

Forgiveness is a huge, broad and complicated subject to talk on in only five minutes or so. We cannot discuss much of it but we can acknowledge that it is an issue for all of us.

We are sinners. We live with sinners. And we hurt each other. All the time.

Forgiveness is serious. Jesus, in his teaching made it very clear that forgiving others is a command. It is in the perfect prayer taught to us by Jesus.

He wants to keep us healthy. As we do with our young children - eat your vegetables, go to bed at a decent time and get enough sleep. Exercise regularly.

'Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us'

Our scripture reading this morning is the second part of Jesus' practical teaching on dealing with those who sin against us.

In the beginning of this chapter, he gives guidelines for Christians, and for sins committed against THEM, not others. He gives guidelines for conflict resolution within the church community. Jesus is all about relationship, and sin creates something like a debt between two people. Which messes up a relationship.

Jesus wants us to restore these relationships by repenting and accepting forgiveness.

Peter's mind must have been whirling at this point. If my sinning brother repents and then does it again...and again? There must be limits Lord?. So he asks Jesus if forgiving a brother 7 times is enough.

Which may sound strange to us, but the rabbis of the day taught the people to forgive those who offend them only 3 times.

So, Peter, was being especially generous here.

But, Jesus, gives a different number - 70 x7.

(Which is interesting when I discovered that 100 was the largest number envisaged.)

And goes on to tell a parable in which the King is God . The first servant owes a ludicrous amount of money...thousands, billions in today's terms. The King hears the pleas for mercy and is lenient. Forgives him and just wipes the debt off.

This forgiven servant is not so kind. He has the second servant who owes him the equivalent of 20 weeks work thrown in prison. This is a paltry amount compared to the billions owed by the first servant

The King's response on hearing these occurrences is anger.

So angry he throws that first servant in prison. And tortures him.

This is scary. This is how serious God is about forgiveness.

Well, you may say, that's fine for them,

But what about the pain I have suffered?

The abuse...The torment of dealing with the same thing day after day. It's unending.

The wounds many of us carry are so very deep and agonising. So big.

Where was God? How do we forgive?

When we are so angry and hurting.

These feelings often lead to an overwhelming desire for revenge, payback.

In the book of Romans 12 v19 it says, 'Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written :'It is mine to avenge. I will repay'' deut 32v35.

Those of us who have gotten revenge know that it doesn't satisfy. It doesn't make us feel any better.

And, God sees it all.

Proverbs 15v3 'The eyes of the Lord are everywhere, keeping watch over the wicked and good.'

Lets be clear.. Forgiveness does not mean there are no consequences for a persons actions. We have scripture that explains we are to follow the laws.

Romans 13 'Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established..'

For example. If you are attacked and robbed, cooperate with the police and courts to bring the criminal to justice. Forgiving them is a separate issue.

Forgiveness doesn't mean that you must treat the person as if the offence had never taken place. It could be foolish to treat that person as before.

-Someone struggling with a gambling addiction, for example, would not heal or recover if left in charge of the churches petty cash.

-Someone convicted of child abuse would not be on the Sunday school rota. That would be dangerous and foolish.

We may need to set boundaries with those (they may be family members) who are dangerous to us. Toxic. Destructive, in their words or actions. Who do not build us up but bring us down. Who continue to hurt us. Who may encourage our own bad behaviour, vices and addictions.

What does forgiveness mean?

It means work. Hard work. A daily decision of the will.

We cannot do it in our own strength. God is gracious and merciful. Take it to him and ask him for the grace to forgive in Jesus name.

Forgiveness of others is tied to our forgiveness from God.

Whatever has been done to us is incomparable to what we have done against God and been forgiven for.

He expects us to forgive as we have been forgiven and it **is** within our power. Just like that first servant who decided not to; he could have written off the debt.

We cannot control our emotions.

But we can control our thoughts, words and actions.

1. We can refuse to entertain the negative thoughts about that person. That just feeds our emotions.

2. We can decide to not gossip about it. If we do we undermine our ability to forgive.

3. We can resist the temptation to get revenge.

Forgiving someone doesn't mean we have to trust them. It is wishing them well though.

Unforgiveness is poisonous.

Unchecked it will eat us alive.

It becomes a self inflicted prison and torture.

We become a jailer of that person. We won't let them out because they hurt us so much.

But, because we are the jailer we are stuck in that prison too. Unable to live our lives fully.

The only way to set yourself free is to let that person, sin, go.

We give life if we forgive. To ourselves and our victims of unforgiveness.
Letting someone off the hook doesn't let them off Gods, but it frees us.

As I close,

Let us recognise that we too, hurt others. Either intentionally or not.
We sin and we need to keep a short account with God.....Admitting, repenting of our sins.
There may be the need for a phone call, a conversation to say sorry to someone.

Let us be really humbled by how much God has forgiven us. And will continue to do so.
Remember that God is judge. He will deal with the sin. That's his job.

And let us see that each time we feel the pain of sin against us, God is showing us the
seriousness and destructive power of sin and opening our eyes to how much Jesus loved us
in bearing the price of our sin.

And, He is giving us an opportunity to hand the gospel to another person in the way we
respond to an offence. The gospel of grace.

Are we going to hand it over or hold on to that grace for ourselves which is what we do
when we refuse to forgive.

With Gods help, we are to be channels of His grace, to transform the world.

'Forgive as He forgave you.'

If this has opened up old, buried wounds, please find a trustworthy person to pray with
you. Seek professional help.

Please do not let this fester and continue to hurt you and weigh you down.

If you are here in church, there is prayer ministry available outside after the service

God created you to be free.

Free from bitterness, rage, anger, revenge and crippling pain.

Be set free.

Let us pray,

Heavenly Father,
thank you for your free and full forgiveness in Christ.

Please help us to forgive as we have been forgiven.

In Jesus name we pray. Amen

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