

Matthew ch 18 vs15-35

Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? That question was basically the catalyst that gives us the text in which we find ourselves this morning. The disciples were always concerned about who it was that was going to have the position of prominence with in the kingdom. But Jesus said the key to being the greatest in the kingdom doesn't lie in trying to be somebody guys, it lies in humbling yourself and serving somebody. It's not in who is of the most impressive status here and now, it's in making yourself of no reputation and being of no status at all, it's not in being independent, it's found in being fully dependent on God. Jesus called a little child to Himself and said, *"Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven."* Then He went on to say that if anyone were to do anything to intentionally cause anyone who believes in Him to stumble or to entice them to sin, that it would be better for that person if a millstone were tied around his neck and he were drowned in the depths of the sea.

You see to take a little child, or for that matter anyone who believes in Jesus Christ who is placing their trust and their hope and faith in Him, and to seek to lead that person astray or destroy their faith is to have the wrath of God abiding on you. and Jesus is saying here that the most heinous form of capital punishment that man can infringe upon you, would be a much favored option compared to the fate that awaits the person who sets out to destroy the faith of another who has placed their faith in Him. and He said I know that offenses have to come, (because He knows the sinful nature of man) but you just do everything you can do to make sure that, that offense doesn't come through you. Paul the apostle put it like this, *"If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men."* Rom 12:18

Then in vs 8-9 Jesus emphasized the importance in doing whatever it takes (and making whatever sacrifices necessary) to enter the kingdom of God. Because it is far better to make temporal sacrifices and enter into everlasting life, then to give yourself over to the flesh and be eternally separated from God in everlasting torment. He wasn't speaking of literal self-mutilation; He was speaking of severing the flesh life. In another place He said you have to lose your life for His sake, He wasn't speaking of committing suicide, He was talking about dying to self, giving up your own wants and giving yourself over to what He wants to do through you. and If that involves self sacrifice (which you would be foolish to think otherwise) than so be it. Does the flesh die-hard? You bettered believe it, but Paul said, *"I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us."*

In other words any afflictions (no matter how bad they may seem at the moment) that we may endure, aren't even worth bringing to the table to stack up against the glory that will be revealed in us, it doesn't even measure up. It's not even worth comparing the difference is so vast. and We wound up speaking on the parable of the lost sheep. and Even as the parable of the hidden treasure and the pearl of great price showed us the value that Jesus places on you individually. and How He was willing to give all that He had that He might purchase you through the shedding of His blood. This parable shows us that once you're apart of the sheepfold, even if you wander off, He'll search you out because He loves you so much and desires that not one of His little ones perish.

So if you've been straying from the sheepfold, He's been searching you out. and When He finds you and brings you back in, He rejoices, He doesn't say, "Oh that annoying sheep I wish they'd just stay put". No way, but rather much like the prodigal son, as a loving Father He rejoices saying My son, or my daughter once was lost but now they're found. Because *"it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish."* So having taught on the seriousness of offending one of His own, now He goes on to teach on what we are to do if we are the one's that have been offended and that by a brother or a sister in Christ. (Read vs 15-20)

Vs15

So 1st of all if a brother sins against you, go and tell him the error between you and him alone, many times you'll find that whoever it is that has offended you isn't even aware of what they've done. and So it's not worth getting a bunch of people involved in something and stirring up dirt in a situation that might be easily rectified or straightened out. But there is the occasion that someone will offend you and they knew what they were doing and for whatever reason they did it anyway, and what Jesus is saying here is, hey don't expect that person to come to you, you go to them. If someone offends you in some way you aren't to wait for them to come to you, and you aren't to go to everyone else about it slandering and tearing down that person. You are to go straight to them about it, now if you have offended someone and you know you did and God has dealt with you concerning that, then you aren't to wait for that person to come to you. If you've repented, bear fruits worthy of repentance and go to that person and ask for their forgiveness that you might be restored into fellowship with that person and be made right with God.

If your brother has sinned against you 1st of all go to him alone, in private because if there has been an error it's God's desire to keep it to the fewest people possible. Why, because Satan has already gotten enough glory just in causing this individual to blow life, he doesn't need anymore, and so why expose a sinful mess and give Satan glory, Jesus says just keep it as quite as possible, go to him alone and talk to him about it.

Don't slam on him or rail him, or belittle them, but explain to them and reason with them gently and in love your perspective in light of what's happened to you in the light of the scriptures and how they've erred against you. and If he hears you or perceives what you're saying and understands where you're coming from and receives your concern and sees his error and repents, then you have gained your brother. and That word "gained" means to win, or to spared, you've won him back from the folly of his ways and have spared him the consequences of his fault. Prov 24:11 says that we're to "*Deliver those who are drawn toward death, and hold back those stumbling to the slaughter.*"

Jesus is saying that if you're brother repents, having seen the wisdom in your counsel and acknowledges his error and is restored to fellowship with you and the Lord, than you've done just that. and That's always to be your motive, again it's not to grind on someone or make them feel bad, your desire is always to win your brother and spare him of the consequences of going astray. Again Prov 11:30, "*The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, and he who wins souls is wise.*" James 5:20 says that, "*he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins.*" You're desire is to see that person grafted back into the vine because they're obviously beginning to stray, or at the very least they have erred in such a way as to cause a breach in your relationship with them which the Lord does not dig.

You're not to approach that person out of anger or bitterness or animosity, and say "hey man, do you know what you did to me!" You're motive is to be that of love, and concern for their spiritual well being and nothing else and if it is something else then you need to ask God to check your motives and you need to be right with God in your heart about it before you approach that person. Because the bible says that the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God, but rather it's the goodness of God that draws man to repentance. The proverbs tell us that "*there is one who speaks like the piercings of a sword, But the tongue of the wise promotes health.*" So it's better to follow the advice of Gal 6:1 "*Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.*" In other words you need to approach that person out of that same sense of love and tenderness and compassion and concern that you would want to be approached with should the shoe be on the other foot.

Vs16

It's possible that he won't hear you, and they might get all up in your face so to speak and say something like, "oh I guess your sinless" or "what about your faults I suppose you're perfect". and They try to turn the table and get the subject off themselves, I've had it go both ways.

There are times when people will acknowledge their error, or their transgression, and they don't try to make any excuses for themselves or justify themselves in any way, but they humbly ask for your forgiveness and desire to grow through it. At which point we are required by scripture to forgive, (which we'll get into in just a few minutes.) But there are those other times where it becomes a real tense situation and it's anybody's fault but their own. and Instead of taking responsibility for their own actions and their own choices, they either point the finger back at you, or blame some other person for their behavior or some situation that's gone on. and It just becomes a big mess, if that happens and you're unable to reason through the situation with this individual, then Jesus says here that you are to take 1 or 2 (the exact # is necessarily significant, He means a small group or witnesses). Which you're obviously going to want to make sure that the people you choose as witnesses are godly individuals and trustworthy people and approach them again.

This is in keeping with Deut 19:15 which says, "*One witness shall not rise against a man concerning any iniquity or any sin that he commits; by the mouth of two or three witnesses the matter shall be established.*" Now this will accomplish a couple of things #1 it will make you seriously evaluate the situation (before you go dragging other people into it) and make sure that your on solid ground with what you're asserting. and #2 it will show the other individual that you're not out in left field somewhere, but that there are other solid, God fearing individuals that see things the same way and that you aren't out there just trying to tear this person down, but that there's a legitimate offense and concern. So it will begin to develop and show the individual the seriousness of the situation, plus it keeps you blameless, it's not just your word against theirs, and you've established accountability. But notice still the Lord is trying to remedy the circumstance with out making a federal case out of the deal. Again the desire is to see that person repent and be restored. It's not a posse trying to gun down some wretched outlaw, it's a group of people that are sincerely concerned for their brother or their sisters spiritual well being.

Vs17

The Proverbs talk about the man who's wiser in his own eyes than 7 men who can answer sensibly. If the person refuses to submit to the counsel of the group of witnesses then Jesus says expose it to the church, and very, very rarely will it ever come to this, I've come close once or twice, but by God's grace it's never had to happen. It's never a fun thing to be apart of church discipline, as a matter of fact if there's one thing that I wish I could separate myself from when it comes to ministry it would be that. Because it's always so hard to approach someone and share with them their error and you risk the chance of ruining your relationship with that person, if they don't respond or they think that you've assumed the position of judge over them and things like that. But you know what, the bible tells us to speak the truth in love, and it's because of my love for people and my desire to see them excel in Christ that I do approach them if I need to.

The bible says that faithful are the wounds of a friend. and I know I've wounded a few people with the truth and I'm sorry that they've been hurt, but I don't regret it, and this is why; I'd rather rebuke an individual and have them maybe think I'm a jerk or self-righteous or whatever. (Because God knows my heart and I'd rather be a God pleaser than a man pleaser), But better to say something and jeopardize a relationship, than say nothing and act like everything's A OK and watch that person stumble right into hell knowing that I didn't do anything about it. And then be held accountable for that before God, Prov 28:23 *"He who rebukes a man will find more favor afterward, Than he who flatters with the tongue."* In other words when that person humbles themselves and repents, they will come to you and say hey, I know that I said and did some pretty cruel things to you or about you, but I realize now that I was out of line. They'll be grateful for the fact that you loved them enough to risk that relationship to spare them the consequences of their sin.

If they never come around, it's most definitely a tragedy, but at least you're clean before God. But if they don't hear the rebuke of 2 or 3 witnesses then Jesus says expose it to the church, most of the time people will leave the fellowship before it gets to that point to avoid that type of humiliation. But again the motive isn't to humiliate people it's to show them the seriousness of the offense that's remaining unrepentant. and When they see that wow, everyone sees this just the opposite of me, then maybe they'll listen to the safety that's found in the multitude of counsel and return to the Lord. It's not shared with the church to vote on whether not we want to keep this person with in these 4 walls, every step that the Lord gives us here is just a progressive intensity with one thing in mind (to gain your brother) and that's it. We don't determine who stays and who goes, it's God who does that, we just concur with His word. He tells us if they don't respond to the church, then that's it, you've done everything you can now let him be as a heathen or a tax collector to you. Which is to say that they were the ones that were basically the outsiders. Now that doesn't mean that you give up hope or praying for them.

I'd hope that you would know that the given in this text is that we are to have a burden and a passion to reach those who are outside the body of Christ. We don't just say hey that's it, enjoy eternity in hell, no way, we are to pray for that person, that they might come to their senses and return to Christ. But a healthy body purges poison, if not the body dies, and so that person is put out until they decide that they want to repent and be made right with God. That's not my opinion that's what the bible teaches. Paul said, *"deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus."* In other words turn them lose, let them go back into the world in hopes that they might realize the futility of the flesh and return to Jesus Christ

The bible says that if there is someone who's claiming to be a Christian and caught up in sin and refuses to repent that we're not even supposed to eat with such a person. Titus 3:10-11 says, "*Reject a divisive man after the first and second admonition, knowing that such a person is warped and sinning, being self-condemned.*" In other words you're not judging them, they've brought this upon themselves, you're simply doing what the bible tells you to do.

Vs18

Again this is in regards to church discipline, and He's not saying that whatever choices you make it will be ratified in heaven. It would be more accurate for us to understand these vs based upon the way that the Greek is laid out as saying whatever you bind on earth will have already been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will have already been loosed in heaven. So it's not that you make the decision and God backs you up, it's that as long as you're doing things the way God's word instructs you to, that you're simply falling in line with what God's already done in heaven. So our actions on earth (if done prayerfully and carefully according to God's word) are simply affirming what God's already done in heaven. You might say that His will is being done on earth as it is in heaven.

Vs19-20

So the power of prayer, and the key being that it's done in His name, the name of Jesus which doesn't mean that we give our list of demands and then postmark it with Jesus' name and it's done. To pray in Jesus name doesn't mean that that's the way that you have to end your prayers, though we often do and there's nothing-wrong with that. But to pray in His name is to pray in His character, in His will, asking the things that He would ask, praying the prayers of His mind set, of His thoughts, of His feelings and His perceptions and in a manner that He would endorse. 1 John 5:14-15 "*Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him.*" and So when you are present with one or two people in the name or character and heart of Jesus there He is with you and when that's taking place your prayers are going to be effective. It's reminiscent of Duet 32:30 with the Lord on your side one could chase 1,000 and 2 could chase 10,000. The more people that you have agreeing with you in prayer that's reflective of the heart of Jesus, the more powerful it becomes. Basic math carries over into the spiritual if there's one person you can only do so much, but when there's 2 of you, a minimum of twice the work can be accomplished, but with the Lord factored in it's increased 10x over. and So even as we gather here this morning Jesus is present with us by the power of the Holy Spirit because we've gathered in His name.

So I couldn't emphasize enough the power of prayer and how I would encourage each of you to have a prayer partner. It's important that you be spending time alone with God no doubt, but it's also important that we be praying together as a body. That the windows of heaven might be opened up and God will do radical things as we get serious about getting in line with Him and opening the doors for Him to move through prayer. Yes we come together to worship God, but its not written My house shall be called a house of worship. Yes we come together to study God's word and learn of Him, but it's not even written My house shall be called a house of Bible study. It is written, "My house shall be called a house of prayer." Prayer is such an essential part of the body of Christ, we wage war on our knees and I could never stress its importance enough, it's our lifeline, and when communications are cut off, it's never a good thing. So pray, pray, pray, pray for this church, pray for this community, pray for me, and the people that God has called here, pray for your brothers and sisters here. We all act as a network and we need each other to be lifting each other up, so that we might be effective in our outreach and our relationship with God so that many might come to know Him. Now, having listened to Jesus' instructions on how we are to respond to those who have sinned against us Peter says to Him.

Vs21

Now here Peter probably feels as though the Lords about to commend him again with another blessed are you Simon bar Jonah, as though he was really getting it. and Being a bit impulsive and seemingly the leader of the group, he pipes up and says Lord how many times should I forgive someone, up to 7 times? You see the Rabbi's taught that you only need to forgive a man the same offense 3x and after that you were released of the obligation. So Peter is more than doubling what they taught, thinking stand back boys another compliment is getting ready to fly my way.

Vs22

490x Lord oi vey!! There's no way that I could possibly keep track of each person that's offended me up to 490x a piece. That's the point. You're to forgive regardless of how many times that you're offended and it doesn't matter what the offense may be. Because none of it compares to the offense you've been forgiven by God. and That's what Jesus is getting ready to emphasize now as He expounds on this principal of forgiveness as it relates to the kingdom of God.

Vs23-24

Now a talent was basically the highest type of currency that was used, and depending on what metal the talent was made of and a couple of other things, commentators have estimated 10,000 talents to be worth anywhere from \$10.2million to the upwards of \$1 billion dollars. The point being that it was a sum that was impossible for this man to pay back.

Vs25

Which obviously wouldn't come anywhere near the debt owed, but the punishment for this type of debt (anything short of death would've been an act of mercy).

Vs26-27

Wow, Can you imagine that, can you imagine if one day you got a call from the bank and they said to you, we're canceling your debt on your house, enjoy your freedom. Or some representative from master card or visa called you up and said, hey we see that you've been behind on your payments for the last several months so instead of turning you over to a collection agency we just canceled your debt. You'd do back flips; this guy was released from a debt owed of millions of dollars. and So many of us have been forgiven for so much that we've done, our sin was stacked up so high before God, and there was nothing we could do to ever make it up, we were violators, and there's no way to change the damage done. But yet how quickly we for get the forgiveness of our debt. What do you mean Jeff? Let's read on, how often do we see ourselves in the reflection of the unforgiving servant?

Vs28

Now a denarii was a days wage for a roman soldier, it equaled .16-. 17cents. There were 6,000 denarii to a talent. So even though it wasn't necessarily an insignificant debt, compared to the debt the other servant owed the king it was nothing. 1 was an impossibility; the other though it may take some time, could be made up for. When you do your math you realize the difference in the debt ratio between these 2 guys was 600,000 times difference. The one man owed the king 600,000 times more than what this guy owed him.

Vs29-30

How can you pay someone a debt when you're in prison? It's an impossibility, this guy was showing no grace, no mercy, and no love, how quickly we forget all that we've been forgiven by God and we hold someone else accountable for every little offense and we're unwilling to forgive them. We don't have the heart of forgiveness even though God has forgiven us. and May God help us to remember the debt that was canceled for us, and the forgiveness that we received because Jesus Christ has paid that debt for us. Because God is not pleased with you, if you're harboring unforgiveness in your heart. (Wait a minute Jeff, what are you talking about?)

Vs31-33

In other words how is it that you were shown such mercy and compassion, and yet you were unwilling to extend that same mercy and compassion yourself to others who owed you a debt that was so insignificant in comparison.

Vs34-35

Heavy! and I would emphasize that little phrase “from his heart”, what’s the standard of forgiveness? To the extent you’ve been forgiven, forgive, and you’ve been forgiven an insurmountable debt. Therefore you are to forgive others regardless of what the offense might be against you, because if you don’t forgive *from your heart*, then how can you expect God to forgive you?

God does not play games, He knows your heart, you may fool me, but Jer 17:9-10 God searches your heart. and If you don’t forgive you won’t be forgiven, what are you saying Jeff is this a salvational deal? I’ll be honest with you, I don’t know what I’m saying, but one thing I won’t do is water down the words of Jesus and explain this away as though it’s not absolutely essential, because Jesus says here that it is. Even in the model prayer a prerequisite was laid out, “*And forgive us our debts, As we forgive our debtors.*” You forgive your debtors, your debt will be forgiven, you don’t forgive, you won’t be forgiven. That’s just what the bible says so if you would like to reap forgiveness in your own life, then it’s imperative that you sow forgiveness towards others. Eph 4:32 says, “*be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you.*” Col 3:12-13 Says, “*therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also **must** do.*” It’s not an option, it’s an obligation, even as you’ve been forgiven, so you must forgive.