



2.13.11/Matthew 18:12-20 The Church Scattered

Opening Activity

Ask the children if they've ever had a favorite toy that was lost. Perhaps a favorite stuffed animal or a blanket. How did they feel? Did they look for it? How much more sad would a parent be if a child got lost? In this passage, we see that God comes to look for us when we stray from His will for our lives. He wants us to take care of each other and pursue each other in love the same way He pursues us.

Read Matthew 18:12-20

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? And if he finds it, truly, I say to you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine that never went astray. So it is not the will of my Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish. "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. 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. 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. 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. 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. For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them."

Discussion

We see in verses 12-14 how Jesus loves us like a shepherd loves his sheep. He takes care of us and pursues us in order to bring us back to Him when we choose our own will instead of His. But how does He want us to help each other? In verses 15-20, Jesus tells us that we are supposed to help each other. When one of us struggles with sin or turns away from Jesus, we are to love each other the way He loves us and remind that person of the Father's love for His sheep.

Question 1

If you knew someone had directions to go somewhere and you knew the way, but you saw them going the wrong way, would you tell them? *Most people would. If a fellow Christian hurts you because they are sinning, it's kind of the same—we are supposed to love each other enough to point each other back to Jesus. Jesus encourages us to urge our brothers and sisters to point their steps toward Him instead of going in a direction that is sinful or unhealthy. Sometimes our brothers and sisters in Christ don't know they are headed the wrong way, or sometimes they choose to go their own way. But the Bible tells us in John 14:6 that Jesus is "the Way, the Truth, and the Life." If we see our brother or sister in Christ doing something or acting in a way that isn't like Jesus, we are supposed to help them come back to Jesus, since He is the only way.*

Question 2

How are we supposed to remind our brothers and sisters that Jesus is the way?

Jesus says you are supposed to go to your brother or sister and tell them in private. Titus 3:1-7 explains why we should do this out of love:

Remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work, to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy toward all people. For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another. But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and



renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. — Titus 3:1-7 (emphasis added)

If we feel that a brother or sister in Christ has gone away from Jesus, we are to speak out of love and humility, knowing that we were once in that position. We were once away from God's will and in desperate need of it for our lives, so we have no room to be self-righteous (thinking we are the ones who removed our sin). It's only through the mercy and goodness of Jesus that we and they are freed from sin.

Question 3

When two or three gather in Jesus' name, where is He? How does this give us boldness to love?

He is there with them! We learned last week in Matthew 28:20 that Jesus is always with us. His Holy Spirit lives inside of those who believe in Him. He said "I am with you always, even to the end of the age." This gives us confidence, because if the Spirit of God is within us, we are all the more able to love our brothers and sisters in Christ and to encourage them to live in God's will.

Wrap Up

In this passage we are reminded of Jesus' great love for us, and how He searches us out like a shepherd looks for sheep. If we love Jesus and follow His commandments, we will love each other like He loves us. This means that if we see a brother or sister in Christ struggling with sin, we should talk to them, encourage them, love them, and try to point them back to Jesus. If you don't yet know Jesus and you want to follow Him, ask a parent about how to do this. Let's pray that Jesus gives us His love for our brothers and sisters in Christ so that we can do a better job of loving them and encouraging each other. He is with us always, and He can give us His love and His strength to care for others in a powerful way!