

Keynotes from Pastor Tim's am Sermon on 7/02/2021

Mini Series – “Making Disciples”

Part 15 - Matthew 18 v 1-4 & 15-35 “Being the greatest disciple”

All scripture references are taken from the ESV

Matthew 18:1-4, 15-35. At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” ² And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them ³ and said, “Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. ⁴ Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

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 ^[f] 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.” ²¹ Then Peter came up and said to him, “Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?” ²² Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times.” ²³ “Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. ²⁴ When he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. ²⁵ And since he could not pay, his master ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made. ²⁶ So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.’ ²⁷ And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt. ²⁸ But when that same servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii, and seizing him, he began to choke him, saying, ‘Pay what you owe.’ ²⁹ So his fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you.’ ³⁰ He refused and went and put him in prison until he should pay the debt. ³¹ When his fellow servants saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their master all that had taken place. ³² Then his master summoned him and said to him, ‘You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. ³³ And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?’ ³⁴ And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers, until he should pay all his

debt. ³⁵ So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.”

Relationships are the bedrock of society, and where relationships break down, society breaks down. This is true within the family, the community and also our church community. In response to two questions from his disciples, Jesus shows us how shows us how we are to deal with relationship conflicts in a way that, if God is gracious, may lead to reconciliation and will bring glory to God. The questions are found in **v1** and **v21** (above). One is about greatness in the kingdom of God, and the other concerns forgiveness in the kingdom of God.

If we understand Jesus’ answers and **all of us** put into practice his teaching, then we will bring glory to God, and be equipped to deal with conflict in a way that gives opportunity for reconciliation.

1. Who is the greatest in God’s kingdom? v1

In our culture, most people measure greatness by status, power and/or wealth. We wouldn’t ever imagine that the great in the world are those with no rights, no might and no power. This was true in Jesus’ day too – it is inbred in the human heart. The disciples must have been stunned by his answer (**vv2-4** above). Jesus isn’t saying that all children are innocent and therefore members of God’s kingdom. The Bible teaches us that we are all born sinners. Jesus is teaching that it is **the humble who are the great in the kingdom of God**.

Children in Jesus’ day had no rights, no might and no wealth. They were completely dependent on their parents for protection and survival, and are a picture of humility. The people who enter God’s kingdom, and are great within it, are those who are dependent on God’s mercy, knowing that they have:

- no right to come before God because of their sin
- no spiritual strength to put themselves right with God
- no moral wealth to offer God

God favours the humble

Humility is one of the true marks that a person belongs to God's kingdom, and is the definition of greatness within it. The greatest disciples in the kingdom of God are those who:

- Know they are sinners – **not** those who have the most knowledge, or the one who is the most gifted teacher
- Are depending on the grace of God to make them right and keep them right with God – **not** those who give the most money
- Are preferring the needs of others before their own needs – **not** the one who leads the biggest congregation

The Lord Jesus Christ is surely the person you would name as the greatest in the kingdom of God yet Paul wrote of him that he took the form of a servant (**Phil 2:6-11** see p4 for full text). Humility in God's kingdom is greatness because

we follow a Saviour who walked the path of humility.

Our Saviour laid aside his majesty and submitted himself to:

- The will of his Father who sent him into a world that would hate him and kill him
- The will of sinful men who beat him and put him to death
- Death on a cross in order to redeem us from sin

The kingdom of God is all about the majesty of God's grace as seen in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is not about us. This God of majesty humbled himself to redeem for himself a people who would glorify him.

Humility is a mark of greatness and leads people to see the greatness of Christ.

Jesus shows us that humility in God's kingdom is worked out in the way we relate to one another. He calls for concern for those disciples who are young in spiritual years (the 'little ones'). He expects mature disciples to protect young disciples and not lead them into sin. Mature disciples are to go in search of young disciples who have wandered off. (**vv1-14** see p4).

He expects all of us (mature and young alike) to resolve conflicts with a view to restoring relationships (vv15-20).

a) This is about resolving conflicts with the community of God's people (v15 your brother)

It is not always possible to keep good relationships with unbelievers, who have no true understanding of forgiveness and grace. As believers, we must seek to win round our brothers and sisters in Christ for the sake of church unity and our witness to the world.

b) This is not about airing your grievances, but about dealing with sin. (v15)

The word Jesus uses means to sin against God's law. Some things people do aren't sin issues but just personal preferences. We might just have to exercise patience! However, where sin is involved, we have to deal with it.

c) This is about protecting the individual and community from harm (v15)

When someone sins against you, you should not go and tell everyone else. You must avoid damaging the reputation of your brother within the community, and damaging the community by causing them to have to take sides. You cannot claim to love God and his people if you are busy exposing the sins of your brothers and sisters to others.

d) This is about restoration, not venting your frustration (v15-20)

When someone sins against us, we generally feel hurt, then become angry and end by either ignoring the person

who hurt us or adding to the sin by a verbal outburst against them. Instead, Jesus calls us to speak to our brother

with a view to getting him to listen and repent, thereby saving (gaining) him.

We will want to:

- save the relationship out of love for our brother because we value them as a member of God's kingdom.
- spare them the pain of having their sin exposed and thus being embarrassed before others
- spare the church the pain of dealing with this as we value the church too much to cause damage to her.

What happens if they don't listen, despite prayer and our efforts to resolve it? Jesus tells us to take witnesses (**v16**) who are there to seek to facilitate the restoration

through repentance, not to take sides. If the offender still doesn't listen, then the matter goes to the church for discipline (v17). At that church meeting, the witnesses will share their testimony and the church will appeal with tears to the sinning party to repent. If they don't, then the church has no choice but to relate to that person as if they are an unbeliever, but they will not be cut off **because the goal is restoration**, not just to the one they sinned against, but to the Lord. Jesus shows that where the church does this, they will know his presence (vv18-20). (Take note that v20 does not apply to a prayer meeting, but to this situation).

Jesus shows us that as we obey him in this he is present to help us and to confirm that we are doing the right thing.

2. How many times do I have to forgive? (vv21-22)

In Jesus' day, the religious leaders taught that forgiving someone three times showed you had a forgiving spirit. Peter had grasped that three probably wasn't enough, but Jesus' answer shows that

true disciples forgive without keeping a record of the number of wrongs done against us

When God forgives us, he chooses to remember our sins no more, and keeps no record of our wrongs against him. When someone who has sinned against us acknowledges their sin and repents before God of it, we too are to choose not to remember it, but that is hard for us. Jesus helps us through the parable he tells in vv23-35 with its application in v35. We need to forgive from our heart, not just with our lips.

Repeated forgiveness for those who have repeatedly sinned against us isn't optional
If we have experienced the mercy and grace of God to forgive us, then we will want to have a heart that is willing to forgive without keeping count. We get this by continually looking to the cross of Christ and what God has done for us. We owe a debt to God for our sin that we can never repay, unless we spend eternity in Hell. In his mercy, God is willing to forgive those who acknowledge that debt and humbly ask for mercy. However, the debt of sin still stands. If God chooses to remember our sins no more, then he must pay himself because his justice still needs to be satisfied for

him to remain holy. To satisfy his own righteousness, he came himself in the person of his Son, and died in the place of everyone who acknowledges their sin and comes to Jesus for mercy.

As we allow the gospel of God's grace to penetrate our heart, we will have a heart that is willing to forgive others.

So where does humility come into this? The gospel humbles us, showing us that we are made right by the grace of God alone. As a result, we will be more willing to seek restoration with our fellow believers, protecting them and forgiving them if they listen, but grieving deeply if they don't.

Harder still, we will be willing to listen to someone when they come to us to expose our sin against them. We will repent and seek to live differently with the help of the Spirit.

Every day, as we contemplate God's grace to us through his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, we are humbled and become more generous-hearted to others. Read how Paul expressed it in **Philippians 2:1-4** (see over).

Let us strive to become those who are the greatest disciples in God's kingdom – humble, dependent on God and serving his people.

Matthew 18: 1-14 At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" ² And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them ³ and said, "Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. ⁴ Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. ⁵ "Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, ⁶ but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea. ⁷ "Woe to the world for temptations to sin! For it is necessary that temptations come, but woe to the one by whom the temptation comes! ⁸ And if your hand or your foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life crippled or lame than with two hands or two feet to be thrown into the eternal fire. ⁹ And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than with two eyes

to be thrown into the hell^[c] of fire.¹⁰ "See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that in heaven their angels always see the face of my Father who is in heaven.^[d] ¹² What 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? ¹³ And 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^[e] Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish.

Philippians 2:6-11 who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. ⁹ Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Philippians 2:1-4 So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, ² complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. ³ Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. ⁴ Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.