

We are in a series on the church. Our study is on Matthew 18-23 during this summer season. On a scale of 1-10, how strong is the church in America? _____ (fill in your answer) The message today is about the quality of the church. The Gospel of Matthew introduces us to the church. Matthew is the only Gospel writer who speaks specifically of the church. Jesus said, “On this rock I will build this church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.” (Matthew 16:18) Jesus had a high view of the church. The word is “ekklesia” and it means “called out ones.” The definition for church would be — the gathering of redeemed people who assemble in Christ’s name. According to Jesus, the church will prevail. The church represents Christ’s authority on earth. In 1 Corinthians 3:10, the foundation of the church is Jesus Christ. The Apostle Paul wrote “. . . to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.” (Ephesians 5:27) Clearly the Lord has high hopes for his church.

Why is God concerned for the church?

This introduction is very important as a prelude to the focus for our study for today. In **Matthew 18:15-20** we read some very important words about the church. The same word is used in verse 17, “tell it to the church.” I would summarize what Jesus says with two words:

- ✓ Independence — The opposite of what Jesus is teaching. This is one of the most subtly destructive aspects of western culture today. It leads to isolation and a vulnerability of God’s people.
 - ✓ Accountable — This is the overarching message of this paragraph and essential for our spiritual protection. Three words that fit its meaning — Responsible, Answerable, Teachable.
- * Move Toward: The teaching of Jesus begins with loving confrontation “just between the two of you.” (verse 15) This is the nature of a caring community. If someone stumbles, another in the church is willing to help, teach and even confront. What parable does Jesus present right before this passage? Wandering Sheep Galatians 6:1 says it well, “Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently.”

How? Speak the truth in love.

Next, “. . . if he will not listen, take one or two others along.” (verse 16) The restoration of a fellow Christian is so important that involving others is the next step. This is not to gang up on a person, but to help bring understanding and clarity. Talking matters over with one or two other wise and gracious people can represent a new atmosphere of understanding and resolve.

However, “If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church.” (verse 17) The authority of the church is involved because a wandering believer breaks the heart of God, grieves the Holy Spirit. “Tell it to the church” means get direct assistance from those that are most involved within the church body. The leadership of the church, or those closest to the person will become involved so that one might be restored.

- * Let Go: “If he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector.” (verse 17) This process has not led to restoration and the person is unwilling to be accountable to the church. We are called then to release them into God’s hands. The language is one of severance — treat them as you would an outsider. Maybe the person will realize what they are missing. This shows that the integrity of the church is so important to the heart of God.
- * Be forgiving: “How many times should I forgive my brother when he sins against me?” (Matthew 18:21) Do you remember Jesus’ answer? 49 (or 70 time 7) This does not mean you condone the person’s behavior. This means that you let go of the hurt and the pain that they have caused through forgiving. If you forgive in your heart, you will then be able to experience healing yourself. When you place someone in the hands of the Lord you are able to wipe the slate clean, knowing that God will do what is just and right.

Conclusion: Communion is a meaningful time to renew your love and devotion to Christ, but it is also a time of letting go and forgiving. Today I hope communion can be just that for you. If the Lord uses the Communion Table to prompt you to approach someone one-on-one, do it today. If you are letting a hurt linger, release it to God. If you realize your own sin, confess it to the Lord. May the Communion Table be cleansing for your soul.

Reflective Questions:

1. How do people perceive the church today? What is your perspective of the church? How important is the church?
2. Do you think God cares about the holiness of the church? Obviously we are called to be loving people, but what about our character? How important is that?
3. Why is loving confrontation important to the body of Christ? How has it helped you? What have you learned from this message?
4. What does Jesus' teaching say to you? What responsibility do you have? How are you accountable? How is the Lord asking you to apply this teaching to your life?

Reading Schedule for June 28th – July 4th, 2010

Have you ever heard of the Sermon on the Mount? Well, starting this Monday, June 28th, you will be reading Jesus' words from the Gospel of Matthew known as the Sermon on the Mount. The words that Jesus uses have actually shaped the way people treat each other. These are some of the most powerful and challenging words that Jesus ever shared. Right from the beginning we read what is called the "beatitudes." We will also read about being salt and light in the world. Many times in the sermon you will read things that reveal how much you need the grace of God. It says never revenge, never lust, love your enemies . . . Without the grace of God you and I will not be able to accomplish these principles. The sermon ultimately teaches you and me that we need Jesus Christ to save us because we could never be good enough without his grace.

June 28: **Matthew 5:1-16** – I have memorized these beatitudes because they are traits that I want to have. The way that I typically think is different than what is presented here – the strong shall succeed; the proud shall be noticed. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." (verse 3) This statement sets all the others in motion. Humility is the character trait of the kingdom of God. I cannot save myself so I need the Lord to help. So I surrender to him because he is the one that I need. Are you poor in spirit? How do you understand that phrase? Why is that principle so important . . . to God? . . . to the church?

June 29: **Matthew 5:17-30** – "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them." (verse 17) Jesus talked about a new way to understand God's law. He was actually trying to bring people back to its original purpose. In Romans we learn that the law was to show us how much we needed God; it makes us conscious of sin. Jesus was the fulfillment of the law because in him we can be made righteous. He lived a perfect life so that a sinful world could be saved through him. Why is Jesus the fulfillment of the law? How does the law point you to Christ? Why are you grateful for grace?

June 30: **Matthew 5:31-48** – "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." (vv. 43 & 44) This is one of the most demanding statements from Jesus because it is so contrary to your natural inclination. When the Pharisees reinterpreted the law and said that we should love those who love us in return, they were making the law doable. But Jesus showed that the depth of the law was impossible to keep. We can love our enemies, but only by the power of the Holy Spirit. In our natural approach to life we will despise our enemies. What does that say to you? Why would Jesus ask us to love our enemies? What is God saying to you through these first three days of reading this week?

July 1: **Matthew 6:1-18** – "This, then, is how you should pray: 'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.'" (verse 9) I am obviously attracted to the Lord's Prayer. I have used the Lord's Prayer as a model for praying in my daily life. I do not pray it by memory, but use its outline to help me focus in my prayers in the same way that Jesus taught. Jesus said that we are to first praise God and then he made his requests. Praising God puts you and me in the right frame of mind so that we might be more inclined to pray prayers consistent with the will of God. Worship and praise in prayer is a very important dimension of prayer. Do you praise God in your prayers? How and why?

July 2: **Matthew 6:19-34** – "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." (vv. 19-21) This principle is so significant. We can be so focused on earth and what we are getting and what we possess and how much money we have that we forget that this life is very short. Jesus challenges us to use the resources of this earth for heavenly purposes. And when we do, we store up for ourselves even a greater treasure in heaven. The Bible calls this eternal rewards. How do you understand eternal rewards? How are you living today that will ensure eternal rewards?

July 3: **Matthew 7:1-12** – "So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets." (verse 12) This is commonly known as the Golden Rule. Jesus made this a significant framework for how to live. Simply put: Think of what you would want to do to bless others that you know would also bless you as well. How will you do good to others today? Why is that important? What does that have to do with eternal rewards?

July 4: **Matthew 7:13-29** – "Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock." (verse 24) A disciple who is responding to the teaching of the Lord and asking him to help you live in obedience, the bible says you are building your life on a rock. Jesus is often described as a rock. In the Old Testament we read several times that God is our rock. Why is living for Christ the most stable way to live? What does it mean to have Christ as your foundation? Read James 1:22-27 for more teaching on putting into practice what we hear?

Prayers: As we anticipate July 4th spend some time praying for our country in this very challenging time in history. Pray for Pastor Steve as he highlights the beginnings of the United States of America and the spirit in which we began this coming Sunday. Pray for the Mexico Mission Team this week as they will be returning on Friday, July 2nd. Pray for God's direction and provision for the ministry of New Harvest.