

A Corporate Faith

by Richard E. Bieber

Richard E. Bieber emphasizes the necessity of corporate faith among believers for spiritual growth and community strength.

Scripture: Matthew 18:15

Topics: "Corporate Faith", "Unity In Christ"

Description

Richard E. Bieber preaches on the importance of individual faith in Jesus, emphasizing that while each of us is called to follow Jesus and will face judgment alone, our faith must also be practiced together in the Body of Christ for it to last and grow. The sermon highlights the need for corporate faith, as demonstrated in Matthew 18, where unity, agreement, and forgiveness play crucial roles in manifesting the power of the kingdom of God. Through unity under Jesus' name, believers can experience His presence, ask and receive from God, and become a gate of heaven for the lost sheep of the world.

Transcript

Each of us is called as an individual to follow Jesus.

Each of us, if the Lord doesn't return in the meantime, will die as an individual.

Each of us will stand alone before the judgment seat of Christ.

And yet, our individual faith in Jesus will never last if we don't also learn how to have faith together.

Kingdom faith is sustained and nourished in the Body of Christ, and nowhere else.

This is why, every time our Lord would find that one lost sheep, he would bring it back and join it to the flock.

He always fits the individual into the Body.

He always makes that "redeemed sheep", a living member of the Body.

There is the only way that its faith will survive and grow and become strong.

So in addition to having faith as individuals, we need to learn to have faith, and practice that faith together as the Body.

This corporate faith, to which we are all called, is best described in Scripture in the 18th chapter of Matthew.

Of course, faith begins as God's gift to each of us as an individual....

"What do you think? If a man has 100 sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the 99 on the hills and go out in search for the one that has gone astray? And if he finds it, truly, I say to you, he rejoices more over that one sheep than over the 99 that have not gone astray. So it is not the will of my Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish." (Matt 18: 12)

Somewhere, somehow, the Lord found us when we were lost,

saved us,

delivered us from sin,

and death,

and Satan,

and hell, and ourselves.

Once he saved us, we were never meant to be out there floating around alone. He fit us together into a community of brothers and sisters.

And it is in functioning together in the Body - together with each other,

that the power of the kingdom of God begins to form within us

and the life of the kingdom of God begins to flow out from us.

But who said our life together would be painless and without conflict?

"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 word may be confirmed by the evidence of 2 or 3 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 in the midst of them."

Then Peter came up and said to him, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?

Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you seven times, but 70 times seven."

(Matthew 18:15-22)

"Whatever you bind on earth, shall be bound in heaven"

"Whatever you loose on earth, shall be loosed in heaven."

This awesome promise was spoken to the Body, not just to the individual.

In Matthew 16:19 it was spoken to Peter, but now in chapter 18, Jesus says this to the disciples - the brothers and sisters together.

i.e.....

"When you are in unity, this is what you are going to do.

When you are one with each other.

When you are carrying the weight of the glory of God I have placed in your midst, and you are committed to carrying this together, then...

what you bind on earth

will be bound in heaven.

You will bind the demons and you will loose the captives."

The Master goes on to say, "If two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father who is in heaven."

He's talking about corporate faith - Body faith.

He's saying that,

when we walk together in this kind of unity,

when we are practicing this kind of commitment to one and another,

then we can ask and we will receive.

When the body is practicing this kind of faith, mighty things happen when it prays.

"For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them."

What is it that holds them together?

Is it the fact that they are all Lutherans, Baptists, Catholics,

Presbyterians, Pentecostals? No!

Is it the fact that they have a strong, wise, visible leader? No!

They are held together by a strong, wise, invisible leader - Jesus himself.

When his name becomes their unity...

When they are gathered under him, because they trust him,

He stands among them, and he speaks to them.

Matthew 18 is not only a description of the early church, as it emerged on Pentecost, and the days that followed, It is our Lord's description of a miracle, which is occurring in thousands of places on earth right now.

Redemptive power - the power to see with new eyes,

and think with the new mind,

and speak with the new tongue,

and love with the new heart,

is given to believers who submit to the corporate faith that Jesus calls for in Matthew 18.

In Matthew 18, corporate faith breaks down to four things:

1. We will have the power to bring heaven to bear on the earth when we walk in peace with each other.
2. We will have the power to ask and receive from the Living God when we are in agreement with each other.
3. We will have the presence of the risen Jesus in our midst when we are in unity, under his name.
4. We will be the gate of heaven to the lost sheep of this world when we practice forgiveness consistently among ourselves.

1. We will have the power to bring heaven to bear on earth when we walk in peace with each other.

"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 word may be confirmed by the evidence of 2 or 3 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 tax collector or a Gentile. 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.

Now the only fellowship where this binding and loosing can go on, under the power of God, is that fellowship where the walls are down between us.

where we are walking in peace with each other.

where we refuse to let resentments fester.

If there's something wrong between us, we have to get it right.

If we are going to bind evil so that it can't spread, and loose the captives from the demonic chains, we have to be at peace with each other.

Of course, the real work in this binding and loosing is done by God.

God does the binding and the loosing. That's not our work.

Our work, in this binding and loosing, is to stay right with each other.

That's our work - to make sure things are absolutely clear between us.

In a marriage relationship, husband and wife have to be right with each other.

And it takes work to constantly maintain a right relationship.

If there's something wrong, it has to be cleared up.

We don't just guess, and we don't jump to conclusions.

We find out and get it right.

So in our life with each other exactly the same principle applies.

We have to be right with each other.

If I am walking around in a snit because you didn't smile at me in the supermarket, then for your good as well as mine, you have to say,

"Hey, are you all right?"

"Yeah, I'm alright."

"No, no, really, is there something wrong?"

"No, there's nothing wrong!"

The problem won't be solved until I admit my attitude
and ask your forgiveness.

One way or another we have to get this right.

Because the Spirit of God will not move among us with any power if the air between us isn't clear.

This is so important that Jesus brings the whole church into it.

If your brother sins against you, tell him. If he listens, you gained your brother. If he doesn't take one or two others along and tell him again. If he still doesn't listen, tell it to the church. If he still doesn't listen. He's out.

He's out because he refuses to let the Spirit's unity prevail.

2. We will have the power to ask and receive from the Living God, when we are in agreement with each other.

One afternoon, I went to see Willie Anderson in Ford Hospital. The other woman in the room with her was in agony with pain. When it came time to pray with Willie, Willie said to me, "Take Michelle's hand."

So I'm standing between the two beds holding Willie's hand and Michelle's hand and praying. When I'm finished, Willie looks over at Michelle and says with absolute authority, "Now Michelle, you're going to feel better." I was praying. Willie was in charge. We were in agreement, and that prayer was answered. Agreement - joining our hearts together under God.

A few weeks ago, Odelle was leading the Bible study, as he does every Tuesday, at 4:00 p.m. at the Yorba Hotel. On this particular day, there was a woman who was wandering around with a troubled mind. You could see fear and despair written on her face. She would sit in one corner of the room taking the stuff out of her bag and put it back. Then go to another corner of the room take the stuff out of her bag and put it back in. This had been going on over at the hotel for days.

Finally, Odelle says, "We're going to pray for her, and God is going to do something." Within hours of that prayer, the EMS arrived. All the red tape was finally cut through and they took this woman for help. Friday afternoon I found this woman at the hospital with hope on her face for the first time in weeks

Believers agreeing together....

We can do this when we're talking on the telephone.

When we are visiting each other.

Agreeing and praying...these two things are meant to become the most natural part of our life together.

3. We will have the presence of the risen Jesus in our midst when we are in unity under his name.

For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.

We need to keep remembering what it is that holds us together.

There is only one thing, and that's Jesus.

We come together;

In submission to him,

In obedience to him.

To listen to him.

To commune with him in the body and the blood.

It is so easy to forget why we're together. We can be distracted by so many things and forget what it is really all about.

But when we fix our hearts on him and say, "Lord, you are the beginning and the ending of this meeting. You are the source of our life here. You are the only one that holds us together,"

then he stands among us and speaks to us in the power of the Holy Spirit.

4. We will be the gate of heaven for the lost sheep of this world when we practice forgiveness consistently among ourselves.

Then Peter came up and said to him, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?"

Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you seven times, but 70 times seven."

You can go into a church where every face is pious and every mind is filled with Scripture, (which is always quoted correctly) but the atmosphere is hard... the air is thick with tension.

The truth is that Sister Jones and Sister Smith haven't spoken to each other for three years. Brother Brown is bitter because he was slighted 10 years ago. The east-siders and the west -siders don't trust each other.

Until the forgiveness of the Lamb of God finds daily expression in that church in their life together,

it's going to be a hard place, a cold place

and the lost sheep of this world will find no hope there.

Likewise with us,

When we humble ourselves and determine that

we are going to live forgiveness,

we are going to practice forgiveness with each other,

then the atmosphere of heaven descends on us.

And the lost sheep who finds his way among us will find God here, he will see

Jesus here.

The faith that we hold in Jesus as individuals always brings us together in the Body. No one can follow Jesus and remain a Lone Ranger.

The faith that we practice together as we walk in agreement, in peace, in unity, and in forgiveness.....

That faith moves mountains.

Breaks chains.

Opens doors.

And brings the dead to life.

God grant that we may commit ourselves to walking in that kind of corporate faith. That we may walk in agreement, in peace, in unity, and in forgiveness.

For when we do, mighty things will happen.

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