

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

The Care of God's Children

Scripture: Matthew 18:10-14

Code: 2329

We'd like you to take your Bible now, if you will, and look at the 18th chapter of Matthew. Matthew chapter 18. This great chapter has a single theme, really. The childlikeness of the believer. It deals with themes related to God's children -- those who are in His redeemed family. And as we've been saying in this particular series, the most common designation for the people of God is children. We are commonly called children; and I think God calls us that, not only because we are the offspring of God, but because we are dependent, because we are weak, because we are ignorant, because we are humble, because we are immature. All of those characteristics that are true of children physically are true of us spiritually; and every section of chapter 18 speaks to the issue of God's people as children.

For example, in verses 3 and 4, Jesus said, "We enter the Kingdom as little children." In verses 5 through 9, we are to be protected from sin like little children. In verses 10 to 14, we are to be cared for like little children. In verses 15 to 20, we are to be disciplined like children; and in verses 21 to 35, we are to be forgiven like children.

Now, we've already looked at the fact that we're to enter the Kingdom like children in verses 3 and 4; and we've also, last week, examined the idea that we are to be protected from sin like little children in verses 5 to 9. And this morning we come to verses 10 through 14; and just a note for some of you, there's a familiar statement in this passage. It's verse 11 in the Authorized. It says, "For the Son of Man is come to save that which was lost." The earlier manuscripts of Matthew do not include that verse. We believe that some scribe put it in. Lemme add that it is true, and it does belong in Luke 19:10. We just don't know how it got in Matthew 18, because in all the early manuscripts, it isn't there. When something isn't in the early manuscripts and it appears in the later manuscripts, we figure somebody later on put it in; and so we're not denying the truth. It's in Luke 19:10, and it's true. It just isn't in this particular text, and we don't know how it managed to wiggle in. Some well-meaning scribe thought it enhanced what Matthew was saying. So just in case you wonder why I go right on by as if it weren't there, it isn't there...

Now, we focused last time on our Lord's very strong warning against anyone who causes His children to sin. A very strong word from Him in verses 5 to 9. Now, in the same general line of thought, we're looking this morning at the positive side to that negative. In other words, we are not only not to allow or to lead Christians into sin, we are positively to care for them; and I see that emerging out of this passage. Although it starts with a negative, it ends with a very positive approach; and so I like to think

that verses 10 through 14 are all about the care of God's children. The care of God's children.

Now, keep in mind that the passage is not talking about physical children. It is not talking about infants and little children physically. It is talking about the childlike believer, the one who knows Jesus Christ, who has come as a child, who is the child of God; and the little child is simply an analogy to define the nature of one who follows God, who loves the Lord Jesus Christ. So it's talking about Christians under the analogy of little children...

Now, the text basically says to us that God cares for His children. That's the basic bottom line truth in this text. God cares for His children, and you can see it pretty well in verse 14. "Even so it is not the will of your Father who is in Heaven that one of these little ones should perish." Or should be marred, or should be ruined, or should be led into disaster. The Father, then, cares for His children. God is a God who cares for His own.

Another underlying principle is this: that God cares for them equally, that He cares for them equally. He says, "One of these little ones," in verse 14. He says, "One of these little ones," in verse 10; and both times that numerical one is put in there just so nobody gets eliminated. It is so very important that every single individual Christian be thought of as in the utmost sense important to the care of God the Father.

Now, with that in mind, let's look, basically, at the text. Verse 10, "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 who is in Heaven. How think ye? If a man have a 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 over that sheep than over the ninety and nine which went not astray. Even so it is not the will of your Father who is in Heaven that one of these little ones should perish."

The...the idea that the text keeps talking us as little ones, as children, emphasizes our humility. It emphasizes our weakness. It emphasizes our lowliness, our meekness, our dependence; and this is a very essential element in understanding the redemptive plan of God. For example, look at 1 Corinthians chapter 1 for a moment, verse 26. Remember Jesus said, "Nobody comes into the Kingdom except as a little child, one who is humble, dependent, weak, and meek, and so forth." The high and the mighty, the lofty, the proud, and all that just don't come in. They...they don't get in. They're not interested. They don't need the help. The person who comes in comes when he senses his own inadequacy and unworthiness and lowliness, childlikeness, desperate need for one to do what he can't do for himself; and so we find in 1 Corinthians 1:26, "You see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called."

Have you noticed that in Christianity? First of all, look that it says not many wise men, not many high class intelligentsia...Now this is a great intellectuals. There aren't many intellectuals. Oh, there are a few, but not many, not many; because they often are satisfied by their own intelligence. And then he says, "There are not many mighty." That has to do with the great, the powerful, the famous, the influential. And then he says, "There are not many noble." That has to do with the well-born, the high-ranking, the royal. That the high-class people basically aren't the ones who dominate the Kingdom of God. It's amazing to me that there are always those people who wanna be out there, thinking they can win those people to the Lord. "Oh, if we could just win these intellectuals, or if we could just win these influential, famous, powerful politicians, athletes, movie stars or leaders, if we could just get over here to the...to the royal people, the high-class people, and so forth, and win those people to Christ, boy, just thing what God could do in the world." And they forget that it's always been this way. There aren't many wise, and there aren't many mighty, and there aren't many noble.

Instead of the wise, verse 27 says, you get the foolish; and instead of the mighty, you get the weak; and in verse 28, instead of the of the noble, you get the base or the common folks. Now this is very important, because what it tells us is that God cares for common people. God cares for the little ones. That's why in Matthew 25 He says, "Whatever you do unto the least of these, My brethren, you've done it unto Me." And I think that there's a very clear reason why God has done this. It's in verse 29. "That no flesh should glory before God." And then verse 31, "He that glories, let him glory in the Lord."

You don't come into God's Kingdom by your intellect. You don't come into God's Kingdom by your power and influence. You don't come into God's Kingdom by your birth or your birthright. Those people just seem somehow to be so disinterested. They seem to lack the kind of humility and desperation of a little child that is necessary for anyone to enter the Kingdom. God has chosen the humble.

When Jesus came to preach in Luke 4, He got up, and He took the text, Isaiah 61, and He said that He had come and been anointed to preach the Gospel to the poor. To the poor...It's hard for rich people to get into the Kingdom of Heaven. It's easier for camels to go through the eye of needles. It's mostly the poor; and so what you have then, keep it in mind, is a whole lotta lowly people in the Kingdom, a lotta little ones, a lot of insignificant folks. There are still stratas, and there are a few of those upper echelon folks, but most are just common folks; and the text is saying we are to care for the common folks, every single one of these little ones, because every single one of these little ones, verse 14 says, is the special care of the Father...

Now, remember, the disciples were arguing about who was gonna be the greatest, who was gonna be the most exalted among them in the Kingdom when it came to earth; and Jesus is really giving them more of an answer than they expected. He's telling them the greatest is the humblest, the greatest is the lowliest; and He says to them, "You can't even get in My Kingdom unless you're

humble; and if you wanna be great in My Kingdom, you must be humble. The humbler, the greater; and instead of provoking each other to pride and ambition and selfishness and jealousy and envy and leading each other into sin...now we come into our text 10 to 14...you oughta be leading one another into righteousness; and instead of looking down on each other and thinking yourself to be worthy of elevation, you oughta be looking up at each other as God considers each to be equal.

In other words, though it stands alone as a teaching passage, its context enriches its immediate impact. These disciples needed to know that, if they were gonna push themselves up, they were gonna have to do it at the expense of pushing someone else down; and that was in violation of the heart of the Father Himself. For all in His Kingdom are great. For all in His Kingdom are humble; because if they weren't humble, they never woulda gotten in His Kingdom. So instead of their proud self-seeking which created jealousy, envy, and pride and led each other to sin, and instead of their care-less attitude that says, "I want what I want whether you get it or not," they should've been seeking the welfare of one another. That's the heart of this text; and lest you think it's some new...new lesson to us who study the New Testament and hasn't been given heretofore, we've given it many times. Every time we allude to Philippians chapter 2, we see the same truth, where the Apostle Paul says to the Philippian believers, "I wish that you had the same love." What do you mean by that, Paul? "Simply I miss...I wish that you loved everybody the same, the same care for one another."

How do you do that, Paul? "Well, you look not on your own things, but on the things of others. You let each man esteem others better than themselves," Philippians 2 says, "For that's the mind of Christ, who, when He was God, thought it not something to hold onto that kind of thing, but humbled Himself and became a Man and died for us." In a sense, He looked on us as better than Himself. He was willing sacrifice everything He had: all the honor, all the glory, and humiliate Himself for our sake; and that's the spirit of this text. Paul is saying, in Philippians 2, "Don't look down on one another. Look up at one another. See yourself as on the bottom." And, here, our Lord is saying the same thing in verse 10. "Don't look down on these little ones...God looks up to them in terms of being underneath them to consider their needs." Very important principle.

Now, let's look at the...the text with just two thoughts, the rule and the reason. The rule and the reason. The rule's in verse 10. "Take heed that you despise not one of these little ones." Stop right there. That is the rule. That's the principle, the standard, the statute, the commandment. Take heed is simply a...phrase meaning be careful. See that you don't. Be careful. A very important command and, again, you get the feeling that this is a warning. That if you're not doing this, you're in some trouble. Last time He said, "Don't lead a Christian into sin. You'd be better off if a millstone were put around your neck and you were drowned in the deep...in the deepest part of the sea." And here He is saying, "Take heed," and it is a strong warning that would imply some similar kind of thing might be better than to do this.

"Take heed that you despise not." The word despise in the Greek is very interesting. Kataphroneho, phroneho has to do with the mind and thinking, and kata is down. Don't think down on people. Don't put yourself up here and look at them as if they were below you, as if they were beneath you. Looking at them with disdain, looking at them with indifference, as if they were valueless or useless or worthless, holding them in contempt...not worth your consideration...

So the command is very simple; and if you take the subjective verb with a negative prohibition, it could say this: "Be warned. This should never, ever, ever happen, that you look down on one of these little ones as if he were without value." That's what it said. Don't ever do that. Notice it says "One of these little ones," and, again, I remind you that little ones has to do with Christians, not with little babies. We know that because of verse 6. "One of these little ones who believe in Me," and that is the key that interprets the little ones for us, because babies can't believe in Jesus Christ. They don't know Him. So the little ones to whom He refers is the...is the group of believers. So don't look down on one believer, not one. That numerical addition is very important. Don't look down on one, not one.

You know, the world has done this. The world has done this. The world has looked down on the Christians. It is enough that the world looks down on Christians. It is enough that they are looked down on and ridiculed and despised and disdained and held in contempt and thought to be worthless and useless and of no value. "It is enough that the world does that to these little ones who belong to Me. You should not do that."...

The Lord is primarily concerned here with how Christians treat Christians. Now, I think the church has caught the spirit of the world, unfortunately. We seem to get the world's diseases so easily. And in the world, you see, you...you despise the simple, and you despise the humble, and you despise the meek, and you inevitably exalt the great, and you lift up the stars and the heroes, and the Lord in Heaven cares for the little ones...the very least of them, and He cares for them -- get this word -- equally. Equally. So the words of Jesus are emphatic. He sets a constant warning in motion against looking down at one single one of God's little children no matter how seemingly valueless, he or she might appear. Don't do it.

The psalmist in that monumental Psalm 15, which talks about the heart of the true worshipper says, "The true worshipper...I love this...honors those who fear the Lord." And so should we honor all those who fear the Lord, no matter where they are on the social strata. Never be guilty of looking down at God's children no matter who they are. You know, we're...we're very good at criticizing. We're very good at laughing at peoples' foibles, laughing at their weaknesses, ridiculing their failures.

Lemme just describe to you, for example, the ways we look down on other Christians; and now we'll know what to avoid. Okay? I give ya few ways in which we tend to look down on other Christians. First, by flaunting our liberty. By flaunting our liberty. We studied this a little bit in Romans last week, when we alluded to chapter 14 and 15; and the implication of chapter 14 is that there were some

Christians who had been Christians for a while, perhaps were rather mature, and had long ago cut the cord with Judaism. They weren't hung up on the...on the Sabbath anymore. They weren't hung up on certain dietary laws. They were free, and they were eating pork, if you will, and they were living in violation of the old traditional Sabbath law. They really weren't bound by that anymore. They felt very free. The first part of Romans 14 says that.

And then there were a group of new Christians coming along, and they...they had just come out of that, and they were still bound in their conscience because of years of loyalty. They were bound to the Sabbath, and they were bound to the festivals, and they were bound to certain kind of dietary laws; and Paul says, "Don't you, that have been freed from that...use your liberty to oppress those other people...and to cause 'em to stumble, and to grieve them, and to injure them, and to wound them." And that's exactly what I'm talking about. We look down on other Christians when we flaunt our liberty with the attitude, "Well, I don't care what it does to him. Who cares how he feels about it. This is my liberty. I'm free to do it. What do I care what they say?" We may not quite say it that boldly, but we may often act in that way; and that's what Peter says in 1 Peter 2:16 is using your liberty as a cloak of maliciousness. In other words, the person who says, "Look, I don't care what those people over there think. I'm free to do this if I want. It's not forbidden in the Bible. I'm gonna do this, even if it does make 'em stumble. They're not gonna make me conform to their standard."

I've had people say to me, "Well, listen, I can't go through my whole life trying to adjust to everybody's problem. I mean they're just gonna have to get over mine." I've had people say to me, "You know, I know it bothers so and so for me to drink, but that's their tough luck. I'm free in Christ, and I'm gonna do it." Paul says in Romans 14, "Don't destroy the Kingdom of God in the life of that person for the sake of something you drink or something you eat."...I mean there's a sense in which you are despising that person. You're saying, "Look, I'm gonna do what I'm gonna do, because I'm more important to me than you are." Be warned, folks. You don't wanna live like that, because you don't wanna live with the consequences of living like that. You certainly don't wanna violate the principles of the Savior you say you love.

So one way we despise other people is by flaunting our liberty. There's a second way. I believe we despise other people, not only by flaunting our liberty, and I think that is so important. I would stress it more. Just lemme remind you of Romans 14:3, "Let not him that eat despise him that eats not." And there he uses the very same term. You despise someone when you use your liberty against their conscience.

But there's a second way, and I see this in James chapter 2. Look at it there. James 2, "Brethren, don't have the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory with respect of persons." In other words, if you're a Christian, and you're in the faith, don't hold that faith, and be a part of the family of God and have in your heart respect of persons. In other words, think of some people as better than others. "And if there comes into your assembly a man with a gold ring, in fine apparel, and there

comes in a man in filthy, vile clothing, and you have respect to the one that wears the fine clothing, and you say, 'Sit thou here in a good place,' and say to the poor, 'Stand thou there,' or 'Sit here under my footstool. Get outta the way, will ya?' are you not partial in yourselves and becoming judge with evil thoughts? Harken, my beloved brethren: Hath not God chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith, and heirs of the Kingdom which He hath promised to them that love Him? But you have despised the poor. Do you...do not rich men oppress you and draw you before the judgment seats? Do not they blaspheme that worthy name by which you are called?"

I mean, you certainly wouldn't wanna cater just to the rich. They've been a problem to the church for a long time. "If you fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, 'Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself,' you do well. But if you have respect of persons, you commit sin." Verse 6, "you have despised the poor." There's a second way you despise people -- by looking down on the lowly, by looking down on the lowly people... Considering people under your social station in life as unworthy of your concern or attention...We do that. Boy, we do everything we can to pad the seat of the one above; and we just don't like the ones below to even interrupt us. That's despising one of the little ones.

There's a third way we despise Christians. First Corinthians chapter 11...1 Corinthians. I didn't know there were so many of these in the Scripture until I got to looking them all up and going through the Scripture, and 1 Corinthians chapter 11, the church come to...had come together regularly for a love feast and the Lord's Supper; and in verse 20 of 1 Corinthians 11, Paul says, "When you come together therefore into one place, this is not the Lord's Supper which you eat. You may think you're eating the Lord's Supper, but it isn't the Lord's Supper. You have really messed it up." And here's how, verse 21, "For in eating, every one taketh before the other his own supper." Now, how would you like to go to a potluck like that? Where all the people who brought the food came an hour early; and by the time the crowd came, it was all eaten by the people who brought it.

That's why Paul says in the next verse, "Don't you have a house to eat in? If all you wanna do is eat a meal, stay home." The result of this is that one is hungry. In other words, the people who didn't have anything, the poor of the church, they came hoping to find some food brought to them by those who had the food; but the people who had it all ate it all up. In fact, they got drunk, so you have half the group drunk, and half of 'em hungry...And he says to them in verse 22, "Do you despise the church of God and shame them that have not?" You despise a person by withholding what he needs. We despise people by flaunting our liberty, looking down on the lowly, and withholding from those in need...by consuming everything without a thought for those who do not have by overindulgence, materialism, consumption...

There's a fourth way. In 2 Corinthians chapter 10. Wish we could spend more time on each of these. First Corinthians...or 2 Corinthians 10 is a very, very fascinating chapter. These self-styled egotistical, proud...self-appointed representatives of God were condemning Paul. They really despised him...and

they despised him for an interesting reason. Verse 10, 2 Corinthians 10, "For his letters,' say they, 'are weighty and powerful, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible.'"...

Here's a fourth way -- by ridiculing someone's physical features. By ridiculing someone's physical features, mocking their appearance or their way of speech; and we can do this. The high-class, you know, we want all the rich and beautiful and lovely people; and the media just continually pumps a stream of that stuff out, that they're the only people worth talking to. They're the only people whose opinions matter.

I remember someone was telling me when Moody went to Cambridge. Cambridge, the most educated spot on the earth. He was to speak, and he said at the beginning of his message, "Don't let nobody never tell you God don't love you 'cause He do."... Man, did he get their attention. See, he had been mocked in the press for his lack of proper English...We look down on people so often because of their physical appearance or because of their simple vocabulary or their simple clothing, their simple lifestyle, their modest living accommodations. We're not to do that. That's wrong.

Lemme give you another one, Galatians 6...Galatians 6 verse 1..."If a man be overtaken in a fault, ye who are spiritual restore such an one in the spirit of meekness, considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted. Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. For if a man think himself to be something when he's nothing, he deceives himself."

You know what? There's another way we can...we can look down in disdain on people. By looking with indifference on a Christian who has fallen. By looking with indifference on a Christian who has fallen. Just wanna push him outta the way. "Well, I mean he had his choice. He made his choice, and that's the way he chose to live." And we're just gonna tell him, "You're gone, fella, and that's it." We wipe our hands clean. That...that's wrong. That's not the way to treat that person. You're to restore him in meekness, humility. It takes humility to be willing to do that. You gotta come down off your thing. "Well, I'm too good to soil my hands with this guy who stained his life in this way," and you're saying, in effect, "I'll come down there, my brother, and I'll lift you up, and I'll carry your burden, and I'll fulfill the law of Christ." And what is the law of Christ? That you should love. That's the law of Christ. If you're too good for that, verse 3, who are you kidding? Not God, just you.

How do we despise others? By flaunting our liberty, by looking down on the lowly, by withholding from those in need, by ridiculing someone's physical features, by looking with indifference on a Christian who has fallen. You know, sometimes we say, "Well, he's getting the judgment of God." Back in the 4th chapter of Galatians, Paul had this happening to him. He says in verse 13, "You know how through infirmity of the flesh I preached the Gospel unto you at the first." And he had a tremendous infirmity of the flesh. He had a severe illness; and he came there and preached; and, apparently, it was a problem for them, because verse 14 says, "And your trial, which was in my flesh, you despised not."

"I mean you didn't look down on me then when I was preaching you the Gospel, even though it must have been difficult for you. You didn't despise me, and you didn't reject me, and now you're rejecting me." Verse 16, "Have I become your enemy because I tell you the truth?"...Now, he says, "You didn't despise me when I gave you the Gospel. Now, when I come back to you and say, 'Get your life straight. Shape up spiritually.' Are you gonna despise me?"

This takes me to a sixth principle. We despise people when we reject those who confront our sinfulness. We despise another believer when we reject the person who confronts our sinfulness. We decide, "Who does he think he is...confronting me?" In the process of discipline, that's happened many times when I have approached a person and said, "You know, your life is out of line, and this is what you need to do to get your life right," and their reply has come, "Well, just who do you think you are?" And they despise the one who seeks to help.

Paul had the same situation in the Corinthian church -- 1 Corinthians 4:10. He says in...in sarcastic terms, "We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are wise. We are weak, but you are strong. You are honorable, but we are despised." He had come to the Corinthians with a message of repentance and a message of get things straightened out, and...they despised him. At the end of 1 Corinthians, look at 16:10, 1 Corinthians 16:10, He says, "If Timothy comes, see that he may be with you without fear. Don't scare him to death." Corinthians were a tough bunch. "For he works the work of the Lord, as I do. And let no man therefore despise him...Don't look down on him. He's gonna come and confront you. He's gonna come and tell you what you need to know. Don't look down on him. Don't despise him."

You know what Paul said to Titus in Titus 2:15? "These words speak and exhort, and rebuke with all authority, and let no man despise you." And he said to Timothy, "Let no man despise you or...what?...your youth. Just because you're young, don't let 'em look down on you if you speak the truth of God." Listen, we look down on other Christians. If they come in love, and they come in care, and they confront us about our sin, and if we don't accept that, we are despising them. That's wrong.

Give you one other way -- 1 Thessalonians chapter 4...We despise a believer when we use him for our own selfish gain. This goes on a lot. When we use him for our own selfish gain. First Thessalonians 4:6, "That no man should go so far as to defraud...Literally means to take advantage of his brother in any matter." Not sexually, not economically, not socially, not anyway should we ever take advantage or, in other words, profit by his loss...in any way; "Because the Lord is the avenger of all such." Now, here we are, folks. When we despise another believer by taking advantage of them, the Lord will pay the account. "For God has not called us to uncleanness, but to holiness; and He therefore that despises that believer by doing that is not despising man but God, who planted the Holy Spirit in him." So you're really dealing with God who is one with that believer.

Now, how do we look down on other Christians? By flaunting our liberty, by being inconsiderate of the lowly, by withholding from those in need while we indulge ourselves, by ridiculing someone's physical features, by looking with indifference on a Christian who has fallen, by rejecting those who confront our sinfulness, and by taking advantage of a fellow believer for personal gain.

Now, let's go back to Matthew 18. Listen, verse 10 says, "Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones." Don't do it. All of these ways are to be rejected. That's the rule. Here comes the reasons. Three reasons, verses 10, 12, 13, 14. Very rapidly, here they come.

Verse 10, reason No. 1, "For I say unto you that in Heaven their angels do always behold the face of My Father who's in Heaven." Why should we not look down on another Christian? Because of their relation to angels. Did you get that? Their relation to angels. That's a marvelous statement. When I got to this, I wanted to teach all over again the series we did some years ago on God's invisible army, and go all the way back through all the angelology. A great, great study of God's holy angels. But I resisted that for the sake of covering the text.

Lemme just tell you what it means. Look at it. "I say unto you." That's emphatic. "With all My authority, I solemnly affirm to you that in Heaven their angels..." Now, oh, this is great. That means that up in Heaven God's people have some angels. See it? "Their angels." They belong to believers. They are our angels. They're for us. Hebrews 1:14, do you know that passage? Tremendously important passage. Talking about the angels, and He says, "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to serve them who shall be heirs of salvation?" Angels in Heaven are ministering spirits sent to serve God's people. So He says, "How could you ever look down on these little ones, when they are the special care of the angels?" The holy angels, the eternally holy angels. Which angels? "The ones who do always behold the face of My Father." What does that mean? That means they're holy, because if they weren't, they couldn't get that close, right? Those who live in the presence of God, those who have access to the third eternal throne of the Father in Heaven, those holy creatures are the special angels, "given to the care of My little ones." That's why you better be careful how you treat the little ones. You don't want a buncha holy angels on your neck, do you?...

Now, lemme tell you what this verse doesn't mean. It doesn't mean that every little baby has a guardian angel for two reasons. First of which, it doesn't say that. Second of which, it isn't talking about physical babies. It also does not mean that every single Christian has his own personal angel. Doesn't say that either. It just says their angels, collectively, are in Heaven standing in the very presence of God. They are the angels of His presence. They are the holy angels who have access to His throne. They behold His face, and those angels have as their special assignment the care of God's little ones. That's all it's saying. You can't conclude from that text that every single baby has his own angel, every single Christian has his own angel. That...that theory grew up, but it's silly, because angels wasting their time when we were asleep just sitting around twiddling their celestial thumbs. I

mean it wouldn't make any sense at all. Plus there are times when some of us need a whole bunch of 'em, and we'd have to borrow them from somebody else. That's not taught in the Scripture.

It did become believed in Judaism, however. The Jewish tradition and superstition, it appears in the beautiful story called Tobit, where everybody, every little child has his own angel. In fact, the Jews did believe this in the time of our Lord, and that's why, in Acts 12:15, you remember when they were praying for Peter to get outta prison? And the Lord delivered Peter, and he banged on the door, and the little girl came to the door and came back and said, "It's Peter." They said, "No, no, he's in prison." They were praying for him to get out. They just believe he would. And so somebody says, "Oh, it is his angel." Now, that wasn't necessarily theologically correct. What it did was articulate a superstition at the time, and the superstition was that everybody had an angel, and that, when you died, it was very likely that your angel would then appear to the people who loved you after your death to let them know that you had gone. And so they're saying, "Oh, this means Peter's dead." So they articulate that common superstition that is not taught in Scripture at all. All it's saying in that verse is that God has all these angels standing in His presence, indicating their infinite holiness, and they are dispatched for the care of His little ones.

What a great thought. It's kind of reminiscent of the Eastern custom where there were people who stood in the presence of the king. First Kings chapter 10, 2 Kings 25, talks about those who stand in presence of the king; and this King, the King of all kings has in His present these...presence these specially set apart holy beings; and they are for the care of His children. So when you're messing with God's children, even the least and the lowliest of them, you're fooling around with those whom the angels are spent to care for; and it may well be that the weaker and the lowlier and the meeker they are, the more angels minister in their behalf.

Second very important principle here. The first reason that we are to care for God's children is because of their relation to angels. Lemme interject a second one -- their relation to Christ. Their relation to Christ, and I wanna draw that back to verse 5, because verse 5 really fits in the flow of thought here. Remember in verse 5 Jesus said, "Whosoever shall receive one such little child in My name, receives Me." Do you remember when we studied that, we went into great detail about the fact that the believer is one with Jesus Christ? So that when you despise a believer, in effect who are you despising? Jesus Christ.

Lest you think that that's stretching the point, look for a moment at Luke 10:16, Luke 10:16. Here our Lord says this..."He that heareth you heareth Me, and he that despiseth you despiseth Me." Jesus was sending out the seventy, two by two. He said, "Know this, if they despise you, they're despising Me." Oh, my, what a statement. What a statement. Christ is one with His little ones. When you look down on one, no matter how lowly, how humble, how unattractive, how simple, how deprived of earthly fare, and you look at that person as if they were of no value, of no use, of no worth, you look down on Jesus Christ. He thought it not something to hold onto...to maintain His glory, but He came

down for the sake of that lowly one and purchased that lowly one with His own precious blood...Great price.

The Pharisees and the scribes, when they found somebody that was lowly or somebody that was insignificant or uneducated, untrained, not intellectual, not well-born, no influence, no money, they despised. They crushed. They stomped on those kinds of people. Very opposite of the Messiah. One of the great verses in Matthew is chapter 12 verse 20. As over against the wretched devastation of the Pharisees against the poor and the weak, it is said of the Messiah in Matthew 12:20, "A bruised reed shall He not break, and smoking flax shall He not quench." A bruised reed trying to stay up in the wind, but bruised and about to bend and fall over, smoking flax trying to stay lit. The fire trying to be alive, but all that's left is a small, little indication of light, and the smoke is coming that indicates its flickering out. When Jesus finds one who is broken and one whose life light is flickering, He doesn't break it further and stomp out the flame that is remaining as the Pharisees did. He doesn't break the bruised reed, and He doesn't quench the smoking flax. Rather, He strengthens the bruised reed, and He fans to flame the smoking flax. The weak and the helpless, the powerless, those destroyed by sin and suffering, those bent with care, those lacking resources, those that the world pushes aside and tramples and despises and crushes and treated...and treats with contempt, the Lord loves and gathers the broken people to His heart. He heals the sick. He raises the outcasts. He cheers the fearful. He strengthens the doubters. He feeds the hungry; forgives the sinners. Not only that, He takes on their sorrow, takes on their woes, takes on their pain and exchanges His love.

Now, listen, when you despise a little one, you do so against the holy angels and the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. Finally, the third beautiful, beautiful reason...the relation of believers to the Father. The relation of believers to the Father. A parable is given. Look at it in verse 12. "How think ye?" In other words, think along with Me. Reason this with Me. Be provoked to think. "If a man have a hundred sheep..." Now, if a man had a hundred sheep, he'd be a wealthy man. That's a lotta sheep. Tell you another thing. If a man had a hundred sheep...he might not miss one if it strayed away. I mean just normally, if all they were was hundred sheep. "But let's say this man had a hundred sheep...Jesus said...One of them is gone. Does he not leave the ninety and nine and go into the mountains and seek the one which has gone astray?"

Now, there's only way a man would do that. He'd have to know that sheep was gone; but, I mean, if you're out there in the field and the pasture, and the sheep are roaming all over the place, how you gonna know that sheep was gone? Are you gonna have to stop and try to count those meandering sheep all over the place? I don't think so. I think the idea here is very, very beautiful. I think a shepherd was so well acquainted with his sheep that he missed the presence of one because of its uniqueness, not because it didn't add up when it was mathematically charted. It wasn't a question of counting all day long. It was a question of missing one, because you didn't see the inimitable characteristics of that one sheep that you knew well being acted out on the stage of the field. The shepherd really knew every sheep. In fact, most of the shepherds would know every little idiosyncrasy

about every sheep, every little quirk, every little thing that the sheep did that was unique to that sheep, because they would inspect them every night as they were taking into the fold for the night; and so the shepherd would miss the one sheep.

In verse 13, "If so be that he goes out and finds it, verily I say unto you, he rejoices more over that sheep than over the ninety and nine which went not astray." That's a simple parable, maybe the simplest parable the Lord ever gave, very easy to understand. All it's simply saying is wrapped up in verse 14. "That's the way it is with the will of your Father who's in Heaven. He doesn't want one of these little ones to wander away, perish." In other words, God cares for His little sheep. That's the point.

This parable, by the way, is also used in Luke 15 verses 3 to 7. There it is used in reference to unbelievers. Here it is used in reference to believers. In each case, it beautifully fits the context and the intent of the Lord. Palestine, it was easy for sheep to go astray. There were little valleys and gullies and hills and ledges and precipices everywhere, and they could wander off, and Palestinian shepherds became experts at tracking lost sheep, snatching them out of lions, pulling them from thorn bushes, getting them off of ledges where they had become marooned; and if that little sheep was brought back alive, and it was wrapped by its legs around the neck of its shepherd, there would be rejoicing in his heart, more than the ninety and nine that didn't go anywhere...This is a real shepherd's heart. Each sheep was important.

I think the implication here is a...is a Christian who wanders off into sin, moral sin, spiritual sin, false doctrine, whatever kind. Here is the drifting Christian who wanders away from the flock, and he's missed by the Father. This wasn't true of the spiritual leaders in Israel. They could've cared less. They devoured the sheep. They never brought them back. They never bound up their broken wounds, but the true shepherd did. He always has. Peter said it, "Casting all your care on Him, for He...what?...careth for you," 1 Peter 5:7, "He careth for you." And He cares for every single one of them. The Bible says repeatedly, "There is no respect of persons with God." He doesn't play any favorites. He doesn't say anything about the sheep. He doesn't say His fattest sheep, His best sheep, His most valuable sheep, His pet sheep. Didn't matter. It was just one of the sheep; but every one of them was equally important to the Lord; because there's no specific valuation given to one over another.

I love what it says in Job 34:19. Talks about God, and it says, "How much less to Him that accepteth not the person of princes, nor regardeth the rich more than the poor! For they are all the work of His hands." God is not particularly fancied by princes, nor does He fancy them to be better than paupers; and even in Matthew 25, when men are judged, sent into eternal hell for what they have done, He says, "Because you have not done it unto the least of these, My brethren." There is no respect of persons with God.

Now, what do we see about the love of the shepherd here? First, it is an individual love. One sheep gone out of a hundred, yet the shepherd wouldn't rest till he brought it home; and that's the Shepherd Father's love. It is an infinite love. He sees not flocks, but individual sheep; and every one has a special, intimate relationship with Him.

I've thought about this recently, that one of the things that makes me be able to understand eternity in terms of its very special meaning is that, throughout all of eternity, I will be in Heaven to God what no one else there will be to Him, because I'm an individual. That makes Heaven wonderful. For years, I kind of thought as Heaven as a whole bunch of perfect people just milling around; and how could God care about one over another? Well, it isn't that He cares about one over another. It is that every one of them is so unique that there is, in the relationship to the eternal God, throughout the all the eons of forever, an intimacy that cannot be known by any other than the one who shares it. So He knows the sheep; and with perfect knowledge, He misses one who strays.

So it is an individual care. Secondly, it's a patient care. He has more patience for His foolish children than we do, I think. The sheep may be foolish, but the shepherd still brings 'em back. He doesn't say, "Boy, that was a foolish sheep anyway. Just let it go." I mean I could understand a shepherd saying, "You know, this is the third time this week that sheep has done that. I hope a lion gets that sheep. I'm not going out there one more time for that sheep. The thing is skinny, anyway; and by the time we slaughter the thing, isn't gonna mean anything for meat; and in the meantime, it's got all kinds of blotches all over it. When you shear the thing, it's practically -- let the thing go." That's not the heart of God...It's a patient, patient care.

Thirdly, a seeking care. God is out there seeking. I love this. It pursues. It doesn't say, "Well, I'm here. When you get ready to come back, let Me know." No, it's not a sheep crawling back and flopping over on its back and putting its feet up in the air and saying, "Please take me back." And some kind of reluctant forgiveness is offered. No. Seeking care. Forgiving care. There's restoration here, brought back into the fold. I don't see any beatings or punishments or...

And then it's a rejoicing. There's no contempt. There's no grudge. "Well, listen, this is once. Three times, you're gone." None of that. Forgiving, and He rejoices more over the one that came back than the one that stayed. You understand that. You understand that. You know, a mother with a lotta children would rejoice more over the one that walked away from the Lord and lived a dissolute life and then turned repentant, came back, and embraced Jesus Christ than she would all the rest who stayed home and never went that way, right? Sure. A mother who has all kinds of children, maybe in her...in her little home, and one of them becomes deathly ill; and he survives the illnesses and is restored to health, she is gonna have a greater joy over the restoration of that child's health than she will have, at that time, over the health of the others that never was broken. That's just part of life...

I mean when you're rescued out of the sea, there's a greater rejoicing than if you'd never been in the sea to begin with. When you survive the disaster, there's a greater rejoicing in the survival than ever there would've been in your life if you hadn't had the disaster to start with. So we understand that.

I love what William Arnot says. "If it did not please Him to get me back, my pleasure would be small." Isn't that a beautiful thought? Then he said this, "The longing of Christ to get the wanderer into His bosom again for the satisfaction of his own soul is the sweetest ingredient in the cup of a returning penitent's joy." Great statement.

Well, verse 14, and we'll close. "So it is not the will of your Father who is in Heaven that one of these little ones should perish." The word perish, *apollome*. Sometimes in the Bible, it means to die and go to hell. Sometimes in the Bible, it can mean to be scarred or marred. Sometimes, it can be to be ruined, to enter into a disaster. It is used 1 Corinthians 8:11, in Romans 14:15 of believers who are ruined in their spiritual life. Not in the final perishing in hell sense; but it ruins their spiritual progress. It ruins their spiritual power. It...it destroys their usefulness to God, and that's what its use is here. It would be better to say, "It's not the will of your Father who's in Heaven that one of these little ones should be spiritual marred...spiritually wounded...spiritually ruined." So God cares. Christ cares, and the angels care. Because of this, beloved, take heed that you despise not one of these little ones.

We come to You, Father, in prayer to close with this worship hour; and we sense that there has been a convicting in our hearts. Help us, Father, that we shall feel sorrow, true sorrow, for the message speaks to me, to every one of us, for we have, by word or deed or indifference, despised some of Your little ones. It is not to say we're not to correct their sin. We are. It is not to say we're not to rightly evaluate and judge where they are that we may help them and strengthen them. It is to say that we disdain them, hold them in contempt, look down on them, think them less than we are. Help us, Father...to be sorrowful. May it be that ever, when we come into Your presence for worship, we leave sorry. Like Isaiah, we cannot see Thee and walk away without saying, "Woe is me for I am undone. I am unclean." So we have failed, Father, in these areas, and may our sorrow be godly sorrow which worketh repentance...And may we esteem Your little ones as the angels esteem them, as the Son esteems them, as You esteem them. May we demonstrate to them the same individual patient, seeking, forgiving, rejoicing care...that You show them.

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