

# (Matthew) ch.17:9-18:20

by Zac Poonen

---

*The sermon emphasizes the importance of humility, faith, and dependence on the Father in achieving greatness in the kingdom of heaven.*

**Duration:** 50:31

**Scripture:** Matthew 17:9-18

**Topics:** "Church Unity", "Spiritual Authority"

---

## Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of unity among believers in the church. He compares the discord of two out-of-tune musical instruments to the disharmony among brothers and sisters in Christ. The speaker highlights that when believers are united in spirit and agreement, the Lord is present and the church can exercise its authority. However, when there is disagreement, jealousy, and bitterness, the Lord is not present. The speaker also discusses the powerlessness of the Christian church in setting people free from spiritual and physical bondage, emphasizing the need for wholehearted prayer and fasting in certain situations. Additionally, the speaker mentions Jesus' prediction of his own death and resurrection, and how Peter has learned the importance of embracing the way of the cross. The sermon concludes with the reminder that even if there are only two or three believers in harmony, they can create a beautiful symphony in the church.

---

## Transcript

Let's turn today to Matthew's Gospel, chapter 17 and verse 9. This is referring to the time when Peter, James and John had just been up the mountain to see Jesus transfigured. And then we read here, as they were coming down from the mountain, Jesus commanded them, saying, Tell the vision to no one until the Son of Man has risen from the dead. When they were on the mountain, Peter had said, Lord, it is good for us to be here.

But it wasn't the will of God that they should stay forever on that mountain, seeing the glory of Jesus. Because there was a world in need, lying at their feet in the valley. And God's will is not that we should forever sit on the mountaintop, seeing the glory of Jesus.

There's something exciting about that. But the purpose of every mountaintop experience is that we might come down from the mountain, down into the valley, to minister to human need. And that's what we see here.

And this is the mistake that people make. They are either living forever in the valley, ministering to human need, never going up to the mountain, seeing the glory of Jesus, or forever seeking to live on the mountaintop, seeing the glory of Jesus, never coming down into the valley to minister to human need. So there's great significance here in that little expression, they came down from the mountain.

In other words, they went up to the mountain, but they didn't stay there. And that's how our life must be. We do need times when we are up on the mountain, seeing the glory of Jesus.

But the purpose of that strengthening, that lifting up of our spirit, is that we might come down from the mountain and minister to human need in the valley. And Jesus commanded them, saying, Tell the vision to no one until the Son of Man is risen from the dead. There's something that stirs us to tell others immediately about any new experience that we've had.

And what a battle that must have been for them to keep quiet about it. Not even to tell the other nine disciples. When we have had something special, a special experience, what a lust there is in our flesh to boast about it.

Paul had an experience, we read in 2 Corinthians 12, that he kept quiet about for fourteen years. And even when he did speak about it, he spoke about it so briefly, and that also, only to establish his apostleship to the Corinthians, so that they would receive his letters as God's word to them. There are many things that God does to us and says to us that we are not to reveal to others.

Many experiences. We need to have wisdom concerning what we can testify about and what we shouldn't testify about. And here is where many believers fail.

They think that everything that they experience and hear and know, they should tell others. That's because of their immaturity and folly. Tell the vision to no one, Jesus said, until the Son of Man is risen from the dead.

And his disciples asked him, saying, why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first? They had just seen Elijah on the mountaintop, and they wondered if this is the coming of Elijah. And he answered and said, Elijah is coming and will restore all things. But I say to you that Elijah already came.

And they did not recognize him, but did to him whatever they wished. Of course, Jesus was referring there to John the Baptist, who had come in the spirit and power of Elijah. John the Baptist was the one person who was the forerunner of Jesus Christ, who came in the spirit and power of Elijah, as prophesied in Malachi chapter 4. And John the Baptist was a partial fulfillment of that prophecy in the first coming of Christ.

He has already come, Jesus said in verse 12. But then Jesus said something else. He said in verse 11 that Elijah is coming and will restore all things.

And this Elijah is a prophetic voice that will be found in the church, particularly before the second coming of Christ, seeking to restore people in the church to that purity that is necessary to be the bride of Christ. Elijah is coming and will restore all things. And this is the calling of the church in this day and age, just before the second coming of Christ, to proclaim God's word in the spirit and power of Elijah.

Backsliding has entered the church, just like backsliding was there in Israel in the days of Elijah. Compromise was there in the days of Elijah, and compromise is found in the Christian church today. And

the need of the hour is the prophetic voice of Elijah in the church, calling the church back to recognize its true God, calling down spiritual fire from heaven.

This is the need of the hour. And God has his prophets even today. Elijah is coming and he will restore all things.

It's a ministry of restoration back to that original standard that God desired when he established the new covenant on the day of Pentecost. So also, it says in verse 12, just like the people did whatever they wished to that first Elijah, the first one who came in the spirit of Elijah, John the Baptist, so also, the last part of verse 12, the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands. Then the disciples understood that he had spoken to them about John the Baptist.

It was clear. And Jesus is also going to suffer like that. And now we see the purpose of coming down the mountain to the valley.

Verse 14, When they came to the multitude, a man came up to him, falling on his knees before him, and saying, Lord, have mercy on my son. Here is human need, people under the grip of Satan, for he is an epileptic and is very ill. And he often falls into the fire and often into the water.

And I brought him to your disciples, and they could not cure him. Just think of that simple statement, dear friends. Verse 16, I brought him to your disciples, and they could not cure him.

What a sad testimony to the powerlessness of the Christian church even today that many people have to say, I brought him to your disciples, and they could not set him free. They could not cure him. They could not cast out the demon.

They could not help him. Why has God placed us as the disciples of Jesus here in the world? Why has he placed the church on earth? So that we might do the works of Jesus. That we might help people to be free from the bondage of Satan, spiritually and physically.

And Jesus answered and said in verse 17, O unbelieving and perverted generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring him here to me. Jesus sought to deliver people from the physical and spiritual oppression of Satan. In fact, when the apostle Paul was describing the ministry of Jesus in the house of Cornelius, he described it like this in Acts 10.38, You know of Jesus of Nazareth, how God anointed him with the Holy Spirit and with power, and how he went about doing good and healing or delivering all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him.

What was his ministry? His ministry was one of doing good and delivering people who were oppressed spiritually and physically by Satan. And why couldn't they deliver him? We read here, Jesus rebuked him and the demon came out of him. Matthew 17.18 And the boy was cured at once.

There was no delay when you came to Jesus, and he is the same yesterday, today and forever. We must remember this, that demon possession was something that Jesus hated, and he hates it today. He delivered every person who came to him, seeking for deliverance from demons.

And every person today who is possessed by demons can be delivered in the name of Jesus Christ. And if there is no one around you who has faith to pray for you, there is a wonderful promise in the New Testament which says, Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be delivered. So that you can call upon the name of the Lord yourself.

You don't have to wait for someone to come and help you. If those who claim to be disciples of Jesus around you are unbelieving and powerless, claim this promise. Whosoever, Acts 2.21, calls on the name of the Lord will be delivered.

Deliverance is for you. Whatever oppression of Satan you are under, physical or spiritual, call upon the name of the Lord, He who is the same yesterday, today and forever. And you can be delivered, not partially, completely, totally, one hundred percent, if you will call upon the name of the Lord and say, Lord, you who delivered people from demons when you were on earth, deliver me from the oppression of Satan in my life.

You can do that right now and be free. The Lord will set you free. The boy was cured at once.

Does Jesus delay? He delays only because you don't call upon Him. Call upon Him now and you can be cured at once. Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, Why could we not cast it out? Hadn't Jesus given them authority? He certainly had.

We read in Matthew chapter 10 and verse 8, He gave them authority, saying, Cast out demons. That was clear. But they did not, because they didn't have faith.

And Jesus said that to them in Matthew 17.20, Even though I have given you authority, you couldn't cast out this demon because of the littleness of your faith. Matthew 17.20, But truly I say to you, If you have faith as a mustard seed, you shall say to this mountain, Move from here to there, and it shall move, and nothing shall be impossible to you. If you can believe that the Lord can fulfill through you that which He has given you authority for, we cannot claim anything from God, but if He has promised something, then we can certainly claim it.

We can even ask a mountain to move. If God has promised that it will move, we can have faith and exercise that authority, and it will move. But verse 21, This kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting.

Sometimes there is a need for wholehearted prayer and fasting if we are to come into this deliverance. But it is ours, in the name of Jesus Christ. Let's turn now to Matthew's Gospel, chapter 17, and verse 22.

And while they were gathering together in Galilee, Jesus said to them, The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill Him, and He will be raised again on the third day. And they were deeply grieved. Again Jesus speaks to them about the cross, but this time Peter does not say, Let it not happen to you, Lord, because he has learnt his lesson, that the voice that tells us to avoid the way of the cross is the voice of Satan.

They were grieved, but they kept quiet. And when they came to Capernaum, verse 24, those who collected the two drachma tax came to Peter and said, Does your teacher not pay the two drachma tax? This was the tax for the temple, and they were wondering whether Jesus, who was establishing new principles compared to the law of Moses, was also not going to pay the tax for that temple. And when they asked Peter, Peter said, Of course, he is going to pay it, yes.

He did not consult the Lord. Very often we are like that too, to give a quick answer before seeking God's will. And when he came into the house, before Peter could say a word, Jesus knew already what the people outside had come for and what Peter had replied through the supernatural revelation of the Spirit.

Jesus spoke to Peter first, it says in verse 25, and said, What do you think, Simon? From whom do the kings of the earth collect customs or poll tax, from their sons or from strangers? And upon this saying, upon Peter saying from strangers, Jesus said to him, Well, then the sons are exempt. The sons do not have to pay tax. For after all, in any nation, if a king collects taxes, he collects taxes from the people of the nation.

He does not collect tax from his own son. And here was a tax being collected for that temple, which was the house of God. And Jesus takes his position there as the son of God and says, If this tax is really being collected for the father, why should I, who am the son, pay this tax? I am free.

I do not have to pay the tax for the house of my own father. But he said, Even though I have that freedom as the son of God, I will not exercise that freedom. And this is another fundamental new covenant principle.

This is the way of the cross. That though I have freedom, I don't exercise that freedom. For the sake of others, I deny myself.

And here Jesus says in verse 27, Lest we give them offense. Lest we cause them to stumble. In other words, he was denying himself for the sake of others.

He was not exercising his right and his privilege as the son of God because he did not want to offend others. Remember this, dear brothers and sisters, that the highest Christian life is where we deny ourselves our rights and privileges for the sake of others, to bring others to blessing, to bring others into the kingdom. To prevent others from stumbling, we deny ourselves our rights.

Jesus said in John 17, For their sakes, I sanctify myself. John 17, 19. He set himself apart.

He gave up certain privileges and rights for the sake of others. And we see an example of that here. Even for the sake of others who were not his disciples.

And the true disciple of Jesus will walk in this way. If he finds that some action of his, which he has liberty to do, is going to cause stumbling to others, he will give it up. Lest we give them offense, he says, we'll pay the tax.

How does he pay it? Go to the sea, and throw in a hook, and take the first fish that comes up. And when you open its mouth, you'll find a stator. Take that and give it to them for you and me.

Oh, here we see something very wonderful. Jesus would never do a miracle for himself. He never turned the stones into bread for himself.

But he was willing to multiply the loaves for others. And here it was a question of paying the tax not only for himself but also for Peter who needed to pay that tax. And Peter had forsaken everything to follow Jesus.

And Jesus was going to help Peter pay his tax. That's a wonderful thing for us to learn. Do you know that God wants you to pay your tax? All your taxes? When you avoid paying your taxes, you're going against the will of God.

But you don't have to be burdened about that. Because the Lord wants to help you to pay your tax. He's going to give you the money to pay your taxes.

That's wonderful. He doesn't want you to avoid paying your taxes. At the same time, He's going to help you, if necessary, supernaturally, to pay your taxes.

That's a wonderful message we get from this passage. Go to the sea and take the first fish that comes up. And Peter was going to experience something that he had never experienced in all the years in which he had been fishing.

He was going to find money in the mouth of a fish. How wonderful God is. Now, there was a treasurer that the apostles had.

Judas Iscariot was the treasurer. But Jesus didn't send Peter to Judas Iscariot. Let Judas Iscariot and Peter get into a conflict.

He said, don't go to Judas. I'll provide that need another way. Go and pick up a fish from the sea.

And you'll find enough there in the mouth of the fish to pay your tax and mine. What a beautiful picture of partnership. The Lord meets our need.

And the Father, who met the need of Jesus, the financial need of Jesus, supernaturally, also met the financial need of Peter, supernaturally. This is a wonderful message that we get in the New Covenant. If Jesus could walk on the water, Peter could walk on the water too.

And if the Father was going to meet Jesus' financial need supernaturally, He was going to meet Peter's financial need supernaturally too. That is the wonderful message of the New Covenant. And that's a word of encouragement for us.

That what God did for Jesus in His earthly life, He will do for us as He cared for Jesus in His earthly life. He will care for you and me, if we are His disciples and if we have forsaken everything to follow Him like Peter did. You'll find that God never lets you down.

He never lets His servants or His disciples down. There need never be that fear in our hearts. If necessary, supernaturally, He will provide our need, even the need to pay our taxes.

If we can walk in the way that Jesus walked, of not standing up for our rights and privileges, but being willing to give them up, because we do not want to cause offense to others. If you find yourself in a situation where you have to give up a certain right or a privilege for the sake of others, and because of that you suffer some loss or some inconvenience, you can be sure that God in heaven who watches that will more than make up for that need. And now we come to chapter 18 and verse 1. At that time the disciples came to Jesus saying, Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven? Here Jesus had spoken about Himself as the Son of God, and the Son of God being exempt from paying tax.

Is He the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked Him this question. And Jesus explained who was the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. In verse 2 He said, He called a child to Himself and stood him in their midst and said, I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven.

The disciples thought this is wonderful to have such an honor to be a son in the kingdom of heaven, but Jesus said that it is the spirit of a child that makes a person great in the kingdom of heaven. And unless you are converted, now these disciples had already forsaken everything in order to be disciples of Jesus.

But although they were converted in one sense, they had revelation concerning Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the living God, they had forsaken their earthly jobs, they had forsaken earthly security, yet they needed another conversion.

That teaches us something very significant. There may be many things that we have given up for the Lord, and yet you and I may need another conversion if we have not become like little children in our attitude, in our spirit. For He spoke about another conversion.

I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven. The kingdom of heaven belongs to those who have understood what it is to come like a little child. And the one thing we know about little children is their helplessness.

A little child is helpless. Whoever then humbles himself, verse 4, as this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. It's not the one who does miracles, but the one who humbles himself.

And to humble oneself means to become like a little child, to have that attitude of helpless dependence upon the Father, accepting everything that the Father allows into our life. That is humility. Helplessly dependent upon the Father for the provision of all our needs, that is humility.

If we are not willing to come to Jesus like that, it says we cannot enter. And the more we are like that little child in helplessness and in humility, in helpless dependence upon the Father, the greater we are in the kingdom of heaven. Jesus is, of course, the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

And when he says that the one who humbles himself as a child is the greatest, it's obvious that Jesus also humbled himself as a little child. Let's get our understanding right. Greatness in the kingdom of heaven is dependent on how childlike we are in our spirit.

Let's turn today to Matthew's Gospel, chapter 18 and verse 5. Jesus had just been explaining to the disciples who was the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. He said it was a little child. The one who humbles himself as a little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven, verse 4. In other words, it is not ability or accomplishment that makes a person great in heaven.

In earth, on earth, it is ability, accomplishment, family, so many things. But in heaven, values are so completely different, exactly the opposite of here on earth. A little child has accomplished nothing.

It hasn't got a name for itself. But the one who has that spirit is the one who is greatest in the kingdom of heaven. If Christians hadn't forgotten this, the spirit in the churches of Jesus Christ would have been something quite different from what it is today.

There is so much of human exaltation, exaltation of human personalities. Those who are not great in heaven are made great in the church. Well, then that is not the church that is representing Jesus Christ correctly.

Jesus went on to say in verse 5, whoever receives one such child in my name receives me. Jesus loved little children. This is quite the opposite attitude to children that we find in the world today.

The world is generally speaking does not have any value for children. In fact, children are often considered a nuisance. And too many children in a family are considered a headache.

But Jesus said, if you receive one child in the name of Jesus, you receive him. Do you know that when you receive a child into your family, you are receiving Jesus Christ? How many people receive a child into their family in the way they receive Jesus Christ? To despise a child is to despise Jesus Christ. We need to have a scriptural understanding in this area.

Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me. And he went on to say in verse 10, see that you do not despise one of these little ones. When you despise children, you are despising Jesus Christ.

And whoever, verse 6, causes one of these little ones who believe in me to stumble, it is better for him that a heavy millstone be hung around his neck and that he be drowned in the depth of the sea. If you do anything or say anything that causes a little child who believes in Jesus to stumble, Jesus said, it is better you go and drown yourself in the sea. Think of the strong expression Jesus used here.

Put a stone around your neck and go and jump in the sea, he said. Because the judgment for you in the final day will be terrible. If you have conducted yourself in a way that causes little ones to stumble, are you conducting yourself in a way that causes other younger children who believe in Jesus to stumble? Father and mother can behave in such a way at home that they cause their little children to stumble.

When father and mother yell at each other at home, they cause their little ones to stumble. When father and mother have practices at home that are dishonoring to God, they cause their little ones to stumble. Or it may be that you are a sister who dresses in a very immodest way and cause younger ones to be led astray into worldliness.

It may be your way of speech. It may be a habit that you have which causes other people to stumble. There could be so many things like this that hinder younger ones in their following of Jesus.

It could be that defiling television program that you are watching. The worldliness that you watch on the television screen causes younger ones to stumble. Jesus said, whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to stumble, it is better for him that a heavy millstone be hung around his neck and that he be drowned in the depth of the sea.

How seriously Jesus took this matter of stumbling little ones. Woe unto the world because of its stumbling blocks. Jesus said in verse 7, it is inevitable that stumbling blocks come.

There will be stumbling blocks in the world. You can't avoid that. But woe unto that man through whom the stumbling block comes.

May God have mercy on us if there is anything in us that causes others to stumble. For our judgment will be very severe. Now is the time to repent, dear friends, of anything in our life that's causing younger believers or little children to stumble in their following of Jesus.

Anything in our speech, anything in our way of life, any habit that we have. Whatever it is, get rid of it. Even if it is as important to you as your hand or your foot.

Jesus said cut it off. It may not be an evil thing. Your hand and foot are not evil things.

Jesus is not speaking now about sinful things. He's talking about things which can stumble others, which you may think are as necessary for you as your hand or your foot. He said if your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away from you.

Get rid of anything you have in your life or in your house which causes other people to stumble. Hinders them from following Jesus in the way of discipleship. It is better for you to enter life crippled or lame than having two hands or two feet to be cast into the eternal fire.

In other words, if you are going to be a stumbling block to others by something you do or say, you can be cast into the eternal fire. That's the plain meaning of these verses. The world will have its stumbling blocks, verse 7. That is inevitable.

But woe unto that man through whom the stumbling block comes. Oh that it may be that none of us will ever be that man or woman through whom a stumbling block comes into the church. And if your eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out and throw it from you.

Pluck out your eye and throw it away. Is there anything wrong in having two eyes? Nothing wrong. But if you are stumbled because of your eye, you cannot control it perhaps.

Jesus said it's better to lose one eye and live in spiritual purity than to have two eyes and to go to hell. It's better for you to enter life with one eye, he said in verse 9, than having two eyes to be cast into the hell of fire. There are very few Christians who take these words seriously.

They are so careless in sinning with their eyes, sinning with their hands, sinning with their body, sinning with their tongue especially. We could add to the words of Jesus in the same spirit, if your tongue causes you to offend, it's better to cut out your tongue and be dumb, so that you don't sin with your tongue and go to hell. It's better to go to heaven without a tongue than to go to hell with a tongue.

Think of taking sin so seriously as Jesus spoke about it. Jesus spoke more about hell and about the lake of fire than any other preacher. We've already come across that in Matthew chapter 5. Here we find it again in Matthew 18.

Sin is serious and particularly if that sin not only causes us to stumble, but is causing other people who look at us to stumble. And if you are a preacher or any type of leader or elder in a church, these words apply ten times more to people like us. For others are looking at us and the way we live and conduct ourselves is so important that we are an example.

Further Jesus went on to say in verse 10 See that you don't despise one of these little ones. For I say to you that there are angels in heaven continually behold the face of my father who is in heaven. Do you know that every child has an angel appointed? And that is the angel that protects our children from many many serious accidents.

There is an angel appointed for every child. And those angels stand before the face of the father in heaven. And when you stumble a little child or despise a little child it's serious.

Because those angels report it to the father. They continually behold the face of my father who is in heaven. Ya, that's serious.

There is a comfort in the latter part of that verse. That the angels appointed for children remain with that child right through life. They don't leave that child when he's grown up.

Psalms 91 says he gives his angels charge concerning us to guard us in all our ways. Thank God for the ministry of angels. Much is spoken in the world today about what demons do.

It's important to know what angels do as well for us. They are appointed by God to take care of us. To protect us.

They behold the face of our father in heaven. So don't despise one of these little ones, he said. For the son of man has come to save that which was lost.

And he is here speaking particularly about little children. Little children are lost. And Jesus has come to save little children.

What do you think if a man has a hundred sheep and one of them has gone astray, doesn't he leave the ninety-nine and go and search for the one that is straying? And if it turns out that he finds it, truly I say to you, he rejoices more over that than over the ninety-nine which have not gone astray. Thus it is not the will of your father who is in heaven that one of these little ones perish. Do you know that little ones can perish? Little children can be lost? And little children can also be saved.

And Jesus spoke here the parable about the ninety-nine sheep and the one sheep that was lost and he replied it to little children. A little child needs to be brought back into the fold. And this is a tremendous ministry that we can have by our life and by our example and by our words to bring little children back into the fold of Jesus Christ.

Let's turn now to Matthew's Gospel, chapter eighteen and verse fifteen. And if your brother sins, go and reprove him in private. If he listens to you, you have won your brother.

But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more witnesses with you so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed. And 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 gatherer. Here Jesus speaks about what we should do when a brother sins, particularly if he has sinned against you.

And what should be your reaction to that? You can ignore it, but he may continue in sin and he will have to answer for it in the day of judgment. Cain said to God, am I my brother's keeper? The answer to that question is yes, you are. We have a responsibility if we belong in the church, in the body of Christ for one another.

That is just like saying the right hand has a responsibility for injury that has come to the left hand to do something about it, not to ignore it. Now in the Old Testament, such a responsibility was not there because people were not in a body. They were a congregation, they were a people.

But in the New Testament, the church is called a body, the body of Christ and we are members one of another. And you know that every member in our body has a responsibility for another member. If my foot is injured, the eyes are interested in that, the hand is interested in that, every part of the body is interested in it.

If the foot is aching, the whole body suffers. And therefore when your brother sins, this is obviously a brother who is in your locality with whom you are in fellowship. He has become your brother and he sins.

Go and reprove him. Make it clear to him. This is a responsibility that very, very few Christians take seriously.

Because they don't want to take the responsibility that comes with it of being that brother's keeper. Reprove him in private. In other words, don't go talking about it to other people.

The very thing that Jesus said we should do, very few people do. And what Jesus said we should not do is what people do. Most believers are in the habit of speaking to other people publicly about the sin of somebody else.

But Jesus said, go and reprove that brother in private. When you speak to other people about that person's sin, you are only bringing him down in the eyes of others and destroying him. But here, if you go and speak to him in private, the chances are that he may listen to you.

And you have won your brother. The aim is to win the person back when the devil has got an advantage over him. And this is exactly what we read also in Galatians chapter 6 and verse 1 where Paul under the inspiration of the Spirit says, if a man is caught in a trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in the spirit of gentleness.

The aim is restoration. Try and bring that brother back into the fold. But if he does not listen to you, then we find a spirit of rebellion.

Then take one or two more with you. Don't go alone a second time. Take one or two responsible mature brothers with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses, every fact may be confirmed.

And if he refuses to listen even to them, in other words, two or three have spoken to him and he still refuses to listen, then tell it to the church. And now we need to ask ourselves what does it mean to tell the church? And it is obvious from the context here that Jesus is speaking to tell it to the elders in the church. Because he goes on to say, if he refuses to listen even to the church, it doesn't mean that we go and tell a hundred and fifty people in a local church about it and that all the hundred and fifty people descend on this man and begin to speak to him.

That is impossible. No. It is obvious when you come to chapter eighteen and verse nineteen and twenty that he is referring to two or three who have authority to bind and lose.

And those two or three are the elders in a local church. The authority in the church. You have first gone with two or three spiritual brothers to try and sort out this problem yourself.

But you have not been able to do it. Well, bring it now to the notice of the elders in the church and let them handle it. Sometimes it may be the wisest thing to go to them straight away.

That in the very first stage, the one or two you take with you are the elders of the church. And then of course you have gone to the church straight away because you find that maybe there are no others with wisdom to handle the situation in your locality. And he refuses to listen to the elders of the church.

Then let that man be to you as a heathen. In other words, Jesus is speaking here about discipline in the church where a brother continues in sin in a spirit of rebellion. The painful necessity of discipline.

It's just like surgery for cancer. Here is a cancer that's begun to grow in the body. Once upon a time it was a living cell.

It was a healthy cell but it has become cancerous. And we have tried to heal it through other means and it's not healed. Then the only solution is to do radical surgery and cut it out and throw it out of the body.

It's no longer a part of the body. Discipline in the church where one who was once a brother is now treated as a heathen. And in this context again, the Lord gives authority to the elders in the church saying whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven.

Whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. It speaks about the authority that the elders who are walking with the Lord have. To bind on earth spiritual forces that are seeking to destroy the church.

And also to loose people who are in bondage on earth and if a brother repents, to loose him from the bondage of Satan into which he had got himself into. In this context, it's very important to see the context, I say to you that if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask. This matter of discipline is not something that one person can do on his own.

There must be a minimum of two agreeing to bind something. Here are two people agreeing concerning something that concerns the purity of the church. In that context, it could be anything that concerns the purity of the church.

Two who are in eldership come together and they ask for anything it will be done for them. By my father in heaven. Because the father in heaven is also concerned about purity in the church.

And in this context, Jesus says, because where two or three are gathered together like this, in my name, in the spirit of unity and harmony, there I am in their midst. Now this is a verse that is very much misunderstood and misquoted. Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst.

Many Christians have this bad habit of quoting scripture out of context. To know a verse and not to know the context in which that verse comes, can lead us to a wrong understanding and interpretation of that verse. Notice the context in which this verse comes.

It comes in the context of the local church. For this is the second time that Jesus spoke about the church. And in the gospel records there are only two places where Jesus spoke about the church.

One is in Matthew 16 which we considered in an earlier study. And the other here is in Matthew 18. Matthew 16 speaks about the universal worldwide church including believers past, present and future.

Matthew 18 speaks about the local church, present in one locality represented by its elders who are two or three. And in that context he speaks about two or three gathering together in his name as a local church. And that teaches us that a local church need comprise of only two or three.

Two or three are enough to comprise a local church provided they are one in spirit. The word used here in verse 19, agreed, is the Greek word symphonio from which we get the English word symphony. It's a musical word.

And how beautiful it is to listen to a number of instruments that are playing in harmony and in symphony. Even if it's two or three, even if there are only two, you can get a jarring note if one is out of tune. Or one is not playing on the same scale.

And Jesus is speaking about that type of fine unity that is found in musical instruments. And there are people with a very highly sensitive ear to music who can discern even if someone is off scale by one fourth of a note. It's that type of unity that the Lord desires in the church where two brothers or two sisters, two or

three, are so completely in harmony in their spirit.

When we hear musical instruments out of tune, think of two brothers who are out of tune with each other or two sisters who are out of tune. That is more of a discord in God's ears than two instruments out of tune in a church meeting. That is the sound that God is listening for, the unity of brothers and sisters who come together, gathered together in unity in the name of Jesus, where they agree together.

And when such agreement is there, the Lord is present. Where they are disagreeing and jealous and bitter against one another, the Lord is not there. For a true church to exercise itself, the authority that the Lord has given to it, there must be this unity.

This is the true church of Jesus Christ, where there are at least two or three who are so united in spirit that they can bind the forces of darkness that seek to bring spiritual death into it. That they can lose in the Lord's name those who are bound by Satan. This is what we should long for in our localities.

The church representing the unity of the Father and Son, for this is what Jesus prayed for, that we might be one as the Father and Son are one. For in the midst of such a church, even if it's only two or three members, the Lord himself is present in all his authority.

---

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/8/SID8316.mp3>

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/zac-poonen/matthew-ch179-1820/>

# *Grow in Your Walk with Christ*

---

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

**[www.sermonindex.net](http://www.sermonindex.net)**