

“As We Forgive”

(Matthew 18:21-35)

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

Peter came up to Jesus and asked, "How many times should I forgive someone who does something wrong to me? Is seven times enough?" Jesus answered, 'Not just 7 times, but 77 times. This story will tell you what the kingdom of heaven is like.'

One day a king decided to call in his officials and asked them to give an account of what they owed him. As he was doing this, one official was brought in who owed him 50 million silver coins. But he didn't have any money to pay what he owed. The king ordered him to be sold, along with his wife and children and all he owned, in order to pay the debt. The official got down on his knees and began begging, "Have pity on me, and I will pay you every cent I owe!" The king felt sorry for him and let him go free. He even told the official that he didn't have to pay back the money.

As the official was leaving, he happened to meet another official, who owed him 100 silver coins, so he grabbed the man by the throat. He started choking him and said, "Pay me what you owe!" The man got down on his knees and began begging, "Have pity on me and I will pay you back." But the first official refused to have pity. Instead he went and had the other official put in jail until he could pay what he owed.

When some other officials found out what had happened, they felt sorry for the man who had been put in jail. Then they told the king what had happened. The king called the first official back in and said, "You are an evil man! When you begged for mercy, I said you didn't have to pay back a cent. Don't you think you should show pity to someone else, as I did to you?" The king was so angry that he ordered the official to be tortured until he could pay back everything he owed. That is how my Father in heaven will treat you, if you don't forgive each of my followers with all your heart.

Dear friends in Jesus,

Have you ever had the experience with brothers or sisters when you were young, or have you ever had the experience with your own children after a ding-dong fight or argument, when parents have said very strongly, "Say SORRY!" And the response has been a sulky and angry response, "SORRY!!", but the only real sorrow was for self and one's own hurt feelings.

Why do Joseph's words to his brothers, "You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good," stand out in such wonderful contrast? When Adlai Stevenson was defeated in the USA presidential election by Dwight Eisenhower, he said, "I urge you all to give General Eisenhower the support he will need to carry out the great tasks that lie before him. I pledge him mine." These words from Joseph Stevenson reveal a spirit that rises above our natural desire for revenge, to get even, and speak something of the language of heaven.

Above all other examples, we listen to the words of Jesus in his darkest moment as he prays, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." There we see the attitude of God towards weak and stubborn and sinful human beings.

One of the greatest words in our language is 'FORGIVEN'. The greatest experience that a sinful person can have is that of being forgiven. Forgiveness is something that God wants for us all. To make this possible he gave his greatest gift to all humans. Forgiveness is written in large letters across the heavens. It is God's wonderful way with humans. It is the basis and essence of Jesus' ministry.

Let's consider our need for forgiveness. Without it there would be no Christian life, because forgiveness is its very foundation. We have all sinned against God and fellow humans. We sin countless times every day in our thoughts, words, and actions. Our debt to God is so great that we could never, never pay it. We are able to stand in his presence only if that debt is removed totally. Accounts must be settled in some way. The necessity of the cancellation of the debt becomes evident when we remember that there will be a reckoning with God.

The glory of the Christian gospel message is that it speaks not only of the **need** for forgiveness but also of the **fact** of forgiveness. Forgiveness and mercy on God's part are declared often in the Old Testament. Jeremiah proclaims God's forgiveness with these words, "For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more." And the Psalmist says, "As far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our sins from us."

In Jesus Christ, our Saviour, Friend and Lord, there is full and complete forgiveness. Through his death for all our sins on Calvary's cross he makes us completely right with our heavenly Father. When we come to Jesus confessing our wrongs and sins, he says, 'Your sins are forgiven!' Yet in this matter of forgiveness we should never lose sight of the **condition**. Jesus taught us to pray, "And forgive us our sins, (our debts), as we forgive those who sin, (have debts), against us."

This was the message of Jesus to Peter, when he asked Jesus how many times he should forgive his brother who sins against him. This is the lesson of our parable story this morning. Forgiveness must be **horizontal** as well as **vertical**. We must share with our fellow humans what we expect God to give us. The master expected his servant to forgive his fellow servant, and he had every right to expect it.

Without a real spirit of willing forgiveness Christianity becomes a mockery. Without forgiveness there is no happiness now or in the future. We are to forgive our neighbour everything, and as often as it is asked for in sorrow and repentance. The one who needs mercy should also be willing to show mercy. This is especially true when we realise that our debt to God is so huge, and our neighbour's debt to us is so small.

How much opportunity there is in our world to forgive. How wonderful it would be, if the spirit of forgiveness should suddenly take hold of the hearts of more and more people, and become a living reality in daily life! We have communities where there are perpetual feuds and arguments between families. To Jesus the unforgiving spirit was one of the most serious of sins, stopping the possibility of God's forgiveness. The unforgiving Christian is a contradiction, because it belongs to the very nature of Christianity that we are willing, so willing, to forgive others.

There is a wonderful healing in forgiveness. It means restoration — restoration to a closer relationship with Jesus. It means being special and precious sons and daughters of God with all the resulting blessings — peace, joy, forgiveness, love, hope and assurance.

Perhaps, unfortunately, there is not much asking and giving of forgiveness in daily life. Is this why there is so much bitterness, grudges and hatred in our society? Genuine forgiveness with love, centred on Jesus and his cross, is the only medicine that will heal the world's wrongs and ills — not getting even and revenge — but forgiveness. It might surprise us how often just simple forgiveness with love will be enough — forgiveness without stint or measure.

What a lovely situation it would be forgiven by God and forgiving one another. Beautiful on earth and a foretaste of heaven! We say, "To err is human, to forgive is divine." We all err and sin, and we need God's forgiveness and love. Forgiveness is what we need and want — God's forgiveness for us in Jesus; the joyous receiving of forgiveness from our fellow humans whom we have wronged; and the generous granting of forgiveness to those who have wronged us. Yes, God forgives without stint and measure through Jesus, our Saviour and Friend. Let us do the same!
AMEN.

And the peace and love of God which passes all human understanding, keep our heart and minds in Christ Jesus. **Amen.**

Sermon by Pastor Graham Zweck 13 September 2020