MATTHEW 18

Loose Outline of the Chapter:

Verse 1-9 = Personal sin or causing someone else to sin

Verse 10-20 = Forgiving those who sin against you

Verse 21-35 = A parable illustrating both principles.

Mat 18:1 - At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?”

Mat 18:2 - And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them

Mat 18:3 - and said, “Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

Mat 18:4 - Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

* Human babies are some of the most helpless babies in all creation.
* Why?
* Perhaps God made us that way so we have time to make observations about what its like to be a child.
* When we are babies our physical needs are immediately in front of us and we would die if somebody didn’t provide those things to us.
* But eventually those babies grow up into adults and are capable of caring for their own physical needs.
* Unless mentally impaired in some way, all human beings Grow up to recognize these realities, But many human beings fail to recognize that they are still in desperate need.
  + Although we may be physically able to secure some of our necessities and desires, we are beyond incapable to manage our spiritual needs.
  + The greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven is the one recognizes his childlike dependence on his/her Father and gladly accepts their role as a child of His.
  + Without this recognition, one can “never enter the Kingdom of Heaven.”
* Recognition and application of this truth are difficult because there is a level of humility required to accept your own insufficiency, especially in a society that puts high value on “the self made man.”

Mat 18:5 - “Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me,

Mat 18:6 - 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.

* Those who are in the Kingdom of Heaven are those who become like children and it is to those “children” (not literal children) Jesus refers to in verse 5.
* Those who receive God’s children are receiving Christ
  + The term “receive” here is used in a similar way to Matthew 10:40-42
  + It means to accept someone.
  + Those who accepted Christ’s messengers would encourage them, assist with their needs, and send them on their way well cared for!
* To treat a Child of God well is to treat Christ well.
* APPLICATION:
  + Are we as quick to jump up and help fellow Christians as we would be to jump up and help Christ if He came to our congregation with a need?
  + This idea is found in Matthew 25:40 when Jesus says, “Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.”
  + Imagine Jesus on Judgement Day thanking us for all the things we’ve done for Him: making a meal for Him when He was sick, giving Him a coat when it was cold outside, babysitting so He could have the night off, etc…
  + We wouldn’t consider any work small or insignificant if we knew Jesus was going to come personally thank us for it!
  + Just remember He will.
  + It ought to encourage us all to do more of the small things.
* In contrast to those who receive a child of God, the one who causes a child of God to sin is strongly condemned.
  + Christ says it would be better for him to be killed (removed from the picture entirely) than to go on leading others into sin.
  + I don’t think Jesus is supporting murder or suicide in saying this but rather using hyperbole to stress the severity of living this way.
  + In a literal sense, it would be better for a person who leads others into sin to be killed on the spot, because in living (assuming they don’t repent) they are only earning a harsher judgement on themselves by corrupting others.
  + Obviously, Jesus wants a person like that to repent, turn from their sins, and their bad influence.

Mat 18:7 - “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!

Mat 18:8 - 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.

Mat 18:9 - 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 of fire.

* The term “woe” is usually used as a statement of grief and sometimes condemnation.
* Jesus uses it twice in this passage
  + The first is a statement of grief.
    - “Woe to the world for temptations to sin!”
    - The world is in a sad state and has been since Adam and Eve first sinned.
    - All human beings have to live in a world troubled by temptation and invitations to sin.
    - Jesus laments this fact.
  + Jesus’ second usage of “woe” is a statement of condemnation.
    - Why is it necessary that temptations exist?
    - Answer: Because of the nature of the world God created.
    - God created a world in which love was possible.
    - In order to have love, a person must have free will to choose to love.
    - Having free will also includes the possibility of choosing not to love.
    - People who choose not to love God but instead pursue love for other things and encourage others to do the same are the tempters of this text.
    - Loving something other than God supremely is sin.
    - There will always be some who choose to live this way.
    - They will tempt others to do the same.
    - So, because of the free will God has granted, temptations will always exist.
    - “…woe to the one by whom the temptation comes.”
    - Jesus’ second woah is a condemnation on those who take this sinful route and push others to join them.
* Verse 8-9 may sound very familiar because Jesus said almost the exact same thing back in chapter 5:29-30 .
  + Again, we see Jesus’ using some hyperbole to communicate the seriousness of removing tempting influences from our presence.
  + We obviously believe our hands, feet, and eyes to be pretty vital.
  + Jesus says, their not vital enough to keep them around if they lead you into sin.
  + What principle is Christ teaching here?
    - Perhaps you have a friend through whom “temptation comes” into your life. That friend, no matter how important to you, may need to be cut off
    - Perhaps there is a place in your life where “temptation comes.” No matter how vital you think the place may be it is not vital enough to go to hell over.
    - Perhaps you have a app or a website or a social media platform through which “temptation comes.” It’s not worth keeping around if it’s leading you to hell.

Mat 18:10 - “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.

* In my opinion, this verse is a bit tricky, not because of what the verse says, but because of the details we don’t know.
* Hebrews 1:14 tells us angels are ministers/servants to Christians
  + Heb 1:14  Are they not all ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation?
* Jesus is warning those who despise believers in light of this fact.
* Angels watch over the saints and have access to God.
* Mistreating the saints will not go unnoticed in the throne room of heaven.

Mat 18:12 - 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?

Mat 18:13 - And if he finds it, truly, I say to you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine that never went astray.

Mat 18:14 - So it is not the will of my Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish.

* These verses describe God’s love for the lost with a simple illustration.
* If a shepherd has 100 sheep, 99 are safely in the fence, but 1 is lost, what does he do?
* If God were the shepherd, He would leave the 99 safe sheep and search out the 1 lost.
* Upon finding the sheep, great rejoicing ensues.
* There is a statement here that I struggled with when I read this for the first time and I want to take a moment to help anyone else who may find it difficult.
  + “And if He finds it, truly, I say to you he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine that never went astray.”
  + Question: Why does God rejoice more over sinners who repent than over faithful believers who never left His fold? Does God love them more?
  + Answer: No, God doesn’t love the faithful less.
  + So, what is the text saying?
    - I believe we can understand the meaning through personal experience.
    - Lets say you are going to buy a gift which costs $1000 dollars for your friends birthday today (you’re a good friend).
    - Yesterday, you had all the money in your wallet but today $100 is missing.
    - You are worried because the time of the party is approaching.
    - Upon realizing 1/10th of your money is missing, you tear your house apart searching for it!
    - After 20 minutes, you find it under the package of cookies you were eating last night.
    - How do you feel?
      * You are relieved!
      * Your heart is full of momentary joy because you found what was lost.
      * What would you have done if you never found it?
      * You don’t know but that stress has now been taken off your shoulders.
      * Your worry is lifted and you rejoice because of it.
    - Are the other $900 in your wallet loved less because you found the missing $100?
    - No! Your joy in them has been steady and consistent.
    - Your joy in the missing $100 is momentarily more potent because of the concern for its safety.
* This text also communicates a beautiful concern God has for individuals.
  + God isn’t just content just having large numbers of people worship Him.
  + He isn’t satisfied when the number of His followers reach a particular level and concerns Himself only when that number falls too low.
  + The Bible tells us God desires all men to be saved.
  + He cares for human beings on an individual level.
  + God isn’t just interested in the church collectively where you attend. He is interested in the individual sheep in that congregation.
  + APPLICATION:
    - We need to be concerned about individuals, not numbers.
    - I know it can be easy for large churches to lose track of individuals who leave and fall off the path because there are still enough people in their pews to not feel the impact.
    - They’ve got a congregation of 100 and 1 lady stops showing up and participating.
      * How would we respond?
      * “Well we’ve got 99 others and I’m sure we can pick up one or two more from somewhere else!”
      * Or, “we’ve got to go help that sheep.”
    - Some congregations grow so large that keeping track of one individual can be difficult.
      * Is that a valid excuse?
      * It doesn’t seem like one the Good Shepherd would be too pleased with.

Mat 18:15 - “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.

Mat 18:16 - 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.

Mat 18:17 - 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.

* We now move from the section about personal sin and causing others to sin into the section instructing us how to act if someone sins against us.
* How do I respond if I’m a victim of sin?
* It is my conviction that these verses contain one of the most vital and most neglected principles for Christian unity.
  + The principle discussed here must be practiced in order for believers to have a solid foundation on which to grow.
  + Neglecting this principle will allow cracks to form in a church’s foundation that can render a congregation useless in the service of the Lord.
* Let’s first discuss what Jesus is saying.
  + (1) If you are the victim of a sin brought about by a fellow brother, you are to take the problem to the brother who offended you and try to resolve the issue. If he hears you out, the problem is solved!
  + (2) If he refuses to listen to you and apologize, you should take one or two others who are familiar with the facts of the situation and talk to the brother again.
  + (3) If he still refuses to repent, the church collectively (this would include the congregation’s leaders) should be made aware of the offense and address the situation.
  + Is the man refuses to listen even to the Church, he is to be considered a gentile and a tax collector.
    - In the Jewish culture the meaning of this phrase would have been obvious.
    - The Jews did not associate with Gentiles and they hated the tax collectors.
    - One who refused to repent of sin against another was to be an outcast in the “church community.”
  + This is one of the important texts to be considered when discussing “church discipline.”
  + There are other verses which we will touch on later that help us understand this principle with even greater clarity.
* Why is Jesus’ advice the best advice?
  + Because He is Jesus! Duh! (😊)
    - That's funny in one sense but in another sense it's really important to recognize.
    - Conflict resolution has always been a difficult space for human beings to navigate.
    - Countless books have been written to try to help people and groups resolve conflicts.
    - But who wrote the book on human nature? Who knows the minds of men and the psychology of men better than anyone?
    - Answer: Jesus!
    - If anyone knows best how to resolve conflicts between parties, Jesus does!
    - No one has more insight.
  + Because Jesus’ solution preserves unity
    - Jesus’ solution only involves the necessary parties at the necessary times.
    - Jesus’ solution requires honesty about the facts.
      * When it’s a conversation between the two people who know the facts best, misinformation is less likely to spread.
      * All the facts and perceptions of the parties can be put on the table.
    - Jesus’ solution prevents gossip.
      * When the first person we are required to discuss an offense with is the person who offended us, we don’t have room to discuss it with others.
    - Jesus’ solution makes us courageous in confronting sin.
      * You wouldn’t think that confronting someone who wronged you would require courage but it does.
      * When you confront someone, you don’t know how they will respond.
        + They might blow up in your face and tell you you are being ridiculous.
        + They might weep over an offense they weren’t aware of.
      * Stepping into that unknown requires courage and embracing that will make us who Christ wants us to be.
    - Jesus’ solution will build respect among Christians
      * When you can approach a person face-to-face and reach resolutions about offenses, both parties will walk away from those conversations with greater respect for each other.
      * They will also know they have approachable brothers if future problems ever arise.
    - Jesus’ solution will keep us from harming our fellow brothers in the future.
      * If offenses are never brought to light how can we learn from them?
      * How can we adjust our actions and lives to better serve other? We can’t!
      * Jesus’ solution gives the greater internal insight for the individual growth in Church community.
    - Jesus’ solution works.
      * I’ve personally experienced how well this works.
      * It is often the case that the person who offended us is unaware or didn’t fully grasp the extent of their wrong towards us.
      * Very few people are willing to hold out in stubborn unrepentance when approached by more than one brother/sister.
      * Those who do refuse to repent need to be identified as unwilling to submit to God. People like this can destroy the Church from the inside and can fly under the radar if a pattern like this isn’t followed.
* We absolutely must not change Jesus’ instruction.
  + Do we know better than Christ?
  + Are we better at leading a congregation than Christ?
  + Many believe they are… or at least their actions reveal they believe it.
    - How many congregations do you know that follow this principle?
    - Their members don’t accept gossip from other member?
    - Their leaders don’t take complains from members about other members until this pattern has been followed?
  + I can’t tell you how many people I’ve encountered that believe they’ve got a better system figured out.
  + If believers and Church leaders want a strong congregation, they need to follow this pattern. No exceptions! You don’t know better than Jesus.

Mat 18:18  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.

* General Meaning:
  + We’ve already read almost this exact statement out of the mouth of Jesus in chapter 16, verse 19.
  + The Apostles would have special authority in the early Church to make decisions on doctrine.
  + Again, let me clarify that these decisions were not made based on the personal preferences or whims of the Apostles fancy but with the divine guidance of the Holy Spirit who was granted to them in a powerful way.
  + Through them the Holy Spirit guided the direction and doctrine of Christ’s Church.
* Specific Contextual Meaning:
  + The decisions of the Apostles on issues of Church conflict and discipline would be confirmed in Heaven.
  + Although they may not have been confirmed about it at this point, there would probably come a day when, either, they questioned their own authority bind such things or others questioned their authority as leaders in the Church.

Mat 18:19 - 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.

Mat 18:20 - For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.”

* I don’t find these verses difficult to understand but I have struggled to discover how they fit into the context of the surrounding verses.
  + I don’t feel like they connect to verses 15-17
  + I understand them as connecting to verse 18 but largely as a stand-alone teaching.
* I want to offer two interpretations of this text for your consideration:
  + (1) Verses 19-20 are addressed specifically to the 12 Apostles.
    - My understanding of verse 18 is that it can only be addressed to the 12 Apostles specifically.
    - It is possible verses 19-20 (being in the same context) should also be interpreted this way.
    - If this interpretation is taken, Jesus is telling His Apostles that while they collectively have the power to bind and loose, God is also with them more intimately.
    - If two of them agree on a direction for the Church and go to God in prayer about their request, God stood ready to answer their request because it originated from His Spirit which dwelt in them.
  + (2) Verses 19-20 are addressed generally to all believers.
    - In this interpretation, Jesus lays down a general principle about the power of unified prayer in seeking council, wisdom, and blessing from God.
    - We know the principle in verse 19 is also true for individual prayers (Matthew 21:22; Mark 11:24) but here Jesus stresses the power of praying in unity with other members of the Kingdom.
    - Even in the smallest groups God is present with us!
* Which interpretation do I like better?
  + That is a good question…
  + I’m still not sure…
  + I’m going to leave it up to you and I’m going to try to continue to make up my mind.

Mat 18:21  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?”

Mat 18:22  Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times.

* After Jesus’ discussion about approaching a brother who has sinned against you, Peter approaches Jesus and asks Him how many times he needed to be willing to forgive his brother.
* He offered a number he probably thought was pretty generous, 7 times.
* Jesus, who may have been thinking, “Peter, I’ve already forgiven you more than 7 times,” told him he ought to forgive “seventy-seven times.”
  + Jesus wasn’t telling him to stop after 77.
  + He was making it clear that forgiveness was always to be extended to one who was willing to repent.
* He then provides a story to explain the reason why…

Mat 18:23 - “Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants.

Mat 18:24 - When he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents.

Mat 18:25 - 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.

Mat 18:26 - So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.’

Mat 18:27 - And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt.

Mat 18:28 - 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.’

Mat 18:29 - So his fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you.’

Mat 18:30 - He refused and went and put him in prison until he should pay the debt.

Mat 18:31 - 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.

Mat 18:32 - Then his master summoned him and said to him, ‘You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me.

Mat 18:33 - And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?’

Mat 18:34 - And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers, until he should pay all his debt.

Mat 18:35 - So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.”

* We won’t go verse by verse through this story because I believe most of it is self-explanatory.
* Basic summary:
  + A king has a servant that owes him a lot of money.
    - He owes him 10,000 talents
    - A talent is a weight, not a particular piece of money.
    - If this was 10,000 talents of gold, using today’s gold price ($1,713 oz), the math breaks down like this…
      * 72 pounds = 1 talent
      * 16 oz = 1 pound
      * $1,713 X 16 = $27,408/pound of gold
      * $27,408 X 72 pounds = $1,973,376/talent of gold
      * $1,973,376 X 10,000 talents = $19,733,760,000
      * This servant owed the King today’s equivalent of 20 billion dollars.
      * I would like to know how he got in that much debt and how rich the king was to forgive it all.
  + The King was going to sell the servant and his family into slavery because he couldn’t pay the debt.
  + But the servant begged for mercy.
  + The King gave him mercy and forgave the debt.
  + The servant then went out and found another servant who owed him 100 denarii
    - From other scriptures we can guess this was about 100 days wages.
    - Not a small figure but certainly no something unpayable.
  + The first servant violently demanded the debt to be payed.
  + When his fellow servant couldn’t pay it, he had him thrown into prison.
  + When the king learned what had happened, he punished the servant he had previously forgiven because of his unwillingness to forgive his fellow servant.
* What did the Apostles need to take away from this story? What do we need to take away from this story.
  + The Apostles may not have appreciated this story fully until after Christ’s death and resurrection.
  + Today, we can look back in light of the sacrifice made on the cross and have insight into Jesus’ words that His Apostles didn’t when they first heard these words.
  + God is the great King who has forgiven the enormous debt of the servant.
  + It is unconscionable that the servant then turns around and won’t forgive a man who owes him a meager fraction of what he was just forgiven.
    - But how often are we like the unforgiving servant?
    - God has forgiven our unpayable sin debt through Jesus.
    - But are we sometimes unwilling to forgive others who have wronged us in tiny ways?
  + Forgiven people should be the most forgiving people.
* Is forgiveness a big deal to Jesus
  + Yes, He took it seriously and so should we.
  + He also emphasized it in Matthew 6:14-15…
    - “For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.” (Matt 6:14-15).
* So, to answer Peter’s question, due to the massive debt we’ve been forgiven, we should always be willing to forgive others their trespasses.