

Great Service

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[0 : 00] And if you want to take hold of your Bible again, we're back on page 985. And if you've got your little handout, that might be useful to you as well.

Let me just get mine. And we're going to carry on reading this passage from Matthew 18. We're at verse 15 now.

We're going to read down all the way to verse 22. Matthew 18, verse 15 down to 22. It's on page 985.

Jesus speaking to his disciples still. If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over.

But if they will not listen, take one or two others along so that every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses. If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church.

[1 : 16] And if they refuse to listen even to the church, we'll treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector. Truly, I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.

Again, truly, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them.

Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister whose sins against me? Up to seven times.

And Jesus answered, I tell you, not seven times, but 77 times. Oh, let's stop there. Let me pray. Father, thank you for these words. Thank you for all the blessings you give to us for time like this on a Saturday, for time with church family. Thank you for the fun things that have gone on this afternoon, just time to talk with each other and spend time.

[2 : 24] I thank you it's good to be together. And thank you that you are here present with us by your spirit. Thank you for your words, where we can listen to the Lord Jesus and be drawn closer to him.

And please help us now as we consider what he's saying here. Help us to understand what you're saying and to trust it and to want to obey it for our good and for your glory.

We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Just as we come to look at this, there's a little question for you to think about with the people sitting beside you again, just for a couple of minutes.

What are some of the great ways people serve at St. Silas's? When you hear that, what comes to mind? You might be, again, very new to St. Silas's. You might have been here for years and you know all sorts of things.

But what are some of the things that come to mind? What are some of the great ways people serve? So just with the people sitting beside you, have a chat for a little bit. Talk about it, the more you think about it, all sorts of things will come to mind.

[3 : 49] it's a good thing to do isn't it stop and think about how people have served you or are serving you good memories come back things you appreciate and good things to say thank you for keep some of those in mind we'll we'll think about them a little bit in light of this passage as we go on but another question for you you don't need to answer out loud to to this one but let me ask you how how you feel about measuring tapes and i can't feel my ribs very much at the moment i can definitely feel other things coming over the top of my trousers but how do you feel about measuring tapes before i moved to derby i had a run-in with one i was about to graduate from the bible college i was at and i needed to buy some vicar clothes and salespeople came to the college martin might remember this kind of thing they had all the stuff that was out there and i went along to see what i needed and one of the salespeople put a tape measure around me and in a manner i can only describe as uncouth began shouting to her colleague across the room neck 15 and a half chest 41

waist whoa whoa there i said let's hold on at that point i said would you mind whispering a little bit it can be it can be quite uncomfortable can't it being measured by someone who's well let's say accurate and it can be quite uncomfortable the disciples you remember we've looked at this passage had asked jesus about greatness in god's kingdom they want to know how they measure up you know what's behind the question who's the who's the greatest it's a loaded question they want to know how they measure up and the conversation wasn't what they had hoped for we've seen that who's the greatest in the kingdom of heaven and jesus said verse three unless you change you won't even get in um and then verse four he begins to talk about humility is that the character trait that's coordinate with being in god's kingdom it kind of goes along with greatness in god's kingdom and we're in verses 15 to 22 now and jesus will tell us more details about greatness and i think he'll show us now what what we thought haven't we about um what it means to be great we thought about a great attitude and he's going to speak now a little bit about what great service in a sense looks like what does great service look like and he'll also i think begin to get at why we find it difficult so if you can if you can have an imaginary tape measure for yourself if you like just keep hold of that kind of imaginary tape measure and we'll see how we measure up what great service looks like in in derby where i live now brian clough is still held in a high esteem in 1968 when he was a manager of derby county they won promotion to the top flight in the 70 71 season they finished ninth and the next season they scrapped out with liverpool leads and manchester city and eventually they came out as the champions of the top flight for the first time in their 88 year history at that point in this regard brian clough served derby well he apparently said on one occasion i'm not saying i'm the best manager in the world but i'm definitely in the top one it's a great line isn't it i never think of stuff like that i wish i did definitely in the top one and we've seen look we we measure greatness in all sorts of different ways i don't know about you look maybe for some of you your your ideas of greatness is just a bit more domestic maybe you're a mum and the greatness you're aiming for is what you think you see in other mums an ordered house children wearing matching clothes at least occasionally and the journey to church on sunday's argument free or maybe you think of greatness is measured in a kind of effortless popularity

it was the lads or or the girls at university who seem to turn the heads of almost anyone in the room and while outwardly you sort of kind of smirk and and mock them slightly part of you feels like to be like that would be great wouldn't it be great if i turned heads like that and the greatness we admire and we aspire to is often that of the high achieving individual isn't it that's that's often the way it works the greatness we aspire to is that of the individual achieving something blazing the trail winning the matches producing the perfect victoria sponge or just looking stunning and yet jesus says in these verses look true greatness is not worked out individually but in relationships because humility requires an encounter with a significant other it requires relating to someone else and we saw earlier jesus spoke about look how you handle christians who wander off in some kind of sin what your attitude is to be towards them in this part he's going to move things on again a little bit and he's going to bring it he's going to bring it closer and make it a bit more niggly because in verse 15 he says something that's so unexpected that if we didn't stop to listen carefully we'd probably sail right past it let me read verse 15 again for you this is what jesus says if your brother or sister sins against you go and show them their fault just between the two of you and if they listen to you you have won them over i wonder if you see the surprise just in that verse maybe just be looking at it and reading it over again and think about what jesus is saying because jesus says in god's kingdom in the church that you've become part of true greatness looks like people in need of forgiveness being served by those who need to forgive them that's what he's saying here people in need of forgiveness being served by those who need to forgive them sinners served by the sinned against is that not outrageous see let me tell you how my thinking works my thinking works like this look if i'm the victim if i'm the sinned against if i'm the one who's been wrong well then it's me who should be served it's me who people should be concerned about it's me who should be gone to and won over it's me but jesus has here true greatness means if someone in the church sins against us we're expected to serve them now that's what church is to be like now i know there's other parts of the bible where jesus says look if you remember that your brother has something against you go and be reconciled to your brother you say that back in matthew chapter 5 verse 24 and that is true there are responsibilities for sinners as well as the sinned against just don't know about you but my temptation is always to play up the responsibilities others have and downplay my own especially when i'm the innocent party and i think the understanding here and what jesus is saying is that sin

damages relationships you know that the discovery of gossip behind your back if you've had that experience i found out somebody has said something behind your back i was talking to a friend the other you've probably heard this before i'd i'd been reminded of the difference between flattery and gossip gossip is saying

behind someone's back something you wouldn't say to their face and flattery is saying something to somebody's face that you wouldn't say behind their back but when people speak about you in those kind of ways either of those kind of ways and you find out what's going on it hurts that kind of stuff the discovery of gossip behind your back or being lied to or being stolen from or being insulted being exasperated by parents being lied to or shouted at by children if you're on the receiving end you have been wronged it's just that jesus says when you're the aggrieved christian in a sin-sired relationship your first thought is not to be how can i get my rights but how can i restore this relationship and you see the lengths we're meant to go to jesus says this is well it's forgiveness that avoids point scoring don't know about you but when i've been wronged i want sympathy and i want my offender to feel some of the discomfort that i felt and i want praise for any forgiveness i give so when people say things like well you're a better person than me david i'd have been furious with them if i'm honest i love that i love it when somebody says that to me and it feels like legitimate compensation it's just the christian greatness jesus describes here doesn't want compensation it wants reconciliation and i don't know if you noticed but this reconciliation flows from the hard work of patient persuasion four times in verses 15 to 17 you find the word listen giving people time to hear properly the speaking is verse 15 where jesus says show them their fault point it out to them that's that's not condemning them it's convict convince them that what they've done is really wrong for most of us when we do something wrong our default reaction is denial this goes on in my house all the time by me it wasn't my fault i don't know what you're talking about you're over sensitive i didn't mean it that way no that's exactly how i meant it i just don't want to have to admit that now i did say the unkind thing you took it exactly the right way and you're not being over sensitive but i want to deny it i'm just tired i've had a stressful day but jesus says look sin is too serious it's not dealt with through denial we need forgiveness and one of the ways we serve those who really sinned is to patiently persuade them that while there may be mitigating circumstances what they've done is wrong they've sinned and you're not to embarrass you do it privately there's no public point scoring it's just between the two of you if you can so those of you with families your son doesn't do the jobs around the house he's promised to i think this means dads you think twice before lecturing him in front of his siblings that's what jesus is saying your husband has been letting his work habitually eat into family time husbands if that's something that's been going on it's wrong it might be easy it might not be easy to change things but you need to change it it shouldn't be happening like that but wives this is saying you need to avoid your first response being a complaint to your friends over coffee that's not what we do

your friend lets you down badly and it's not the first time everyone else may do but you don't mention anything on facebook not even just one of these not so subtle hints feeling disappointed and those who know get the loaded statement we don't do that that's not how we operate and you begin to think about these things and maybe others that are coming to mind and you ask well how does that tape measure feel how great are you feeling these disciples come asking who's the greatest well how great do you feel now and jesus says look the widening of the people involved in verses 16 and 17 it only happens when the situation becomes too complicated for one person to deal with the desire is always for genuine forgiveness for real reconciliation in fact that reality seems to be the only limiting factor because if someone refuses really needed forgiveness well there can be no genuine restoring of relationship and what christians can't do is settle for unreality settle for just pretending it's all okay jesus says when it gets that serious verse 17 treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector as someone on the outside of the church who needs forgiveness in order to be brought back in again don't be confused by these words in verses 18 and 19 they're binding and loosing heaven and earth

I think the context is this kind of last resort church discipline last resort church discipline we're being told the guidelines for discipline is the gospel we do it in jesus's name and there should be a correspondence between what we do as a church and how god views things from heaven we can't pretend someone's really part of the church if they persistently refuse to live the way jesus says see what happens when someone is obviously not living with jesus as lord but wants the privileges of being part of the church family on their terms not someone who says i'm not a christian i'm just coming along i'm checking things out i'm new to things it's not talking about that kind of thing no it's

someone who wants to be accepted as part of the church family but only on their terms it's hard isn't it because we want to include them they might be good friends but as a mark of loving concern the church needs to show them look you're out of step with god

[18:33] I'm not sure that's something we find very easy to do maybe in some ways it's good that we don't find it easy to do don't want to be down on people all the time but it needs to happen I think of friends who were part of another church and they were due to start as apprentices ministry trainees and when they came and spoke to one of the leaders told them that they'd been sleeping together they weren't married they spent some time talking with the church leader very honest and the church leader said look it needs to stop you know it needs to stop and they agreed but a month later they confessed it was happening again and so the decision was made look you can't be ministry trainees for the coming year that was caring church discipline for all sorts of reasons the leader said nothing publicly but you can imagine the fallout for them parents asking what's happening friends who knew the plans asking the same it was awkward it was embarrassing and yet a year later the guy told me it was one of the best things that happened to them church leaders didn't give up on them not for a moment they were genuinely loving they weren't being thrown out but they were confronted with the consequences of actions and it forced them to have some serious thinking about what they were doing it humbled them and it led to genuine repentance and the year after started as apprentices almost 14 years later they've kept going as

Christians they're married they have a family what might have happened if those church leaders had either bottled out of discipline or just tried to get rid of problem people they didn't do either of those things discipline in the church is a good thing and at times we'll need to do that but that's a long long way off in this passage Jesus wants to say to us look true greatness it looks like people in need of forgiveness being served by those who need to forgive them sinners served by the sin against that's what great service looks like in a church family are you serving well in this church family are you serving well like this and the other side of it is are you making it easy for others to serve you well like this all of us do things wrong all of us need people to just have the quiet conversation with as it says how are you doing are you sure you're okay or

I'm not sure that was quite the right thing to say what kind of person are you at that point do you get prickly is it always denial are you allowing other people to serve you well like this you might want to serve I guess in music ministry or leadership you might want to serve in kids or youth work you might want to serve helping with the outreach they're all good ways to serve but I suspect your service will always be kind of limited if you've never really learned to serve and be serve like this so how's that take measure feeling forgiveness is not easy is it here's the next thing just to think about why we find great service like this difficult I think there's a number of reasons as we've seen none of is like admitting we've done wrong and trying to speak to someone who consistently denies it and is defensive and is difficult you feel like giving up don't you

I think another reason is look there's some situations produced by certain sins that are complicated we can be wronged in ways that continue to leave us vulnerable and perplexed in our family we've had the experience of trying to forgive someone who says they're a Christian denies the wrong they've done and continues to be manipulative it's really hard it's heartbreaking at times if you have similar experiences look Jesus knows forgiveness is complicated he's not trying to make you feel guilty here he's not trying to put a burden on you that you can't bear in fact in those situations his words seem to suggest he wants you to have the help of the wider church family to think it through to figure out wisely in light of what God says how to handle it if you're in a situation like that where you think it's just been really hard I've been hurt I want to forgive and I don't quite know what to do with this why not chat to

Martin one of the other leaders of the church that said I think these verses tell us another reason we find forgiveness difficult and it's this when it comes to forgiveness we think we can be generous and you might think well that's an odd thing to say surely generosity is a commendable virtue surely Christians should be generous well not with forgiveness I don't think let me show you what I mean verse 21 Peter speaks to Jesus at this point and he says Lord how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me up to seven times what's going on Peter I think is asking what do you do with a serial offender in church the person who keeps doing things against you the guys who say stupid things the people who keep losing their temper whatever it is and the rabbis of the day discussed this and the consensus was three times so you understand Peter when he says seven times he's being really generous he's more than doubled it but Jesus replies

[24 : 44] I tell you not seven times but 77 times it's a funny number to use isn't it it's a funny number if you know the old testament you might recognize it because it comes up in a little story in Genesis 4 there's a nasty character called Lamech and he kills a man and then he promises revenge on anyone who attacks him 77 times over and it's a kind of numerical way of saying my vindictive vengeance will be unlimited that's what he's saying 77 times you attack me I'll come back after you 77 times my vindictive vengeance will be unlimited and I think the Bible saying to us at that point that's the kind of people sin eventually produces I went to see a lady I know the other day who'd been hurt very deeply and we talked for a while about it and then in some of the pain she was feeling out of her came this line and we sat and we talked about it for a while she said

I'll see them in hell before I forgive them and I think as soon as she said it she realized how terrible that sounds but we feel it sometimes don't we and we talked a little bit about the Lord Jesus and how he leads us in forgiveness and who he is and what he's done in saying that he would rather endure hell so that he could forgive us that's the difference isn't it but we feel sometimes with some hurt that's caused to us what I just want to get back at this person and in that story in Genesis with Lamech my vindictive vengeance will be unlimited and Jesus is flipping that round and he says if you're a Christian the church you've become part of will have occasions for discipline but it's intended to be unlimited in a different direction and you understand what that means if you're a Christian Jesus says being in God's kingdom you're acknowledging you don't have any rights to withhold forgiveness from people and so generosity would be the wrong way to think because it suggests there is an agreed limit above which I've moved into being generous but there's no limit and I think when you hear that you realize Jesus is asking a hard thing isn't he you think about the people in this room people sitting beside you at some point in the future one of them will sin against you it's bound to happen and if it's not one of those little things that we all take on the chin that we can more easily forgive and move on you will feel angry hurt and not unjustly and Jesus says if they come and ask for forgiveness you're to give it and get this he's saying if they don't you are to go to them and graciously persuade them that they need forgiveness how does that tape measure feel is it a little tight

I find myself thinking when I stop and ponder these words if that's greatness I'm not sure I want it there are times when I want to keep my hurt and my anger I'll be honest I think I've only experienced one situation where I thought at an angry gut level I will never forgive them I remember it so upset and I remember praying like this God I will never forgive them and I phoned a good friend of mine called Jim he used to be in my church in Sheffield I told him what happened he listened to me as I spoke to him and the only thing he said to me afterwards was David you need to ask Jesus to help you forgive them best advice at that point I think I have no power to do this I need help from outside and remember sitting in a room praying Lord Jesus please help me with this I imagine for some of you forgiveness feels harder than that but even with that pain Jesus says if you're a Christian you've given up your right to withhold forgiveness there are times when I think I'm not sure I can do that and so you remember now Jesus words back in verse 3 remember what he said to the disciples unless you change unless you change and become like little children become really humble it really is humbling isn't it I can't do it Lord can't do it myself unless you change and become like little children you'll never enter the kingdom of heaven unless you do this Jesus says you won't be a Christian where can we find the power to change what can change us so much that it produces the kind of humility that when I'm genuinely wrong my desire is not for my own rights but for the forgiveness of those who hurt me we're going to think about that a little bit more tomorrow morning at the service

[30 : 22] I hope you're able to come back for that Jesus is going to go and tell a parable about that but just getting us thinking here's one final thing for us this evening this conversation it started with a question who's the greatest in the kingdom of heaven and I think we're some way closer to be able to answer that now some of the things we've heard Jesus say I think who's the greatest in the kingdom of heaven well it must be the one who has been the most sinned against by his brothers and sisters and yet in humility comes to them and patiently without wanting to embarrass persuades them to accept his forgiveness who's the greatest the one who's been the most sinned against by his brothers and sisters and yet humbly comes to them not wanting to embarrass comes to persuade them to accept his forgiveness and as soon as you think about that you think who does that sound like it sounds like the

Lord Jesus doesn't it the God who we have sinned against and he has paid the price for our debt with his body and blood on the cross and even today even this evening in the words of Matthew 18 he has come to you by his spirit not to embarrass you but to humbly persuade you to turn from any kind of pride to turn from any kind of sin of unforgiveness and to share in his joy and enjoy relationship with him where forgiveness continually flows to you and and overflows from you to others is that not good news and as for that tape measure you don't need it you don't need tape measures you don't need to measure yourself when you know Jesus

Christ has forgiven you all you need to know is know lord I am a sinner and I stuff up thank you for your forgiveness and please will you help me I can't do it by myself I come to you like a little one just asking for your help you can stop measuring yourself when you know Jesus Christ has forgiven you and you can stop measuring others when you start to forgive like him I'm going to stop there our time has gone on we've not got so much discussion questions just now but here's a couple of things to think about a couple of things to maybe pray about is there anyone I need to forgive is there any forgiveness that I need to ask for and how can I better serve like this in church if this is what great service looks like we're going to have a moment of quiet just now just for you for your own thoughts just to think there might be something you want to say to the

Lord yourself let's take a moment to do that and just have a moment to pray and in a little while after that Martin's going to come back up and lead us we might spend a little bit more time just praying in groups more generally for the church family so just take a moment just to think about these things maybe read through Jesus words again and then pray yourself and talk to the Lord who loves you and cares for you let's do that now