

Bible Study 4

Jesus' Usage of Jewish Scripture

Aim: To examine how Jesus uses the Jewish Scriptures in the Gospels and how Christians may hear those texts today as a call to faithful and holy living.

Opening Prayer: Gracious God, open our hearts and minds as we study your Word. Help us to hear the Scriptures as Jesus taught them, to recognize your liberating work among us, and to respond with faith, humility, and holy living. Guide our conversation, deepen our understanding, and form us into a community that bears witness to your justice, mercy, and peace. Amen.

Learning Guide Questions

- What might Jewish Scripture have meant within its own historical and theological context?
- What should we understand about the imagination and hope of the First Testament?
- How does Jesus interpret Scripture in relation to his mission and message?
- How can Christians today hear Jesus' call to holy living?

Primary Texts

Opening Reflection Question: When conflict or hurt arises within a faith community, what helps us move toward healing rather than distance?

Readings: Matthew 18:15-19

Matthew 18: 15-19

Sinning brother or sister

"If your brother or sister sins against you, go and correct them when you are alone together. If they listen to you, then you've won over your brother or sister. But if they won't listen, take with

you one or two others so that every word may be established by the mouth of two or three witnesses. But if they still won't pay attention, report it to the church. If they won't pay attention even to the church, treat them as you would a Gentile and tax collector. I assure you that whatever you fasten on earth will be fastened in heaven. And whatever you loosen on earth will be loosened in heaven. Again I assure you that if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, then my Father who is in heaven will do it for you. For where two or three are gathered in my name, I'm there with them."

Commentary:

In this teaching about life together, Jesus gently guides his community in how to live as followers and disciples of Christ. These teaching moments echo the Beatitudes in chapter 5 and invite us to listen and respond to Jesus, the bearer of God's rule and the revelation of the kingdom of heaven. As citizens of God's kingdom, we are called to live in ways that challenge harmful patterns and reflect God's grace, justice, mercy, and holy love.

This passage invites us to consider how the church responds when sin causes harm within the community. Matthew addresses discipline within the church, but the goal is not punishment for its own sake. The goal is loving restoration, faithful accountability, and the healing of relationships. It is significant that the church community is explicitly mentioned in verse 17.

What kind of action against someone within the church community would qualify as sin or become the cause of conflict?

Matthew 18:1-14 points to the spiritual character of a caring community. When the disciples ask who is greatest in the kingdom of heaven, Jesus redirects them toward humility. Those who belong to the community of Jesus are called to embrace the humble way of a child—one who may be vulnerable, dependent, or in need of protection. In the Roman world, especially in poor villages, children were often powerless and exposed to hardship. Yet Jesus lifts up this image to teach that kingdom life is not built

on status or control, but on trust, humility, and care. To reject this way of faith is to damage our relationship with Jesus and with one another.

Another sign of broken relationship in the community is described as a “stumbling block.” Disciples are not to make it harder for others to follow Jesus. When our words, actions, or attitudes hinder another person’s spiritual growth, the whole community is affected. The biblical language is strong because Jesus takes seriously the spiritual well-being of each person. The passage also reminds us to take responsibility for anything within ourselves that blocks faithful living. I do not understand this as a literal call to self-mutilation, but as a serious invitation to pursue spiritual integrity.

Another beautiful picture of life in the Christian community is found in the loving rescue of the “one sheep,” or “little one,” who has gone astray (vv. 10-14). In Matthew’s teaching from Jesus, no one who belongs to him is to be forgotten or discarded. On the way to the cross, Jesus calls his church to reflect God’s patient and seeking love. God’s will is shown in the community’s willingness to care for, restore, and protect those who are vulnerable or wandering. Could it be that neglecting this kind of relational care is itself a serious form of sin?

If that is so, how can these three aspects of sin, or breaks in relationship with Jesus and his community, be rectified? Matthew 18:15-20 shows the way.

[Read Matthew 18:15-20 again]

Let us note some things:

1. Despite Jesus’ teachings, exhortations, and expectations, conflicts can still occur among humans. Why?
2. The focus is placed on retaining the offending member rather than ostracizing or dismissing him or her.

3. Interpersonal connection, in which the wronged person takes initiative (v. 15), along with community support, is necessary. Why?

4. Matthew's use of Jewish Scripture again serves as a guide. Let us look at this tradition in the texts below.

Leviticus 19: 15 -19 Holy Living

"You must not act unjustly in a legal case. Do not show favoritism to the poor or deference to the great; you must judge your fellow Israelites fairly. Do not go around slandering your people. Do not stand by while your neighbor's blood is shed; I am the LORD. You must not hate your fellow Israelite in your heart. Rebuke your fellow Israelite strongly, so you don't become responsible for his sin. You must not take revenge nor hold a grudge against any of your people; instead, you must love your neighbor as yourself; I am the LORD."

Numbers 35:30

"Anyone who kills another will be executed on the evidence of witnesses. But one witness alone cannot testify against a person for a death sentence." CEB

Deuteronomy 17:6-7

"Capital punishment must be decided by two or three witnesses. No one may be executed on the basis of only one testimony. In the execution, the hands of the witnesses must be against the guilty person from the start; the hand of all the people will be involved at the end. Remove such evil from your community!" CEB

2 Corinthians 13:1

This is the third time that I'm coming to visit you. Every matter is settled on the evidence of two or three witnesses. CEB

1 Timothy 5:19

“Don’t accept an accusation made against an elder unless it is confirmed by two or three witnesses.” CEB

What is observed from these scripture verses?

Reflection: Jesus and Discipline within Church

Matthew 18:15-20 offers a gracious and practical path for maintaining spiritual health within the church community. This discipline is meant to serve saving grace, not to reject or harm the offender. The Scripture used to guide righteous action states that “every word may be established by the mouth of two or three witnesses.” This standard protects the community from unfair judgment and encourages accountability grounded in care.

When accountability is not accepted, the church must still act with humility and prayerful seriousness. The offender or offenders may be placed at the edge of the community, not because the church has stopped loving them, but because continued harm cannot be ignored. Like tax collectors and Gentiles, their relationship to the community would be limited, placing them outside the church’s regular guidance until restoration becomes possible. This disciplinary action receives divine support after sincere attempts have been made to restore the member. The language of “fasten” and “loosen” suggests that the church community has divine sanction and authority to care responsibly.

Later, Peter asks the question, “Lord, how many times should I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Should I forgive as many as seven times?” (Matthew 18:21 CEB). Jesus suggests that God’s forgiveness of us carries with it a heart of forgiveness that must be extended to others.

Care for the person of faith requires loving responsibility. As the whole community bears witness to the world about the wonders

of the kingdom of God, we are invited to practice truth-telling, forgiveness, humility, and grace in ways that reflect the heart of Christ.

Facilitator Note: *As the group moves toward the lesson summary, ask participants to identify one practice that can help the church become more faithful in handling conflict, accountability, and forgiveness.*

Discussion Questions

Facilitator Note: *Allow a few moments of quiet reflection before discussion. Remind participants that they may share from personal experience but should avoid naming private conflicts or speaking about others in ways that break trust.*

1. What words, phrases, or images stand out to you in these passages?
2. What do these statements reveal about God's intention for people and communities?
3. How do these texts shape the way you hear Jesus' mission?

Lesson Summary

- Jesus calls the church to be a humble, caring, and supportive community that reflects the values of the kingdom of heaven.
- Sin within the community damages relationship with God and others, especially when believers cause one another to stumble or fail to care for the vulnerable.
- Matthew 18 teaches that discipline in the church should aim at restoration, fairness, and the recovery of the offending member rather than rejection.

- Jewish Scripture provides the foundation for accountability through truthful witness, righteous judgment, love of neighbor, and holy living.

Closing Prayer: Gracious and loving God, we thank you for the wisdom of your Word and for the teaching of Jesus, who calls us into faithful relationship with you and with one another. Help us to become a community marked by humility, accountability, mercy, and love. Give us courage to seek reconciliation, wisdom to correct with grace, and hearts willing to forgive as we have been forgiven. May our life together bear witness to your kingdom, and may your Spirit guide us in holy living. In Jesus' name, Amen.