



THE COMPASS

RED HILL LUTHERAN CHURCH

The Compass:
Encounter-Examine-Explore-Embrace God's Word
On
Your Discipleship Path

Sermon Series: "Surrender: Serving the Savior"
(Pentecost, 2026)
"Serving" Text(s): *Matthew 18.1-20.*

□ **Day #1—Monday, September 7th. Read: Matthew 18.1. –Encounter: God's Word and your life—What do you Hear and/or See?**

While the church has faced resistance, persecution, and condemnation in every age and cultural milieu, as well as internal, theological and doctrinal threats, in this current cultural moment, the church faces some significant *challenges* in its mission in the world. For example, statistics report an increasing number of younger people do not identify with Christianity or even *any* religion. According to the Pew Research Center, these so-called "Nones," make up roughly 23% of the U.S. adult population. Even Christian families are concerned that their children are "drifting away" from Christianity. Of course, there are many reasons for this drifting away. Very often, one of these reasons is that the faith and beliefs that these young Christians possess are often ridiculed and attacked in their colleges, schools, as well as within the dominant, popular culture.

Part of this cultural resistance comes from a mistaken understanding of who Jesus is and what He has come to do. This will be the focus of our study this week. One of the very stark differences between Jesus, other religions, and the dominant cultures of the world, is His understanding of "greatness." The disciples' question about who is greatest in the Kingdom of God, likely reflects their desire to attain greatness according to the world's standards of power (coercion), control, and status. However, for Jesus, His Kingdom is known not by coercion and control, but by love and a certain *powerlessness*. To illustrate this, Jesus is going to liken the status of children to living in the Kingdom of God! Below is a graphic depicting this text:



In a culture where children were seen as non-essential, in God's eyes, all people are essential and worthy of love. Jesus tells us that we should treat others in this way as well!

Consider/Reflect: “In this last brief sojourn at Ephraim, Jesus continued to teach His disciples. On no part of His teachings did He insist more often than on the purity of little children and the beauty of their innocent souls when contrasted with the worldly-wise and sinning souls of their elders. Love for children was an essential part of the man nature in Jesus, and of His life.”¹

□ **Day #2—Tuesday, September 8th. Read: Matthew 18.2-4. —Examine: The Text and its Message.**

Jesus now gives a living example of His view of “greatness,” by calling a child to come to Him. According to J. Nolland:

The child has been placed in the midst of the disciples to symbolize what discipleship entails. Clearly the disciples here stand for the discipleship of all Christians...The required reorientation is to ‘become like children’...humility...the condition for entry [into the Kingdom] ...turns out to be identical to the basis for greatness...The interest all along in the image of the child has been in the (necessary) humility of the child. The vital difference, however, between the child and what Jesus calls for is that for the child this is a natural state, but what the kingdom of God calls for is a deliberately chosen (‘turn and become’) stance of humility. It is a form of self-denial that has its counterpart in the taking up the cross of 16:24.²

It is important to delineate what Jesus is calling for here in humility and what some assume humility is. Biblical humility is not low self-regard; thinking and acting like a “door mat” for others. Biblical humility is to put God in control of one’s decisions and actions. It is to know that we need others—we do not have all the answers. We need others. As one of my professors once told me, “Humility is to be “teachable.” Biblical humility is not *thinking less of yourself*; it is *thinking of yourself less*. New Testament scholar, L. Morris, helpfully expands on Jesus’ example of being “child-like.” As Morris explains, for Jesus, greatness, as well as the overall lifestyle of a disciple, is...

...becoming *like little children*; adults tend to leave childlike ways behind them (and some such ways certainly ought to be abandoned; children can manifest qualities like pride, selfishness, and temper), but Jesus is pointing out that there are some things to be learned from small children. He seems to be referring to the insignificance and unimportance of children as the ancient world saw them, perhaps also to qualities like trustfulness and dependence...We should notice further that Jesus does not answer the set terms of the question...[18.1]...He does not concern himself with relative positions and who will have the top job when the kingdom comes...His emphatic double negative rules out the possibility of even entering the kingdom for those seeking great things for themselves. He does not talk about eminence in the kingdom at all; without genuine humility it is impossible even to get into it, and for humility the question of personal preeminence does not arise.³

Consider/Reflect: “A child’s humility is evident especially in dependence on and trust in a superior. Greatness in the kingdom is characterized by humble trust in the Lord. ‘Just as a child neither takes nor seeks sovereignty for himself, so this shows that there is not to be sovereignty among ministers’ ... [To be like a child is] ...One who humbly trusts in the Lord (v 4). Jesus identified Himself with such children (11:25; 25:40, 45).”⁴

□ **Day #3—Wednesday, September 9th. Read: Matthew 18.5-6. —Explore: The background to this text(s).**

Jesus now issues both an assurance and a warning. Disciples not only are to be humble, but we are to welcome other fellow believers who exhibit this same, Jesus-like humility. In this command to “welcome is in Christ’s name...As in 10:40–42, Jesus has in mind people who welcome disciples because they accept their message and thus become disciples themselves.”⁵ Conversely, and using hyperbolic language, Jesus wants:

One who might otherwise cause such a little one to sin ought to long for dramatic, decisive, physical death rather than risk eternal judgment. The “large millstone” (literally, *millstone for a donkey*) referred to the huge stone wheels that were attached to a horizontal bar connected to a donkey’s harness. As the animal walked around in circles, the wheel rolled over a raised stone slab (similar in appearance to a large birdbath), crushing the grain underneath. *Pelagei* (“depths”) refers to the deepest part of the sea. With this vivid metaphor, Jesus leaves no one in doubt over the certainty of drowning. Jesus’ logic proceeds as in 5:21–22. He does not imply that one evil act leads to damnation, but a life-style characterized by causing others to sin is incompatible with true discipleship.⁶

1 www.logos.com.

2 J. Nolland. *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 2005).

3 L. Morris. *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1995).

4 *The Lutheran Study Bible* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009).

5 *New American Commentary*. (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992).

6 Ibid.

Consider/Reflect: “Jesus demonstrates that humility is the hallmark of greatness in the Kingdom of heaven. Humility means confessing our inability to do anything at all to become worthy before God and earn salvation. Humility depends entirely on God’s mercy for forgiveness. It looks to Jesus Christ as the Savior who became one with sinners to redeem them. [Pray]: Daily teach me, dear Jesus, to turn and become like a child. Amen.”⁷

□ **Day #4--Thursday, September 10th. Read: Matthew 18.7-9. —Explore: The background to this text(s).**

Jesus continues His warnings from *v.6*, about what *causes* someone to *sin*. It is important to note that in the ESV, in *v.6*, the Greek word for “causes...to...sin” is *σκανδαλίζομαι* (*skandalizomai*), (from where we get the English word, “scandal”). Elsewhere, this word is translated as “stumbling block.” In *v.7*, the same word is used for “temptations to sin.” Similar to His warnings about causing His “little ones” to sin/stumble, one of Jesus’ points in verses 7-9 is to be avoid the “stumbling blocks” that causes one to “sin” and fall away from following Jesus.

These verses [7-9] are bound together by the Greek word *skandalon* (“stumbling-block”) and its related verb *skandalizo* (“to trip up”). The...[ESV]...uses “cause to sin” to translate these words, but they are less specific. Anything that gets in the way of effective discipleship is a *skandalon*, an unkind word or a cold shoulder no less than a “cause of sin.” Such stumbling-blocks may come from others (6–7) or from ourselves (8–9). Both are equally serious.⁸

Again, Jesus uses a teaching style He engaged often. Sometimes referred to as “prophetic hyperbole,” Jesus describes in vivid terms what is necessary for discipleship, as well as the *eternal* outcomes:

The gravity of sinning and falling away is now further stressed, but along a somewhat different line (although what causes oneself to fall can also become the cause of others’ falling), which focuses upon specific offending members of the human body, the hand or the foot (*v.8*) and the eye (*v.9*)...the point is the desirability of drastic action (though the exhortations are hyperbolic and not to be taken literally) to overcome the instrument of stumbling. The new element in these verses...is the positive reference in the repeated words...“to enter into life”...refer to entrance into the eschatological kingdom at the time of the last judgment.⁹

Consider/Reflect: “One need look no further than these words of Jesus to see how much the holy God hates sin. Here, the Law strikes us with all its fury. Who of us can say that our hand or foot or eye has not caused us to sin? We all deserve to be thrown into the hell of fire. Thank God that Jesus’ hands and feet were pierced for our iniquities and that His eyes beheld our sin in order to turn the Father’s face from it. By His wounds and precious death, we enter life. [Pray]: Holy Father, I confess my sins of thought and word and deed. Forgive me for Jesus’ sake. Amen.”¹⁰

□ **Day #5— Friday, September 11th. Read: Matthew 18.10-14. —Explore: The background to this text(s).**

Jesus now shifts the image somewhat, from warning assurance. Using a parable of a shepherd in search of his lost sheep, Jesus is giving a picture of God’s concern for His “little ones;” His children—you and me and all believers! The parable also shows that, like the shepherd, we should have the same concern for each other, our fellow “little ones.” “The temptation to *look down on* less confident or ‘successful’ fellow-disciples, and therefore to ignore their pastoral needs, shows an attitude out of tune with God’s concern.”¹¹

If we go back to Matthew 18.1-4 (See Monday and Tuesday), we see the connection Jesus is making with this parable. What are the characteristics of children? Humility, dependence, and trust. And, again, children in the first-century world were seen as insignificant and powerless. So are we! *We need God to find us*. Lost sheep need a shepherd to go looking for them; *sheep do not go looking for the shepherd!*

In this “mini-parable,” two points stand out: The will of the shepherd to find the lost sheep and then the joy of the shepherd when the lost are found. Some further lessons on this parable about God’s love and grace:

- God’s grace is **Individual**.
- God’s grace is **Patient**.
- God’s grace is **Seeking**.
- God’s grace is **Joyous**.
- God’s grace is **Protecting**.

7 The Lutheran Study Bible.

8 J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.). *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* (Wheaton, Illinois: Victor Books, 1985).

9 D.A. Hagner. *Word Biblical Commentary*: (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1993).

10 The Lutheran Study Bible.

11 Walvoord, et al., *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*.

The truth is that we have a God that finds us in our “lostness.” We are not able to work up some acceptable level of spiritual improvement. God moves before we do! And, God “remembers” our sins no more!

Consider/Reflect: “Jesus compares the Father’s love for His little ones to that of a shepherd who left his 99 sheep to search for the one who went astray. Do we show similar concern when fellow Christians stray from faith in Christ? May we never despise one of the little ones for whom Christ died. God did everything He could to seek and to save the lost. He spared not His only Son but gave Him up for us all. [Pray]: Give me a heart, O Father, that cares about each of Your little ones. Amen.”¹²

☐ **Day #6-Saturday, September 12th. Read: Psalm 119.1-8. —Embrace: God and His guiding you through His Word.** Once again, we use the “Daily Order of Prayer” found in *Luther’s Small Catechism*.¹³ Read and mediate on *Psalm 119.1-8* and: “[M]ake the sign of the Holy Cross and say: In the name of the Father and of the Son + and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Then, kneeling or standing, repeat the Creed and the Lord’s Prayer:

I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth. And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary; suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; He descended into hell; the third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead. I believe in the Holy Ghost; one holy Christian Church, the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting. Amen.

Our Father, which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy Name. Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, As it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, As we forgive them that trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, But deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

(Depending on the time of day, pray the prayers below):

(Morning) I thank you, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, Your dear Son, that You have kept me this night from all harm and danger; and I pray that You would keep me this day also from sin and every evil, that all my doings and life may please You. For into Your hands I commend myself, my body and soul, and all things. Let Your holy angel be with me, that the evil foe may have no power over me. Amen.

(Afternoon/Evening) I thank you, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, Your dear Son, that You have graciously kept me this day; and I pray that You would forgive me all my sins where I have done wrong, and graciously keep me this night. For into Your hands, I commend myself, my body and soul, and all things. Let Your holy angel be with me, that the evil foe may have no power over me. Amen.

Questions of Today’s Text: What does this Psalm teach me about God? What does this Psalm teach me about myself? What does this Psalm lead me to do?

Pray and Prepare for Worship Tomorrow...
Sermon Series: “Surrender. Serving the Savior.”
Scripture Texts:
Genesis 50.15-21
Romans 14.1-12
Matthew 18.21-35

¹² *Lutheran Study Bible.*

¹³ Martin Luther. “Luther’s Small Catechism.” Taken from, *The Lutheran Study Bible*. (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009).