

MATTHEW 18 v 21-END SUNDAY 17.11,19

May I speak in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Our Gospel reading today is all about the story of the unforgiving servant.

FORGIVENESS

I have found that folk have no problem with forgiveness as long as they are on the receiving end. Whenever we do wrong our desire is to be forgiven, I know myself that when I've hurt someone or said something I shouldn't have, I've felt release when I've been forgiven. But whenever we need to forgive others, that's a whole different matter, because we're not so quick to forgive, as we want to be forgiven, again I know that from my own experience.

It seems to be part of our human nature, some folk will never want to forgive someone who has done something to hurt them, or upset them. They could apologise until they are blue in the face but we still don't always want to be forgiving.

Is this how Jesus says we should behave. I can really feel for Peter as he asks Jesus in verse 21 "how often should I forgive? As many as seven times." Seven times he asks, and here I am thinking surely once is enough!! What is Jesus reply? Verse 22, "Jesus said to him, 'Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times'".

There is a basic fact of life, and that is, we're going to be hurt, or upset by someone, at sometime. There are things people said and have done, where the heartache, hurt, and memory are as fresh today as the day that it happened.

And while most everyone knows they need to forgive, forgiving others isn't something that comes easily.

There's nothing complicated about forgiveness. It's in the application that we find the difficulty. So, let's begin.

Why Should We Forgive?

1. Because God Has Forgiven Us

The reason we need to forgive others is because God has forgiven us. Therefore, because we have been forgiven by God we need to learn to forgive others.

In Ephesians 4 verse 32 Paul says "be kind to one another, tender hearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you."

If we don't feel forgiven, it's hard for us to find forgiveness in our heart. Equally, if we don't forgive, it's hard for us to be truly forgiven ourselves.

If we don't feel set free, then the last thing that we want to do is to help set others free. That is just a part of our sinful nature.

The reality is that we will never forgive anybody more than what God has already forgiven us for. And so, we should forgive because God has forgiven us.

As we read again the words that Jesus spoke to Peter, 'Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times'. I think of how many times Jesus has forgiven me, seven times, seventy seven time, seven hundred and seventy seven times, seven thousand seven hundred and seventy seven times, need I go on, probably but God doesn't count the numbers, He forgives every time we ask sincerely.

Notice in Jesus' story that the unforgiving servant wasn't very forgiving. He held the debt of the other person against him until every last penny had been paid, but such an unforgiving spirit only led him to his own prison sentence.

Unforgiving is very self-destructive. Unforgiving often hurts us more than the person we're not forgiving.

Some of you would have heard me speak of Ray and Vi Donovan before, but their story is about true modern day forgiveness.

Their son Chris was murdered as he and his brother, walked past a group of teenagers high on drink and drugs, that's the teens not Chris and his brother. One of the teens wanted to show he was worthy to be in the group so hit Chris's brother as they walked passed. Chris went to help his brother and was punched, kicked stamped on and left in the middle of the road. Chris was then hit by a car, the driver thought it was a bundle of rubbish. Chris was dead before the car hit him. Three of the group all teenagers were convicted of murder and were given prison sentences

Matthew 6 verse 14 & 15. ¹⁴For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; ¹⁵but if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."

Ray and Vi were Christians and through prayer forgave the three teenagers who had murdered their son.

I'd like to share a few of Ray's words. Forgiving Christopher's killers was the hardest, and at the same time the best, thing we could have ever done because it not only set them free, it set us free from the prison of unforgiveness. They not only forgave, but helped them when they were released from prison.

Forgiveness doesn't excuse people's behaviour. It doesn't dismiss your feelings. We still feel angry at times, particularly at birthdays and other significant anniversaries.

The cracks are still there but we are whole again and stronger than we ever were.

Ray and Vi released themselves from the burden of unforgiveness, they are an amazing couple, if you would like to read their book I have a copy. They are very good friends of mine.

When we don't forgive others, it brings about a bondage to our souls that could be compared to being enslaved by people or bound by a substance addiction. Often this unforgiveness causes a bitterness that claims us from the inside out. It locks in sorrow, anger and strife; it locks out joy, love and fellowship. This bitterness is a result of a proud spirit that seeks to keep score and gain revenge for perceived and real wrongs. If we refuse to release our offended feelings, they will eventually control us. We will be in bondage to them as well as in the bondage of sin before God.

Jesus taught that the only way for us to grant forgiveness to others is in the way He has forgiven us. We are not to condition forgiveness according to the nature or gravity of the offense against us, the number of offenses, or the character of the offender. We are to show unconditional mercy as God has shown mercy to us. As we humble ourselves and extend forgiveness to others, God opens the way for us to seek forgiveness for our own mistakes and sins. God fully forgives all that come to Him with a humble and repentant spirit.

"As we follow the Holy Spirit, we will know the truth, and the truth shall make us free. ([John 8:32](#)). Verse 36 says, "So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed".

Forgiveness is a two-way street. We can't expect to be forgiven if we are unwilling to forgive. This is exactly what we say at the end of the "Lord's Prayer"

What do we see with the unforgiving servant. He was unwilling to forgive the servant who owed him money, which led to the king not to forgive the debt he owed him.

We can't receive what we're unwilling to give, and what we sow is what we're going to reap. Therefore, if we're unforgiving then we shouldn't expect forgiveness in return.

A man came to John Wesley and said, "I could never forgive that person." Wesley replied, "Then I hope you never sin. When you are unforgiving, you're burning the very bridge you need to walk across."

And so, we need to forgive others, and when we do we'll receive the fullness of God's forgiveness for our lives.

And so, why do we need to forgive? First because God forgave us, and then because unforgiveness doesn't work, and finally because we need God to forgive us.

How do we go about this forgiveness process? First it is by recognizing that we are all human, and therefore imperfect. Next we're to release our right to get even, and to respond to the hurt done against us with good, and we do that through praying for God to bless, forgive, and save those who have hurt us. And finally we need to get our focus off the offense, and refocus onto God and His purpose for our lives.

And so, I think we all can see that this value of forgiveness is vital if we truly want to build up the house of God within us.