

A Heart for the Vulnerable (the Little Ones)

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We turn in sacred Scripture to Matthew 18. Matthew 18. At Grace we are currently going through a series, glimpses into the heart of Jesus, and two weeks ago I preached from this passage and taken as my text verse 6 and that is the text that we have tonight as we take a glimpse into the heart of Jesus tonight from another point of view. That's what my series is looking at, Jesus' heart from different points of view and we see that in the text Matthew 18:6. Let's first read the first 14 verses. Matthew 18.

1 At the same time came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?

Meaning this, who among us is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?

2 And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them,
3 And said, Verily [truly] I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. 4 Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven. 5 And whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me. 6 But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea. 7 Woe unto the world because of offences! for it must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh! 8 Wherefore if thy hand or thy foot offend thee, cut them off, and cast them from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life halt or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet to be cast into everlasting fire. 9 And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire. 10 Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven. 11 For the Son of man is come to save that which was lost. 12 How think ye? if a man have an hundred sheep, and one of them be gone astray, doth he not leave the ninety and nine, and goeth into the mountains, and seeketh that which is gone astray? 13 And if so be that he find it, verily I say unto you, he rejoiceth more of that sheep,

than of the ninety and nine which went not astray. 14 Even so it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish.

So far we read God's holy and infallible word.

The text is verse 6,

6 But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea.

Let's go to Lord in prayer.

Our Father, who is sufficient to handle the word and even as we sit under the word, Lord, who is sufficient even to hear it? But we depend upon thee and thy Spirit and thy grace, open our ears, open our eyes, that we might see and understand the instruction of our Savior and we might take it home with us, and it might shape our hearts and lives. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Beloved in our Lord Jesus Christ, the words of the text this evening contain some of the harshest, most severe and most pointed words that come from the mouth of our Savior. In fact, it is precisely because of how severe this warning is that we all know this verse. We're all familiar with this verse. We all know it's in the Bible precisely because when you read the text, the warning that Jesus gives makes a lasting impression on the mind and heart and that's exactly what Jesus intended.

What's striking is that as severe as these words are, these words themselves are built on another warning Jesus gives found in verse 3, another warning which itself is a bone-chilling warning to his disciples, "Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven." Our focus tonight isn't going to be on verse 3, but we should see the connection between these two verses in the passage. The passage starts out by telling us that Jesus' disciples were arguing amongst themselves about which one of them was the greatest and would be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven, and Jesus, hearing that kind of arrogant talk, responds with a severe word of warning. And so he calls a little child to come to him, and then he turns to his disciples and he says, "Except you be converted, except you change, except you change your attitudes and you change your behavior and you become as little children and become as this little child, ye my disciples, shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven." Jesus says, "You men need to change. Listen to yourselves talk. You're full of arrogance, full of an air of superiority over others, full of stinking pride, and except you change completely you will not even enter my kingdom, let alone be great in my kingdom."

And then on the heels of those words, with this little child still on Jesus' mind, Jesus goes further, and he says and pay attention to this too, for this is intimately related,

"Whosoever of you shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone be hanged about his neck and that he be drowned in the depth of the sea." And that should have made the hair on the neck of Jesus' disciples stand up. And then after a few more warnings in which Jesus tells his disciples that if needs be they must cut off their hands and pluck out their eyes in order to avoid falling into sin, which needs to be understood properly, Jesus says in verse 10, "Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones." The point is this whole passage is one in which Jesus is passionately concerned about the well-being of his lowly people, his lowly people who trust in him.

Jesus says, "You disciples want to talk about being great in the kingdom, but I tell you, my eye is on the lowly, my eye is on the weak, my eye is on those who have no pride, who have no arrogance, but who are nothing and they know they are nothing and they humble themselves before me and they cling to me with perfect hope, perfect love and perfect expectation. My little ones are deeply precious to me." And Jesus says, "I have a special place in my heart for those whom you might refer to as the least of the sheep, those who are lost and go astray, those who are weak, those who are immature, those who are simple, those who are vulnerable, whom you might judge to be inferior to you, whom you might even be in a position to take advantage of if you wanted to. They are precious in my eyes. If you want to be great in the kingdom, forget about yourself and focus your attention upon caring for these little ones." And Jesus says, the last thing you want to do, the last thing anyone wants to do is offend one of the little ones in Christ's church and take advantage of them and lead them into sin by your attitude and your behavior and your treatment of them and/or your negligence of them.

Well, what we have in this entire passage, congregation, is another glimpse into the heart of Jesus. We see here a heart that beats passionately for the vulnerable and for the weak. We take as our theme tonight "A Heart For the Vulnerable (the Little Ones), and we'll look at that theme under three points. First, we look at the sin Jesus hates. Second, we look at the seriousness of this sin. And third, we look at the punishment for this sin.

The text begins with Jesus mentioning the sin of offending one of these little ones. That word "offend," first of all, that word "offend" in verse 6 in the original is actually the word from which we get the word "scandal." "Whosoever shall scandalize one of these little ones," that's literally how you could read it. Now, in our culture today, the word "scandal" has a few different connotations, but generally speaking, a scandal is something that brings disgrace upon someone. A scandal is an action or an event that causes moral outrage and shock in the community. In the Bible, however, the word "scandal," this word "offence" has a slightly different emphasis. The word that Jesus uses means this: to influence to sin; to influence someone to sin; to tempt someone to sin. Used as a noun, an offence is something that is apt to make someone to sin; or to put it another way, an offence is something that stands in the way of a person and Jesus Christ. By the way you talk, by the way you act, you influence or you tempt another person to sin.

Many translations today translate the word this way: to cause to stumble, so that the translations read like this, "Whosoever shall cause one of these little ones to stumble, it

were better for him that a millstone be hanged about his neck and that he be drowned in the depth of the sea." And the idea, of course, is to cause someone to stumble into sin. Whosoever shall cause one of these little ones to stumble into sin so that he becomes trapped in sin and he loses his way, or so that he becomes offended at the gospel or the hypocrisy of God's people, and for that reason, too, they turn away from the right way, and they walk in the paths of sin and maybe they become lost for a moment or for a season, or maybe they're so offended that they turn away from the gospel altogether, that's what Jesus means. To offend, to put a stumblingblock in the way of someone so that they are hindered from right thinking and they fall into sin.

In the Bible, we find this language quite frequently. In Matthew 18, we find it once in verse 6, we find it three times in verse 7, once again in verse 8, and once more in verse 9. Our own bodies, our own hands and eyes can be an offense to us leading us into sin. That's the reality of our sinful natures.

Another passage where you find this word is Matthew 16:23. In Matthew 16:23 Jesus, he's telling his disciples there about the suffering he must endure, and Peter responds by saying, "We can't possibly let this happen." And in verse 23 of Matthew 16, Jesus says, "Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men." In that passage Peter was offending Jesus; not that Peter actually caused Jesus to fall into sin but what Peter said was used by Satan to influence Jesus, to tempt Jesus to sin, to turn from the path of suffering that God had ordained for him. It was intended by Satan to be an offense to cause Jesus to stumble.

So sometimes an offense is given but a person does not actually fall into sin, in the case of Matthew 16, and sometimes the opposite happens too. Sometimes an offense is taken when no true offense was given. That is, a person maybe says something or does something that's right and proper, but someone else takes it the wrong way and then uses it to walk in sin as an excuse to stumble and fall into sin. Sometimes that happens too. So an offense is something that influences someone to sin, that tempts someone to stumble and fall out of the way of God's path into the way of sin.

Now in the text Jesus says, "But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me," so now we need to look at that. What does that mean, one of these little ones? Well, perhaps especially when we read this verse in the context, our thoughts immediately go to the little children in the church. And that's certainly appropriate, that's part of the meaning here, but there's more involved in verse 6. On the one hand, what we should understand is that Jesus is really talking about all his people because, in a sense, all Jesus' people have become as little children, all Jesus' people resemble little children in the sense that we have a childlike faith, "Except ye become as a little child you shall not enter the kingdom."

So we're little children, we humbly trust in Jesus as our complete Savior and we rest in his promises. We become little children, yet with that being said, we should also understand, on the other hand, that the language "little ones" here is especially referring to those whom we might be inclined to judge as the lesser of God's people. This would

include perhaps those who are newly converted, those who are yet young in their Christian life and they need guidance and instruction. Maybe we could say that they're not as mature as we are. They're uneducated and impressionable, and they are vulnerable and they're trusting and so they can easily be taken advantage of and led astray. The newly converted, this would include those who are hurting, those who maybe need counseling and who call up a friend or a pastor or an elder for help and encouragement and they are vulnerable. This would include the poor and the needy, the lonely, those who are emotionally vulnerable, those who are spiritually vulnerable. This would include those who are victims or survivors of horrible things done to them. All these people would fall under the category of little ones, and what Jesus is emphasizing is that he has a deep love and concern for these members of the church. He doesn't want his disciples to be a cause for these people to stumble.

And notice who it is to whom Jesus speaks. He's speaking to his disciples. He's speaking to those in positions of authority. He's speaking to the strong, those whom we might even refer to as the prestigious, in a sense, those who could use their position and skill and reputation against weaker members in the church. Jesus here in the text is speaking to the office bearers. He's speaking to the teachers. Jesus is speaking here to the men in the church, those who have a position of authority. And Jesus is speaking to those who, because of their position of authority, might be tempted to be insensitive to the needs of those under their authority. He's speaking to those who would have the power and the skill and education and influence to take advantage of the vulnerable and hurt them and use them and abuse them and control them if they wanted to. And to these people, to his disciples, he gives the strongest of warnings, "But whoso shall offend one of these little ones," one of these little children, one of the weak and vulnerable members of my church, one of the members whom you might be inclined to judge as inferior to yourself or you might judge as one inconvenient to deal with, one of the members you might judge as a person who simply needs to stop being a wimp, get over it and move on with life and simply be as tough as you are. "Whosoever shall offend, shall cause to stumble or get between one of these little ones and me so that they turn into the path of sin, it were better for him that a millstone be hanged about his neck and that he'd be drowned in the depth of the sea." And Jesus says this to his very own disciples because this was exactly the temptation they were facing with all their airs of superiority. Jesus says, "With all that pride and all that arrogance, you are going to hurt my people." Jesus says, "You must be careful." That's the meaning of these words. That's the sin Jesus hates.

Now the question we need to ask is: how is this sin committed? Where do we see this sin today? Are we guilty of this sin? Well, there are a few obvious ways in which this sin is committed today. First of all, think of false teachers. Think of ministers teaching false doctrine in the catechism class, taking advantage of the young minds of the young people. Think of the ministers who instead of feeding the flock are fleecing the flock for their own gain with their skill and education and reputation and position. They take advantage of the people. They manipulate others. They push others down in order to assert themselves, maybe they even give condescending facial expressions so that others look stupid and they look good. And they're doing things for themselves and their own advancement and their own protection and their own good. That's what Jesus is talking

about. Think of the college professor, perhaps especially at the Christian college teaching his students that evolutionism is true, teaching his students that the Bible should be treated just like any other book, teaching his students to tolerate the gross and offensive sins that are in the culture today. That's bringing an offense to God's people. That's influencing God's little ones to walk in sin. That's the sin of standing in the way between these young, bright students, perhaps a little naive in their youth, and Jesus Christ, their Savior. Jesus says it were better for that professor that a millstone be hanged about his neck and he were drowned in the depth of the sea. Congregation, there will be a special place in hell for all those ministers and professors and teachers and leaders who ridicule the Christian faith and who destroy the faith of the little ones who sat under their instruction and who were turned away from Christ.

Or think of this, think of child abuse. Think of child sexual abuse. In fact, think of all kinds of abuse. This is exactly what abuse is. This is what the text is talking about, someone in a position of power misusing someone who is weaker. What Jesus is addressing in the text is the sin of abuse. Think of child sexual abuse. We almost shudder to mention it off the pulpit because it's such a perverted sin, but it's a reality. You know it's a reality. Men and women preying in a sexual way on children and it's an offense, beloved. It's an offense. And for the children, it profoundly affects the children. It profoundly impacts their relationship with God. It changes their soul. It changes who they are as a person. Some children, by God's amazing grace, learn to live with the damage and honor the Lord through it, but others simply turn away from the church and the Christian faith. What a stumblingblock for a covenant child to have to work through. Sometimes the church even tries to protect the perpetrators. Sometimes it's even the office bearers in the church who commit these gross sins. I tell you, for those who offend the children of Jesus Christ in this way, except for the unspeakable grace of God and true repentance, it were better for that perpetrator that a millstone were hanged about his neck and that he be drowned in the depth of the sea.

And how is God going to judge those people who are privy to these things happening and who don't stand up to protect the vulnerable and stand against the oppressor? His wrath falls upon them also. We just read it this morning at Grace from Leviticus 20. Offering your children to Molech, not only will you be cut off, but those who know what's going on and don't stop you from doing it, they will be cut off too. And then we need to ask ourselves when we have the opportunity to protect and to safeguard the vulnerable and we neglect that opportunity and that calling, is that reflecting the heart of our Savior, Jesus Christ?

But don't just think of child sexual abuse, think of other forms of abuse. Think of a husband badgering, harassing, intimidating his wife, murdering his wife with his words or with the silent treatment or whatever it may be, attacking his wife by viewing pornography, maybe even trying to get her to join in on it. That's sin against one of Christ's little ones, a precious wife who is in a vulnerable position as a wife, one who's under authority and knows it well in the church, and here is a husband who is called to honor his wife and instead he's dishonoring his wife. He's quenching the Spirit in her. He's provoking her to wrath, making her exasperated and he's destroying her soul, and

he's doing it as one who's supposed to be a reflection of Jesus Christ to her. That's an offense, beloved. That's causing a woman to stumble.

In addition, that's not just a sin against his wife, that's also setting an entire atmosphere in the home that is destructive, and that will be a stumblingblock to the children living in that home. When we think about abuse cases, we must not just think that, oh, there's a marriage at stake here, as if the only thing we should be concerned about is preserving this marriage. No, we need to understand there are the souls of those involved. The soul of the wife as a person, the souls of the children as persons, the soul of the perpetrator as a person. If we don't deal with these sins honestly, if we don't deal with them properly before the face of Jesus Christ, well, the wife and those children are going to see it and you are going to put an offense in front of them. These are vulnerable people who see the sin, they understand the sin for what it is and they are expecting those in positions of authority and power to do what is proper and when leaders ignore the plea for help and only want to act in the way that saves face for them, they're causing the little ones of Jesus to stumble so that those little ones ask themselves, "Is this who Jesus is? Is this what the church of Jesus is about? Is this what he stands for?" And it's an offense.

Think of those who are hurting or wounded and they need counseling and they come to a person in authority for help and they get taken advantage of. That's an offense. Think of men who talk down to their wives or talk down about women in front of others, make the women the butt of their jokes so that even the women start laughing at these jokes. And it's an offense. Think of a young man who's out for a date with a young woman and the young man takes advantage of that young woman and he forces her to do something she doesn't want to do, and he so manipulates her and he so charms her or so simply overpowers her, that he simply does what he wants with her. That's an offense. She asks herself, "Is this what a godly man looks like? Is this what the men in the church are like? Is this what Jesus stands for?" I tell you, young men, it were better for that young man that a millstone be hanged about his neck and he be drowned in the depths of the sea than that he'd do something like what I just described.

But it's not just abuse. We can make this more general. Think of parents who profess Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and yet they have a lifestyle that utterly contradicts their faith and utterly contradicts what's heard off the pulpit. That gives great offense to the children and the young people and young adults in church. Parents who say amen to the words of the preacher and yet it doesn't have any impact at all on their life and the life of repentance. Maybe the children are listening to this very sermon and they're expecting their parents to be impacted by it, maybe go home and talk about the sermon and how maybe we as parents need to do better at certain things. But it never happens and their children see right through their parents. How often you can look at it from your own history and your own experience living in the midst of the church, how often doesn't that cause the children to stumble and lose their way in the Christian walk? Think of parents who don't know how to apologize to their children because that's just too humbling for them, that they don't know even how to repent or express repentance in front of their children. It's a cause for stumbling.

But maybe I should apply this to myself. I had to do that at Grace. Here I am preaching a sermon, maybe it sounds nice but are my actions going to match up to what I'm preaching? Am I as a pastor going to truly have a heart for the vulnerable while standing true to the truth of God's word all at the same time, which is standing up for the vulnerable? Or am I simply going to do what is convenient for me or what's popular?

Maybe here in Hudsonville I can apply it this way, maybe the vulnerable member in the congregation is listening to the sermon and maybe they're taking a sneak peek at the elders' bench and they're thinking to themselves, "Do the elders agree with this kind of preaching? Are the elders going to care for the vulnerable? Are the elders going to rise up and work for their protection? Are they going to reflect Jesus' love for the vulnerable? Are they trustworthy?" The elders need to hear this just like the disciples needed to hear this, just like we all need to hear it. Congregation, may the Lord help us all in these matters more and more so that we have the heart of Jesus Christ, having true compassion for the weak, being zealous, jealous to protect the needy so that we put away this air of superiority that so often clings to us, as if, "I have made myself to differ from others, as if I already know I am one of the greater ones in the kingdom of God, and I know you are one of the inferior ones, and if only you were more like me, you would be better off."

How offensive is that? Yet that was the attitude the disciples were struggling with. It's real. Can you imagine being young in the faith and coming to a church that has that kind of attitude? How offensive. Beloved, may the Lord help us all to be humble and truly have the heart of Jesus Christ, and if you are in a position of leadership and authority, if you are a man in the church, then you better be on your knees praying for mercy, praying for mercy and for grace to handle this position in a way that honors the King. And this is not to exclude women who are in position of authority, mothers certainly and others, but this is what we need, to pray for mercy and for grace to handle this position in a way that honors the King and the heart of the King.

I need to add more. There are all kinds of examples but let me just give one more example. Think of children bullying each other on the schoolyard, how devastating bullying can be to a child. It makes them to stumble in all kinds of devastating and often unseen ways. It shapes their lives. Children and young people this evening, these words of the text are not just for your parents, these words are for you. Jesus calls you to be kind and to be caring, to do good to your fellow classmates. And Jesus warns you this evening, don't bully your classmate, especially those of you who might be tempted to think that you are stronger or you are smarter or you are more popular or you are more beautiful. Be careful. Be careful in how you interact with those whom you would judge to be weaker than you. You tyrannize and you taunt and you mock your classmate and Jesus says, "You better be careful what you are doing because what you are doing to them you are doing to me."

Jesus says, "But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea." Well, this is a serious matter, isn't it? It's a matter of utmost seriousness. Notice the language Jesus uses, "But whoso shall offend one of these little

ones," not even a whole bunch, just one. "If you offend just one of my little ones, my wrath will fall on you. You're exposed to my wrath."

Jesus is dead serious. Well, why is this such a serious matter? First of all, these little ones are God's children. These little ones belong to Jesus. He emphasizes that in verse 5, "And whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me." Jesus says, "I and this little child, we are one. What you do to this little child, you do to me." And I think we can understand the idea. Parents have a jealousy over their children, don't they? If the parents see their children being mistreated by another person, especially by an adult, one who is mature, they're going to step in pretty quickly. I think parents understand that pretty clearly. If you want to get on my bad side, all you have to do is hurt my child. Hurt my child, do harm to my child, be a bad influence on my child, and we will have problems. If you contribute to the spiritual well-being of my child by lifting them up, encouraging them, showing kindness, teaching them the things of God, encouraging them to obey their parents, then you and I are going to get along just fine. But if you influence my child for evil, then we will have a problem. You see, that's exactly Jesus' attitude here. Jesus says, "These are my little ones. Don't lay a finger on one of my sheep except to bless them and do them good." Jesus died for this sheep. Jesus purchased these vulnerable sheep with the unspeakable agonies of his death on the cross. He cares for their sheep. They are the apple of his eye. Jesus is glad to leave the 99 in order to pursue that one vulnerable sheep that has gone astray. And if Jesus, so to speak, finds out that you were the one who caused that sheep to go astray, that incurs his wrath. It were better for you that a millstone be hanged about your neck and that you'd be drowned in the depth of the sea.

You see, it's impossible to separate Jesus from his people. As he says in Matthew 25:40, he says, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me." That's true for all of us, beloved, who belong to Jesus Christ. That's why in the church we deal as gently as we can with each other, because we're all the little ones of Jesus Christ, we're all the little children, the precious in Jesus' sight, the ones who are precious in Jesus' sight. God is very jealous over us.

Jesus' heart is a heart consumed with love for his people and that's emphasized when you go down to verse 10. Verse 10 we read, "Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven." You might ask what does that mean? Well, the point of the words is simply this: the little ones in Jesus' kingdom are so important to him that he has given the angels to serve as their companions and as their messengers and to labor for their spiritual well-being. These are the angels, beloved, holy, powerful creatures whom God has commissioned to labor for the spiritual well-being of these vulnerable ones. And the point Jesus is making is this: if even the holy mighty angels have been tasked with this calling to serve the salvation of the little ones in Christ's kingdom, well, then it certainly isn't beneath the disciples to be diligent in that same work that the angels are busy in.

The point is, Jesus is deeply committed to the care, protection and good of the little children in the church, and we better be on board with him and do everything in our

ability to further the good of Jesus' little children or we will stand exposed to his wrath and what will be that punishment? What will be that punishment? Jesus says it were better for him that a millstone be hanged about his neck and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea. Well, the millstone that Jesus is talking about here is literally the mule stone. This is the millstone, that big, heavy stone that was pulled by the mule or the donkey. Children, you remember Samson when he was captured by the Philistines and his eyes were plucked out and the Philistines tied him to a millstone and forced him to grind the grain in the mill. This was a huge stone. It took a beast to pull this stone. As it rolled on the ground it weighed tons. And Jesus says to his disciples, imagine having that stone tied around your neck and then imagine having someone take you out on a ship into the middle of the Mediterranean Sea and dropping you overboard with that stone tied about your neck. The point is not only are you going to drown, but there is no coming back either, and Jesus says it were better, dying like this would be better for you than if you offend one of my little ones.

And we need to remember too drowning was a sign of judgment. Drowning was a death the people feared. It was a horrible way to die. Jesus says you would be better off dead with the worst kind of death imaginable than to offend one of my little ones because what is the punishment for offending one of Jesus' little ones? Nothing less than the wrath of Jesus himself, being cast into hell. And there is no language on earth that can adequately describe and capture the reality of the horrors of hell. And of course, the point is this is how offensive this sin is to Jesus. This is the kind of punishment befitting this sin.

Congregation, just imagine the disciples as they listened to these words. What a word of warning. "Let it be understood, my disciples, you want to be great in the kingdom of heaven? Receive my little ones. Do them good and do not cause them to stumble, but serve them, protect them, care for them." What a word of warning for us, beloved, what a word of warning, what a word for the office bearers. "Take care of the vulnerable. Do what you can to protect them." What a word for the parents. What a word for the men in church. What a word for all of us. We might even be inclined to say who is sufficient for these things, not just to preach the gospel, but who is even sufficient to interact with the vulnerable in the church? How careful we must be. But then we also remember God equips us with his Holy Spirit. He gives us the grace to do what he calls us to do. He gives his grace and his Spirit to those who, with continual sighs, ask them of him and are thankful for them. He equips us and he equips us in such a way that it's Christ that is seen even in that care for the vulnerable so that he receives the glory.

Then we also need to hear this: there is forgiveness for those in Jesus Christ who have been guilty of this sin with true repentance and confession of sin, there is forgiveness found in the blood of Jesus Christ. Oh, your sins don't go unpunished. They still deserve hell. But this is the mercy of your Lord and your God, that for all who believe in him, they find Jesus as the substitute who had that stone hung around his neck, and who, so to speak, was drowned in the depths of the sea and who bore the punishment they deserved, who himself descended not just into the depths of the sea, but who descended into hell itself, and who endured the unspeakable agonies of hell in their place, in order that Jesus

might save even the lowliest sinner from the guilt and shame of his sins. That message needs to be heard too.

Think of the Apostle Paul who, when he was Saul before his conversion, went about persecuting the church. How offensive was his behavior to God's precious people? That's why Paul says he was the chief of sinners. Look at how offensive his behavior was but there's mercy even for Paul. And if there's mercy for Paul, well, that's an example that there's also mercy for all who call on the name of Jesus Christ.

And then finally, there's also this, maybe there are some believers in our midst this evening who have been offended, who have been scandalized and who have stumbled because of the sin of others and how those sins affected them, maybe there are little ones in our midst today who have stumbled, who've been tempted into sin and maybe now they're even struggling, maybe they're even struggling with their faith and who is Jesus. Maybe you feel like you've done the worst sin that you can do because you've stumbled, and maybe you know that, well, others have caused me to stumble, but you also know that this sin I've committed is a sin I've committed. Know this, child of God: you are the precious possession of your Savior, Jesus Christ and in his blood there is forgiveness certainly for the sins you've committed too. The same blood that washes away the sins of Paul and others is the same blood that is also powerful to wash away all your sins.

And by the end of the sermon this evening, what you should understand, little one, is that Jesus cares for you. He cares for you. He will do you good. He will bless you. This is the heart of your Savior and he will turn all things out to your advantage. You're the little one about whom Jesus is speaking in this passage. And then we can apply this to all of us who have become as little children and who humbly just trust in Jesus Christ and who are seeking after him, walking in his ways. We are all the little ones if we are in Christ.

And this is Jesus' heart to all of us tonight. This is the gospel. This is what we take home with us tonight. This is the love of my Savior for me as lowly and as little as I am, Jesus is jealous over me. He has a heart that is jealous for me and I certainly am vulnerable in this culture, against my own sinful nature, against the world, against the devil. Jesus is jealous over me. Yes, it must needs come. It must needs be that offenses come and God will use offenses. They are part of his decree. Woe unto those by whom those offenses come but God will even use those offenses in his sovereignty to lead his precious little ones to himself. And if they go astray, he does go out and he seeks the lost and he brings them back because that's the heart of our Savior, the heart of a shepherd.

What's our calling? Even as we bask in this comforting truth, what is our calling as we go home? Our calling is to remain as little children. Our calling is to become as a little child. That was the calling of the disciples. Humble yourself as a little child and rest yourself in the love of your Jesus. Trust in him. Trust in him. He will take care of you. His heart is safe. He is jealous over you. This is the heart of your Savior. Amen.

Let us pray.

Our Father, we thank thee for such an amazing Savior, such a perfect Savior in every way. Cause us to see more of Jesus, to know him. And Lord, where it is needed soften our hearts that we might receive this expression of love of our Savior for his little ones, and we might trust him when we hear of his love for his people. Give us all to be as little children, Lord, to trust in him and we pray that in that way his Fatherly care and his awesome goodness might shine as the one who is faithful to those who put their trust in him. In Jesus' name we pray.