

Lesson 18. . . Children of the Covenant Family



Notes From the Podium

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These notes are intended to augment your own reading and study of the lesson. Please use as an aid to help document the main message of the lecture.

Matthew 18:1-35

I. Matthew Chapters 16 and 17

- A. Recall that in the last 2 chapters, our Lord has been drawing Peter close to Him, identifying Peter with Himself.
- B. Jesus even pays the temple tax for both of them with that one coin that was in the fish's mouth.
- C. This does not go unnoticed by the other disciples.
 1. They all have to pay the temple tax.
 2. Christ paid for himself and for Peter as one.

II. "At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?"

- A. "Who then is the greatest..." translated from Greek: "*tis ara meizōn estin*"
- B. "*tis ara*" is often not translated and "*ara*" means "then".
- C. It should read: "Who *then* is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?"
- D. They're watching as our Lord draws Peter closer to himself.
 1. Peter has been called blessed.
 2. Our Lord has changed his name from Simon to Peter.
 3. Peter is placed as the rock; he is transformed into a rock.
 4. Our Lord paid the temple tax for Peter.
 5. It is not difficult to imagine the other apostles saying, *So who then is the greatest in the kingdom of God, is it Peter, is he the top?*
- E. Our Lord responds, "And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them"
 1. A child unaware of himself, just standing out there somewhere on the outside.
 2. Our Lord takes this child and puts him at the epicenter of the kingdom of heaven.
 3. The apostles have all been learning that at the epicenter of the kingdom of heaven stands a Son, an eternal child, and He is the one who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. So to is anyone who is like unto Him.
 4. To be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven is not a matter of jockeying for position.
 5. The kingdom of heaven is not a matter of position but of possession.
 - a. Possession of the Son.
 - b. It is a matter of Sonship.
 6. And our Lord says to them, "Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."
 7. He doesn't say you're not going to enter, He says you will never have the *capacity* to do so. You're not going *to be able* to enter.
- F. How small you have to be to get through the narrow way, to pass through the eye of a needle.
 1. You have to be like a little child.
 2. The only one who is in heaven with the Father in the Holy Spirit is His Son...
 3. He's making sons out of the apostles.
- G. "Whoever humbles himself like this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven."
 1. The Greeks hated that word, "humble".



Notes From the Podium (cont)

2. One wonders if the disdain for acts of devotion, like genuflection, kneeling, and prostration, isn't because they are the physical manifestations of humility.
 - a. These signs of humility are positions of adoration.
 - b. And a sign of humility, whether it is genuine or not, makes the statement that *I must be small*.
 - i. Throwing oneself down as a priest does for example at his ordination,
 - ii. Kneeling is often given before the reception of Holy Communion.
 - c. The Greeks hated it, hated prostration, it made them nothing, and our Lord loves it
 - i. He emptied himself and took the form of the slave.
 - ii. In the washing of the feet, Our Lord even assumes the position of being at our feet, being down there on his knees.
 - iii. If the Son of God does that, how much more should we.
- III. "Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me."
- A. This is not the normal word for "reception", but one that presupposes a prior giving.
 1. That someone is giving a gift and then we are actively receiving, not taking but actively receiving.
 2. It is much like how someone actively receives a little one in the gift of life at conception.
 3. Ultimately the little ones are the apostles themselves and their teaching.
 4. When someone receives them they will see Christ because He has gifted Himself in those realities.
 - B. "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 round his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea."
 1. This is the degree to which our Lord cares for those who have humbled themselves in the church.
 2. These "little ones" have become like children, become like the Son,
 3. He refers here to an "ass millstone" which is heavier than a normal millstone. It required an ass to move it.
 4. We see here the hyperbole Jesus often uses to make his point.
- IV. "Woe to the world for temptations to sin! For it is necessary that temptations come, but woe to the man by whom the temptation comes! And if your hand or your foot causes you to sin, cut it off ..."
- A. What good will it be for you to have all of yourself intact and esthetically perfect only to be cast into hell.
 - B. It would be better to be like an old battle worn soldier, limping into heaven.
 - C. Temptations will come, don't let them come by you.
 - D. If there are things in life that are occasions of sin, cut them out.
- V. "See that you do not despise one of these little ones..."
- A. The word used here for "despise" means "to think little of".
 - B. Do not think that because they're small and humble, they are not great.
 - C. "I tell you that in heaven their angels always behold the face of my Father who is in heaven."
 1. These angels are their guardian angels.
 2. These great angels, who behold the Father are the ones who are given charge over these little ones.
 3. These incredible celestial beings are sent as servants, as guardians over the little ones. How great the little ones must be if such great ones serve them.



Notes From the Podium (cont)

- VI. “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?”
- A. Of course the answer to that most likely is “no”. -Would you risk 99 sheep being attacked, to go find just one sheep?
 - B. Because Jesus poses this question after he has just made mention of the angels, The father’s of the Church have always seen in this:
 - 1. The 99 sheep are the angels in heaven. (According to St. Thomas Aquinas each angel is it’s own species)
 - 2. The one sheep that went astray is man.
 - 3. Man is one of His creation, one of the persons who were made to enjoy Him, to be sons, to be little ones, to be sons in the Son.
 - 4. Our Lord left the glory of heaven to go find the one who was lost, the one of the 99 of the Father’s little ones.
 - C. “Truly I say to you he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine that never went astray...”
 - 1. Our Lord rejoices in finding us, but so often we think we have found Christ because of our diligent search.
 - 2. It is of course, Christ who has found us, lost in the labyrinth of our own minds, in sin and darkness.
 - 3. Our rejoicing is just a small hint of participation in His joy that He’s captured us.
 - 4. He is the *Hound of Heaven*.
- VII. “If your brother sins against you go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone.”
- A. Our Lord is not telling us to go call someone out every time they hurt our feelings.
 - 1. We often assume that if we have been offended then we have been wronged.
 - 2. Sometimes we should be offended at the truth that is given to us or the mirror that is held up by a loved one.
 - 3. They have done us a great service by revealing the truth, that is a matter of love.
 - 4. Those who genuinely love us are the ones who reveal the truth to us.
 - 5. That is a pruning that must take place.
 - B. But when someone has genuinely offended us (sinned against us) how interesting it is that the burden is on the offended party, to go and tell them.
 - 1. This is not for the purpose of exacting justice or just to make them feel awful.
 - 2. The reason the offended party is supposed to go after them is that we don’t want one of these little ones to be lost.
 - a. They’re part of the same family and out of our intense love for them when they hurt us, when they sin against us; we go to them because we don’t want them to be lost.
 - b. Sin is its own punishment and will disfigure them and keep them from the kingdom.
 - c. Sin can make them think that they are great, when they should be small.
 - d. By sinning against us they are keeping the Father’s love from themselves and we don’t want them to be without it.
 - e. That’s the reason we go to them and that’s the reason why we go to them alone.
 - f. It would be wrong to bring a whole cadre of people along to say look at how magnanimous I am, I’m so large, and I’m going to forgive this person. I am going to correct them.
 - g. “If he listens to you, you have gained your brother.” -and this was the purpose, to gain him back.



Notes From the Podium (cont)

- h. “But if he does not listen, *then* take one or two others along with you, that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. 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. Because ultimately if he is not going to be a little one, if he will not be brought back by you, back by you and others, not even by the Church, then you must cut him off.
 - ii. And that too is remedial, for when he is away from the flock, when he is cut off from the life giving branch, when he is outside of the Body, and then perhaps he will see his situation and come home.
 - iii. The Church is always solicitous to receive back the little ones of the Father for she wants none to be lost.
 - iv. And so our Lord will now extend the power of binding and loosening to all the apostles.
- VIII. “Truly, I say to you, [*you all, you apostles*] whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven...”
 - A. They are becoming judges.
 - B. They are to speak symphonically among themselves.
 - C. The hierarchy of the Church, the Magisterium, speaks with one voice in and through Peter, the voice of Christ.
 - D. The same will be done in heaven and therefore these sons ultimately must also at times act as fathers.
 - E. He’s teaching his friends to be sons as he is a Son and to be representatives of the Father to the other sons.
 - F. That’s why St. Augustine once said that *with you I am a sheep, for you I am a shepherd*.
 - G. But the sons who become fathers never cease to be sons.
 - 1. Priests, Bishops, the Pope himself, must be sons with you in the Son.
 - 2. For you, the faithful, we have to act often as fathers, dispensing the very Fatherhood of God, that’s why you call priests “Father”.
- IX. “For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them.”
 - A. We just saw that phrase “in the midst of them”.
 - B. The little child was placed in the midst of them,
 - C. Our Lord is telling us here that when two or three are gathered *into* His name, if we become sons, there He is in the midst of us, just like He just placed that child in the midst of the apostles.
- X. “Then Peter came up and said to him, “Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?”
 - 1. Now the rabbinic tradition was three, so ultimately Peter is being very generous.
 - 2. Our Lord says, “I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven.” (seventy seven times)
 - 3. Ultimately this has the significance of saying *never* can you refuse to offer mercy.
 - 4. He then gives them a parable.
 - a. “Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants...”
 - b. The servant is depicted as owing an absolute impossible sum to pay,
 - c. “...as he could not pay his lord ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made.
 - d. The servant fell on his knees,” he took a position of a little one and implored his master saying, “lord, have patience with me, have mercy on me...”



Notes From the Podium (cont)

- e. The master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt.
- f. The master's mercy was instantaneous, the entire debt was paid which means the king himself had to incur the penalty, he had to pay the price himself, which is what mercy is, not the contradiction of justice but paying for it yourself.
- g. "But that same servant, as he went out,"
 - i. There was no gratitude, no sense that someone else had to pay his debt for him.
 - ii. He "came upon one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii." (A hundred denarii is absolutely nothing)
 - iii. "and seizing him by the throat he said, 'Pay what you owe.' So his fellow servant fell down and besought him," in the same way that he besought the master.
 - iv. He refused and went and put him in prison till he should pay the debt.
- h. His fellow servants went and reported to their lord all that had taken place.
 - i. His lord summoned him and said, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you besought me; and should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?'
 - ii. His lord delivered him to the jailers, till he should pay all his debt.
- i. "So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart."
 - i. If the price of mercy was paid for by the king himself, how do you think the Father will look on us when we will not forgive?
 - ii. If in order to forgive us it cost him the blood of his Son, our Lord tells us this is how you will be treated, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.
 - iii. Don't let anyone control your heart but Christ; he is the only one who is the king of the human heart.
 - iv. And so despite whatever offenses land on the human heart from someone else, be long suffering with them and be willing to pay the debt; for it is a small debt indeed.
 - v. You might not only win your brother but you will most certainly win our Lord.
 - vi. As sons in the Son, we love with a freedom that is even willing to offer our own life in payment for another.

I.