

“It will be done...”

Matthew 18

Children and ‘little ones’ (Matthew 18 v 1 to 6; 10 to 14)

- What do you think motivated the disciples to ask Jesus the question in verse 1? How did Jesus respond (v 2)? What child-like qualities does Jesus commend in verses 3 and 4?
- Note that Jesus talks about ‘a child’ (παιδιον, *paidion*), but then goes on to talk about ‘little ones’ (μικροί, *mikroi*). ‘Little ones’ includes children, but also refers to those who are young in faith. Why was Jesus’ condemnation of those who cause young believers to sin so severe (v 6)?
- Do all children have guardian angels (v 10)? What about adults? See Acts 12 v 15. Hebrews 1 v 14 teaches that angels are ‘ministering spirits’ sent to those who are to inherit salvation.
- Are all children ‘saved’ (v 14)? See 2 Samuel 12 v 22, 23 – David believed he would be reunited with his dead child. See also Job 42 v 13, and compare with Job 1 v 1 to 3 – the suggestion is that Job’s seven sons and three daughters were not ‘lost’, but were waiting for him, and he was eventually reunited with them...

Temptations to sin (Matthew 18 v 7 to 9)

- “But woe to the one by whom the temptation comes” (v 7), one such person being Judas Iscariot. Psalm 41 v 9 predicts his betrayal, but does this take away the responsibility for his action?
- What do verses 8 and 9 tell us about the attitude we should adopt towards sin? See Romans 12 v 9b.

Reconciliation and due process, agreement in prayer (Matthew 18 v 15 to 20)

- What do these verses teach us about reconciliation and ‘due process’? See also Galatians 6 v 1. What can we learn about the ministry of the Church, and the practical value of acting in agreement?

The charge Jesus gave Peter to ‘bind’ and ‘loose’ in Matthew 16 (v 18 to 20) he now gives to *all* the disciples (v 18) – but what does this mean? In the immediate context, ‘binding’ and ‘loosing’ refers to church discipline and indicates that the disciplinary measures handed down by the disciples on earth are ratified in heaven. But linking verse 18 with the next two verses suggests a deeper meaning. Sometimes in prayer for a person oppressed by the enemy we may be called to ‘bind’ evil powers – to “bind the strong man” (Matthew 12 v 29), i.e. the enemy, his works, servants and effects – to bind perhaps addictions, traumas and fears; and then to ‘loose’ the Holy Spirit and the love of God (Romans 5 v 5) into that person’s life.

The phrase “it will be done” (v 19) translates the Greek word *γενησεται* (*genesetai*), and Jesus promises that if two ‘agree’ (συμφωνησωσιν, *symphonisosin*, related to ‘symphony’) on earth about anything they ask, it will be done by the Father in heaven. These three verses (18 to 20) provide some of the most amazing promises in the Bible concerning agreement in prayer, and the way God answers such prayer...

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The parable of the unforgiving servant (Matthew 18 v 21 to 35)

- How does the parable in verses 23 to 35 answer Peter's question in verse 21? What other lessons does it teach? See Matthew 6 v 12 to 15.

“Seventy times seven” (v 22): $70 \times 7 = 490$, and this number is significant. The Sabbath for the land was six years for cultivation, then the seventh year for rest (Leviticus 25 v 1 to 5). But for 490 years Israel failed to keep the Sabbath for the land, and God ‘forgave them’; but in the 491st year God called what was due, and said in effect, “Tough luck, guys, you owe me seventy”, and for 70 years (to the day) the people of Israel were sent into captivity in Babylon (2 Chronicles 36 v 20, 21).

Consider also the ‘seventy weeks’ of years (i.e. 490 years) decreed for Israel in Daniel 9 v 24. We need to treat the Bible seriously and treat details like numbers with respect, and not assume that ‘seventy times seven’ just means a very large number, and so forgiveness is necessarily infinite...