Ha Lim (Deborah) Lee
Proclamation & Communication
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Sermon Manuscript: Matthew 18:15-20

Introduction:

Have you ever been in a situation where someone lied to you, went behind your back, did something to hurt you, or spoke to you unkindly? Of course you have! We have all experienced that. In all human relationships, there's going to be conflict. And how many of you knew what to do about that hurt? Did you ever talk to them about it? Did you confront them? Or worse, did you confront them and they got defensive or denied ever doing such a thing? Jesus has given us the ministry of reconciliation, but the majority of us are terrible at reconciling with one another. In families, marriages, among siblings, and within our churches. Many of us will turn a blind eye to the sins of another brother or sister to avoid confrontation, but Jesus actually tells us not to do that.

Let's read Matthew 18:15-20 together to find out how Jesus tells us how to deal with sin and how to reconcile with one another.

Passage:

> "If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over. But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.' If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector.
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> "Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.
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> "Again, truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them."

The purpose of this passage is not to disown or kick anyone out of the church, but it's a process of restoration. It's a protocol on how to deal with conflict. Now, the context of this passage is a conversation with Jesus among his disciples. They asked him a question which kick-started Jesus off to a series of teachings and parables. They asked him "Who, then, is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven" (18:1). These disciples are essentially asking Jesus, "Who is the big

dog among us here?" His answer to them is basically, the one who is willing to be the least, the lowest of lows, the meek, the humble, is the greatest in the kingdom.

Let's go back and take a look at verse 15. It says, "If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you." This is the first step of restoration. Jesus is talking about confidentiality. If you see that someone is sinning or has sinned against you personally, go to them privately. Don't talk about it with other people, and don't bring it up in front of others. Don't hold onto your offense. Go and speak to them one-on-one.

So what happens when you confront them, and they don't listen? Verse 16 says, "Take one or two others along, so that every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses."

This verse refers to an Old Testament law concerning witnesses in Deuteronomy 19:15-21. It basically says that there needs to be two or three witnesses in order for a matter to be established. This ensures accountability. So, you go to your brother or sister and confront them, but they don't agree with what you brought before them. Bring one or two others along to get their perspective of the situation. Sometimes, it might be an issue that you yourself need to deal with. Maybe the way you saw things was skewed and maybe it was a misunderstanding of a situation. Or maybe there's a problem that you need to deal with within your own soul. Both people in this confrontation are now accountable for telling the truth and be reconciled and restored to each other. Having one or two others in this stage is important to follow through with the process of restoration and restoring relationships.

On the other side of this situation, it may be that this person who you have confronted still does not see where they have been wrong.

At this point, you have gone to them privately - they didn't agree with what you thought was wrong. You have also brought in one or two others, and they still don't agree with you and a few others. What do you do now? At this point, you might feel frustrated with how the other person is responding and you want to give up. How come this person does not see that they are clearly in the wrong? It's easy to give up, but there's a next step, which continues to require humility and forgiveness.

Jesus gives the next step of this process in the following verse. Verse 17 says, "If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector." This process of bringing in more witnesses to the matter is not at all meant to be punitive or ostracizing. It is definitely not meant to be used to kick anyone out of the church or to shun or mistreat them as they would a tax collector in New Testament Jerusalem times. As Reimer says, "The writer of this book is a tax collector!"

The purpose of bringing to light the sin of this particular brother or sister is to make it known that this person needs to be restored into a relationship with God. They have not been able to come into agreement with what the church agrees upon, which is the Word of God. The Word of God that is "God-breathed and useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2

Tim. 3:16-17). The process of reconciliation that Jesus walks the disciples through is a protocol for restoration. Restoration that is built upon agreement.

Agreement is for the sake of unity. Agreement with Jesus and with each other will give us the authority to bind in heaven whatever we bind on earth, and to loose in heaven whatever we loose on earth. Agreement and restoration to each other in Jesus is supernatural and releases power and authority in the body. Verse 19 says, "Again, truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for it will be done for them by my Father in heaven." Agreement with each other about Jesus and the word of God brings us into unity with each other and the Lord.

Upon this agreement and the fellowship of the united Body promises the presence of God. It is Jesus's promise that He will be with us when we gather in His name.

Restoration and agreement is for the sake of Unity.

Conclusion:

Jesus starts out in Matthew 18 by emphasizing humility. The disciples ask, "Who is the greatest?" And Jesus talks about humility. The restoration protocol in Matthew 18:15-20 is impossible without humility. In Ephesians 4:2-3, it says, "Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace." Humility is required for the restoration of souls to God and to one another. We must be willing to repent because all have fallen short of the glory of God. We must also be willing to forgive because Jesus first forgave us. We must also have the humility to bear each other's burdens. Galatians 6:1-2 says, "Brothers, if anyone is caught in transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ."

When we see others who are in sin or have been sinned against by another brother or sister, let us not shy away from the restoration protocol that Jesus lays out for us in Matthew 18. Let us bring those who are out of alignment into alignment in humility, for the sake of unity and the restoration of our relationship to each other and God.

Prayer Point:

Let us pause and reflect on this. Is there someone whom we need to forgive? Is there someone who we need to reconcile with and confront?