

Theme: Dealing with sin, sinners and entry into God's Kingdom.

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

<sup>2</sup> Then Jesus called a little child to Him, set him in the midst of them, <sup>3</sup> and said, "Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. <sup>4</sup> Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. <sup>5</sup> Whoever receives one little child like this in My name receives Me.

<sup>6</sup> "But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea. <sup>7</sup> Woe to the world because of offenses! For offenses must come, but woe to that man by whom the offense comes!

<sup>8</sup> "If your hand or foot causes you to sin, cut it off and cast *it* from you. It is better for you to enter into life lame or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet, to be cast into the everlasting fire. <sup>9</sup> And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast *it* from you. It is better for you to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes, to be cast into hell fire.

<sup>10</sup> "Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that in heaven their angels always see the face of My Father who is in heaven. <sup>11</sup> For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost.

<sup>12</sup> "What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them goes astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine and go to the mountains to seek the one that is straying? <sup>13</sup> And if he should find it, assuredly, I say to you, he rejoices more over that *sheep* than over the ninety-nine that did not go astray. <sup>14</sup> Even so it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish.

### Introduction

We are now about to begin the fourth of five teaching blocks in Matthew's Gospel.

Unless you are following the Bible chapter by chapter, it is always best to read and understand what has happened in the narrative before the incident that you will study.

### In our case this is Matthew chapter 17: v.24-27. (in the N.K.J.)

<sup>24</sup> When they had come to Capernaum, those who received the *temple* tax came to Peter and said, "Does your Teacher not pay the *temple* tax?"

<sup>25</sup> He said, "Yes."

And when he had come into the house, Jesus anticipated him, saying, "What do you think, Simon? From whom do the kings of the earth take customs or taxes, from their sons or from strangers?"

<sup>26</sup> Peter said to Him, "From strangers."

Jesus said to him, "Then the sons are free. <sup>27</sup> Nevertheless, lest we offend them, go to the sea, cast in a hook, and take the fish that comes up first. And when you have opened its mouth, you will find a piece of money; take that and give it to them for Me and you."

This little incident provides us with a **bridge into chapter 18.**

There was a two drachma tax levied on every male Jew for the support of the Temple and its ministry. When Jesus and the disciples arrived in Capernaum, the collectors of the Temple tax came to Peter and asked him a question. The question was, does your teacher (Jesus) pay the Temple tax?

Peter replied "Yes He does"

When they entered somebodies home, Jesus, knowing what had happened, brought up the subject of the Temple tax.

Jesus asked Simon/ Peter "**From whom do the kings of the earth take customs or taxes, from their sons or from strangers?**"

Peter replied " from strangers"

Jesus said that "**the sons are free.**"

In other words the **kings of the earth did not charge their sons customs or taxes.**

Although Jesus produced a miracle by providing some money in the mouth of a fish to pay the Temple tax, it wasn't the main point.

**The main point that Jesus was teaching Peter was that He didn't have to pay the Temple Tax because He was the Son of the Heavenly Father.**

Also because Peter was a **member of the Kingdom of God**, he didn't have to pay the Temple tax either. Jesus was making Peter aware of the blessing and benefit of being in God's Kingdom.

However because the **Old Testament was existing alongside with the New Testament** at this point Jesus provided the money through a miracle.

Nevertheless Jesus was moving towards the **birth of a new community** and as such Jesus starts to teach about **relationships within the new community of God's kingdom.**

**The central issue of chapter 18 is understanding and dealing with sin, and the people who sin in God's kingdom.**

I will divide Chapter 18 into two parts.

Part one will be chapter 18: v. 1-14, and next month on October 6<sup>th</sup> we will look at v. 15-35.

### **1. The disciples question – v.1.**

The question the disciples asked was “Who **then** is greatest in the kingdom of Heaven?”

By using the English word “**then**” at this point, it refers back to the incident concerning the Temple Tax. The disciples realised that Jesus had great privileges, but what were the disciples going to get and who would be the greatest disciple in this new kingdom?

It is quite possible that because Peter had been involved in many incidents previous to this question that the disciples **might have thought** that Jesus had selected him for **a special place in God's kingdom.**

The fact that the disciples were asking this question was actually **their biggest problem.**

The disciples were concerned with **worldly thinking concerning status in God's Kingdom**, however Jesus's main concern was **not status but entry in God's Kingdom.**

Jesus was also concerned with keeping yourself free from both sin in your own life and from causing other people to sin, through your actions.

### **2. Jesus gives the entry requirements for His Kingdom. v. 2-5.**

It appears that Jesus ignores the question of the disciples about who is going to be the greatest in His kingdom. The reason for Jesus side-stepping the question was **because the disciples thinking was all wrong.**

They were thinking about a physical kingdom, based upon the values of this earth, but Jesus was teaching them about a **Heavenly Kingdom**, based upon **spiritual values.**

Actually Jesus does answer their question, but not in the way that the disciples expected.

Jesus immediately points to the **entry requirements for His kingdom.**

Jesus used a little child to teach the disciples about how to enter God's kingdom.

Jesus said that **unless we are converted and become as little children**, we won't even enter the kingdom of heaven.

#### **Q. What does Jesus mean here?**

There are four occasions in Matthew's gospel where Jesus refers to children.

At each of these times there was always a child very near Jesus so that He could use the child to **illustrate or to give an example of His teaching.**

(Matt. 14:21,15:38,18:3,19:3)

Undoubtedly children felt attracted to Jesus and wanted to be near Him.

You can imagine the scene.

Jesus has a child in His arms and all of His disciples are in a semi-circle around Jesus waiting for His teaching.

The first thing we need to understand is what qualities little children have that Jesus wanted the disciples to have.

**These qualities were needed for conversion and entry into God's kingdom.**

There are a number of favourable qualities which we can generally associate with little children.

These are, **simplicity, frankness, obedience, unpretentiousness, (not trying to impress people) humility and trustfulness.**

Although children are born with a sinful human nature, and are at times badly behaved, nevertheless they do have these favourable qualities up to a certain age.

However it is clear from the passage that Jesus is wanting the disciples to focus upon the quality of **humility** as the main focus here in this passage.

In other words, if we are not prepared to **humble ourselves like a little child**, then it is impossible to enter God's Kingdom.

What Jesus is saying here is that there must be a **humble trustfulness in Him**, in order to enter into God's Kingdom.

Matthew 11:v. 28-30 in the N.L.T.

<sup>28</sup> Then Jesus said, "Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. <sup>29</sup> Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls. <sup>30</sup> For my yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light."

There is an old Dutch Poem written many years ago which highlights the need for child-like faith. It goes like this.

Make me, O Lord, a child again.  
So tender, frail, and small,  
In self possessing nothing, and  
In thee possessing all.

O Saviour, make me small once more,  
That downward I may grow,  
And in this heart of mine restore  
The faith of long ago.

With thee may I be crucified –  
No longer I that lives –  
O Saviour, crush my sinful pride  
By grace which pardon gives.

Make me, O Lord, a child again,  
Obedient to thy call,  
In self possessing nothing, and  
In thee possessing all.

If you are a Christian today there must have been a time in your life when you were prepared to humble yourself and admit that your sin was separating you from a relationship with the Holy creator God of this Universe.

You must have humbly trusted in the words of Jesus, inviting you to repent of your sin and put your faith and trust in Him.

If you are not yet a Christian, then maybe your problem is that you have to become like a little child, and humbly accept the words of Jesus from the Bible.

If you can't do this, then you remain outside of God's Kingdom.

**However you can ask God to help you become like a little child, and He will give you the humility and faithful trust in His word.**

Q. Why not pray this prayer today, and ask God to change your proud heart and make you humble and willing to trust Him like a little child.?

### **3. Jesus wants us to treat all believers the same way we would treat Jesus. – v.5.**

Verse 5 is a very challenging verse for all Christian believers.

What Jesus is saying is that ALL Christians are on the same level.

There is no status in the Christian community.

Everybody is saved by grace, lives by God's grace, and dies believing in the Salvation of their soul, because of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ who dies on the cross for our sins.

This verse is a bridge that helps us to cross over to the next section of v.6-9.

#### **4. Jesus challenges us to a life-style that repels sin and avoids negative influence**

(v. 6-9.)

These verses are very challenging to all believers in Jesus. The reason they are challenging are two-fold. Firstly because Jesus takes sin in the life of a believer very seriously, and secondly because our behaviour as a Christian can influence other people to sin.

In fact Jesus is saying that the complete removal of the thing that is causing you to sin is the only option.

In other words drastic action is required to overcome temptation.

The drastic action that is required is through prayer.

Matthew 6: v.13 in the N.L.T.

<sup>13</sup> And don't let us yield to temptation, but rescue us from the evil one.

Matthew 26: v.40-41.in the N.L.T.

<sup>40</sup> Then he returned to the disciples and found them asleep. He said to Peter, "Couldn't you watch with me even one hour? <sup>41</sup> Keep watch and pray, so that you will not give in to temptation. For the spirit is willing, but the body is weak!"

If we pray for God's help then we can claim victory over temptation.

Matthew 7: v.7-8 in the N.L.T

<sup>7</sup> "Keep on asking, and you will receive what you ask for. Keep on seeking, and you will find. Keep on knocking, and the door will be opened to you. <sup>8</sup> For everyone who asks, receives. Everyone who seeks, finds. And to everyone who knocks, the door will be opened.

1 Corinthians 10: v.12-13 in the N.L.T

<sup>12</sup> If you think you are standing strong, be careful not to fall. <sup>13</sup> The temptations in your life are no different from what others experience. And God is faithful. He will not allow the temptation to be more than you can stand. When you are tempted, he will show you a way out so that you can endure.

Hebrews 2: v. 17-18.in the N.L.T

<sup>17</sup> Therefore, it was necessary for him to be made in every respect like us, his brothers and sisters, so that he could be our merciful and faithful High Priest before God. Then he could offer a sacrifice that would take away the sins of the people. <sup>18</sup> Since he himself has gone through suffering and testing, he is able to help us when we are being tested.

#### **5. Jesus exposes the root cause of all self-exaltation. – v. 10.**

In v. 10 Jesus says that we must not look down upon, or despise one of these little ones. Jesus was referring to the people who become like little children in order to enter God's Kingdom.

In the original Greek translation it uses a word that means "thinking down upon others".

The correct attitude that we must have is the attitude that Paul expresses in Philippians 2 : v. 3.-4.

Philippians 2 : v. 3.-4.( N.L.T.)

<sup>3</sup> Don't be selfish; don't try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves. <sup>4</sup> Don't look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too.

#### **6. Jesus is interested in saving lost people. – v. 11-14.**

In v. 11 Jesus declares His interest in lost people.

(Mat 18: v. 11 in N.K.J.)

<sup>11</sup> For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost.

Lost people, are people whose sin separates them from their creator God.

After this Jesus tells us a story to illustrate both His involvement in reaching out to lost people, and also how we can be involved in that process too.!!!

(A more extended form of this parable is found in Luke 15: v.3-7)

If you were a Shepherd in those days, in charge of a large flock of Sheep and lost one sheep, then you would be very concerned to rescue that sheep quickly because it was in danger of being killed by a wild animal.

The disciples would have been well aware of the point that Jesus was stressing here.

Jesus was saying that reaching out to lost people is a very important focus in our Christian lives.

Jesus wants us to reach out to lost people because His main purpose of coming into the world was to rescue lost people.

In fact Jesus died on a cross and received the wrath of God, so that we could be rescued from the punishment of our sins.

Today we celebrate the "**Communion service**" because it was a wonderful thing that Jesus did for each one of us, by leaving the glory of Heaven and coming to this world to rescue us from God's eternal wrath and punishment.

The question you need to ask yourself today is Am I lost and out of god's Kingdom, or am I saved and have I entered God's Kingdom.?

In v. 14 it tells us that it is not God's will that anybody remains lost and out of God's Kingdom.

The provision is made for everybody to enter God's Kingdom. Jesus has secured that provision for us through His death on the cross.

John 3: v. 16. ( N.L.T.)

<sup>16</sup> "For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.

It is only our pride that stops us accepting His invitation to come to Him.

Your challenge today is to pray that God will humble you and give you the trusting faith like a little child, so that you may enter God's Kingdom.

If you are already in God's Kingdom, then you and I have a responsibility to live our lives so that they will have a very positive affect on other people.

We must NOT cause people to sin because of our actions or life-style.

If there is any attitude, or behaviour in your life that might cause another person to be influenced towards a sinful act or behaviour, then we must deal with it immediately and through prayer.

Let us pray.