

# Living on Earth for Heaven: Walking Humbly

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[ 0 : 00 ] Good, well let's turn to God's Word and to Matthew's Gospel and chapter 18 this morning, Willie is continuing his series through Matthew's Gospel. So do turn to Matthew 18 and we're reading verses 1 to 14 there.

Matthew 18 and reading from verse 1. At that time, the disciples came to Jesus saying, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?

And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them and said, Truly I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Whoever receives one such child in my name, receives me. But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea.

Woe to the world for temptations to sin. For it is necessary that temptations come, but woe to the one by whom the temptation comes.

[ 1 : 28 ] And if your hand or your foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life crippled or lame than with two hands or two feet to be thrown into the eternal fire.

And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into the hell of fire.

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 who 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.

[ 2 : 38 ] Amen. May God bless to us his words this morning. Well, good to see you all and welcome to those who are joining us in Queen's Park and in Bath Street and also those watching us online.

Do join with me, if you would, in turning back to Matthew chapter 18. We're going to be studying this passage together this morning that we read a little earlier. And it's all about family values.

Family values is a phrase that was once rather popular among politicians, wasn't it? But it often came back to bite them when they were caught with their pants down or their fingers in the piggy bank.

And so perhaps for that reason, we don't see it, don't hear it so often today. But of course, real family values are very important.

But they're not really about moral pronouncements and tough discipline. Rather, actually, they're all about understanding grace and right relationships.

- [ 3 : 47 ] And that's what Jesus means when he talks about family values in the new community that he's gathering around himself. That is, his church, which he is building, he tells us, and the gates of hell themselves will never prevail against them.
- The church is not an institution. The church is a real family. Tragic, isn't it, that that's so often been forgotten. Church has been very often full of crippling formalism, of stiffness, of deadness.
- But the church is not an institution. Thank God for that. To misquote Groucho Marx, who wants to live in an institution? No, the church is Christ's family.
- And Matthew is keen to hammer that home. Remember back in chapter 12, verse 50. Whoever does the will of my Father in heaven, he is my mother and sister and brother.
- Family. And as we saw last time in chapter 17, he is leading his family to their true and glorious family home in his glorious heavenly kingdom.
- [ 4 : 59 ] And if you look at the end of chapter 17 there that we looked at last time, verse 26. We are sons of the king, he says. One day to be freed from all the bonds, all the rules of this world, all the governments of this world, all the taxes of this world indeed.
- We are heirs of the cosmos, says Jesus. But we also saw, didn't we, that we can only follow Jesus there by walking with him here.
- And the glory that is promised to all true sons and daughters who are adopted into the father's family through faith, it is ours, but not yet. Only when the Son of Man comes again in his glory to judge all things.
- As we saw at the end of chapter 16. But yes, certainly well, then there will be, for everyone who has done God's will on earth and followed Jesus Christ, there will be glory unimaginable.
- But what Jesus is teaching us is that even now we must live in the light of that great day. We must live out our true identity as the family of the living God.
- [ 6 : 07 ] And that's what Matthew chapter 18 here is all about. It's the fourth of these major teaching blocks that we find that Matthew has preserved for us. And in it we find Jesus as the head of his heavenly household teaching us how to live as his church, as the household of God, as heirs of his heavenly kingdom.
- And it's all about living now on earth, but for heaven. And it's all a family affair.
- Indeed, it's a royal family affair. As we can see from the language all the way through, it picks up from the end of chapter 17, which speaks about sons and heirs of the king. And chapter 18 is full of family language.
- Children, brothers, the father. Real family values for the family of God. And, by the way, the way to real greatness in that family.
- Now, it shouldn't surprise us what God wants from us as his family, because the whole Old Testament is full of that kind of teaching. Prophet Micah summed it up very pithily in Micah chapter 6, verse 8.
- [ 7 : 17 ] What does the Lord require of you? To do justly. To love mercy. And to walk humbly before your God. Well, says Jesus, that is how you are to live now.
- Living on earth for heaven. And as we'll see, verses 1 to 14 that we're looking at this morning are all about walking humbly. Just as verses 15 to 20 teaches about doing justly.
- And the rest of the chapter about loving mercy. So let's focus now on verses 1 to 14. And the first thing essential to the values of the family of our Lord Jesus Christ.
- Walking humbly before our God. Which is the only way to true greatness in the church of Jesus Christ, the family of God. We're to walk humbly by receiving Jesus himself.

By never risking ruin for Jesus' brothers. But always by reflecting Jesus' father. Look at verses 1 to 5.

[ 8 : 16 ] It teaches about receiving Jesus himself. True greatness in the kingdom means having been truly humbled by God's grace. And becoming utterly dependent on Jesus for everything.

Trusting him because we know that by ourselves we are nothing and have nothing. Notice in verse 1 how Matthew connects this very clearly with the preceding words.

About the disciples being royal sons of a glorious king. At that time. Right after verse 17. The disciples came to Jesus asking this question. Who's the greatest?

There's actually a so missing in our translation. The question begins so. Who is the greatest? And that's not the so that seems to begin every one of our sentences today.

You know you ask somebody how are you doing today? And they say oh so I'm fine thank you. So seems to become the new capital letter doesn't it in our language. But this is a proper so. It's not one of those so's. It's so in the light of all these things you've been teaching us about our glorious inheritance to come.

[ 9 : 24 ] So who's the greatest? In Mark's account in Mark 9 he tells us. He fills in that the disciples have actually been arguing among themselves about which of them is the greatest you see.

It's astonishing really isn't it? After chapter 17 which had shown up their utter failure. Their faithlessness. Their lack of spiritual power. And Jesus plain talk also there about his own humiliation.

His coming death on the cross. And yet still these disciples can talk about glory and greatness for themselves. Of course none of us would be like that would we?

Let's not be too harsh on them because after all we have got far more understanding haven't we? Of the whole gospel now that we have the whole of the Bible.

The whole of the New Testament. Much more than they had at this stage. And yet the Holy Spirit must know that we need to learn these lessons too. Because that's why it's been preserved in scripture.

[ 10 : 26 ] That's why Matthew has recorded it for us. So we'd better listen. First of all notice how the disciples asked him this question about greatness. And when they do that Jesus immediately turns the table and puts the spotlight right back on them.

On the questioners. That's so typical of the Lord Jesus isn't it? He will not be in the dock. It's us human beings who are in the dock. And what Jesus says is never mind greatness in the kingdom.

Unless you turn verse 3. Unless you change fundamentally. You'll never even enter the kingdom of heaven. You'll never even be the least in the kingdom.

Never mind the greatest. Jesus' words really I think are as shocking here as the words he spoke to Peter. Remember back in chapter 16.

Get behind me Satan. It's shocking because he's speaking here to his closest disciples. His friends. Those who are already following him.

[ 11 : 28 ] Those who are already within the community of his church. And he's saying that unless they. That is unless we. Change in our hearts.

We'll never even enter his heavenly kingdom when it comes at last in glory. That is he's saying that you can profess Jesus as Lord. That's what Peter had done. You can have all the soundest teaching in the world.

That's what the disciples certainly had. You can be part of Jesus church here on earth. Even pillars of that church. And yet. Be barred from the gates of heaven.

Verse 3. You will never enter. Same words he used back in chapter 5. Unless your righteousness exceeds the scribes and the Pharisees. You will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

Unless. You turn. That is you change fundamentally in heart and mind. And become says Jesus. Like children. What does Jesus mean by that?

[ 12 : 31 ] Well let me tell you what he doesn't mean by that. Some people think. We're to be like children here. Meaning oh we're to be full of innocence. We're to be full of natural goodness. All the unselfishness of a child.

Un sullied by adult corruptions. I can only think that people who think that or write that. Have never actually had children. I certainly haven't spent much time teaching children in primary school.

Those who have will tell you what utter nonsense that idea is. There's nothing to do with that. It's hard for us to grasp actually in the 21st century. Because our culture has so sentimentalized children.

Often treat children as if they had all the full responsibility of adults and so on. But in 1st century Palestine it was the absolute opposite of that. Children and especially little children had no recognition at all.

Very few rights. No status in the eyes of the world. The rabbis actually had a common little triad for nobodies. It was the deaf and dumb.

[ 13 : 35 ] It was the weak minded and the underage. So in Jewish contemporary law a little child had absolutely no status at all. And Jesus is saying that's what you must embrace for yourselves.

That's the bitter pill that you must swallow. Not gag on if you're even to enter my heavenly kingdom. When you come to Jesus at first.

It means admitting that all my former way of life has been a mistake. It's been a waste. I've got to start all over again. It's like a new birth.

Jesus says elsewhere. That's essential for even entering the kingdom of heaven. But more than that it's essential for every step of the way on after that.

It's the only road of discipleship. Embracing daily the reality that I am nothing. That I have nothing. No status at all.

[ 14 : 38 ] Except what I receive from the arms of Jesus the Son of God. And that's Jesus' repeated message isn't it? Ever since Jesus was named as the Christ by Peter in chapter 16 verse 16.

The way of the Christ he says is the way of the cross. And the way of the disciple is the way of the cross. That is it is death to all earthly pride and status.

It is utter humbling. And it's acceptance of the status of nothing in the eyes of God. Losing life in order to find true life.

To become like mere infants in the eyes of a scornful world having no status. And therefore becoming willingly utterly dependent on Jesus Christ alone.

Trusting him totally. And his welcome of us has been all the status and all the acceptance that we will ever need.

[ 15 : 42 ] Look at verse 4. Whoever humbles himself like this child. Not just as in verse 3 now. Just like children. But like this child. Is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

This child is the one that Jesus called to him in verse 2. And the one who answered him. And has come through all the crowds of disciples to stand right in the midst of him with Jesus. Mark actually says he came into Jesus' arms.

This child trusted Jesus. And put himself in carefree dependence on Jesus. Despite no doubt some frowns and some dirty looks from these disciples.

If you look at chapter 19 verse 13. If that's anything to go by you'll see that they were hardly a very child friendly bunch. But here this little child comes. And Jesus says unless you are like this little child.

Willing to come boldly, personally, publicly. Into the arms of Jesus. Even though that will bring you the scorn of the community. Because you trust Jesus.

[ 16 : 43 ] To confer on you all the value that you need. Because you trust Jesus to make you great. Because you trust that for Jesus to accept you.

Even though you know that you don't have any impressive strength of your own. You don't have any status of your own. But nothing that you have done to serve him warrants that welcome.

To have no greatness at all. Other than the greatness that you gain. From his arms of welcome into your family. Unless you are truly like that, says Jesus.

You can't even enter the kingdom. But if you are like that. If you're like this child. That is the way to true greatness. In other words.

True greatness. Is something that can only come to those who receive it. And you can receive that greatness only. By coming to the Lord Jesus Christ.

[ 17 : 44 ] But you can only receive Jesus like that. If you have been turned. If you've been truly humbled. If you've come to understand the real truth about your own sin.

And what that means in the face of a holy God. And the truth about the grace of God. And what that means in the face of our human pride. And Jesus is teaching you see that whether.

Whether you have really turned like that or not. Is something that isn't actually invisible. It's not only a matter of the heart. It's not private and personal.

Now look at verse 5. It's clear. If it is true. If your heart really is changed. Then it will be visible. If you've really been welcomed in the arms of Jesus. Then it will be visibly evident in your welcome of other believers.

Verse 5. Whoever receives. Or whoever welcomes. As the NIV puts it. Whoever welcomes one such child in my name. Welcomes me. Receives me. You're not talking here just generally about being kind to children.

[ 18 : 51 ] It's one such child. Like the one in verse 4. Who came to him. Again. It's parallel again there in verse 6. It's little ones who believe in me. And what Jesus clearly means is that if you recognize our true savior.

If you recognize the head of the family. You will recognize and welcome brothers and sisters in the family. And we do so on the same basis.

That Christ has welcomed and received us. We welcome them because Jesus has welcomed them. And because he has given them status as sons and daughters of his kingdom.

And we love them because Christ has loved them. Because we're a family. We're one with all of the others. Who had nothing. Who have no status in this world.

But have been humbled by the grace of God in Jesus Christ. And to receive them says Jesus. Is to receive me. To love them. Is to love me. And it's by loving them.

[ 19 : 53 ] And it's by receiving them. That we'll show. That we really have received Jesus himself. That's a real challenge to us in the professing church. Isn't it? Because we might ask ourselves.

What is the evidence? That we have really received Jesus truly like that. That we are turned people. Who do we welcome into our homes?

Jesus commands us doesn't he? To have open homes. Open lives. Sharing our lives. With all Christ's children. Well are we actually. Opening our homes to all kinds of people.

Or is it just our kind of people? Is it just social entertainment? That's very different isn't it? From real Christian hospitality. Who do we really welcome into our hearts?

Those we defend. Those we give ourselves to. Is it just as the world does? People like us. People we like. In worldly terms.

[ 20 : 55 ] Is that status. Shaping. What we think. How we act. Or is our heart really open to. Little ones.

People. Who believe in Jesus. Whoever they are. Even though in the world's eyes. Well maybe they're feeble. They're strugglers. They're misfits. And we often are. The challenge isn't it?

Perhaps we need to. To reread. James chapter 2. A little more often. Who are the people that we really value. In our lives. The answer.

To that question. Tells us a very great deal. About the truth. Of whether in fact. We really do value Jesus Christ. Above all things. Says Lord. Whoever receives.

One such child. In my name. Says Jesus. Receives me. And unless we are. Truly receiving Jesus. That way. He says.

[ 21 : 50 ] We may. Spend our lives. In the church. But we won't. Enter the kingdom of heaven. On the day of his glory. That's a very sobering thought. Isn't it? And it's meant to make us think.

But Jesus doesn't stop there. In verses 6 to 9. He says the same thing. But this time he frames it negatively. To show what it means. To not walk humbly.

As truly turned people. This is how to be the opposite. Of great. In the kingdom of heaven. It's one of these necessary negatives. That the bible is full of. For the avoidance of doubt.

As the lawyers put it. Well for the avoidance of doubt. Walking humbly means. Not ruining. Jesus brothers. And sisters. True greatness.

In the kingdom. Means that we will never. Risk ruin. To any one of Jesus. Precious. Brothers and sisters. Including. By the way. Ourselves. If you have an NIV.

[ 22 : 47 ] I think it's better than the ESV here. It begins a new sentence. In paragraph. Verse 6. With the word. But. Because Jesus shows us. That for the avoidance of doubt.

Just as receiving. His brothers and sisters. With real grace. Shows that we've received him. So also. We reject. Jesus himself. We scorn. And disdain him.

When we carelessly. Risk ruin. For his precious brethren. One idea dominates. In verses 6 to 9. And it's all to do with.

Causing. Believers. To sin. The word. Word translated. Temptation there. To temptation. To sin. Or in verse. 8 and 9. Cause to sin. It literally means.

To cause to stumble. Scandalize. It's where we get our word. Scandalize from. It means to be brought. To downfall. And the noun.

[ 23 : 42 ] That's there in verse 7. The temptation. Is literally. The stumbling block. It's the trap. It's the snare. It's the thing. Which causes. The downfall. Which here.

He is. He's clearly speaking. About falling away. Into apostasy. From the true church. And Jesus message. Message is very clear. Because his family. Is so precious to him.

To sin. Against his family members. To sin. Against these little ones. Who believe in him. Is the most serious. Kind of sin. And the mark of true greatness.

Therefore. Is never to jeopardize. One of these little ones. Never to cause them. To stumble. However much. It might personally. Cost you. To ensure that.

Because that. Is the pattern. That Jesus himself. Shows us. Look back to the end. Of chapter 17. Where Jesus. Tells us. That although. As heaven's heir.

[ 24 : 37 ] He is free. He is not subject. To any ruler. Nor earthly ruler. No taxes. Nevertheless. Verse 27. He says. And so as not. To give offense. Same word here. So as not.

To cause any. To stumble. So as not. To risk. Losing. Any of his. Precious people. He will. Submit himself. To others. He will. Deny himself.

So as not. To risk. The ruin. Of any. That he came. To save. And those. Who would be great. In his kingdom. Must do likewise.

Bear. For any. Personal cost. Rather than. Ever. By their words. Or their actions. Be found. Causing the ruin. Of brothers and sisters. In Christ. Causing them.

To fall. Into spiritual. Downfall. And verse 6. Emphasizes. Just how. Serious. That careless. Sin is. Better. To be drowned.

[ 25 : 34 ] In the sea. Now. Than to live. To commit. Such a sin. That can only mean. Can't it. That physical death. Will save you.

From a fate. Worse than death. From hell itself. And that's how seriously. Jesus. Takes the sin. That would imperil. The spiritual life.

Of his family. Of his church. We scorn. And reject. Jesus himself. When we scorn. And reject his church. And when we risk. The ruin. Of God's. Precious children.

And if we scorn. And reject Jesus. Then we need to be clear. We will. Consign ourselves. To eternal punishment. That's. What Jesus says.

That's how serious this is. It's a real warning. He's saying that we bear. Responsibility. For one another. And the more. Authority. And the more. Influence.

[ 26 : 28 ] That we have. The more. Responsibility. We bear. So leaders. In every part of the church. Listen up. Many things. Can cause people.

To stumble. Into spiritual ruin. And verse 7. Is very plain. Isn't it? Realistic. There will be. Many such. In the church. Right to the end. It's necessary. It must be so.

In a world of sin. The church. Will never be. Free of ruinous. Influences. Until the Lord Jesus. Comes again. But be warned. Don't you. Be one of them.

He says. Because that is the way. To certain judgment. Woe. To the one. By whom it comes. We need to be very careful.

There's so many ways. To cause little ones. To stumble. Especially those who are frail. Especially those who are weak. Those who are struggling. Those who are new. In the faith. A disdainful attitude.

[ 27 : 26 ] From a Christian. Who thinks. That they're much more learned. And mature. Careless words. That can crush. A fragile believer. Make them feel inferior. Make them feel.

Unworthy. Make them feel unwelcome. In the church. Be careful. Says Jesus. You do that to them. You're doing it to me. It's especially challenging.

As I've said. To leaders in the church. Very easy. For an inflated sense of status. To lead to all kinds of high handedness. And pride. Towards others.

That often damages others. And can turn them away. Peter clearly remembered these words. Because later. He writes. To Christian leaders. And says. You are not to be domineering.

Over those in your charge. But examples to the flock. It's even more challenging. To those who are called. To be preachers and teachers. In the church. That's why James.

- [ 28 : 21 ] The apostle says. Not many should seek that. Why? Well because he says. We who teach. Will be judged. With greater strictness. For we all stumble. In many ways. James chapter 3 verse 1.
- And we can cause others. To stumble. If we teach. That which is false. The huge capacity. For preachers.
- And teachers. In the church. To cause others to stumble. To lead them into spiritual ruin. And that's why the New Testament. Warns so repeatedly. Against false teachers. Peter in 2 Peter 2.
- Warns about those. Who will exploit you. With false words. Causing people to stumble. Especially he says. When they entice. By sensual passions. Of the flesh.
- Those who are barely escaping. From those who live in error. That is vulnerable. New Christians. Little ones. Who have trusted Jesus. But are led. Sometimes into ruin.
- [ 29 : 19 ] By Christian leaders. Who tell them. That turning to Jesus. Needn't really mean. Turning away. From their sensual passions.
- Of their former lives. Their former behavior. Their former values. They don't worry. Your sexual behavior. For example. Isn't that important. It's who you are.
- Jesus wants you to be. Who you are. No need to change that. Or those other things. That you do. That no no no. That's you. That's your identity. It's all right. Don't need to change.
- Beware of that. Says Jesus. To all. And especially. To churchmen. Who are influential. Who are high profile. These things will be. But woe.
- To them. That do that. A horrible drowning. Would be far far worse. Than ever having to face. That woe. Which Jesus describes. Look at verse 8.
- [ 30 : 19 ] As eternal fire. Verse 9. The hell. Of fire. You destroy. My family. You destroy. My little ones.
- And I will destroy you. Because if you. Willfully reject them. And ruin them. You are willfully. Rejecting. And opposing me. Prominent church leaders.
- Who teach falsehood. They need to heed that warning. Don't they? But so do we all. Because we are rejecting. The Lord Jesus Christ himself.
- Whenever we. Put our brothers and sisters. At risk. And by the way. Look at verses 8 and 9. Also. Just as clearly. When.
- When we risk our own. Spiritual ruin. Our hands. And feet. And eyes. Can become stumbling blocks. To ourselves. To our own salvation. The places we go.
- [ 31 : 21 ] The things we do. Or don't do. The things we look at. And discuss. They can all cause us. To stumble into ruin. And unless we are careful. Of ourselves. Says Jesus. We risk.
- Eternal fire. We are responsible for others. And also ourselves. Because we are valuable to Jesus. We are not our own. We are bought with a price. He says. So we must know.
- And we must fear. The consequences of sin. In our own lives. I am not sure. That we take the warnings. Of the New Testament. Nearly. Nearly seriously enough.
- Warnings to those. Inside the church. But they are plentiful. Friends. Go and read. Second Peter. Read Jude. Read Hebrews. Just for starters. If we are honest.
- We know it is true. Don't we? We know. There is all kinds. Of stumbling blocks. That we can put in our own way. Things. That our hands are taken up with. Things that our feet. Take us to.
- [ 32 : 22 ] Things that our eyes. Feast on. And of themselves. These things might actually be. Very very innocent. I am not talking about. Terrible vices here. It is a middle aged man.



He is rising up the career ladder. At work. And he is busy. And tired. And his weekends begin to suffer. So gradually.

He is less and less. In church. Less and less. In real fellowship. Less nourishment. In the word. And he begins to stumble. Middle age is the most dangerous period.

In my experience. For. Christian men. For younger folk. There are plenty of stumbling blocks. One of them. Very commonly. Is sport. Especially if they are very gifted.

Especially if they compete in sport. Because church life. Can be just squeezed out. And spiritual life. It can become strangled. By the good thing. That is sport. Or. Or. Or. Or. Or.

[ 33 : 20 ] Or wealth. And possessions. Nothing wrong with that. Or the desire for them. Sometimes. Is a great stumbling block. Can be a snare. Can't it?

That plunges people into ruin. Paul says that to Timothy. First Timothy six. And he can do that in myriads of different ways. Having wealth and properties. Can be a terrible headache.

Goodness. How that can corrupt and divide families. Not having it. Can equally poison people. Who are desperately craving it. All of these things can be snares.

That entangle. That eventually suffocate. Spiritual life. A holiday home. Well that's a lovely thing of course. But it can be one of the most dangerous possessions.

For a Christian. If week ending away. All the time at your holiday home. Means you're no longer. Sharing in the heart of the life of the church. None of these things. They have vices in themselves.

[ 34 : 16 ] Are they? But they can all. Have a vice like grip. That will choke. And ruin. Your Christian faith. So I suggest.

Perhaps that we meditate. On verses six to nine. All through this week. And remember. That to have any part. In ruining.

Christ's family. Including. Ourselves. Is to reject. The Lord. The Lord. The Lord Jesus himself. And there can be no place. Can there. In his kingdom.

For that kind of attitude. Better limp. Humbly. Into his kingdom. Even with grievous personal loss. Yet. Better that. Than to have it all.

And to stumble away. Into eternal fire. Poignant words. But important words. For all of us. I think. Finally.

[ 35 : 14 ] Look briefly. At verses 10 to 14. Where we see that. Walking humbly. Means not just receiving Jesus. And not bringing ruin. To his family. But it means. Therefore. Obviously. Reflecting.

Jesus father. True greatness. In the kingdom of heaven. Means. Having our hearts aligned. With our heavenly father. Whose love was so great.

So deep. And wide. That he wills to give everything. For those who deserve nothing. And who rejoices. With great joy. Over every wandering little one.

Who's restored to their true faith. In his family. Verse 10. Sums up. Verses 6 to 9. Doesn't it? And gives a further reason.

We're not to despise. One of these little ones. One of these. Brothers of Christ. Because that's to reject. Him. But more than that. Each one. Is precious. In the eyes.

[ 36 : 09 ] Of the heavenly father. And so. Woe betide any. Who touches the apple. Of his eye. They're so precious. Indeed. Look. Each one. Has their own. Angel.

With uninterrupted. Access. To God's royal presence. Do you find that hard. To believe. The idea of guardian angels.

Has been so trivialized. Hasn't it? In fairy stories. And so on. That. There are many bible scholars. Who want to try and. Pretend this verse away. I'm going to read. Hebrews chapter 1. It says. Plainly.

Angels. Are ministering spirits. Sent to. Serve. To serve. For the sake. Of the heirs. Of salvation. That's pretty plain. Read.

Acts chapter 12. You'll find out. What Peter's ministering angel. Did for him. When Herod locked him up. And you'll find. What he did to Herod. Afterwards. Too. Pretty nasty. No.

[ 37 : 03 ] It's a mark. Of God's. Real. Fatherly. Care. That he does. Indeed. Have heavenly. Minders. For his little ones. And they always. See his face.

Do you see. They have immediate. Access. To call God. Into action. Whenever one of his little ones. Is under threat. So beware. If you hurt. The father's children.

Their angels. See it all. And they always see the father's face. They have his ear. Don't think you can hurt. The Lord's children.

Without being noticed. There's nothing anonymous. In heaven. All the gossip. All the nasty. Twitter insinuations. All the nasty Facebook posts.

That even Christians seem to hurl at each other. These days. Doing great harm. He sees. God knows. God cares. And his angels.

[ 37 : 59 ] Are assigned. And they're alert. And when the father hears. Of little ones. At risk of stumbling. At risk of going astray. As verse 12 puts it here.

He cares. Actively. Because it is not the will. Of my father in heaven. Verse 14. That one of these little ones. Should perish.

You remember. Luke chapter 15. Jesus tells a different story. A parable. About lost sheep. On the outside. But here. Look. He's talking about believers.

Who are within. The church family. But who are now going astray. Who are wandering. That phrase is used three times here. And if they're not found. And restored. He says in verse 14.

Quite clearly. They may indeed perish. And that confirms. What we've seen. In verses 8 and 9. Isn't it? That there is a real risk.

[ 38 : 54 ] Of falling away. To ultimate judgment. From within. The professing church. Of Jesus Christ. Those who have all the marks. And graces.

Of being Christians. And yet. Jesus says. They are at risk. Of being lost. In the end. Of eternally perishing. Now that does not mean.

That God is not sovereign. That does not mean. That God's electing grace. Is somehow insufficient. But it's simply to say. That the New Testament. Deals with visible. Tangible realities.

Not with theological. Speculations. It deals with real people. In real church pews. Like us this morning. And it tells us plainly.

That little ones. That little ones. Who believe and follow Jesus. Can be made to stumble. And fall away. On account. Of the actions of others. Or on account of our own actions.

[ 39 : 50 ] And that they may perish. And what we are to do. Friends. When Jesus says that to us. Is not to try and. Plumb the mind of the eternal God.

And ask all sorts of foolish questions. About oh well. Were they really saved. In the first place or not. Now that's all academic. Isn't it? That's utterly fruitless. That is no practical help. To anyone. Now what we are to do.

Is to plumb the depth of love. In the heart of God. Which is laid open. So plainly. Isn't it? In the gospel of his son. And in these verses here. And we are to reflect his heart.

A heart of love. And of concern. And we are to have determined efforts. With one another. To reflect. Our father in heaven. To humbly give.

Even what might be most precious. And valuable to us. And that might often be our time. Mightn't it? To restore. Those who are wondering. And to happily rejoice. With all the exultant joy of heaven.

[ 40 : 47 ] When even one such little one. Like that. Is brought back. Into the fold. That's how you show true greatness. In the kingdom of heaven. To weep over the wonder.

And to rejoice. Over the one that's restored. Because for God. Nothing is greater. His family is precious to him.

It matters to him. Infinitely. Eternally. Just look at the cross. Of his beloved son. And so to love him.

And to live for his family. That's true greatness. In the kingdom of heaven. Who would be. The greatest. In the kingdom of heaven. Amen. Well. Let them live. Day by day. Turning. In humble.

[ 41 : 44 ] Penitent faith. To receive Jesus. As those who know. That they have nothing otherwise. To never risk ruin. To our Lord's.

Brothers and sisters. Brothers. But rather. To reflect our father in heaven. Who weeps. For the wonder. And rejoices. To restore.

That's how we'll be living on earth. For heaven. And that's what it means to belong. To the church. Of our Lord Jesus Christ. Well let's pray.

O Lord who has mercy. Upon all. Take away from us our sins. And mercifully kindle in us.

The fire of thy Holy Spirit. Take away from us the heart of stone. And give us a heart of flesh. A heart to love and adore thee.

[ 42 : 48 ] A heart to delight in thee. To follow and enjoy thee. For Christ our Lord seek. Amen.