

Provision For Sinners

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[0 : 00] God and Father, as we turn our minds and our hearts to your word, we ask that you, by our Holy Spirit, will speak to all our hearts.

And the places where we are all tied up and don't know how to cope or how to deal with the circumstances of our lives, will you, in each of those situations, set us free to be obedient to you in love?

We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. Now, the sermon this morning has to do with Matthew chapter 18 and verse 18.

And it's a very famous passage in the whole history of the Christian church. And we dealt with it just in passing when we were in Matthew chapter 16.

But I want us to spend some more time on it, as it's repeated in a somewhat different context and in slightly different words here in Matthew chapter 18 and verse 18.

[1 : 08] If you will find it, it's in the New Blue Pew Bible on page 18. Truly I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

Remember, this is chapter 18 of Matthew's gospel. It's addressed particularly and personally to the disciples. It's deliberately a teaching passage, and it's telling them how to be the church of Jesus Christ.

And so this very significant statement around which much of church history has been written comes here in the center of the chapter.

Reading it again. I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

Now when you turn back in your Bible to chapter 16 of Matthew and verse 18, and you'll see the parallel verses which I was telling you about.

[2 : 26] Chapter 16 and verse 18 reads this way. I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the powers of death shall not prevail against it.

I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

Well, here it is given to Peter in a personal way, that whatever he binds will be bound, and whatever he looses will be loosed.

Now you may not be very familiar with the scriptures, but all of you are familiar here with those jokes in which you come to heaven, and Peter says to you, why do you think you should get into heaven?

Well, the reason it's always Peter that's there is simply because of this verse, that he has the key. But you do notice that in the course of two chapters, there is no reference to Peter in chapter 18, verse 18.

[3 : 40] Christ is speaking to the community of the disciples and saying to them, not to Peter this time, but to the disciples, whatever you bound shall be bound, and whatever you loose shall be loosed.

So this is something which belongs to the congregation of Christ's people. Now there's another reference which is very alike and very different, and that's in John chapter 20 and verse 22.

Luke, I'm sorry, John chapter 20 and verse 22. And this is a picture at the close of Christ's post-resurrection ministry when he turns to his disciples and says to them, sorry, John 21, verse 22. I'm sorry I'm confused you about this. If you're right on the ball, you'll know now that it's John chapter 20, verse 22. And Jesus said this.

He breathed on them and said to them, receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven. If you retain the sins of any, they are retained.

[5 : 09] So the central for the life of the church is the reality of having been forgiven your sins or the reality of not going to be forgiven.

So that one of the things that should happen to us as we come together this morning for this service, we should rejoice that we have been forgiven or we should be solemnly repentant that we have not been forgiven.

And that should become abundantly and personally clear to each one of us in this service. Let me talk now a minute about Vancouver as I know it.

Because I have just been shaken a little by Vancouver this weekend. One of the things I have been told is that there is nobody in Vancouver in the summertime.

There is a folk festival going along at one o'clock this morning. Somehow, I feel somebody has made the mistake that there must be somebody in Vancouver in the summertime.

[6 : 25] There apparently were 60,000 people watching the fireworks on English Bay last night.

There is a folk festival going along at Jericho Beach which could be heard for at least 12 blocks in any direction.

And a lot of people heard it because they had to walk that far to park their car anywhere in that area. On Tuesday night of this past week, this church was packed to the doors to hear a lecture.

Which again impresses me that there must be somebody in Vancouver in the summertime. Last Friday night, I tried to get one person into Shaughnessy Hospital and was told by the emergency, the doctor on emergency there, that there wasn't a bed in Shaughnessy Hospital.

I tried to get one person into a restroom this week and was told that there isn't a bed available. Now there's got to be somebody here in Jericho.

And somehow I think we have to come to terms with that. Now, the terms that we have to come to are, I decided when I thought all that through that I probably should get to church very early this morning because I felt there would be such a surge of thankfulness in the hearts of people that they would be breaking down the doors of the church in order to get in here to worship God on this beautiful day in midsummer 1979 in this city of Vancouver.

[8 : 10] Why we are not so overwhelmed by thankfulness for the privilege of living in such a place at such a time is something I'm not altogether sure I understand.

You may say to me that's because I haven't got a sufficient doctrine of original sin and I'll work on that to trust and understand it. But it is a really remarkable thing, isn't it, to be alive in such a city at such a time.

And yet, the cry to worship God, the cry to know God, when you are surrounded by the loveliness of the mountains and the islands of the sea and the beauty of the weather, why is it that our hearts are not crying out to worship God in some way or other?

Well, I think it's because we have to come to terms with this verse. That is, those who sinned, you retain, they are retained, and those who sinned, you forgive, they are forgiven.

And that so many people have been caught without any real experience of what this means, that the church has been discarded right past as being hopeless and irrelevant.

[9 : 43] And I think it happened because of our misunderstanding of this central responsibility that we have. Now, you know that historically, the church has seen fit to try and reduce this to a kind of counseling relationship between the minister and the parishioner, whereby the parishioner comes to the confession and makes it confession, and the priest or minister pronounces absolution.

And that absolution gives that person the right to receive the sacrament of the bread and the wine, and in receiving of the sacrament of the bread and the wine, he finds salvation.

So that it's a personal process that has been worked out in the life of the church. But the reformers and the architects of the Anglican prayerful came along and said, that's not how it works.

That it's not a matter of getting people to confess their sins. Because most people, and I would think that most, my judgment of the 60,000 people watching the firework last night, most of them weren't overwhelmed with a sense of sin.

They seemed to be enjoying themselves very much indeed. And I felt, well, what a sad job I meant to try and convince people in Vancouver that they're sinners when they're all having such a lovely time.

[11 : 24] And so it becomes difficult. Well, how do you do it? Well, to ask people to come on a Friday or Saturday night and make confession that confession of sins they're not sure they have seems to me to be one of the reasons that the church is almost totally irrelevant.

Supposing that you were locked up in a box right now and asked to confess your sins, would that be a great joy to you to have the opportunity to do that?

Or would you find that personally rather dull and a kind of implicit denial of much of the joy and much of the happiness that you enjoy in your life?

Then how are people going to be brought to a conviction of sin? And it's this bringing people to the conviction of sin that allows you to tell them of the freeing power of the gospel.

So that what the reformers discovered and what they incorporated into the liturgy of the Anglican Church is that the way that you get people to confession is to preach the gospel to them.

[12 : 46] It's to preach the word. It's to deliver the word. And that that word will be the effective need of binding them in their sins or loosing them from their sins.

So that the important thing is to bring everybody into firsthand personal contact with the scriptures. And in that experience they will be convicted of their sins.

And they will also be made of prayer of God's forgiveness. So they will recognize the process of binding and they will also recognize the process of loosing.

And that is the dreadful and glorious responsibility that preachers have. To make people aware of the word of God to the extent that they may be convicted of their sins and being convicted of their sins they might become gloriously aware of the reality of forgiveness through the death of Jesus Christ and that they might come as the picture of Peter says they might come into the kingdom that the doors of the kingdom will be thrown open to them and that they can enter in.

That's the thing that that's the message that we have to declare. Now in the very happy circumstances of God from this is the beginning I understand of the sea festival and if you take the beginning of the sea festival and look at the gospel for today you'll see how appropriate it is that these fishermen were out on the lake all night long and took nothing and then when Jesus said cast your net on the other side they cast their net on the other side and they hauled in so many fish that the net began to break and they had to bring along another boat in order to load the fish into it well that seems a lovely picture for the beginning of the sea festival week but do you see what happened to Peter in that situation he turned to the

[15 : 17] Lord and said depart from me for I am a sinful man in other words he caught so many fish that he was convicted of his sin and of his unbelief and it would seem to me that this is particularly appropriate to us in Vancouver where so much has been given to us in response to very little faith indeed that we might well follow the steps of Peter in this sea festival week and say with him depart from me for I am a sinful man you have set me in the midst of such an amazing provision of every possible natural and human resource and such loveliness and perfection of a part of the world in which to live that it wouldn't be inappropriate at all for me to say

Lord depart from me for I am a sinful man I'm not worthy of the kind of blessing that you seem fit to pour upon me and so a man can be brought in repentance before Christ not by a recitation of his sins of the past week or the past month or the past year or the past lifetime but a man can be brought to repentance simply by being made aware of all that he's been given simply by being made aware of the provision that God has made for us and come to the place that Peter came to where he said God be merciful to me a sinner and you see the difficulty is this this is the process by which Peter came to it Jesus gave him a word and

Peter obeyed that word but only in part and having obeyed only in part his neck broke and he had more fish than he could handle and he was overwhelmed with the sense of God's provision for him and he recognized that he had been only very half hearted in his response to the word for what I'm asking you to tell in Christ's name on this Sunday morning in the middle of a lovely summer in Vancouver is to try and hear the word of God as it comes to you in the circumstances of your life and to try and obey it and to suggest to you that it will be a profound experience that God is willing to bless you far more than you're willing to receive the blessing which he has for you God is prepared to do for you much more than you can imagine let alone ask and greatest

Columbia seems to be a splendid example of that how richly we have been provided for and even out of that should come a really deep and profound sense of repentance and we haven't deserved what God has given us and if we come back to him and we ask him for pardon and for the grace to hear and respond and to be obedient to his word to do what he says in order that we might inherit

what he has provided for us okay now that's the responsibility of the church and that's the thing that we have to make known one to another that this kind of thing is available that's the ministry we're to have to one another and when we see one another laboring under the burden of sin laboring under half-hearted obedience to the word of

God laboring under a form of religion that denies the power of it and what we have to do is loose that person and if they will not receive that gift of pardon and freeing which Christ gives us then that person becomes bound bound because of their inability to respond to the grace and mercy of God that can only happen once they've known it well this is this is the thing that is at the heart of the life of a congregation of Christ's people this is the thing that's been very much historically at the heart of the life of the church is that is this verse from

[20 : 54] Matthew 18 when it says I say to you whatever you find on earth shall be found in heaven and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven and I think that we are going about that the result of much of the religion that we practice does not loose people that binds them into a fatalistic despair and hopelessness because we're not really sharing with one another the word which comes from God we're not really encouraging one another to come face to face to come to grips with to see the implications and applications of it in our own lives what can we do about it how can we come to terms with that how are you going to come to terms with it has this been your experience of the one holy catholic and apostolic church of

Christ we profess to believe we have found in an encounter with the word of God the freedom which we so desperately need in all our lives and has it occurred to you that if you're having trouble coming to terms with it in your life try helping somebody else to come to terms with it in their life and then you may better understand the implications of it in your life and perhaps the reason that we don't know it very often is because we've never tried to share it to share what we've been given King he all him