

A Heart for the Vulnerable

Glimpses Into The Heart of Jesus

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We turn in sacred scripture to Matthew 18, again, Matthew 18. This afternoon we read the first 14 verses of Matthew 18 and the text will be verse 6. Matthew 18. This is the word of the Lord.

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

Meaning, "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 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, "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." Beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, the words of the text for this evening contains some of the harshest, most severe and most pointed words of warning that come from the mouth of our Savior. In fact, it is precisely because of how severe this warning is that we all know about this verse, don't we? We're all familiar with this language. We all know this is in the Bible precisely because when you read the text, the warning that Jesus gives here makes a lasting impression on the mind and that's exactly how Jesus intended it.

What's striking is that even as stern as these words are, the words themselves are built on another warning that Jesus gives back in verse 3, another warning, which is itself a bone-chilling warning Jesus gives 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." Now our focus this evening is not going to be on verse 3, but we should see and understand the connection between these verses. The passage starts out by telling us that the disciples were arguing amongst themselves over who was the greatest in the kingdom of heaven, and Jesus, hearing that kind of arrogant talk, responds with a severe word of warning. He calls a little child to come to him, and then Jesus turns to his disciples and he says, "Except ye be converted, except you change, except you change your attitude and you change your behavior and you become as a little child like this little child right here, you, my disciples, shall not enter 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. Except you change completely, you will not even enter my kingdom, let alone be among the great in my kingdom." And then on the heels of those words, with this little child stone his mind, Jesus goes further and says, "And pay attention to this, for this is intimately related, whosoever of you shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better that a millstone be hanged about his neck and that he be drowned in the midst of the sea." And that should have made the hair on the back of the disciples' neck stand up on end.

And then after a few more warnings in which he tells his disciples that if need be cut off your hand, cut off your foot, pluck out your eye in order to avoid falling into sin, and that needs to be understood the right way, but Jesus says in verse 10 again, "Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones." The point is, in the whole passage Jesus is passionately concerned about the well-being of his lowly people, his lowly people who humbly trust in him. Jesus says, "You disciples want to be great in my kingdom? I tell you this, my eye is on the lowly, my eye is on the weak, my eye is on those who have no pride, who know they are nothing, who have no arrogance but who humble themselves before me, who cling to me with perfect hope and love and expectation. These little ones, my little ones, are deeply precious to me." And Jesus says, "I have a special place in my heart for what you disciples might refer to as the least of the sheep. Those who are the lost, the one that's gone astray, those who are weak, those who are immature, those who are simple, those who are vulnerable, those whom you would judge to be inferior, those

whom you would be in a position to take advantage of if you wanted to, they are the ones 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 anybody 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 or your negligence of them."

Well congregation, what we have in this entire passage is another glimpse into the heart of our Savior, a heart we see in the passage this evening that beats passionately, a heart that beats passionately for the vulnerable and for the weak, the little ones in his flock. We takes our theme this afternoon "A Heart for the Vulnerable," the little ones. We take it and we 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 then third, the punishment for this sin.

The text begins by using that language, "whoso shall offend one of these little ones." We need to explore that language. What does that mean? Well, the word "offend" here in verse 6 in the original is actually the word from which we get the word "scandal." Really, we could say "whosoever shall scandalize one of these little ones." 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 shock and outrage in the community. I think we understand what a scandal is. In the Bible, however, this word "scandal," the word "offense," has a slightly different emphasis. The word that Jesus uses, "skandalon," really means this, "to influence someone to sin; to tempt someone to sin." So used as a noun on offense is something that is apt to make someone sin, or maybe understood a little differently, an offense is something that comes between the child of God and his Savior Jesus Christ, as a kind of barrier preventing that person from coming to his Savior Jesus Christ and enjoying him. By the way, you talk by the way you act, you influence or tempt another person to sin and to stumble.

Really many translations, if you would look at other translations, they translate the word this way, "to cause to stumble, whosoever shall offend, whosoever shall cause one of these little ones to stumble, it were better that a millstone be hanged about his neck and that he be drowned in the midst of the sea, in the depths of the sea." The idea, of course, is to cause someone to stumble into sin either so that they become trapped and ensnared in sin and they lose their way, they go astray like that one sheep, or so that they become offended at the gospel or they become offended at the hypocrisy of God's people, and for that reason too, they turn from the right way and they begin walking in the paths of sin, either for a moment or for a season, or maybe they are so offended that they turn away from the gospel altogether. That's what it means to offend. It means to put a stumbling block in the way of someone so that they are hindered from right thinking and they fall into sin.

Now in the Bible we find this language frequently. In Matthew 18 we find it once in verse 6, the text, we find it three times in verse 7, we find it once in verse 8 and once more in verse 9. It's the same word skandalon. Our own bodies, our own hands and our

eyes can be an offense to us, leading us, causing us to stumble into sin. That's the reality of our sinful natures. Well, another passage is Matthew 16, verse 23. In Matthew 16:23, the context there Jesus is telling his disciples about the sufferings he must endure, and Peter responds, you remember, by saying, "Far be it from thee, Lord. This must not happen." And in Matthew 16:23, 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." So in that passage Peter is offending Jesus, not that Peter actually caused Jesus to stumble into sin, but the idea is that Peter, what he said was used by Satan to tempt Jesus or to influence 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 into sin.

So sometimes an offense is given but a person does not actually fall into sin, but an offense is still given, and sometimes the opposite happens, sometimes an offense is taken where no true offense was given. That is maybe a person says something that is right and proper but then someone else takes it the wrong way; they take it as an offense and they use it to walk in sin as an excuse to stumble and fall into sin, and that happens sometimes too. So just the word itself, 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," and now the question is what does Jesus mean by that language, "these little ones"? Well, perhaps we think immediately about the children in the church, and that's certainly appropriate, especially from the context, Jesus has a little child in his midst, but there's more here that we need to understand. There's more in the passage. On the one hand, what we should understand is that when Jesus uses that language, "one of these little ones," he's really talking about all his people, all his true children, because in a sense all of God's people have become as little children. All God's people resemble little children in the sense that we have a childlike faith. That's how we enter the kingdom. We let go of everything else and we trust entirely in Christ as our complete Savior and we rest in his certain promises. Yet, with that being said, on the other hand, we should understand that that language, "little ones," especially refers to those among God's people whom we might be inclined to judge as the lesser of God's people. That would include maybe little children of the church who are childish, who need to be catechized, who need to grow. This would include those who are newly converted who are yet young in their Christian life and who need guidance and instruction. They are uneducated perhaps, they are impressionable and they are vulnerable, and they are trusting and they are those who could easily be taken advantage of by those who would want to take advantage of them. These "little ones" would also include those who are hurting, those who need counseling and maybe they call up a friend or an elder or the pastor for help and encouragement and they are vulnerable because they are hurting. This would include the poor and the needy and the lonely, those who are emotionally vulnerable and spiritually vulnerable. This would include those who are victims or survivors of horrible things done to them.

All these kinds of people would fall under that category of "little ones" and what Jesus is emphasizing is that he has a deep care 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 that,

notice who it is to whom Jesus speaks, he's talking to his disciples. He's talking to those who are in positions of authority. He's speaking to the strong, we might even say to the prestigious, those who could use their position and use their skill and their gifts against weaker members in the church. Jesus is speaking here in the passage to officebearers. He's speaking to teachers. He's speaking to the men in the congregation. He's speaking to those who have a position of authority. He's speaking to those who, because of their position of authority, might be tempted to become insensitive to the needs of those who are under authority. He's speaking to those who would have the power and the skill and education and influence to take advantage of the vulnerable, hurt them, use them and abuse them and control them if they wanted to.

And to these disciples, Jesus gives the strongest of warnings, "But whoso shall offend one of these little ones, one of these little children, the weak and vulnerable members of my church, one of the members that you, you who think you are great in the kingdom, you who might be inclined to judge as inferior to yourself, you who might even be inclined to judge as inconvenient," remember how the disciples even tried to shoo those parents away who wanted to bring their children to Jesus to be blessed by him and said, "Shoo, shoo, we don't have time for you." "Whosoever shall offend one of these little ones, a person you might judge to be simply a wimp, and they need to just move on with life and be as tough as you are or as strong in their faith as you are in yours, whosoever shall offend, shall cause to stumble or get between one of these little ones and me, so that they turn in the path of sin, 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 Jesus says this to his very own disciples, because, again, that was the temptation they were facing with all of their airs of superiority, "Which one of us is the greatest in the kingdom?" And Jesus says, "With all that pride and all that arrogance, you are going to hurt my people." Jesus says, "You better be careful."

So that's the meaning of these words. Now the question we need to ask is this, this is the sin: how is this sin committed? Where is this sin committed today? Are we guilty of this sin? Well, there are a few obvious ways in which this sin is committed today. First, think of false teachers. Think of ministers who are teaching false doctrine in the catechism class, taking advantage of the young minds of the young people. Think of those ministers who, instead of feeding the flock, are fleecing the flock for their own gain so that with their skill and education and reputation and position, they take advantage of the people, they manipulate the people, they push others down in order to assert themselves, maybe they even give condescending facial expressions towards others so that others might look stupid and they look smart, and they're doing everything for themselves and their own advancement. That's what Jesus is talking about here. Think of the college professor perhaps particularly in the Christian College teaching his students that evolutionism is true, the Bible is just like any other book written by man, teaching his students that they ought to approve the gross and offensive sins they see in the culture around them. That's bringing an offense before God's people, that's influencing God's little ones to walk in sin. That's the sin of standing in between the bright young minds, although perhaps impressionable, naive young minds of the college students and Jesus Christ. It were better for that professor that a millstone be hanged about his neck and that he be drowned in the

depth of the sea. There will be a special place in hell for all those ministers, officebearers, professors and teachers and leaders who ridiculed the Christian faith and destroyed the faith of the little ones who sat under their instruction.

Think of this. Think of child abuse. Think of child sexual abuse. In fact, think of all kinds of abuse. This is really what abuse is, someone who's misusing someone who is weaker, someone with power misusing someone who is weaker. That's really what Jesus is addressing in the text, the sin of abuse. But think for a moment 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. We know it's a reality. Men and women preying on children in sexual ways, it's an offense. It is an offense, beloved. For the children, it profoundly affects them. It affects their relationship with God. It changes their souls. Some children, by God's amazing grace, learn to live with the damage and honor the Lord through it, but others simply walk away from the church and the Christian faith. What a stumbling block for a covenant child to have to work through these things. Sometimes the church even tries to protect the perpetrators. Sometimes it's even the officebearers in the church who commit these gross sins. I tell you, for those who offend the children of Jesus Christ in this way, except it be for the unspeakable grace and mercy of God and true repentance, it were better for that perpetrator that a millstone be hanged about his neck, and that he be drowned in the depth of the sea. And how is the Lord going to judge the people who are privy to these things happening and they don't stand up to protect the vulnerable and stand against the oppressor? His wrath falls on them also. And then we need to apply this to ourselves and ask when we have opportunity to protect and safeguard the vulnerable and we neglect that opportunity and that calling, is that reflecting the heart of Jesus as it's expressed in this passage?

Don't just think of childhood sexual abuse, think of other forms of abuse. Think of a husband badgering and harassing and intimidating his wife, murdering his wife with words, or maybe murdering her with the silent treatment, whatever it may be. That is sin against one of Jesus' little ones, a precious wife who is vulnerable in her position as a wife under authority. Here is a husband who is called in his position of authority to honor his wife and instead he's dishonoring his wife, he's quenching the spirit in her, he's provoking her to wrath, and he's destroying her soul and he's doing it as one who as the heirs in the church of doing it reflecting Jesus Christ to her. That's an offense, beloved. That causes a woman to stumble. And in addition, that's not just sin against his wife, that's also setting an entire atmosphere in the home that is destructive, and that will be a stumbling block to the children living in that home.

When you think about abuse cases, don't just think there's a marriage at stake, don't just think, "Oh, we need to preserve this marriage. This marriage is the be-all and end-all." No, we need to understand there are souls involved here, the soul of the wife, the soul of the children, the soul of the perpetrator, for that matter. And like we heard this morning, if you don't deal with the sin honestly, if you don't deal with it properly before the face of Jesus Christ, certainly the wife and the 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 and they are expecting those in positions of power and authority to do

what is proper. And when leaders ignore their pleas for help and they only want to act in a way that saves face, that saves reputations, maybe their own reputation, that causes the little ones of Jesus to stumble. Those little ones of Jesus ask themselves, "Is this who Jesus is? Is this what Jesus stands for?" And it's an offense.

Think of those who are hurting or wounded and they need counseling, and they come to that position in authority for help and they get taken advantage of. What an offense. That is an offense.

Think of a young man out on a date with a young woman and the young man takes advantage of a young woman and he forces her to do something she doesn't want to do, and he so manipulates her, he so charms her with his words, or he overpowers her, that he simply does what he wants with her. That's an offense, beloved. She asks herself, "Is this what a godly man looks like? Is this who the men are in the church? Is this what Jesus stands for?" I tell you, young men, it were better for that young man to have a millstone hanged around his neck and he be drowned in the depths of the sea than that he do something like what I just described. You're offending one of Jesus' little ones.

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, that utterly contradicts what they bring their children to hear off the pulpit week after week. That gives offense to the children and to the young people and the young adults, parents who say amen to the words of the preacher and yet it doesn't have any impact whatsoever on their life. Maybe the children are even listening to this very sermon this evening and they're expecting their parents to be impacted by it. So maybe the parents go home and talk with their children about the sermon and how maybe they as parents need to do better at certain things, and yet these things never happen and the children see right through their parents, and how often doesn't it cause these children to stumble and lose their way in their Christian walk? Think of parents who simply don't know how to apologize to their children. They've never apologized. They don't know how to apologize to their children because that's just too humbling for them.

That's a cause for stumbling. It is. But maybe I should be applying this to myself. Here I am preaching this sermon, maybe it sounds nice, but are my actions as a pastor going to match up with what I'm preaching? Am I as a pastor going to truly have a heart for the vulnerable, the heart of Christ? Or am I simply going to do what is easy and convenient for me or what's popular, what people are happy with? Maybe my own wife and children are listening to the sermon. Maybe the vulnerable member in church is listening to this sermon and I don't even know them right now, and the question is, is this just talk or is this coming from the heart? Are my actions going to be consistent with what I'm preaching? Am I going to care for the vulnerable and do what I can do for their protection?

You see, I need to hear this kind of a word too. It's talking to me and just like the disciples needed to hear it, we all need to hear it, don't we? Oh congregation, may the Lord help us all, may the Lord help us all in having more and more this heart of Jesus

Christ, having that true compassion for the weak, being 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 anyone else, as if I already know, yes, I am one of the greater ones in the kingdom and you're one of the lesser ones and if only you were more like me and have my faith and my attitude, you would be better off. That's an offense. That is an offense. Can you imagine being young in the faith and coming to a church that has that kind of an attitude? Here I am looking for Jesus and I see Pharisees all around me. That's offensive. Beloved, may the Lord help us all to be humble and truly have this kind of heart of Jesus. And if you are in a position of leadership and authority, men, parents, officebearers, pastor, then you'd better be on your knees praying for mercy, praying for mercy and for grace to handle this position God has given you in a way that honors the King, that honors the heart of King Jesus.

But I need to add more. There are so many examples we could give, let me give one more example. Think of children bullying each other in the schoolyard. That's an application here too. How devastating bullying can be to a child. It makes them stumble into all kinds of devastating and in all kinds of devastating and unseen ways. Children, young people, these words this evening are not just for your parents, these words are for you. Jesus calls you to be kind, to be caring, to do good to your fellow classmates. Show Christ even in the classroom. It begins when you're young. And Jesus warns you this evening, don't bully your classmate especially those of you who might think you are stronger or smarter or more popular or more beautiful. Be careful. Be careful on how you interact with those who are weaker than you. You tyrannize and you mock and taunt your classmate and Jesus says, "You'd better be careful what you are doing because what you are doing to the least of these you're doing unto me."

Jesus says, "Whoso 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." This is a serious matter, isn't it? In fact, it's a matter of utmost seriousness. Notice the language Jesus uses, "But whoso shall offend one of these little ones," not a whole bunch, but just one, just one. "If you offend just of one of my little lambs my wrath will fall upon you." That's the implication. Jesus is dead serious.

Well, why is this such a serious matter? First of all, these little ones are God's children. They are Jesus' little ones. He says that in verse 5, "And whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me." Jesus says, "This little one and me, we are one. What you do to this little one you're doing unto me." And I think we understand that. Parents have a jealousy over their children, a right and godly jealousy, so that if parents see their children being mistreated by another person, especially by an adult, one who is in power, one who is mature, that parent is going to step in pretty quickly. I think parents can understand this 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 the Lord, encouraging them to obey their parents and all those good things, then then you and I are

going to get along just fine. But if you influence my child for evil, we're going to have problems.

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. I died on the cross for this little one. I endured the unspeakable agonies of hell for this little one. This little one is my friend, for whom I lay down my life. I care for this sheep, this lamb. This sheep is the apple of my eye." Jesus is like that poor man, remember that parable that Nathan gave to David, that poor man who only had that one sheep. That's how Jesus views all of his people individually. They are precious to him. And if Jesus, so to speak, finds out that you were the one who caused that sheep to go astray, that incurs his wrath, and it were better for you that a millstone be hanged about your neck and that you be drowned in the depth of the sea."

You see, it's impossible to separate Jesus from his people. As Jesus says in Matthew 25:40, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me." He's not just talking about children there, he's talking about my brothers and my sisters. And that's true for all of us, beloved, who belong to Jesus Christ. That's the jealousy of your Savior for you. That's the comfort that your Savior is that jealous over you and now that affects us as we live in the church. We deal as gently with each other as we can because we're all the little ones of God and God is very jealous over us.

Jesus' heart is a heart consumed with love for his people. This is emphasized down in verse 10. Verse 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." Well, what does that mean? Well, the point of that verse is simply this: the little ones in Jesus' kingdom are so important to him that Jesus has given his angels the commission to serve as their messengers and their companions, really their servants to labor for their spiritual well-being." Angels, holy awesome creatures whom God has commissioned to labor on behalf of his little ones. And the point is if even the holy angels, awesome in power, able to do so much, if even the holy angels are given this kind of calling to serve the salvation of the little ones in Christ's kingdom, well then certainly it isn't beneath the disciples to be diligent in that same work that the angels themselves are occupied in. The point is, Jesus is deeply committed to the care and protection and the good of the little children in church and we better be on board with him and do everything in our ability to further the good of Jesus' little children or his wrath comes upon us.

And what will that punishment be? Jesus says, "it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck and that he'd be drowned in the in the depth of the sea." That's the punishment. And the millstone that Jesus talks about here is literally the mule stone. That's the millstone that was pulled by the donkey. The donkey was in the mill and he had to pull that stone as it rolled so that it would grind the grain as the donkey moved in a circle like that. Remember when Samson was captured by the Philistines and his eyes were plucked out and they tied him up to that millstone, and that's how he spent his days walking around grinding the grain? A huge beast had to pull this stone. It weighed tons. It

weighed tons, literally. And Jesus says imagine having that huge stone wrapped around your neck with a rope, then imagine someone taking you out on a ship to the middle of the Mediterranean Sea and dropping you, rolling that stone overboard and dropping you into the Mediterranean Sea tied to that stone. The point is not only are you going to drown but there's no coming back either, and Jesus says it were better, Jesus says dying like that and drowning is a picture of judgment. I think we've covered that too. When you pass through the waters, drowning is a picture, to drown is a horrible way to die and Jesus says dying like this would be better for you than if you offend one of my little ones. 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, being cast into hell. That's the implication here 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.

Now, beloved, imagine being the disciples in Jesus' midst listening to Jesus talk. This is a word for them. "Let it be understood, my disciples, you want to be great in the kingdom of heaven? Receive my little ones and do them good. Do not cause them to stumble, but serve them and protect them and care for them." What a word for us, beloved, what a warning, what a word for the officebearers. Take care of the vulnerable. Do what you can to protect them and do them right. What a word for the parents, what a word for all of us. We might even say who is sufficient, who is sufficient even to interact with the vulnerable in the church? That should be our attitude. How careful we must be. And then we remember God also equips us with his Holy Spirit. He works the heart of Jesus in us so that we can do what we are called to do. He gives us his grace. He gives his grace and his Spirit to those who with sincere desire continually ask them of him and are thankful to him for them.

And then we also need to hear this: there is forgiveness for those in Jesus Christ who have been guilty of this sin. You know it is an offensive sin. It is offensive. Those who are guilty of this sin with true repentance and confession of sin, there is forgiveness found in the blood of Jesus Christ. That is the amazing grace of your Savior and your God. Oh, your sins don't go unpunished, they still deserve hell but this is the mercy of Jesus, your Savior. Now for all who believe in him, they find him as their substitute who bore those punishments that they deserved, who himself descended into hell, and endured those unspeakable agonies of hell in their place, so that Jesus might save even the lowliest sinner from the guilt and shame of his sins. Even an Apostle Paul who certainly was an offense to God's people when he was killing them and bringing them to prison. That message needs to be heard too, there is forgiveness in the amazing grace of our God and in the cross 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 you know what that means to be scandalized, you have stumbled because of the sins of others and how they have offended you, maybe there are little ones in our midst today who have stumbled, they've been tempted into sin and maybe even now are struggling, they're struggling

maybe even in their faith, maybe you look at what you've done and maybe you feel like you've done the worst that you can do it, and yes, we know that others have caused us to stumble, but we also know that this sin is the sin I've committed, and I'm accountable for the sins that I commit before the Lord. Child of God, know this: you are the precious possession of your Savior Jesus Christ and in his blood there is forgiveness for the sins you have committed too. The same blood that washes away the sins of a Saul who became Paul is the same blood that is also able to wash away your sins and that does wash away your sins. And by the end of the sermon this evening, what we should all understand, especially those who have been offended and scandalized, what we should understand is that Jesus cares for you. Jesus has a heart that is jealous for the vulnerable. He cares for you. He cares oh so much for you. He will do you good. He will bless you.

This is the heart of your Jesus and Jesus will in his infinite wisdom turn things to your advantage. You're the one about whom Jesus is speaking. Yes, verse 7 says, "it must needs be that offense has come," God has decreed offenses and God will use offenses, but God will even use these offenses in his sovereignty to lead his precious little ones to himself. This is the heart of Jesus for all of us who know ourselves to be the little one, to be that little one of childlike faith who only has Jesus as my hope, who only has Jesus as my Savior. I'm the little one and this is Jesus' jealousy for me, his little lamb.

And what is our calling as God's people? Our calling is simply to stay there, to remain as little children, remain as a little child, have that childlike faith, humble yourself as a little child and rest yourself in the love of your Savior and the love of God, your heavenly Father. He will take care of you. He is jealous over you. His heart is safe. Amen.

Let us pray.

Our Father, we thank thee for the jealousy we see in our Savior for the little ones in his flock. And we thank thee, Lord, that even though this is a stern word he spoke to his disciples, it's a word that's overflowing and oozing with love for us, thy people. Lord, we pray that we might see that love, that heart of Jesus, and we might enjoy it and rest in it. And we certainly pray, Lord, that for those in authority, for those who have that calling to lead, that they might do it with the heart of Jesus. And we pray that we might see the heart of Jesus in each other and exult thy saving grace. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.