

Matthew

A Careful Study of Matthew

May 18, 2025

I. Introduction

- A. Today, beginning with **Matthew 17:22-23**, we will work our way through several stories – reading and dealing with each one individually.
- B. Pray

II. The godly suffer, religious blindness, true greatness, stumbling blocks

- A. **Matthew 17:22-23**, And while [the disciples] were gathering together in Galilee, Jesus said to them, “The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men; [23] and they will kill Him, and He will be raised on the third day.” And they were deeply grieved.
 - 1. According to Matthew, Jesus began preparing His disciples for His death and resurrection back in **Matthew 16:21**. The second time Jesus spoke to His disciples of what was to come is here in **Matthew 17**, and the third time is in **Matthew 20:17-19**, just prior to going to Jerusalem.
 - 2. The disciples had a hard time making sense of what Jesus was saying, probably because of their preconceived notions about the Messiah and what the Messiah would do when He came to earth.
 - a. A preconceived notion is an opinion formed beforehand without adequate evidence, experience, or thought.
 - b. The problem with preconceived notions is that they affect how we perceive reality and hear truth. They even push us to reject reality and truth when what is happening or being said doesn’t match our preconceived notions.
 - c. Though we are prone to hold preconceived notions, we are capable of discovering them and either correcting or discarding them. And we ought, because preconceived notions can get in the way of hearing, understanding, and applying what God has said in His word or what He is speaking or doing in the moment.
 - 3. In this story, Jesus speaks of suffering unjustly at the hands of the religious community. His was not an uncommon experience, for the prophets before Him and believers after Him have had similar experiences. In fact, the scripture says that those who are committed to godly living will at some time and in some way experience persecution (**2 Timothy 3:12**). And Jesus in **John 15:20**, “A slave is not greater than his master. If they persecuted Me, they will also

- persecute you; if they kept My word, they will keep yours also.” And sadly, it is often the religious community who persecutes the godly – either directly or in league with the civil authorities. For example: Paul was stoned, dragged out of the city, and left for dead by the religious Jews.
4. It seems the further a nation or religious community move away from God, the greater the probability that sincere-minded Christians will be persecuted. Though at first the persecution may be mild – as it is in our nation today, it will get worse.
 5. Yet in spite of the persecution, Paul was also able to say, “We have this treasure (*God and His truth*) in earthen vessels, so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves; [8] we are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; [9] persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; [10] always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body” (**2 Corinthians 4:7-10**).
 6. May we value God and truth enough to remain faithful in the face of persecution, and may our attitude be like Paul’s.

B. **Matthew 17:24-27**, When they came to Capernaum, those who collected the two-drachma tax came to Peter and said, “Does your teacher not pay the two-drachma tax?” (*The two-drachma tax was a voluntary tax collected from Jewish adults once a year for the upkeep of the Temple.*) [25] Peter 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?” [26] When Peter said, “From strangers,” Jesus said to him, “Then the sons are exempt. (*It appears Jesus knew what Peter said when asked about Jesus paying the tax. So before Peter could say anything about it, Jesus asked this question. And based on the question, it appears Jesus was prompting Peter to maintain a constant awareness that Jesus was the Son of God, and therefore would be exempt from paying the tax.*) [27] However, so that we do not offend them, go to the sea and throw in a hook, and take the first fish that comes up; and when you open its mouth, you will find a shekel. Take that and give it to them for you and Me.” (*It appears Jesus used the method of logical consequences to reprimand Peter for failing to say Jesus did not have to pay the tax because of who He was. And Jesus did this by having Peter work for the money to pay the tax. Finally, Jesus chose not to offend those who lacked the desire know better.*)

C. **Matthew 18:1-4**, At that time the disciples came to Jesus and said, “Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” [2] And He called a child to Himself and set him before them, [3] and said, “Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. [4] Whoever then humbles himself as this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

1. Before answering the disciples’ question, Jesus states two requirements that must be met to get into the kingdom of heaven.
2. **First**, we must be converted. In a Christian context, to be converted is to change or turn from one state, condition, or belief to another. In other words, it is to transform the heart and mind from what it was before believing in God to what God says it should be. It is to change our thinking and moral character from the way of selfishness and sin to the way of love and godliness. It is to be born again (*start anew*) or to become a new creation.
3. **Second**, we must become like children – not become a child or childish, but like a child in some particular way. Based on the context, the particular way in which we are to be like a child is to take on the mindset and attitude of one who is **less** in the presence of those who are **more**. In other words, we are to behave as those under authority rather than those in authority, or as the worker rather than the boss, or as the servant rather than the master.
 - a. **Luke 22:26** puts it this way, “The one who is the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like the servant.”
 - b. Jesus set the example of a leader having the mindset and behavior a child in serving those under Him when He washed His disciples’ feet, and when He gave His life a ransom by dying in our place.
4. Question: Why would Jesus say we must be converted and become like children to enter kingdom of heaven before answering the question of who is the greatest in the kingdom?
 - a. Historically and universally, it is the expectation that children are to see themselves as being under authority, and that they are to behave as those who are under authority.
 - b. It is also the accepted practice for adults who are under authority, or whose social status or nature of work is deemed less important, to relate to those over them with some measure of humility and respect. Examples of this would be employees with employers, workers with supervisors, and citizens with the police or king or president. This is almost a universal norm.

5. In other words, we have been raised this way and taught to have the mindset needed to relate to those around us in this way. And because this is our accepted way of life, we bring this thinking and behavior into the Christian life and the life of the church.
6. However, Jesus turns this universal practice upside down by saying the greatest in His kingdom are those who – regardless of their position, social status, or nature of work – humble themselves like children in relation to everyone around them. Yet because the old way is so ingrained, we need to be converted from the world’s mindset and behavior to the Christian mindset and behavior so that we will behave like a child in the way we relate to those around us.
7. Because many in the church today assume that praying the salvation prayer secures our eternal destiny, I want to remind you that Jesus says that without this kind of conversion or change in thinking and living, we will not enter the kingdom of heaven.

D. **Matthew 18:5-7**, And whoever receives one such child in My name receives Me; [6] but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him to have a heavy millstone hung around his neck, and to be drowned in the depth of the sea. [7] Woe to the world because of its stumbling blocks! For it is inevitable that stumbling blocks come; but woe to that man through whom the stumbling block comes!

1. Jesus begins this section by saying, “whoever receives one such child in My name receives Me.” In other words, when we interact with those around us according to the way God wants us to interact with them, we are – at the very same time – interacting with God, himself. This is especially true when showing love to the weak, impoverished, disenfranchised, prisoners, orphans, hungry, and the homeless.
 - a. **Proverbs 19:17**, One who is gracious to a poor man lends to the LORD, and [the LORD] will repay him for his good deed.
 - b. **Matthew 25:40**, Jesus said, “Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me.”
 - c. **Luke 9:48**, Jesus said, “Whoever receives this child in My name receives Me, and whoever receives Me receives Him who sent Me.”
 - d. It is my hope that this truth will lead you to an ever-growing awareness that you are not just interacting with and serving another person, you are interacting with and serving God when caring for and serving those around you.

2. Jesus goes on to say, “whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him to have a heavy millstone hung around his neck, and to be drowned in the depth of the sea.”
 - a. To cause a child or a teenager or an adult or a believer to stumble is to do something, whether once or repeatedly, that causes or leads him to turn away from God and godliness, and return to old selfish and sinful ways in one or more areas of life.
 - b. God provided an example of a stumbling block in **Leviticus 19:14**, “You shall not...place a stumbling block before the blind, but you shall revere your God; I am the LORD.” If it is cruel to put something in front of a blind person to make them stumble and fall, then it is even worse to put something in front of someone to make them move away from God.
 - c. Paul gave an example of this among believers in **1 Corinthians 8** where he warns the more mature Christians about eating meat offered to idols lest it wound a weaker Christian’s conscience and the weaker Christian goes on to do things that are ungodly because of a malfunctioning conscience.
 - d. Jesus makes it clear how evil it is to be a stumbling block by saying it would be better – or even an act of mercy – to be forcibly drowned before we can carry out our stumbling block activity. In other words, to be a stumbling block is a serious evil.
3. Jesus finishes this section with a warning to unbelievers, “Woe to the world because of its stumbling blocks! For it is inevitable that stumbling blocks come; but woe to that man through whom the stumbling block comes!”
 - a. Generally speaking, unbelievers are committed to themselves, first and foremost, which means their way of life is self-serving. Being self-serving, they are NOT prone to consider the effects of their choices and behavior on others.
 - b. Therefore, it is inevitable that unbelievers will make self-serving choices and behave in ways that either deliberately or carelessly compel those around them to get so involved in worldly things, ways, and beliefs as to have no time to consider God, or to close their mind to the existence of God, or to believe that God is not a good god, or turn completely away from believing in God.
 - c. However, if the judgement of God on believers is such that it is better for us to suffer a horrible death than to cause someone to stumble, be assured that God’s judgment on the unbeliever will

be just as severe. Therefore Jesus says, “Woe to that man (*the unbeliever*) through whom the stumbling block comes!”

4. It is easy to be a stumbling block, to do things and live in ways that drive others away from God, or to think ill of God, or to look at the Christian life as a foolish life, or to ignore their conscience. May we, as God’s children, put forth a worthy effort to discover what we are doing that causes someone else to stumble, and may we make the changes necessary to stop being a stumbling-block.

E. **Matthew 18:8-9**, If your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it from you; it is better for you to enter life crippled or lame, than to have two hands or two feet and be cast into the eternal fire. [9] If your eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out and throw it from you. It is better for you to enter life with one eye, than to have two eyes and be cast into the fiery hell.

1. This is the second time Jesus used this description of taking severe action against ourselves to put an end to the ongoing practice of some sin. The first time (**Matthew 5:29-30**) was in relation to physical and mental adultery. This time it is in relation to being a stumbling block to those around us.
2. The point is, it is far better and far wiser to take drastic measures to stop sinning or stop being a stumbling block than to experience the consequences God brings upon us for such things.
3. Besides, in as much as we want others to do what is necessary to stop sinning against us, we ought to do the same for God’s sake and the sake of those effected by our selfish and sinful choices and behavior.

F. **Matthew 18:10**, “See that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that their angels in heaven continually see the face of My Father who is in heaven.”

1. Never allow yourself to think you can get away with mistreating, failing to love, sinning against, or causing anyone – be it a child or the weak, impoverished, disenfranchised, prisoners, orphans, hungry, and homeless to stumble, for such thinking is foolish. As Jesus points out, each one’s angel has direct and constant access to God, and will inform God as to your treatment of such ones.

III. Conclusion

- A. May we think, seek God’s wisdom, shamelessly talk about God and His truth to those around us, love godliness, and love others as ourselves.