

## **THE PARABLES OF JESUS, #24**

### **A Chronological Study**

*"To Him who opened His mouth in parables and uttered things hidden since the creation of the world."*  
Psalm 78:2



### **"DANGER, STUMBLING BLOCKS AHEAD"**

#### **Mt 18:5-6; Mk 9:35-37; Luke 17:1-4**

This parable breaks down into seven sections that will take us down the road of salvation and on into the normal Christian life. We'll deal with the Christian's position, humility, reception, being a cause of stumbling, completion, correction, and forgiveness--all in this one little parable as told in these three gospels. Each of the seven lessons are all about "Not Stumbling" over the rocks of life.

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## SECTION 1, POSITION

### THE TEXT:

#### **Mt 18:1**

*1 At that hour the disciples came to Jesus and said, "Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?"*

#### **Mark 9:35**

*35 Sitting down, He called the twelve and says to them, "If anyone wants to be first, let him be last of all and servant of all."*

In the previous chapter Jesus and His disciples had come to Capernaum. This town had a temple tax (2 days wages that was due to the temple for strangers). Jesus sends Peter to the edge of the Sea of Galilee to catch a fish that would have a coin in its mouth that would pay the tax for both of them.

Just a quick word about God's supply. The topic comes up quite often. It's usually in the form of praying to God to supply one's need in a certain circumstance. Often His response is "yes" and the need is met immediately (most times without even asking). Then there are times when the answer is "No" and we're left on our own, as His will did not allow for it. The alternate is a "Not now." The need will continue to be pressing on you, but in the end it is met.

Many of us with some age on us remind others that in the long-run God is faithful to His Children. His answers depend upon our conformity to His will. He will always provide an answer if that conformity is there, He will not provide an answer if that conformity is not there. Again, in the long-run, I can look back at the difficulties, problems, sins, and all kinds of trouble of my past and definitely see that He has not only been faithful... but amazingly graceful, fulfilling His needs for me in abundance. I will always find myself humbled and blessed by the magnitude of His love for me.

Matthew's text tells us that in that same hour the rest of His disciples came to the home that He was staying in. Apparently a discussion had broken out among them as to who was going to be the most important among them when the kingdom was established. So they asked Him, "Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven." In a number of earlier parables we've discussed the term "The kingdom of heaven," as it being the sovereign rule of our Lord in specific times and places. They were counting on Jesus to lead the rebellion against the Romans and retake their land from them and establish the "Promised kingdom" (Genesis 12:1-4), and thus, they were asking, what important role they would play in that new kingdom.

Mark tells us that part of Jesus' response came as He sat down and called them all together to hear His answer. A pretty clear indication that this was a serious question and they all needed to hear the answer.

He gives them a two part answer, "*If anyone wants to be **first**, let him be **last of all and servant of all.***" I'm sure His answer took them by complete surprise. After all... human nature demands that we all look after ourselves first, and especially for men, all others should bow before them. This immediately brings forth 1 Corinthians 1:27, among many others. <sup>1</sup>

*"But God chose the foolish things to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things for the world to shame the things which are strong."*

Each of us is responsible for understanding this verse and applying it to our Christian life and walk. Our God is a God of love and grace. The epitome of a human life is the human life He gave to His Son Jesus. He called Him to this human life in order to be the ideal servant; to give His life for all of the broken, desperately wicked humans that would ever live--in order that some would turn from their wicked ways (wicked in God's eyes), and love and believe, and believe in, His Son, and He would rescue (save) them and adopt them into His heavenly kingdom forever. The first lesson Jesus points to is for those who wish to "be first." They need to learn the lessons of how to be last. It seems like a major contradiction, but the second part of the lesson is learning to be important to God means to be able to see the value of all others and "minister" to them - becoming the servant of all - because of their value to God. And so, all of us are called therefore to become the humble servant, and do the wonders of God before a dying world that they too might believe, and believe in, His precious Son, and be saved, and live. It's why Jesus was servant to His heavenly father, came to earth and died for all men and women - because of God's love for mankind.

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Corinthians 1:27  
 Psalm 8:2; Isaiah 44:25  
 1 Corinthians 1:20  
 1 Corinthians 1:21  
 1 Corinthians 2:12  
 James 2:5  
 Isaiah 26:5,6  
 Isaiah 29:14,19

## **SECTION 2, HUMILITY**

### **THE TEXT:**

#### **Mt 18:2-4**

*2 And He called a child to Himself and set him in their midst, 3 and said, "Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. 4 Whoever then humbles himself as this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.*

So then, how do we do that? Some of my favorite internet videos are the ones where dog owners return home from wherever or whatever only to find their living room couch completely destroyed, and one or two dogs crouching and cowering in a corner completely ashamed of what they have done, drooping their heads in shame and wagging their tails - begging for forgiveness.

But... how often this is not the way we humans react to our shame and misdoings. We are so likely to "stand our ground," as if the sins we commit were righteous because of some rationalization we made. Men and women often try to blame someone else and seldom hang their heads in shame and beg forgiveness.

Jesus says that unless we are "turned around" from our sin and "become like children" we will not enter the kingdom of heaven. Those are pretty serious words, especially in this parable as He is speaking to the group of 12 disciples who were currently counting on Jesus to establish the kingdom of heaven on earth in their immediate future.

He then gives them the example of the little child standing in their midst, "as this child." I have this wonderful image for you: I have a dear friend who has a young family. When I see him at church with his two boys and they seem eager to get away from their dad and "do mischief" together, he gently says to them, "Boys, pockets." Immediately each boy goes to one side of their dad and takes hold of dad's pants pocket and stays attached to that pocket wherever dad goes. "Become like this child."

What was so special about "this child?" Well, nothing! We can't refer to him as innocent, as all human beings are born under the curse of sin. I think that Jesus sees in this small child in this home the lack of self-importance and self-aggrandizement that each of the disciples were portraying at that moment. "Who's going to be the greatest in the kingdom?" And in the mind of this small child, "When's lunch." The contrast should grip each of us as we consider this situation. The disciples, all caught up in seeming self importance, the small child intent on his toys, his lunch, and his nap.

So as we, each of us, consider our roles in the advancement of Christ's kingdom here on earth - remember: it is the humble servant who is first in that kingdom.

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### **SECTION 3, RECEPTION**

#### **THE TEXT:**

##### **Mt 18:5**

*5 And whoever receives one such child in My name receives Me;*

##### **Mark 9:36-37a**

*36 Taking a child, He set him in their midst, and taking him in His arms, He said to them, 37a "Whoever receives one of such children in My name receives Me; and*

Don't miss this point! It is about your role in receiving another into Christ's kingdom. When have you last won someone to Christ. When did you [figuratively] take one into your arms and show them the Love and Grace of the Savior, leading them to conversion, turning them around from their sin(s) and escorting them into the kingdom of Christ.

And don't miss the tag line of each of these verses... *"Whoever does this"... "in My name"... "receives Me."*

Whether it is in the grocery store, on the street, in a Sunday school class, a small group, or at home with your little one, there is nothing that will draw you closer to Christ than leading another to Him.

Some of the most satisfying and spiritual life building moments in my life came to me while being the "pastor" at a youth camp in New Jersey. Teaching classes, playing with the children, daily lunch messages, and evening campfires, and "the Altar calls." To spend the week preparing, speaking, interacting, and singling out individuals to pray for - and watching them come to Christ will forever bless my soul, and brought me closer to Him.

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## SECTION 4, CAUSING TO STUMBLE

### THE TEXT:

#### **Mt 18:6**

*6 but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him to have a heavy millstone hung around his neck, and to be drowned in the depth of the sea.*

#### **Lk 17:1-2**

*He said to His disciples, "It is inevitable that stumbling blocks come [temptations to sin], but woe to him through whom they come! 2 It is better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea, than that he would cause one of these little ones to stumble.*

Now comes the severe warning. Who are Christ's "little ones?" It is all of us who belong to Him. When you consider the magnitude of Almighty God... compared to we created creatures abiding in His grace... we are His little ones. It doesn't matter if you are brand new in-Christ, or a learned scholar with years of degrees and teaching/preaching under your belt. You are one of Christ's little ones.

First, we must consider the history of "The Stone of Rejection" throughout the scriptures, as there are 82 verses in your bible about building a stone foundation. In our context the reference is made to the stones of Jerusalem that were the result of the Assyrian and the Babylonian captivities when the Temple was destroyed and all of its parts lay upon the ground. Apparently, during Nehemiah's time it was common for those who were rebuilding the temple, to believe that these stones were unusable and were cast into the surrounding fields. If you've ever walked through a late summer wheat field you may have had the experience of tripping over a large rock hidden by the wheat - thus, "The Stone of Stumbling that the Builders Rejected." <sup>2</sup>

Now, think of the context of these verses. Jesus is speaking about those who have come to Himself. He's speaking to His disciples and making a very focused point that many will miss. It is also we, the believing, that should never be found to be leading other believers astray. For there was Jesus with His 12 and He was speaking to them who had just wanted to know which one of them would be "The greatest in the heavenly kingdom," when they should have been questioning, "Who will be the humblest servant." They were ready to man-up and be the boss, but Jesus want's none of that. One of them was ready to man-up and sell His Savior down the river. Jesus

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<sup>2</sup> List of important references to "The Stone of Stumbling."

Psalms 118:22; Isaiah 28:16; Isaiah 8:13-15; Romans 9:30-33; Romans 14:13; Matthew 21:42-46; Luke 17:1-4; John 6:60-65; Acts 4:10-13; 2 Corinthians 6:2b-4a; 1 Peter 2:4-8

wants leaders who serve in humility, with grace and love. To do otherwise is to bring His wrath to bear.

We expect the world to be mean and cruel--and they will pay the price - but it had better not be found in us, especially in our dealings with those new to faith in Christ.

There are two places in the book of Isaiah that I want to bring attention to. The first is Isaiah 8:13-15, for it is about the prophecy of who Jesus would be seen as by much of the Nation of Israel.

"13 It is the Lord of hosts whom you should regard as holy. And He shall be your fear, And He shall be your dread. 14 Then He shall become a sanctuary; but to both the houses of Israel (Israel & Judah), a stone to strike and a rock to stumble over, and a snare and a trap for the inhabitants of Jerusalem. 15 Many will stumble over them, then they will fall and be broken; they will even be snared and caught."

This is what was going on during Jesus' ministry years. God has become man and dwelt among us - but God's covenanted people would stumble over Him. We've seen in our Parables of Jesus study a number of times how the leadership of the people, and those people who would follow their leadership, would be ultimately condemned for their part in the killing of their long expected savior. And this then is the background to what Jesus is telling His disciples concerning their part in their ministries among those who would come and follow Jesus. It is God you shall fear; It is God you should dread... if you become active in leading Christ's "little ones" astray.

My experience in the many churches I've ministered and worshipped is that the pews are filled with those who express completely negative feelings toward their fellow believers. Many who feel it is their responsibility to gossip about their fellow brothers and sisters. These actions deeply hurt the church body and even lead many away from worship and fellowship. If you are one of these... you need to recognize the damage you are doing and get down on your knees and repent, turn around, and seek forgiveness - not just to God, but to those you may have hurt.

There are many other kinds of hurt we can impose upon our believing brothers and sisters. How often it is that in this "modern" world we see a believer who's moral and behavioral needs profoundly affect those around them who wish to have them as friends. A brother or sister who leads another into a drug dependence or a sexual relationship that is outside the biblical standard. Some other things seem so insignificant... not stopping at

stop signs, driving outside the legal speed limits, passing over the yellow lines, on and on.

The Lord is calling to you to look over and analyze your life and your relationships. He loves you much more than you can contemplate - so double check every action and desire... and submit them to Him for correction.

The second place in Isaiah is Chapter 28 and verse 16:

"Therefore thus says the Lord God, 'Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a tested stone, A costly cornerstone for the foundation, firmly placed. **He who believes in it will not be disturbed.**"

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## SECTION 5, COMPLETION

### THE TEXT:

#### **MK 9:37b**

*37b whoever receives Me does not receive Me, but Him who sent Me."*

Jesus is taking the opportunity to say something twice for His disciples and us. And it is one of those moments when proper Theology is a necessity. Jesus' ministry on earth as a God/man in the flesh is by the direct will of God the Father. Jesus has come to be the obedient Son, to suffer and die on the Cross, in order to provide salvation to those who would believe this and put their saving faith in Jesus, the Savior.

The KJV puts it this way:

*"Whosoever shall receive one of such children in my name, receiveth me: and whosoever shall receive me, receiveth not me, but him that sent me."*

To say again what we said two sections ago, when you bring someone to Christ - you are bringing more of Christ to you as well. Remember to reach out to someone at every opportunity - that they might be saved, and that you might grow in Christ.

When you trust Jesus... you are trusting the sovereign will of Almighty God. When seen in the eyes of eternity you are received by Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, one God. You are received in the position as an adopted adult son, with a complete inheritance for all of eternity.



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**SECTION 6, CORRECTION****THE TEXT:****LK 17:3**

*3 Be on your guard! If your brother sins, rebuke him;*

Now on to more responsibilities to our brothers and sisters. "Be on your guard!" That's a pretty strong statement when you consider that Jesus is talking about dealing with each other - remembering He's talking to His 12 disciples. Perhaps He's referring to Judas, who will sin against Jesus and bring about His death. Perhaps He is telling His 12 that they need to be careful not to lead each other astray of His teaching. Perhaps He is telling us today to be on our guard - that not what every preacher/teacher is teaching or preaching is the truth. I expect it is all of these scenarios and much more.

As hard as it is... there are times when we need to attempt correction in those who succumb to sin, either public or private. But it must be done with grace and love. Let them know that you know the difference and that they should know better and change their ways. Ever be an encouragement to them, don't throw them away. Help them to repent and "turn around," and turn back to righteousness. Jesus says that it is not just something you "should" do, but a necessity. Do what you can to return their lives to righteous living.

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## SECTION 7, FORGIVENESS



### THE TEXT:

#### LK 17:4

*and if he repents, forgive him. 4 And if he sins against you seven times a day, and returns to you seven times, saying, 'I repent,' you shall forgive him."*

This last section is possibly, at least for many of us, the hardest task of all - forgiveness of the repeat sinner who is in Christ. Remember that Jesus is talking about your "Spiritual" brother. Forgiving a believer caught up in sin, who has a repentant heart is just as important as their salvation is. I'll say it again, "Don't throw them away." Perhaps the life you save...

The deacons and elders are the ones charged with dealing with church body sin. It's their job to diagnose and clean-up sin within the functioning body. Don't confuse their task with what Jesus calls you to do among your fellow believers who are failing at their responsibilities in sin. If their sin is public and hurting the body - the leadership may have to deal harshly with them, but... don't allow yourself to walk away from those in Christ who are in trouble with sin. Go have coffee with them, talk to them, encourage them, love them, help them. Many will have their lives changed back to a life of righteousness because of what you may do for them.

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**FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS WITHOUT ANSWERS**

1. **Position:** What's wrong in seeking status in the kingdom?
  2. **Humility:** What are the 3 Steps to Humility?
  3. **Reception:** What are the 2 important messages here?
  4. **Stumble:** Who is involved here, and why is that important?
  5. **Completion:** When "In Christ" in whom are you complete?
  6. **Correction:** What is your responsibility when you know a brother or sister in Christ are "in sin?"
  7. **Forgiveness:** What is your responsibility when a fellow believer continually falls to sin and asks for forgiveness?
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## FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS WITH ANSWERS

- 1. Position:** What's wrong in seeking status in the kingdom?  
Ultimately we are to be children of Our God and He defines Himself as loving and graceful when it comes to those who come to Him. So much so that He sent His Son to die for us that we might be saved. That is our calling.
  - 2. Humility:** What are the 3 Steps to Humility?

    1. Be Called by Christ
    2. Be Converted (turned around) from your sin
    3. Become like a Child in His Presence
  - 3. Reception:** What are the 2 important messages here?

    1. It is the believer's responsibility to use the gifts that God gives you to lead others to Christ.
    2. The end result from being responsible in this way... is you receiving more and more of Christ.
  - 4. Stumble:** Who is involved here, and why is that important?  
Believers who lead other believers astray of God's Word. It is a MOST serious offense to God.
  - 5. Completion:** When "In Christ" in whom are you complete?  
We become complete not only in Christ, but in the whole Trinity, One God. It is an amazing promise!
  - 6. Correction:** What is your responsibility when you know a brother or sister in Christ are "in sin?"  
To Go to them... in love and grace in an attempt to encourage them back to righteousness.
  - 7. Forgiveness:** What is your responsibility when a fellow believer continually falls to sin and asks for forgiveness?  
You are to continually forgive them. Why? Because Christ died for you, and continually forgives you, and we are to be like Him. Jesus brought forgiveness to the whole world - certainly we should be able to forgive one another.
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Jeremiah 18:15

"Don't stumble from the Ancient Path"

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