**HARMONY MATTERS**

**(Matthew 18:15-20)**

Before my son was born, his mother and I attended birthing classes at Freeman Hospital in Joplin, MO where he was later born. The nurse who taught the classes explained that when a couple has their first child, they want the baby in the room the entire time the mom is in the hospital. When they have their second child, they want the baby in the room about half the time with the other half him being in the nursery. She said that when they have their third child, they say, “We’ll pick him up on the weekend.”

At the time that both my daughter and son were born, I was pastoring a church on Grand Lake in NE Oklahoma. The church was on a beautiful place called Monkey Island. While I was there, I met a man an older man who had once been a pastor. He never shared the experiences he had as a pastor. I assume they were not good ones. He was not a member of our church, and during the five years I was there, he never came despite repeated invitations. He must have been able to tell that I enjoyed being a pastor because he once said to me, “You’ll get over it.”

Well, I haven’t. I’m still thankful God called me to be a pastor, and there is nothing I would rather do than preach God’s word to God’s people.

There are many things in life that we should never get over. We should never get over God’s grace. We should never get over salvation, the privilege of being a child of God, and the joy of being a member of God’s family. Since God is our Father, that means you and I and everyone who has received Jesus as Savior and Lord are brothers and sisters. Being family should never be viewed as commonplace, old hat, humdrum. It is an exceptional fact that should be celebrated loudly and often.

Attending worship and Sunday School with one another should never be viewed as an obligation; it is a privilege. That also means we should treat one another as though it is a privilege to talk with them and fellowship with them.

Our text is Matthew 18:15-20. There are a couple of interesting words that show up in our text. One is the word *church.* You might think that is a common word that shows up often in the NT. The fact is that *church* is not a common word in the gospels. It shows up only three times in Matthew and not a single time in Mark, Luke, or John. Of the three times it is found in Matthew, two of those are in today’s passage. Some weeks ago, we looked at the only other time *church* is used in the gospels. It is found in Matthew 16 where Jesus declares, “I will build My church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:18).

There is another interesting word that shows up that forms the basis of today’s message. It is the Greek word from which we get our word *symphony.* In English, symphony is a noun, but in our text *symphoneo* is a verb. We are expected to *symphony* with one another.

Before I show you where the word is in our text, let me explain the idea behind it. Have you ever been to a symphony or orchestra concert or even a band concert? Often, before the concert begins, the musicians will tune their instrument. Each musician will play whatever he or she wants to play. The sound they produce is absolutely awful. We have a word for it—cacophony. It is harsh discord. The musicians are not playing in concert with one another. There is no harmony.

Look at what Jesus said in 18:19. Jesus wants us to pray in symphony with one another. When we pray in symphonic harmony, that is beautiful to God’s ears, and He will surely grant whatever it is that we ask of Him.

Praying in agreement with one another is more likely to happen when we are living in agreement with one another. Harmonic prayers are a result of harmonic lives.

I am here today to tell you that harmony matters. It matters to God and because it matters to God, it should matter to us. From our text, I am going to give you three reasons that harmony matters.

1. **HARMONY MATTERS BECAUSE THE PEOPLE OF GOD MATTER.**

The first person of God that matters is you. You matter. Look again at v. 15. If another believer insults you or hurts you or harms you in any way, you are to go speak to that person. The text does not say, “If your brother sins against you, just forget about it.” Jesus does not tell us stuff our emotions. He does not call upon us sweep it under the rug, to lock it away in a closet, or pretend it doesn’t matter.

We are to go to the other person firstly, because we matter. There is a saying, “To heal it you’ve got to feel it.” We can’t heal hurt if we deny the hurt exists. When we allow ourselves to feel the pain of what someone has said or done to us, that should give us the motivation to go to that person who has sinned against us and speak to them honestly. If the other person will own up to what he or she has done and will apologize, that will go a long way in helping us to heal.

Our goal should be healing because we matter. If we do not pursue healing. If we just pretend that it is not that big of deal, when it actually is big, the hurt won’t heal.

If you have a broken bone that needs to be set and you refuse to go to the doctor or anyone else to set the bone, the problem is not going to go away with the passage of time. It will leave you permanently disabled at best.

My job is relationally dangerous. I am expected to speak to a crowd of people for a good amount of time at least twice a week. The likelihood of me offending someone is pretty high. Just think about that for a moment. Imagine that you have the responsibility of talking to a crowd of people for at least 30 minutes, non-stop, twice a week, week in and week out. Do you think you might ever say something that offends someone else?

Many people can’t talk to one person for two-minutes without offending that person.

Very likely, I have offended more people over the years than I realize, but I can remember two different people who came to because they were offended by what I said in a sermon. Both times it happened when I attempted to be funny. I was going for a laugh, and I said something that to the other person was hurtful.

To their credit they came to me. How did I respond to them? What did I say? I could have said, “Are you serious? You’re upset about that? You need thicker skin than that if you are going to make it in this world.” Do you think I said that? Would that have been helpful?

No. I didn’t say that. Instead, I apologized. I owned up to having said something that was inappropriate. I asked for their forgiveness. Why did I do that? I did that because the other person is made in the image of God. She matters. He matters.

What should you do if someone sins against and you know that person is not going to apologize? You know that you are just going to set yourself up for further hurt. What should you do then? Do you get a pass? Does the command of Jesus not apply to you?

You should go to that person not because you matter. You should go to that person because he matters or she matters. Your brother or sister matters. He or she needs to know what he or she said or did was not appropriate, that it was not acceptable. Failure to confront them gives them your permission to continue acting in hurtful ways. It robs them of the opportunity to grow. If you want your brother or sister to grow in Christ-likeness, you need to confront them when they act towards you if definitely non-Christlike ways.

That doesn’t mean we have to confront someone every time he or she says or does something insensitive. Sometimes we can just let things slide because it really didn’t bother us. We think to ourselves, “That’s just Joe being Joe. That’s just Sue being Sue.” Whenever, however, you feel the weight of having been wronged of having been sinned against, go to the other person, if not because you matter then because they matter. For their own good they need to know.

So, what happens when that person blows you off and says that it is no big deal, to mind your own business, to leave you alone? Then what?

Jesus tells us what to do next. Look at v. 16. Not only do you matter and not only does your Christian brother or sister matter, but also godly counselors matters. You are to return to your brother or sister with one or two others. We have to be careful who we choose to take with us. We don’t take our best friend. We don’t take our spouse. We don’t take someone the other person doesn’t know. We take a godly person or two—people who are known for their wisdom and who are respected by the other person. When we confide and confer with the person, he or she may correct our perception. They might say, “I think you are reading this incorrectly.” They might say, “Yeah, you have a right to be upset. Let’s go talk to Joe. Let’s go talk to Sue and see if we can work this out.”

In the vast majority of cases, the problem will be worked out satisfactorily if we first lovingly confront our brother or sister on our own or with a wise, respected believer.

Unfortunately, all too often we short-circuit and sabotage the protocol Jesus gave us. If we are A and we are hurt by B, instead of going back to B to work things out, we go to C, D, and E, not to get their godly counsel but to get them to validate our hurt feelings. Then, somehow, B gets word that we have gone to C, D, and E, and so he goes to F, G, and H to make his case how we are being ridiculous. In short order, a private dispute has become a public affair with people taking sides and the reputation of the church being sullied.

Who wants to join a church that bickers and fights? Those who are unchurched have enough stress in their life already. They have no interest in becoming part of our fighting family so they can add to it.

You matter. Our brother and sister matter. Godly counsel matters.

So, what do we do if our brother or sister doesn’t listen to us or to the one, or two, we have brought along? Look at the words of Jesus in v. 17. The will of the church matters. If the brother or sister is unrepentant, we would bring a serious matter before the church. If he or she will not listen to the church, the church is to treat the person as an unsaved person. We love the unsaved. We pray for the unsaved, but we don’t put the unsaved on committees or allow them to teach a Sunday School class. We don’t entrust them with the rights and responsibilities of church membership.

One example for why and how the church matters is found in v. 18. This matter of binding and loosing seems confusing, but it is really quite simple. When a person repents of their sin, they are loosed from it. When sinners refuse to repent, they are still bound by their sin. So, when the church says, “Joe has not repented of his sin. He is still bound up by his sin, heaven agrees.” When the church says, “Sue has repented of her sin. She is not loosed from it,” heaven agrees.

In such a situation, the church and heaven are acting symphonically. They are in harmony with one another. Harmony matters because the people of God matter.

1. **HARMONY MATTERS BECAUSE THE PRAYERS OF THE CHURCH MATTER.**

Look at v. 19. Here is that word agree. It is the verb form of *symphony* in Greek. We are to pray in harmony with one another. When God hears harmonious praying, He is moved to act on our behalf.

In Deuteronomy 32:30 we find an interesting verse about how one solider defeated a thousand enemy troops and that two soldiers defeated 10,000 enemy troops. You would think that if one soldier could chase away 1000 troops, then 2 could put 2000 to flight.

The truth is that partnership creates synergy. When we work and pray together, we don’t just double what we can accomplish. We multiply it exponentially because it is not just two. In reality, we have invited a third Person, to join us, and that Third Person is God Himself, the Almighty God, the Omnipotent God.

God loves to work on behalf of those who are praying and living in harmony. Listen to Psalm 133:1, 3 from the New Living Translation: “How wonderful it is, how pleasant, when brothers live together in harmony! Harmony is as refreshing as the dew from Mount Hermon that falls on the mountains of Zion. And the LORD has pronounced His blessing, even life forevermore.”

Do you have a prayer partner, someone you pray with on a regular basis? I challenge you to find a prayer partner and to pray with that person at least weekly.

Pastor David Dykes claimed, “Every great spiritual awakening was ignited by prayer and not by preaching.”

When I was a sophomore at OBU, I took a class on revivalism is America. It was then that I learned about the prayer revival of 1858. It began in NYC. The late 1850’s was a difficult time in our nation. The threat of the coming civil war cast a dark shadow over the country. There were strikes, depressions, failing banks, long jobless lines, and an air of simmering violence.

A man named Jeremiah Lanphier accepted a call as a full-time city evangelist in NYC. He walked the streets, knocked on doors, put up posters, and prayed constantly—all with no visible result.

Knowing that NYC was a business town, Lanphier decided to hold a prayer luncheon at Noon. He nailed up his signs advertising a noon lunch in the Old Dutch Reformed Church on Fulton Street. When the hour came, he sat and waited until finally a single visitor arrived. Several minutes later, a couple of stragglers peeked through the door. The handful of them had a nice meal.

Lanphier gave his idea another a go. The following week, twenty men attended. Forty men came on the third week. The men were getting to know each other by this time, and one of them suggested that he'd be willing to come for food and prayer every day. Lanphier thought that was a good sign, and he ramped up his efforts for a daily meal and prayer time.

Before long, the building was overflowing. The luncheon had to move again and again to accommodate the crowds. The most intriguing element of the “Fulton Street Revival,” as they called the phenomenon, was the ripple effect. Offices began closing for prayer at noon. Fulton Street was the talk of the town, with men telegraphing prayer news back and forth between New York City and other cities. Other cities had started their own Noon prayer meetings.

The center of the meeting was prayer, and it was okay to come late or leave early, as needed. Men stood and shared testimonies. Preaching did not take place. This was about the working class, businessmen who wanted to share the things of God.

Some historians went so far as to refer to the Fulton Street Revival as the Third Great Awakening, because it lasted for two years and saw as many as one million decisions for Christ. At that time, the population of the United States was 30 million people. Today, our population is 330 million. If the same percentage were saved, that would equal about 11 million people which is more people that the combined populations of Kansas, Oklahoma, and Arkansas.

That prayer revival was started more than 160 years ago. It is time for God to do it again, and I believe He will if we will give ourselves to Him in prayer.

1. **HARMONY MATTERS BECAUSE THE PRESENCE OF JESUS MATTERS.**

Look at v. 20. Jesus is always with us, but He is with us in a special way when we gather in His name and when there is harmonious unity among us.

I am convinced that what makes the church the church is the presence of Jesus. Without the presence of Jesus, we are just a social group. With His presence we are the Church of the Living God. It is His presence that makes the difference.

One of my favorite movies is the 1995 film Mr. Holland’s Opus. Richard Dreyfuss plays Glenn Holland, a frustrated composer in Portland, Oregon, who takes a job as a high school band teacher in the 1960s. He believes his school job is only temporary. He thinks that before long he will make it big in the music industry.

He maintains his determination to write an opus or a concerto by composing at his piano after putting in a full day with his students. But, as family demands increase (including discovery that his infant son is deaf) and the pressures of his job multiply, Mr. Holland recognizes that his dream of leaving a lasting musical legacy is merely a dream.

At the end of the movie we find an aged Mr. Holland having to retire after 35-years because the school board has decided to reduce the operating budget by cutting the music and drama program.

Mr. Holland returns to his classroom to retrieve his belongings a few days after school has let out for summer vacation. He has taught his final class. With regret and sorrow, he fills a box with artifacts that represent the tools of his trade and memories of many meaningful classes. His wife and son arrive to give him a hand.

As they leave the room and walk down the hall, Mr. Holland hears some noise in the auditorium. Because school is out, he opens the door to see what the commotion is. To his amazement he sees a capacity audience of former students and teaching colleagues and a banner that reads "Goodbye, Mr. Holland." Those in attendance greet Mr. Holland with a standing ovation while a band (consisting of past and present members) plays songs they learned at his hand.

His wife, who was in on the surprise reception, comes to the front and makes small talk until the master of ceremonies, the Governor of Oregon, arrives. The governor is none other than a student Mr. Holland helped to believe in herself his first year of teaching. As she addresses the room of well-wishers, she speaks for the hundreds who fill the auditorium:

“Mr. Holland had a profound influence in my life (on a lot of lives, I know), and yet I get the feeling that he considers a great part of his life misspent. Rumor had it he was always working on this symphony of his, and this was going to make him famous or rich (probably both). But Mr. Holland isn’t rich and he isn’t famous. At least not outside our little town. So, it might be easy for him to think himself a failure, but he’d be wrong, because I think he’s achieved a success far beyond riches and fame.”

Looking at her former teacher the governor gestures with a sweeping hand and continues, “Look around you. There is not a life in this room that you have not touched, and each one of us is a better person because of you. We are your symphony, Mr. Holland. We are the melodies and the notes of your opus. And we are the music of your life.”

May you and this church be God’s symphony, the melodies and note of His opus, the music of His life. We will be a thing of beauty as we pray and live in harmony with one another.