

# 13<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

SEPTEMBER 7, 2014

## BEAR ONE ANOTHER'S BURDENS

Pastor Jim Dunn

### Matthew 18:1-20

#### Who Is the Greatest?

**18** At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" **2** And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them **3** and said, "Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. **4** Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

**5** "Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, **6** but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea.

#### Temptations to Sin

**7** "Woe to the world for temptations to sin! For it is necessary that temptations come, but woe to the one by whom the temptation comes! **8** And if your hand or your foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life crippled or lame than with two hands or two feet to be thrown into the eternal fire. **9** And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into the hell of fire.

#### The Parable of the Lost Sheep

**10** "See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that in heaven their angels always see the face of my Father who is in heaven. **12** 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?

**13** And if he finds it, truly, I say to you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine that never went astray. **14** So it is not the will of my Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish.

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## If Your Brother Sins Against You

**15** "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. **16** 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. **17** 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. **18** 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. **19** 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. **20** For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them."

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A few years ago, the movie Frost/Nixon was released. It revived people's interest in a series of interviews of former president Richard Nixon. Nixon had resigned from the presidency in 1974 in the middle of impeachment hearings, in which he was charged with obstruction of justice and attempting to cover up the so-called "Watergate burglaries." Well, after his resignation, Nixon was away from public life for three years when British journalist David Frost offered to interview Nixon for television. Nixon agreed.

So, in March of 1977, the taping of the interviews began. They were taped for about two hours a day, on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. Over the course of four weeks, Frost interviewed Nixon for a total of 28 hours and 45 minutes. These tapes were edited down into four 90-minute programs, which were aired in the U.S. that same year. The first program received 45 million viewers, which is still a record for a televised political interview. Those who tuned in saw just the two men, Frost and Nixon, sitting across from each other in the living room of a California home. You saw just the two of them, one on one, like you were about to witness a private confession.

One-on-one.

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In Matthew chapter 18, Jesus describes some similar one-on-one situations. "If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him *alone*." (18:15) "If a man has a hundred sheep and *one* of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine and go in search of the *one* that went astray?" (18:12) "Whoever humbles himself like a child is the greatest in the reign of heaven. Whoever receives *one* such child in My name receives Me..." (18:4-5)

In these verses, Jesus is describing one-on-one conversations about sin. Either a person's sin is being confronted by a brother in Christ one on one, or a brother who's gone astray from the flock is being gently confronted one on one so that he may be returned to the flock, or a sin is being humbly confessed and the listener is speaking God's word of forgiveness. To humble yourself like a child is to confess that you are dependent and needy like a child. That is, spiritually dependent, spiritually needy, poor in spirit, spiritually impoverished and having nothing spiritual to offer God but filthy rags.

Such a one is a child. A child of God, whether he is one or ninety-one. Blessed is the one who reassures him of that, who receives one such child in Jesus' name. In other words, blessed is *the one* who confesses that he is a poor, miserable sinner, and blessed is *the one* who receives his confession and speaks to him God's forgiveness in Christ's name.

As it says in James 5:16, "Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed." When it comes to bearing one another's burdens (Galatians 6:2), we are usually quick to pray for each other for healing of sickness or injury. Seldom do we consider that bearing one another's burdens means also hearing each other's confession one-on-one. Seldom do we consider confiding to a brother or sister in Christ our struggle with a specific sin and ask him to pray that we not fall into that sin or ask her to pray for the healing of God's forgiveness when we have fallen into that sin.

Well, that certainly sounds like a burden, like a huge responsibility, hearing someone else's confession or burdening someone with your confession. These days, it seems there's barely time to *start* a one-on-one conversation with a brother or sister in Christ, let alone have time to move the conversation into weightier matters like personal sins and forgiveness.

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We see so little of one another. When we speak of our life together as a congregation, we're talking about one or two hours together per week at most. Nixon and Frost had more than six hours together per week.

But maybe that's it. We think of private confession as something formal, requiring hours of our time, as in a confessional booth or as in the case of Frost and Nixon sitting across from each other for hours on end. We use that as an excuse, reassuring ourselves that when it comes to confessing specific sins, it is good enough to informally confess to God on our own.

So, we must ask ourselves with regard to confessing specific sins to God, whether we have been confessing these sins to ourselves and granting ourselves forgiveness. If we confess our specific sins by ourselves, then these sins remain in the dark. Where sin likes to remain. In the dark, hidden. If we confess our specific sins to a brother, then these sins are brought into the light. Better the light of today than that these sins are exposed in the harsh light of the final judgment.

Actually, private confession has been one of the strengths of Alcoholics Anonymous. In that program, each person has a sponsor, someone to confide in, and someone he can call when he is on the verge of a relapse. That is the very definition of bearing one another's burdens. Yes, that is burden. To be a sponsor, to be a brother to someone is a burden. But without that, without a brother to confess to and confess with, could that have something to do with the feebleness of our obedience, our countless relapses into old habits?

It's only when a person becomes a burden to you that you know he's your brother.

Now, I'm talking about Jesus. Jesus could not know you as His brother or sister, could not make you a child of God, until you became a burden to Him. So, Jesus took you upon Himself and carried your sins. Someone has said that all of Jesus' work can be summed up in the words "carry" and "bear," as in bearing the cross, bearing us as His burden, carrying you as a shepherd carries the lost lamb that has been found.

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“Surely He has *borne* our griefs and *carried* our sorrows...the punishment that brought us peace was *upon* Him.” (Isaiah 53:4-5) Jesus carried you and your sins upon the cross, like a mother carries her child. One-on-one.

Which describes one of the powerful elements of the Lord's Supper. In the bread and wine, Jesus comes to you personally, one-on-one. He says to you one-on-one, “This is My body, given for **you**. This is My blood, shed for **you**.”

That same Lord's Supper reveals a holy communion between you and your brothers and sisters in Christ, who stand before the altar with you. You stand as the fellowship of the cross, as those who bear the cross and as those who have denied themselves, taken up the cross, and followed Jesus, bearing the cross. To bear the cross is to bear one another's burdens.

The love that compelled Jesus to bear the cross, to carry your sins, was no human love. Likewise, the love that would compel us to bear the burdens of our brother is not in us. It's not a human love. It doesn't come down to a fondness or affection for someone. Rather, it's a love that is rooted in Christ and His Supper and His Word. It's a love that breaks through our excuses and helps us to get to know each other as brothers and sisters, as those who would become a burden to us.

Is this a formal burden? How formal is a phone call? In AA, members are encouraged to phone their sponsor when there is a need. There's not much Frost and Nixon formality to that. If it's okay for us to pray for one another over the phone for healing or comfort, then why not call a brother when we're in some spiritual need and discuss that specific sin that is troubling us, confess it, and right there over the phone hear from that brother's lips the healing words of God's forgiveness in Christ?

One-on-one. Private confession. Conversations about sin one-on-one – confessing to one another our sins and thus bearing one another's burdens. It's a lot to think about. It's not something to talk about only once and then set it aside.

We will speak of this more. It's important not for doing what's right. It's important for our salvation and for the life and health of this congregation. What holds us together as a congregation, as brothers and sisters? Is it not Christ Himself and the faith He's given us that we are made right with God because He has "*borne our griefs and carried our sorrows*" and because "*the Lord has laid upon Him the iniquity of us all*"? (Isaiah 53:4,6)

Amen.