

Lecture on Lesson 15 – January 18, 2018
The Care of His Children
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Jesus and his disciples had been through amazing experiences together, not the least of which was the transfiguration we studied last week.

Remember, only Peter, James and John had witnessed this spectacular event, but Jesus had made them promise not to reveal what they had witnessed to anyone, yet. The rest of the disciples had been on their own missions, preaching and healing in the surrounding villages.

In today's lesson, they were now all together, traveling back to Capurnaum to discuss what they had learned. And yet, as they walk back toward Galilee, Peter, James and John are obviously keeping secrets. They are beaming from their experience on the mountain, but will not tell the rest of the disciples what it was all about. Now, the others begin to think these three are "putting on airs" and that they think they are better than the rest. And so begins the argument.

Luke 9:46 revealed, "An argument started among the disciples as to which of them would be the greatest." Matthew 18:1 explained that this contest was to discover their positions of power "in the kingdom of heaven". The disciples had seen Jesus draw crowds of thousands to hear him speak. They had seen him heal the sick and possessed, feed the multitudes, correct religious rulers and walk on water! How great would be his kingdom and power when he turned to take his place as Messiah and King of Kings! And, of course, they as his chosen disciples would surely rule in his court right

along side of him.

However, such delusions of grandeur were the opposite of Jesus' plan for his disciples in his kingdom. Jesus for the second time tried to get their heads out of the clouds and down to the reality of his actual mission to save mankind. "While everyone was marveling at all that Jesus did, he said to his disciples, Listen carefully to what I am about to tell you: 'The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men.'" (Luke 9:43,44) Mark's record added: "They will kill him, and after three days he will rise." (Mark 9:31b) That declaration should have stopped all false illusions of castles and kings.

But all of our readings went on to declare, "But they did not understand what this meant. It was hidden from them, so that they did not grasp it, and they were afraid to ask him about it." (Luke 9:45) "And the disciples were filled with grief." (Matthew 17:23b)

It was all so confusing. One minute Jesus would show his divine power, and the next he seemed so morose. He was the Messiah. How could he talk about being killed by men if he was the Son of God? No, this just didn't make sense. He must be tired and will be better when we can all rest. Besides he had trained the disciples for about two years now. Why did he train them so thoroughly except as Messiah's representatives in his kingdom? And so their argument continued.

When they came into the town by Galilee, everything seemed just as they had left it. Except that now, the men who were collecting the two-drachma tax for the upkeep of the temple were asking every household to pay

up. Peter was approached first as head of his household. The men also wanted to know if Jesus planned to pay the tax. (Matthew 17:24,25) Peter knew Jesus had paid this tax in the past and so answered, yes. Now remember, the disciples were quite young, probably teens when they first followed Jesus, perhaps now some were in their twenties. So, Jesus as their rabbi would function as the head of their household.

Jesus already knew that Peter had been approached and so, "When Peter came into the house, Jesus was the first to speak, 'What do you think, Simon?' he asked, 'From whom do the kings of earth collect duty and taxes – from their own children or from others?'" (Matthew 17:25 -27) Now surely this was somewhat tongue in cheek, referring to all the discussions about the kingdom the disciples had had. These men were collecting taxes for the temple, not the emperor. But Jesus knew how his disciples had been dreaming of being kings themselves. Yet now, they needed to pay this tax to others. Step one back to reality.

Peter rightly answered, "From others," and Jesus replied, "Then the children are exempt." Jesus was the Son of God. The temple, then was his Father's house. So, the disciples, his children, were exempt. But He went on, "But so that we may not cause offense, go down to the lake and throw out your line. Take the first fish you catch; open its mouth and you will find a four-drachma coin. Take it and give it to them for my tax and yours." (verses 26 – 27) Neither Jesus nor his disciples were meant to lift themselves up, at this time, above their fellow Jewish countrymen. They too needed to pay this

tax. Step two back to reality.

Jesus planned to take the disciples apart from the demands of the crowds and teach them privately. As they entered Capernaum, they probably went into Peter's house and it was there Jesus began to teach them. Luke 9:47 & 48 went on to say, "Jesus knowing their thoughts took a little child and had him stand beside him. Then he said to them, 'Whoever welcomes this little child in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. For it is the one who is least among you who is the greatest.'"

Matthew recorded that a few disciples actually came to Jesus and asked, "Who, then is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" He called a little child to him, and placed the child among them. And he said, "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 18:1-4)

Step three towards reality. This little child may have had the lowly job of washing the guest's feet when they entered Peter's home. Quite likely the child was one of Peter's. But Jesus held and placed this little one before the disciples as an example to be valued as the greatest in the kingdom. Notice Jesus' words, "unless you change and become like little children...." (verse 3) Jesus was training his disciples that the greatest value one could have to God would be that one would consider himself or herself to be of no importance at all and to serve everyone else before themselves.

Jesus knew their aspirations. Jesus realized those dreams were creating divisions among them. Jesus knew also that this train of thought took them absolutely in the wrong direction from where they needed to be when he would die. They would need a unified strength to survive the mission ahead. So he started to teach how important humility was in his true spiritual kingdom. “If anyone causes one of these little ones – those who believe in me-to stumble, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea.” (Matthew 18:6) Zing! Step four, ground floor – welcome to reality.

Even the disciples in their greatest positions as apostles were known for helping, teaching, nurturing new believers. They must understand now that everyone, including themselves had a learning curve and that their current attitudes of “me first” would only hinder their own ministries in the true kingdom. So Jesus drove home his point by challenging each disciple to reevaluate his attitude and his own motives.

If you desired to be at the head of the line in importance so much that you would hinder other believers in their journey to faith: “It was better to have a millstone hung around your neck and be thrown into the sea.” (verse 6) The world will soon be throwing enough things in the way to keep new followers from believing: “But woe to the person through whom they come!” (verse 7) The habits and temptations to be selfish, that each disciple would be facing in their journeys, will be bad enough: “It is better for you to enter life maimed or crippled than to have two hands and two feet and be

thrown into eternal fire.” (verse 8) Turning your thoughts toward worldly lusts and prideful desires only divides and loses your focus for the kingdom: “It is better for you to enter life with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into the fire of hell.” (verse 9)

Jesus here was using hyperbole – an exaggeration to emphasize his point. His disciples, just like we do, were missing the whole point. Their thoughts were so consumed by their ambitions that they missed his vital teaching of his death for their salvation! But don't we do the same thing? We easily pray for God to bless our plans. We ask, “Make me one of your greatest, let me do great things!” instead of asking, “Teach me your will, Lord.” Barnes showed the importance of this point of view in his commentary, “To esteem ourselves as God esteems us is humility, and it cannot be degrading to think of ourselves as we are; but pride or an attempt to be thought of more important than we are, is foolish, wicked and degrading.”

Our pride, just like the pride of the disciples, is destructive. God hates it. It is better to go through any disgrace or failure to have that pride cut away from our lives, than to let our pride reject faith in Jesus and be condemned to eternal separation from him. God seeks humility and a willingness to learn above all prideful talents in his children.

So, rather than despising our fellow disciples, our Lord taught that young believers are precious to him. He even had angels in heaven reporting to the Father of their progress! The disciples may have thought their purpose

for following Jesus and traveling with him was so they could be instrumental in ushering in his earthly kingdom. However they never considered how all of this reflected the Father's eternal purpose. Jesus had told them, "Whoever welcomes me, welcomes the one who sent me," namely the Father. He was not waiting for an earthly kingdom, because his desire was redemption of all of mankind. Eternity was in view at all times.

Christ's kingdom would include every person who in humility recognized their utter inability to stop their own sinning that caused them to "wander off". Like the good shepherd in his story, Christ would leave the 99, who are safe in the flock of believers, and seek out the lost sheep who were not in the flock. Each person who accepted Jesus' death on the cross to be on their behalf, would be joyfully redeemed. And "In the same way your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should perish." (Matthew 17:12-14)

It is at this point that John thought of an instance he had witnessed on his missions trip. In Mark 9:38 he said, "Teacher,...we saw someone driving out demons in your name and we told him to stop because he was not one of us." More divisions. It was as if the disciples were beginning to understand Jesus' point of view. But surely he would want his sheep to be all of the same flock.

Haven't we felt this same way? They don't worship the way we do. They have louder music, or no instruments at all. They have too much liturgy or they totally forget to read God's Word. They kneel on cue or they

raise their hands and dance! We can cite so many differences among believer's that we have even created different denominations to handle them. But Jesus answered as much to us as he did to John: "Do not stop him,' Jesus said. 'For no one who does a miracle in my name can in the next moment say anything bad about me. For whoever is not against us is for us; Truly I tell you, anyone who gives you a cup of water in my name because you belong to the Messiah will certainly not lose their reward.'" (Mark 9:39-41) Jesus' teaching led them into an inclusive kingdom. One made up of everyone who loved him and lived like it. This kingdom would reach beyond those numbered among the twelve – even to us.

That is the kingdom Jesus was establishing. That is the kingdom the disciples would begin. But divisions among them would not easily cease. Offenses so easily break off fellowship. So Jesus instituted a method for dealing with the way sin - true offenses between believers- should be dealt with: Matthew 18:15-19

1. First, go and talk to your brother, one on one, in private and talk out the offense. The intent here is to get the other party's point of view, and to understand how it offended. Hopefully the offender will repent, and the fellowship of worshiping together will be restored.
2. If he doesn't repent, Bring one or two others with you and try for reconciliation again. The Jewish Law was that a legal matter was to be established by multiple witnesses: Deut. 19:15 "One witness is not enough to convict anyone accused of any crime or offense they may have committed. A

matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.” This is vital for unity. We cannot take just one side of a disagreement as truth. Both sides must be heard. Gossip is just one side of the argument. Therefore, Jesus instructed that believers must establish the truth through two or more witnesses. Again, the purpose is to restore the believing brother into fellowship by resolving the offense through the repentance of the offending party.

3. However, if the sinning brother does not repent of their sin, they should be taken before the church. By now the witnesses would have heard both sides and determined that one is truly guilty of sin. The object is to seek restoration through repentance using the unified pressure of the congregation. However, if the guilty one still refuses to repent of their sin, they are to be treated as though they are not a believer.

It is amazing here that Jesus used the term we translate “church” because there was no such body recognized at that time as we know it today. However the term means the local congregation. Although the disciples and others who followed Jesus didn't know it yet, they were the beginning of just such a body. These instructions looked forward to what we recognize now as the age of the church. And this method is the best way to handle offenses among us, even today.

In our generation we have difficulty handling sin among believers using these methods. First of all, we don't always recognize that a difference in ideas is not always sin. Scripture teaches clearly things that are sins: We are

familiar with the ten commandments, but Paul in Galatians challenges us in the church with more details: “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 5:19-21

Some who live among believers have not truly repented of their sins or fall into the temptation of living like the world around us. If we, as fellow believers would challenge those we find out are living in such sins, to repent, as these guidelines instruct us to do, perhaps many would be restored to living in faith. But those who will not give up such a sinful life style may not be truly saved in the first place. One who recognizes their sin, must repent of that sin to receive Jesus' gift of redemption. If they will not repent, but instead continue to live in sin, they must be sent out of the congregation.

Secondly, a “church member” today can be sent out from one church, only to join another local congregation. The body of Christ is not as close-knit as it should be. However, scripture clearly indicates when sin is harbored knowingly or unknowingly in the church, it hurts worship, fellowship, unity and growth. To treat the unrepentant sinner as being among the unsaved is to continue to love and pray for them to repent, yet not have the intimate fellowship of the church body.

To help his disciples understand what a healthy congregation should look like, Jesus expanded his teaching. “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. 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.” (Matthew 18:18,19) According to Matthew Poole, “This gives authority to the congregation of believers that – acting together in the Spirit – their decisions on discipline are in accordance with God's decisions.”

Notice that Jesus said believers were to “gather in my name”. This is not a blank check for individual believers to ask whatever they want for themselves. This amazing promise explains that God the Father in the person of Jesus and the person of the Holy Spirit dwells among believers. As believers seek God's will for church decisions, He would lead them to pray so that His will is accomplished. That is much more powerful than a selfish prayer for personal gain. It is a promise that changes the world through prayer.

Accordingly, this promise was to solidify the unity of the church. By settling squabbles between believers, which come as sure as we are all human, the harmony of the church is maintained. The word that is translated, “agree” in this passage comes from the same root as the word, symphony. In Vincent's Word Study he states that the single prayer, “...has so far lost its distinctive character as a concord...” Jamison-Faucett and Brown continue this definition by saying, “it is symphonious prayer, the prayer by kindred spirits, members of one family, servants of one Lord, constrained by the same

love, fighting under one banner, cheered by assurances of the same victory; a living and loving union, whose voice in the divine ear is as the sound of many waters Thus will He be the living conductor of the prayer upward and the answer downward.”

The disciples were as moved as we are with this promise of their unity. However, they were still mired in their thoughts of their divisions. So, Peter wondered aloud. If there was this method for reconciliation, and a brother might seem to repent, but they do it again, how many chances should they get before they get dis-communicated from the group? So he asked, “Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?” (Matthew 19:21,22)

Now, seven being the number of perfection sounded pretty magnanimous to Peter. He, being a “ready, fire, aim” personality thought that if he could put up with a repeat offender against him seven times, he could then get rid of said offender. Now, before we judge Peter too harshly, it is important to know that the Jews had a rule that one should only forgive three times and then were justified in not forgiving a fourth. So, Peter was working at being merciful.

But Jesus revealed that the kingdom of God was different. “Jesus answered, 'I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times. Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants.'” (Matthew 18:22, 23) Although Peter may have been quite serious, I believe Jesus had a twinkle in his eye as he gave this number. He

didn't mean that believers were to keep a tab on each other's offenses, but rather, as one theologian put it, "Forgiveness is qualitative, not quantitative." So, Jesus began this parable of the unmerciful servant to illustrate his point.

It was the custom of the king of a large kingdom to appoint tax-collectors per region, to collect monies owed for taxes. When he was called to give an account, this servant now owed "ten thousand bags of gold" - so, in our economy, this was like owing 200 years of paychecks totaling millions of dollars. But the man did not have the money.

Such a debt must be paid, so the man and his family were to be sold into slavery to pay the debt – probably not in total, but in a lifetime of servitude. Of course, this terrified the man. He begged to be allowed to pay back what he owed. The King showed mercy, and in pity canceled the debt that was owed, setting the man free. We must notice that his debt was canceled, not postponed.

However, under the adrenaline of this near catastrophe, the servant left the king's presence, only to spot a servant who had borrowed one hundred day's wages from him, 100 denarii silver coins. Without a thought as to the mercy shown to him, this servant began to choke the lesser servant and demand payment. He refused the servant's plea for time and mercy, had the man drug off to be imprisoned until he could pay off his debt.

The other servants, reported all of this to the king, who had the first servant called back before him and said, "You wicked servant, ... I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn't you have had

mercy on your fellow servant just as I had mercy on you?" (Matt. 18:33)

Matthew Henry drew this conclusion: "The greatness of sin magnifies the riches of pardoning mercy; and the comfortable service of pardoning mercy, does much to dispose our hearts to forgive our brethren." Jesus taught his disciples by this parable to understand how great God's mercy was to forgive their own sins, to teach that they too must forgive others as freely. It may not be easy to forget sins against us. But Jesus was saying that in light of all God has forgiven us in our lives, forgiving one sin of a sister or brother is a small burden of mercy.

The time had come for them to once again travel away from home. In Luke 9:51 it states, "As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem." MacLaren observed, "The picture that is given is that of a clear knowledge of what awaited him." Jesus would take his last trip from Galilee toward Jerusalem which inevitably would end in his crucifixion, burial and resurrection. But he didn't take the route most Jews would have taken, east along the Jordan River. He began his journey to the West, by way of Samaria.

Remember, the Samaritans had animosity between themselves and the pious Jews. Long ago, they had decided they didn't need to go to Jerusalem to worship God. This village had no doubt heard about Jesus. He had done miracles and preached in other Samaritan villages. But because Jesus was bound for Jerusalem to worship, rather than condoning their place of worship, they refused to welcome Jesus and his disciples. This did not set

well with John and his brother James.

They suggested, “Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?” (Luke 9:54) They were probably remembering the stories about Elijah who had called down fire on 100 men who had come to summon him for wicked Ahaziah. This had happened not far from this very spot. (2 Kings 1:1-13) But the Lord Jesus rebuked James and John, and from that time on called them Boanerges - “Sons of Thunder” (Mark 3:17) as a nick name! So, the heart change from quarrelsome disciples to merciful disciples would take some time.

Even though they were traveling the less used route through Samaria, others also walked with them. And soon the word spread that Jesus was nearby. Luke 9:57-62 recorded the story of three men who contemplated, as had the disciples, how great it would be to follow Jesus too. However, each one had not understood the cost they must incur to do so.

The first volunteered saying, “I will follow you wherever you go.” (Luke 9:57) There were actually many faithful followers who walked wherever Jesus went. This man desired the same notoriety the disciples had argued about. Surely if Jesus is Messiah, he would want me as his follower to have importance in his earthly kingdom. This would be advantageous for my future. But Jesus cut his dream short by informing him that although even “Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.” (verse 58) The cost to follow Jesus would not necessarily include the comfort of a palace.

Next, Jesus initiated the invitation to follow him, to another man. Perhaps this man had been following Jesus for a time and had been considering the cost of being a disciple. He asked, “Lord, first let me go and bury my father.” This man was considering what his family and neighbors would think of him if he left his expected position and responsibilities behind, to follow Jesus. Knowing this, “Jesus said to him, 'Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God.’” What greater position in the community could one have than to be known as one who led people to God?

The final example shared with us is one who said, “I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say goodbye to my family.” This man had considered the cost of discipleship, but had difficulty in leaving all he knew. He decided he wanted to commit, but not quite yet. He was non-committal in his faith. Jesus challenged him by saying, “No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the service in the kingdom of God.” Young man, you must choose your direction of life and focus on your goal, or you will never get there.

The Expositor's Greek Testament described these three proposed disciples in this way. “The first case is that of inconsiderate impulse, the second that of conflicting duties, the third that of a divided mind.” How often do we fall into one of these three categories? We want to follow Jesus but we never considered how much it would change our lives. Unsaved family and friends will not understand our commitment. They may stop

wanting to be with us. We may want to go on a missions trip but we have these responsibilities at work that make it hard to arrange the time, or finances for such an undertaking. We may even finally decide to step out, to teach a children's Sunday school class or connection group, but find out that it required a weekly commitment and we are not sure if we can do that.

Jesus called us to follow him. His life may change our old life in many ways. But it is absolutely worth it. The cost in some lives may be misunderstanding from family or friends, or a loss of income because we can no longer cheat the way fellow employees do. It may not be what we expected it to be here on earth, but the benefits are a life of hope and purpose lived for Christ and life eternal afterward. Let us never turn back in our job of sharing the kingdom of God. As His little children, He so wants to bless us!

Let's consider what we learned about God from this study:

God hates pride but desires humility in his children's lives.

God rejoices when his wandering children are found.

God is not willing that any of his children should perish.

God desires forgiveness, mercy and unity among his children.

God leads us as we commit to follow Him.