

“Cherishing Children” *Matt. 18:1–5, 10-14 9-10-17*

Children are a cherished joy. From Ark Linkletter unrehearsed interview with them to many Facebook posts of children and grandchildren. I find great joy in the daily hallway highchair huddles. It’s hard not to love children.

God loves them too, and desires that we take great care not to look down on them or leave them in physical or spiritual danger.

In fact, Jesus refers to a child’s faith to teach about greatness in the kingdom of God. He tells us to turn from thinking that greatness is about our work for God to believing that it is humbly trusting God’s work for us. In fact, Jesus saved the world from sin by humbly entrusting himself to His heavenly Father, who then exalted him above all. As Jesus said before, those who lose their life for him will gain it. If we are humble, we are great in God’s eyes.

Thus, we would never despise children, but cherish them, and protect their faith by any and all means. Jesus refers to those who believe in him with the word “micros”, an infant. The cherishing begins by bringing them to baptism and continues through teaching and modeling the faith at home and in public worship and Sunday School.

The “little” ones include any vulnerable believer whose faith could be destroyed by the false teachings, evil actions, or spiritual neglect of those over them.

We miss the seriousness of this by reading the word *sin* where Jesus means *entrap*, the word that is the source of the English “scandal”. The noun refers to a trigger on an animal trap. The verb means to become ensnare; not just to sin or stumble, but to fall into unbelief. The same word appears when Peter disagreed that Jesus should die on the cross. Jesus rebukes Satan for setting a trap for him--the ultimate faith destroyer had Jesus taken the bait.

That’s why Jesus’ words are so harsh. To have a huge donkey pulled millstone tied around your neck and be thrown into the deep sea is not his punishment for destroying a child’s faith. Rather those who would do that should prefer that punishment to the one they will face. Jesus uses the same *scandal* word in reference to temptations that will come from the world. Likewise, the world too will be harshly judged.

If we are to cherish the faith of the vulnerable, we must also protect our own. Jesus warns us against anything that would cause us to lose our faith, which would endanger the faith of those under our care. We can’t do this by cutting off a hand or plucking out an eye, for the other eye or hand could do as much harm. Earlier Jesus said that sins such as evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander come from within.

Repentance and faith are means of guarding our hearts. Intentional sinning without remorse will harden hearts to the suffering of Christ by which he took our sins’ punishment. Impenitence destroys faith as it leads us to believe we have no need of a Savior. That’s why Jesus later instructs us to call impenitent sinners to repentance, as the prophet Ezekiel also did. Paul’s epistle teaches that God uses even secular authority to keep us from doing harm to others.

So as to cherishing our children of all ages, Jesus wants us to know that he himself cherishes them even more. A mother surprised her little son by telling him that God loves him even more she does. To consider that God’s love is even greater than hers had to fill his little heart to overflowing. Our bedtimes prayers with our little children often ended with this simple benediction, “Mommy loves you, Daddy loves you but Jesus loves you most of all.”

Jesus compares himself to a shepherd with a hundred sheep who leaves the 99 to find the one that goes astray. Each of us, great or small, is precious to him, and He rejoices along with the angels when we return to Him. And if angels before God are concerned about even the young and vulnerable shouldn’t we all be?

The mom I referred to earlier wrote: *Raising our boys to trust in the Lord is our biggest job. How to do that? She adds, Love and respect God as we expect our children to. Be excited and thirsty about learning more about him! Be eager to make the Lord your best friend!*” Faith is taught by the word and caught by example. Cherish your children, as God does. Protect and practice the faith you teach them.

Only God can enable us to do that. We need the grace, guidance, and forgiveness of Jesus our Lord and Savior. When we fail as parents, grandparents, teachers, and pastors to cherish and nurture the simple faith of those young in the faith, let us be diligent to humble ourselves, turn in repentance, be renewed by His promises of grace. Amen.