

The Humbling Stone, Matthew 18:1-14

The disciples, being full of themselves due to the great power they wielded as the closest of Jesus' followers, presumed upon him to ask "who then is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" Thinking they might even hear one of their names, they instead gave Jesus the opportunity to address human pride and its antithesis, childlike humility: a virtue the world neither embraces nor understands.

Metaphors and allegory

- The Child, v.1-6
 - Unless you "turn around" and become like children, you shall not enter the kingdom of God. _____
 - Naivety and openness. _____
 - Not yet subject to the closed arrogance of adulthood. _____
 - Using a street child, Jesus also drew attention to a broad cultural issue of ignoring the "rabble" as insignificant.
 - If you receive one in my name. _____
 - But, if you cause one to stumble . . . _____
- Stumbling blocks, v.7-11
 - The stumbling blocks of the world. Temptation to:
 - Minimize sin. _____
 - Blame others. _____
 - Selfishness. _____
 - Find fault in the faith. _____
 - Hands and eyes: those things which tempt us personally.
 - Coveting: wanting what we see. _____
 - Lusting: tactile and visual. _____
 - Don't tempt yourself. _____
 - Don't be the cause of another's sin, v.6,10.
 - Don't use or abuse. _____
 - Don't revel in the fall of another. _____
 - Don't be the tempter. _____
 - The "Millstone" punishment. Less than what one would deserve. Like the devil himself. _____

- The one lost sheep: the value of the individual, v.12-14.
 - In regard to v.1-11, no one is such a discard that he or she can be treated with contempt. _____
 - You can't simply "save" yourself and ignore those who are lost. _____
 - No one is to be considered unredeemable. _____

Stumbling block or stumbling stone: What's the difference?

- The other stumbling stone
 - Matthew 21:42-44. Be broken or be crushed; you choose. _____
 - Isaiah 8:14-15. But to Israel, a stone which crushes them. _____
 - I Peter 2:4-10. A model for us. _____
- This is the stone which both trips us in our pursuit of self and self-righteous activities, and which teaches true righteousness.
 - It (he) is intended to produce humbleness. _____
 - When our face is in the dirt . . . _____
- Yet it is human nature to resist any call to humbleness.
 - Witness the disciplined child. _____
 - Witness yourself. _____

Though the disciples didn't directly ask which of them is the greatest in the kingdom of God, and some readers might deny they had that intent, remember the question of James and John regarding their place in glory. The accounts differ slightly. In Matthew 20:20-23 their mother requests Jesus to command that in his kingdom they each be assigned a seat on his left and right hand. Mark 10:35-40 differs only in that James and John ask Jesus directly. In response Jesus indicates that it is not in his authority to grant such a request, but the Father's only. He further adds the real value in this discussion: "whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave." Throughout all of scripture, humbleness is the key to grace.

To the proud and selfish then and now: humble yourself or face humiliation at the hands of God.