

Jesus Explained the Importance of Caring for Children

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our children learn, by our example, how to avoid hindering others from coming to Jesus in repentance and faith. That is a key lesson to help them learn to be effective as they share the message of the death and resurrection of Christ with others. In this topic, we will see that Jesus showed the disciples, by His example, the importance of taking time to reach out to physical and spiritual children.

The world looks for greatness and success. We see that was also true of the disciples when they first followed Jesus. In Matthew 18:1-5, we see that the disciples came to Jesus with a question. “At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, ‘Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?’ Then Jesus called a little child to Him, set him in the midst of them, and said, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Whoever receives one little child like this in My name receives Me.’” Instead of just answering their question, Jesus gave a living illustration of His answer.

Jesus called a little child to Him and sat the child in the middle of the disciples. Then, Jesus began to speak to the disciples. The word translated “converted” means *to turn around, to turn from one’s course of conduct or to change one’s mind*. Most uses of this word refer to Jesus turning, God turning or some other person turning. However, in Acts 7:39, we read about the people of Israel when they were in the wilderness and that verse says, “Whom our fathers would not obey, but rejected. And in their hearts they turned back to Egypt.” In this case, Israel rejected the Word of God and, in their hearts, they wanted to return to Egypt. In this verse, in Matthew, we see that Jesus says that people must turn in heart and become like little children to even be in the kingdom of heaven. Those who are filled with pride and depend on their own efforts will not even be a part of the kingdom of heaven.

Then, Jesus used the little child that He had called to Him to explain a key lesson about greatness in the kingdom of heaven. Jesus said that a person has to humble himself like a little child to be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Christ is our example of One who humbled Himself. Philippians 2:8 says, “And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to *the point of death*, even the death of the cross.” Jesus is the One who is King of kings and Lord of lords. James 4:10 tells us, “Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up.” Then, 1 Peter 5:6 tells us, “Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time.” We are to humble ourselves and not seek to be the greatest. Jesus said that those who have such humility will also receive a little child like the one that He had set in the middle of the disciples.

Then, Jesus went on to warn the disciples about causing a child to sin. Matthew 18:6-9 says, “Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a

millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea. Woe to the world because of offenses! For offenses must come, but woe to that man by whom the offense comes! If your hand or foot causes you to sin, cut it off and cast *it* from you. It is better for you to enter into life lame or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet, to be cast into the everlasting fire. And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast *it* from you. It is better for you to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes, to be cast into hell fire.” This speaks about a Christian causing someone to stumble and includes a physical child and also a spiritual child. A spiritual child is a new Christian or a Christian that is still spiritually immature.

A millstone was a large stone that was turned by a donkey to crush the grain and grind it so that it could be used for bread and other forms of food. If a person had such a millstone hung about his neck and he was thrown into the sea, that person would quickly sink to the bottom of the sea and drown. Jesus was making it very clear to the disciples that they were not to cause a child or a weak Christian to sin by the things they said or did. 1 Corinthians 8:1 says, “Now concerning things offered to idols: We know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies.” Then, Romans 14:19-20 says, “Therefore let us pursue the things *which make* for peace and the things by which one may edify another. Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All things indeed *are* pure, but *it is* evil for the man who eats with offense.” Here, we see that Paul gave warning about the danger of boasting about our knowledge which could easily cause a weak Christian to stumble. In contrast, love will lead us to help others and build them up in their spiritual lives.

Jesus said that there will be offenses in the world. Those who are not Christians like to boast about their knowledge and speak against those who are new or weak Christians. They also try to cause those who are weak Christians to sin in other ways. We are to leave their judgment to the Lord. Romans 12:19 says, “Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but *rather* give place to wrath; for it is written, ‘Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,’ says the Lord.” Those in the world must either accept Christ’s payment for their judgment or they will experience that judgment. Revelation 20:15 says, “And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.” That judgment will be eternal. Our prayer for all who are not followers of Jesus should be that the Holy Spirit will convict them and the Father will draw them to Christ, so they can receive forgiveness.

Jesus knew that Judas was showing the outward actions of a follower of Jesus, but his heart was filled with sin. Perhaps, there were others there that day, in the larger group of disciples, who were also pretending to be followers of Jesus. As a result, Jesus gave a warning to all who were not true followers. Jesus said it would be better to lose a hand or a foot rather than experience the judgment which faces all who do not repent of their sin of unbelief and receive Christ by faith. The same thing would be true for their eye. It would be better to be blind and live on earth with only one eye than to never come to Christ and experience the eternal judgment of everlasting fire.

Then, Jesus went on to apply this principle and warn the disciples not to despise a little one by giving a parable. Matthew 18:10-14 says, “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. For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost. “What do you think? If a man has a

hundred sheep, and one of them goes astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine 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 *sheep* than over the ninety-nine that did not go astray. Even so it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish.””

The word translated “despise” means *to reject, make fun of or to treat unkindly*. Jesus said that the disciples were not to treat a little child or a weak or new Christian in this way. In addition to the concern of the Father, we see that the angels are also concerned when a child or a weak Christian is treated in this way. Jesus did not come to make fun of such individuals. Instead, Luke 19:10 says, “For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.” That same thought is repeated here in verse eleven. Then, Jesus gave a parable to His disciples.

Jesus began that parable with the question, “What do you think?” Here, we see that the purpose when Jesus gave this parable was to make His disciples really think. It is the desire of Jesus that we will also really think about this parable and let it be a guide for the actions that we take in our lives. The parable is about a man with one hundred sheep that had one of them go astray. The word translated “goes astray” means *to cause to stray, to lead from the right way, to lead from the truth or to lead into error* and is usually translated “deceive”. This word is used twice in 2 Timothy 3:13 where we read, “But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived.” Here, we see that it talks about false teachers who deceive others and, at the same time, also deceive themselves. It is easy for weak Christians to be deceived by false teachers.

Jesus told his disciples that a true shepherd would rejoice more over finding that straying sheep than he will over the ninety-nine that did not go astray. Peter always remembered what Jesus said that day. He wrote in 1 Peter 2:25, “For you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.” In the earlier part of the chapter, Peter had warned that we will suffer for Christ. 1 Peter 2:21 says, “For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps.” Christ had gone to the Sea of Galilee to find Peter, when Peter had denied Jesus three times and then gone back to fishing, in John 21. There, Jesus had asked Peter three times if Peter loved Him. Each time, Jesus had told Peter to feed and shepherd His lambs and His sheep. In the same way, Jesus has gone after each of us when we have strayed away from Him. Jesus said it is not the will of the Father that a weak Christian should be destroyed or caused to perish. Instead, we are to follow the example of Jesus and seek the weak and straying Christian and bring them back into the fellowship of the other believers.

The Lord calls us to show our physical and spiritual children how to go and seek for those weak and struggling Christians who have gone astray and bring them back to the fellowship of the church. In that way, we will also be following the instructions that Jesus gave to the disciples that day. May the Lord richly bless you as you show your children how to seek weak Christians who have gone astray.