

14th Sunday after Pentecost September 6, 2020

13th Sunday after Trinity Proper 18 (23)
Lectionary Year A – the Gospel of Matthew

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<https://steadfastlutherans.org/2017/09/dealing-drastically-with-sin-sermon-on-matthew-181-20-by-pr-charles-henrickson/>

Hymn of the Day

Lutheran Service Book (LSB) 820 The Lutheran Hymnal (TLH) 34

“My soul, now praise your Maker”

“Intended as a paraphrase of Psalm 103, “My Soul” has a royal history. Martin Chemnitz knew that this hymn was commissioned by Albrecht the Elder, Duke of Prussia, a supporter of the Lutheran Reformation and of Luther himself. Psalm 103 was the Duke’s favorite psalm. This hymn was a favorite of Swedish king Gustavus Adolphus. A hymn of consolation, it was sung in thanksgiving for the conclusion of the Thirty Years’ War by Christians in Osnabrück, Westphalia. Author Johann Gramann (1487–1541) was known at the time for his preaching and pastoral care, as well as church visitation and the establishment of Lutheran schools. Today his hymn of praise, one of the earliest Lutheran hymns, lives on in Lutheran Service Book (LSB)...” study by Paul J. Cain

- <https://www.lcms.org/worship/hymn-of-the-day-studies>
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dexUSRk0_uE Organ, (NUN LOB, MEIN SEEL) from the Lutheran Service Book #820 with improvised introduction. [Jeff Windoloski](#)
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7br1D4gtkZs> Heirs of the Reformation: Treasures of the Singing Church © 2008 Concordia Publishing House
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fmRp--LRhY0> A variation on melody and tempo. “Metrical Psalm 103 setting from the second day of the 2019 Pastors Conference at Church of the Redeemer in West Monroe, LA... Tune by Heinrich Schütz(1661).”

Commentaries have been chosen because the author has written in a way that compliments the reading. Not all of the commentaries are from Lutheran sources. They have been edited for length and in some cases for additional content that is not in keeping with a Lutheran understanding of Scripture. Links are provided for those who wish to read the entire commentary.

The Holy Bible, English Standard Version. ESV® Text Edition: 2016. Copyright © 2001
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O. T. - “So you, son of man, I have made a watchman”

Psalm – “Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven”

Epistle – “there is no authority except from God”

Gospel – *“unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.”*

Ezekiel 33:7-9; Revised Common Lectionary (RCL), Exodus 12:1-14 or Ezekiel 33:7-11 (Next week: Genesis 50:15-21; RCL, Exodus 14:19-31 or Genesis 50:15-21)

“I think it is important to point out that being a watchman back then was quite different from being a watchman today. Today a watchman or a security guard is in not a very well-paid or esteemed position at all, but in those days it was. In fact, the watchman was one of the most well-paid and prominent people in town. He was the key figure in the defense of a city. It was his job to station himself high atop the city wall and to act as a sentry, scanning the horizon for any would-be attackers that might come to molest the people. The moment he saw anything suspicious, he was supposed to immediately take out his ram’s horn and blow the warning signal, so that the citizens in the field could retreat to the safety of the city walls and the men could prepare for battle. Any failure on the part of the watchman would often result in death,

either death for many or all the members of his city or his own death, because if he failed to do his job he would be executed, because he was considered liable for the lives of the people. If the watchman didn't blow the warning signal and someone got killed on account of it, he would be judged a murderer and the victim's next of kin would be obligated to avenge the wrong by stoning the watchman to death!..(continued after the reading)

Ezekiel Is Israel's Watchman Verses 1-9

⁷ “So you, son of man, I have made a watchman for the house of Israel. Whenever you hear a word from my mouth, you shall give them warning from me. ⁸ If I say to the wicked, O wicked one, you shall surely die, and you do not speak to warn the wicked to turn from his way, that wicked person shall die in his iniquity, but his blood I will require at your hand. ⁹ But if you warn the wicked to turn from his way, and he does not turn from his way, that person shall die in his iniquity, but you will have delivered your soul.

Why Will You Die, Israel? Verses 10-20

¹⁰ *“And you, son of man, say to the house of Israel, Thus have you said: ‘Surely our transgressions and our sins are upon us, and we rot away because of them. How then can we live?’ ¹¹ Say to them, As I live, declares the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways, for why will you die, O house of Israel?”*

Jerusalem Struck Down Verses 21-33

- a. [Ezekiel 33:12](#) Hebrew *by it*
- b. [Ezekiel 33:32](#) Hebrew *like the singing of lustful songs with a beautiful voice and one who plays*

“Now I don’t know about you, but if I were Ezekiel I might have been inclined to ask God to look for someone else to do the job, because it was so risky. Sure, it was prestigious and well-paying to be a watchman, but it sure doesn’t sound like it would be worth the risk, if you should happen to make a mistake. However, we must remember that Ezekiel was called by God, not to be a military watchman, but a spiritual one. He didn’t have to stand on top of a wall and blow a ram’s horn. Instead, he had to stand firmly on the Holy Scriptures and proclaim the truth of God’s Holy Word.

In many respects that’s an even more weighty responsibility. Being a spiritual watchman is a very serious endeavor – so much so, that God gave Ezekiel the following caution:

If I say to the wicked, O wicked one, you shall surely die, and you do not speak to warn the wicked to turn from his way, that wicked person shall die in his iniquity, but his blood I will require at your hand. But if you warn the wicked to turn from his way, and he does not turn from his way, that person shall die in his iniquity, but you will have delivered your [own]soul.

According to these words, Ezekiel as the spiritual watchman would be held accountable by God. He was not just looking out for the people's physical welfare, but for their spiritual welfare, which, in many ways, was more important. It is an extremely serious matter, because his failure to warn would not just result in people's physical or temporal death, but their spiritual or eternal death in hell, which was and still is much worse.

Surprisingly enough though, Ezekiel did not withdraw his application. He gladly took on the job of spiritual watchman for the House of Israel. And by the power of God the Holy Spirit, he did what God gave him to do. He made it his business to warn the wicked to turn away from their sinful ways, to repent and to believe and trust in the Lord God of Israel so that they would not surely die, but live eternally with Him..."

- <https://www.hclchr.org/posts/sermon-texts/7-september-2014-gods-watchmen-ezekiel-33-7-9>
Rev. Bruce Skelton, Holy Cross Lutheran Church, Highlands Ranch, Colorado

Psalm 32:1-7; RCL, Psalm 149 or Psalm 119:33-40 (Psalm 103:1-12; RCL, Psalm 114/Exodus 15:1b-11,20-21 or Psalm 103:1-7)

Also used on the 4th Sunday in Lent, Year C.

"It is told of Luther that one day being asked which of all the Psalms were the best, he made answer, "Psalmi Paulini," and when his friends pressed to know which these might be, he said, "The 32nd, the 51st, the 130th, and the 143rd. For they all teach that the forgiveness of our sins comes, without the law and without works, to the man who believes, and therefore I call them Pauline Psalms; and David sings, 'There is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared,' this is just what Paul says, 'God hath concluded them all in unbelief, that he might have mercy upon all.' Romans 11:32. Thus no man may boast of his own righteousness. That word, 'That thou mayest be feared,' dusts away all merit, and teaches us to uncover our heads before God, and confess gratia est, non meritum: remissio, non satisfactio; it is mere forgiveness, not merit at all."

- <https://www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/treasury-of-david/psalms-32-1.html>
Luther's Table Talk.

Blessed Are the Forgiven A Maskil^[a] of David. Verses 1-11

32 Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven,
whose sin is covered.

2 Blessed is the man against whom the LORD counts no iniquity,
and in whose spirit there is no deceit.

3 For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away
through my groaning all day long.

4 For day and night your hand was heavy upon me;
my strength was dried up^[b] as by the heat of summer. **Selah**

⁵ I acknowledged my sin to you,
and I did not cover my iniquity;
I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD,"
and you forgave the iniquity of my sin. **Selah**

⁶ Therefore let everyone who is godly
offer prayer to you at a time when you may be found;
surely in the rush of great waters,
they shall not reach him.

⁷ You are a hiding place for me;
you preserve me from trouble;
you surround me with shouts of deliverance. **Selah...**

⁹ *Be not like a horse or a mule, without understanding,
which must be curbed with bit and bridle,
or it will not stay near you...*

- a. [Psalm 32:1](#) Probably a musical or liturgical term
- b. [Psalm 32:4](#) Hebrew *my vitality was changed*

“The term Maschil is prefixed to thirteen Psalms. Our translators have not ventured to do more, in the text, than simply print the word in English characters; in the margin however they render it, as the Geneva version had done before them, "to give instruction." It would be going too far to affirm that this interpretation is subject to no doubt. Some good Hebraists take exception to it; so that, perhaps, our venerable translators did well to leave it untranslated. Still the interpretation they have set down in the margin, as it is in the most ancient, so it is sustained by the great preponderance of authority. It agrees remarkably with the contents of the thirty-second Psalm, which affords the earliest instance of its use, for that Psalm is preeminently didactic. Its scope is to instruct the convicted soul how to obtain peace with God, and be compassed about with songs of deliverance.”

- <https://www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/treasury-of-david/psalms-32-1.html> William Binnie, D.D., in "The Psalms: Their History, Teachings, and Use," 1870.

Indeed, if I were to preach on this text, my sermon would be entitled “The Cover Up,” not only because David uses that word as part of his confession (verse 5), but also because that’s the word he uses to describe God’s forgiveness of his sin. “Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered.” Further, the idea of being covered is suggested by David’s description of his post-forgiveness faith experience. “You are my hiding place; you will protect me from trouble...” (verse 7) That reminded me of Moses hiding in the cleft of the Rock in Exodus 33, where God covered him with his hand as God passed by in all his glory. That, in turn, made me think of how Adam and Eve covered themselves with fig leaves after they fell into sin, and how God replaced their hastily devised cover up with skins from

slain animals. That intimation of blood being shed reminded me of that famous text in Heb. 9:22, “without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.” ...

...Let’s follow David’s train of thought. While the whole subject of the confession of sin sounds like a real downer, David clearly did not experience or explain it that way. His first word is a twice repeated “blessed,” and his last words are a call to sing and rejoice. In a world that follows a million different paths to happiness, David had discovered that there is no happiness in the deepest sense of being “blessed” without an open and honest confession of sin. Indeed, the Bible is filled with these Beatitudes, but Psalm 32 suggests that forgiveness by God is the first and principal basis for a truly happy life. That will come as news to a world wearing fig leaves and hiding from God. David’s words about confession and forgiveness are not an invitation to writhe in moral misery or to wallow in guilt or to blush with shame, but to sing for joy over the blessing of forgiveness.

David ends his opening riff on the blessedness of being forgiveness with a word that is crucial to forgiveness. Blessed is the person “in whose spirit there is no deceit.” That is the human secret of forgiveness; that is what God requires of us in the mysterious transaction of forgiveness. We must come to God with no deceit—not with no sin (that, after all, is why we must confess), but with no deceit. In what follows we discover that deceit can take **two forms**.

First, and most obviously, deceit can take the form of covering up our sin with a code of silence... Through his suffering David experienced the hand of God upon him, not in grace, but in judgment. Does that mean that every episode of suffering is a judgment of God upon our sin? Of course not! Job and Jesus teach us not to think that way. But when we keep guilty silence, we do experience the heavy hand of God, even if we don’t know what we’re feeling.

The way to the blessedness of forgiveness, says David, is to stop being deceitful, and that means breaking the silence...

“But there’s a **second way** we can be deceitful with regard to our confession of sin. We can be deceitful in the very act of confession— if it is a routine shallow mouthing of words, or if it is a thoughtless easy presumption on God’s forgiveness, or, more subtly, if we see our confession as an act of righteousness that earns God’s forgiveness. The honest truth is that God forgives us not because we confess our sins, but because Jesus’ blood and righteousness covers that sin...

David wanted to be sure that his awful/wonderful experience wouldn’t get lost in the mist of history, so he wrote this Psalm to instruct all Israel. In his speech to God, David is also addressing us. “Therefore, let everyone who is godly pray to you (in this fashion) while you may be found.”...

...Those who are upright in heart (because they have stopped being deceitful in spirit) can sing with joy to the Lord. That’s how a sermon on this penitential Psalm should be framed and preached—as a call to the joy of forgiveness, which comes only to those who walk the Via Dolorosa of deep, honest, open, intensely personal confession of sins. That’s the paradoxical Good News of Psalm 32. Those who uncover their sins before God will experience the joy of having their sins covered by God’s grace in Christ.

➤ https://cep.calvinseminary.edu/sermon-starters/lent-4c/?type=the_lectionary_psalms

Stan Mast

Romans 13:1-10; RCL, Romans 13:8-14 (Romans 14:1-12; RCL, the same reading)

Verses 8-14 are also used one the First Sunday in Advent, Year A

“At the time Paul wrote this letter, Nero publicized his rule as the dawn of a golden age. Yet, privately, there were rumors that his mother had poisoned Claudius, her husband and uncle, to secure the throne for her son. Nero himself joked about the poisoning, saying that Claudius became a god by eating a mushroom. A poisoned mushroom. While there were suspicions of assassination and conspiracy and a fearful use of power, Nero pictured himself early on as one who promoted peace. What the public heard about Nero is that he was a peaceful man, but privately what people whispered about him revealed their darkest fears.

Imagine the difficulty this posed for Christians. How do you relate to the civil authorities when publicly they say one thing and privately do another? How do you obey, as a Christian, when it seems like the rulers you are asked to obey are obscured by propaganda so you never know the truth? The question is as relevant for Christians today as it was for Christians in Rome. In many countries around the world, this is a struggle that Christians have to face. Unfortunately, our is become more and more like ancient pagan Rome...

The apostle Paul, however, offers another way. Paul knows of two kingdoms, two ways in which God is at work in the world. Earlier in the letter, Paul has recognized God’s gift of the church. The church is the means whereby God proclaims salvation to the world, that good news that the kingdom of God is here in Jesus. This is not earthly kingdom, but a heavenly one, an eternal one. Through the Gospel, God has called you into that kingdom and, though this world and Satan himself should fight against it, the gates of hell itself will not prevail. When you walk through the valley of the shadow of death, this Jesus is with you. Through Him, you live. In Him, you die. And by Him, you will be raised to eternal life...”

- <https://www.zionlutherannampa.com/posts/sermons/romans-13-1-10-living-in-faithful-obedience> Pastor Ross Shaver Zion Lutheran Church, School and Daycare, Nampa, ID

Submission to the Authorities Verses 1-7

13 Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. **2** Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. **3** For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, **4** for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer. **5** Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience. **6** For because of this you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this

very thing. ⁷ Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed.

Fulfilling the Law Through Love Verses 8-14

⁸ Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. ⁹ For the commandments, “You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet,” and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” ¹⁰ Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.

¹¹ Besides this you know the time, that the hour has come for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed. ¹² The night is far gone; the day is at hand. So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light. ¹³ Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy. ¹⁴ But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

“In the first part of Romans 13, Paul addresses what those in the Christian community owe the civil authorities.

He writes, "Pay to all what is due them -- taxes to whom taxes are due, revenue to whom revenue is due, respect to whom respect is due, honor to whom honor is due" (Romans 13:7, NET).

Many readers of Paul's letters worry that the first half of this chapter can be easily appropriated by corrupt governments or misguided clergy to silence Christians who might otherwise courageously, faithfully resist systemic evil. In fact, the text has been used in this way. The ease with which Romans 13:1-7 is misunderstood may explain its absence from the Revised Common Lectionary.

From Obligation to Love

However, Paul is not counseling the Roman Christians to passivity vis-à-vis the Empire. In the second half of the chapter, Paul moves from the language of tax returns to the language of love. "Owe no one anything, except to love one another" (13:8). With the mention of love, the scope of the imperative has changed. No longer is Paul talking about paying bills, but rather about seeking the neighbor's highest good.

This transition -- the move from fulfilling one's obligations to living in love -- is the same one Jesus made in the Sermon on the Mount when he said, "You have heard it said..., but I say to

you" (cf. Matthew 5:21-48). "You have heard it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you..." (Matthew 5:43-44, NRSV).

The language of the balance sheet does not adequately describe the Christian life. Why? Because we are children of God, and God sends rain on the just and the unjust (cf. Matthew 5:45) and otherwise gives to the undeserving..."

- http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=1061 [Mary Hinkle Shore](#)
Rector and Dean, Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary, Columbia, S.C.

Read the Wikipedia article of how verses 1-8 have been used though out history to justify actions. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Romans_13

Matthew 18:1-20; RCL, Matthew 18:15-20 (Matthew 18:21-35; RCL, the same reading)

(You might want to read Chapter 17 since the lectionary skips it entirely.)

A focus on Jesus' identity in Matthew 17 now gives way to the identity of Jesus-followers. Matthew 18 is commonly and appropriately identified as the "community discourse" because of its attention to the identity of and interactions among Jesus-followers.

The emphasis on communal relationships and identity is important for the way of the cross that Jesus' followers are to live (Matthew 16:24)..."

- https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=3867
[Warren Carter](#) Professor of New Testament, Brite Divinity School, Fort Worth, Texas

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"This is not an easy message for us to hear today. We do not take sin nearly seriously enough as we should. We do not take drastic, radical action to deal with the sin in our lives. Our repentance is a light and surfacey thing. It doesn't last. It doesn't take. But in Jesus' view, which is God's view, sin is a very serious matter, and we need to deal drastically with it. In our text today, from Matthew 18, Jesus warns us not to take sin lightly. Instead, he teaches us to take decisive, drastic action to deal with it..."

- <https://steadfastlutherans.org/2017/09/dealing-drastically-with-sin-sermon-on-matthew-181-20-by-pr-charles-henrickson/> Pastor Charles Henrickson

"The Holy Gospel beginning in the 18th Chapter of St. Matthew"

Who Is the Greatest? Verses 1-6 Rank in the Kingdom*

18 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,^[a] 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.

Temptations to Sin Verses 7-9 *Stumbling Blocks* *American Standard Bible

7 “Woe to the world for temptations to sin!^[b] 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^[c] of fire.

The Parable of the Lost Sheep Verses 10-14

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.^[d] 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^[e] Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish.

If Your Brother Sins Against You Verses 15-20 *Discipline and Prayer**

15 “If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. 16 But if he does 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 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. ¹⁸ Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed¹⁹ 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.”

The Parable of the Unforgiving Servant Verses 21-35 (Proper 19)

- a. [Matthew 18:6](#) Greek *causes... to stumble*; also verses [8](#), [9](#)
- b. [Matthew 18:7](#) Greek *stumbling blocks*
- c. [Matthew 18:9](#) Greek *Gehenna*
- d. [Matthew 18:10](#) Some manuscripts add verse [11](#): *For the Son of Man came to save the lost*
- e. [Matthew 18:14](#) Some manuscripts *your*
- f. [Matthew 18:18](#) Or *shall have been bound... shall have been loosed*
- g. [Matthew 18:23](#) Or *bondservants*; also verses [28](#), [31](#)
- h. [Matthew 18:24](#) A *talent* was a monetary unit worth about twenty years' wages for a laborer
- i. [Matthew 18:26](#) Or *bondservant*, also verses [27](#), [28](#), [29](#), [32](#), [33](#)
- j. [Matthew 18:28](#) A *denarius* was a day's wage for a laborer
- k. [Matthew 18:34](#) Greek *torturers*

***Section titles and footnotes in New American Standard Bible**

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|---|--|
| 1. Matthew 18:1 Lit <i>hour</i> | 11. Matthew 18:15 Late mss add <i>against you</i> |
| 2. Matthew 18:2 Lit <i>in their midst</i> | 12. Matthew 18:15 Or <i>reprove</i> |
| 3. Matthew 18:3 Lit <i>are turned</i> | 13. Matthew 18:15 Lit <i>between you and him alone</i> |
| 4. Matthew 18:6 Lit <i>is better</i> | 14. Matthew 18:16 Lit <i>word</i> |
| 5. Matthew 18:6 Lit <i>millstone turned by a donkey</i> | 15. Matthew 18:17 Lit <i>the</i> |
| 6. Matthew 18:8 Lit <i>having</i> ; Gr part. | 16. Matthew 18:17 Lit <i>the</i> |
| 7. Matthew 18:9 Lit <i>having</i> ; Gr part. | 17. Matthew 18:18 Or <i>forbid</i> |
| 8. Matthew 18:9 Lit <i>Gehenna of fire</i> | 18. Matthew 18:18 Gr fut. pft. pass. |
| 9. Matthew 18:11 Early mss do not contain this v | 19. Matthew 18:18 Or <i>permit</i> |
| 10. Matthew 18:14 Lit <i>before</i> | 20. Matthew 18:18 Gr fut. pft. pass. |
| | 21. Matthew 18:19 Lit <i>from</i> |

“This is the Gospel of the Lord” “Praise to You, O Christ”

The Gospel that we just read from Matthew 18 is very rich in a wide variety of topics: the serious nature of sin, the generosity of God's forgiveness, the love God has for His little ones, and the serious consequences of leading His little ones astray. Of all these topics, the one topic that seems to underlie most of the Lord's teaching in Matthew 18 is the topic of Christ's little ones.

Matthew 18 begins with one of those teachable moments in which the disciples plant their feet firmly in their mouths and ask Jesus a question. At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" This question tells us that the disciples don't get it. They are still trying to figure out which post they will have in Jesus' cabinet once He takes over.

Jesus' teaching defuses this kind of thinking. And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them and said, "Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Jesus did not choose one of the disciples, but a child. Here Jesus teaches that the one who is humble like a child is the greatest in the Kingdom.

As we proceed through the rest of Matthew 18, Jesus expands on His teaching about children. "Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, 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." That is pretty serious. The type of millstone that Jesus describes here needs a donkey to turn it and would weigh more than a ton.

Jesus also said, "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.

Even as Jesus tells the story of searching for the one lost sheep out of one hundred, He tells us, "So it is not the will of my Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish."

When Jesus talks of the little ones, He is of course, talking about those who are biologically young. Even so, we can also apply what Jesus says to those who are young in the faith - that is new believers no matter what their age.

God has always given a high priority to learning His word and in passing that Word on to the next generation. [Deuteronomy 6:6-9] "These words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. [Proverbs 22:6] Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it. [Matthew 28:19-20] Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you..."

➤ <http://lcmssermons.com/?sn=1051> James T. Batchelor Good Shepherd Lutheran Church Hoopeston, IL

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"...the very thing that God exalts and lifts up in this morning's text by our Lord Jesus. Because God exalts and lifts up childlikeness, but not childishness. The problem that lies therein is that you and I, we fall, for most of us, in the big fat realm of childishness. Neither are we at the very twilight of our life where we begin to realize and are very aware of the frailty of our bodies and our souls, and neither are we at that toddler or infant stage or younger where we are also very aware of adults who are older than we and who know more than we and we gladly yield to their wisdom. Rather, we are in the fat middle where childishness abounds...

So when Jesus, amongst these great twelve, *the chosen*, who for time immemorial will always be remembered in God's Holy Gospel because they were *the twelve*. In the midst of these twelve great men who had lots of childish attitudes and attributes of which Scripture is very replete, does God in Christ Jesus bring a child and says, "This is what it is to be the greatest."

Look at even what Jesus does. He doesn't take a child and bring him. He calls the child. The child obediently listens and comes. Doesn't ask why. Doesn't ask, "What is it going to cost me?" ... "And yet, that's how you and I think in terms when someone asks for us. And that's also what we heard and what came out of our mouths when we heard it from our own children, and it came out of our mouths when we were their age..."

You see, when God went to look for the one, leaving the ninety-nine on the hillside, the one having been found by God was extremely embarrassed because he or she had been caught having had to admit they were in the wrong. They went out too far. They shot their mouth off. They burned their bridges behind them. They committed what they did.

How does your Father receive such a sheep as you back? Because the only kind of sheep that He receives back are the lost ones, the ones who know that they're lost, who know that they're childish. He seeks you in your childishness, in your petty grievances, in your family histories of grumblings, and so on. In your marriages, he seeks your brokenness. He seeks you in all the things of which you are embarrassed and of which you wish not to confess to Him. He seeks that kind of a person. That's the only kind He seeks, because that's the kind who knows that they're lost but are fearful of the receiving back that the Father has.

The good news? You and I have it. It's just continually coming back and realizing again, *Yes, Lord, You're right. Without You, I am childish. With You, I am childlike and dependent upon the One from whom my life and soul is sustained.*"

- <https://www.stpaulaustin.org/sermons/childlike-not-childish/> Rev. Dr. Mark S. Nuckols, Senior Pastor Saint Paul Lutheran Church, Austin, TX

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The passage (18:15-20) is situated shortly after Jesus' exhortation to exhibit concern for the "little ones," those who are afforded the least power within the dominant community (Matthew 18:1-9). Jesus focuses attention on their vulnerability by centering a child "in the middle" of the disciples. He proclaims that it would be better to be thrown into the sea with a millstone around one's neck than to place a "stumbling block" before such a one. It is a strong indictment against attitudes and practices that obstruct human flourishing for all of God's children, regardless of chronological age. In today's *parlance*, perhaps Jesus might have said to the disciples, "Check your privilege, people."

Immediately before our passage, Jesus connects these "little ones" to the parable of the sheep, for whose sake the shepherd leaves 99 in order to seek the one (Matthew 18:10-14). In Matthew's version of the parable, there is no hint that the single sheep is more sinful than the 99, nor that it is in any way inferior to the others.¹ It has simply been "led astray." No cause is given... Just as the child matters to Jesus, the lone sheep matters to the shepherd.

Both teachings focus the church's attention on those who face the larger risks, or have the least power and the most to lose, or who find themselves to be in a dangerous or vulnerable situation—often through no fault of their own. The process of truth-telling and accountability enjoined in this passage best takes place with careful attention to the church's

call to protect the disempowered and/or vulnerable ones, walking alongside in solidarity as they speak up about the harm they have experienced.

...Jesus' point seems to be that insofar as it is possible, his followers are responsible for assuring accountability while also safeguarding those who are most vulnerable or at risk.

- http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=4558 Audrey West Visiting Associate Professor of New Testament; Project Administrator, Moravian Clergy Connections, Moravian Theological Seminary, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania

Matthew 18:15-20

2017-09-06 — “And if your brother sins against you, smile through clenched teeth and tell him everything is just fine.” – Matthew 18:15, The Revised Passive Aggressive Version [RPAV]



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The Matthew Challenge It is 28 chapters long (1071 verses or 18,345 words, subject to the translation). Break that down to a schedule that works for you. If you are starting now, your new pace is 2.3 chapters per week (up from 2 weeks per chapter), or about 13 verses per day (up from three verses per day.) Ready to start?

Weekly review thoughts

