

## Studies in the Gospel of Matthew #49

### Pride and Passion

Matt 18:1-14

#### Introduction:

1. Scripture describes and identifies the people of God by many names.
  - a. But more frequently than anything else we are called children
  - b. Children of promise, children of the day, children of the light, beloved children, dear children, and children of God.
2. As believers we can rejoice in the wonderful truth that, through Christ, we have become God's own children, adopted through grace.
  - a. Consequently, we bear the image of God's family and are joint heirs with Jesus Christ of everything God possesses.
  - b. We enjoy God's love, care, protection, power, and other resources in abundance for all eternity.
3. But there is another side to our being children, and in Scripture believers are also referred to as children in the sense that we are incomplete, weak, dependent, undeveloped, unskilled, vulnerable, and immature.
  - a. This chapter focuses on those immature, unperfected, childlike qualities that believers demonstrate as they develop into conformity to the fullness of the stature of Jesus Christ.
  - b. This chapter is a sermon by our Lord on the specific theme of the childlikeness of the believer, speaking directly to the reality that we are spiritual children with all the weaknesses that childhood implies.
4. This chapter teaches us how to get along with each other.
5. It is no exaggeration to say that this is the single greatest discourse our Lord ever gave on life among the redeemed people in His church.

#### I. Pride of the Disciples – vs 1-10

##### A. Inquiry by Pride – vs 1

**1 At the same time came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?**

1. The Time of the Inquiry – “at the same time”
  - a) *The time of this inquiry and instructions about pride was right after Peter had found the coin in the mouth of the fish to help pay the tribute tax for Christ and himself.*
  - b) *Not all of Matthew is tied together in sequence but this chapter is tied to the previous text of the last chapter.*
2. The Theme of the Inquiry – “the greatest in the kingdom”
  - a) *Here the "kingdom of heaven" speaks of the reign of Christ on earth.*
    - (1) This is the kingdom the Israelites were looking for with great anticipation.
    - (2) The disciples felt that Christ was soon to establish the kingdom and were interested in what position they would have in the kingdom.
  - b) *The "Who" needs to be understood as "Who of us."*
    - (1) The disciples had much carnal interest in position
    - (2) They had disputed at times among themselves which of them was the greatest ([Mark 9:33,34](#); [Luke 9:46](#)).
    - (3) They were the twelve disciples and obviously the close ones to Christ, so they expected the best positions in the kingdom and wanted to know which one of themselves had the highest position in the coming kingdom.
  - c) *In the next chapter of Matthew, it is stated specifically that in the kingdom the twelve disciples would "sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel" ([Matthew 19:28](#)), but which one is the greatest is not answered by Christ.*
    - (1) This fact and the inquiry is a blow to the theology of the church of Rome which makes Peter the first pope and the head of the church.
    - (2) The thing wrong with that theology is that it has no Scripture to support it.

**BYZ Matthew 18:1** Ἐν ἐκείνῃ τῇ ὥρᾳ προσῆλθον οἱ μαθηταὶ τῷ Ἰησοῦ, λέγοντες, Τίς ἄρα μείζων ἐστὶν ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ τῶν οὐρανῶν;

Who then is greatest (tis ara meizōn estin). The ara seems to point back to the tax-collection incident when Jesus had claimed exemption for them all as "sons" of the Father. But it was not a new dispute, for jealousy had been growing in their hearts. The wonderful words of Jesus to Peter on Mount Hermon (Matthew 16:17-19) had evidently made Peter feel a fresh sense of leadership on the basis of which he had dared even to rebuke Jesus for speaking of his death (Matthew 16:22). And then Peter was one of the three (James and John also) taken with the Master up on the Mount of Transfiguration. Peter on that occasion had spoken up promptly. And just now the tax-collectors had singled out Peter as the one who seemed to represent the group. Mark (Mark 9:33) represents Jesus as asking them about their dispute on the way into the house, perhaps just after their question in Matthew 18:1. Jesus had noticed the wrangling. It will break out again and again (Matthew 20:20-28; Luke 22:24). Plainly the primacy of Peter was not yet admitted by the others. The use of the comparative meizōn (so ho meizōn in Matthew 18:4) rather than the superlative megistos is quite in accord with the Koiné idiom where the comparative is displacing the superlative (Robertson, Grammar, pp. 667ff.). But it is a sad discovery to find the disciples chiefly concerned about their own places (offices) in the political kingdom which they were expecting.

3. The Thinking for the Inquiry – “greatest”

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

- a) *The disciples' interest in the coming kingdom of Christ on earth was one of position.*  
(1) Many have struggled with the desire for recognition, position, prestige, authority, esteem  
(2) These must not become prideful, covetous, worldly
- b) *They were not thinking of honor for Christ in the kingdom but of their own honor.*
- c) *The Israelites interest in the kingdom was not very spiritual either.*
- d) *They wanted the Messiah to take over and drive out the hated Roman oppressors.*  
(1) It was a political interest.  
(2) They were not thinking about the glory for the Messiah but the glory, and especially the vengeance, for the Israelites.
- e) *They were so caught up in their own desire for prestige, glory, and personal aggrandizement that they were impervious to much of what Jesus said—even about His suffering, death, and resurrection.*
- f) *They demonstrated no concept of humility, very little compassion, and certainly no willingness to take up their own crosses and follow Christ*

**B. Instructions for Pride – vs 2-10**

1. The Child in the Instructions – vs 2-4

2 And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them, 3 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. 4 Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

- a) *Christ's answer was a rebuke.*
- b) *It exhorted the disciples to humility.*
- c) *The word "converted" is not speaking of soul salvation but a change of mind in their thinking.*  
(1) To be **converted** requires people to **become like children**, Jesus explained.  
(2) A little child is simple, dependent, helpless, unaffected, unpretentious, unambitious.  
(3) Children are not sinless or naturally unselfish, and they display their fallen nature from the earliest age.  
(4) But they are nevertheless naive and unassuming, trusting of others and without ambition for grandeur and greatness.
- d) *If they wanted to enter the kingdom with status, they had better walk humbly—the child was the picture of humility because of its status and innocence in society.*  
(1) Paidion identifies a very young child, sometimes even an infant  
(2) Perhaps this was a toddler just old enough to run to Jesus when He called
- e) *The fact that a person must **enter the kingdom** assumes he is born outside of it under the rule of Satan and that he is not naturally a heavenly citizen under the rule of God.*

2. The Caution in the Instructions – vs 5-6, 10

5 And whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me. 6 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. 10 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.

- a) *It is clear here that Jesus is using this child as an illustration only*  
(1) The little child represents believers who come to Christ in true, childlike faith  
(2) And no matter how lowly unsophisticated, immature, or weak a believer is, he must be treated as the precious **child** of God he truly is.
- b) *Lest the disciples think that being humble like a child would result in their be trampled on by the world, Christ expresses His concern about them.*

2 Καὶ προσκαλεσάμενος ὁ Ἰησοῦς παιδίον ἔστησεν αὐτὸ ἐν μέσῳ αὐτῶν,

Called to him (proskalesamenos). Indirect middle voice aorist participle. It may even be Peter's "little child" (paidion) as it was probably in Peter's house (Mark 9:33).

3 καὶ εἶπεν, Ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν, ἐὰν μὴ στραφῆτε καὶ γένησθε ὡς τὰ παιδιά, οὐ μὴ εἰσέλθητε εἰς τὴν βασιλείαν τῶν οὐρανῶν.

Except ye turn and become (ean mē straphēte kai genēsthe). Third-class condition, undetermined but with prospect of determination. Straphēte is second aorist passive subjunctive and genēsthe second aorist middle subjunctive. They were headed in the wrong direction with their selfish ambition.

4 Ὅστις οὖν ταπεινώσει ἑαυτὸν ὡς τὸ παιδίον τοῦτο, οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ μείζων ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ τῶν οὐρανῶν.

This little child (to paidion touto). This saying about humbling oneself Jesus repeated a number of times as for instance in Matthew 23:12. Probably Jesus pointed to the child by his side. The ninth-century story that the child was Ignatius is worthless.

5 Καὶ ὃς ἐὰν δέξηται παιδίον τοιοῦτον ἐν ἐπὶ τῷ ὀνόματί μου, ἐμὲ δέχεται· 6 Ὅς δ' ἂν σκανδαλίση ἓνα τῶν μικρῶν τούτων τῶν πιστευόντων εἰς ἐμέ, σμύρει αὐτῷ ἵνα κρεμασθῆ μύλος ὀνικός εἰς τὸν τράχηλον αὐτοῦ, καὶ καταποντισθῆ ἐν τῷ πελάγει τῆς θαλάσσης.

A great millstone (mulos onikos), literally, "a millstone turned by an ass." The upper millstone was turned by an ass (onos). There were no examples of the adjective onikos (turned by an ass) outside the N.T. until the papyri revealed several for loads requiring an ass to carry them, stones requiring an ass to move them, etc. Deissmann (Light from the Ancient East, p. 81) notes it also in papyri examples about the sale of an ass and tax for an ass's burden of goods.

- c) *The "little child" application here is not to small children but to believers who walk humbly as a child and also to young believers.*
- d) *Most parents are more grateful for what is done on behalf of and for the benefit of their children than for anything that could be done for themselves.*
- (1) Likewise, most parents find it easier to forgive an offense against themselves than one against their child.
  - (2) Parents are grateful to friends, teachers, and others who encourage, support, and build up their children.
- e) *God is the perfect model of parental concern, because He has always been concerned about the way His children are treated.*
- f) *He therefore promises blessing to those who treat His children well and gives dire warning to those who cause them harm.*
- g) *Their angels – vs 10*
- (1) The writer of Hebrews explains that the holy, elect angels are "all ministering spirits, sent out to render service for the sake of those who will inherit salvation" ([Heb. 1:14](#)).
  - (2) Their purpose is to serve God by attending to the care of His people.
  - (3) These **angels in heaven** live in the very presence of God, where they wait attentively for His commands to serve the people of His love.
  - (4) "They **continually behold the face of My Father who is in heaven**," Jesus said.
  - (5) The implication is that the holy angels never take their eyes off God, lest they miss some direction from Him regarding a task they are to perform on behalf of a believer.
  - (6) MacArthur says that there are no individual guardian angels – these believers and angels are used in a collective sense
3. The Commands in the Instructions – vs 7-9
- 7 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! 8 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. 9 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.**
- a) *It is a strong exhortation to do the extreme if necessary in order to avoid doing evil.*
  - b) *It is better to have some amputations to keep from doing evil than go to hell for eternity.*
  - c) *The Lord is obviously speaking figuratively because no part of our physical bodies causes us to sin, and removing any part of it would not keep us from sinning.*
  - d) *The point was that a person should do whatever is necessary no matter how extreme and painful it might be, to keep from sinning himself or to keep from causing others to sin.*
  - e) *Nothing is worth keeping if, in any way it leads to sin.*
  - f) *And the implication here is that there is overcoming grace available for victory over temptation and sin.*
4. Beware of Pride
- a) *During the Great Awakening, when the Spirit of God revived much of our nation's early faith, Jonathan Edwards was presiding over a massive prayer meeting. Eight hundred men prayed with him. Into that meeting a woman sent a message asking the men to pray for her husband. The note described a man who had become unloving, prideful, and difficult. Edwards read the message in private and then, thinking that perhaps the man described was present, made a bold request. Edwards read the note to the 800 men. Then he asked if the man who had been described would raise his hand, so that the whole assembly could pray for him. Three hundred men raised their hands.*
  - b) *To impress his date, the young man took her to a very chic Italian restaurant. After sipping some fine wine, he picked up the menu and ordered. "We'll have the 'guiseppe spomdalucci,' " he said. "Sorry, sir," said the waiter. "That's the owner of this restaurant."*

BYZ **Matthew 18:7** Οὐαὶ τῷ κόσμῳ ἀπὸ τῶν σκανδάλων· ἀνάγκη γάρ ἐστιν ἔλθειν τὰ σκάνδαλα· πλὴν οὐαὶ τῷ ἀνθρώπῳ ἐκείνῳ, δι' οὗ τὸ σκάνδαλον ἔρχεται.

BYZ **Matthew 18:8** Εἰ δὲ ἡ χεὶρ σου ἢ ὁ πούς σου σκανδαλίζει σε, ἔκκοψον αὐτὰ καὶ βάλε ἀπὸ σοῦ· καλόν σοι ἐστὶν εἰσελθεῖν εἰς τὴν ζωὴν χωλὸν ἢ κυλλόν, ἢ δύο χεῖρας ἢ δύο πόδας ἔχοντα βληθῆναι εἰς τὸ πῦρ τὸ αἰώνιον.

BYZ **Matthew 18:9** Καὶ εἰ ὁ ὀφθαλμός σου σκανδαλίζει σε, ἔξελε αὐτὸν καὶ βάλε ἀπὸ σοῦ· καλόν σοι ἐστὶν μονόφθαλμον εἰς τὴν ζωὴν εἰσελθεῖν, ἢ δύο ὀφθαλμοὺς ἔχοντα βληθῆναι εἰς τὴν γέενναν τοῦ πυρός.

BYZ **Matthew 18:10** Ὁρᾶτε μὴ καταφρονήσητε ἑνὸς τῶν μικρῶν τούτων, λέγω γὰρ ὑμῖν ὅτι οἱ ἄγγελοι αὐτῶν ἐν οὐρανοῖς διαπαντός βλέπουσιν τὸ πρόσωπον τοῦ πατρὸς μου τοῦ ἐν οὐρανοῖς. Despise (kataphronēsēte). Literally, "think down on," with the assumption of superiority. Their angels (hoi aggeloi autōn). The Jews believed that each nation had a guardian angel (Daniel 10:13, 20-21; Daniel 12:1). The seven churches in Revelation (Rev. 1:20) have angels, each of them, whatsoever the meaning is. Does Jesus mean to teach here that each little child or child of faith had a special angel who appears in God's presence, "see the face of my Father" (blepousin to prosōpon tou patros mou) in special intimacy? Or does he simply mean that the angels do take an interest in the welfare of God's people (Hebrews 1:14)? There is comfort to us in that thought. Certainly Jesus means that the Father takes special care of his "little ones" who believe in Him. There are angels in God's presence (Luke 1:19).

## II. Passion for the Lost – vs 11-14

### A. Intention of His Passion – vs 11

11 For the Son of man is come to save that which was lost.

1. This statement states the reason Christ came to earth.
2. The disciples were inquiring about the crown (kingdom rule), but Christ was focusing on the cross.
3. The passion of God the Father and God the Son was all focused on saving lost souls.
4. "For God so loved" (John 3:16) was the driving force behind the ministry of Christ in His first coming to earth.
5. It was the cross, not the crown that Jesus was emphasizing here.

### B. Illustration of His Passion – vs 12-14

1. Rambling of the Sheep – vs 12

12 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?

- a) None of the 12 apostles was specifically identified as a shepherd
  - b) But all Palestinian Jews were familiar with shepherds and their ways
  - c) The word "astray" means to wander.
  - d) The sinner has wandered from the right way and needs to be saved.
  - e) We see here that Christ loves us personally and individually – no matter which sheep goes astray
  - f) See here that the Lord's care for His people is patient
  - g) See God's seeking care of the sheep
2. Rescue of the Sheep – vs 12
- a) The language here is that of earnestness, sacrifice—all of which speak of great compassion.
  - b) It pictures well the work of Christ seeking to save sinners.
3. Rejoicing Over the Sheep – vs 13
- 13 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.
- a) The rejoicing in saving the lost sheep is very great.
  - b) Heaven rejoices, Christ rejoices, and the redeemed rejoices.
  - c) Furthermore, many friends and relatives are often included in the rejoicing experience.
4. Reassurance about the Sheep – vs 14
- 14 Even so it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish.
- a) "Little ones" refers to the humble believers.
  - b) The security of the believer is obvious in this text as well as Christ's compassion for His own.
  - c) MacArthur says that perish here refers to spiritual progress in the Christian life
  - d) God does not want one of His children to be spiritually wounded or marred
  - e) When His children fall into sin it destroys their usefulness to Him and to the church and it undercuts their happiness and their right relationship to Him and to one another.

11 Ἦλθεν γὰρ ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου σῶσαι τὸ ἀπολωλός.

BYZ **Matthew 18:12** Τί ὑμῖν δοκεῖ; Ἐὰν γένηται τινὶ ἀνθρώπῳ ἑκατὸν πρόβατα, καὶ πλανηθῇ ἓν ἐξ αὐτῶν· οὐχὶ ἀφείς τὰ ἐνενήκοντα ἐννέα, ἐπὶ τὰ ὄρη πορευθεὶς ζητεῖ τὸ πλανώμενον;

Leave the ninety and nine (aphēsei ta enenēkonta ennea epi ta orē kai poreutheis zētei to planōmenon;). This is the text of Westcott and Hort after BL, etc. This text means: "Will he not leave the ninety and nine upon the mountains and going does he not seek (change to present tense) the wandering one?" On the high pastures where the sheep graze at will one has wandered afield. See this parable later in Luke 15:4-7. Our word "planet" is from planaomai, wandering (moving) stars they were called as opposed to fixed stars. But now we know that no stars are fixed. They are all moving and rapidly.

BYZ **Matthew 18:13** Καὶ ἐὰν γένηται εὐρεῖν αὐτό, ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν ὅτι χαίρει ἐπ' αὐτῷ μᾶλλον, ἢ ἐπὶ τοῖς ἐνενήκοντα ἐννέα τοῖς μὴ πεπλανημένοις.

BYZ **Matthew 18:14** Οὕτως οὐκ ἔστιν θέλημα ἐμπροσθεν τοῦ πατρὸς ὑμῶν τοῦ ἐν οὐρανοῖς, ἵνα ἀπόληται εἰς τῶν μικρῶν τούτων. The will of your Father (thelēma emprosthen). Observe that Westcott and Hort read mou here rather than hūmōn after B Sahidic Coptic. Either makes good sense, though "your" carries on the picture of God's care for "each one of these little ones" (hen tōn mikrōn toutōn) among God's children. The use of emprosthen with thelēma is a Hebraism like emprosthen sou in Matthew 11:25 with eudokia, "before the face" of God.

## Prodigal Pig

As a boy, I worked summers on my aunt and uncle's pig farm. Every week, I pumped out the sewage pit running the length of the pig barn with the "honey wagon". One particular day, I backed up to the barn and pushed the suction hose between the large grates and into the liquid "soup" below. Hearing squealing, I ran inside and jumped over the pen to where I had slid the hose down, and looked down to find that a pig had fallen into the "soup"! I yelled across the yard for someone to "Get my uncle, and come quick!" I ran back into the barn, grabbed one of the grates over the sewage pit and swung down into the mess below. The liquid was well over my waist! The startled pig started a frantic swim for the far end with me pursuing. At the end of the pit I grabbed him by the ears and started my journey back to the open grate above. My uncle lowered a ladder, and I grabbed the slippery pig around his belly and lifted. Part way up the ladder, he kicked up a fight, and we both fell backwards under the surface. Sputtering and exasperated, I grabbed Mr. Pig and this time got him high enough so my uncle could grab him and pull him out. I was greeted with howls of laughter for my lifeguard efforts as I stood under the sun and got hosed down in my "birthday suit" to get cleaned off. My clothes were ruined and had to be buried. I think of a rebellious son in Luke 15 who crested a hill and was spotted by his father "a long way off". Despite the repulsive condition of his son, the father ran to him, fell on his neck, and welcomed him with kisses. Such love surpasses our understanding. Are you wandering? Do you feel no one notices you, no one cares? God knows and God cares. There is always a way back. God has welcomed us into His presence. He has cleansed us from our sin through Jesus Christ. He has cleansed us and allowed us to sit in His banqueting house, despite our prodigal ways and the ravages of sin that mark us.