

Pastor Daniel Waldschmidt – Matt 18:15-20 – 16th Sunday after Pentecost – Sept 24th, 2017

How would you expect Jesus to finish his sentence, “If your brother or sister sins...” How would you expect Jesus to finish that sentence? Our sinful natures might want Jesus finish his sentence, “If your brother or sister sins, *go and talk to your friends about it.*” Usually when somebody sins against us we usually don’t go to that person, instead we usually go and tell our friends, “You won’t believe what this person did to me!” But that’s not how Jesus finishes the sentence. Listen to how Jesus finishes the sentence: “If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, *just between the two of you.*” Instead of going and talking to your friends about it, Jesus says that we should go and talk to that person about it in private, “just between the two of you.” Why does Jesus say that? Because Jesus cares about the reputation even of the person who sinned and so Jesus says to point out their sins in private just between the two of you so that their reputation can be preserved. But you might say, “Who cares about their reputation, they sinned against me!” Well, would you want people talking about all of your sins? That’s why Jesus says, “If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, *just between the two of you.*” Or we might want Jesus to finish the sentence a different way. We might want Jesus to finish the sentence, “If your brother or sister sins, *don’t do anything about it.*” There’s lots of reasons we might want to finish the sentence this way. It’s very difficult to point out to someone that they have sinned. Or we might think, “It’s none of my business.” But Jesus does not say, “If your brother or sister sins, *that’s none of your business.*” Jesus says, “If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you” (Matt 18:15). But we might say, “I have sins of my own. I’m a sinner too. How I can I point out the sins of someone else?” Jesus knows that you’re a sinner too, and yet he still commands you, “If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you” (Matt 18:15).

But why does Jesus command you to point out the sins of your brother? Jesus commands you to point out the sins of another person, because Jesus loves that person. Jesus knows that if a person persists in unrepentant sin that person will go to hell. “Unrepentant sin” means that you do it and you’re not sorry about it. Unrepentant sin means that if you had the situation over again that you would do it again. Unrepentant sin means that you make excuses for it. Unrepentant sin means that you have no intention of stopping that sin in the future and you’re not sorry that you did it in the past. And so if you see a Christian commit a sin or you have first-hand knowledge that a Christian has committed a sin and that Christian doesn’t seem to be sorry about it, then Jesus says go and point out their fault, just between the two of you” (Matt 18:15).

Why does Jesus tell you to do that? Because unrepentant sin will send people to hell. The apostle Paul says in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10, **“Or do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexual immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.”** (1 Cor 6:9-10) If the person who professes to be a believer in Jesus, continues in that unrepentant sin, he will not inherit the kingdom of God. Paul says in Galatians chapter 5: **“The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy,**

fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God” (Galatians 5:20-21). Notice that these lists from Paul include what we might consider more obvious sins, like sexual immorality. So if a Christian is living with his girlfriend outside of marriage and having sex with his girlfriend, if he doesn't repent of that sin, that sin could send him to hell. But there's also a whole lot of other sins on here that we might consider more minor sins. Like “slander.” Slander is when you say hateful things about other people. “Fits of rage” and “drunkenness” are also on the list of things that can keep people out of the kingdom of God. If a Christian continues to do any of these sins and does not repent of them, then these sins could send them to hell. **“I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God” (Galatians 5:21).** And so now you see why Jesus commands you, “if your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you.” This is a matter of life and death. And now we see why the way we would finish the sentence completely misses the point. Remember we would finish the sentence, “If your brother or sister sins, *go and tell other people about it.*” Well if we go and tell other people about it, it's not going to do that person any good. Or we might finish the sentence, “If your brother or sister sins, don't do anything about it.” Well if we don't do anything about it and just let them continue in their unrepentant sin, then we're letting them continue down the road to hell and that's obviously not loving.

But you might say, “But pastor, they'll probably be really upset with me.” Yes, they might get really upset with you. If you point out someone's sin you take the risk of them getting really upset with you. That's why pointing out someone's sin is a self-sacrificial thing. Did Jesus ever do anything self-sacrificial to save someone else's soul? Yes of course he did. Jesus sacrificed himself on the cross to pay for your sins and mine and the sins of the person you're talking to. But you see in order for him to receive the benefits of Jesus' sacrifice he needs to look to Jesus in repentance and faith. And in order for him to look to Jesus in repentance and faith, you need to point out his sin to him. You see it's love for the other person that causes us to point out their sin.

That's type of love that Jesus has for that person's soul. Just before our passage Jesus tells a story about a Shepherd who has 100 sheep and loses one of them. And he loves that one sheep so much that he goes out and finds it. Jesus loves each one of his sheep. Jesus loves you enough that he tells you what you need to hear, even if it's hard to hear. And Jesus often uses another Christian to tell you what you need to hear another Christian who loves you so much that he'll tell you what you need to hear at great personal risk to himself. For most of this sermon I've been talking to the person doing the admonishing. But if you're the person being admonished, be humble enough to say, “You're right. I shouldn't have done that. I'm sorry. I won't do it again.” Sometimes our pride gets in the way and we begin to make excuses or rationalize our behavior. It's much better and much easier to simply swallow our pride and admit, “You're right. I'm sorry.” And when you say I'm sorry, then you get to hear the Gospel. Then you get to hear the person say, “Jesus died for you and you're completely forgiven.” And when you're

sorry for your sins and when the person says, “Your sins are forgiven,” that’s as valid and certain as if our Lord Jesus had said it to you himself. Look what Jesus says, **“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” (Matt 18:18)**. This is a repeat of what Jesus says to Peter in chapter 16 and back in chapter 16 Jesus also said, “I give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven” And so this passage is often called the power of the keys. What this passage means is that if you are not sorry for your sins and someone tells you because you’re not sorry for your sins your sins are not forgiven, because you’re not sorry for your sins the door of heaven is locked to you, if you’re not sorry for your sins, that’s not just the person or the church saying that, that’s valid in heaven. But if you are sorry for your sins and the person tells you “You’re forgiven,” that forgiveness is also valid in heaven. When you’re sorry for your sins and a fellow Christian tells you, “You’re forgiven. Jesus died for you,” that Christian takes the keys and opens the door of heaven for you. The Small Catechism has a very clear and very simple explanation for this. **“The use of the keys is that special power and right which Christ gives to his church on earth: to forgive the sins of penitent sinners but refuse forgiveness to the impenitent as long as they do not repent. ... A Christian congregation with its called servant of Christ uses the keys in accordance with Christ’s command by forgiving those who repent of their sin and are willing to amend, and by excluding from the congregation those who are plainly impenitent that they may repent. I believe that when this is done, it is as valid and certain in heaven also, as if Christ, our dear Lord, dealt with us himself. Where is this written? Jesus says in Matthew chapter 18, “Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.”** If you go to the person and they say, “No I’m not sorry for my sins,” then you bind the sins to that person and say “Your sins are still on you because you are not sorry.” If, however, you go to the person and they say “Yeah, I’m sorry for doing that” then you loose the person from their sins, like untying a rope so that they don’t have to carry their sins around with them anymore because their sins are forgiven because of the blood of Jesus.

But you might say, “OK pastor. I understand why this is important.” But it’s still a very difficult thing to do. Jesus knows that and that’s why he promises you that when you ask him he’ll give you the courage and the words to say and he will be with you. **“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.” (Matt 18:19-20)**

Today we’ve seen that Jesus loves you enough to tell you what you need to hear – and he often uses other Christians to do it, Christians who love your soul so much that they’re brave enough to tell you what you need to hear, even if it’s difficult. Be thankful for that. Be thankful that Jesus and your fellow Christians love you that much. Amen.

