

The Greatest and the Best II

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[0 : 00] We're going to be looking at this passage from Matthew 18, a very interesting discussion about if your brother sins against you and binding and loosing. And I'm going to just take in also verses 19 through 20, those very famous verses again.

I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am in the midst of them. I want to ask you a bit about church. What is the first word that comes in your mind when you do think about church? There's some free association thinking here. Is it a negative feeling or a positive one?

What does that say about you? For many, it is a building. For others, it is a duty. Some think of the church as an institution in terms of hierarchy.

We talk about going to church, getting people to go to church, wondering why people don't go to church. And sometimes getting people to go to church seems to be the overpowering purpose of the church.

[1 : 05] What does church mean to you? What does it mean? Because if you look at this passage from Matthew chapter 18, Jesus is talking about qualities of his followers as they gather together.

What are some of the qualities, if you like, that mark the life of his followers and their relationships together? And at the heart of it all, he puts not a building, not a hierarchy, not an institution, but relationship.

Believers gather together in relationship to Jesus Christ, enjoying the presence of God the Father. And there you have church.

If you look at the passage, they've got three qualities. What it means for us to gather together as Jesus followers. The first is accountability. The second, authority. And the third, access.

First, accountability. This is verses 15 to 17. If your brother sins against you, go to him and tell him his fault between you and him alone.

[2 : 11] Now here you see Jesus setting up a process, a way for dealing with sin amongst Christian brothers and sisters. He's talking, he uses the word brother, he's talking within the Christian body here, amongst his followers.

Amongst Christians. What happens if your brother or sister sins? Sins against you. He's setting up something that's scriptural, that comes from the Old Testament.

This kind of process, having witnesses and confrontation happen in the temple. But here he makes it quite different. He brings it into the Christian sphere.

Puts this amongst his followers. And makes it very relational. If you look at this, you'll see it's relational before it's ever institutional. The way he gives of dealing with sin.

You go and you privately talk to the person who has sinned or who has sinned against you. And then he sends, if that person listens to you, you have gained your brother.

[3 : 15] But then if that brother refuses, you take one or two witnesses so there can be agreement. If he refuses to listen, take it to the assembly, the church gathered together.

And then if he refuses to listen and repent, then you break relations with that person. And what this shows is that Jesus understood that the gathering of his followers was not a fellowship of the perfect.

And that is a tension that has beset the church throughout the ages. Are we a gathering of the perfect or not? And this is not about perfection. This is not about pointing the finger at people. But it is about relationship. And it is about Christians being in relationship to one another. A relationship that is marked by accountability.

And the purpose of this is not to condemn people, but to win people. To bring people back into the fellowship with Jesus Christ. When I read these verses, I immediately thought, you know, Jesus knew a thing or two about human nature.

[4 : 21] Because in any community or gathering of human beings, what is the first thing that someone does when somebody else sins or falls out or does something wrong? What's the first thing you do?

You get on the phone and tell someone else. That's the first thing. If person A and person B has a big fight, person B will tell person C and person A will tell person D.

Before you know it, people are lining up, taking sides and not talking to one another. It reminds me of one of my family reunions. My sister would tell my mother something in deepest confidence, which my mother would tell me in deepest confidence.

And then I would go back and tell my sister I knew in deep confidence. Before you know it, you're going around in circles and no one knows anything because it's all in confidence. And that kind of thing happens in all sorts of human associations.

But do you know what's wrong with that? Can you see? It fails to deal with sin. And it breaks relationship. You see, if David sins against me, and instead of dealing with that with David, I go and tell my fellow minister Felix that not only have I not helped David deal with his sin, I have sinned by gossiping to Felix.

[5 : 34] And we've damaged our relationships. I brought sin into our fellowship. And that is not the kind of body Christians are meant to form.

That is not the kind of body the church is meant to be. We are all brothers and sisters in Jesus. We exist in relationship to one another and to Jesus.

And so if we are the followers of Jesus and live in his kingdom, then that has to work out in our lives every day and in our relationships. And do you see the kind of community Jesus is setting out here? It is a community of people who hold one another accountable for their lives, accountable for the sin in their lives. It is a community of people who go after one another when someone sins.

And it is a community of people who want to give each other the opportunity to repent. The purpose of this is to win our brothers and sisters, not to condemn them.

[6 : 36] And that is one of the ways the church is meant to deal with sin. Because if we are followers of Jesus, if we are living in the kingdom of God, then we need to be a community that deals effectively with sin.

And we do that in a way that is relational, caring, but real. And remember what we've been looking at as we've been going through Matthew's gospel over these last weeks. Jesus defined his mission as repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

Jesus understood that his mission culminated on the cross with his death and resurrection. Jesus understood that his death on the cross was intended to provide forgiveness of sins.

This is my blood, which is poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. So that means Jesus provided a way to deal effectively with sin. We saw also last week that God cares deeply about each and every single person who believes in Jesus.

And that God desires very much that none should be lost, that none should be tempted into sin. Because sin leads to damnation, whereas faith in Jesus Christ leads to eternal life.

[7 : 48] So now that care that God has for each and every single soul who believes in Jesus, his care that none should be lost, that's worked out here in our lives, in our relationships.

We need to be a community that deals effectively with sin. We must not tolerate it. We must not close our eyes to it. We cannot ignore it. We have to deal with it. And we do it by holding each other accountable, by offering each other opportunities to repent, by reaching out.

We want to win one another. Remember when Jesus taught about taking the log out of your own eye first? He says you take the log out of your own eye and then take the speck out of your brother or sister's eye.

See, he doesn't say just deal with your own sin. We have to deal with one another's sin. And that is the quality of relationship we need to have amongst ourselves. The mark of a Christian community is not condemnation and finger-waving, pointing out other people's problems because we're so perfect.

We're not. We're all sinners and we all need correction. But nor is it simple friendliness. Because if we are busy being friendly towards one another and affirming one another and supporting one

another, that's good.

[9 : 11] But we're not doing anything different from any other human association. Our relationships as brothers and sisters in Jesus need to have that quality of character, of accountability.

And I just wonder in your own life, is there a Christian brother or sister to whom you are accountable for sin? You're for your inner life. For the things you say and the things you do. I'm thinking I need to set that up in my own life.

Someone to whom I can confess. We have to have accountability in our lives over sin. But second, we've also got authority. This is verse 18.

He talks about binding on earth, being bound in heaven. Whatever you loose on earth, you loose in heaven. And you see Jesus giving an authority. The same authority he gave to Peter in chapter 16. And now he gives it to all of his followers, to the church. Binding and loosing. It's interesting to note here that in so handing over this authority, Jesus makes no mention of hierarchy or liturgy or anything else like that.

[10 : 20] He is handing over authority over sin. Over binding and loosing. And this follows on from the previous two verses in dealing with sin.

And it's very challenging. Because it means that we have the authority and also the duty to name sin. But at the same time to proclaim forgiveness.

We have sometimes to tell people that what they are doing is sinful. We have sometimes to tell people that if they persist in what they are doing, they are going to go to hell. It's our duty.

But it's also our joy that when someone repents, to welcome them back into the fellowship of Christ's followers. Remember, as I said in the passage last week, Jesus' great concern is that people believe in him should not be led back into sin.

And he offered a choice between two paths. You engage with sin and that becomes your character. It leads to eternal punishment. Deal with sin effectively. It leads to eternal life. Now, here Jesus is talking about relationships within the church amongst his followers.

[11 : 27] This is about what happens when someone who is a believer falls into sin. Now, when someone confesses Christ and becomes a Christian, that person joins the kingdom of God.

The kingdom of God becomes the framework within which they live their lives. And that is a wonderful thing. And that means we all have a job to do, to share with one another our lives. To tell people what the Bible says about God and Jesus, about what God's expectations are and how he wants us to live our lives. How he relates to us. How he saves us. And it takes time. It takes time for people to get to know Jesus for themselves. To learn the Bible. And so to attune their lives to Jesus. All of us are learning that. So the authority we have here is not meant to be used judgmentally.

And again, it's not about just pointing our fingers at people. We're not a community of the perfected. We are a community of sinners who have been redeemed by Jesus Christ.

[12 : 29] And that means that the kingdom of God is now the framework in which we live our lives. And so when someone steps out of that framework, when someone is tempted into sin, we've got to tell them.

We have to tell them this is sinful. This is leading you away. But do you see the nature and the order of authority over sin? It is spiritual.

It comes from Jesus. And it is delegated to us. It doesn't go through a hierarchy. It comes from Jesus. And it is delegated to us. And this purpose is that people might be warned and might be saved.

Because what many people want today in the church is not salvation, but acceptance. People want the institutional church to accept them and embrace them. And really what they want is for God to accept them.

But real authority over sin doesn't reside in structures or hierarchy. It resides in us. In you and me and our relationship together with Jesus Christ.

[13 : 36] And its purpose is to welcome repentant sinners like ourselves into the community of the church. And only, if absolutely necessary, to hand over the unrepentant sinner to Satan.

But you see, this is an authority that comes from Jesus and resides in Jesus. No institution or hierarchy or anyone has any authority to change the way God understands sin.

For if we in our greater wisdom today decide that something God has called sin is no longer sin, we're lying. We do not have the authority to do that. What we do have is the privilege and the joy of

telling people about Jesus Christ.

Of offering them salvation. Of helping offer them the chance to repent. That's the authority Jesus gives us. And to declare the repentant sinner forgiven.

It's our authority. Finally, we have access. And that's this wonderful verse, verses 19 and 20. If two of you agree on earth about anything you ask for it, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven.

[14:50] For where two or three come together in my name, there I am with them. We have dealt with sin in the previous verses. And now we get on with this wonderful business of living a Christian life.

Because when you become a Christian, Jesus deals with sin in your life. He forgives you and redeems you. And then we have to get on with the job and the wonderful life of getting to know him better.

And the glorious reality of being a Christian, of claiming Jesus Christ for yourself, is that through him you have access to God the Father. But do you see how profoundly relational this whole thing is here?

The church is an association of people. We are Jesus' disciples. And when even two or three people gather in Jesus' name, the result is access to God the Father.

And that is church. That is the kingdom of God. Jesus brought the kingdom of God, the spiritual reality of God, into human experience. Through Jesus, that reality becomes ours.

[15:54] We have access. And that is the glory of being Christian and of being church. That through Jesus, we have access. We have a relationship with God the Father in heaven.

What other religion or philosophy or system could boast like that? We do not have to live our lives alone. We do not have to suffer from insecurity or uncertainty.

Because in Jesus, we have access to the love, the power, the resources of God. But we need to cultivate that relationship amongst ourselves, in our prayer life, our worship life, our reading of the Bible.

We have to cultivate that relationship. But can you see there is nothing more powerful, nothing more profound, nothing more important than our relationships with one another and our relationship with Jesus Christ.

Because it is through Jesus we have access to God the Father. Not a hierarchy, a relationship. Jesus doesn't talk about buildings or liturgy or structure.

[17:00] He talks about relationship. Human beings coming together in relationship. Human beings in relationship to Jesus. And so in relationship to God the Father.

Praying with one another. Living our lives together. Supporting one another. Coming into agreement with one another. And this, I think, is an attractive and rich picture of what it means to live your life with Jesus.

Not a ritual, but a relationship. Access to God the Father is not achieved by going to a certain place. You don't have to go to the temple. It is not mediated through particular people dressed up in funny clothes.

You don't have to do certain rituals. You didn't have to go to theology college. It's relationship with Jesus Christ. When we gather in Jesus' name, there is church.

When we gather around his word, there is church. We can live our lives in the here and now, in the presence of God, through Jesus Christ. We don't have to be alone.

[18:02] It is that access to God that Jesus offers. And that access to God the Father that Jesus offers us provides a point of continuity for the church, down through the ages, that has never changed.

God the Father, through our relationship with Jesus Christ, provides a fixed point in our lives for the church that has never changed, and which never will change.

Because God never changes. And so even though society changes, and we do need to think about how we proclaim Jesus in our society, God the Father, through Jesus, offers a fixed point in our lives.

And that never changes. So the church is the place where people gather together around Jesus Christ and his word.

And I feel I need to add that, because in a time where there are differences of opinion in the church that has happened in the past, and we're in a time now, how do you define, well, what is the congregation that is church and which is not?

[19:07] And so people, leaders in the church, felt the need to define that a bit more. And so they defined the church in terms of the people gathered around Jesus and the preaching of his word.

And that's the basis of the Anglican church. In our Constitution, the articles, it says this, The visible church of Christ is a congregation of faithful people in which the pure word of God is preached and the sacraments duly administered, according to Christ's ordinance.

And that's church. We are the people gathered together around the person of Jesus Christ and around his word.

And through him, we have access to God the Father. Accountability, authority, access. You see what a compelling and attractive picture Jesus paints here of what it means for his disciples to gather together in community, to be his followers, to be church.

It is a place where we live out together the kingdom of God, where sin is dealt with, and where we enjoy the blessing of access to God the Father.

[20:18] Church is not about duty. It is about Jesus, meeting your deepest needs for security, for peace, for community. and at the heart of it all is relationship, and at the center is Jesus Christ.

Yeah. God bless you. So, we gotta ■ pentate it here. I imagine it's more- for the talking of the Father should, so the number you may have come to and call from the Father to God yes let the Father to save God.

The Father can really crack his alive the suffering of a son that I can neither live in the path, making our son that, but the Spirit can really push to God the Son of God well. So, can you tell him and how to serve he the truth. Let's have■■ is Jesus Christ, He could about the Spirit, one of the Spirit can also guide me, we can make a lot of the Spirit to another country of and equitable day,