

All That Jesus Taught Bible Study - Part 58

by Zac Poonen

Zac Poonen explores the teachings of Jesus on humility, offense, and the importance of childlike faith in the Christian life.

Duration: 25:23

Scripture: Matthew 17:22, Matthew 18:1-10, Matthew 18:14

Topics: "Christian Humility", "Jesus Teachings"

Description

This sermon delves into the teachings of Jesus regarding humility, avoiding causing offense, and the importance of our attitude towards children. Jesus emphasizes the need for humility by using extreme examples of cutting off body parts to prevent stumbling others. He warns against despising or causing little ones to stumble, highlighting the care and value God places on children. The message focuses on living in a way that reflects Christ's humility and love, especially towards the vulnerable and young.

Transcript

So we continue our study today on all that Jesus taught. And we have been looking at the things that Jesus taught, not only by his words and his actions, but also by the circumstances in which he brought his disciples into and what he wanted to learn from them. God educates us in many ways.

One of the ways is by the circumstances he leads us through and the way he delivers us from some of those situations or what we go through and experience in those situations of God's goodness and power. So we turn now to Matthew chapter 17 and verse 22. It says, While they were gathering together in Galilee, Jesus said to them, The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men.

They will kill him and he will be raised on the third day. And they were deeply grieved. And when they had come to Capernaum, those who collected the two drachma tax came to Peter and said, Does your teacher not pay the two drachma tax? And he promptly said yes.

And when he came into the house, Jesus spoke to him first saying, What do you think, Simon? From whom do the kings of the earth collect customs or poll tax? From their sons or from strangers? And upon his saying from strangers, Jesus said to him, Consequently, the sons are exempt. But lest we give them offense, go to the sea and throw in a hook. Take the first fish that comes up and when you open its mouth, you'll find a stater.

Take that and give it to them for you and me. We see something here of Jesus' attitude towards things that he didn't have to do. He says, I don't have to pay the tax when I'm a son.

But to avoid giving them offense, let's pay it. So sometimes in the Christian life, we may have to do certain things which we don't have to do. But we want to avoid giving offense.

It's a great example Jesus has given us here by his life that we don't stand on our rights. See, the question he asked here was this. Do kings ever collect tax from their own sons? No.

Then the sons are exempt. So I really don't have to pay tax. But I don't want to give them offense.

So let's pay it. Many people sometimes stand on their rights. And they think that is standing for the truth and standing for the faith.

Sometimes it can be pretty stupid. A true Christian would be gracious. Okay, I don't want to cause offense.

It's a small thing. It's just a money matter. Take it.

I'll pay it off. No problem. Instead of standing on some imaginary right that I think I have.

If there was one person who did not need to pay tax, it was Christ. The Son of God. But this principle, lest we give them offense.

You see, are we trying to please men? Was Christ trying to please men? No. But he didn't want anyone to get stumbled over a small thing like this. What is there if you give a little extra money? Give it all.

Because his aim was to win people to God. And our aim is to win people to Christ. And we want to make sure that nothing we do or stand for causes offense to people unnecessarily.

I mean, there is an offense called the offense of the cross. That we are willing to accept. But we don't want to create offense for unnecessary things that don't relate to the offense of the cross.

And that's where we need to be wise. Because some Christians are foolish and stand on certain rights. And they are very poor witnesses for Christ as a result.

And you can apply that to your own life and see how that can apply. And the other beautiful thing I see here is Jesus was so considerate. He said, when you take that money, that will cover tax for you and for me.

For you and me. What a beautiful expression. Jesus entering into partnership with Peter.

And paying his debt as well. I like that. Because this is how the Lord treats you and me as well.

You can take that to yourself. The Lord says, for you and me. I'm in partnership with you in this ministry.

Peter had forsaken everything to serve the Lord. Now Peter was a Christian who was spending his life making money. There was no need for the Lord to say that.

But because he had forsaken everything for the Lord's sake, the Lord says, don't worry, I'll take care of your tax as well. What about you? Do you sometimes try to cheat on the tax? The Lord says, you don't have to. There's no shortage of money with me.

I can get money out of a fish's mouth to pay your tax. I have a shortage of honest people. And don't add to that shortage by you yourself going and cheating on taxes.

I'll give you the money to pay the tax. I can even get it out of a fish's mouth. I can provide it for you supernaturally.

But I don't want you to cheat and be crooked. And don't cause offense to people. So there's some wonderful lessons here.

All that Jesus taught. This is what we're trying to learn. So that our life, in our life we walk as Jesus walked.

That's our goal. 1 John 2, verse 6. Everyone who says he's a Christian must live like Christ lived. That's the Living Bible paraphrase.

Must walk as he walked by the same principles by which he lived. And this is the purpose of our study. At that time, Matthew 18, verse 1. The disciples came to Jesus saying, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? This seems to have been an issue with them many times.

It's an issue with many Christian leaders. Who is greater? You or me? You know, a lot of people who say they have come to serve the meek and lowly Jesus who washed the disciples' feet. When they come into Christian ministry, they're always thinking, Who is senior? You or me? And there's a great lust for seniority.

So even at the last supper they were discussing, Who is the greatest? And here also, who is the greatest? James and John wanted to sit at the right hand and the left hand of Jesus. Greatest in heaven. Now that sounds like a good thing.

I don't want to be great on earth, but I want to be great in heaven. But even that is wrong because they were seeking honor. Wherever you seek honor, whether you seek honor on this earth or honor in heaven, it's wrong.

And James and John's mother came to Jesus and said, Put my sons on either side of you in the coming kingdom. This honor-seeking, like the kings of the Gentiles. I'm sorry to say that I have seen it in every single denomination.

In every single church, in the purest church, in the most corrupt church. This desire for position and power by the leaders to be recognized as a leader among others. This is 180 degrees the opposite, the exact opposite of the spirit of Christ.

And so Jesus takes the most unlikely person on earth to be the greatest. And he called a little child to himself. I don't know how old that child was.

And he set this child, must be a very, very little child, and set the child before them and said, Listen, fellas, forget about being the greatest. If you want to even enter, enter the kingdom of heaven, you got to be converted from your way of thinking and become like children, like this little child. Now, he's not talking about being great.

He started with entering. To enter the kingdom, you must change your entire way of thinking. That's the meaning of converted.

Your whole mind, thought process must change. Your value system must change completely till you become like little children. Where little children, I mean, they may fight for toys and all, but they're not seeking for honor in this world.

They're not seeking to be great people in the church. And isn't it wonderful? Have you ever seen a little child wanting to be an elder in a church or wanting to be a leader in a church? No. A little one, two-year-old or a little child lying in a cradle, he doesn't want to be a leader anywhere.

So that's the spirit that's going to take you into God's kingdom. And then, after entering the kingdom, that's stage one, verse three, then if you want to be the greatest in the kingdom, then you got to keep humbling yourself like this child. I mean, you get converted and become like this child first.

And, you know, that helpless dependence on the parents to come to a life of helpless dependence upon God. That's how you enter the kingdom. That's what faith means.

And then, you keep humbling yourself, humbling yourself, and gradually you become the greatest in God's kingdom. So it's by humility. Like I've often said, there's three secrets of the Christian life.

Our humility, second, humility, third, humility. That's it. So that is the way.

And I have preached this for years. But I find even those who have heard me preach this for 20, 30 years, they're still seeking to be great in the church. Jesus once told a parable about a couple of chapters after this, where Peter once, when the rich young ruler went away saying, I can't give up all that I have to follow you, at the end of Matthew 19, Peter went up to Jesus and said, Hey, Lord, this guy was not willing to give up everything he had to follow you, but we gave up everything to follow you.

What are we going to get? And the Lord said, Okay, I'll tell you what you're going to get. Yeah, you will get, I mean, if you've given up houses and lands, the Lord will give you back houses and lands, along with persecutions here on this earth, and also eternal life, Matthew 19, 29. And then he said, I'll tell you a parable.

This business of wanting to get a highest reward and be greatest in the kingdom and all that. He tells the story of the laborers. And the people who came last, we'll come to that in a little while, were first.

And so that's the thing that Jesus was constantly emphasizing, here also. It's not the people you think are right in front who are going to be greatest in God's kingdom. It's the one who is humble, the one who is really willing to take the low place to be, doesn't want his name or fame.

A child is not trying to get his name in the newspaper. A child is not trying to get himself a little baby. He's not bothered whether people photograph him or not.

He's not trying to get into every photograph. He's not trying to be somebody great. He's just a little child.

I often meditate on a little one-month-old child in a cradle. I say, what type of thoughts are going through this child's mind? He's not thinking what a great, smart guy I am or how handsome I am or how much people admire me or how many people are photographing me. There's not a single thought like that in the mind of that one-month-old child.

If you pinch it today and go away, tomorrow when you come, he won't even, he'll smile at you. He doesn't even remember that you pinched him yesterday. What a wonderful thing it is to be like a little child, in total

humility, no grudges, no complaints, no memory of some evil that you did to it yesterday.

That is true humility. And such a person is the greatest in God's kingdom. And so, he goes on to say that if you receive one such child in my name, you will receive me.

Now you've got to compare this with the other verse which we considered earlier when Jesus said to his apostles in Matthew 10 and verse 40 that whoever receives you, receives me. That means when you receive an apostle of Jesus Christ, you're actually receiving Christ. But there are not many apostles in the world.

I can count on my fingers of one hand the number of apostles I've met in my life of 53 years as a believer. There are not at all many apostles in the world. So how in the world can I receive Christ? Well, you can receive a little child.

It's the same word. Whoever receives an apostle, receives me, Matthew 10, 40. And whoever receives a child, Matthew 18, 5, also receives me.

And children are more abundant than apostles. They're everywhere. So if you want to receive Jesus, receive a child in Jesus' name.

When you have a baby born into your home, what is Jesus teaching? Receive that child in Jesus' name. You know how it is in India? If it's a girl, they say, oh no, another girl. That's not receiving a child in Jesus' name.

Certainly not. But that child is God's gift to you. God is the one who determined the sex of that child.

God is the one who determined that that was to be a girl. Whatever heathen tradition and philosophy and religion may teach, God creates men and women. God created male and female in his image.

And a lot of Christians also sometimes think God created only males in his image and not females. So when a little girl is born, they're disappointed. Even if they don't express it, sometimes in their heart they're disappointed.

That is evil. It's not just a weakness. It is 100% evil.

It's the mark of an unbeliever. It's the mark of an atheist who doesn't believe in God. If you get a daughter and you say, oh no, why another daughter? Well, God decided that you needed a daughter.

And that God is going to fulfill a great plan through that little girl. So it's very sad. I mean, I can understand heathen people, godless atheists having that attitude.

But when Christians have that attitude, I'd say they are no better than those godless atheists. They are Christians only in name. In actual fact, they are godless atheists who got a Christianized religion.

But they're not spiritual. Receive a child in Jesus' name. And don't say, oh how dark that is.

How dark that child is. Does God create dark children? Does he create only white children? What all wrong ideas born-again Christians have who behave exactly like the heathen when it comes to this area. Receive that child in Jesus' name.

And don't judge your child just because he's not as intelligent in school as somebody else's. Everybody's child can't come first in the class. Accept your child with whatever measure of intelligence God has given him.

Receive a child in Jesus' name. Dear brothers and sisters, this is a fundamental aspect of true Christianity. And he goes on to say, there are a number of things he says here about little children.

First of all, to enter the kingdom of heaven, you must be converted and become like little children. And then he says, if you want to be great in the kingdom of heaven, verse 4, you've got to keep on humbling yourself in every situation like little children who are perfect examples of humility. That humility means that helpless dependence.

You know, a little one-month-old child is so helpless in a cradle. It's not a shame to admit, I need my mummy for everything. And in that way to say, I need God for everything.

If I want to know what to do next, mummy has to tell me. If I want to know what to do next, God has to tell me. This is humility.

Humility is not bowing our head down and talking softly. That's all counterfeit. Humility is that helpless dependence on God and saying, I need God's help for every little thing, just like a little child.

And if you keep walking like that, you'll be great in God's kingdom. And then he goes on to speak about receiving children in Jesus' name. And then he warns, a warning.

If you cause one of these little ones who believe in me to stumble, deep down in a child's heart, I believe there's some awareness of a God in heaven. I don't know if God has put that awareness in a child. I believe that.

And if you cause one of these little ones to stumble by something you do, it is better for you to tie a heavy millstone around the neck and be drowned in the depth of the sea. These are very strong words. I mean, do you stumble little children by anything you do or say? When father and mother fight in the house, what are they doing? You're stumbling their poor little children in the house, showing them that Christianity does not deliver you from anger, does not deliver you from a foul, filthy mouth.

It just may teach you to sing songs on Sunday. You're stumbling those little children. When you dress in an immodest way, you teenage girls, you girls in your twenties, when you dress in an immodest way, you're stumbling other little children in your church, the six-year-old girls and the ten-year-old girls, who go to their dads and say, why can't I dress like that sister? You're a stumbling block when you dress immodestly, when you expose parts of your body that you shouldn't be exposing, you girls.

When you wear those tight-fitting clothes around your body, upper or lower part of your body, to provoke men to lust, you're stumbling other younger girls who are younger than you. You're making it difficult for the fathers of those girls to protect those girls from those stylish things because you, an older sister in the church, is setting such a bad example. And some of you older sisters dress like this, you may even be teaching Sunday school.

That compounds your error and your crime when you dress like that and dare to teach Sunday school. Sunday school teaching is not just academic knowledge of the Bible, it's your whole appearance and bearing. So if you are like that, let me tell you what you should do.

You should go to a hardware shop and buy a millstone and make sure it's really heavy, something like 20 kilos or something. Get a really heavy stone and get a rope, tie it around your neck and go jump in the sea. Those are the words of Jesus.

He's not telling you to actually do that, but he's saying it's better you do that than be a stumbling block to these children. See the strong words he uses. Sometimes people tell me, Brother Zack, you speak so hard and strong.

I say, you haven't heard Jesus. Have you ever heard me say anything like this? Tie a millstone around your neck and go jump in the sea? That's very strong. I would never say that to anyone.

But Jesus said it. He was trying to emphasize how terrible it is to do something that would stumble little children. I don't know whether you realize the seriousness of that crime.

Then he goes on to say in verse 7, there will always be stumbling blocks as long as this world exists. There will be stumbling blocks. You can't avoid it.

In your church there will be stumbling blocks. No matter how much we preach and no matter what they hear, there will still be stubborn girls and young women who will defy authority and misbehave and dress how they like and stumble younger people. What shall we do? Woe unto the world because of its stumbling blocks.

It is inevitable, verse 7, that stumbling blocks will come. But woe to the person through whom the stumbling block comes. There is a real woe and a curse on any brother or sister who stumbles little children by their conduct, by their anger or their misbehavior or immodest dress.

So what should you do? Well, here's the solution. Jesus' solutions are always radical. He says if it's your hand or your foot that's causing you to stumble, just cut it off.

Dear brother, sister, have you ever heard preaching like this? If your hand offends you, cut it off. If your foot offends you, cut it off. I think people would say to such a preacher, be Christ-like, man, when you're preaching.

They don't realize that this is Christ-like. This is exactly what Jesus said. If your hand offends you, cut it off.

If your foot offends you, cut it off. It's better for you to enter life crippled or lame than having two hands and two feet go straight into hell, to eternal fire. He's talking about offending others by our conduct.

Do you know that you can go to eternal fires by offending others by your conduct? So here's something that we need to take very, very seriously. And further, if it's your eye, whether it's your hand or your feet or your eye, if your eye causes you to stumble, plug it out and throw it from you. It's better for you to enter life without eyes, without hands, without legs, than to have all these members of your body and go to hell.

What's the subject he's talking about? He's talking about offending little children. So he comes back to it. See that you don't despise one of these little ones.

First of all, he says, see that you don't stumble one of these little ones. Verse 6. And then he goes on to say, don't despise one of these little ones. Don't look down on little children.

Woe unto that church which despises or looks down upon their little children. I often say, in our church, these are our flowers. We may not be rich enough to put real flowers in our church, but we can have these little children.

These are our flowers. And see that you don't despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that there are angels in heaven continually behold the face of my father who is in heaven. So it appears to me that every child has an angel.

At least one. Maybe more. And that angel is always in the presence of the father.

And at the same time, available to this child on earth to protect it from harm and danger. And every type of evil. And so he said, be careful that you don't despise one of these little ones because the angels will report you to the father.

For the son of man has come to seek and to save that which was lost. There's a beautiful section here on children emphasizing that Jesus came even to save little children. So I would encourage all of you to meditate on this passage to understand what Jesus taught about our attitude to little children.

We'll continue our study in our next episode.

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