

Healthy Community Matthew 18v5-22

In 1941, in the university church on the High Street in Oxford, CS Lewis preached a message called "The Weight of Glory." We're continuing to think about this theme of glory. Church is people brought together by the King of glory, to be made like him and to share in his glory. *As we look around us, how do we think of other people and others in the fellowship?*

Recall (or google!) that quote from Lewis' sermon, which includes these words: "All day long we are, in some degree, helping each other to one or the other of two destinations...there are no ordinary people." The Lord values and restores his people when they wander (v12-13), and in this passage he urges us to do the same for one another as instruments in his hands.

1) Valuing (v5-14)

"These little ones" in v6, v10 & v14 are believers. And in v10, Jesus tells us not to look down on any believer (v10). Every believer is headed into the immediate presence of his Father in heaven (v10). As this parable of the straying or lost sheep shows (v12-14), each and every single believer (v12) is individually valued by the Father and the Son. If you're straying from the Lord at the moment, see his heart towards you here. He isn't going to begrudgingly accept you back, he's going to jump for joy as you turn and ask him to carry you and bind up your wounds.

We shouldn't ever despise or look down on any believer, because God cares passionately about them and so pursues them with all his heart and all his love (that's the logic of v10-14). Therefore, be welcoming and hospitable towards his little ones (v5), because this is to open our hearts to Jesus himself. Therefore, avoid any lifestyle that causes believers to stumble and fall in sin, because this attracts God's judgement (v6-7) and puts someone in danger of hell. Sin is opposed to life (v8-9). To be a spiritually healthy church, we need to take sin seriously and to value Christ's brothers and sisters as he does—there are no ordinary or unimportant believers.

2) Restoring (v15-22)

Church is people brought together by the King of glory to share his life. Jesus calls us to be a community filled with his grace, his mercy and his loving holiness. He calls us never to bear a grudge and withhold forgiveness in our relationships and friendship with one another (v21-22), no matter how often a particular relationship comes under strain. Our forgiveness is to be like his—lavish, complete and unending. In v15-19, the problem is that a brother or sister in the local church has obviously sinned, perhaps against you personally. Sin is cancerous, opposed to life, and it spreads. Jesus urges us to address these problems directly, with the aim of restoring people to close fellowship with God and with one another. Too much is at stake to mess around. We should move forwards in stages: going personally and 1-1 to gain them back (v15); then if needed with one or two more, again in person (v16); if they refuse to hear and turn back to life, telling the church ("ekklesia", the people brought together by Jesus under his rule); and as a loving last resort, to treat them as an unbeliever and seek their repentance (v17). Jesus is present in a special way among his church, giving Kingdom authority to deal with and heal sin (v18-20).

The question for us is the one from Jesus in v12, "What do you think?" How should we live as his people? If this is how the Lord values his church, his little ones, do we value, protect and nurture one another in the same way, realising the priority these things have in God's heart?

