

Matthew 18:1-5 12/24/13 (Red Letters #18) **Letters of Humility**

Some 15 weeks ago we began a journey in this church to learn more about Jesus. People have been saying “I love Jesus, but not the church.” So we took the time to get to know Who Jesus really is – not from people’s opinions, not from commentators, not from theologians, not from the internet, but from the words of Jesus Himself, printed in many editions of the Bible, in **Red**, hence The Red Letters. It’s fitting to finish this series on Christmas, even for our guests who haven’t been part of it, because in order to properly celebrate the coming of Jesus into our world we have to know Who He really is, not what we feel about Him, and not the picture from either the secular culture

Slide: plastic Jesus pic

Or the Christian culture

Slide: Effeminate Jesus pic

but Who He actually is. And what better way to know Who He is than from what He actually said. And folks, as we have truly set aside the time to listen to Jesus, we have had our picture of Jesus expand and become bigger and bigger and bigger.

To just walk briefly through the series... in the **Red Letters** we found a Jesus who commands us to change, to admit where we’ve gone wrong and to be willing to give up those things.

Slide: Letters of Repentance.

But then also to be ready to receive the forgiveness Jesus won for us by taking the responsibility for our sins and being punished for them on the cross.

Slide: Letters of Forgiveness

In the Red Letters we found in Jesus “A man of truth, with nothing false about him.” (John 7:18)

Slide: Letters of Truth

Who also demanded that His disciples live by The Truth, instead of morphing and shaping the truth into our image.

In the Red Letters we met a Jesus who relentlessly invites us to believe in Him as The Way the Truth and the Life.

Slide: Letters of Invitation

And who also invites us to join in His mission of taking people off the road to hell and putting them on the road to heaven.

In the Red Letters we found that Jesus confronted the Holy Schmoes of the church with their hypocrisy.

Slide: Letters of Confrontation

And He also confronted all of us with our sin and our deep need for Him to be our Savior.

The Red Letters showed that Jesus was not at all interested in the status quo.

Slide: Letters that Rock the Boat

He was interested in people, and in what was necessary for them to give up so that they could embrace Him as their Lord and Savior.

In the Red Letters we had to deal with the fact that the Church isn’t always asking for your money...

Slide: Letters of Stewardship

But Jesus does when He tells us, “Where your money is there will your heart be also” and that “You cannot serve both God and money.”

Through Jesus'...

Slide: Letters of Discipleship

We found out that true Disciples of Christ lead a disciplined life; that we won't necessarily have it easy in this life and in fact, that we can expect to be hated by the world if we truly follow Him.

In the Red Letters we found that Jesus is not content to let us be pew potatoes, just casually following Him, like you might follow somebody on Twitter or Fakebook.

Slide: Letters of Mission.

But that a commitment to Christ means a commitment to be His witnesses, disciples who will disciple others.

Today it's become popular not to judge another person's beliefs or religion, but in the Red Letters we encounter a Jesus who declared that His way was the right way and everybody else was wrong.

Slide: Letters of Warning

And so He loved every human being enough to warn them against a real Satan and a real hell where people go when they reject Him and say "No" to Him in their lives.

In the Red Letters of Jesus we were comforted by

Slide: Letters of Faith

Slide: Letters of Hope

And by letters of His love for us.

Slide: Letters of Love

In the Red Letters we put an end to the silly notion that Jesus was just a wise teacher. Instead we know that in those "red letters", those words from Jesus, we are either reading...

Slide: Letters from God

Or letters from a lunatic, because there is no question that Jesus knew Himself to be God and claimed the authority and power of God.

At the same time Jesus did not come to establish His rule and authority in a physical way here on earth.

Slide: Letters of the Kingdom

But to rule in the hearts of men as He changes each of us individually and teaches us that we are citizens of a heavenly kingdom.

And in the Red Letters we heard Jesus tell us how to pray for that kingdom to come

Slide: Letters of Prayer

And to come through us.

Tomorrow we'll hear the beautiful letters of life and salvation.

Slide: Letters of Life and Salvation

That Jesus came into this world to bring to all who will believe in Him.

And so we've met a Jesus in the Red Letters who really is the King of the universe, with all the authority of heaven and on earth given to Him, very God of very God, being of one substance with God the Father, by whom all things were made, and yet through it all a God who came to His people with the utmost humility.

Slide: Letters of Humility

Who came into the world that way and who wants us to step out of the world in the same way...

You simply can't get any more humble than a baby.

Slide: Baby Jesus pic

And words will always fall short and be incapable of describing the awesome love for us in that act...just coming to us in that way. The King of Kings and the Lord of Lords was willing to be placed into the hands of men, helpless, needing to be fed and diapered. The Word of God incarnate was taught the alphabet, the One who made the universe and set the stars in place, learned how to be a carpenter, to hammer nails, to shape wood and stone. That's your God, that's how much He loves you – to be fully one of you and to be one with you. The Apostle Paul perhaps came the closest to describing the meaning of that first Christmas Eve and the coming of Christ and how we should respond to it.

Slide: “5 Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:

6 Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, 7 but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. 8 And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death— even death on a cross!

9 Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, 10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” (Philippians 2:5–11 NIV)

Beautiful! The Humility of Christ and His willingness to bear the responsibility for our sin in our place. And also the plain fact that either we find it within ourselves to humble ourselves and bend the knee to Christ, or one day we will **be humbled** and humiliated and **forced** to bend the knee...

And in response to all that glorious truth, we find the disciples coming to Jesus and asking:

Slide: “At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, ‘Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?’” (Matthew 18:1 NIV)

And I can just picture Jesus shaking His head almost in despair, as He gets ready to correct them yet another time – on this same issue. If you've been with us in the Red Letter series you've seen it, right?

Slide: “33 When he was in the house, he asked them, “What were you arguing about on the road?” 34 But they kept quiet because on the way they had argued about who was the greatest.” (Mark 9:33–34 NIV)

Slide: “35 Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him. “Teacher,” they said, “we want you to do for us whatever we ask.” 36 “What do you want me to do for you?” he asked. 37 They replied, “Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory.”” (Mark 10:36–37 NIV)

Slide: “An argument started among the disciples as to which of them would be the greatest.” (Luke 9:46 NIV)

Slide: “Also a dispute arose among them as to which of them was considered to be greatest.” (Luke 22:24 NIV)

Who cares?! Right? Apparently they did. They were so full of themselves... And they are so like us... or we are so like them. It's wonderful... It's wonderful folks! It's God shouting from heaven that we belong to Him. That there isn't some other category of **super-disciple** to which we could never hope to attain, but rather there are only typical self-centered sinners like us, who came to Jesus and believed in Him despite themselves, who came to embrace the Grace

of God and who received the Holy Spirit Who finally did give them the power to forget themselves and cling to Christ and to the mission of Christ...

To that end, look at the response of Jesus to the pride of the disciples:

Slide: “2 He called a little child and had him stand among them. 3 And he said: “I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. 4 Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. 5 And whoever welcomes a little child like this in my name welcomes me.” (Matthew 18:2–5 NIV)

Is there anything more natural than hearing Jesus take a little child into His arms? Is there anything more natural than hearing the disciples arguing about who is greatest? What a clash! But think about it: All our lives we seek to climb up out of our childhood and be recognized as adults in the room. And all our lives Jesus is asking us to reverse that process: to become like a little child in humility so that we can welcome a little child...

Let's do that together as we respond to Jesus' Letters of Humility with the song: “Away in a Manger.”