

Hello little ones... I'm a little one too... Here we are, all little ones together ... And we're little ones, because the Big One, is our Heavenly Father...

The disciples came to Jesus and asked "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" I don't know if they were asking Jesus which one of **them** was greatest, or whether they were expecting Jesus to tell them Moses or David or Elijah or Elisha...

So, I don't know what their question about who is the **greatest** was **really** about – whether it was about self-seeking a place of prominence, or what it was... But Jesus' **answer** is **very** clear...

² ... calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them ³ and said, "Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. ⁴ Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

In the eyes of Christ, humility, is **the** highest-ranking of virtues. Humility is a mark of a Christian. We are to model ourselves on the humility of our master – Jesus Christ. Without humility, we cannot even **enter** the Kingdom of Heaven.

You see, humility begins, when we kill-off our pride – and we admit that we're not good enough – that we could never **be** good enough... Humility begins, when **I** admit that **I** am a dirty, rotten sinner, in need of a saviour...

That's when humility begins, and for that to happen, requires us to actually turn – we have to change the way we function... We have to make a conscious decision, "I have been full of pride, trying to do it my way for so very long". And we turn, and we discard our pride – we leave it behind.... And now we take up the way of Christ – the way of humility...

We humble ourselves at the point of conversion, and that gets us into the Kingdom of Heaven, but remember, we've turned from pride, and we embrace the new way of humility.

4 Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

The way of Christ isn't just a one-off event of humbling ourselves to get saved, and then we're 'good to go' – it's a turning **from** the **way** of pride to the way of **humility**.

You know, we Christians get our priorities so wrong sometimes... We have a habit of looking up to the big-time, prominent personalities... We make a big deal of Christians who are sports stars or politicians, or business identities or entertainers... We make a big deal out of them...

And you might be saying to yourself, "I'm a nobody... I'm not very important – I can never be a Billy Graham, or a Johnny Cash, or a Rebecca St James, or an Amy Grant... I'm not a famous preacher, or a well known personality... Hardly anyone even knows I exist..."

You know what??? You don't need to be... In fact, don't even **aspire** to gain the attention of men.... Don't try and

attract attention to yourself.., and deflect any glory you do get, to Christ.

To humble ourselves, is to always put others first... It means, “I **don't** stand up for my rights”... It means “I become a servant to all”...

Humility is the greatest Christian virtue... And yet, it is so often ignored...

In some branches of the church today, they teach more the wisdom of psychology, than they do the wisdom of God... They teach “empowerment”, and if you feel “disempowered” – that somebody might happen to be better or have more power than you, well that’s a bad thing...

That’s not the way of Christ.... The greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven, are those who do **not** stand up for their rights... The greatest are those who do **not** seek power... The greatest are **not** those who are served, but those who do the serving...

If you want to be a better Christian – if you want to develop the attributes of God that will bring you reward, humble yourself – become a servant... And if you receive a child in Jesus' name, you receive Him...

Now at this point, Jesus begins to speak of “**these little ones**” and it’s easy to get the idea that He’s talking about children in general, but He’s not... He makes that clear by saying “**these little ones who believe in me**”. He’s not talking about kids – He’s now talking about disciples, which is

why I began the message this morning by saying “hello little ones” ...

As Christians, we are God’s children – we are His “little ones”. And as little ones, we should not presume power or authority or control... As “little ones”, we are at His bidding. As His little ones who believe in Him, He is the one who cares for us and sustains us...

OK, so let’s live as “little ones” – not as “big ones”... Let’s humble ourselves....

And at this point, Jesus shifts from teaching on humility, to sharing His concern for His little ones... And His concern, is that His “little ones” – His disciples – you and I., would continue in a faithful walk with God..... Because there’s going to be plenty of stuff to try and distract us from that.

When I began preparing for this message, I thought to myself, “This is going to be a really quick message to write – I know it pretty well, but when I went to the original language – the Greek, I discovered something that was pretty important to investigate. The word that the NIV and ESV translates as “sin”, is not the normal Greek word for “sin”.

The usual Greek word for “sin” is “hamartia”, which means to miss the mark – it’s a wrong attitude toward God...

But that’s not the word used here. Matthew uses the word **σκάνδαλον** (*skandalon*), offense; **σκανδαλίζω** (*skandalizō*), give offense, lead astray¹. It can be translated as “stumbling block”, or to put a stumbling block in somebody’s way. It can mean “to trip somebody up and cause someone to fall”.

And so I did a bit of a word study on this σκανδαλίζω (*skandalizō*), and how it's used in the Bible, and particularly in Matthew...

- *The noun means a temptation to sin*ⁱⁱ,
- *It is an enticement to apostasy and unbelief*ⁱⁱⁱ
That means to have faith in Christ, but then to lose it... or to hold to sound teaching and to then divert from it... It means, to at one time, to be a disciple of Jesus Christ, but then to have that faith destroyed – that you turn your back on Christ altogether...
- *Correspondingly the vb. means to lead into sin, to give offense*^{iv}
- This all means you can fall away, or be misled.^v It's the word used for when Jesus said "Peter, you're going to fall away on account of me", when He predicted Peter's denial on the night of Jesus' arrest.

When Jesus is talking about the great tribulation which is to come, He said 24:⁹ **“Then they will deliver you up to tribulation (big trouble) and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for my name's sake.”**¹⁰ **And then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another.**¹¹ **And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray.**

- A few weeks ago, we had the parable of the weeds, and how, at the end of time, the angels will come to root out the weeds to be burnt... And these are those who are children of the devil, who cause people to stumble.

- And when one falls away, it leads to destruction...

A teaching which only arose a couple of hundred years ago, and is now actually quite prominent in some evangelical circles, is the notion of “once saved, always saved”... It basically is a belief that “I can’t fall away from Jesus”. “Once I’ve become a Christian and believed in Jesus, I can’t ever change my mind – once I’m saved, I’m going to heaven whether I like it or not”... And let me tell you, that is not a biblical teaching... The New Testament is full of warnings of ‘not to fall away’... And the consequences of falling away, is *destruction and exclusion from Christ's Kingdom*^{vi}.

OK, so this offence – this stumbling block, isn’t just a temptation to sin:

- It **is** a temptation to sin, but it also includes
- A temptation to apostasy and unbelief
- To get misled (by false teachers)
- To deny Christ.

And Jesus says, if you are a **cause** of this stumbling – if you **cause** one of Jesus' little ones (disciples):

- To sin
- Or to fall away
- To lose faith
- To give up on following Jesus
- If you mislead with false teaching, causing any of these things to happen
- Or if you persecute the church, causing people to fall away from Christ,

You’d be better off to have a mill stone tied to your neck and thrown into sea...

That would be better for you, then the consequences that you would receive at judgment...

Jesus is **greatly** concerned, for His little ones... - And I believe it's a real **pastoral** concern. We need to be encouraging one another, and urging one another on in the faith. We need to be guarding against false doctrine, that leads people to apostasy. (and there's lots of that about)...

One of the saddest conversations I've ever experienced, was when someone said to me "*My faith is very different now, to what it used to be. I don't believe in the God I was taught about in Sunday School any more*"... And they went on to tell me about this God that they've created in their own mind – a god that looks much more like themselves, then the God who revealed Himself in Christ.... And I just want to cry, because someone had led them astray...

That person who led them astray, is Bishop John Shelby Spong. And his teachings have taken root in the hearts of the weak... It would be better for him to have the millstone tied to his neck and thrown into the sea, than what is going to happen to him on judgment day... With His lies, and silver tongue, and clever words, he has led many good Christian people, to faithlessness... Woe...

7 "Woe to the world from causes of stumbling! For it is necessary that causes of stumbling come, but woe to the person by whom the causes of stumbling comes!"

8 And if your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life crippled or lame than with two hands or two feet to be thrown into the eternal fire. ⁹ And if your eye causes you to stumble, tear it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into the hell of fire.

That's the second time Matthew records Jesus saying this. Back in May, we were studying Jesus' sermon on the mount, and that's the other place He said it... Maybe, if Jesus is repeating Himself, maybe it's really important, hey??? Or maybe Jesus is making an extra point here???

Sin is such a serious matter that any sacrifice is worth making to eliminate it. And following on in your walk with God, is so critical, that if there is anything or any one who is going to be a stumbling block to you, then eliminate them from your life.

If you have a friend who tries to convince you that what you believe is a whole heap of rubbish – if you're strong in your faith, well that's ok. But if you find yourself starting to be led, and find yourself feeling "He's making some good points", cut him or her off. Don't listen to them any more.

Before I left the uniting church, I had begun to question other ministers, why they continue allow people to run bible studies in their church, who would deny the virgin birth of Christ; they denied the resurrection, they denied that it was God's will for Jesus to die to save us from our sins.... This is what

they were teaching – why would they allow it in their churches?..... Cut it off...

Young people, I want to talk to you about who you date and who you marry. The bible is very clear, that a Christian should only marry another Christian. The purpose of dating, is to decide if this person is a suitable person for you to marry or not. If that other person is not a Christian, well you've already got your answer, "No. They are not a suitable person to marry, because they are not a Christian, so don't even begin to date them."

So many young people (particularly young women) ignore that advice. They OK it in their own minds by saying "Oh, we're not getting married – we're just dating"... And then they get attached to them, and eventually they get married...

And then in a short time, they wonder why their relationship with God just isn't what it should be. They begin to wonder why their children are not accepting the Christian faith.

If you marry an unbeliever, you are purposely bringing into your life, something that will make you stumble in your walk with God.

For a husband or a wife, you should be looking for someone who can lift you up and hold you firm in your faith. You need someone who will encourage you and urge you **on** in your faith...

Anything that might cause you to stumble, cut it off. Never even begin to date – if they're not a Christian, cut off that relationship right now... it's better to cut it off and be faithful

to Christ, then to fall from your faith and be subject to the hell of fire...

Jesus is so concerned for His little ones (for His disciples), that there be no stumbling blocks to trip us up and make us fall.

And He cares for the weak – He cares for the nobodies. He said ¹⁰ **“See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that in heaven their angels always see the face of my Father who is in heaven.**

Did you know you have a guardian angel – it’s true. Every one of us is really, really important to God. And every one of us is so important, that if one of us begins to stumble in our faith, don’t despise them – encourage them...

Don’t say “Oh, they’re not worth the effort... They get depressed and they lose conviction – they start the race, but they don’t run it – Oh, they’re such hard work”....

Don’t despise them – encourage them. Urge one another on... A word we don’t use much in our society today, is “exhort”. The apostle Paul said to Timothy, **devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching^{vii}**. We need to be a people of exhortation – little ones who urge other little ones on.

So, if you’ve noticed “So and so hasn’t been to church for a while”... Give them a call – encourage them. If you know

someone who was following Christ, but now they seem to be falling away, get along side of them. Bring them back...

In Luke, the story about the lost sheep, is about evangelism. But in Matthew (where we are today), it is about restoration – bringing back those who were following Christ, but have now fallen away...

And I would encourage you, to read this story again, when you get home, and ask God, “Lord, who has wandered off, that you want me to encourage? Who is no longer following you, that you want me to share this story with, and invite them back???” Ask God that, and see who comes to mind... There’ll probably be a few people He wants you to go and see.

It is not God’s will that any **of these little ones should perish.**

God is greatly concerned for His ‘little ones’.
Little Ones, beware of stumbling blocks and encourage and urge other little ones on in following Christ.
Amen.

ⁱ Brown, C., 1986. *New international dictionary of New Testament theology.*

ⁱⁱ Brown, C., 1986. *New international dictionary of New Testament theology.*

ⁱⁱⁱ Brown, C., 1986. *New international dictionary of New Testament theology.*

^{iv} Brown, C., 1986. *New international dictionary of New Testament theology.*

^v Brown, C., 1986. *New international dictionary of New Testament theology.*

^{vi} Brown, C., 1986. *New international dictionary of New Testament theology.*

^{vii} 1 Timothy 4:13