



## **Matthew 18:10**

10 “See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven.

### **Reflection**

(Today’s reflection is given by Justin Mof-fatt)

I have only one sentence today so let me set it in context. In Matthew 18:1 Jesus’ dis-

iples came and asked him about ‘greatness’ in his kingdom. Like many good communicators, Jesus makes things visual and concrete. He ushers a little child right into the centre of the discussion and says in verse 3:

‘Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.’

In other words, repent and take the lowly position (v. 4). Take a position like a child, who in that culture (unlike ours) wasn’t considered important. Adulthood brought importance. ‘Little ones’ were considered unimportant.

Jesus then reorientates his disciples not

only to 'becoming' like children, but also to treat other 'little ones' as precious. It was revolutionary then. In many ways, Jesus' revolution has won the day, since children are now considered the most precious.

Jesus says: "Welcome such a child" in verse 6. And,

'If anyone causes one of these little ones, who believe in me, to stumble, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung round their neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea.'

Wow. Take radical action. Don't think of sin lightly. Especially 'against a little one'. That was yesterday in *A Year With Jesus*. Go back and have a listen. In today's text,

Jesus says why.

‘See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven.’

So Jesus says WHAT to do, and WHY we ought to do it. The first part is easier to understand than the second. But the principle isn't hard to work out. What to do?

‘See that you do not despise one of these little ones.’

Don't look down on them. Don't mistreat them. Don't abuse them. Don't persecute them. Don't cause them to stumble or sin. Don't be proud around them. All abuse is evil.

This child in front of the disciples represents the 'little ones'. But it could refer to 'those who believe in me', perhaps new believers, and all vulnerable people. People on whom you could easily look down on, or boss, or have power over. Jesus is calling us to a position of humility towards those without power.

C.S. Lewis, in *Mere Christianity* wrote: 'As long as you are proud you cannot know God. A proud man is always looking down on things and people: and, of course, as long as you are looking down you cannot see something that is above you.' And what is above you that would make you pause before you 'despised' or 'looked down on' or tried to hurt someone that you perceive is 'below' you? The answer

is: God is above you. Or 'my Father', as Jesus puts it. So be careful.

But also, it is God who endows these little one's with dignity. That's what the second half of the sentence is about. WHY do you not despise these 'little ones'? I guess we could come up with our own reasons, but Jesus gives this unusual, powerful and memorable reason:

For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven.

OK. Let's admit it, no one quite knows what this means. Some think that this means that each 'little one' has a 'guardian angel' looking after them. This comes out in popular language. If someone narrow-

ly escapes injury, that person might be told: 'Your guardian angel is looking after you.' But there is little evidence in the Bible that each person has a 'guardian angel'. In Daniel, nations have an angel. And in Acts 12 and in the Book of Revelation, there are some oblique references. In Hebrews, angels attend to believers, which is a great comfort.

A couple of things, actually three. First, I do believe in angels. I don't think you can sum up the world in purely materialistic terms. I believe in God. I believe in the resurrection. I believe in angels. And I believe in and hate Satan. I know that there is a spiritual battle and that Jesus has defeated all evil and will bring joy and order to his cosmos.

Second: These angels aren't looking down on me. They 'always see the face of my Father in Heaven'. In other words, their effectual power for the little ones is their orientation towards the Father in worship; not in their looking after little ones.

Third: Some have claimed that 'their angels' refers to their spirits after death. In other words, you can 'despise' a little one, but the believer will eventually be vindicated. I think that's a stretch.

So, difficult as the verse is, what can be concluded?

## **Think**

These little ones are precious, because God has made them precious. They are his



‘little ones’. Whatever else we say about it, their angels – whether each has one, or if angels are assigned to the vulnerable or some other scenario – have constant access to the Father. It is their constant access to the Father who dwells in unapproachable light that makes these little ones valuable.

God endows human beings with dignity. That’s why you don’t despise a little one. They have intrinsic value. Inherent worth. They have worth even if not another a soul on earth believes they do. That’s what inherent worth means. We are ‘created in the image of God’. There’s nothing extrinsic about that. If one is ‘made in God’s image’, then you don’t get the right to break that image.

Another verse: 'If your brother or sister is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love. Do not by your eating destroy someone for whom Christ died' (a paraphrase of Rom 14:20). Nothing extrinsic about that. This brother or sister is: 'One for whom Christ died.' If they are, you don't get to destroy them. It is their value before God that makes your behaviour towards them so wrong.

An aside, even if an important one, regarding abortion. The question of what governments ought to legislate is important, but this is only one way to look at the issue. The other way is if you personally are considering one, then reach out to someone who believes and see if there is an alternative. Reach out to a community of faith who wants to help. I know that's hard to

say, and some people will not like hearing it. But if every life has intrinsic value, then perhaps the lives of the yet unborn are most precious because they are the most vulnerable. Please contact me if you think that's inappropriate. I do want to be help for whom this issue is a trigger issue.

## **Pray**

Thank God that 'little ones' have worth from God. And pray that those who have contact with the vulnerable will be able to see it and act accordingly. We have such a responsibility.

But going a bit deeper: what makes us despise, or 'look down' on any one else? It's pride isn't it? Pride is an invisible thing that can cause such carnage on the ground.

David Wells wrote: 'How can we be so knowledgeable about evil in the world and so innocent about sin in ourselves?'

If you know how to despise another, pray for the perspective of the angels, who 'always see the face of my Father in heaven.' Pray to see the face of Jesus Christ, the Father's Son, who was the despised and humbled one. The one who died to take my pride to the cross, and raise me as a humble one. And then pray that we might treat others well out of that humility.