

A Short Commentary on Matthew 18:1-14.

Matthew 18:1-14. *“At the same time came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them, And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me. But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and [that] he were drowned in the depth of the sea. Woe unto the world because of offences! for it must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh! Wherefore if thy hand or thy foot offend thee, cut them off, and cast [them] from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life halt or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet to be cast into everlasting fire. And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast [it] from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire. Take heed that ye 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. For the Son of man is come to save that which was lost. How think ye? if a man have an hundred sheep, and one of them be gone astray, doth he not leave the ninety and nine, and goeth into the mountains, and seeketh that which is gone astray? And if so be that he find it, verily I say unto you, he rejoiceth more of that [sheep], than of the ninety and nine which went not astray. Even so it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish.”*

The question posed here by Christ’s disciples was who the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Verse 1.

Jesus’ answer to them is very rich and full of information. Christ’s answer opens to those present the whole of the Father’s work in sending Christ Jesus into the world. Christ Jesus also gave them a glimpse into pre-creative eternity. While this answer was to those then present, the truth of it stands firm to all of the Father’s children of all time from everlasting.

A careful consideration of all that Christ Jesus here taught will reveal to us the eternal will of God the Father, the nature of the ministry of Christ according to His Father’s will, and the fruits and effects of our standing in Christ Jesus.

Let us consider the richness of Christ’s teaching here under four heads.

Firstly, what is the Father’s will herein described?

Secondly, what, flowing from the previous head, is Christ Jesus’ purpose according to his Father’s will?

Thirdly, what are the fruits or effects of Christ’s ministry.

And lastly, I wish to tie these three heads together to relate how Christ here reveals that He fulfills all three previous heads.

Being not yet fully converted, Christ's disciples asked Him who the greatest citizen of the kingdom of heaven was. Our Lord Jesus makes known to these disciples the fullness of their citizenship in the kingdom of heaven. In response to this question, our Lord Jesus in this discourse gives them a full answer.

It is the will of the Father that none of these little ones should perish.

Our Lord Jesus Christ told His disciples, verse 14, "*Even so it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish.*" Here our Lord opens a great mystery hidden from the foundation of the world. Christ likens His disciples to little children. Using little children as a figure, our Lord teaches that those who are citizens of the kingdom of heaven are they who are converted and become as a little child. But this is not the cause of their citizenship, but, rather, the evidence thereof.

The significance of the phrase "your Father which is in heaven."

The great mystery Christ Jesus opens to us here is that the children of the kingdom of heaven are the Father's children. "*It is not the will of your Father,*" Christ tells us. We learn hereby that the kingdom of heaven is not an earthly physical kingdom to whom all of mankind belong, but a spiritual kingdom whose ruler is identified as "*your Father which is in heaven.*"

Not an Earthly Father

If the kingdom of heaven were of this earth, then our Lord would have had no cause to rebuke those scribes and Pharisees, John 8:41-44, who held that God was their father. The Jews held that false belief because they claimed Abraham as their fleshly father. From this they understood themselves to be children of God; however, Jesus rebuked them telling them that their physical lineage made no difference, and that they were of their father, the devil.

We learn from this that the children of God are not children of God by physical, natural birth. God formed man from the dust of the earth and breathed into him the breath of life. Gen. 2:7. Knowing this, then it will appear that the Father had children prior to their dust of the earth creation.

A Heavenly Covenant, Christ

The Jews thought that because God made a covenant with Abram, Genesis 17, they were the children of God. However, we know from the New Testament that this Abrahamic covenant was not the institution of a fleshly covenant, but the revelation of a spiritual, everlasting covenant. "*Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ. And this I say, [that] the covenant, that*

was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect.” Galations 3:16, 17.

Spiritual Children

We know that fleshly seed, i.e. offspring, are not the seed meant in the everlasting covenant. Christ is the seed. This everlasting covenant, sometimes called the sure mercies of David (Isa. 55:3; Acts 13:34), the covenant of my peace (Isa. 54:10; Eze. 34:25; 37:26), a new covenant (Jer. 31:31; Heb. 8:8, 12:24), the holy covenant (Dan. 11:28, 30; Luk. 1:72), a better covenant (Heb. 8:6), the oath (Luk. 1:73; Heb. 7:28), and an oath (Acts 2:30; Heb. 6:17, 7:21) is none other than Christ Jesus Himself.

“I the LORD have called thee in righteousness, and will hold thine hand, and will keep thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles;” Isa. 42:6. And again, “Thus saith the LORD, In an acceptable time have I heard thee, and in a day of salvation have I helped thee: and I will preserve thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, to establish the earth, to cause to inherit the desolate heritages;” Isa. 49:8.

Christ’s Spiritual Children From Before Creation

Christ Jesus is the everlasting covenant, and those that are the children of this kingdom of heaven are Christ’s. In Malachai 2:4, we read, *“My covenant was with him of life and peace; and I gave them to him [for] the fear wherewith he feared me, and was afraid before my name. The law of truth was in his mouth, and iniquity was not found in his lips: he walked with me in peace and equity, and did turn many away from iniquity.”* Christ was given many and these he did turn away from iniquity.

This same truth is more plainly expressed in Ephesians 1:3, 4, *“Blessed [be] the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly [places] in Christ: According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love:”* Here we more fully see that God the Father gave many to Jesus Christ, the Covenant, before the foundation of the world. These given to Christ Jesus before creation are rightly God the Father’s children. They have been so in Christ from before all time and will remain so forever.

Christ’s Children are the Father’s Children, Firstly

These children of the Father belonged to Him before he gave them to Christ. John 17:6 *“I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world: thine they were, and thou gavest them me; and they have kept thy word.”* And again, *“Behold, I and the children whom the LORD hath given me..”* Isaiah 8:18. These, the Father’s children, were given to Christ before the foundation of the world.

Second Consideration—the Children shall not perish.

God the Father gave His spiritual children to Christ Jesus to maintain them by redeeming them from their fleshly sins.

“Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil;” Hebrews 2:14.

Christ’s Mission in His Flesh

Christ’s own words in the eleventh verse of this eighteenth chapter tell of His earthly mission. ***“For the Son of Man is come to save that which was lost.”*** Christ came to save that which was lost. What does our Lord mean here by “lost?” Perhaps the most plain parable to answer this is our Lord’s parable of the prodigal son. Luke 15:1-32. Here we learn of a certain man who had two sons. The younger asked for his portion of his father’s inheritance. Soon after receiving his part, the young son left home and journeyed into a far country and there wasted all of his inheritance. A famine struck the country in which he was living and he grew hungry. He became a slave to a man that had him work by feeding swill to hogs. He became so hungry that he wanted to eat the hogs’ swill, but he wasn’t allowed. He then came to himself and realized that his father had many servants who had more than enough to eat. He decided to return home, confess his sin against heaven and before him, tell his father that he was no more worthy to be called his son and ask that his father hire him as a servant. He arose and went to his father. Before he came near to where his father was, his father saw him, had compassion on him, ran out to him, hugged and kissed him. The son confessed his sin and unworthiness, but the father clothed him, gave him a ring, and had his servants prepare a great feast in his honor, ***“for this my son was dead, and is alive again. He was lost, and is found.”***

The elder brother returned home and discovered what the father had ordered be done. He was angered and would not go in to celebrate. The father went outside to the elder son and entreated him to join the celebration, but the elder son felt slighted by the feast as he had remained faithful in his father’s house. He told his father that he never had never made a feast for him and his friends, but as soon as my younger brother showed up that wasted his entire inheritance with harlots, you made a feast for him. The father answered the elder son saying, Son, you are ever with me and all I have is yours. It was proper that we should celebrate and be glad, for this your brother ***“was dead, and is alive again, and was lost but now is found.”***

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