

# Service Transcript 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2022

Welcome, Notices, Birthday Box

## What a God we worship!

Leader What a God we worship!

Group A He has always known us; he is our Maker.

*Group B He has always loved us; he is our Saviour.*

Group A In our darkest hours he is our light;

*Group B In our fiercest fight he is our shield.*

Group A When we need direction, he is our guide;

*Group B When our joy runs dry, he is our song.*

Group A At the point of despair, he is our hope;

Group B at the moment of danger, he is our refuge.

*Group A He is just and true, loving and merciful;*

*Group B He is Rock and Shepherd, King and Father.*

*All What a God we serve!*

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## Prayer - extempore

### 21 And can it be

As we have thought about the love and the grace that God has shown us in Christ, we continue in worship to the One who we love and adore because He has rescued us! To us He is amazing, glorious. We sing Beautiful One

### 1632 Beautiful One

## VIDEO Open Doors World Watch List

Prayers – extempore based on the following information and requests from Open Doors



- Open Doors World Watch List – 93 MPs attended the launch. New “No 1” in the hall of infamy – Afghanistan.
- The Middle East – prayer for Christians in Muslim majority countries whose freedoms and opportunities are limited and/or who fear violence and injustice.

Prayer for MRBC – *from weekly sheet – silent.*

## 1062 Now is the time

### Reading: Matthew 18:6-14

*At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, “Who, then, is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?”*

*2 He called a little child to him, and placed the child among them. 3 And he said: “Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. 4 Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. 5 And whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.*

*6 “If anyone causes one of these little ones—those who believe in me—to stumble, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea. 7 Woe to the world because of the things that cause people to stumble! Such things must come, but woe to the person through whom they come! 8 If your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life maimed or crippled than to have two hands or two feet and be thrown into eternal fire. 9 And if your eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into the fire of hell.*

*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.*

*12 “What do you think? If a man owns a hundred sheep, and one of them wanders away, will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hills and go to look for the one that wandered off? 13 And if he finds it, truly I tell you, he is happier about that one sheep than about the ninety-nine that did not wander off. 14 In the same way your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should perish.*

### Sermon: Concrete Boots

I can recall showing the Two Ronnies and Morcambe and Wise at this church over the years. But I don't think I've ever shown a clip of this double act.

VIDEO CLIP Laurel and Hardy

HUMAN SUBBUTEO

Yes, Laurel and Hardy being dealt with by some Mafia thugs who believe they had stolen some jewellery. They were suffering a punishment by the Mafia who dealt with those who had wronged them by giving them “cement shoes” or “concrete boots” and throwing them into the local river to drown. In this case the thugs were as incompetent as our heroes as the water wasn't deep enough to drown them!

## CONCRETE BOOTS

Cement shoes aren't just a Mafia thing; it was one of the methods of making people disappear during the Dirty War in Argentina during the late 70s and early 80s where the military government killed those who opposed it awful ways including drowning them with concrete blocks chained to them. You won't be surprised to know that the Romans (and the Greeks before them) tied millstones to victims and drowned them in deep water as a form of execution. And we find Jesus uses this picture of execution here in Matthew 18 verse 6.

## LITTLE CHILD

Last time we were on Matthew 18, we saw that greatness in God's eyes is becoming as a small child and have a complete trust in God and walk in humility in relation to others. The "little children" Jesus refers to the people of the kingdom, His people, Christians, us.

There is another aspect of childlikeness Jesus brings out of the picture of the small child – and that is a child's vulnerability. We protect our children from harm and as we have seen in our own society, it isn't a responsibility of just the parent, but the whole of society to ensure that children do not come to harm. And when we hear dramatic stories of abused children we say "where were the family, where were the neighbours, where were the authorities?" Sadly, each year we hear of horror cases don't we? Usually punishments are harsh for those who abuse children and quite rightly so.

And Jesus said as He talked about the little ones in His kingdom *If anyone causes one of these little ones—those who believe in me—to stumble, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea.*

Did Jesus really say that who cause those who follow Jesus to stumble in the faith should be executed? I hope not, because most of us are probably worthy of a pair of concrete shoes right now! That being said, in past centuries that was taken literally, and those who denied or opposed the teaching of the church were executed horrifically. It's extreme and not what Jesus meant.

This is an example of what is called hyperbole which was quite a common in those days as is now. If we want to make a point really strongly we use exaggeration to do so – that's hyperbole. "If I catch you doing that again, you'll be hung drawn and quartered." Really? Of course not – what it means is that if we do that again, we will be in deep, deep trouble. This is what Jesus does here. If we cause another believer to stumble, God takes a severe view when we do so – we deserve the harshest of punishments. Thankfully God is gracious as we know – but it doesn't mean He's soft. Jesus, in line with other NT writers tells us that a day of reckoning awaits all those who don't turn from their sin and find forgiveness. God takes rebellion against Him seriously.

So God takes a very dim view of those who cause His people to stumble and also says that in MATTHEW 18:7 *Woe to the world because of the things that cause people to stumble! Such things must come, but woe to the person through whom they come!*

Please understand this, when we do any actions that cause other believers to stumble, we dishonour God by doing so. We grieve Him deeply. There is even sterner warning for those of us who teach others in JAMES 3:1-2 *Not many of you should become teachers, my fellow believers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly. 2 We all stumble in many ways. Anyone who is never at fault in what they say is perfect, able to keep their whole body in check.*

That last sentence is a tongue in cheek piece of cynicism by James because none of us are perfect and James goes on to talk about being careful what we say, because that is usually what causes most damage and causes believers to stumble in the church and in life generally.

How many people do you know have been stumbed by what others have said? How often has it happened to you? How often have you stumbed someone? Probably more times than you thought you have!

In God's eyes, none of this is a trivial matter. To Him it is disobedience, you're double crossing Him to use a bit of Mafia speak, you are committing treason against the kingdom of God by damaging a fellow-believer! You deserve a pair of cement shoes as far as God is concerned. This is serious stuff! And if you think I'm OTT, then look at what Jesus says again MATTHEW 18:6 *If anyone causes one of these little ones—those who believe in me—to stumble, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea.* If any of us stumbles someone: that's all we are fit for – concrete shoes.

Furthermore, if we cause someone to stumble, it's because we are stumbling. What has shaped us that make us think that we can speak to someone how we please? What has caused us to pile our unforgiveness on someone? Why do we think we are so superior that we should judge someone? (*gap*) Because we have a problem. We have sin in our lives. It's like a contagious disease: when we stumble, we pass it on to someone else who then stumbles: (*gap*) who follows our example, who copies our unforgiveness, who shares our resentment, who copies our disobedience.

Think carefully about the example you set, about your lifestyle, your speech, your attitudes and values. Are they of Christ, or do they drag you down and you pass them on to others? Here's what Jesus said: *If your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life maimed or crippled than to have two hands or two feet and be thrown into eternal fire. And if your eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into the fire of hell.* It's another piece of hyperbole. If there is something that is stumbling you, if there is sin in your life, damaging your relationships (*gap*) then cut it out of your life, however painful, however costly. It is better to suffer loss now, than trash your own life and for that matter, someone else's.

Is there sin in our lives today, Jesus says, commands us – get rid of it. Now! Confess it! Deal with it! Whenever there is division in a church, with harsh words and hurt feelings, that moves like a cancer through the church. It's damaging and destructive and most people aren't often aware that what they are saying and doing is destructive? Such is the nature of sin. One stumbles, some more stumble many stumble. Church can turn into a spiritual car crash.

Why do people sin? Do they think that even though sin is bad, that they'll give it a try, like children who have their first smoke behind the bike shed? People sin, they disobey God because for whatever reason, they think that it is OK, (*gap*) that it is justified to disrespect someone we don't agree with because they are wrong, that we can call anyone anything they like because they are objectionable, (*gap*) that we don't need to forgive because someone doesn't deserve our forgiveness, (*gap*) we are "mature" and look down on someone, (*gap*) that we are well off so we are blessed of God and others aren't. It's all sin - how do I know? Because it is in the Bible – all this and more – stamped through all 66 books. How dare we think the divisiveness, injustice and hatred of this world is somehow normal in the kingdom of God! Sadly in the 2000 years since

Jesus uttered these words, nothing has changed. There wouldn't be the need for a Week of Prayer for Christian Unity if Christian people could graciously disagree. Christians stumble and stumble others – we sin and cause others to sin – and God doesn't shrug our behaviour off – it makes Him burn with anger – and He's on the lookout!

Here's verse 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. MATTHEW 18:10*

The Message puts it like this *“Watch that you don't treat a single one of these childlike believers arrogantly. You realize, don't you, that their personal angels are constantly in touch with my Father in heaven? Someone's watching you!*

There is an imperative here in this passage. Get your life right before God. Get your attitudes right towards others. WE ARE PRECIOUS TO GOD Why – because our God is passionate about all His children including those we may treat badly or despise. In fact, what we learn of true greatness in this passage is that greatness is defined by our protecting one another and particularly the weakest amongst us. I will deal with the parable of the lost sheep next time but it basically shows us that God has gone to great length to rescue both you and me and all His children. How dare we despise any of them, because we have sinned too and we've all been forgiven much.

Jesus calls for each of us to recognise who we are and what we are in Him. We need to come before Him in confession for the times in which we have hurt others whom God loves. We need to confess too our failures and how our actions drag others down with us.

We need to come before Him in repentance, confessing our sin and accept that we need, with the strength of the Holy Spirit to do what it takes to get that sin out of our lives

#### CONFESSION

Maybe you have already realised that there is someone you have hurt stumbled here in this church. You need to deal with that. You need to deal with the sin that gave birth to those attitudes and come before God and seek His forgiveness. Our God is the forgiving God – accept that forgiveness this morning because when we confess our sins, He will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

In the silence, let's bring our own confessions before Him.

Confession always leads to repentance. There is action we all need to take. We need to make peace with those we have stumbled, those we have sinned against. We need to make peace with those who have offended us too. We need to reach out with forgiveness. We're going to deal with that more thoroughly in a few weeks as we look down at the end of the chapter. Let's pray.

Lord Jesus,, as we recognise how our sin has damaged us and damages others, destroys relationships, give us strength by Your Spirit to be both forgiving and seek forgiveness, to have gracious hearts and actions and to willingly love one another as You have loved us as You commanded us, we ask this in Your name. Amen.

Let's close the service by calling on Jesus to truly reign in our hearts, controlling our thoughts, our attitudes, our aspirations our words, our actions.

**1498 Lord reign in me**

There has been a lot of challenge in our service this morning. If you need to pray with someone, take the opportunity to speak to someone you know and trust here today and pray together. Maybe you just need to speak to someone you know that you have strained or broken relationships with – it's time for grace forgiveness and love to enter into the equation. Let's share this blessing to one another as we close: *May the Lord shine on You.*

**May the Lord shine on you (Andy Rayner)**

## **FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION**

*Read Matthew 18:1-14*

1. What do you think *stumbling* entails in the life of believers? What sorts of things do we do to stumble another? In what ways have you been stumbled in the past.
2. Mark has assumed the “penalties” for stumbling others or not getting rid of those things in our lives which stumble us are hyperbole. Are they, and if they are what is Jesus trying to convey to us? What usually happens in churches where the actions of people discourage others?
3. What does this passage convey about God's attitude towards His “little ones”?