

MATTHEW 18: 1-20

All of us have been fans of one musical group or another at some time in our lives. Take the Beatles for instance. They cranked out hit after hit and everyone sat by the radio on the edge their seat waiting for the next single to be released. For almost a decade they ruled the roost. After all, didn't they sing, "All you need is love?" And then they broke up, never to reunite. What happened?

As it turns out, there had been a power struggle in the band for years and it finally came to a head. That breach could not be healed. And though they spoke here and there in the years to come, there was always an uneasy tension between them that never allowed them to re-form the band.

Though none of us were the Beatles, we can run into the same type of trap. There are just some people who feel the need to assert themselves and be the lord over others. Now, there does have to be a leader, but there is a difference in a person who gathers a following due to their character, skills and abilities and the person who just wants to be the "top dog."

Coming on the heels of Jesus' announcement of His death, a power struggle came about and there was a question as to who would fill the vacuum. Some of the disciples wanted to be John or Paul, having a larger say in whose songs got on the album and who would sing lead. No one was willing to be Ringo or George.

The Rolling Stones have been together now for almost 60 years. Mick Jagger is the obvious leader. Someone has to be. He handles the business end of the group, but he always makes sure the others are respected and doesn't lord over them. In turn, they follow his lead. They are all willing to play their parts and Mick doesn't look down on them.

But at this time in Jesus' ministry, the disciples were more like the Beatles than the Stones.

1 At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?"

2 Then Jesus called a little child to Him, set him in the midst of them, 3 and said, "Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. 4 Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. 5 Whoever receives one little child like this in My name receives Me.

- This pericope is linked to the last because Jesus spoke of "sons" in relation to strangers concerning the temple tax. That has brought up a sore subject

between the disciples. They want to compare status within the kingdom. And Jesus is having none of it. Don't fall into the trap of thinking that the "kingdom" is Heaven. It had already come in one sense in the form of a new type more'. We are not to lord over each other. There are no "A- postles" and "B-postles." There are only servants. Sure there are titles and job descriptions within the kingdom, but everyone is on the same footing. This is akin to how Jesus sees the different roles of a man and woman in a marriage. There are different roles and responsibilities, but the man is of no higher status or value than the man.

- Humbles – This word is most often used to denote a mental virtue of humility, but that is only the case when the word is used as an adjective. But here it is used as a verb and that carries a different meaning. In this case it doesn't meant to attempt to gain the mental virtue of humility but to accept the lowly social STATUS of a child, who in an adult world would have no self-determination and MUST submit to the will of adults who "know best."
- Jesus calls for all who believe to adopt this child-like position.

6 "Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea. 7 Woe to the world because of offenses! For offenses must come, but woe to that man by whom the offense comes!

8 "If your hand or foot causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you. It is better for you to enter into life lame or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet, to be cast into the everlasting fire. 9 And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you. It is better for you to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes, to be cast into hell fire.

- "Little ones" defined. Those within the church who seek no social status. Something like we imagine a new believer to be. The opposite of what the
- The millstone was the larger one, the type to which a donkey would have been attached. (hundreds of pounds!)
- Woe! Emphatic and always attached to judgment.
- Offenses – stumbling blocks – skandalizo
- Verses 8 and 9; remove yourself from things/ situations that stumble you. Don't go there! Jesus will address what to do when people in the church are stumbling blocks shortly.

10 "Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that in heaven their angels always see the face of My Father who is in heaven. 11 For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost.

12 "What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them goes astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine and go to the mountains to seek the one

that is straying? 13 And if he should find it, assuredly, I say to you, he rejoices more over that sheep than over the ninety-nine that did not go astray. 14 Even so it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish.

- “Little ones again.
- Despise = disesteem; Do not look down on them. They have the same value as those who hold office or seem to be movers and shakers in the church.
- “Their angels.”
- Look at how much Jesus values these “little ones!” He will leave the group in order to find the straying little one. Look at how secure we can be in Jesus! Yet at the same time, He doesn’t value the large group any less than the one little one!

15 “Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. 16 But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that ‘by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.’ 17 And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector.

18 “Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.

19 “Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven. 20 For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them.”

- If your brother, (fellow believer) sins against you, “stumbles you,” go to him in private to address the problem. If he hears you, you have won your brother.
- If he won’t hear it, then take some respected elders.
- If he still refuses to listen, then take it to the church. (Last resort for a major offense.)
- Heathen and a tax collector. Unbelievers and traitors. These people were avoided for the most part unless you just had to cross their paths in the normal course of the day’s events. But we are told we are to still pray for them. The end goal is always reconciliation.
- Verses 18 and 19: Binding and loosing. This is the second time Jesus has quoted this passage from Isaiah. The first time He was talking to Peter at Caesarea Phillipi. That passage talks about a new steward taking office. In this context, it simply means that concerning what is decided when it comes to church discipline, that decision will be honored in Heaven.
- The rabbis taught that whenever two people were speaking of the Law and

prophets, then the Shekinah glory of God was there between them.

We are human. We will encounter stumbling blocks from time to time. Sometimes they will be stumbling blocks of our own doing. And the Holy Spirit will let us know when these things are issues. From those things we need to remove ourselves. After all, the best way to avoid a punch is not to be there when it is thrown.

But there will be other times when the stumbling block comes from another believer. When that happens we are to go directly to them in private, in grace and try to work out the situation. Reconciliation is the ultimate goal.

And when we have earnestly gone through the process with a humble heart, seeking reconciliation and we come to an impasse, then we remove ourselves from that person and that situation, all the while praying for reconciliation.

(Thomas Moore and Charles Edwards)

Look at how we are valued by Jesus. And look at how He sees those of us who are seen by some to be the least in the kingdom! He is always scouring the by-ways looking for us!

And look at how far He went to reconcile us to Him! Put it this way, we know we can be trouble. And we know what it is like to have to deal with be people that cause us trouble. But Jesus doesn't sigh, shake His head or put His head in His hands. He gets up and runs around calling and looking for us!

His goal, and it should always be ours, is reconciliation! He is always looking to repair the breach! He shows the grace and mercy towards us and we are to replicate that, showing it to those around us.

When any sort of leader or official shows that much concern and love for a missing person, they are cherished, loved and respected. Now take that picture and see it in the grand scope of what Jesus has done for us.

Jesus willingly left His status in Heaven, at the right hand of the Father in order to come down here, as a child obeying the will of his Father in order to remove the stumbling block of sin and its judgment for us.

That is the God I can serve.