

# The Gospel According to Matthew



## Part 2

Thanks to my Uncle Geoff, who showed me the character and love of Christ, I'll see you in heaven at the Lord's side.

**General Editor**

Joe Donaldson

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**Layout & Printing**

Josh Penny

**Editors**

Lori Ivarson

Jason Long

**Cover Design by Russ Pate**

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# King Jesus Wakes Us Up

## Matthew 17:14-21

The predominant modern worldview is one that believes in the mechanized, automated, and industrialized. We live in a world of technology and ease. In a world of comfort and instant gratification, we can be prone to see everything as a reliable process. For example, if I insert money into the vending machine, I receive the delicious Little Debbie Oatmeal Crème. Or, if I click “Buy with one click” on Amazon, my desired purchase will arrive on my porch within days. In other words, we expect certain actions will lead to certain results.

Unfortunately, we can also treat faith, prayer, and our God in this way. We can take phrases like, “If you have faith...” and take them to mean that if we only have enough faith, our prayers will always be answered in the exact way we expect. Or we can think that if we just pray hard enough, or say the right words, God will hear us and grant our requests.

Yet, by doing so, not only makes God our magic genie, but it also is to do exactly what Jesus warns us against doing in this passage. Biblical scholar David Crump writes on this passage, “the comparative value of the mustard seed defines the disciples’ ‘little faith’ as very little indeed— in fact, it is smaller than a mustard seed... [So] Jesus is not quantifying the requisite amount of miracle working faith; he is calling for the exercise of any amount of faith.”<sup>[1]</sup>

You see our mistake then. Jesus says any amount of faith can do anything one asks, not that a large amount of faith will do anything one asks. It is a question of possibility, not certainty. And because Jesus Himself has this faith (indeed faith much larger than a mustard seed), He is able to do anything, including not having His requests answered.

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<sup>[1]</sup> David Crump, *Knocking on Heaven’s Door*

This of course led to the cross, His bearing our sin, and ultimately our salvation.

## **Personal Reflection**

### **TREASURE (Questions about God)**

Read the text 2-3 times. Record any observations below.

Jesus may seem harsh in this passage, but where do we see His actual kindness?

What is the result of this man bringing his son to Him?

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### **GROW (Questions about you, your sin, and your relationship to God)**

How are you tempted to view God as our magic genie in the sky versus understanding Him as the sovereign Creator of the universe? What would change about your prayer life if you adjusted your view of God?

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### **GO (Questions about your relationship to the world)**

How does the power of faithful prayer encourage us to pray for others and their salvation? What about our own needs and concerns?

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## Discussion Questions

1. Share a time when you felt completely out of control. What were the circumstances? How did that impact your walk with God?
2. Put yourself in the shoes of the father and the son. What must that have been like for them?
3. Now, put yourself in the shoes of the disciples. What must their experience have been like?
4. Now, see Jesus. How does He respond? What might you learn from Him?
5. What is going on in your life that you are powerless to change? How do you long for Jesus to move towards you and/or change your situation? What would it look like for you to turn to Jesus and trust in Him right now? Spend some time in prayer for one another.

## Additional Reading

By Charles Spurgeon<sup>2</sup>

I think our Lord intends that we should often have something fresh come across our path to keep us from getting into ruts. It is a very bad thing for anyone when even the Christian life gets to be merely mechanical, you know what state of things that is, you may have come here to this service just as a matter of course, almost without thinking what you were doing.

I have known many persons, in the public worship of God, sing simply because the time for singing has come, and they frequently prove that they are singing only in a mechanical fashion, for they sit down before the hymn has come to an end, showing that they are not sufficiently interested to find out how it closes. So we may kneel apparently in prayer, and not really be praying, for the mind is gadding to and fro. The minister also can get into a way of preaching that is almost like a parrot repeating by

<sup>[2]</sup> “The Secret of Failure,” <https://www.spurgeongems.org/sermon/chs2454.pdf>

rote what it has been taught to say.

This will not do, brothers and sisters. The Lord will not have us always moving in ruts, so He does what men do sometimes in our roads when they put great blocks of timber to turn travelers off from one side of the road on to the other. In that way, this lunatic child was put right in the disciples' road, so that they should not go on sleepily doing the same work without heart and without thought.

This strange case wakes them up, they have something to deal with now that is very different from that they have had before, it is not a common fever, or even an ordinary case of Satanic possession, but it is a dreadful demoniac who is now before them, foaming, and raging, and wallowing in their presence, and altogether beyond their power to heal. This wakes them up, and the Lord permits us sometimes to have trouble in the church, or a shock in the family, that we may wake right up, and not go on mechanically with no spiritual life in us.

# King Jesus Sets Us Free

## Matthew 17:22-27

### Introduction:

Of all the issues swirling among Christians, perhaps none is more contentious than the intersection of faith and politics. We have a lot of questions about what it means to be a good citizen and a good Christian. Do we vote? Do we pay taxes? How do we relate to the government as citizens of Christ's heavenly kingdom?

Jesus offers us no direct answers to apply to each individual situation. As is often the case, He leaves many choices up to our consciences and to trust His Spirit to direct us as we are formed into His image. But He does give us some guidance and direction. He shows us how to be in this earthly kingdom as those belonging to the heavenly one.

In today's passage, Jesus shows us the way of love towards our neighbor applies towards the government as well. Just because we are free in Christ, this does not mean we can do whatever we want. Though free from temporal concerns, we are still bound by the law of love to do good to our neighbors. Or, as Paul writes, "the love of Christ compels us" (2 Cor 5:14). Our stance towards this world is to follow the contours of Christian affection, not to give offense and to lord our freedom over others.



## Personal Reflection

### TREASURE (Questions about God)

Read the text 2-3 times. Record any observations.

How does this passage confirm the truth the Jesus is God? What attribute(s) does He display?

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### GROW (Questions about you, your sin, and your relationship to God)

What is adoption? How does this text connect to the reality that we are adopted by God?

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### GO (Questions about your relationship to the world)

Jesus warns us to not give offense (Greek, *scandalizō*) the outside world. What does He mean by this? Are there times it is ok to give offense?

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Take some time to reflect on instances where you have not loved your neighbor in the area of politics and given unnecessary offense.

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## Discussion Questions:

1. Do you tend to pay a lot or a little attention to politics? What's a story that displays your disposition towards politics and government?
2. Jesus is asked about his view on and willingness to pay taxes. Summarize his answer. What other passage(s) might further articulate what should be our posture towards the government?
3. Compare and contrast earthly rulers (v. 25-26) with our heavenly king (v. 22-23). How do they relate to us? How should we relate to them?
4. In what way(s) might your attitude and behavior change to be more in line with Jesus' instructions to relate to our earthly rulers and our heavenly king?
5. Spend some time praying for our rulers, our country, and our world. Also, pray for wisdom in how best to live as citizens of both a temporary, earthly kingdom and an eternal, heavenly one.

## Additional Reading

By D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones <sup>3</sup>

Let me sum it all up by putting it like this. We are to remember that as Christians our relationship to the state is, at its very best, only temporary. This is our position: 'Our conversation' - citizenship - 'is in heaven' (Phil. 3:20). Now I have warned you not to misinterpret that and say, 'Therefore I've nothing to do with the state' That is wrong. Nevertheless, it is our fundamental position that the place we belong to is heaven. That is our capital city. We are strangers here. We are men and women away from home. We are 'colonists', as somebody translates it, and we must never lose sight of that.

So we realize that we are only here as strangers and pilgrims, travellers and sojourners. That, again, is one of the great differences between the Christian and the non-Christian. Non-Christians live for this life and this world alone, so they get excited

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<sup>[3]</sup> *Life in Two Kingdoms: An Exposition of Romans 13*, page 59

about the state and about their political parties. They believe the state can work wonders and they are consequently full of a false optimism. That should never be true of the Christian.

The Christian says: 'Thank God, I've been delivered. I belong to that kingdom that will come visibly on earth. That is where I really belong right now, but I still have to live in this world. It is God's will that I should live here, and He has appointed the powers that be. So I, of all people, must recognize them. I must live in these strange conditions while I'm on this earth. I must therefore do my utmost to keep the world and its life within bounds, because this is the will of God.'

I repeat that Christians do not set their affection on this world. They do not believe that the world will be reformed and will be made wonderful and perfect. Of course not; they know it cannot happen. They have their eye on the second coming of Christ and the ushering in of the kingdom of God in a visible manner. So their relationship to the state is, in a sense, detached. They are in it, they are subject to it, they observe its rules and its laws, they are the best of citizens. Yet the whole time there is a detachment; they are not lost in it, involved in it, thrilled by it, excited by it, ready to quarrel with people over it. *They cannot, because ultimately their citizenship is in heaven.*

of church tradition.”

# King Jesus Welcomes Children

## Matthew 18:1-9

### Introduction: 250 words about the passage

“I am the greatest!” So said Muhammad Ali, who was perhaps the greatest boxer of all time as he boasted of his greatness. Even if not as brash as Ali, most of us are prone to the same self-aggrandizement if we are honest. We boast in ourselves and about ourselves. This propensity to boast reveals the pride inherent in each human heart.

The disciples in this passage are no different than us. They want to be the greatest. Is their ambition wrong? Well, yes... and no. It is not wrong to desire to be great. However, it *is* wrong to desire to be great as the world sees greatness.

Greatness in the kingdom of God is about humility. It is about becoming like a child. We pray, “Our Father” because we know we are children of God. As adopted children of the most high God, we cry, “Abba! Father!” (Rom 8:15). This stance reveals our dependence on God, our limitedness in light of His infiniteness, and the contours of our relationship with Him.

Like children, we should trust our heavenly father. To boast of our greatness is to take pride in our ability to be our own man or woman. But, in reality, we must humble ourselves and rely on our Heavenly Father’s care. Even at our best, we are just like children. Just as He took care of His firstborn Son (cf. Col 1:15), so He cares for us.

Jesus shows that He values His people as He calls them to childlike faith. Imperfect as we are, He commends this faith to us, as an innocent and trusting child. Unfortunately, this stance can also be manipulated in its simplicity. Against those who use their freedom to hurt others, Jesus has some harsh words. It would be terrible if we not only caused the world to stumble, but also others in the church. Such a body would be better off removing such members that cause one to sin.

We would do well to heed these warnings and listen to our Lord's voice.

## Personal Reflection

### TREASURE (Questions about God)

Re-read the text. 2-3 times Record any Observations.

What does it look like to have God as Father? Reflect the ways in which this reality defines how you relate to Him as his child.

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In some places, Jesus is called a stumbling block (cf. Rom 9:33). What is it about Him and His gospel that may cause others to stumble?

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### GROW (Questions about you, your sin, and your relationship to God)

How have you tried to be the greatest at the expense of others? What happened and how did it affect you and them? Repent of ways you have exalted yourself at the expense of others.

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Read Romans 14:13. What are some areas in which you feel stronger in faith? Weaker in faith? Have you caused others to stumble, and if so, how?

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**GO (Questions about your relationship to the world)**

How can we model childlike faith and humility to the outside world, in a way that draws others to God?

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What is an example of a freedom we have in Christ that, when flaunted unwisely, could cause someone else to stumble?

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## Discussion Questions

1. Right now, who do you think the world would say is “the greatest” and why?
2. Who does Jesus say is the greatest and why? What would it look like for you to “be like a child” in the kingdom of heaven?
3. Jesus provides a stern warning for those who cause children to sin. What is it? How does this warning reflect His heart for children? How might your heart become more like His?
4. Jesus uses strong language when talking about our fight against sin. Why?
5. Where are you currently being tempted or have recently given in to temptation? How might you turn away from sin and turn to Christ? Be specific.
6. Spend some time as a group praying for one another, for your children, and for anyone your heart goes out to who might be stuck in the throes of temptation.

## Additional Reading (18:1-5)

By Stanley Hauerwas<sup>4</sup>

To answer the disciples’ question, Jesus calls into their presence a child. He tells the disciples that unless they become like children they will not enter the kingdom of heaven. Children can invite us to speculate concerning the characteristics that make them exemplars of the kingdom Jesus has brought. Often, for example, children are assumed to have an innocence that adults lack. This kind of speculation, however, can result in sentimental versions of Jesus’s work that betray the hardness of the kingdom. There is nothing sentimental about the demands that Jesus places on those able to receive this child.

Jesus quite clearly identifies what the child represents: unless we become as humble as a child we cannot participate in the kingdom. It seems that in issues of hierarchy “the

<sup>[4]</sup> *Matthew (Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible)*, 161,

greatest in the kingdom” is to be determined by those who are willing, those who take the time, to receive a child. A child has no acquired status; he or she is totally dependent on others. Mary bore the Messiah, but she first and foremost proved to be hospitable to a child whose existence she could not have anticipated.

Jesus, Mary’s child, tells us that children are henceforth to be welcomed in his name. In a world so dark that it would kill children, Jesus tells his disciples that they must instead receive children. In a world that thinks it has no time for children, Jesus calls his followers to be people of patience, taking the time to welcome children, to have and raise them. This is possible because the kingdom has already been accomplished; time is reconfigured.

have assertion of our rights. We do not know how to contend unless we're standing up for our rights, standing on our dignity and our goodness and saying, "This is what I'm owed." But this woman is not doing that at all. This is rightless assertiveness, something we know little about. She's not saying, "Lord, give me what I deserve on the basis of my goodness." She's saying, "Give me what I don't deserve on the basis of your goodness--and I need it now."

## Additional Reading (18:7-9)

By Fredrick Dale Bruner<sup>5</sup>

It is a matter of kill or be killed. Jesus' way of approaching the problem of hurting other people's faith is severe and death dealing. He commands us to look at what is hurting faith in ourselves and others and to kill *it*. Jesus' thinking is like this: we are most apt to hit on how we are hurting others by discovering what is hurting *us*. ...

Jesus' approach to such problems is not to humor them; it is to cut them out immediately and to throw them as far away as possible. A kind of heroism is called for here, a kind of violence (with oneself!) that is Christian. In moral questions one often encounters the desire for a *semi*-repentance that wants to end the immorality but not yet, or the familiar "I don't want to hurt the other person," the third party, a misplaced compassion.

Hurting *oneself*... is of course a consequence of chopping off a hand or foot. But this is *good* hurting... the repentant disciplined life often *hurts* – we must say this to ourselves and to our pleasure-seeking church more often. But disciplined hurting is only *for a while*; its long term reward is *Life!* Genuine discipleship *does* hurt, but consider the rewards!

[<sup>5</sup>] *The Churchbook: A Commentary on Matthew 13-28*, Kindle Edition (Location 4290)

# King Jesus Seeks Us

## Matthew 18:10-14

Do you often doubt Jesus loves you? Or wonder if God truly cares deeply for you and has forgiven your sins in Christ?

Let's be honest, we all do. We all have moments.

But Jesus knows our doubting hearts. After He spoke honestly about judgment, warning of Hell, our Lord knows we may be shaking in our boots. So, He comforts us.

Often when we hear of the perils of the unredeemed, we can drift towards believing it is somehow on us to avoid that fate. Perhaps even unconsciously, we find ourselves drifting towards emphasizing our role in staying within the love of God and to keep ourselves out of Hell. Other times, we can feel overwhelming condemnation and the weight of past failures, wondering if God's love extends over those sins.

Again, Jesus knows. So, He tells us of His pursuing, tender lovingkindness towards us. He reminds us that we are His people and the sheep of His pasture (Psalm 100:3). We are all once the little ones. We were all straying like sheep. But He relentlessly seeks after us. He doesn't literally leave the other sheep behind, but His seemingly unending pursuit of us may seem reckless to those doubting their value. But He rejoices with the angels when we are brought back.

Even if we stumble, God brings us back. The Father wills our return, the Son accomplishes, and the Spirit secures our salvation. Jesus as our Good Shepherd shows us that God does not desire any of us should perish but have life in His name (cf. 2 Peter 3:9).

## Personal Reflection

### **TREASURE (Questions about God)**

Re-read the text 2-3 times. Record any observations.

How did Jesus seek you out before you were a believer? How about at times when you were discouraged? How has He brought you back when you strayed?

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### **GROW (Questions about you, your sin, and your relationship to God)**

What are some things that lead you to stray? How does the love of Jesus portrayed here rebuke such temptation to sin?

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### **GO (Questions about your relationship to the world)**

Think about the people God has sent your way to pursue you. Who in your life has strayed from the fold of God? How can you be an instrument of God's pursuing grace in their life?

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## Discussion Questions

1. Share a time when you or someone you loved was lost. What happened? How were you or your loved one found?
2. Talk about this parable. How are we like sheep?
3. Now talk about the shepherd. How do his actions reveal the heart of God? How might that encourage you as you relate to Him?
4. Who is lost that you long to be found by God? How might you reflect the heart of God as you pray for and pursue them?
5. Spend some time as a group praising God for His rescue of you and praying for other lost sheep who need to be found.

## Additional Reading

By Charles Spurgeon<sup>6</sup>

A great sorrow was on Christ when our load was laid on him; but a greater joy flashed into his mind when he thought that we were thus recovered from our lost estate... His love to them made it a joy to feel every lash of the scourge of justice; his love to them made it a delight that the nails should pierce his hands and feet, and that his heart should be broken with the absence of his Father, God. Even "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani," when the deeps of its woe have been sounded, will be found to have pearls of joy in its caverns. No shout of triumph can equal that cry of grief, because our Lord joyed to bear even the forsaking by his Father for the sin of his chosen whom he had loved from before the foundation of the world.

Oh, you cannot understand it except in a very feeble measure! ... Soul, remember you have given Jesus great joy in his saving you. He was forever with the Father, eternally happy, infinitely glorious, as God over all; yet he must needs come hither out of

<sup>[6]</sup> "Parable of the Lost Sheep," <https://www.thekingdomcollective.com/spurgeon/sermon/1801/>

boundless love, take upon himself our nature, and suffer in our stead to bring us back to holiness and God. "He layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing." That day the shepherd knew but one joy. He had found his sheep, and the very pressure of it upon his shoulders made his heart light, for he knew by that sign that the object of his care was safe beyond all question.

Now he goes home with it, and this joy of his was then so great that it filled his soul to overflowing. The parable speaks nothing as to his joy in getting home again, nor a word concerning the joy of being saluted by his friends and neighbours. No, the joy of having found his sheep eclipsed all other gladness of heart, and dimmed the light of home and friendship. He turns around to friends and neighbours and entreats them to help him to bear the weight of his happiness. He cries, "Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost." One sinner had repented, and all heaven must make holiday concerning it.

Oh, brethren, there is enough joy in the heart of Christ over his saved ones to flood all heaven with delight. The streets of Paradise run knee-deep with the heavenly waters of the Saviour's joy. They flow out of the very soul of Christ, and angels and glorified spirits bathe in the mighty stream. Let us do the same. We are friends if we are not neighbours. He calls us to-day to come and bring our hearts, like empty vessels, that he may fill them with his own joy, that our joy may be full. Those of us who are saved must enter into the joy of our Lord.

When I was trying to think over this text I rejoiced with my Lord in the bringing in of each of his sheep, for each one makes a heaven full of joy. But, oh to see all the redeemed brought in! Jesus would have no joy if he should lose one: it would seem to spoil it all. If the purpose of mercy were frustrated in any one instance it were a dreary defeat of the great Saviour. But his purpose shall be carried out in every instance. He "shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied." He shall not fail nor be discouraged. He shall carry out the will of the Father. He shall have the full reward of his passion. Let us joy and rejoice with him this morning!



# King Jesus Commands Restoration

## Matthew 18:15-20

I once heard a pastor joke that if you walk into a meeting at church, and someone begins to quote Matthew 18, buckle up and be prepared. But to only speak of the disciplinary nature of this text is to miss the thrust of Jesus' words.

This text is one of those that is so often removed from its context and used for competing extremes. On the one hand, the most famous line, "Where two or three are gathered...", is quoted often as a general statement of Jesus' presence with His people. This may *generally* be true, but it is not *the* main point of this text. Still others use this text almost as a legal procedure for confronting sin in the church. While this may also be true, it also misses the heart of this text.

When we read this small passage in context of the previous section, we see that confronting sin in the church is indeed about Jesus' presence in the church: His loving, gracious, and truthful pursuit of His sheep that go astray. Church discipline is a thorny topic, which often makes modern Christians uncomfortable, because we often only want to think about the kind, sentimental Jesus who is ever so gentle and lowly. But church discipline *is* the sentimental Jesus, the One who graciously seeks us out, calls us back to fellowship, and restores us in His grace.

Paul in 1 Corinthians 5 makes a similar point. Church discipline is not punitive. Rather, it is primarily about restoration. As Paul writes, "hand that one over... *so that* his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord." When we confront sin in the church, we are enacting the gospel in microcosm by displaying the seeking, saving love of Christ to our brothers and sisters. Contrary to the world, which sees harshness and intolerance, this is actually a response of faithful love that is characteristic of the God who is Love.

## Personal Reflection

### TREASURE (Questions about God)

Re-read the text 2-3 Times. Record any observations.

How does Jesus' teaching on church discipline reshape your views of His character?  
How can discipline actually show love?

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### GROW (Questions about you, your sin, and your relationship to God)

How can you enact Jesus' pursuing love in this text with someone in your life?

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### GO (Questions about your relationship to the world)

If we were honest about sin in the church, how would that change how we are perceived *outside* the church? At the same time, how do we avoid legalism and still pursue truth?

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## Discussion Questions

1. Share a story when you were disciplined as a kid. What happened? What was positive or negative about it?
2. What is the process of discipline Jesus outlines in this passage? What is the aim of each step?
3. When have you seen this process of discipline followed well? followed poorly? What were the results?
4. Jesus makes several promises in verses 18-20. How should we properly understand and apply them?
5. Spend some time in prayer as a group, seeking to apply these promises of God's presence and power to specific situations in your life.

## Additional Reading

by Stanley Hauerwas<sup>7</sup>

Jesus clearly implies, just as he had with the analogy of our hands and feet, that his new people must excommunicate. Some may well find this inconsistent with his teaching that we are to love our enemies (Matt. 5:43–48), that we are to do to others as we would have them do to us (7:12), and that we are to love our neighbors as ourselves (22:39).

Yet excommunication *is* an act of love. Excommunication is not to throw someone out of the church, but rather an attempt to help them see that they have become a stumbling block and are, therefore, already out of the church. Excommunication is a call to come home by undergoing the appropriate penance.

The procedure outlined by Jesus in Matt. 18 is how and what it means for his disciples

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<sup>[7]</sup> *Matthew (Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible)*, 166

to be at peace with one another. Jesus assumes that those who follow him will wrong one another and, subsequently, they will be caught in what may seem irresolvable conflict. The question is not whether such conflict can be eliminated, but how his followers are to deal with conflict. He assumes that conflict is not to be ignored or denied, but rather conflict, which may involve sins, is to be forced into the open. Christian discipleship requires confrontation because the peace that Jesus has established is not simply the absence of violence. The peace of Christ is nonviolent precisely because it is based on truth and truth-telling. Just as love without truth cannot help but be accursed, so peace between the brothers and sisters of Jesus must be without illusion.

Yet we must confess that truth is about the last thing most of us want to know about ourselves. We may say that the truth saves, but in fact we know that any truth, particularly the truth that is Jesus, is as disturbing as it is fulfilling. That is why Jesus insists that those who would follow him cannot let sins go unchallenged. If we fail to challenge one another in our sins, we in fact abandon one another to our sin. We show how little we love our brother and sister by our refusal to engage in the hard work of reconciliation.

# King Jesus Forgives

## Matthew 18:21-35

We have all heard non-Christians say, “Jesus was great, but he was only a great teacher.” We are rightly incensed when we hear this, because He was more than that! But maybe sometimes we do forget just how great of a teacher Jesus really was.

This truth is especially noticeable in a gospel like Matthew’s, who structures his narrative around blocks of teaching. Chapter 18 is part of Jesus’ dialogue about the church. It can sometimes be easy to get lost in the weeds in these verses, and to start pulling them out of context, but once you step back and see what our Lord is doing, a brilliant picture emerges.

Jesus is painting a picture of a beautiful, loving, and humble community. He has told us about how to treat those who are least among us, how He seeks and saves the lost, how to restore a brother or sister in Christ, and now, He concludes by driving it all home with the theme of integrity and wholeness.

Like He does elsewhere in discussions like the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus demands whole-hearted discipleship. This is why our righteousness must exceed the Pharisees (see Matthew 5:20), because they only outwardly obeyed, not inwardly from their hearts.

And so, when Peter asks how many times he must forgive, Jesus sees the heart behind the question: “Do I really have to forgive someone? What if they did something really bad? What if they keep doing it? What is the limit on that?” In response, Jesus points to the grace of God in our own lives. If you have been forgiven of everything by God in Christ, why not forgive others in the same way? By doing so, Jesus shows the magnitude of God’s goodness and directs us to show that same goodness to others.

## Personal Reflection

### TREASURE (Questions about God)

Re-read the text 2-3 times. Record any observations.

How does this story show the just and forgiving nature of God? How does this parable illustrate the greatness of what we have been forgiven because of Jesus?

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### GROW (Questions about you, your sin, and your relationship to God)

Who do you need to forgive? Who has wronged you? What would it look like to follow Jesus in this teaching on forgiveness?

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### GO (Questions about your relationship to the world)

Why is it important for our gospel witness that we are a forgiving people? What does it communicate? How do we balance between forgiving others for the same wrong and addressing the underlying issues in their hearts?

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## Discussion Questions

1. Share a story of forgiveness. What was the situation? How did it impact you?
2. Peter asks Jesus a question about the extent to which he should forgive. Can you relate to his question? How might you assess your ability, willingness, and readiness to forgive?
3. Jesus not only gives Peter an answer but also a parable about forgiveness. Summarize it and then discuss the “hidden spiritual truths” you think Jesus seeks to reveal regarding forgiveness.
4. How do you personally relate to this parable? What is most encouraging? Convicting? Challenging?
5. How is God speaking to you right now to apply His Word to your life? Spend some time as a group praying for one another.

## Additional Reading

By Timothy Keller<sup>8</sup>

This parable is an account of forgiveness failure because that is the usual human story. The movement from divine forgiveness to human forgiveness is constantly being frustrated by human sin. Even in Jesus’s other famous parable about forgiveness—the parable of the Prodigal Son—we see the Father’s action causing offense and controversy instead of love and generosity.

Are Christian churches famous for their love and graciousness to skeptics and nonbelievers? They are not. Are you a professing Christian? If so, are you known by your friends and neighbors for being unusually loving, generous, gracious, and forgiving? If not, then hear this parable and hear Jesus saying, “You are the one.” If we have truly grasped and received his salvation, it should change us as it did not change this man. God’s mercy must and will make us merciful—if it doesn’t, then we never

<sup>[8]</sup> *Forgiveness: Why Should I and How Can I?*, 12-13

understood or accepted God's mercy in truth.

If you believe the gospel—that you are saved by sheer grace and the free forgiveness of God—and you still hold a grudge—at the very least it shows that you are blocking the actual effect of the gospel in your life, or you're kidding yourself and perhaps you don't believe the gospel at all. Either way, spiritually speaking, to not forgive somebody is to put yourself in a kind of jail. The final act of the parable—where the Unforgiving Servant is thrown into prison—seems harsh, but it is quite realistic. The self-centeredness that grows when you stay angry at somebody, when you hold things against them, when you continue to regard them as if they're liable to you and they owe you, is a prison.

# King Jesus and Marriage

## Matthew 19:1-12

Behind many problems in this world is a distorted view of marriage. Some say marriage is primarily about my personal happiness and self-fulfillment. Others think of it purely in transactional terms. Regardless, nearly everyone views it as not really binding for life and easily breakable if it “no longer works.”

Anyone teaching on the Biblical doctrine of marriage is liable to offend anyone and everyone. It is an incredibly touchy subject, and I suspect most of us would rather listen to a sermon on money rather than marriage! Yet, it is a strange comfort to see that even Jesus offended people around Him as He defended the Biblical doctrine of marriage, and to realize our struggles today are much the same as they were in Jesus’ time. It is really true that there is nothing new under the sun!

To Jesus, marriage is one of the most important institutions established by God. Healthy marriages are an important aspect of human flourishing. By moving from teaching on the church to teaching on marriage and family, Jesus is instructing us on the different levels of community in our lives. Just as in church we commit to a larger group of people, so in our families we have commitments and constraints placed there by God in His grace.

In a masterful move, our Master quotes from Genesis, which, like other works of the Hebrew Scriptures, was treasured, read, and even memorized by the religious leaders. Moreover, they believed as we do that passages from Genesis are foundational to understanding what God intends for humans as their Maker. Critically, doctrines derived from Genesis apply in a way that transcends cultures and times. Jesus, the one by whom all things are made, is telling us why He made us and how we were designed for community. As Creator, God sets the rules.

Divorce is a painful reality in our world that Jesus allows only in extreme cases. He calls His people to be different. We are, to use a Puritan phrase, to be long-suffering in our marriages. How? In the last chapter, Jesus taught on forgiveness. Now He asks we apply this forgiveness in marriage. So, we are to forgive our spouses 70x7 times, to confront our spouse in love, and to honor our covenant with the other person, just as we do for those in our church.

Jesus is creating a network of committed relationships for us to know Him more, become more like Him, and to show His glory to a broken world.

## **Personal Reflection**

### **TREASURE (Questions about God)**

Re-read the text 2-3 times. Record any observations.

Read Ephesians 5:22-33. What does marriage “refer to” as a symbol? How does this teach us about our relationship to God and His love for us?

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### **GROW (Questions about you, your sin, and your relationship to God)**

If you are married, how is your marriage? Are you being patient with your spouse, acting as the forgiving king in the previous section? Or, are you more like the unforgiving servant?

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If you are unmarried, how forgiving are you in your relationships with family and friends? Reflect on God's gracious forgiveness of you and seek to grow in reflecting that back to the world.

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**GO (Questions about your relationship to the world)**

Think back to the Ephesians 5 passage. How does marriage display the gospel?

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<sup>[9]</sup> *The Mystery of Marriage*, 115-116



## Discussion Questions

1. How have you seen and experienced the impact of divorce—personally, societally, or both?
2. The Pharisees ask Jesus a question about the legality of divorce. What do you think was their intent in asking this question?
3. How does Jesus respond? What sticks out to you about His answer? Is there anything surprising, convicting, or new to you on the topic of marriage and divorce?
4. How does Jesus' response reveal His (and the Father's) heart for His people and how they are to live with one another? How might your heart more align with His?
5. For those who are married, how might your group pray for you as you seek to grow in oneness with your spouse? For those who are not married, how might your group pray for you regarding relationships with your family/friends/significant other?

## Additional Reading

By Mike Mason<sup>9</sup>

Holy matrimony represents the most popular set of religious vows in history. So popular are these vows that most people in modern times do not even think of them as vows at all...

But make no mistake about it: the joining of a man and a woman in matrimony is a supernatural event, founded upon a mutual exchange of holy pledges. As we have seen, these pledges are the only true vows that most people will ever take. They may even be the only truly sacred words that will ever darken a couple's mouths. The saying of them requires about thirty seconds. But keeping them is the work of a lifetime.

To keep a vow, however, does not mean to keep from breaking it. If that were the case,

<sup>[9]</sup> *The Mystery of Marriage*, 115-116

marriage vows would be broken the day they were made. This is where a vow differs from a mere promise or resolution. A resolution, once broken, must either be forgotten or made again. But a vow retains its power and validity irrespective of conduct. It is not like the signing of a legal contract and not like any other form of human promise. A person cannot promise to love another person: he can only vow to do so. A vow is, per se, a confession of inadequacy and an automatic calling upon the only adequacy there is, which is the mercy and power of God.

To keep a vow, therefore, means not to keep from breaking it, but rather to devote the rest of one's life to discovering what the vow means, and to be willing to change and to grow accordingly. It might almost be said that the sign that a vow is being kept is the realization of how far one is from keeping it. In a very real way, it is the vow which keeps the man rather than vice versa. A vow may keep a man honest, for example, by facing him day in and day out with the depth of his insincerity, and he may be kept loving through a continual confrontation with his own unloveliness. The vow is a mystery, an insoluble riddle, which somehow corrects and shames him at the same time as it picks him up and spurs him on to higher things. So, a married person is a kept person, kept in the profound protection of vows that have been taken before the Lord. This is not the protection of a lazy security and comfort; rather, it is the protection of an inexhaustible forgiveness.





# FOUR OAKS CHURCH

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4500 W Shannon Lakes Dr

[fouroakskillern.com](http://fouroakskillern.com)

850.385.0004 | [fouroakschurch.com](http://fouroakschurch.com) | [info@fouroakschurch.com](mailto:info@fouroakschurch.com)

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