

God's Pursuit of his Lost Sheep

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 05 July 2020

[0 : 00] If you'll please open your Bibles to the Gospel of Matthew, and we're in the 18th chapter, Matthew chapter 18.

We're continuing our series in the Gospel of Matthew. As I've said already, we're in chapter 18. Today we'll be looking at verses 10 through 14. So Matthew 18, verses 10 through 14.

So let's read there together. 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 99 on the mountains and go in search of the one that went astray?

And if he finds it, truly I say to you, he rejoices over it more than over the 99 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.

[1 : 25] Let's pray together. Dear Heavenly Father, we again ask for your blessing upon your word. As we think about this passage in particular and how it speaks of you as our Father.

Lord, we pray that we rejoice in that love, that we would see you as a loving Father. That we give you the worship and glory that's due your name. We pray this in Christ's name.

Amen. I want to start just by looking at the flow of Matthew 18. And we're going to say that again as we move forward.

But I want to remind you that there's something we've been looking at and it's flowing really nicely in chapter 18. So the section begins with the disciples asking the question, who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?

And we talked about this. They're really arguing amongst themselves which one of them is the greatest in the kingdom. And so Jesus answers by setting before them a child and teaching them about humility.

[2 : 27] He really makes this comparison that this child is greater in the kingdom than they are. And unless they change, they're not even going to get into the kingdom.

And so as we look at this passage, we see in Matthew 18.10, it speaks of these little ones. See that you do not despise one of these little ones.

Well, the little ones here we've spoken of already is just referring to Christians. Christians. He's just speaking of Christians. Maybe there's some indication of a new believer or maybe a vulnerable believer, a weak believer in some way.

But in the very broadest sense, he's speaking of Christians. And so he's teaching, Jesus is teaching us to live humbly for God and entrust ourselves to him.

So become like a child with God as your father. Stop trying to argue over which one of you is the greatest in the kingdom. Rather, humble yourselves. Become like a child who's trusting in your father.

[3 : 30] And as we've seen already, well, that may lead to a whole number of questions. And we see that in the product as we go throughout this. They begin to question. Well, we don't see them asking questions.

Maybe he's answering potential questions. But what he argues is that if we do this, here's what I envision the disciples asking and us asking would be this. Well, if we just humble ourselves and become like a child, who's going to take care of us?

Who's going to protect us? And so Jesus all along in this chapter has been arguing for God's going to protect you. If he's your father and you're his child, what kind of dad would he be if he wasn't looking out for his children?

So he's going to protect you. He's going to take care of you. And we've seen that already in terms of temptation to sin, the curse upon those who attempt them. In verse 6, 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 be drowned in the depths of the sea.

We see in what we looked at last week, 7 through 9, twice references to hell for those who attempt someone to sin, as well as the encouragement from God that we avoid sin, that we do whatever we can to avoid sin.

[4 : 47] And so we see this fatherly care for his child. He protects his children. And in some way, he's giving them counsel and encouragement of how they ought to protect themselves. Don't allow yourselves to fall into sin.

Don't go that route. And so if that's what we've seen so far, we're seeing a continuation of that as we move into chapter, excuse me, verses 10 through 14. And so I want to begin just by looking at what he says about angelic oversight.

It's just how I entitled it in chapter, excuse me, verse 10. We see, see that you do not despise one of these little ones. Again, one of these Christians, he specifically says, for I tell you that in heaven, their angels see the face of my father who is in heaven.

So he gives us a warning just to begin with not to despise one of these Christians, one of these little ones. Maybe it's not to look down on them in pride. Look at verse 4.

Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. So we see both sides of it, right? To become like a child is to humble yourselves. Well, doesn't that make us, are people going to look down on us if we do that?

[5 : 52] Don't I need to boost myself? Do you ever feel like pride is a necessary thing? Because if you don't, if you're not proud of yourself, other people are going to put you down. And I mean, what's going to happen if I humble myself?

Are people going to look down on me in pride? And in light of their question in verse 1, which one of us is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? Jesus may very well be addressing that same idea.

Instead of pride, don't despise one of these little, if we're prideful, if we think highly of ourselves, then we look down on other people, right?

And one indication of this oftentimes is comparing yourself to other people. Sometimes we think of pride only as when we think we're better than other people. But pride is really self-focused thought.

When we're thinking about ourselves, we're number one, we're what we're most concerned about. So sometimes that even looks like negative thoughts. I don't compare to other people. I'm worse than other people. But all my thought is consumed with comparing myself to other people.

[6 : 59] How do I look in comparison to them? And so in particular, one idea with pride, especially for these disciples who are wondering which one of them is the greatest in the kingdom, if they're wondering if they're the greatest, how does everybody else compare to them?

Eh, somewhere down there. Hey, you know, way down there, right? And so don't despise these other Christians. Don't look down upon them. Don't despise them. Maybe in particular, as I've said, this idea of the little ones could be speaking of those who are weaker in the faith.

Or maybe new believers, and he's encouraging them, don't despise such people. Now, there's a reason behind this. We'll look at it in a second. But Romans 14.10 says, Why do you pass judgment on your brother?

Or you, why do you despise your brother? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God. So here's one reason that we ought not despise each other given to us in Romans. Because we'll stand before the judgment seat of God.

We're going to give an account of how we view one another. And in particular, Romans 14 deals, just like this passage, with judgment on our brother or other Christians. Back in verse 6, we saw there's a warning against causing them to sin.

[8 : 14] In verse 7, we see addressing tempting these Christians to sin. And so here's two ways in which maybe despising them is addressed.

What are ways we would despise them? Well, we would think so little of them that we might cause them to sin. We might provoke them to sin. We might tempt them to sin. But I think the real reason why we're not to despise them is because they're loved by God.

And they're guarded by Him, which is what we've been seeing all throughout this chapter. This is demonstrated, I think, in the proof of verse 10. So the proof given to us is that the angels are watching over them.

See that you do not despise one of these little ones for. Because, here's a reason. I tell you that in heaven, their angels always see the face of my Father who is in heaven. And so, because their angels are watching out for them, we ought not despise them.

I think it's even remarkable what it says the angels are their angels. What does that mean? You're probably all wondering that as we read that anyway, right? See that you do not despise one of these little ones for. I tell you that in heaven, their angels.

[9 : 20] Little ones as Christians. Don't despise a Christian because they're angels. What does that mean? Do Christians possess angels? From this passage, I think some people have, I don't think, some people have come to the conclusion that we have guardian angels.

You guys have heard of guardian angels before? That people have guardian angels? I think this passage is the primary place that that's coming from. You have these angels who are watching out for you.

It's their angels are before the face of God looking out for them. And so, some have concluded that every person has a guardian angel. Now, you may remember when we went through Daniel. Daniel, I argued that Daniel argues that there is some hierarchy to the demonic powers and to angelic powers.

And so, we saw specifically in Daniel that there were demons that were assigned to political leaders, kings and rulers. And so, if we understand some hierarchy, then we could probably understand that there's some dividing up amongst the angels and how they oversee things.

There's structure. There's organization. And so, you could see as well how someone might come to that conclusion. I think if you did, we have to understand that specifically in this passage, it doesn't say that every single person has an angel who's watching out for them.

[10 : 37] He says these little ones. He's specifically speaking of Christians. I think probably a better approach, though, than guarding angels is to understand that we're united to Christ.

As Christians, we're united to Christ Jesus. And God's word makes clear that all that is Christ is ours. The angels are his. We've been united to him.

They're our angels. And I think that's probably a more accurate understanding of this passage. He's saying those angels are our angels because they belong to Christ.

And as well as we think back to, remember the whole contents of our passage, our Heavenly Father is looking out for us. And they're his angels. And we're his children. And so, those are our angels. It's like you can imagine if your parents bought a big guard dog.

Right? That's your guard dog, too. Because they bought him to guard you. Not to compare the angels to dogs. But you understand, our Father, he's got these angels who are serving him.

[11 : 38] And part of his service to the Father is that they look out for his children. Like good guardians ought to do. And so, as children, we can say those are our angels looking out for us.

And I find it overwhelming, just as I go through this passage, the fatherly love and care. And that's what I really want you to see in this chapter of God for his children.

I think that's what's being communicated. Don't despise other Christians. Why? Because they belong to God. He's their Father. He's got angels looking out for them.

Do you really want to side against God and his angels? Angels? The answer is no. I know when we think of angels, we think of Charmin angels, right? Like the little babies with the wings, you know.

That's not the picture in God's Word. Almost every time that we see angels presented in God's Word, when an angel confronts a human being, the response is always, what a fear. You've never seen God's Word like, oh, cute, look at the little baby.

[12 : 41] I love the diaper with the wings, how they coordinate. That's great. No. They fall down to their face in fear. Why? I think part of this is demonstrated in, them being referred to as a host of angels.

I've told you this before, but I think we translate that really poorly. When we think of hosts, we think of a volume, a large group. Host, biblically, is referring to an army.

It's an army of angels. I mean, these are soldiers. God's spiritual soldiers that are looking out for his people. I've said, we're united to Christ and all that is ours, all that is his is ours in him.

Hebrews 1.14 says, are they not all ministering spirits, speaking of angels, sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation? So the whole purpose is, they're sent out to serve for the sake of those who will inherit salvation.

Who are the ones who will inherit salvation? Christians, these little ones, who Jesus is speaking of. Matthew Henry says, some have imagined that every particular saint has a guardian angel.

[13 : 48] But why should we suppose this? When we are sure that every particular saint, when there is occasion, has a guard of angels. So he argues, that's not enough.

Right? The guardian angel thing sounds really cute. We have one angel assigned to us. But what he's saying is, that's poor. That's not enough. What it says is, God's angels are our angels.

angels. God's always, God always has his angels protecting us. We have a multitude. And I think of, how do we measure greatness in the world? Right?

When you look around you, how do you tell if someone's great? Well, I would say in our day and age, one way that you can tell someone's great is by their entourage, we might call it. Right? Great people have an entourage.

If you're a famous celebrity, you pay some big guys that stand around you who are your bodyguards. And they're protecting you. But the guy gets out of his car, he has his friends around him, he has his bodyguards, there's this crowd following this man around wherever he goes.

- [14 : 53] Maybe if that doesn't work, we can step back and say, what about the president? You think if, the Secret Service is always around him. He drives down the road, yeah, he doesn't drive down the road like we do, does he? He's got the limo with the flats on it. He's got police escort on both sides, motorcycles, cars. I mean, there's an entourage with him. And so how do we measure greatness? If we step back a second in thinking of their question, who's the greatest in the kingdom?
- And Jesus' response is, humble yourself and become like a child and my father will take care of you and he'll send his entourage with you. There's greatness. What's great for us is that we belong to our Heavenly Father, that we're his children.
- So don't demean yourself by trying to make yourself great. Humble yourself and know true greatness in his family. That's really, I think, the message that's being communicated to us in this passage.
- Oh, I'm sorry. I just saw one of my other examples was a clan of children for Dave Thompson. How do you know great men? He's got his children around him, his entourage. Now, my point was, in the Old Testament, it says, children are a blessing of the Lord.
- [16 : 00] And when you meet them at the gate, they're like arrows in the quiver. And so when you meet your enemy at the gate, you bring your family with them. Who's all that with you? That's just my family. Oh, excuse me.
- I'm sorry. Whatever I said, forgive me. I apologize. But you have this idea of an entourage and here are God's people with children, excuse me, with angels who are walking with them. And so though we're despised and rejected of men in this world, we are loved by our Father in Heaven.
- And he sends his angels to watch over us. It says, their angels always see the face of my Father who is in Heaven. What does it mean to always see his face? Well, I think there's a couple of things that are being implied here.
- One is that it speaks to their faithfulness and their allegiance to God. Their faithfulness and allegiance to God. Even as they watch over us, their gaze is fixed on the Father.
- They're doing his will. And so again, implied with us is not that the angels are at our disposal because they're ours. No, they're looking to the Father and this is what the Father is giving them to do.
- [17 : 07] Aren't they all ministering spirits who are sent to serve those who will be saved? And so, there's a faithfulness and allegiance to God that results in their care for his children. They look to him to receive their orders regarding their care for us.
- I think it also speaks to their continual access to the Father. Aren't they always seeing the face of the Father? They have continual access to the Father on our behalf, on behalf of God's people.
- And what a blessing that is for us. And then the second thing that's really presented to us in these verses is the fatherly pursuit and protection of God. Look with me at verses 12 through 13.
- What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the 99 on the mountain and go in search of the one that went astray?
- And if he finds it, truly I say to you, he rejoices over it more than over the 99 that never went astray. We could add verse 14 as well which is connected. So it is not the will of my Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish.
- [18 : 19] So as neat as it is to consider angels, the focus of this passage isn't on angels. Sometimes people really get caught up on the whole angel thing and the guardian angels and it really becomes something fascinating.

But there's one verse that mentions that and then it moves into God's fatherly care. And so the angelic protection or guardianship, whatever you want to call it, is but an example of God's fatherly care.

And here we see a further expression of that. In this passage. And so don't be thankful for the angelic protection but don't focus there. Focus on the Father and what God's doing.

God's fatherly love and care is displayed by this parable of the lost sheep. One that you're probably well familiar with. Though the shepherd has a hundred sheep, he's concerned for each and every one of them.

And if this is how fallen man treats animals, how much more so will our Heavenly Father look out for us and protect us and pursue us. I'll try to think of what might an example of this look like for us.

[19 : 24] Because in all likelihood I don't think any of us have any sheep. And maybe we're not real familiar with sheep. And you may have learned or heard that they're not real bright and they can get lost and can't find their way back.

And we were laughing. This isn't my example. But we were laughing this morning just that we have guineas again. We have chickens and guineas and just how much less intelligent the guineas are than the chickens.

They just can't figure their way even out of the coop in the first place. You've got to teach them how to get out of the coop and then once they do they can't get back in at night. You've got to teach them. It just takes so long for them to finally figure it out and how much more so as they wander around as they get lost and you have to go looking for them.

But I thought maybe a great example of this is if you can imagine being a parent, married, you have children who are very young. And as parents of young children you're inclined to do in your foolishness in your excitement whatever you want to call it you decide to take them to a theme park.

Now that sounds like a great idea in theory doesn't it? So I thought maybe Knoebels but if you'll allow me to expand a little bit further just imagine you take your kids to Disney. Now I've read that in the summer the attendance at Disney can reach 100 to 110,000.

[20 : 36] That's maximum capacity before they close the door. They don't release exact numbers but somewhere around 110,000 people. To put that in perspective that would be all of the greater Hazleton area times four all together in one small area theme park.

So you take your kid to Disney there's 100,000 other people there that day. Again, it sounded great in theory didn't it? Then you're there you're walking amongst the crowds and what do you tell your kids?

Of course you stay with mom and dad. And so as you're wandering around you're walking the kids are there the kids are there and you look and one of your children are missing.

What do you do? How do you respond to that? Well, in our scenario you're married you say to your spouse you stay here with the kids we still got.

I'm going looking for the other one. And what does it look like when you're looking for the other one? You're all nice and you're calm. Have you seen this kid? No!

[21 : 37] You're panicking. You're screaming at this point. You're yelling the kid's name you're going out looking anybody you can to help. There's just fear. And then what happens when you find the child?

Well, we know they're in big trouble because they're supposed to obey the rules. I said you stay beside mommy and daddy and you didn't do it. Now, that may happen at some point that you actually say you should have stayed with mommy and daddy.

But is that your immediate response? No! You grab them up. You hug them. You rejoice that you found your child.

And I think that's the picture that's being presented to us here of God as our father. He gives an example that would have been common that day. You understand how even a shepherd will take care of a sheep?

And I think I've expanded it further to say what about a parent with their child? You think God's going to treat you any differently? You're his child.

[22 : 38] I think as we look at this I haven't even talked about what is this lost sheep? What's going on here? Let's just follow the flow for a second.

We've talked about it already. I don't want to recount it all. But what happens if we humble ourselves? Is it going to be hard on us? Are people going to take advantage of us? Is there going to be temptation to sin?

Well, God says I'm going to judge those who tempt you. Right? But temptation comes from inside. You've got to put that to death. Cut it off. Okay, but what happens if I still give myself into sin?

What happens if I wander away from God's people? Right? A hundred sheep one sheep wanders off. What happens if I wander off from God's people? What happens if I fall into sin and walk away from you, God, my father?

My shepherd? What happens then? And what's God's answer? I'm going to beat you. I'm going to chastise you. What's his answer? I'm going to pursue you until I find you and I bring you back.

[23 : 42] I'm going to rejoice over you more than those who are still here. And so that's what's happening in this passage.

You have one child of God who's wandered off into sin. And what God says, what does God say is going to happen when that happens? I'm going to pursue him.

And if you even doubt that that's even the reference, if you look at verse 14 again, so is not the will of my father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish. Now, I'm probably way out of order at this point, but here, I'm going to reverse until I get caught back up.

the blessings of church discipline, I think is one of the applications of this. Now, I don't want to go too far into the application of this, because if you look at verse 15, and Lord willing, where we'll be next week, it deals with what happens when your brother sins against you.

So, still, we're following that same train of thought, right? Who's going to take care of me? Who's going to look out for me? What if I wander off? What if my brother sins against me? But we see, I think, the blessing of church discipline.

[24 : 55] It follows the pattern of the Father in heaven. Sometimes we think of church discipline as, I don't know, I think the world views it as something abusive, as something hard. We think of discipline in those kind of ways.

But we understand, we have to understand, biblically, that discipline is a loving way of drawing someone back, bringing them back. And so, we don't want anyone to wander off to their destruction.

And so, church discipline is really pursuing a sheep that's wandered off, just like our Father does. I think we can even argue that's part of the means by which he does his pursuit of the unbeliever, excuse me, of the believer who wanders off.

And we can relate as well that it's a great joy when it's successful. When you see someone who's wandered off into sin, who finally repents and turns back, what joy is there for us as Christians?

There's joy both on earth, but also we see there's joy in heaven, that God rejoices over one who turns back. We see as well in this passage the doctrine of perseverance, if I want to put it in big doctrinal terms.

[26 : 06] But that is this, that if we have, by God's grace, if God has saved us, if we put our trust in Jesus Christ, that will never come to an end. There may be times when a sheep will wander off, but notice that his pursuit of the sheep is effective.

God finds the sheep. He brings it back. And again, verse 14, it is not the will of my Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones shall perish. Maybe we can relate this to Matthew 10, 27-29, another passage that speaks of sheep.

Jesus speaking of himself as the shepherd says, my sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish.

And no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father who has given them to me is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of my Father's hand. And so we have this picture.

We belong to God. We belong to Christ. He's given us eternal life. And how long will eternal life last for? Come on, guys. It's eternity. Right?

[27 : 16] So who can take eternal life from us? Well, no one. Then it would be eternal life. It might be 2,000 year life or something, but it would be eternal. And what will it require for us to lose our salvation?

Well, Jesus says, they're in my hand, and they're in the Father's hand. No one can take them from me, and no one can snatch them out of the other. So all it would take for you to lose your salvation is for somebody to come along who's more powerful than God, who can snatch you out of his hand.

It's never going to happen. It's an impossibility. And so as long as it's God who's secure, if it's up to me, well, I know my own heart. There's a tendency to turn away.

We're like the dumb sheep who wants to wander off not realizing where we ought to be. Or like the child who gets distracted looking at the castle and misses it the family kept walking on and gets lost.

We're so easily distracted. distracted. But it's not left up to us, is it? God keeps his children. He protects them.

[28 : 21] And that's what we're seeing here in this passage. The fatherly love and care and protection of God for his children. He's not letting anybody take them. Right?

You can imagine someone if they tried to kidnap your child. Would you fight for your child? Of course you would. The problem is sometimes the bigger and more, maybe better arm than you are.

Maybe. That's never the case with God. Who's going to snatch you out of God's hand? No one's going to come along who's bigger, badder, more powerful.

Whatever you want to say, God will protect his children. Maybe even as we think back to the broader passage, this also means that our despising of our brothers and sisters will not cause them ultimately to fall away.

again, God's protecting his sheep. Temptation to sin will not end in their damnation. Again, it's not left up to you or to them.

[29 : 24] It's not left up to us. We, like sheep, are prone to wonder. We're prone to leave the God we love. But God pursues us and he brings us back and he rejoices over us.

And what a beautiful picture that is. Now I want to make just a few points of application as we come to a close. And I've been trying to make application all along, so just a few short things.

I want to remind you that the whole scope of the passage, Jesus is still answering who is the greatest in the kingdom. And maybe we can say the answer is the one who does not despise the weaker brother, but rather watches over him, who operates like God the Father, who loves and cares for his brothers and sisters in the Lord and is willing to watch out for them.

The one who does not despise the weaker brother. And so we're encouraged that we must lovingly and with much care watch over each other like a shepherd who watches over the sheep.

So we follow in the pattern of our fathers. We look out for one another. And then be encouraged as well that there's joy in heaven in finding a lost little one, but also realize that there's wrath in heaven for despising them and causing them to stumble and sin.

[30 : 44] So we see in the whole scope of the passage, we see if he calls your brother or sister to sin, God's wrath is poured out. But look at the joy there is when one's brought back in.

Secondly, in Ezekiel 34, we see really an Old Testament example of God's love and care for sheep. It begins with judgment on the shepherds of Israel. They haven't cared for the sheep.

In fact, they've been using the resources to feed themselves. They've only looked out for themselves. Of course, referring to the religious leaders in Israel, they haven't protected the sheep. They've only served themselves.

And then Ezekiel 34, 11-16 says, For thus says the Lord God, Behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep, and will seek them out.

As the shepherd seeks out his flock when he is among his sheep that have been scattered, so will I seek out my sheep, and I will rescue them from all places where they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness.

[31 : 49] And I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries, and will bring them into their own land, and I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the ravines, and in all the inhabited places of the country.

I will feed them with good pasture, and on the mountain heights of Israel shall be their grazing land. There they shall lie down in good grazing land, and on rich pasture they shall feed on the mountains of Israel.

I myself will be shepherd of my sheep, and I myself will make them lie down, declares the Lord God. I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak, and the fat and the strong I will destroy.

I will feed them in justice. So here we have this picture of God seeking out his scattered sheep. And I think it does a great job of combining both the picture of the Old Testament, but also moving forward into the New Testament.

God's people scattered all over the world. Here comes Christ as the shepherd. He will shepherd. God himself will come to shepherd his people, and draw them out from the nations, and gather them together as one people.

[33 : 02] And we see that going on. If that's true in terms of the grand scheme of what Christ is doing, then what's going to happen if one of these sheep wander off? You think Jesus' work is just going to...

He's gone to the furthest stretches of the world to draw the sheep in and make it a part of the flock. And it wanders off. He says, that's a shame. We lost one. We had such a good number, and now we're down one.

No. He's come to earth for this. He dies for this. His blood has been shed for that sheep. It's never going to get lost. And so we see this love, this care.

But I think we also see an evangelistic plea that we ought to take the gospel to the very ends of the earth. That he's gathering his sheep in even now from the ends of the earth. And so we encourage us in that as well.

thirdly, the greatest expression of this love and care and pursuit is God sending his son to die to redeem these little ones.

[34 : 06] So going back to our question, see that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you, they're angels. But I think we can step back even further and say, what's the greatest reason we ought not despise one of these little ones?

Well, I've argued already, they're the children of God and God's protecting them. That's absolutely true. But I think we have to understand as well, it's because Christ has died for them. The other things are true because Christ has died for them and they've been united to him.

Christ's blood has been shed for them so that they have become children of God and so that his angels are looking out for them. So who are you to despise one for whom Christ has shed his blood?

Christ has chosen this one out and says, he's mine. I value him highly. And you go, I don't. He just doesn't measure up, you know.

He's got some weird beliefs. He thinks some strange things. He's awkward to talk to. He's proud. So because he's proud, I'm not going to like him because I'm better than that.

[35 : 10] You get that, right? Right? So we ought not despise anyone for whom Christ has shed his blood. I think we could step back even further and say, it's not as though as Christians we say, well, it's okay then to despise unbelievers, is it?

I think we have to understand that all humans are made in the image of God. And there's something inherently wrong about pride in comparison to other believers and in despising other believers who have been made in God's image.

But how much more so when we understand that Jesus has shed his blood for them. And really, Paul applies the same logic in his argument regarding the weaker brother in 1 Corinthians 8, 11-13.

So, by your knowledge, this weak person is destroyed. The brother for whom Christ died. Thus, sinning against your brothers and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ.

therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never eat meat lest I make my brother stumble. You see what Paul is saying. If we sin against our brothers, we despise them, we sin against Christ.

[36 : 24] That amps it up a level. It makes it far more serious. And so, we ought to be careful about how we treat our brothers. And although this application of this passage, I really want to end by focusing on what I think is the major message of this passage and of what we've seen so far in Romans, excuse me, in Matthew 18.

I want to encourage you to rejoice in our loving Heavenly Father who loves his children, who guards them, who watches out for them, who's not okay with a child wandering off.

He pursues us when we stray, which, lest we become proud, all of us do. To some extent, even every time we sin, it's saying, I'm choosing something else other than God.

And why don't you just keep going that way? God's pursuing you. He's not going to let you. Does that mean we become lazy with it? No.

In fact, he's already dealt with that. If your eyes call you to sin, just gouge them out. That's pretty drastic measures we're called to. So we're to be badly sinned, but we have to understand as well that our God is pursuing us because he loves us, because we're his children, because he's our father.

[37 : 44] And when we return, he rejoices over us. And to me, this picture of the love of the father is overwhelming. And I realize in interacting with many of you that not all of you had great parents.

Maybe not all of you had great fathers. But even in those who had the best of fathers, none of it measures up to what we see here in the fatherly love of God.

And how blessed are you if you're a Christian today, that you've trusted in Jesus Christ as your Savior, to have God your Father who loves you and cares for you and watches out for you. God's love of God.

I want to end with us thinking about that great blessing that we have. That we might meditate upon the love of our father in heaven.

That we don't just spout out our heavenly father without giving thought to the fact, God is our father. And what does that mean for us? It means he loves you. It means he pursues you.

[38 : 43] He protects you. It means those who mess with you, he wraps a stone around their neck and throws them in the ocean. It's an Italian father. No. But you see, this kind of love, this protection for his children.

He punishes those who mess with his children. But he seeks out his child when it's lost. And he brings them back in with joy, rejoicing over them. Let's pray together.

Dear Heavenly Father, we thank you. For your love, your cares that's displayed to us. Lord, we thank you for sending your son to die, to shed his blood for our sins, that we might be redeemed.

Lord, we pray that we would give you the worship and glory that's through your name for the love that you've demonstrated to us. Lord, we pray for anyone in this room who doesn't know that love, that they would put their trust in Jesus Christ, that they might become a part of this family.

And Lord, we think of the application of this. We pray that you would help us, that we would love one another, watch out for one another, not despise each other, look down upon them or judge one another.

[40 : 13] When we fall in sin, that we would seek each other out. By your spirit, work to draw them back into the family, into the fold.

Lord, we pray all this in Christ's name. Amen.