

"JESUS' STRATEGY FOR WINNING"
MATTHEW 18:15-20
FIFTEENTH S. A. PENTECOST
MESSIAH, BOERNE
SEPTEMBER 10, 2023

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY
SPIRIT. AMEN.

TEXT: MT 18:15-20

DEAR FRIENDS IN CHRIST:

COUNTLESS HOURS ARE SPENT AND GREAT EFFORT IS EXPENDED
IN DEVELOPING WINNING STRATEGIES FOR BUSINESS, POLITICS,
SPORTS, AND OTHER HUMAN ENDEAVORS. SOMETIMES THOSE
STRATEGIES PRODUCE EXCELLENT RESULTS, SUCH AS WHEN A
FOOTBALL COACH FOLLOWS A STRATEGY THAT LEADS HIS TEAM TO
VICTORY IN THE SUPER BOWL. HOWEVER, SOME STRATEGIES LEAD
TO FAILURE AND DEFEAT, SUCH AS AN ERONEOUS BUSINESS
VENTURE. THUS, WE SEE THE WISDOM OF THE APOSTLE JAMES WHEN
HE INSTRUCTS CHRISTIANS CONCERNING A GODLY ATTITUDE TOWARD
STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT: "YOU OUGHT TO SAY, 'IF IT IS THE
LORD'S WILL, WE WILL LIVE AND DO THIS OR THAT'" (JAM 4:15).

ONE HUMAN VENTURE IS OF DIVINE ORIGIN, HOWEVER, OF THE
LORD'S OWN WILL. THAT IS GOD'S PLAN FOR BUILDING CHRIST'S
KINGDOM, THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH, ACCORDING TO HIS WORD. IT
INVOLVES US CHRISTIANS IN THE MOST CHALLENGING OF HUMAN
RELATIONSHIPS, THAT OF LIVING TOGETHER AS BROTHERS AND

SISTERS IN GOD'S FAMILY THROUGH FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST. AS SUCH, IT MAKES HUGE DEMANDS ON US. FOR EXAMPLE, WHAT DO YOU DO WHEN A FELLOW CHRISTIAN, PERHAPS EVEN A FELLOW MEMBER OF THIS CONGREGATION, TELLS LIES, GOSSIPS, STEALS, CAUSES PHYSICAL OR EMOTIONAL SCARS, FRAUDULENTLY SIPHONS OFF YOUR CUSTOMERS, TURNS YOUR SPOUSE AND YOUR CHILDREN AGAINST YOU, OR IN SOME OTHER WAY CLEARLY MISSES THE MARK WITH REGARD TO WHAT GOD DESIRES OF US AS CHRISTIANS? WHAT'S YOUR STRATEGY FOR DEALING WITH THIS BROTHER OR SISTER IN CHRIST?

WELL, *THE WINNING STRATEGY* COMES TO US FROM OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST IN THE GOSPEL READING FOR TODAY. IT'S *JESUS'* STRATEGY FOR WINNING BACK CHRISTIANS WHO OPENLY SIN. OUR GOAL THIS MORNING IS THAT WE MAY LEARN AND EMPLOY THIS STRATEGY—*JESUS' STRATEGY FOR WINNING*—IN OUR DEALINGS WITH ONE ANOTHER IN CHRIST, SO THAT WE MAY CONTINUE TO LIVE TOGETHER IN PEACE AND LOVE AS ONE REDEEMED BODY OF BELIEVERS IN MESSIAH JESUS.

FIRST OF ALL, WHEN WE LOOK AT *JESUS'* STRATEGY FOR WINNING, WE NOTE THAT IT IS *BASED ON LOVE*. EVEN AS GOD'S STRATEGY FOR SAVING THE WORLD IS BASED ON LOVE (JN 3:16-18), SO *ALL* OUR BEHAVIOR AS CHRISTIANS MUST ALSO HAVE *LOVE*, THAT IS, *AGAPE*—SACRIFICIAL LOVE—AS ITS FOUNDATION. AS ST.

PAUL WRITES: "LET NO DEBT REMAIN OUTSTANDING, EXCEPT THE CONTINUING DEBT TO LOVE ONE ANOTHER. . . . THE COMMANDMENTS . . . ARE SUMMED UP IN THIS ONE RULE: 'LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.' . . . THEREFORE LOVE IS THE FULFILLMENT OF THE LAW" (ROM 13:8-10). AS CHRISTIANS OUR EVERY THOUGHT, WORD, AND DEED IS TO BE ORDERED BY THE RULE OF LOVE.

WE NEGATE JESUS' STRATEGY FOR WINNING, HINDER GOD'S WILL, AND PLACE OURSELVES UNDER HIS JUDGEMENT, HOWEVER, WHEN WE DON'T CARE ENOUGH ABOUT OUR BROTHERS AND SISTERS IN CHRIST TO BRING THEIR SIN TO THEIR ATTENTION SO THAT THEY CAN REPENT, RECEIVE GOD'S FORGIVENESS IN CHRIST, AND BE RECONCILED TO GOD AND THEIR FELLOW BELIEVERS. THIS HAPPENS WHEN WE BECOME SO PREOCCUPIED WITH OUR OWN SELFISH INTERESTS THAT WE ARE DIVERTED FROM THE VERY REAL SPIRITUAL NEEDS OF OTHERS. PERHAPS WE SIMPLY DO NOT CARE ENOUGH ABOUT THEM TO POINT OUT THEIR SIN OR SIMPLY THINK THAT SIN ISN'T IMPORTANT ENOUGH TO WARRANT SUCH ACTION. WE MAY ALSO TRY TO USE *SINFUL STRATEGIES* SUCH AS GOSSIP OR BACKSTABBING IN ORDER TO GET EVEN OR COME OUT AHEAD INSTEAD OF *HONEST CONFRONTATION* IN ORDER TO WIN OUR BROTHERS AND SISTERS IN CHRIST BACK INTO GOD'S FAMILY OF FAITH, THE CHURCH.

NEVERTHELESS, GOD, FOR CHRIST'S SAKE, CONTINUES TO

WORK OUT HIS PLAN OF SALVATION FOR THE WORLD. BECAUSE OF HIS *BOUNDLESS LOVE* FOR HUMANKIND, GOD PURSUES HIS SAVING STRATEGY AMONG US. HE CALLS US TO *REPENT* OF OUR PREOCCUPATION WITH SELF AND LACK OF CONCERN FOR OUR BROTHERS AND SISTERS IN CHRIST. FOR JESUS' SAKE, HE DECLARES US *FORGIVEN*, EVEN OF OUR VICIOUS ATTEMPTS TO RETALIATE AGAINST THOSE WHO HAVE SINNED AGAINST US, AND HE COMMANDS US TO *LOVE ONE ANOTHER* (JN 13:34).

SECOND, JESUS' STRATEGY FOR WINNING IS CHARACTERIZED BY *PATIENCE* AND *LONG-SUFFERING*. BY HIS WORD AND SACRAMENTS GOD EMPOWERS US, HIS FORGIVEN CHILDREN, TO PUT JESUS' STRATEGY INTO ACTION. THIS HAPPENS WHEN WE CARE ENOUGH TO *PATIENTLY* CONFRONT THOSE WHO SIN AGAINST US ACCORDING TO THE STEPS OF *CHRISTIAN DISCIPLINE* OUTLINED FOR US BY JESUS IN OUR GOSPEL LESSON. IN HIS BOOK *CARING ENOUGH TO CONFRONT*, DAVID AUGSBURGER PROPOSES A NEW WORD TO DESCRIBE THIS PROCESS WHICH COMBINES CARING AND CONFRONTING: *CARE-FRONTING*. WHEN A PERSON CARE-FRONTS ANOTHER, GENUINE CARING IS OFFERED ALONG WITH REAL CONFRONTATION OF SIN. CARE-FRONTING UNITES LOVE AND POWER, HUMILITY WITH AUTHORITY, AS ST. PAUL WRITES, "SPEAKING THE TRUTH IN LOVE, WE WILL IN ALL THINGS GROW UP INTO HIM WHO IS THE HEAD, THAT IS, CHRIST" (EPH 4:15).

THEN, IF OR WHEN OUR ONE-ON-ONE EFFORT FAILS, WE MAY TAKE TWO OR THREE CARING FRIENDS TO CONTINUE THE PROCESS OF CARE-FRONTING TENDERLY. JESUS GIVES THE MINISTRY OF RECONCILIATION TO EACH OF US. AS HE SAYS IN OUR GOSPEL READING: "I TELL YOU THE TRUTH, WHATEVER YOU BIND ON EARTH WILL BE BOUND IN HEAVEN, AND WHATEVER YOU LOOSE ON EARTH WILL BE LOOSED IN HEAVEN" (MT 18:18). EVERY CHRISTIAN HAS BEEN CALLED BY JESUS TO PROCLAIM THE GOSPEL, THAT IS, TO SHARE THE GOOD NEWS OF FORGIVENESS AND RECONCILIATION THROUGH JESUS CHRIST WITH OTHERS. THUS, "FROM [CHRIST] THE WHOLE BODY, JOINED AND HELD TOGETHER BY EVERY SUPPORTING LIGAMENT, GROWS AND BUILDS ITSELF UP IN LOVE, AS EACH PART DOES ITS WORK" (EPH 4:16).

IF THE COMPASSIONATE EFFORT OF A FEW FAILS, HOWEVER, THEN WE ARE TO ACT IN COMPASSION AS A CONGREGATION, LOOSING THE SINS OF THOSE WHO REPENT AND BINDING THE SINS OF THE UNREPENTANT AS LONG AS THEY DO NOT REPENT. HERE WE HAVE A CLEAR-CUT EXPRESSION OF JESUS' WILL FOR THE FELLOWSHIP OF HIS DISCIPLES. JESUS DOES NOT WANT THE FATE OF ANY SINNER COMMITTED TO THE SUBJECTIVITY OF ANY ONE MAN OR WOMAN. THE SPIRITUAL WELL-BEING OF EVERY CHRISTIAN IS TO BE THE CONCERN OF THE COLLECTIVE LOVE AND WISDOM OF THE WHOLE CHURCH. IN THIS WAY THE NEW PEOPLE OF GOD IN CHRIST JESUS

ARE TO REMAIN A PURE PEOPLE OF GOD, PURE IN VIEW OF THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS AT WORK AMONG THEM THROUGH JESUS CHRIST. IN THE MIDST OF THEIR FELLOWSHIP, JESUS MESSIAH PROMISES HIS PRESENCE AND POWER AS THEY FULFILL THEIR CALLING TO MAKE DISCIPLES OF ALL PEOPLE GROUPS.

DEAR FRIENDS IN CHRIST, WE ARE CONNECTED WITH JESUS AND ONE ANOTHER AS ONE FAMILY BY THE HOLY SPIRIT, WHO WORKS FAITH IN OUR HEARTS THROUGH THE GOSPEL. TOGETHER WE ARE FORGIVEN AND RECONCILED IN JESUS' NAME. ASSURED OF HIS PRESENCE AND POWER AMONG US, WE ARE EQUIPPED TO CARRY OUT THE MINISTRY OF CARE-FRONTING THOSE WHO HAVE SINNED AGAINST US. AS WE DO SO, HOWEVER, LET US KEEP IN MIND ST. PAUL'S EXHORTATION TO THE EPHESIANS: "BE COMPLETELY HUMBLE AND GENTLE; BE PATIENT, BEARING WITH ONE ANOTHER IN LOVE. MAKE EVERY EFFORT TO KEEP THE UNITY OF THE SPIRIT THROUGH THE BOND OF PEACE" (EPH 4:2-3). AND SINCE THIS IS THE LORD'S WILL, WE WILL DO IT; IN JESUS' NAME. AMEN.