

Matthew 18 - The Purpose of the Kingdom Community

I. Introduction

A. Last week we finished the fourth action section of Matthew - and we saw that it was all about the Kingdom Community

1. After promising in the Parables that there would be a new community who understood who He was, Jesus is acting to make this a reality - He is calling together a new community to be His people
2. So the first section was the Center of the Kingdom Community: Jesus is the center of His kingdom community and the disciples start to understand that Jesus is the Son of God
3. And the second section was the Identity of the Kingdom Community: Jesus' people are those who know that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God
4. And the last section, centered on the Transfiguration, was the Formation of the Kingdom Community: Jesus' people are founded by the perfect Son of God being sacrificed for His people

B. Today we are starting the fourth teaching section of Matthew - and it continues the theme of Kingdom Community

1. But the focus changes - we understand the who and the how of Jesus' people - who they are and how they are called out
2. But now, we are going to start looking at what they do - how does this new community interact, how do they live as Jesus' people?
3. So, this week, in Matthew 18, I've called the Purpose of the Kingdom Community: what are Jesus' people about? What are they supposed to be doing?

C. This section starts with a question from the disciples that prompts Jesus' teaching

1. The disciples ask: Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?
 - a. And can we start by saying - what a dumb question - now, I say this as a matter of fact, not a matter of judgment - it is a dumb question, but I'm not looking down on the disciples, because I can be pretty foolish myself - actually it gives me comfort to see the disciples acting foolish, because we know that Jesus works with foolish people
 - b. But it is a dumb question - have the disciples not been paying attention for the last four chapters? Or really, have they been paying attention anytime?
 - c. The question is dumb, because the disciples should by now be able to clearly and confidently identify who the greatest in the kingdom of heaven is - clearly the greatest in the kingdom of heaven is Jesus
 - d. Let's just go back and look at the three confessions in chapters 14-17
 - i. Truly [He is] the Son of God
 - ii. [He is] the Christ, the Son of the Living God
 - iii. He is God's beloved Son, the one with whom God is well pleased
 - e. Jesus must be the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven - anything else just doesn't make sense
2. But Jesus uses the disciples' foolishness to teach them what His kingdom is about and this starts the fourth discourse
 - a. Jesus' community isn't about one-upmanship
 - b. But if it isn't about being the best, then what is Jesus' community about?
 - c. And the answer comes down to the fact that Jesus is the greatest, and that ought to be reflected in us

D. Read Matthew 18

E. Proposition: If Jesus is the greatest this truth must be reflected in the Kingdom Community

1. Jesus' supremacy is the compelling potency of the Kingdom Community
2. Jesus' supremacy calls for childlike humility in the Kingdom Community
3. Jesus' supremacy calls for warlike mentality in the Kingdom Community
4. Jesus' supremacy calls for sacrificial unity in the Kingdom Community
5. Jesus' supremacy calls for careful diplomacy in the Kingdom Community

II. Jesus' supremacy is the compelling potency of the Kingdom Community

- A. Matthew 18:1 - At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?"**
1. Before we even enter the teaching section, I want to meditate on the disciples' question for a moment
 2. It is no accident that Matthew starts this section with this question, and I think we're supposed to pause on this question for a moment
 3. Matthew could have started this section with Jesus' teaching about the His community, but he starts with this question - who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?
- B. Now, I've already paused for a moment to consider that Jesus is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven**
1. He is the Center of the Kingdom Community, His identity gives identity to the Kingdom Community and His sacrificial work is the Formation of the Kingdom Community - how could anyone else be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven
 2. But why does Matthew start with this question? Is it because this entire section has to do with Jesus' supremacy?
 3. Perhaps Matthew wants us to think about who is supreme - if Jesus is supreme, what does this mean for Jesus people?
 4. How does this cause Jesus' people to act? How does it give them purpose? How does it define their community
- C. If this is true, then we need to start by defining what Jesus' supremacy means**
1. If Jesus' supremacy is what is going to compel the attitudes and actions that Jesus calls for in this section, we need to understand what His supremacy is so that we can allow it to drive us forward in obedience
 2. And to define Jesus' supremacy is easy - simply look at the last four chapters of Matthew
 - a. Matthew has been working hard to reveal an accurate and powerful description of who Jesus is
 - b. Jesus promised to reveal Himself to some even as He is being rejected by most, and that has come true in Matthew 14-17 - the disciples have come to have an understanding of who Jesus is
 3. And we see that there are at least two facets to Jesus' supremacy in this section
 - a. First, we see that Jesus has supremacy of being - He is the Anointed One, the Beloved Son of God
 - i. Jesus is, bluntly, the greatest man that ever lived, there is no one who could ever possibly compare to Him
 - ii. He is God Himself wrapped in human flesh, He contains the supreme power and supreme glory of the universe in Himself, He existed before all time and will exist for all eternity, He is the Creator and the Sustainer, in Him all things move and have their being
 - iii. *He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities ---all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent.* (Colossians 1:15-18)
 - iv. Jesus is supreme in being and He is the center of the Kingdom Community! But if Jesus is the center of the Kingdom Community, how does this supremacy define the Kingdom Community?
 - b. And, not only that, second, we see that Jesus has supremacy of action - He has come to redeem His people
 - i. Jesus is the greatest man who came to do the greatest deed and to reveal the greatest love
 - ii. He is God Himself wrapped in human flesh and yet He became obedient to death
 - iii. He contains the supreme power and glory of the universe and yet He chose to suffer and be rejected
 - iv. He existed before all time and will exist for all eternity and yet He was dead and buried
 - v. *For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.* (Colossians 1:19-20)
 - vi. And He did all of this for us, He did all of this to redeem us
 - vii. Jesus is supreme in action and He is the center of the Kingdom Community! But if Jesus is the center of the Kingdom Community, how does this supremacy define the Kingdom Community?

III. Jesus' supremacy calls for childlike humility in the Kingdom Community

A. As Jesus responds to the disciples' question, He starts with a straightforward response to His supremacy

1. Matthew 18:1-4 - *At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them and said, "Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven."*
2. Jesus doesn't exactly answer the question, He doesn't declare who the greatest is, He doesn't claim His own supremacy
3. Instead, He looks past the question and tells the disciples, "You aren't asking the right question. You don't need to worry about who's the greatest, you need to worry about whether you are going to even get into the kingdom of heaven."
4. He says, "don't be worrying about who's the greatest, instead you need to be like a child or you'll never even enter the kingdom of heaven. So you need to turn your thoughts around, you're pursuing the wrong object."
5. But then Jesus says He values such humility - the one who isn't seeking to be great, the one who has childlike humility is the greatest - to be great in Jesus' community is to not be great
6. But what does this mean? What does childlike humility look like?

B. First, it means we don't act to exalt ourselves because we value Jesus' supremacy

1. The central phrase here is "*Whoever humbles himself like this child*"
 - a. This was in direct opposition to what the disciples were trying to do, they were trying to exalt themselves, but Jesus calls them to humility, refusing to exalt themselves - Humility is a core attitude in Jesus' community
2. And this truth is splashed all over the pages of the Bible
 - a. Humility is a significant theme in Psalms and Proverbs, for example Proverbs 3:34 - *Toward the scorers he is scornful, but to the humble he gives favor.*
 - b. And this Proverb has the unique pleasure of being quoted twice in the New Testament:
 - c. James 4:6 - *But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble."*
 - d. And again, 1 Peter 5:5 - *Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."*
3. Discipleship - membership in the Kingdom Community - requires humility
 - a. If Jesus is the greatest, we can't be jockeying to win other's esteem or to make ourselves look better than others
 - b. If we are trying to be great, to exalt ourselves, we aren't valuing Jesus' supremacy
 - c. So, instead we wholeheartedly acknowledge Jesus' supremacy and make ourselves nothing because that is what we really are - we don't act to exalt ourselves, we value Jesus' supremacy

C. Instead, it means we act with childlike dependence because this displays Jesus' supremacy

1. The lesson here is humility, but Jesus' object lesson, calling a child, helps us understand what this humility looks like
 - a. The humility that Jesus desires in His people is a reliant humility - a humility that recognizes that they are insufficient on their own, that they need to be provided for, that they need a protector and savior
 - b. In sum, they need to have the standing of a child, a child that relies on his parents for everything - for food and clothing, shelter and protection, guidance and discipline - literally everything in the world
 - c. So we should become like children - this is the opposite of pride, it is a humble acknowledgment that we are nothing and that we need everything from Jesus
 - d. How could we be prideful if we are so dependent on another? Pride is not just wrong in the Kingdom Community, pride is foolish and absurd - you are children relying on Jesus, act like it
2. And this dependence, this reliant humility, exalts Jesus
 - a. By acting with reliant humility we declare that Jesus has supremacy of being - we aren't the greatest, He is the greatest, we will not exalt ourselves because in everything He is preeminent
 - b. And, by acting with childlike dependence, we declare that Jesus has supremacy of action - we are so little that we can't even provide for ourselves, we need Jesus to provide for us, we need Jesus to act on our behalf
 - c. By refusing pride and instead acting with childlike dependence, we show how great Jesus is, we display His greatness to each other and to the world - so Jesus' supremacy calls for childlike humility

D. Being part of Jesus' community means making Jesus supreme, not ourselves

1. It comes back to Jesus' supremacy - our pride must be set aside in favor of Jesus' value - He is infinitely greater than we are, and our attitude should reflect that - Jesus is the greatest, not us
2. But, not only that, it comes back to Jesus' supremacy because in humbling ourselves we are imitating Him - He, in His greatness, humbled Himself and came to earth for us, how could we seek to exalt ourselves when our head, our savior and king, chose the path of nothingness? We exalt Jesus' supremacy by imitating Him.

IV. Jesus' supremacy calls for warlike mentality in the Kingdom Community

A. As we continue in Matthew 18, we see three more exhortations to the disciples

1. Matthew 18:5-14 - *"Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, 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. "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! 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. 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. "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. 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.*
2. In this section, Jesus continues to talk about children - *whoever receives one such child; whoever causes one of these little ones; it is not the will of my Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish*
3. Now we need to remember that Jesus isn't talking about children, at least not in the biological sense - the children, the little ones of Matthew 18 are disciples, members of the kingdom community - the disciples are to enter the kingdom community like children - so how should these children act together in kingdom community
4. And I've called this section 'warlike mentality', not so much because Jesus uses militant pictures in this section, but I think this communicates to us what Jesus is communicating to His disciples
5. In this section, Jesus identifies an enemy of the members of the kingdom community and calls the members of the kingdom community to oppose this enemy together - they are to be a band of brothers fighting a common enemy
6. And the great enemy of Jesus' community is sin - sin is why Jesus is dying, Jesus will sacrifice Himself to free His people from sin, so sin cannot be welcomed into the kingdom community, but must be identified as the enemy
7. So, Jesus commands three responses to our common enemy, and we can think of each of these in militant terms

B. We must refuse aid or comfort to the enemy

1. In verses 5-7, Jesus starts by defining sides - Jesus' community is on His side and sin is the enemy
2. So those who claim to be part of Jesus' community cannot be giving aid or comfort to the enemy - woe to those who would encourage sin and sinfulness within the kingdom community, woe to those who would value sin over the life of a brother or sister
3. If sin is our common enemy, we cannot be partnering with the enemy - Jesus' community must be being careful to not act in ways that would encourage sin in our midst, not to act in ways that would tempt a brother or sister in Christ
4. Obviously Jesus' warning is about intentional actions here, an intent to cause a brother to sin, an intent to choose the enemy instead of loving a brother - for one who chooses Jesus' enemy over His community it would be better to be drowned in the depths of the sea
5. But this warning should cause all of us to pause and consider - are we acting in ways that could, even accidentally, be encouraging brothers or sisters in Christ to sin? Are we, even unwittingly, giving aid or comfort to the enemy?
6. I think this is a great place to think about things like modesty - are we dressing, are we presenting ourselves in such a way that we are careful not to tempt others to sin? Whether in lust, or pride, or covetousness?
7. Or we could our activities - are we doing things that might cause others to sin? Are we tempting others to value something unnecessarily? Are we participating in something that is against a brother's conscience? Are we thinking through our activities in light of our brothers and sisters in Christ?
8. And this could be applied to all areas of life - are we acting in ways that might cause others to sin? Are we thinking about brothers and sisters in Christ, or only thinking about ourselves? Are we, perhaps unintentionally, giving aid or comfort to the enemy? Are we loving each other enough to think through these things?
9. Paul exhorted the Romans to think through these things, he says in Romans 14:13 - *Therefore let us not pass judgment on one another any longer, but rather decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother.*
10. Jesus' community should clearly know what side they are on - they are together for Jesus and sin is the enemy - acting in a way that encourages sin is anathema to the kingdom community, we must refuse aid or comfort to the enemy

C. We must take the battle to the enemy

1. In verse 8, Jesus turns from talking about others' sin to one's own sin - temptations to sin may come from others, or it may come from ourselves - regardless of where they come from, woe to all temptations!
2. And the main point of this section is the same - it would be better to be destroyed than to be the portal of temptation - but instead of looking at tempting others, it is looking at fighting your own temptations
3. Temptation will come, even if no one else tempts us, we will be tempted by our own passions, our own desires - and whenever temptation happens, we must be ready to take the battle to the enemy
4. That is the emphasis of Jesus' command here, we must be willing to do battle against temptation, we must not let sin have the upper hand - *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. 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.*
5. If sin wins, that's the end of the game, so those in Jesus' community must be willing to take the battle to the enemy - be willing to sacrifice to defeat sin
6. The flow of verses 5-9 is: instead of casually acting in ways that promote sin in the kingdom community, we should each, individually, be battling sin to death - we need to be mortifying our own sin - we need to take the battle to the enemy
7. And so we need to consider - are we viewing sin in this light? Are we viewing sin as our mortal enemy, an enemy which we should be willing to sacrifice even our hand or our eye to defeat? Are we willing to risk all on the battlefield against this enemy? Have we made real sacrifices in our fight against sin? Are we willing to continue making sacrifices in our fight against sin? Or is our fight against sin a passive fight? Have we chosen not to risk ourselves to defeat sin?
8. If we aren't taking the battle to the enemy, if we aren't truly struggling against sin, we may find we are not truly part of Jesus' community, we may be on the outside, we may be those cast out of the Kingdom Community at the last day
9. So, as the author of Hebrews says, Hebrews 12:4 - *In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.* - Sin must be viewed as a real enemy and we must have a real struggle against it - take the battle to the enemy! Do whatever is necessary to defeat Jesus' mortal enemy!

D. We must refuse to leave a comrade behind

1. In verse 10, Jesus turns his focus back to thinking about others and He says not to despise one of these little ones
2. As we participate together in the war against sin, there will be casualties - in fact, as James says, each of us will stumble and fall at many times, sin will win a battle here and there - but we must not despise each other in this
3. We must not look down on each other when we fail in the battle against sin, instead we must remember that we are brothers in arms, we are a united force fighting a common enemy
4. So when one of us stumbles, when one of us falls to temptation, instead of despising one another, we imitate what Jesus did - we go out and seek the one who has stumbled, we seek restoration, we don't leave our comrade behind
5. That's the mindset that Jesus is setting before His community - we are a band of brothers with a common enemy, set aside any differences you have and work for each other's good
6. Don't ignore sin in your midst and don't judge each other for sin in your midst, instead work to lovingly restore each other so that together you can defeat sin in your midst
7. And so we have to consider - is this how we are reacting to sin in our fellowship? Are we dedicated to 1) refusing to judge each other, refusing to despise each other as sin becomes apparent; and 2) restoring each other as we fall into sin? Is that the attitude of our church? Are we a place where we can admit sin honestly without fear because we know that our brothers and sisters in Christ will not despise us, but will work for our restoration?
8. Don't leave a comrade on the battlefield, you are brothers in arms, make sure each one of you makes it home

E. Being part of Jesus' community means making Jesus supreme, not our worldly pleasures

1. Again, it comes back to Jesus' supremacy - our sin must be set aside in favor of Jesus' value - He is infinitely greater than the deceitful pleasures of sin - Jesus is desirable, not this world
2. But, again, it also comes back to Jesus' supremacy because by setting our face against sin, we are imitating Him again - we are displaying His supremacy by doing what He did, fighting sin to the death, not allowing it to continue in our midst - this was Jesus' purpose, how could we exalt Him while ignoring His purpose? We exalt Jesus' supremacy by imitating Him!

V. Jesus' supremacy calls for sacrificial unity in the Kingdom Community

A. As we continue in Matthew 18, we see three exhortations in a row that stress the unity of the Kingdom Community

1. Matthew 18:10-35 - *"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. 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." Then Peter came up and said to him, "Lord, how often will 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 seventy times seven. "Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. When he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. And since he could not pay, his master ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made. So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.' And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt. But when that same servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii, and seizing him, he began to choke him, saying, 'Pay what you owe.' So his fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you.' He refused and went and put him in prison until he should pay the debt. When his fellow servants saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their master all that had taken place. Then his master summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?' And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers, until he should pay all his debt. So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart."*
2. As we finish the chapter, we see that Jesus clearly wants His community to be unified - He doesn't want anything to pull it apart, especially He doesn't want the deceitfulness of sin to creep in and destroy the unity of His people
3. So Jesus calls us to sacrificially seek unity in the kingdom community, to set aside our rights to work for the good of the whole, to make the needs of the community more important than our desires

B. We must value unity in the face of sin

1. Returning to verses 10-14, the parable of the lost sheep that we just looked at, we see the start of this exhortation to unity - sin would cause us to drift apart, but we must value our unity in Christ enough to go search for the one who has wandered off in sin
2. This parable calls us to an intentional and even sacrificial unity - even when it appears that we don't have any responsibility to the lost sheep, the lost brother, we are called to sacrifice our time and our effort to go seek out a lost brother, to return him to the fold and to bring the community back to unity again
3. In the face of sin's call to disunity, to pursue other pleasures, we must sacrificially seek unity with each other, we must seek out the one who has gone astray, we must value our relationships with each other enough to sacrifice for each other
4. So again, consider - are you willing to seek your brothers and sisters in Christ here at this church in this way? Are you willing to inconvenience or discomfort yourself to care for another? Do you feel a responsibility to your brothers and sisters here? Or is it just a place to come on Sunday mornings?

C. We must value unity in the face of conflict

1. Sometimes sin is not just abstract sin, sometimes a brother isn't just sinning, but his sin has caused a conflict in the church, a situation that requires confrontation between brothers and sisters in Christ
2. So, in verses 15-20, we see an exhortation to seek your brother and work for unity even when his sin is against you - *If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone.*
3. An underlying goal of this exhortation is to preserve unity within the church, to not allow sin to drive each other away, because of our sin, we may wander off or because of our sin we may drive each other away
4. But instead of driving each other away, in the midst of conflict we should seek unity
5. We should seek unity by keeping the matter as small as possible, to not involve extra members in conflict if we don't have to; we should seek unity by honest appeal, to not allow sin to fester in our midst but go to your brother; we should seek unity by seeking repentance, seeking to turn your brother away from sin, not seeking retribution
6. Since this exhortation ends with a command to exclude an unrepentant brother, we might be tempted to think this command is against unity, but actually every step here is meant to seek unity and not allow disunity to continue
7. So, instead of letting sin continue and fester and destroy relationships, you are called to go to your brother and go to him alone so that sin does not have a chance to affect the wider body
8. Instead of involving the wider church through gossip and backbiting, if there continues to be a disagreement, you are to submit yourselves together to only one or two others to allow them to lovingly sort through the situation
9. And then, if there is continuing unrepentance, then instead of allowing the sin to persist in the church unabated, the church is to exclude the sinner from their midst in order to protect their unity - this passage is about preserving unity
10. So consider - are you valuing unity enough to go to a brother instead of letting sin fester and destroy relationships? Are you being careful not to gossip about others and reveal sin to others or do you try to keep conflict as close as possible? Are you carefully seeking unity even when offended, or are you seeking retribution and vindication?

D. We must value unity in the face of offense

1. The last exhortation in Matthew 18 continues this theme of how to deal with sin in our midst - how to preserve our unity
2. So, we don't allow sin to cause brothers or sisters to wander away from our community and we don't let sin fester destroying relationships in our community and, in verses 21-35, we see what to do when there is repentance from sin
3. It is almost a stepwise progression - we start with a determination not to let sin tear us apart, we go and seek repentance from sin instead, and when repentance is given how do we continue to seek unity
4. And Jesus' exhortation is clear - we seek unity through forgiveness - once sin is repented of we don't allow the offense to continue, we don't harbor animosity or anger, distrust or guardedness, instead we truly forgive the debt
5. Once sin is repented of, we return to unity, we set aside the offense and the debt owed to us and welcome our brother back, and we do this over and over and over again, because sin is simply a reality in our world
6. But we don't let sin have the final word, we seek out sinners, we confront sin, and then we forgive sin - we destroy sin and don't allow it to break up our community
7. So consider - are you holding grudges against brothers or sisters in Christ? Do you avoid people in the church because you are still hurt by their actions? Have you truly offered forgiveness, complete forgiveness, for sins committed against you? Are you truly seeking restored relationships, or are you letting sin have the final word?

E. Being part of Jesus' community means making Jesus supreme, not our rights

1. Again, it comes back to Jesus' supremacy - our rights must be set aside in favor of Jesus' value - He is infinitely greater than anything we could give up when we set aside our rights and pursue unity in His body - Jesus is valuable, not our rights, He is supreme and so we seek His purposes together not our rights
2. And again, it also comes back to Jesus' supremacy through imitation - Jesus is the one who came seeking us as lost sheep, who refused to let a relationship be broken but called us to repentance, who freely and fully forgave every offense that we committed against Him - if this is what Jesus did, how could we exalt Him while doing otherwise? We exalt Jesus' supremacy by imitating Him!
3. And the last story in this chapter emphasizes this imitation - the king forgave the debt, the servant should be forgiving the debt as well; if the servant refuses to forgive the debt, he doesn't have any idea how great His king is, in fact, he may be cast out of the kingdom community because he hasn't bowed the knee to his king

VI. Jesus' supremacy calls for careful diplomacy in the Kingdom Community

A. Before we finish, I want to return to verses 15-20 one more time and consider one more aspect of what Jesus is teaching

1. Matthew 18:15-20 - *"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."*
2. This exhortation in Matthew 18 echoes Matthew 16:18-19 - *And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.*
3. Somehow our refusal to let sin continue in our midst, even to the point of confronting and, when absolutely necessary, excluding a brother relates to the very core purpose of the church, the activity of the kingdom community
4. If you'll recall, the identity of the kingdom community is those who know who Jesus is and Jesus will build His church on that confession - and this helps us understand the purpose of the community
5. The community's purpose is to represent Jesus, they are to be His diplomatic corps, His embassy in this world, so they absolutely must know who He is and what He is about
6. Their identity is tied up in His identity because their purpose is to reveal who He is
7. But how does this affect our understanding of church discipline in Matthew 18 and how does this call us to eventually exclude a brother when the overarching goal here is unity?

B. Eventually unity calls us to exclude an unrepentant brother, because superficial unity isn't our goal

1. Our goal is to be unified in representing and revealing Christ well in the midst of enemy territory - so we desire unity, but a unity that reveals who Jesus is, not a unity that confuses who Jesus is
2. Behind our desire for unity, upholding and driving our desire for unity, is a desire to represent Christ well, to truly show the world who He is and what He is about, to be His faithful embassy in this world
3. And so, at some point of extreme unrepentance, we will exclude a brother from the community because we want to display a unified picture of what Jesus is about, and extreme un-repentant sin mars this picture
4. So our unity is not content-less, our unity is not superficial, we are unified in order to represent Christ, we are embassy staff working together in a foreign people, we are representatives in enemy territory
5. If we are in enemy territory, assuredly we want unity, we want to represent our king with one, united front - but if a brother in Christ continues to demonstrate that He doesn't want to represent our king, we have to exclude him in order to preserve our unity, in order to preserve our witness - we can't allow enemy agents in our midst

C. So the overarching purpose of the kingdom community is to represent Jesus well

1. Our purpose is to display Jesus to the world, to show the world that Jesus is supreme, He is the Son of God, the anointed of God, the beloved of God and He came to sacrifice Himself to call sinners back to God
2. And we must carefully guard our witness - we must take care to make sure Jesus is supreme in our midst and so we pursue humility; we must take care that Jesus' purpose is supreme in our midst so we battle sin; we must take care that Jesus' people are unified in representing Him so we refuse to let sin tear us apart
3. And finally, we must make sure that our witness is unified, so when absolutely necessary, we will exclude a brother from our community because he is intent on misrepresenting who Jesus is through his life and his actions
4. Church discipline isn't working against unity in Christ it is guarding our unity in Christ, it is taking care that our unity is meeting its purpose - to faithfully represent Christ

D. Being part of Jesus' community means making Jesus supreme, not misrepresenting Him

1. Again it comes back to Jesus' supremacy - if Jesus is supreme then we want to faithfully represent who He is to the nations, we don't want to make Him appear less than He is
2. So we will carefully guard our witness even to the point of excluding a brother who continually refuses to repent from sin in our midst because our community is the embassy of Christ
3. And, in a way, it comes back to imitation again - Jesus came to represent His Father and He did so perfectly and faithfully, and now we are His representatives and we follow His pattern - If Jesus is supreme we must represent Him well