

Sermon Outline

“Forgiven to Forgive”

Matthew 18:21-35 – Joshua Harris – September 26, 2010

Introduction

1. When we, as Christians, refuse to forgive the wrongs done against us, it reveals that we don't understand or don't remember how God has forgiven us in Christ. Forgiveness is an urgent concern for Christians because forgiveness is at the center of our identity in Christ. Christians are the forgiven people of God. To neglect forgiveness or to fail to reflect our identity in Christ is to deny and dishonor God.
2. In verse 21, Peter asks an honest question that we have all had, “*Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him?*” Like Peter, our impulse is to figure out when we get to put a cap on forgiveness. We want limitations because we want control. We don't want to be victimized. We want to know when we're allowed to retreat into the castle of refusing to forgive/bitterness where we'll be safe.
3. Jesus' answer is unnerving. Whether you translate Jesus' words as 77 times or 70 x 7 (490 times), Jesus' answer calls for unlimited forgiveness. But how can anyone live like that? Jesus tells a parable that helps us to understand how citizens of his kingdom (those under his rule and reign) can forgive without limits.

How Great Is God's Forgiveness of Me? (v. 23-27)

1. The parable begins by orienting us to the forgiveness of the King (i.e., the forgiveness of God). The servant brought before the King owes a great debt: 10,000 talents. 10,000 talents is an outrageous amount—billions and billions and billions of dollars. The point is that it's an amount that is impossible to repay.
2. The servant represents each of us and our great debt of sin before God. Because of rebellion, disobedience, idolatry and lust, our guilt before God is so vast that we could never pay it off with our good works. There is nothing we can do for God that can pay for our sin.
3. Sadly, with the passing of time, the remembrance of our sin and huge debt lessens. We begin to think we are basically good: we pray, read the Word, serve, tithe, and are generally kind to others. We don't think our sins are so great that we could never repay them.
4. But Scripture rescues us from such an illusion. Psalm 130:3: “*If you, O LORD, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand?*” Do we realize how much we've been forgiven by God? Not just those big moments of great transgression that stand out in our memory, but the countless instances of pride, lust and selfishness? Do we realize all the good we've left undone? Can we comprehend the worship and adoration we've neglected? And we can't

Sermon Outline

even begin to see that even the good we've done has been marred by wrong intentions and selfish ambition.

- a. We deserve to forfeit our lives. We deserve, like the parable, to have everything that we own stripped from us. More accurately, we deserve the eternal judgment of God in hell.
- b. How great is the mercy of God! In our lives, God forgives our debt at a much greater cost to himself than the king in the parable. In Christ, God pays the debt himself. Jesus laid down his life on the cross and received God's wrath; he was cursed by God in our place. This was the price of our forgiveness.

- *"But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities..." — Isaiah 53:5*
- *"He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness". — 1 Peter 2:24*
- *"For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." — 2 Corinthians 5:21*
- *"In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace." — Ephesians 1:7*

5. We can never have an appropriate perspective on the wrongs done to us until we see the incalculable wrong we've committed against a perfectly Holy God. Only when we see how great God's forgiveness is can we understand God's call for us to forgive others.

How Connected God's Forgiveness of Me Is to My Forgiveness of Others

1. Everything I do in my relationships with others reveals how I view God and relate to him. If we have a wrong understanding of God's forgiveness toward us, that will show in how we forgive others. For example:
 - a. If we think of our sin as small, we think God's forgiveness is a small thing. As a result, other people's sin against us seems greater by comparison and forgiveness seems unreasonable.
 - b. Or, if we wrongly think that God hasn't really forgiven us, we don't understand how complete the work of Christ is for us. We think we're still on probation for our sins. And that's exactly how we forgive others. We hold their sin against them. We hold it over them.

Sermon Outline

- c. Or, if we wrongly think that we have earned God's forgiveness, we believe that our prayers, our sacrifice and good deeds have paid for our forgiveness. And so when other people wrong us we demand the same. We make them pay us back.
2. The last example (1c) is the heart attitude of the unforgiving servant. Verse 26 says that he fell on his knees and pleaded that with MORE TIME he would pay back the debt. We might think that his problem started when he saw the man on the street who owed him money. But the unforgiving servant's problem started in the throne room. Grace went right over his head. He thought he could repay his debt. He thought that time plus effort equals salvation. People who don't know they need grace never give grace to others.
 - a. And when his debt was forgiven, there was no response of gratefulness for the mercy that was received. There was no amazement at grace. There is no praise.
3. As believers, every moment of our lives should be lived as though we just walked out of the throne room where every sin was forgiven. We should have a song of praise on our lips. We should have hearts distracted by grace. We should be filled with gratitude. We should feel unworthy to have such a debt forgiven. We should be quick to extend mercy. We should have trouble seeing the sins done against us because our eyes are still wet with tears of joy.

Fellowship Starters

1. How is an unwillingness to forgive a symptom of gospel-amnesia?
2. Psalm 130:3 states, *"If you, O LORD, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand?"* Do you realize how much God has forgiven you? How can living every moment aware of the huge debt of your forgiven sin enable you to extend forgiveness to others?
3. Josh shared, "People who don't know they need grace, never give grace to others." How do you typically respond when someone sins against you? What does this reveal about your need for awareness of God's forgiving grace? Where do you want to grow?
4. Do you need to extended forgiveness in your heart to a brother or sister who has sinned against you? Do you need to go and be reconciled?

Josh shared, "As believers, every moment of our lives should be lived as though we just walked out of the throne room where every sin was forgiven." Take time this week to reflect on God's incalculable forgiveness for your sins. Ask God to make his grace a greater reality in your heart.