

Matthew: The Kingdom of Heaven

Matthew 18 | Forgiven to Forgive

→ *Survey: Let's understand the background and context of the passage.*

Matthew is written for a Jewish audience to highlight Jesus as the promised Messiah, meaning anointed one. They expected this Messiah to set up a kingdom on earth and subdue the enemies of Israel as a conquering king. But Jesus came in humility to conquer sin and death. In this, he set up an upside-down kingdom, where the first will be last, and the last will be first; those seen as the least in the world's eyes will be seen as the greatest in the kingdom, as we will see tonight in our study. Therefore true Kingdom people store up treasures in heaven and not on earth because we await the return of King Jesus who will bring about the new heavens and the earth.

As we skip ahead to Matthew 18 tonight, Jesus has already predicted his death twice, yet the Jewish people don't understand or don't agree with Jesus' ways. They still expect him to set up his kingdom now, not after his death. Despite this, Jesus continues to teach them about the kingdom of heaven and how his followers should act. As we read tonight's study, we will be challenged in similar ways. We will see Jesus emphasize the destructive ways of sin, and the grandeur of God's love for His children. With this, Jesus uses a parable to highlight the necessity of forgiveness for his followers. Because we have been forgiven much, we must forgive much. But is it really that simple? Let's explore this together as we read Matthew 18.

Read: Matthew 18 (NIV)

→ *Observe: Let's take a close look at what the text is saying.*

1. Did you notice any similarities between this passage and previous Matthew studies?
2. What question do the disciples ask Jesus (v. 1)? To answer, who does Jesus bring over (v. 2)? Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven (v. 4)?
3. What would be better than causing one of the children to stumble (v. 6)?
4. What do we do if we are stumbling (v. 8-9)? What 2 examples does Jesus give? Why is that?
5. Who is in the metaphor that Jesus gives next (v. 12)? What happens if the man finds the sheep (v. 13)? How does Jesus connect this story to what he was saying earlier (v. 14)?
6. What are the four steps that should be taken if someone sins against you (v. 15-17)?
7. Who comes up to Jesus and what does he ask him (v. 21)? How does Jesus respond (v. 22)?
8. What story does Jesus tell to demonstrate this (v. 23-34)? Summarize it in your own words!
9. What point is Jesus making (v. 35)?

→ *Interpret: Let's seek to understand the meaning of this text in its original context.*

1. How might the people listening have answered who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? How would you describe children - what words come to mind? How is that different? Why would Jesus say whoever is lowly like a child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven (v. 2-5)?
2. Why does Jesus give such extreme examples when talking about the things that cause us or others to stumble? What is he saying about sin? How does the metaphor in verses 12-14 help us understand God's relationship with His children?
3. How do the steps listed in verses 15-17 reveal to us what matters in God's Kingdom? What 1 or 2 things would you say matter most in pursuing reconciliation?
4. What does Peter's question and Jesus' response (v. 21-22) teach us about forgiveness? Why can followers of Jesus be quick to forgive? How does the parable (v. 23-35) help us understand?

→ *Apply: Let's explore where the text intersects with our lives and our world.*

1. In what areas do you struggle with pride or wanting recognition? How does Jesus' teaching about the "greatest in the kingdom of heaven" affect how you see yourself & others? Do you treat people who seem 'less important' (like children) with the same value you give to others?
2. What are some wrong ways to deal with the sins of our brothers and sisters? What are the biblical options when it comes to dealing with the sins of our brother or sister? How do you know when you've truly forgiven someone?
 - Is there someone you need to forgive but haven't? Consider the parable - God has forgiven you... what's holding you back?