

This morning as we begin, I want to ask you a question. What do you believe is the #1 hindrance to the Church in America today? What is it that's holding back the church of Jesus Christ from being what she needs to be? Could you define it in one word? I believe we can. That word is: SIN.

You might say, “That’s too simple.” And I would reply, “Perhaps.” But, I can say this...I believe I’m on pretty solid ground by making the claim that I have, because I believe our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, made the same claim. He said, “Blessed are the PURE IN HEART... Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for RIGHTEOUSNESS.” I have come to seek and save that which is lost. To what? SIN!

You see, Jesus Christ came to this earth to die for sin and provide the way that we might live holy, pure and righteous lives. It's those characteristics of love, purity and holiness that radiate the purity of Christ to the world. But, I know what some might be thinking. What ABOUT LOVE! Some would say that's the most pressing matter before the church. We need to show more love. Yet, others might say, “No! The most pressing matter is to show FORGIVENESS.” Certainly, Jesus came to this earth to show love and forgiveness. But, Church, I want you to hear this and hear this well... The greatest act of love and forgiveness ever displayed on this earth, was displayed by Jesus Christ, when He died on the cross to pay for our SIN. Listen...Jesus came to conquer sin, because it is sin that will send a soul to hell. Sin is what damns a human being to an eternity separated from God. **Sin**. Yes, a lack of love and forgiveness are symptoms of that greatest problem human beings face and that is SIN!

Church family, we have to get this right. I know the mantra of our day is all about love. We just need to show more love and I get that and that's true, but LISTEN...to offer love to a human being who is ravaged by the disease of sin without offering them the truth that it's their sin that will destroy them...to offer them love without truth...is to offer that person nothing more than sentimentality and sentimentality will leave that soul in the bondage of their sin...NO! There's nothing loving about that. Listen, the purpose of Jesus coming to this earth and showing love and forgiveness was so that we might become like Him... and how is that? HOLY!

Oh church family, the very process of salvation itself is to lead us to holiness. Think about it. In heaven there will be no sin...only absolute holiness...just like our Savior Jesus Christ, who was perfectly holy and who never sinned!

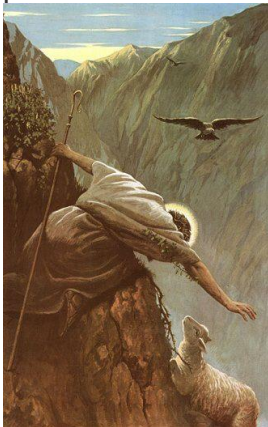
So, what is the greatest need for the Church today? I'm convinced it's Holiness. Therefore, just as Jesus was an instrument of holiness in the world; we today, as His Church are to be instruments of holiness. And that will be the backdrop of the entire message today.

This morning, as we return to Matthew 18, may we be reminded of what Jesus is doing... He is teaching in a home in Capernaum (most likely Peter's home) and He has a child in His lap, as He is teaching on humility.

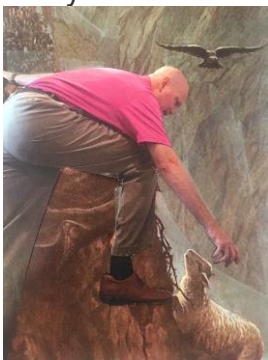


He's been telling His disciples that He's going to die (He only has about 3-4 months left to live) and He's concerned that they've begun to stray from His teaching. They've been arguing about who is the greatest and Jesus has used the child in His lap to say, "You better humble yourself and be unassuming and trusting like a child if you want any part of me."

Jesus continued this teaching (as we saw last week) by telling a parable of how a shepherd left his 100 sheep on the mountain to go get 1 sheep that had wandered away. Do you remember the picture?



That's how much Jesus loves us. He reaches down to us to rescue us! And you know what church, now that He's in heaven...it's our job to reach for people! In fact, it's been said, "Never is the Church more like Jesus than when she's reaching down to help deliver a soul from the destruction and separation of their sin." I want to show you a picture of the message today. And I know you might laugh...but, I promise you won't forget it. Here the a picture of the message today...



Do you get it? That's got to be us now! We're in the place of Jesus. We've got to reach down for the wayward sheep. We're going to **pick up with verse 12**, as Jesus tells the parable of the wayward sheep.

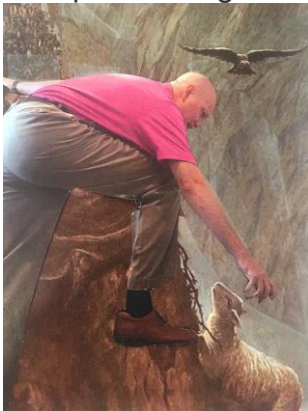
Matthew 18:12-20

¹²What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go in search of the one that went astray? ¹³And if

he finds it, truly, I say to you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine that never went astray. ¹⁴ So it is not the will of my Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish.

¹⁵ “If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. ¹⁶ But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. ¹⁷ If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. 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. ¹⁹ 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. ²⁰ For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.”

Now the reason we started with the parable of the sheep is because we need context. We need to understand what Jesus was teaching prior to telling His disciples that they should go and help their brother who has sinned against them. The context of going is embodied as a shepherd going after sheep. See it again...



Try to keep this in your mind... This sheep is a sheep who sinned against me... This is the image Jesus wants the disciples to have in their minds. You go to someone who has sinned against you and seek to bring them back to the fold! Now folks, that's HUMILITY if I've ever seen it!

Think about it...there you are... leaning over a ledge trying to rescue the one who has SINNED AGAINST YOU! Folks, that's Christianity! That's: "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do!" **Look at verse 15** and let's see how Jesus teaches us to do this...

Matthew 18:15

¹⁵ “If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother.

You say, “What kind of sin is it?” Jesus doesn't say. He simply says, “Your brother sins against you.” The word “sin” used there means: “to miss the mark and stray from the path of righteousness.” But, I'll say this...I believe we're talking about an egregious sin. Not something petty...like getting your parking spot at WalMart or not speaking to you in the hallway here at church. NO! In my mind, this is a serious sin.

Now, WHO did Jesus say is to go to that person to straighten this out? I know: The preacher! Call him! Or the Deacon. Call him! Or call your neighbor to gossip (I mean pray about it). No! You are to go! This is to be one on one...and I'll say this...face to face is what's intimidated here. I know you can do stuff today by text or email, but let's be honest...that's often just hiding and it's honestly more potentially damaging than helpful because of how emails and texts can be interpreted.

We're to go IN PERSON if at all possible. There's something else about going one on one... That keeps it quiet. Jesus said, "You and him alone!" Alone means alone. That protects the offender and keeps it from getting blown out of proportion and it keeps rumors from starting. And the truth is: They might not even realize they've done something wrong. Which is all the more reason to keep it private. But, this is not typically our response is it?

Typically, we want to go talk about how wronged we've been and try to justify our position to others, especially church leadership. NO! Jesus, says, "You go to that person and tell them their sin ALONE"...with the goal of winning your brother or sister back! The goal is reconciliation. You want to "gain back your brother." It's not about being mean or looking down our nose at them or setting them straight. We go with reconciliation as the goal.

The Apostle Paul taught this to the believers scattered throughout Galatia... see the screens...

Galatians 6:1-3

¹Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. ²Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. ³For if anyone thinks he is something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself.

We don't go in arrogance...we go in humility. We go as one being "spiritual..." Do you know what that means? It means that you are seeking the Lord about how to reconcile this situation. You aren't acting in fleshly emotion or anger. It means you have the right attitude. You come in humility to help that brother or sister. That's what Christians do. That's part of what Paul said is "the law of Christ?"

We know it also as the: "Royal Law." This is where Jesus boiled down the 10 Commandments to 2 when He said to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength and to love your neighbor as yourself. When you do...you'll go to them. And let me tell you something...when they see you coming it will almost always melt their heart, because you're showing such great humility in coming to them, even though you were the one who has been hurt.

But, what if they won't listen? Well, that's where you can now go and get someone else...

Matthew 18:16

¹⁶But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses.

According to the Mosaic Law recorded in Deuteronomy 19, in order for an accusation to legally be levied against someone, it had to be verified or established by 2-3 witnesses. So, if your brother won't listen to you, then you should take 1 or 2 more people with you, to establish as witnesses.

Now, is this like the Gestapo? Is this a witch-hunt? No! Remember, the goal is to restore this brother or sister, this wayward sheep, back to the fold. So, take with you reputable, seasoned, mature Christians. But, if they still won't listen, you got to step 3...

Matthew 18:17

¹⁷ If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.

Folks, it's serious now. You've tried on your own. You've gone back, having taken a couple of mature believers with you and they still won't listen. And so, now you tell it to the church. How does that look? Do you stand up in the pulpit on a Sunday morning and do so? I think not. You go to the leaders and you tell us...that would be Elders and Deacons and we try. But, if that doesn't work, we'll have no choice but to remove them from the fellowship of the church.

You say, "Boy that's going a little too far, don't you think? They need to be in church." Folks, I didn't say this. Jesus did. See it again...

Matthew 18:17

¹⁷ If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.

A Gentile is a pagan. In other words, Jesus is saying, we're to treat them as if they are lost. They might be part of the church, but Jesus is saying you have to go on their actions. Treat them like a Gentile or a tax collector. Remember, a tax collector was a Jew who sold his soul to the Romans to collect taxes from their countrymen. A tax collector was considered a traitor.

You say, "How will kicking them out of the church help them?" Because, they'll see the seriousness of the situation and once they've been left alone to themselves...they might come to their senses...just like the prodigal son in the pig-pen.

The Apostle Paul is dealing with a very loose church. Church at Corinth was a problem church throughout its existence because they were morally loose and accepted almost anything.

Listen as you're turning... if there isn't purity in a church, there won't be power. And there will NOT be power without purity! It's that simple! And I'll tell you this...there will be no purity if sin isn't addressed. Sin MUST be addressed. Listen, is it any wonder why the Church in America is so powerless and ineffective today!! It's because sin is rampant! It's because preachers are watering down the Word of God like some horrible mother who waters down her child's antibiotic. You don't water down the medicine-you give it in full strength if you truly want the full power to bring healing!

1 Corinthians 5:1-5

¹It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans, for a man has his father's wife. ²And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you. ³For though absent in body, I am present in spirit; and as if present, I have already pronounced judgment on the one who did such a thing. ⁴When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus, ⁵you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.

Church, we as Christ's followers, are to protect the purity of the church. Paul tells that loose church: "Turn the man over to Satan so he can hit rock bottom, so that he might come to his senses and eventually be saved." You see, holiness is the key. At this point, when you've got this kind of stuff going on, we can't treat this individual like a spiritual brother or sister anymore, because they have forfeited that right by their actions.

You say, "Do we really have the authority to do this?" Yes we do! Jesus said so... **See verse 18** and notice He says, "Truly" because it seems so hard to believe.

Matthew 18:18-20

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. ¹⁹ 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. ²⁰ For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them."

By the way, verse 20...if taken in context, means that the Lord is with us when we're going through these steps of discipline. I've taken this verse out of context many times, as I've heard many preachers do the same when we claim that if 2 or 3 Christians are together, that means God is there. The truth is...God is with the believer, even if you are alone and are by yourself, He's there because the Holy Spirit dwells inside of you. So, let's not take verse 20 out of context. It was said by Jesus in the context of church discipline.

I want to point out the word "agree." In verse 19. In the Greek it's: **Sumpheneo**. We get our English word for this:

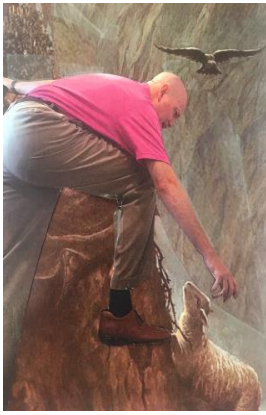


Symphony! When we follow the four steps Jesus has indicated here in Matthew 18, we are in agreement...acting "in symphony"...we are together...playing the same notes as a body of believers. In other words, the church is acting on the behalf of God... Truly, we're saying: "Thy will be done on earth, as it is heaven." You see, Jesus has placed this authority of church discipline into our hands. He gave us the keys. That's what He said to the disciples in Caesarea Philippi.

Matthew 16:19

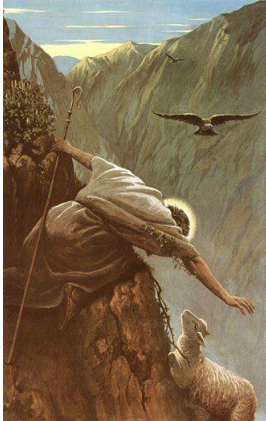
¹⁹ I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."

You see, if we go through this process to try to bring back a person to the fold and they refuse and we, as a church, decide to leave them to their own devices, then God agrees with that. So, yes, we have the authority and the backing of Jesus' teaching to seek to bring back the wandering. The question is: **Will we care enough about that person to do so. Will we do this...**



or will I just hum loudly and look the other way. So often, I'm afraid, we show that we don't really care. We say we don't want to get involved, who am I to say anything...but the truth is we're just indifferent and that indifference is a sure sign that, we too, have wandered and strayed from the truth of Jesus' teaching. It's the humble person who goes...it's the proud person who won't.

Let me close by saying a word to the sheep...



There you are...having wandered away. What will you do?

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the German pastor who stood up to Hitler during WWII said this: (It's a lengthy quote...but, I want you to see it so that it might sink in.) Keep that picture of the sheep over the cliff in mind...

“Sin demands to have a man by himself. It withdraws him from the community. The more isolated a person is, the more destructive will be the power of sin over him. Sin wants to remain unknown. And the more deeply one becomes involved in sin, the more disastrous becomes the isolation. Sin shuns the light. In the darkness of the unexpressed it poisons the whole being of a person. This can happen even in the midst of a church community.

However, in confession, the light of the gospel breaks into the darkness and the seclusion of the heart. The sin is brought into the light. The unexpressed is openly spoken and acknowledged. All that is secret and hidden is now made manifest. Oh, it is a hard struggle until the sin is openly admitted, but God breaks gates of brass and bars of iron.

Therefore, since the confession of sin is made in the presence of a Christian brother, the last stronghold of self-justification is abandoned. The sinner surrenders. He gives up his evil. He gives his heart to God. The expressed, acknowledged sin has lost all its power! It has been revealed and

judged as sin, and it can no longer tear the fellowship asunder. Because now the fellowship bears the sin of the brother. He is no longer alone with his evil for he has cast off his sin in confession and handed it over to God. It has been taken away from him! He stands in the fellowship of sinners who live by the grace of God and the cross of Jesus Christ. The sin concealed separated him from the fellowship, and that sin made all his apparent fellowship a sham. Yet, the sin confessed has, once again, helped him to find true fellowship with his brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ.”

Oh...confession of sin is the key to purity and power and to the effectiveness of the Church. And, oh what a ministry we have as believers to restore the sinning brother or sister! What a sign of humility and love and forgiveness!