father who is in heaven.

Let’s see if we can get hold of what Jesus means.

*The best way we can lead others to Christ is to follow Him ourselves. In order to do so, we must be humble, as He humbled Himself even to the cross. We must be Jesus to others. We must obey Him and love Him and love one another.*

Mat 10:42 And whoever gives one of these little ones even a cup of cold water because he is a disciple, truly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward.”

Now, what does following Christ require? It requires what Jesus calls “taking up our cross.”

Mat 10:37-39 Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. (38) And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. (39) Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

Mat 16:24 Then Jesus told his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.

And this is the point Jesus is making here in vss 8-9. This is an example of *hyperbole*. He doesn’t mean that everyone must amputate their hand or foot or gouge out their eye. He is using exaggeration for effect so that we all understand this:

*We must give up anything that is keeping us from following Christ. If we do not, Christ will not own us. He will not have us. And any claim that we*

*make to belong to Him will be a false claim that is going to cause others to stumble and prevent them from finding Christ themselves.*

Now think about this. This is absolutely true, is it not? Halfway “Christians” cause others to want nothing to do with Christ. Hypocrites and counterfeits cause the little ones to turn away from Him. And Christ is putting this very, very, sobering question to each of us:

*Are you causing little ones who believe in Me to stumble and wander from Me, or are you following Me in truth so that when they see you, they see Me?*

Listen again:

(10) “See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that in heaven their angels always see the face of my Father who is in heaven.

Think of the famous “Christian” leaders who, it turns out, have been abusing children for decades. What is Jesus saying about such a person? He means that the hottest fires of hell are reserved for them. Or wicked, evil domestic abusers who parade as fine, upstanding church members? Same thing. Welcome to the hottest eternal furnace boys. Got your name on it.

Because they are despising and abusing little ones who are the apple of His eye and whom He has assigned angels to in order to watch over them. [Apparently there is such a thing as a child’s guardian angel].

Finally, to drive the point home:

Mat 18:12-14 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.

Anyone who contributes to one of these little ones being lost, leading them further away from Christ, is harming a person whom Christ loves. And one of the most common ways such an evil person does this is to pretend to be a Christian and lust for greatness for himself, thus despising and using little ones for his own wicked ends.

There are many such people sitting in church pews every single week. I have no doubt that the people who are going to receive the most intense judgment on the day when Christ returns will be

people who so many thought were just the finest saints you could ever meet. But they in fact were fakes, out to get glory for themselves, causing the little ones to have a harder time finding Christ.

Mat 23:13 “But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut the kingdom of heaven in people's faces. For you neither enter yourselves nor allow those who would enter to go in.

Do any of us think that we can follow Christ halfway, still holding onto things in this world which He calls us to give up? Because, you see, that is how we will cause little ones to stumble. As long as we are self-seeking and clinging to things that exalt us, we will necessarily despise these little ones Christ loves.

What then is it that Christ requires you to die to? Only you can answer that question – or rather only HE can answer it for you. It may be:

- Wealth (think of the rich young ruler)
- Career
- Fame
- Reputation
- Loss of popularity
- Friends who want to prevent us from serving Christ

- Family [a most common and particularly favorite means the enemy uses]
- Some vice or sin

If we refuse to take up our cross and follow Him, then we are necessarily going to be in the same class as those Pharisee hypocrites who not only fail to enter the kingdom of heaven themselves, but who obstruct others from finding it.

Whatever it is, it must be cut off or gouged out. That is Jesus' point. IF your relatives are keeping you from following Christ fully as He requires, they must be cut off. If a love for money is, it must be cut off. If that name you want for yourself is making you ashamed of Christ, it must be gouged out.

Because it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God without friends, without family, without fame, without money...than to be thrown into hell with them.

Following Christ requires no sacrifice? Is that what that opening statement I read says? On that Day anyone who believes that is going to find Jesus never knew them at all.