

Greetings:

The study that Pastor Pat brings on Sunday mornings is a reflection of the study for that week. It represents a lot of research. Not all of what he has prepared is communicated. In an attempt to continue the learning process, he is making available his study notes to the congregation.

These notes are edited, but not “book” ready. To the critical eye, mistakes can possibly be found. Therefore, he asks that you take the material with humility, teach-ability, and charity.

Enjoy and if you should have any questions or corrections, please do not hesitate to email him at pastorpat@waukeshabile.org.

Date: **March 3, 2019**

Sermon Title: **The Extreme Importance of Keeping Jesus Front and Center**

Sermon Series: Matthew

Text: Matthew 18:1-14

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Title: The Extreme Importance of Keeping Jesus Front and Center
Text: Matthew 18:1-14
Theme: Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life; no one can come to the Father except through Him. Anything else is scandalous and damnable.

As one reads through Matthew 18, they are confronted by the excessive or heightened speech used throughout. The intent is to emphasize just how serious the act is. There are multiple

“We overstate what we intend for the sake of emphasis or to make our statement colorful and memorable.”¹ Hyperbole is exaggerated statements or claims not meant to be taken literally. As we work through our chapter, I hope to see two things. First, the language throughout is heightened for emphasis. Second, the paragraphs have a common “thread” tying them together. What those threads are will become evident and help accent the primary idea throughout.

Visual

1. Rope off the back sections of the church pew and put signs up telling people that the way to God is to move forward.
2. What would be scandalous? Idols in the sanctuary? Rosaries? Ponzi schemes? What do we consider scandalous?
 - a. Elmbrook pastors running off with co-workers
 - b. Bill Hybel being removed from his position at willow creek
 - c. James McDonald being removed from pastor of harvest church
 - d. Tullian Tchvejian having multiple affairs while pastoring corral ridge church
 - e. The owner of the Patriots caught in a sex scandal. Good grief.
 - f. For me, none of this is shocking or scandalous.

In our context, the scandal is offering another way to have your sins forgiven and access to the Father by anything or anyone other than the person and work of Jesus. If this is true, then our world lives in redemptive scandal.

3. Put hurdles in the aisle way
- 4. Wearing a weight vest; ankle and wrist weights**
5. Put 5 gallon buckets in the pews
6. Lock doors; turn off lights;
- 7. Handout the simple tract, “you can’t, etc.”**
- 8. Have cookies next to a jar of poison. As soon as you mix poison into the cookies, they are not just ruined but lethal.**
9. **Ipecac** is used in the emergency treatment of certain kinds of poisoning. It is used to cause vomiting of the poison. The gospel is a chocolate chip cookie. There is no downside to salvation. Yet, we allow ourselves to accept a form of the gospel that makes us vomit. Folks, become ipecac resistant isn’t a good thing. Get rid of it and enjoy the pure and powerful gospel.
- 10. “Horse apple pie”**

Introduction:

“This chapter is the fourth major discourse in the Book of Matthew. What strikes you as you read the chapter is the use of family terms for believers--they are little ones, children, brethren. The family terminology, related elsewhere to covenant language, immediately reminds us of our duties to one another.”²

- The King’s Pathway Revealed (16)
- Coming off the Mt. (18)
- Hyperbole
- The Seriousness of getting “In”
- The Seriousness of causing someone to stumble
- The Seriousness of seeking out the Lost
- The Seriousness of removing offenders
- The Seriousness of Forgiving others

Matthew 18 - Following the “Thread”	
vv. 1-6 Who is the Greatest?	Truly, I say to you, unless you humble yourself like this child you will never enter into the kingdom of heaven.
vv. 7-9 Temptations to Sin	If you keep a child from the Kingdom, it would be better that a milestone fastened around your neck and you were drowned in the depth of the open sea.
vv. 10-14 The Parable of the Lost Sheep	In fact, the salvation of God’s people is so central that He would leave everything to find the one lost.
vv. 15-20 If your Brothers Sins Against You	If you find one who is scandalizing the gospel, go to them. If they refuse to repent of their scandal, remove them from the church.
vv. 21-35 How often must I forgive my offending brother?	Because of God’s great forgiveness toward us, we must forgive everyone else.

Why This?
Why Here?
Why Now?

“This sequence of thought has a unity.”³

We are getting ever closer to His death, burial, and resurrection. Each day takes us a step closer. Two things will happen. First, the gospel that is Jesus Christ becomes primary and pervasive. There is no thinning of it. This is what Paul argue in Romans 16:17.

- ¹⁷ I urge you, brothers and sisters, **to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way** that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. **Keep away from them.** ¹⁸ For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. By smooth talk and flattery they deceive the minds of naive people.

The gospel must remain pure to remain powerful. In fact, any attempt to add to or subtract from this is scandalous and damnable. This is when a local church carries out what we commonly call, “Church Discipline.” Second, once you have been forgiven, forgiving others is the natural consequence. Every other offense pales in comparison to our offense before God that He forgave in the person and work of Jesus. In fact, the JESUS SEED of being FORGIVEN always produces the GOSPEL FRUIT of FORGIVENESS. We will expand on this when we deal with Matthew 18:21-35.

1. What is the **author’s structure** of this passage? Please a) show *sections with verse references*, b) state the *author’s emphasis*, and c) explain what *strategies* you used to see this structure.

I. The Extreme Question - “Who is the Greatest?” (v. 1)

- “At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, ‘Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?’” (Matt. 18:1).

Matthew 18:1. At the same time — When Jesus had just foretold his own sufferings, death, and resurrection; came the disciples, saying, Who is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?⁴ When you set these two in contrast, it would drive any sane person batty.

Verse 1. - **At the same time; literally, in that hour.** The narrator connects the following important discourse with the circumstances just previously related. Peter had completed the business of the didrachma, and had rejoined the body of disciples. These, according to St. Mark, had disputed about precedence on the way to Capernaum. Fired with the notion that their Master would before long publicly assert his Messianic claims, which, in their view, implied temporal sovereignty and secular power, they looked forward to becoming dignitaries in this new kingdom.⁵

By noting the time sequence, Matthew highlights the brazen inappropriateness of the disciples. Our response to such insensitivity is, “How could you be so stupid.” Yet we must forever see ourselves as these stumbling, bumbling disciples. Not a one of us beyond or above this.

Jesus will revisit this idea of greatness in Matthew 20:20-28 and 23:11. He will tie greatness to servanthood. The problem of posturing, pride, and power is nothing new. It drove the devil and it drives us. The key is to recognize it for what it is and put it to death. **Greatness is a consequence of humility; humility is not a consequence of greatness.**

- II. The Extreme Answer (vv. 2-4) – deny, die, follow / “Unless you become like a child you won’t even enter the Kingdom” [They are worried about being great and Jesus is only speaking of getting in.] The negation in Greek (οὐ μὴ, *ou mē*) is very strong here.

In fact,

- It would be better to die physically, than to lead someone [i.e. a child] away from believing in Jesus spiritually (vv. 5, 6).
 - It would be better to live physically maimed and enter the kingdom, than to die physically “whole” and enter into hell (vv. 7-9).
 - God is passionately pursuing to restore the “one child” who has strayed from the flock (vv. 10-14).
 - The local church is to guard the purity of the gospel.
- ²“And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them ³and said, “Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. ⁴Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 18:2-4).

HUMILITY AND THE GOSPEL

The above two statements are in synonymous parallelism. The quality emphasized is that of humility. Humility will run throughout this entire chapter. What is the idea expressed and how does this tie into Matthew 11:28-30 and Matthew 16:24-28? We think of humility as one of condescension, of stooping. But the idea emphasized is not so much a stooping down, but a reaching up. When you and I accept Jesus as Messiah, we are not condescending. We are not stooping down. When we accept Jesus as Messiah, we are reaching up. We are not stepping out of anything. We are being pulled up into.

We have painted salvation by the negative of deny, die, and follow. But such actions are only sacrifices if we were giving up some good for something less good. Salvation is giving up the bad and embracing the good. The humility in our passage and running throughout Matthew’s gospel is a humility that says, “I can’t.” This humility is a recognition that everything the Scripture says of us is true. We are children of Adam and as such lawbreakers. There is nothing we can do to undo what he and we have done. We are sinners in need of a Savior. This is what the Jews and the Greeks found so offensive.

- ²³“But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; ²⁴But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God” (1 Cor. 1:23, 24).

When we come to Jesus, we come as those who have nothing to give and everything to gain. We come as dead people asking to be resurrected into life. This is the humility described in our text. We will see that same kind of humility in Matthew 18:21-35. When you fully understand just how spiritually bankrupt you were, you can no longer hold others in bondage. When Christians forgive those who have despitely used them, they are embracing the humility it took to come to Jesus and the humility that continues to mark them.

THE LITTLE ONES

The “little ones” are in contrast to those who are wise and understanding (Matt. 11:25-27; 21:16 [nepios]). Jesus draws a sharp line between those who propose a way of salvation outside of Him and those who embrace Him as the way, the truth, and the life. **The little ones are those who have no self-deception of self-reliance.** The teaching of self-salvation or somehow working with God in the saving of your soul is scandalous and damnable. The only way to enter the Kingdom of Heaven is recognizing that “you can’t, but God can, and Jesus did.” Anything other than this is scandalous and damnable. **Unless and until you humble yourself by accepting who you really are and who He really is, you cannot be saved.** The Greek construction of the double negative communicates significant force. He is not offering an option among options. He is saying unless or until this happens nothing else will come of it.

“In response, Jesus offers a profound critique of their very question. He calls a child, places the child among them, and tells them that unless they change and become as little children, they will never even enter the kingdom (18:3; **Matthew uses the strong double negative, *ou mé***). As long as they are concerned about their own status, they have missed the point completely. A child in the ancient world was without status or rights, completely dependent on the good will of others to care for him or her. Notice that Jesus does not tell the disciples that they should have faith like a little child -- as if they could conjure up this kind of faith on their own -- but that they need to become like little children. Jesus further specifies what this means in the following verse: “Whoever humbles themselves like this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 18:4). It is giving up claims to power and status and knowing one’s total dependence on God that counts as greatness in the kingdom of heaven.”⁶

“Except ye be converted.—The English word expresses the force of the Greek, but the ‘conversion’ spoken of was not used in the definite, half-technical sense of later religious experiences. **What was needed was that they should ‘turn’ from their self-seeking ambition,** and regain, in this respect, the relative blamelessness of children. Ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.—**The force of the words as spoken to the Twelve can hardly be exaggerated. They were disputing about precedence in the kingdom, and in that very dispute they were showing that they were not truly in it. It was essentially spiritual, and its first condition was abnegation of self.**”⁷

Think of Matthew 16:24-28. Until you die to self, you will not live in His kingdom.

- III. The Extreme Warning [i.e. Scandal] – the scandal is offering something other than Jesus. Folks, remember, there is no one beside Him and there is nothing beyond Him. It is Jesus plus nothing equals everything and everything minus Jesus equals nothing. Keeping people out / “Do not become an obstacle to the gospel.” i.e., Pharisees, etc.

The idea of scandal runs throughout this chapter. What then is the scandal?

SKANDALIZO

Causes / skandalizo (vv. 6, 8, 9 [stumbling block])

- ⁶ but whoever **causes** one of these little ones who believe in Me **to stumble**, it would be better for him to have a heavy millstone hung around his neck, and to be drowned in the depth of the sea.
- ⁸ "If your hand or your foot **causes you to stumble**, cut it off and throw it from you; it is better for you to enter life crippled or lame, than to have two hands or two feet and be cast into the eternal fire.
- ⁹ "If your eye **causes you to stumble**, pluck it out and throw it from you. It is better for you to enter life with one eye, than to have two eyes and be cast into the fiery hell.

Temptation / skandalon (v. 7 / 3 times)

- ⁷ "Woe to the world because of its **stumbling blocks**! For it is inevitable that **stumbling blocks** come; but woe to that man through whom the **stumbling block** comes!

Despise / kataphroneo, "to think against, to disesteem" (v. 10)

- The scandal consists of blocking others from entering the Kingdom of Heaven. This is what the Pharisees, Scribes, and Sadducees were doing. The Religious establishment was keeping people from entering the kingdom of God. They are the recipients of the WOE (cf. Matt. 23:13-28). The stumbling block is either causing one to stop believing or keeping them from believing at all.
 - ¹³ "But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, **because you shut off the kingdom of heaven from people; for you do not enter in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in.**
- **The great scandal is to teach works righteousness.** Such a teaching strips Jesus of His person, work, purpose, and mission.
- The great scandal that is unforgiveable is to teach that somehow you can do what Jesus only does.
- That is the offense that demands church discipline. Anything that would divert the church from carrying forward this message is to be checked at the door.

What does this mean? We should do whatever is necessary to make sure **we are in, and enabling as many as possible to get in.** We must fight for and be persistent in keeping the gospel clear and distinct.

What does this defense for the gospel look like?

IV. The Extreme Response – Drown (v. 6), cut off (v. 8), put out (v. 17)

- 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 [open] sea.**
- 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^l of fire.**
- ¹⁷ If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, **let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.**

I believe two of the three statements are hyperbole. They are over reaching to show the abject horror of what is happening. What is it that would require such extreme responses? There is only one thing that would call us to such excessive action and it is when we add to or subtract from **the** gospel that is sourced solely in the person and work of Jesus.

Friends, I think our failure as Christians is unfortunate and that sin can be catastrophic in the horizontal, but nothing compares to the tampering of the gospel. When we add to the gospel with works righteousness or subtract from the gospel the element of humility, denying, dying, and following, we have heard the clarion call to kill that thing.

V. The Extreme Mission (vv. 6, 10-14)

God the Father is on Mission. He sent His Son into the world to save the world. Notice the intensity of the pursuer. He leaves what He has to gain what is lost. Verse 11 is a summary statement of the gospel's intrinsic aggressive nature. **The gospel goes out. The gospel is incapable of being contained. Its very fiber and fabric pursues and invites.** This is what anyone who or anything that tampers with or thins out the gospel is to be aggressively addressed.

It is this gospel that saves you and it is this gospel that sustains you. No matter what your issue is on this plane, when you go back to the gospel your problem begins to work itself out. And that gospel work will always begin in you first.

[Matthew 18:21-35 is FOR FUTURE STUDY]

VI. Forgive "Anything other than gospel scandal is to be forgiven." (vv. 21-35).

- Anything less than this is to be forgiven (vv. 21-35). Once we have tasted of God's goodness in Christ, it is the same offering we extend to others.
- Think the LORD'S PRAYER. Christian forgiveness flows readily from Christians being forgiven.

"AGAINST YOU"

- "If your brother **sins against you**, go and tell him his faulty" (vv. 15-20)
- "Lord, how often will my brother **sin against me**, and I forgive him?" (vv. 21-35)
- It is the exact same construction. What is the same? What is different?

Author's Emphasis:

The gospel is *the* clear and direct path to God. Anything else is scandalous and damnable. The gospel is all encompassing. Anything that would take away from the gospel is scandalous and avoided at all cost.

Author's Strategies:

Word repetition such as "little children," "scandal," and "forgive" occur throughout. There appears to be a logical thread connecting the multiple parts.

2. How does the **context inform the meaning** of this passage? Answer this question using a) the *literary context* (the passages on either side), b) the *historical context* (circumstances and culture of the audience), and c) the *biblical context* (connections to other places in the Bible).

Literary Context:

This chapter is the fourth of five teaching chapters.

This chapter is the end of the section, "THE KING'S PATHWAY REVEALED." Jesus has just told His disciples that He is going to die, be buried, and rise again the third day. All they heard was, "He is going to die."

Historical Context:

The religious establishment was resistant to Jesus. They sought His demise.

Biblical Context:

The Pharisees were, through their teaching, keeping people from entering the kingdom of heaven. This text is an indirect assault against the religious establishment of His day.

3. In light of the emphasis of this passage in its context, state the **author's main idea** for *his audience* (in one short sentence).

Do not add to or subtract from the simple path to Jesus.

4. What parts of this passage **connect to the gospel** of Jesus Christ? What *particular facet of the gospel* is in view? [What are its Christological / Christo-centric contributions?]

The gospel *is the person and work of Jesus Christ.*

The gospel is *the* clear and direct path to God; anything else is scandalous and damnable.

Jesus has cleared the way to God. We are not to clutter that path with our "junk."

5. In light of your gospel connection, what **argument** (one short sentence) will you make to **your audience**? What **applications** from this argument will you make for the believer? The unbeliever?

To the believing: Keep the gospel cleared of congestion and clutter.

To the unbelieving: Jesus is the only way into the kingdom of heaven.

Shepherding the Sheep: (WHAT'S NEXT?)

1. Know the gospel path [small tract].
2. Keep the path cleared of congestion and clutter.
3. We are to fight against anyone or anything that would congest or clutter the clear gospel path.

¹ <https://deeperstudy.com/hyperbole-and-overstatement-as-tools-for-deeper/>

² <https://bible.org/seriespage/26-life-under-kingdom-authority-matthew-18>

³ <https://concordiatheology.org/2011/07/proper-18-%E2%80%A2-matthew-18:1-20-%E2%80%A2-september-4-2011/>

⁴ Benson Commentary on Matthew 18:1.

⁵ Pulpit Commentary on Matthew 18:1-35.

⁶ https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=2355

⁷ Ellicott's Commentary for English Readers on Matthew 18:3.