

Scripture Reading:

Luke 13: "23 Then one said to [Jesus], 'Lord, are there few who are saved?' And He said to them, 24 'Strive to enter through the narrow gate, for many, I say to you, will seek to enter and will not be able. 25 When once the Master of the house has risen up and shut the door, and you begin to stand outside and knock at the door, saying, 'Lord, Lord, open for us,' and He will answer and say to you, 'I do not know you, where you are from,' 26 then you will begin to say, 'We ate and drank in Your presence, and You taught in our streets.' 27 But He will say, 'I tell you I do not know you, where you are from. Depart from Me, all you workers of iniquity.' 28 There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and yourselves thrust out. 29 They will come from the east and the west, from the north and the south, and sit down in the kingdom of God. 30 And indeed there are last who will be first, and there are first who will be last."

31 On that very day some Pharisees came, saying to Him, "Get out and depart from here, for Herod wants to kill You." 32 And He said to them, "Go, tell that fox, 'Behold, I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I shall be perfected.' 33 Nevertheless I must journey today, tomorrow, and the day following; for it cannot be that a prophet should perish outside of Jerusalem. 34 "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, but you were not willing! 35 See! Your house is left to you desolate; and assuredly, I say to you, you shall not see Me until the time comes when you say, 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!'"

"Lament Over Jerusalem"

This morning we come to a passage that deals with a very difficult subject: Church discipline. It is not a pleasant subject and this may not be a pleasant sermon. The passage before us shows the heart of God in the matter and it is not something that is easy to understand, BUT vitally important to our walk with the Lord of Glory.

Last week we saw how God plans to fill the earth with His Kingdom, bringing in the fullness of the Gentiles, from the east and the west, from the north and the south!

This week we see Jesus lamenting over a stubborn people who have refused to listen: Those first who will be last

- **This is not something that should have surprised those who were familiar with the Old Testament or the history of Israel**

**Consider the call for repentance in Psalm 81:10 “I am Jehovah your God, Who brought you out of the land of Egypt; Open your mouth wide, and I will fill it.
11 "But My people would not heed My voice, And Israel would have none of Me.
12 So I gave them over to their own stubborn heart, To walk in their own counsels.
13 "Oh, that My people would listen to Me, That Israel would walk in My ways!”**

Our morning readings for July have taken us through the Book of Proverbs where Lady Wisdom calls out and we are admonished over and over again heed Her call and live! But we know from the warnings in the very first chapter that there will be those who will not listen and there will come a time where Lady Wisdom will not answer their call.

- **The time for the final judgment of Jerusalem is fast approaching and from this account we can learn some important principles Jesus demonstrates for proper judgment or discipline today**

Once again, you have my outline for chapters 13 & 14, and next week we will see how rest, obedience and judgment should work together in our lives. This week we will focus on the importance of proper judgment which allows us to see our short comings for what they are and also why they must be handled Biblically. This can apply to problems in our marriages, families, here at church or in the workplace or our nation

We should see three important principles in how Jesus handles the situation in today’s account:

- 1) We must not allow other events to distract us from the important priorities: Jesus quickly puts Herod in the proper focus of Psalm 2!**
- 2) We must make the proper judgments about how the problem is to be handled: Last week we saw the picture of weeping and gnashing of teeth for individuals and this week we see that Jerusalem is to be left desolate**
- 3) Finally, we must have the heart of Jesus as we confront those who fall into grievous sin, like the mother hen who desires to gather her chicks under the safety of her wings**

We can certainly see the importance of these principles in the raising of our covenant children:

- **We must NOT be distracted by other problems or urgent things but must remain focused on fulfilling the responsibilities we have to teach them from when they rise up until they lie down.**
- **We must properly and lovingly judge them when they disobey with the rod as we are commanded in the Scriptures: If we fail here the Bible says that we hate the child**
- **AND we must lament when a young child chooses to resist this Godly correction, but continue to urge them to obedience...
And it will almost always be over something simple!**

The applications of these lessons changes as children grow older and we could also discuss how they apply in our marriages or in the work place and even for civil government...

But this morning I want to focus on how they apply to church discipline

There have been many battles down through the ages in the Church and sadly we have divided over many things, sometimes with good cause and sometimes not. As the centuries have unfolded there has been remarkable agreement about the marks of the true church:

- The faithful preaching of the God's Word
- The faithful administration of the Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper
- The faithful administration of Godly discipline

As churches, we have had our disagreements as to what each of these means and how they should be properly administered. We all as sinners certainly fail to function perfectly in any of these areas

- BUT when we see a body of believers desiring to be faithful in all three of these areas, there should be no doubt that they are a part of the true church.

Here at Church on the King we certainly strive to preach the Word: Consider our service! We try to properly focus on the two signs and seals of the covenant, believing that God's promise is to us and to our children! And finally, in a modern age where church discipline has fallen on hard times we have strived to be faithful in the area of discipline as well: It begins with our member covenant where we take seriously our community together

Our Church Constitution covers discipline in Article 7 where we say that discipline is one of the marks of the true church of Jesus Christ: "The purpose of church discipline is, through biblical means, to prevent, restrain, or even to remove any evil that may threaten the church and to promote and encourage that which is good and glorifying to God."

We then outline four types of Church discipline:

1. Preventative Discipline: This aspect of church discipline guards the entrance into the church and seeks to prevent unbelievers from becoming a part of the local assembly (*a famous Biblical example of this being the doubts the early disciples had about Paul!*).

2. Formative Discipline: Once a person has become a member of the church, they immediately come under the primary work of the church, which is formative discipline. (*Here we remember the importance of Covenant Renewal Worship where we*

have the preaching of the Word and proper administration of the Sacraments -- Also the feasting and fellowship in our community that we will consider next week)

3. The third aspect of church discipline is corrective discipline whereby the church applies lawful (i.e., biblical and constitutional) influence to a wayward member by means of informal and/or formal action and hoping to see the member restored to a place of conformity to Christ's rule

- This discipline clearly applies to each and every one of us as we respond to God's call each week to come and worship, first confessing our sins and knowing God's forgiveness:

But, Paul also reminds us in Gal. 6:1 "Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted." This corrective discipline can be coming along side a husband who has no idea of how a family should function and helping him understand his role and responsibilities from the Bible. It can also be the Prophet Nathan confronting King David who had fallen into grievous sin. In both cases our prayer and desire is that the sinner respond with proper repentance and obedience

- Repentance, even in David's case, brings life & life abundantly!

However, if someone hardens their heart the way that King Saul did at this point it can lead to the final step of excommunication.

- It is important to remember that it is here where we must see the heart of Jesus as He lamented over Jerusalem...

He cries "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her!" There is no compromise with her sin, but His heart aches as He remembers, "How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, but you were not willing!"

Those of us who have unsaved family members have known this pain. Linda and I have often watched couples making the same mistakes over and over and sit wondering "why do they want to be unhappy?"

- But sadly sometimes we do see a hardened heart which can lead to the final form of discipline:

4. **Excommunication:** A severe aspect of church discipline, which is the church's responsibility to perform, is the removal of a member by judicial action. The church has no choice but to obey Christ in these matters.

We are commanded to bring the sinner who has hardened their heart before the elders of the church and Jesus says in Matthew 18, "if he refuses to even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector."

Jesus has just taught His disciples to NOT fear those who can only kill the body, but to Fear Him who, after He has killed, has power to cast into hell; yes, I say to you, fear Him!” Remembering this, the next words from Jesus should be very sobering: “Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.”

- **Excommunication is a very serious matter, but it is something that the Church must be willing to practice**

WE must obey for the sake of our covenant children, who are always watching what we do AND the sake of the watching world that needs to be confronted with the truth of the Gospel!

The reason that Jesus is lamenting over Jerusalem in this morning’s text is that He knows the time for their excommunication has come: In AD 70 the city will be left desolate. Jesus laments just as David did over his son Absalom and as we do over any Saints who harden their hearts to the point that it results in their excommunication.

Obviously some today would object that failure to attend services or to honor ones parents should not rise to the level of excommunication: Didn’t Jesus say to those legalistic Pharisee’s who wanted permanent excommunication for the woman caught in adultery that the one who was without sin should cast the first stone?

Neither Theron nor I are without sin: There is not an elder serving any church in the world that can make that claim, so IF that is what Jesus intended, then we would have no excommunications.

However, the Apostle Paul clearly outlines the need for excommunication in I Corinthians chapter 5 and severely criticizes them for not casting out the sinner

So how do we reconcile this tension?

The simple answer is that we are called to follow the instructions Jesus gave to His disciples in Matthew chapter 18: A person in sin is approached by a brother first, he takes others with him if he will not listen and then the matter is taken to the leaders of the church who must act if there is no repentance.

This was certainly NOT what those Pharisees had done: There plan was to trap Jesus and they did not even bother to bring the man who had to have been present if the woman was caught in the very act of adultery!

- **This still leaves the question of whether excommunication is too severe for what may seem like minor offenses rather than scandalous sins**

Our answer lies in the text if we simply ask why Jerusalem was given such a strong judgment:

- **Was Jerusalem the most wicked city at that time?’**
- **What about Rome, or Corinth or even Pompey?**

The obvious answer is that Jerusalem was God's covenant city, the home of His covenant people!

- They were held to a higher standard and so are those who are baptized into the name of the Father, the Son & the Holy Spirit

When you consider what happened to the City of Jerusalem it is not much different from what we see in those who are excommunicated: Jerusalem was judged in AD 70

NOT because they were the worst of sinners... remember the account of the Galileans who were slaughtered or those killed by the tower of Siloam? Jerusalem was NOT even judged for killing God's Son: Jesus said "Father forgive them for they know not what they do." Jesus had told them that sins against the Son would be forgiven, but not sins against the Spirit.

After the Spirit was poured out at Pentecost, miracles were seen throughout the city and thousands were saved, the people of Jerusalem then sinned against the Holy Spirit by persecuting the Bride of Jesus, His Church and it was for this that judgment came. It was this that Jesus lamented over and it is this type of hard-hearted refusal to listen to the rebukes from the Spirit, delivered as He did then through the Church, that brings excommunication:

- It is not the gravity of the sin but the response of the sinner that matters most – again remember the contrast of King Saul and King David

Excommunication is not a sentence of hell, but rather the strongest corrective discipline to save the sinner: The Apostle Paul makes this abundantly clear when he commands the Corinthians to cast out the sinner saying, I Corinthians 5:4 "In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, along with my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, 5 deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus."

Here the destruction of the flesh is the breaking of the hard-heart that prevents repentance and God shows that He can even use the wiles of Satan to accomplish His purposes if this person is one of God's elect.

This is obviously what our prayer is for anyone who is excommunicated and Paul tells the Corinthians in the next letter to care quickly for one who repents: II Corinthians 2:6 "This punishment which was inflicted by the majority is sufficient for such a man, 7 so that, on the contrary, you ought rather to forgive and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one be swallowed up with too much sorrow. 8 Therefore I urge you to reaffirm your love to him."

- The goal of ALL church discipline is the growth of God's Saints and it is done to maintain the purity of God's Church

Jesus said there would come a time when the master would close the door, and Lady Wisdom said there comes a time when she will no longer listen, but these are times

known only to God and we are not to make that judgment: Here we must declare with Paul, “33 Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! 34 "For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has become His counselor?"

The final judgments are left to God, but in the mean time, we are to love the Saints:

-- With the faithful preaching of the Word,

-- With the faithful administration of the sacraments

-- AND with faithful discipline to bring maturity and to lead those who harden their hearts to repentance!

➤ May we, by the Grace of God, continue as a true Church demonstrating the true love of Jesus in all of these areas!

Communion Meditation:

John 6:53 “Then Jesus said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. 54 Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day..."

60 Therefore many of His disciples, when they heard this, said, "This is a hard saying; who can understand it?" 61 When Jesus knew in Himself that His disciples complained about this, He said to them, "Does this offend you? 62 What then if you should see the Son of Man ascend where He was before? 63 It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life..."

66 From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more. 67 Then Jesus said to the twelve, "Do you also want to go away?" 68 But Simon Peter answered Him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life."