

Week 1, Day 1

Matthew 18:1-9

Today's passage begins with a question, "Who is the greatest?"

Who is the greatest person you know? Who is the greatest person you have ever known? Think carefully and answer both questions in the space provided. In addition to giving a name write beside each name why you have listed them as the greatest. Remember this is your personal list and so if you have more than two names that is ok. List as many as you feel comfortable. However, if you list a name, please explain why you listed that person.

In order to make this listing of greatness have a profound impact, write a note or email to the person and tell them that you listed them as great. Share with them the reasons you listed them as a great person.

Each one doing this study will have a different understanding of what makes someone great. In today's passage, the disciples wanted to know who was the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven because they wanted to compare themselves to that *greatness*. This must have been a fairly common debate among the disciples. Mark and Luke record discussions, in chapter 9 of each Gospel that the disciples had along these same lines. Who is the greatest of the disciples? Who would be in a position of rank in the *Kingdom*?

Greatness was a common subject of debate amongst scholarly and political groups in Jesus' day. They sought rank and privilege as status symbols for obedience and service. Jesus took the discussion and completely turned it on end by challenging the disciples to be like little children. In verse 2 we see that Jesus called a child over and had the child stand among the disciples. As the disciples looked at the child they would have been reminded of one very penetrating truth. Children have no rank or position; instead they have complete dependence on the parent to provide. Jesus was reminding the disciples that instead of position or rank the disciples need to focus on dependence, a believer's complete dependence on God. That is an amazing spiritual truth. We as adult believers should be as dependant as little children. In order to make that type of transformation in life Jesus used a strong word in verse 3. Jesus said, "Unless you are _____". That word implies turning and going the other way. In essence Jesus was telling the disciples that instead of wondering which one of them was the greatest they needed to turn that conversation one hundred eighty degrees and humble themselves by realizing their dependence. Dependence brings with it a humbling.

Humility can be a very difficult lesson to learn. However, Scripture teaches that there are many benefits to humbling ourselves before the Lord. Below you will find a list of Scripture. Read each Scripture and then list the benefit (s) given in the passage when someone humbles themselves.

Passage

Benefit

Psalm 10:17

Isaiah 57:15

Matthew 23:12

James 4:6

1 Peter 5:6

Jesus said that the disciples should humble themselves and think of themselves as dependant, not as the greatest. Can you recall a time in your life that you had no “plan b” if God did not move in the circumstance? Write a brief account in the space provided. (Be prepared to share this account in class because these times of how God moved in your life may be just what someone needs to hear.)

Prayer Primer: Pray that you will realize today your profound need for and dependence on God.

Week 1, Day 2

Matthew 18:11-14

What is your life's purpose? In just a few, concise, and specific sentences write out your personal purpose/mission statement:

Perhaps verse 11 of Matthew 18 is written in parenthesis in your Bible. It may even be left out of your translation. *For the Son of Man has come to save the lost.* It was Christ's mission statement; the reason He left His heavenly home and came to earth in human form. Some early manuscripts do not include this verse and it appears as a parenthetical statement in others. A parallel verse is found in Luke 19:10. Write that verse here:

Now go back up to the first verse of chapter 19 of Luke and read through verse 10. List every fact you can find out about Zacchaeus. How did the purpose of Jesus collide with Zacchaeus in this text?

No matter your circumstances, what you were or did before you knew Jesus, or where you came from, Jesus pursued you into relationship with Himself. He is the Seeker of men and women and boys and girls. He found you and called you His own. Check out Galatians 4:4-7. How is this passage an encouragement to you?

Now turn back to Matt 18 and read verses 12-14 again. When something gets misplaced in my house I cannot stop until I find it. Sometimes Johnny will say, "It will turn up." It doesn't matter, I *have* to find it. When my kids were little they would say that I was a "good finder." If they were missing something then I would be relentless in searching for it until it was found. That's how the man was searching for the lost sheep in these verses. He willingly left the 99. They were safe. He didn't have to worry about them. It was that lost one that had his concern.

I want you to stop for just a minute and think about that. Assuming that you are a believer and follower of Jesus Christ, you should be able to relate to that lost sheep. You were also once lost, but now you are found. That is profound. But, let's also look at the lost sheep from another perspective. Maybe you can relate to the sheep as one who wandered away. I know I can. I had the

experience of being saved but going through a period when I was not following Jesus like I should have. We see all throughout the Old Testament, when God's people rebelled, He always was calling them to repentance and to return. Just like He pursued me initially, He pursued me back into close fellowship with Himself. Do you have an experience like that? How did you see God at work in your life during that time?

I hope you took the time to write out your own purpose or mission statement in the first part of today's lesson. But, here's the real truth of the matter: our purpose should be tied to His purpose. We, as followers, are to carry on His mission in the world. His purpose becomes our purpose: to seek the lost and give them the information they need so they might be saved. Additionally, those of us who are more mature in our faith are to encourage and mentor those who are younger in the faith.

With that in mind, does that change or add to what you wrote as your purpose or mission statement? If so, how?

Prayer Primer: Ask God how you can integrate His purpose into your purpose.

Week 1, Day 3

Matthew 18:15-20

The first time that Jesus mentioned the church in Scripture is in Matthew 16. We examined that meeting at Caesarea Philippi a few weeks ago. Here, in chapter 18, Jesus began to expound on the idea of the church and how believers are to relate to one another in the church. What we are about to read does not occur very often in the church. The first time we read the word *church* our Lord is telling us that nothing can stop it and that the church can charge Hell and conquer the enemy! But here, in Christ's second use of the word church we get a different picture. This is not a picture of the church confronting Hell in the world. It is a picture of the church confronting sin in her body. This is a difficult passage and that is why we see it happen so little in the church.

In December we completed our interview process for new deacons here at FBCM. We have a wonderful group of men who have agreed to serve the Lord in that capacity this year in our church. As a part of that process I say to each candidate that I, as pastor, have to make one thing very clear. I ask these men if they understand that the church reserves the right to ask them to step down if we see something in their lives that is "bringing a reproach on the Kingdom of God or FBCM." We take this passage very seriously but this is the first church I have served where that commitment exists.

With that in mind let's examine the text. Look at verse 15. What type of sin is mentioned here in verse 15?

If you said no specific sin is mentioned you are right. That is exactly what the text says. "If your brother sins against you....." There is no mention of what that sin might be.

When your brother or sister in Christ lies to you or about you we all understand that would fall into the category of sinning against you. What about less obvious things. Turn to Genesis 25 and read verses 29-34. The Bible is clear that there is a sin against someone committed in this passage. What is the sin? Why would you consider it to be a sin? Who committed it?

Sin against a brother can be a very difficult thing to nail down. Is it a sin if one person feels wronged and the other feels like they have done nothing at all?

Brother Fred fails to invite Brother Mike to a get together at Fred's house. Fred is unaware of the slight and thinks nothing of it. Mike, however, is offended by Fred's insensitive nature and refuses to speak with Fred until he apologizes. Who is at fault? Is that what this passage talks about when it says "a brother sins against you"?

The fact is that the Bible does not clarify the “sin” used in verse 15. The Greek word used there, *harmatano* is simply defined as missing the mark. So we are to go to a brother or sister that misses the mark in life. Well, would we not always be going to each other continuously? The point of this passage is not petty squabbles but it is the health and ministry of the church. So what we are talking about here are things that will disrupt the ministry of the body or the church. Galatians 6 gives us some further insight into this area. Read Galatians 6:1-2. Two words in verse 1 need to be defined: spiritual and restore.

Spiritual: controlled by the Spirit or owned by the Spirit

Restore: a medical term used to refer to resetting fractures

Therefore, according to Galatians 6:1, we who are owned by the Spirit (all believers) are to gently reset the misstep in someone’s life.

When you and I confront and restore we fulfill the law of Christ according to verse 2. Given those definitions, rewrite Galatians 6:1-2 in your own words in the space provided:

As turn our attention back to Matthew 18 we pick the passage up in verse 19. There is an unstated directive here in dealing with sin in someone’s life. What is that unstated directive?

As we pray for that person we are to lift them up for restoring and resetting of their spiritual life. The reference to witnesses is from Deuteronomy 19:15. What type of sin does that verse specify needs two or three witnesses to agree?

So as we agree in prayer for the brother or sister God will move and work. Do you know of someone in who has wronged you? Are you ready to confront them?

Prayer Primer: Pray that God will give you the strength and the words to confront someone who you might need to confront

Week 1, Day 4

Matthew 18:21-35

In order to fully grasp what we are told here we have to understand this passage in light of its context. Christ was teaching His disciples and He had called a child to stand in the midst of them and reminds them that they must become like a child. The child may or may not still be standing in the midst when Christ spoke these words on forgiveness but the setting has not changed and so the image would still be very vivid for the disciples. Have you ever noticed how easy it is for a child to forgive or to forgive a child? It is made easy for the child because they typically believe the best about people. It takes years for people to become cynical. It is made easy for adults to forgive by the fact that the child usually does not know any better. We are to become childlike in our dealings with each other as Christ said and that includes in the area of forgiveness.

I want to use several Old Testament examples to explore how we are to forgive. Turn to Genesis 50 and read verses 15-21. There is a conditional phrase in verse 15. It is in the form of an “if” – “then” statement. Write that conditional phrase here:

Verse 19 tells us why Joseph has no grudges against his brothers. What is the reason he gives in verse 20 for not holding a grudge?

We do not know how long Joseph was confined in prison. He had a choice to grow bitter or to grow compassion. He obviously grew compassion. Forgiveness involves more than just no longer being mad. What is the last thing said in verse 21 about how Joseph treated his brothers?

Turn to I Samuel 24 and read verses 1-11. David had the opportunity to kill Saul for the evil that Saul has done to him. David, however, did not do harm to Saul and he gave the reason in verse 6. What is the simple reason that David gives for refusing to harm Saul?

We might not state our reason in those words. However, God has a purpose and a plan for every person. Jesus Christ died on the cross for every person. Every person deserves our forgiveness. How could you restate David's reason for not harming Saul and make it apply to people we come in contact with each day?

One last example today, and it shows another side of forgiveness. What if the person who has offended you never repents, never asks your forgiveness, never expresses remorse? Should you forgive that person if you are challenged to forgive by a third party?

Read 1 Samuel 25. It is not a very long chapter but it tells an amazing truth.

Nabal never expressed remorse or asked for forgiveness. Yet David granted forgiveness because someone else asked on Nabal's behalf. The forgiveness granted was not for Nabal's sake but for David's sake. David was about to take matters into his own hand (note David's words in verse 33). Could you forgive if a third party asked on their behalf?

Prayer Primer: O.K. I'm asking on their behalf....pray that you can forgive them.

Week 1, Day 5

Matthew 19:16-22

What an interesting question starts our Scripture reading today, "Teacher, what good must I do to have eternal life?" We started this week of study with a question as well. Look back at the first lesson to see the question asked. What was it?

Do these two questions have anything in common?

As you are contemplating these questions, please see the parallel accounts as follows: Mark 10:17-22 and Luke 18:18-23. Write every fact you find about the person asking the question in the space below:

Why, in your opinion, did the man ask the question? Do you know people who have asked the same type of question? What is their reason for asking?

Do you at all find it interesting that the man wanted to *do* something? It is like he wanted to make a list and check it twice, checking off his spiritual duty rather than completely devoting his life to being a follower. Once Jesus told the man to follow commandments and the man asked which ones, Jesus listed some. What do the commandments Jesus listed have in common with each other?

Jesus taught that a relationship with the Father is absolutely essential for eternal life. But, there was a new commandment, an outward way of expressing that inward relationship. Turn to John 13:34-35 and write the new commandment. What does it have in common with the commandments Jesus listed in verse 18 and 19 of Matthew 19?

The man replied to Jesus that he had already tried that. I just want to say, “Really? You’ve kept *all* of them?” I think some people in our culture think the same way as the man. *I’m a good person* or *I’ve lived a moral life*. They want to be good enough by their actions without sacrifice or giving up any control they think they have. The man didn’t get the answer he wanted so he asked for something else. What was the point Jesus was making with His answer? Was Jesus saying that we cannot have material possessions to have eternal life? Of course not! So, what was the meaning of His response?

The man heard the answer given by Jesus and went away grieving. The disappointment came when he realized his possessions were more valuable to him than the desire to have eternal life or a real relationship with God.

What do you have that you value over your salvation and/or your relationship with God? What do you have that you value over serving Him? What do you have or what do you do that you are unwilling to give up to be a more committed follower of Jesus?

These are serious questions and ones that I do not want you to hurry past. While your initial inclination might be to write nothing, maybe there is proof in your life otherwise. Our natural or human nature wants to hold onto possessions or relationships or habits that make us comfortable. We want to hold onto our money or possessions, especially in a time of economic crisis, because we want to be prepared for the future. We have a fear of life without the things we are hanging onto so we hold on tightly.

There was another Jewish man who, previous to becoming a follower of Jesus, thought himself to be a keeper of the law. However, when he was converted he realized that all the law-following, religious acts were really worthless outside a relationship with Jesus.

Read Philippians 3:4-11. According to Paul, what was gain to him? How can you take these words of Paul and apply them to your own life?

Prayer Primer: Ask God to reveal to you what it is that you are hanging onto more than your relationship with Him. Then ask Him for the ability or the willingness to let it go.

