



Matthew 18

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Tape #8017
By Chuck Smith

At the same time came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? (18:1)

God chose ordinary people to be His disciples. People who have the same kind of problems that we have. People who have a problem with carnality, as we do. And it seems that the disciples were always interested in and arguing over the fact of who would be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. This was a thing that they argued over and the only reason why they argued over it, because each of them thought that they would be the greatest. And they had their reasons for thinking that. It was a dispute that went on among them. James and John, their mother even got into the issue and came to Jesus and said, Lord when you come into Your kingdom I'd like my one boy on the right side and the other on the left side of You. Now they are questioning Jesus. They said to Jesus, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" and I'm certain that each of them were waiting with anticipation as Jesus they thought was going to say, Peter will be the greatest, or John, or James, they were each waiting for that. But instead,

Jesus called a little child, and He set him in the midst of them, (18:2)

Called a little child, Come here, honey, stand here a minute.

And He said, Verily I say unto you, Except you be converted, and become as little children, you're not going to even enter the kingdom of heaven. (18:3)

You worry about who's going to be the greatest, but unless you become converted and like a little child, you're not going to even enter the kingdom of heaven.

Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. (18:4)

Jesus taught that the way up was down. And the way down was up. He that exalteth himself shall be abased. He that humbleth himself shall be exalted. If you want to be great in the kingdom of God, learn to be the servant of all. Become as a little child, who really doesn't have those kinds of ambitions. Now with that little child there in the midst of them, Jesus went on to say a lot of different things and things that didn't seem to relate directly to the little child, but He yet kept coming back to the little child. So we have a lot of interesting teachings of Jesus, but the little child is still there and He keeps coming back to this little child that is standing there in the midst of them. So He said,

Whosoever shall receive one such little child in my name receives me. (18:5)

What does that tell you about ministry to children? What a blessed privilege! Receiving a little child is tantamount to receiving the Lord, according to His statement. Jesus placed a great priority on and interest in little children. And then He went on to say,

And whoso shall offend one of these little ones that believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he was drowned in the depth of the sea. (18:6)

If you saw the millstones over in Israel, you would realize that Jesus is speaking in a pretty rash way. But again, the faith of a child. The faith and the heart of a little child, the believing in Jesus, how horrible it is for an adult to try to destroy the faith of a little child. To pit his mind against the mind of the child in an effort to destroy that child's faith in Jesus. That's one of the worst crimes that a person could commit, trying to destroy the faith of a child. Jesus said, Be better for that person just to put a millstone about his neck and throw him in the sea. I love to hear little children talk about God. The simplicity of their faith, the beauty of their faith, it's a wonderful thing. And to try to destroy that would take some kind of a perverted mind.

Woe unto the world [Jesus said, and now He seems to digress a little bit, but yet He comes back to it] because of offences!

He's talking about offending one of these little ones that believe in Him. "Woe unto the world because of offences!"

for it must needs be that offences come;

You can't escape it, living in this world there are going to be offences that are going to come,
but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh! (18:7)

Jesus, in speaking of Judas Iscariot, now it must needs be that one of His number will betray Him. That was prophesied. And yet when Judas went out to betray Him, Jesus said, "It would have been better for that man had he never been born." Here He is saying that offences are inevitable, it's going to happen. "But woe to the man who brings the offence, from whom the offence comes!"

And now He is getting very dramatic when He talks about the importance of entering the kingdom of heaven. The most important thing in all of our lives is where we're going to spend eternity. That's more important than your being healthy, more important than your being wise, more important than anything else is where you're going to spend eternity. And to illustrate it, Jesus gets very graphic and He speaks now in very extreme terms.

Wherefore if your hand or your foot offend you, cut them off, cast them from you: it is better for you to enter into life halt or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet be cast into everlasting fire. (18:8)

Somehow in these days, we have lost sight of the eternal. We become so involved in the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other things, that we forget about eternity. And we are more prone to measure by the temporal advantage than the eternal advantage of things. We're more prone to opt for temporal advantages, rather than eternal advantages. And yet Jesus in the most graphic way is expressing to us the importance of the eternal destiny of our souls. You'd be better off, He is saying, going through life crippled than to go into eternity lost. I do not believe that Jesus is here speaking literally; if your hand offends you, cut it off, or if your foot offends you, cut it off and throw it away; because you would still have your other hand. But He is just trying to illustrate by this gruesome, graphic illustration how important it is that your eternal welfare and your eternal destiny is settled. It's far more important than anything physical. Your spiritual health is far more important than your physical health. And so He goes on and again uses another gruesome graphic illustration.

If thine eye offend thee, pluck it out, cast it from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life with one eye, than having two eyes be cast into Gehenna fire. (18:9)

Jesus spoke more about hell than all of the other Bible writers combined. He gave more warning about the future than all of the other Bible writers. Here He is talking about the Gehenna fire. Now there is what is called "Sheol" in the Hebrew or "Hades" in the Greek. It is a temporary abode of today, the unrighteous dead.

In the Old Testament time, the word "Sheol" sometimes translated hell, sometimes translated grave, is a reference to that place, a holding place, that was in Old Testament times divided into two compartments. In Luke sixteen, Jesus talks about a certain rich man who fared sumptuously everyday and a poor man that was brought daily and laid at his gate, full of sores, eating the crumbs that came from the rich man's table. And the poor man died and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom. Moreover, the rich man died also and in hell, Hades, lifted up his eyes, being in torment; and seeing Lazarus afar off, called to father Abraham and said, "Abraham, have mercy on me, send Lazarus that he might take and put his finger in water and touch my tongue, I'm tormented in this heat."

Jesus is describing the condition of the dead before His death, before He led the captives from their captivity. For when Jesus died, He descended into hell, into Hades. With the promise of the Father that He would not leave His soul in Hades, neither would He allow the Holy One to see corruption. Jesus, we are told by Peter, preached to those souls in prison. Paul the apostle tells us that He who has ascended, that is, Jesus, is the same one who first of all descended into the lower parts of the earth and when He ascended, He led the captives from their captivity.

According to the book of Hebrews, it was impossible that the blood of bulls or goats could put away sin, all they could do was speak of a better covenant that was coming. So the blood of the bulls and goats covered the sin, did not put away the sin, thus all these men of faith in the Old Testament died not having received the promise. God having reserved some better thing for us that they apart from us couldn't come in to the perfected state. There is what is called in the scripture the "abusso" and it is the place of incarceration

for evil spirits, for satanic spirits, demonic spirits, and this “abusso” would seem to be a shaft that goes from the surface of the earth on down into Hades, which is in the heart of the earth. Jesus, when asked for a sign, said, “No sign will be given to this generation except the sign of the prophet Jonah, as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the whale, so shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth,” locating then hell as the heart of the earth. He who has ascended is the same one who first of all descended into the lower part of the earth, so that Hades is the place today of the incarceration of the evil spirits, of men who have died apart from Christ, and one day, death and hell are going to give them up. They’re going to leave to stand before God at His great white throne and those whose names were not found written in the book of life will then be cast into Gehenna.

Gehenna is the place that God prepared, according to Jesus, for Satan and his angels. Their eternal punishment is to be in Gehenna. Here Jesus is warning about being cast into Gehenna fire. Jesus will talk more about Gehenna, He tells us where the worm dieth not, neither is the fire quenched. When Jesus came to Gadara and that demoniac who said his name was Legion because there were many demons, and when they spoke to Christ, they requested that He would not send them to the “abusso,” it’s translated “pit,” to the abusso before their time. When Jesus comes again and Satan is bound, he will be cast into the abusso, the shaft, incarceration of evil spirits, demonic forms of spirits.

When the antichrist and the false prophet come to the earth, they come out of the abusso. In the book of Revelation, there is an angel that comes with the key to the abusso and opens it up and the earth is invaded by hordes of demonic spirits. When Jesus comes again, Satan will be put in the abusso for a thousand years, but the false prophet and the antichrist will at that time be cast into Gehenna. At the end of the thousand year reign of Christ, when Satan is released for a short season, and then when he is brought to judgment, he also will be cast into Gehenna where the beast and false prophet are, and then death and hell will give up the dead which are in them, Hades, those that are in the heart of the earth, and they will be cast into outer darkness into the place called Gehenna, where again Jesus said the fires are not quenched, neither does the worm die.

So the warnings against this place of punishment for Satan and his angels, where those human beings who have chosen to cast their lot with Satan will share in that punishment. God didn’t really create it for man but for Satan and his angels. But those men who chose to go along with Satan’s rebellion will also share. He comes back to the thought of the child, the little child is probably still standing there, and at this point, I suppose quite wild-eyed, as he hears Jesus saying these things. And He said,

Take heed that you despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven. (18:10)

It would seem that the scriptures do teach concerning what is sometimes classified as guardian angels. In the Psalms, it said, “And He shall give His angels charge over thee, to bear thee up lest at any time, you dash your foot against a stone.” They have been charged to watch over you, to take care of you, to protect you. Sometimes my angel has been sleeping on the job, but there have been other times when I was very aware of that protection. I’m still here, had it not been for him I’m sure I wouldn’t be. I’ve had such experiences where I knew that the Lord was just there and watching over and protecting and keeping me.

In the book of Hebrews, speaking of angels, it said, “Are they not all ministering spirits who have been sent forth to minister to them who are heirs of salvation?” And now here Jesus is speaking of these little children who have angels, and their angels do always behold the face of My Father which is in heaven. You know that some of these little kids have angels watching over them. And so Jesus warns against really despising these little ones, because God is so concerned for the little ones. And then Jesus said,

For the Son of man is come to save that which was lost. (18:11)

How think ye? [What do you think about this?] if a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine, and goes into the mountains, and seeks the one which is gone astray? (18:12)

And if so be that he finds it, verily I say unto you, he rejoices more of that sheep, than of the ninety-nine which went not astray. (18:13)

The heart of the shepherd. One sheep, as he counts them into the fold at night, is missing. He goes back out, searches over the mountain until he finds that missing sheep. And he rejoices that the lost one has been

found. More than the fact that ninety-nine are safely there in the fold, the rejoicing is over the lost one that has been found.

And then, back to the child.

Even so it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish. (18:14)

Their angels watch over them. They're important to Him. It's best that you not offend one of these little ones. The interest of Jesus in the little children, it's beautiful.

Now he turns, perhaps the little child has ran away back to its mommy, and so Jesus now says,

If your brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone: if he hears you, you've gained a brother. (18:15)

This is really a form of discipline within the church that Jesus is setting forth, though the church at this point doesn't yet exist. This is the way relationships are maintained. If you're offended because of a brother, because of his actions, because of his deeds, because of something perhaps that he has said, best that you go alone to him, sit down with him and talk it out with him. Don't go around broadcasting, do you know what he did? I can't believe it. I saw him myself, I know... and going around broadcasting it to everybody and trying to get everybody on your side. First of all, go to the brother. Deal with him. If he hears you, good. You've gained a friend. You can just bury it right there.

If he doesn't hear you, then take one or two more with you, take someone else along, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. (18:16)

In other words, there are some people that I don't like to talk to unless I have some others with me. So if you come to see me and I invite Romaine into the office with us, you'll know that you're one of them. A lot of times, you say things to people and whether or not it is deliberate, I don't know, but they go out and they distort what has been said. They totally twist it or they even add things that weren't said but attribute you as having said them. And when I find such individuals that word comes back to me what I was supposed to have said, they said that I said, and it's just off the wall kind of stuff, then I get leery of even talking to those people without witnesses.

When you have an offensive brother, when you go to them, quite often they rebel against what you say. They're not going to always, if they listen, if they hearken, great, you've gained a friend. If they don't, then don't jeopardize yourself by going alone the next time, go back again with some witnesses that every word might be established in the mouth of two or three witnesses. They can say, Chuck didn't say that and you've got back-up. Otherwise, you just got them saying, Chuck said that. And I said, No I didn't say that. That's ridiculous, but Chuck said that. No, no, I didn't. And you've got their word against yours. Now Romaine can say "I was there the whole while and he didn't say that kind of junk." And you're protected. Now let me say that there are times when Romaine needs to be in, not because of this but just... so don't get offended if you come and see me and I have Romaine there too. That's not always the case.

If he neglects to hear them, [the two or three that have gone to him] then tell it to the church: [then they should be exposed before the church] and if they refuse to hear the church, then let them be to you as heathen or publican. (18:17)

They're not really a part of the fellowship of God's people.

Jesus again changes the subject and He talks about binding on earth and loosing on earth.

Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: whatsoever you shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. (18:18)

The heavenly powers that have been vested in God's people by God, powers over the powers of darkness, so that we as children of God have the authority to bind evil spirits, tormenting spirits. Whatsoever we bind on earth will be verified by heaven. The question often arises, If man is a free moral agent, God has given to him that capacity of choice and does not violate that capacity of choice, then how can we pray that an unsaved person will be saved? Because they have the power of choice and God won't violate that capacity of choice that He's given to them, and therefore, how can I really pray for them? Because if they don't choose to receive Christ, they can't be saved and God's not going to force them to choose.

You need to take it one step further and you need to ask, why haven't they received Jesus and His

forgiveness for their sins? And the answer is, according to the scriptures, the God of this world has blinded their eyes so that they cannot see. They are being held as captives by Satan. He has distorted their perception of spiritual things. He has lied to them about God, about Christianity. They are very prejudiced against spiritual things because of the work of Satan blinding their eyes to God's truth. So, though I cannot say God save them, that is against their will, recognizing why they are in darkness and why they have not received is because they are blind to the truth... If you can once see the truth of Jesus Christ and what God has offered to us as far as the forgiveness of our sins, the blotting out of our past, the hope of eternal life with Him, and the fact that God only calls you to love, to forgive, to live a good life, a holy life, a righteous life, now these things are not odious at all. These are idealistic and God has called you to this ideal of purity, righteousness, goodness, love, marvelous characteristics. But Satan has so distorted the minds of people that they do not and can not see the truth.

So by prayer, I can bind this power of Satan that is blinding them and keeping them in darkness. And whatever I bind on earth will be bound in heaven. As I bind the powers of darkness that are blinding their eyes, then God binds these powers of darkness. If anybody could ever just see the truth, that they just could see it without this heavy prejudice of Satan clouding the issues, of course, they would receive Jesus Christ. You'd have to be a fool to reject the offers that God has made to us. If a person only saw the truth. But the problem is, they can't because of Satan's blinding influence. So I have the power to bind, and Jesus said, Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and I also have the power of just loosing the Spirit of God to work in their hearts and lives. Whatever I loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. Great, great powers that God has given to us as His children to exercise these powers in the redemption of the lost.

And then Jesus said,

Again I say unto you [another thought], That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. (18:19)

That's beautiful, isn't it? Whatever you bind on earth will be bound, whatever you loose would be loosed, and if just two of you will agree touching any thing, you will have what you ask, it will be done for them of my Father which is in heaven.

For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them. (18:20)

I can say to you tonight, Jesus is here. He's here tonight. He's here in the midst of us. He's here to minister to you and to your needs. Our problem is, we can't see Him. And thus because we can't see Him, then it's hard for us to realize that He is here. If He should suddenly materialize, and we could actually see Him, if you could see Him just standing here beside me, what do you think your response would be? If you have a physical malady here tonight, I think that you would be wanting to get close to touch the hem of His garment. We all have that confidence that if He was just here, He could take care of any problem that we possess, physical, whatever. If we could just see Him. But Jesus said to Thomas, "Blessed are those who see and believe and more blessed are those who believe without seeing." The Lord wants you to have the greater blessing. He just says I'm there in the midst. And so I can assure you that Jesus is here tonight to meet your needs, to minister to you. Because He said, I didn't come to be ministered to, I came to minister. And His being here tonight isn't really for the purpose that we should minister to Him, He desires to minister to us.

Now Peter changes the subject completely.

Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times? (18:21)

As I mentioned this morning, I think that Peter was stretching it even in his thinking of his own ability, I think he was trying to make points with the Lord. They were arguing who was going to be the greatest, and they even questioned, Lord, who's going to be the greatest? So Peter is trying to get in on this now, Lord, how often should I forgive a fellow that sin.. seven times Lord? See how I'm growing, I'm getting the message and when You set up the kingdom, remember Lord, I can do it seven times, maybe, proper circumstances and all.

And Jesus said, No Peter, not seven times: but, Until seventy times seven. (18:22)

Four hundred and ninety? I'm sure that the Lord figured you'd lose count before you got that far. Wouldn't that be horrible? Four hundred and how many? Then I want to slug this guy, where are we? We'd

realize that forgiveness isn't mathematics, it's a spirit that God wants us to possess. A Christlike spirit, who when they were crucifying Him, prayed, Father, forgive them, they know not what they do. He said, when you stand praying, forgive.

Therefore the kingdom of heaven is likened unto a certain king, which took an account of his servants. (18:23)

And when he had begun to reckon in the accounting, there was brought to him, one which owed him ten thousand talents. (18:24)

I told you this morning that was fifteen million dollars. You see, I was in Bible College back in 1945 and at that time ten thousand talents of silver would have been worth about fifteen million dollars. However, with inflation and all, some of your new Bibles read about fifty-two million dollars. Good amount, how ever you look at it. Big amount in 1945 at fifteen, and big amount in 1994 at fifty-two million. The price of silver has gone up. Can you imagine owing someone that much money?

But forasmuch as he did not have the money to pay, his lord commanded that he be sold, with his wife, and children, and all that he had, in order that the payment might be made. (18:25)

And the servant therefore fell down, and worshipped him, and said, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. (18:26)

Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and he loosed him, and forgave him the debt. (18:27)

He'd been bound, he was headed for jail. Headed to be sold actually on auction as a slave, money applied to the debt. But they loosed him and he forgave him the debt.

But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellowservants, which owed him a hundred pence:

Back in my Bible College days, that was fifteen dollars and now it's estimated to be about forty-two.

and he laid hands on him, and took him by the throat, and said, Pay me what you owe. (18:28)

What a graphic picture this is. A picture of us. Jesus is seeking to remind us of the great debt that we owed that God forgave. All of your sin has been forgiven, every offence, every transgression, everything. God's forgiveness is complete and yet, we are guilty of holding these little offences against one another. Angry, bitter, because of what someone said, what someone did. And we get so upset and we hang on to these things. We let these just sort of eat us up.

About three years ago, my wife and I met a man over in Austria who twenty-five years ago, his wife ran off with an evangelist. Twenty-five years ago. And this man was still so bitter over that which happened twenty-five years ago. So bitter, so angry that all he could talk about that whole evening was this horrible thing that happened to him twenty-five years ago and how angry he was with his wife and how angry he was with all ministers and, it was just pouring out of every pore of his body, the bitterness, the anger that he had been holding for twenty-five years. Let it go! Now, all of this bitterness and anger isn't hurting his wife and that evangelist at all. They're probably having a lark someplace. But this guy is just as bitter and it's eating him up.

These things hurt you more than they hurt the persons that it is directed towards. That is a major offence, to be sure. Many of the offences that we have are very minor. Just someone said something, well, or we heard that they said it. And that's enough for us. We knew that they were rotten rats anyhow. What do you expect out of someone like that! And we're so unwilling to forgive these slight offences and Jesus is drawing a picture here. God has forgiven you a debt of fifty-two million bucks, and here you're ready to destroy a brother because of forty-four dollar debt? The idea is having been given so much really puts me under the obligation to forgive. I have received forgiveness and therefore, it's obligatory that I forgive.

And so the fellowservant, laid his hands, took him by the throat, said, Pay me what you owe.

And the servant fell down at his feet, and begged him, saying, Have patience with me, I will pay thee all. (18:29)

He said the exact same words. The same petition.

And he would not: but cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt. (18:30)

When the other fellowservants saw what was done, they were very sorry, and they came and told their lord what was done. (18:31)

And then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O you wicked servant, I forgave you all that debt, because you desiredst me, you asked me: (18:32)

Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, even as I had pity on you? (18:33)

Be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ' sake has forgiven you. That's what the Lord has asked. You've been, God has forgiven you, be kind one to another, God's been kind to you. Be tenderhearted, God's been tenderhearted. Forgiving, God forgave. And so we're asked to have these Godlike qualities and characteristics.

And the lord was angry, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him. (18:34)

So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if you from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses. (18:35)

As we said this morning, forgiveness is not an option. It's not even a suggestion by Jesus. It is a command. And He is telling you that your heavenly Father will do the same to you and of course, it's very easy in the parable to see that the King or the Lord is God. And it's very easy to see that I'm the servant that had this huge debt and I was forgiven. And it's very easy to get the point that I must forgive because I have been forgiven. What a horrible thing unforgiveness is. How it eats away and destroys you. How it can cause all kinds of mental aberrations. Mental turmoil. How important that we have a forgiving spirit.

To walk away from a situation and to be able to just leave it. Not to brood over it, not to breathe out threats, not to determine to get even, but just to forgive. And what a witness that is when you can forgive. And when you do forgive.

Father, we come tonight looking at the injunctions in these passages, looking at the teaching in these passages. And Lord, help us that we might become as a little child, simple in our faith and in our trust. And Lord may we have a concern for those little ones that trust in you. May we encourage them, may we love them, may we teach them, may they be brought by us to a fuller understanding of Your love for them. And Lord, help us that we would not be guilty of causing offences to Your Name or to the kingdom of God. Help us Lord to walk circumspectly. May we not offend those little ones that have come to trust in You because of certain liberties that we feel we have the freedom to exercise. But may we live by the higher law of love and walk in love even towards the weaker brethren. Thank You Lord for Your presence. Thank You for the power that You've entrusted into our hands. And now Lord, make it complete, give to us the capacity to forgive fully, just like You have forgiven us. In Jesus' Name we pray, Amen.