

# Matthew 18:10–14

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[ 0 : 00 ] Matthew 18, 10 to 14. 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.

What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go in search of the one that went astray? And if he finds it, truly I say to you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine that never went astray. So it is not the will of my Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. You may be seated. Let me add my greetings to the many that have preceded, and we're glad that you've chosen to be here on this Lord's Day. Let me just pause and pray for our time. Speak, O Lord. Speak, O Lord. For we come to you to receive the food of your holy word and take your truth and plant it deep in us, shape and fashion us into your likeness, we pray.

[ 1 : 23 ] We ask these things for Jesus' sake. Amen. In our armed forces, there is an unspoken code of honor.

It is a solemn vow that no man or woman would be left behind. History roots its origins in the French and Indian War just predating the Revolutionary War.

It is an oath to never leave a fallen comrade behind. It's a promise that soldiers make to one another, that even if one were to die in battle, those who bear arms would do everything they could do to bring the body home, deceased or wounded.

Regardless of the challenge, the difficulty, or the risk involved, no one would be left to the enemy. No one was to be left behind. We continue our 15-part mini-series within Matthew's Gospel, and we are in part 7 this morning.

[ 2 : 44 ] We titled the series, Following Jesus the King, as King, 15 Lessons Along the Way. And this morning, the seventh lesson I've titled, Leave No One Behind.

Leave no one behind. Jesus is setting up the priorities of his kingdom. He is establishing duties for his disciples. So much so that Matthew will give himself to record these for the community of believers that follow, for us who aspire to discipleship.

And speaking to the disciples in chapter 18, they were to leave no one behind. See, it's ultimately demonstrated when we search for those who have gone astray.

Our text is a logical unit. It's bracketed and framed, you can see it there in your Bibles, by the phrase, little ones, in verse 10, and then concluding in verse 14.

There's also a window into heaven that centers around the heavenly Father. This text is immensely fascinating because it is one of the few places in our Bible where what happens on earth actually affects what takes place in heaven.

[ 4 : 14 ] Astonishingly, what takes place on earth creates a particular scene in heaven. Jesus reveals to us what concerns his Father's heart.

Jesus reveals to us the very will of God. Jesus shares with us what makes God glad.

And here we go. Two points this morning. We are firstly to heed the warning, verse 10.

Followed by we are to seek the wandering. Heed the warning and seek the wandering. The object lesson thus far in this chapter has been a young child.

The child was brought before Jesus and the disciples in verse 2. And it's likely that that child continues to serve as the centerpiece in verses 10 through 14.

[ 5 : 16 ] The child's not an icon necessarily of humility, though that's certainly a trait. But the child was to represent the undervalued and undesired in society.

Allow me to explain. It may surprise you that in the first century, children had little social value. They had almost no social standing.

They were often disregarded and discarded as dispensable objects. A father, if desired, could actually murder his offspring.

A letter dated 1 B.C. from a Roman man to his wife in the first century writes from Alexandria and writes this way to his wife.

Do not worry if when all others return, if I remain in Alexandria. Alexandria, I beg and beseech you to take care of the little child and as soon as we receive wages, I will send them to you.

[ 6 : 18 ] And if you have a child, if it is a boy, let it live. If it is a girl, throw it away.

Unwanted children simply were left out in the ancient garbage landfills of the day. Historians call it exposure. They were exposed to the elements and left to die.

The Roman philosopher Seneca, writing also in the first century, writes as if it's the commonest practice in the world. Speaking of the Romans, we slaughter a fierce ox, we strangle a mad dog, we plunge the knife into a sickly cattle lest it taint the herd.

Children. Children. Who are born weak, deformed, we drown. It's hard to believe that any civilized society would neglect or mistreat children.

We take it for granted. And if you read widely enough, you will find that Christianity actually changed that, but that's for a different time. But this is what makes this text revolutionary.

[ 7 : 36 ] Because Jesus' command is countercultural. Do not despise these little ones. When they were despised and discarded by the outside world, the faith community could not act in the same way.

And yes, it applied literally to children. But the text, I think, has expanded to apply little ones not just to children, but those who carried the same status as children.

The lowly. The forgotten. The insignificant. You see, Jesus had a lesson he was making. Chapter 18 began with, Jesus, Jesus, who's the greatest?

And Jesus says, well, let me give you the answer. The answer is actually the lowliest. The least. The humble.

The contrite. When you're considering greatness, you need to know Jesus considers the lowly the greatest.

[ 8 : 45 ] We see that in verse 4. The greatest in the kingdom of heaven. The church would be made up of the world's most humble, most contrite, and lowly of all people.

The little ones, they're not just children, but those are, they are those who have this lowly earthly estate. They have little earthly value and possess insignificant social status.

They are those who are often overlooked, forgotten, and neglected. And what's interesting is this is an early lesson for the disciple. they need to know that they could not despise anyone.

So let me ask you this question. Who do you look down upon? Who do you despise? Perhaps you snub your nose at those you have social advantage over?

Perhaps you look down upon those who don't hold your educational standard. Perhaps you see yourself as more important or more valuable than those you perceive as odd or weird or just strange or bizarre.

[ 10 : 12 ] but here is the warning that we must heed. We can never let our self-importance or pride cause us to look down upon others.

Do not, you cannot despise these little ones. As disciples, you must never despise, ignore, or overlook. their earthly status may be low, but their condition, according to the latter part of verse 10, which I know we're all curious about, is always being brought to God's attention.

This is the reason they can never be despised. You need to know you can never despise the lowly because God is always concerned for them.

The latter half of verse 10 puzzles commentators. The straightforward reading of the passage makes it appear that these little ones have angels that are pleading their cause before God.

The writer writes, for I tell you that in heaven, there, referring to the little ones, their angels always see the face of my Father who is in heaven.

[ 11 : 25 ] Now, some have derived a sophisticated doctrine of guardian angels from this single verse. It's always ambitious to build out a doctrine from one verse.

But we know this, that according to Hebrews, angels are ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation.

We have record in the Old Testament that there were angels over particular nations in the book of Daniel. In the book of Revelation, you have angels over churches.

And so what are we to make of this? in this verse, it appears that the angels which Jesus refers to do not necessarily guard the little ones, but certainly they bring their situation before God.

In other words, one writer puts it this way, God in heaven is aware of the situation here on earth of even earth's lowliest people.

[ 12 : 36 ] God in heaven is aware of the situation here on earth of even earth's lowliest people. And as followers of Christ, we cannot, we are not allowed to overlook the least of these.

We are charged to be concerned about the insignificant ones because God is aware of their circumstances in heaven. We are those who cannot overlook others because God refuses to do so.

We are to heed the warning, verse 10. Verse 11 is missing and you could read your footnotes to figure out why. But in verses 12 to 14, where we spend the remainder of our time, we are to seek the wandering.

We are to seek the wandering. The emerging question then becomes, well then, what does it look like to not despise one of these little ones?

What would it look like to not despise one of these little ones? It is here that Jesus introduces a parable. A parable is an instructive story that communicates truth about the kingdom of God.

[ 13 : 51 ] And Jesus will give them a parable that reiterates the value of one of the least of these in the eyes of God. So the text asks, well what do you think?

Jesus asks, if a man has a hundred sheep and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go in search of the one that went astray? And if he finds it, truly I say to you, he rejoices over it more than the other ninety-nine that never went astray.

Now, I'm unsure if my heart's in the wrong place, but when I first read this, my response to the reading was, I wouldn't leave a ninety-nine.

That's a bad move. Imagine, it's a major exam, and you score ninety-nine out of a hundred.

That's pretty good. That's an A plus. I missed one point. would I go to the professor's office hours and contest the one point?

[ 14 : 58 ] Maybe I think I should have got it. No. I'd be satisfied with the ninety-nine. It would be no big deal. Ninety-nine out of a hundred is near perfect, flawless.

It would be so foolish to jeopardize the ninety-nine sheep for the one rebellious, wandering, wayward, little one. That couldn't keep in line.

Losing one sheep, I think, in the scheme of things, is insignificant. But this is not the heart of God. God demands perfection.

He would not let one be lost. He would not let one be despised. He would not overlook a single one. Ninety-nine out of a hundred is not accepted.

invisible. See, the man in the parable is a shepherd, an emblematic of Jesus. He is the good shepherd who will secure his sheep so that none would perish. He would be the good shepherd for who he would lay down his life for his sheep.

[ 16 : 07 ] He would be the fulfillment of Ezekiel's promise that God says, I myself will go search for the sheep and find them. Ezekiel 34, 11 and following, he writes this, I will seek the lost, this is God speaking, and I will bring back the strayed and I will bind up the injured and I will strengthen the weak.

The parable asserts that God refuses to lose sight of the little ones. Out of love for his flock, he would be vigilant and watch over them.

It may be an obvious connection that the man in the parable is Jesus, but for Matthew, he actually doesn't draw that line explicitly. The parable commends to you and to me, the reader, that we are to actually be like this man.

We are to imitate the shepherd. We are to copy him in his effort. We are to seek the wandering. We are to be those who go after those who have gone astray.

I think for those of us who have been in church for a while, we may think immediately of Luke chapter 15 and these stories of the lost, parables of the lost son, the lost coin, the lost sheep.

[ 17 : 35 ] And in that context, the whole call is to evangelism, that you are to go outside these doors, outside the fold, and to bring them back. But Matthew gives us a particular nuance, because in contrast to Luke chapter 15's use of seeking the lost, Matthew has given us a very noticeable

difference.

He's repeated it three times so we don't miss it. Yes, Christ has come back to seek and save the lost, but here the task is to seek and to restore those who have gone astray.

In this passage, we don't observe a shepherd going outside their fold to try to bring or to recover lost sheep.

What we find is there is one in the fold that has somehow strayed and left the flock.

It is one among us that for whatever reason has wandered away and left us. It is one who began the race but has somehow taken a detour in the middle of it.

[ 18 : 48 ] It is one who professed faith, walked in faith, but now has somehow stumbled in the faith. And let me help you, let me, I guess, reason aloud.

Why is this here? See, one of the central themes in chapter 18 is sin. The leading question is who's the greatest and Jesus is going to answer that, but all in chapter 18, it's all about sin.

And let me point it out. You see it occur multiple times in chapter 18. When they ask about who's the greatest, Jesus actually gives them a kingdom lesson on sin.

We are not to be those who cause others to sin. Do not cause yourself to sin. We saw that last week. And it will conclude with what happens when someone sins against me.

How many times do I actually forgive someone who sins? But in this whole chapter, there's this insertion about a wandering sheep. And the question is why here?

[ 20 : 02 ] Why now? And I think the logic of it goes something like this. You know what? Jesus, I've actually caused people to sin.

sin. I've actually caused people to stumble. And you've told me, whoever causes one of these little ones to sin, it would be better to tie a millstone around my neck and jump into the sea.

I've caused others to sin. I continue wayward in sin. I'm unable to, I'm plagued by my addiction or pride or misguided affections, harsh speech, demeaning thoughts, dishonesty, greed, covetous lust. I'm unable to, according to last week, resist the power. I cannot cut it off. I cannot tear it out. I cannot flee from it. Sin just sticks to me.

And the logic of the passage, I think, goes something like this. Jesus, I'm trying to be a disciple. I'm really trying, but sin persists.

[ 21 : 22 ] And I'm just going to wander off this way. I'm going to go in this direction because I don't have a place in this flock.

And this is where Jesus' words are so impactful. Faithful. One, this flock can never snub.

We cannot snub our noses at anyone. We are, if you know your condition, the worst of sinners. We can never say, good riddance.

I'm glad they're gone. We're better because they're out of here. No. We can never say that. The warning has been sounded.

Do not dare look down upon them. Do not despise them. Instead, go find them. In their sinfulness, according to Galatians 6, 1, restore them in gentleness.

[ 22 : 22 ] James, one of the twelve, which I'm guessing is sitting in this conversation, writes at the conclusion of his letter, if anyone wanders from the truth, and someone brings him back, let him know that whoever brings back the sinner from their wandering, will save their soul from death.

For this congregation, it is our duty in discipleship to seek the wandering. This is why our community groups exist, to search out those who go astray.

We are our brother's keeper. We are to keep watch over one another. We are to seek and rescue those entrapped and ensnared by sin.

We are to seek the sinner. We are to pursue them, follow them. We are God's search and rescue team for one another. The passage concludes, upon the return of the lost wanderer, joy ensues.

Joy over the one that was found and brought back. The return of one is to give us a picture of a shepherd rejoicing. The return of one gives us a picture of the gladness of God.

[ 23 : 37 ] The return of one gives us a picture of a flock made whole. For it is the will of God, according to verse 14, to recover the lost so that none would perish.

Do you want to know what the will of God is for your life? Rescue the wandering from perishing. This is my pastoral charge.

This is my personal charge. This is our congregational charge that of all the things you give yourself to, good things that you give yourself to, if you're wondering what the will of God is for your life, it's certainly partly this.

We are to give ourselves to rescue the wandering of all the things you concern your life about. You can unmistakably commit to this, knowing that this is the will of God.

Seek the wandering. We are to heed the warning. We are to seek the wandering. I open with the military code of honor that no one should be left behind.

[ 24 : 53 ] In recent times, it's come under intense scrutiny. The principle is honorable, but practically speaking, it is immensely costly and risky.

Should it be the priority to save one when the expenses are exceedingly costly? Should the military expend all these resources to recover a body?

be? What if more lives are lost in the process? Would it be worth it? In recent years, there have been some incredible human feats of human, incredible feats of human rescue.

If you were around in 2010, the news, it was filled on all news sources. 33 Chilean miners were rescued from half a mile underground after 69 days of rescue effort.

In recent, many of us might be familiar with the rescue of a youth soccer team in northern Thailand in the summer of 18. The team, you might have read, went to explore a few caves, only to become trapped after the caves began to fill with water following heavy rains.

[ 26 : 20 ] The 12 boys and their coach were lodged for nearly three weeks. Their rescue effort involved as many as 10,000 people, 100 divers, scores of rescue workers, representatives from over 100 governmental agencies, 900 police officers, 2,000 soldiers, 10 police helicopters, 7 ambulances, more than 700 diving cylinders, and they pumped 1 billion liters of water from the caves to rescue the 13.

One rescuer died in the process. Another would die from complications a year later. water. It was a marvelous feat of great rescue that came at great cost.

But can I tell you another rescue story? Can I tell you a greater rescue story? Have you heard how Bing was rescued?

It was a cold December day, as cold as it gets in California, and there I sat, there I sat in an auditorium attending the Christmas program where my younger siblings performed in the back of a Masonic temple.

Yes, a Masonic temple. As I slouched in my seat wishing for the program to end so that I could partake in the holiday snacks, my heart was arrested.

[ 28 : 13 ] My soul was seized. My eyes flooded with tears. My heart overflowed with love. My ears filled with the songs of salvation.

salvation. And then it happened. The rescue. The rescue happened. There I realized the bottomless abyss in which I was falling.

I was enslaved to myself, my sin, and Satan without any hope in the world. My shame and my guilt accompanied me in all my failures as a sibling and as a son and as a self-centered soul, neglecting everyone around me.

And in my hopeless despair, the voice of heaven spoke of a savior, one whom I had heard repeatedly in Sunday school.

And in my lostness, I was found. In my sorrow, I was sought. and from the wages of my sin, I was saved.

[ 29 : 22 ] And you might ask, at what cost? How much was your ransom, Bing? How many were in your rescue party?

Just one. Just one. only one rescuer was needed. Only one was required. Only one begotten son of God.

His life for my life. His cross for my pardon. His condemnation for my justification.

salvation. At what cost, you ask? He exchanged heaven for earth. He exchanged a crown for a cross.

He exchanged the adulation of angels for the scornful shouts of sinners. At what cost? He exchanged himself for me.

[ 30 : 32 ] God made him who knew no sin be sin for me so that in him I might become the righteousness of God.

What a rescue. What a rescue. What a ransom. And in that moment, God rejoiced.

And in that moment, I rejoiced. Well, lesson seven.

Here it is. Leave no one behind. father.

Father, we come to you this morning.

[ 31 : 45 ] And we desire really your joy. And according to the text, your great joy is found in the rescue of the wandering.

And so father, this morning, my prayer is that in this moment, in these moments, in these days, in the same way, rescue came to me when it was completely unexpected.

There are those in this room where you will throw out the life ring, where you will send out the rescue convoy, where we will search, we will be your search and rescue team, and we will find those who are wayward.

What a rescue. What a ransom. May it be a reality to all this morning. We ask these things for Jesus' sake.

Amen. Amen. Amen.