

“Forgiveness – Living in God’s Mercy and Grace” (Matthew 18:21-35)

Sunday, May 17, 2020 – Pastor Dan Malone

This past week, Pastor Ray ended his sermon encouraging us to Rest in God’s Mercy and Grace. Ray, using Samson’s mother as an example, stressed the importance of living in obedience to God... But he also reassured us that there will be times when we fail... saying...

“None of us are perfect. None of us are going to keep God’s commands perfectly...

So, when we fail, when we fall short, when we disobey, we need to go to God for forgiveness...

We need to rest in God’s mercy and grace... that he offers so freely in his son Jesus.”

For me... praying to God... and asking for forgiveness... is a daily event... And a great source of comfort...

This is not because I am an awful person... I struggle with living in total obedience to God.

And so... I will just leave it there...

Resting in God’s mercy and grace is a huge benefit of life for those of us who are the people of God.

We all rest in the scriptural promise of forgiveness found in 1 John 1:9.

“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”

Forgiveness is the subject we will look at in scripture today.

But we will focus not so much on God’s forgiveness for us but on our extending forgiveness to others.

Rather than resting in God’s mercy and grace, today we will consider Living in God’s Mercy and Grace.

Specifically... freely forgiving others as God freely forgives us...

This Corona Virus is causing a lot of problems, and it is most likely sparking many tensions and anger.

I heard on the radio the other day that Kanye West and his wife Kim Kardashian are having problems...

Supposedly, this confinement has them (the commentator says...) wanting to strangle each other...

So, they are now reportedly living on opposite ends of the house...

Does not sound like there is much forgiveness going on there...

But you know... we do not need a Corona virus to spur arguments and broken relationships...

Arguments and broken relationships have been going on since the fall of man.

Martin Luther once wrote “think of all the squabbles Adam and Eve must have had in the course of 900 years of married life. It all started like this:” Eve: “You ate the apple.” Adam: “You gave it to me.”

But let us be serious... Evil takes many forms... and evil actions are sometimes seemingly unforgivable...

Actions like physical or mental abuse, murder, torture, and recklessness can destroy people’s lives.

When any of us suffers from evil actions like these... How can we recover, let alone forgive?

Unforgiveness surfaces in every area of our lives; even causing pain and turmoil within our churches.

I think man’s inability to forgive is historically a much more pervasive pandemic than this Corona virus...

And this pandemic of unforgiveness has been with us causing great human misery since the fall of man...

We all get angry. It is a human sin condition, and the response to anger is often not forgiveness... ever...!

Instead, we want vengeance, some sort of retribution, or at least, repentance from the offending party.

And often these acts of vengeance lead to further pain, ruined lives, economic disaster, even wars...!

But most tragically, these acts of retribution can lead to a break in our personal relationships with God.

All of this can develop into an underlying or obvious lack of peace which just festers, without relief.

Scientists are working hard to develop a vaccine for the Corona virus... Well...

We need a vaccine for this pandemic of unforgiveness! But there is Good News! Scripture provides it!

The vaccine involves determining to increasingly live and forgive in the grace and mercy of God’s love.

But how does this vaccine work? Why should we live this way? And how does this forgiveness look?

We can find answers to these questions in the gospel of Matthew, chapter 18. Turn there with me.

Here Jesus is recorded giving his disciples direct guidance on extending forgiveness to others.

We will look at all the verses beginning at verse 21 through 35, but I will now read just verses 21 and 22.

So... There are three main points to consider in today’s scripture passages:

- Jesus teaches that forgiveness for others has no limitations
- Jesus teaches us why forgiveness has no limitations
- Jesus alludes to how it looks when we forgive others and live in God’s mercy and Grace

First point:

Jesus teaches us that there are no limitations to how many times we should forgive somebody.

The setting is... Jesus gathering with his disciples near Galilee and teaching them many things.

He had just discussed how to deal with fellow church members who are living and struggling with sin.

But Peter then takes the situation one step further asking, *“Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?”*

Peter’s suggestion to forgive up to seven times probably seemed to him as beyond reasonable...

For one reason... Jesus had just taught that the sin of a church member should be confronted 3 times...

But Jesus’ answer is way beyond what Peter, or anyone might have thought... He said 70 times 7 times...

The force of the Greek wording here suggests unlimited forgiveness... forgiveness not worth counting...

You see... God’s love is always available, and His compassion is limitless...

His anger is never sustained... God forever desires to grant forgiveness for His people...

Micah 7: 18, 19; *“Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance? You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy. You will again have compassion on us; you will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the seas.”*

And again... From our first reading today in Psalm 103, David writes... *“The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. He will not always accuse, nor will he harbor his anger forever.”*

As Christians, we know this unlimited love and forgiveness.

I imagine Peter, witnessing Jesus’ love and compassion, was not too surprised to hear Jesus’ answer...

So, first, Jesus teaches us that **there is to be no limitation to forgiveness...**

2nd Point

Jesus then reinforces his teaching using a parable to illustrate **Why forgiveness has no limitations...**

The parable is titled in our Bibles *“The Parable of the Unmerciful Servant.”*

The story is quite simple...

A wealthy man (the master) approaches one of his servants who owes him a great amount of debt.

He demands the servant to pay up... but the servant is unable to pay...

So, the master determines that the servant, his wife and all his children are to be sold to repay the debt.

Devastated, the servant begs for additional time, promising to pay back everything...

But then, amazingly, the master takes pity on the man and lets him go free of any debt.

But then, this same servant approaches a fellow servant demanding payment for a much smaller debt.

This fellow servant pleads for patience just as the first servant had pled to the master...

But the first servant treats him with no mercy, instead throwing him into prison until his family can pay.

Well... Eventually the master hears how the servant he pardoned treated his fellow servant...

So the master hands him over to jailers to be treated harshly, calling him a wicked servant.

The master scolds the wicked servant saying, "shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?"

Jesus then sums the parable up saying... *"This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart."*

Two things should be noticed from this parable:

1st: The verb used for the master's *having pity* is the same verb translated as Jesus having *compassion*...
For the five thousand, feeding them with 5 loaves and two fish and... and...

For the people in all the villages and towns... healing every disease and sickness.

This means we are to care for and forgive those who ask for our forgiveness just as God cares for us...

Rather than having any negative reactions, we need to treat repentant offenders with grace and mercy...

Ephesians 4:31, 32; *"Get rid of all bitterness, rage, and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you."*

2nd: We also must understand that our forgiveness for others is to be the measure by which God displays His forgiveness to us.

Scripture is clear about this in many supportive passages: This is a critical part of the Lord's prayer...

Matthew 6:12, 14-15; *"And forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors...For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your father will not forgive your sins."*

Mark 11: 22, 25; *"Have faith in God, Jesus answered... And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive them, so that your Father in heaven may forgive your sins."*

Luke 6:37; *"Do not judge and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive and you will be forgiven."*

These passages are commands... We are to forgive those who repent and are seeking our forgiveness.

Understand this. Scripture does not teach that we lose our salvation when we struggle with forgiveness.

It does teach, however, that we will not have the full measure of peace available from a forgiving heart...

So... **Why should there be no limitation to forgiveness?**

The answer is because God's forgiveness has no limitations...

As we truly understand the gravity of our own sins, and God's incredible forgiveness for us in Christ...

The only appropriate response is to mirror God's forgiveness to those who have hurt us...

But... Forgiveness is often Hard Work!

It can feel impossible to be forgiving someone who has hurt us badly...

Or to have forgiveness for someone who has not repented or asked for forgiveness...

People who have been hurt badly may say "You have no idea what I'm going through... I cannot forgive!"

These injured people feel weak, vulnerable, and angry, and they may hold fast to their anger...

Using the anger as a source of power against the offender...

And to keep them from being repeatedly vulnerable and hurt... Yet know this...

Forgiveness should never require the injured person to remain in any danger or continued harm.

You need to stay safe and physically separated from people who would harm you...

Yet... Sometimes, forgiveness for an unrepentant person can free up the grip of hatred we harbor inside.

A Rabbi immigrant from Germany after the war was recorded making an astonishing statement...

"Before coming to America, I had to forgive Hitler... You see...I did not want to bring Hitler inside me to my new country."

Recognize that having protective anger alone can prevent us from extending forgiveness...

And understand that the power of anger is not the power which must be used for forgiveness...

The power for being able to genuinely forgive comes only from the power of the Holy Spirit in us...

Forgiveness is a fruit of the Spirit which needs to grow in us...

And we have God's power to grow this fruit

So...

1. Jesus teaches that forgiveness for others has no limitations
2. Jesus teaches us why forgiveness has no limitations

3rd Point

Jesus alludes to how it looks when we forgive others and live in God's mercy and Grace.

We can see this in verse 35.

Where Jesus sums the parable up first saying... *"This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart."*

What people see, when they encounter someone displaying godly forgiveness, is the heart of God.

The heart of God is love, and God wants his people to be people of love, just as He is of love...

In Ephesians 4:2, God's people are called to *"be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love."*

In John's gospel, John 13: 34,35, Jesus says *"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples if you love one another."*

These are wonderful passages and we need to embrace them as directives for godly living...

Having a forgiving heart is God's directive for His people... Our example here again is Jesus...

In his humanity, Jesus cries out to the father... *"If it is possible, may this cup be taken from me."*

But later, in obedience to the Father, and for our eternal salvation... hanging in agony from the Cross...

Jesus again cries out... *"Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."*

God's free grace is the power of the gospel which frees people from sin and changes lives.

In a similar way, freely extending forgiveness can break discord and begin the process of reconciliation...

This is the work of the Holy Spirit working through the godly heart of a believer...

A theologian named Donald Guthrie makes this observation... Here is what he writes...

"One feature which relates to human forgiveness, but which may throw light on divine forgiveness is the obligation of the offended person to take the initiative in setting the process of reconciliation in motion."

Phillip Yancey, in his book titled *"What's So Amazing About Grace"* writes something similar...

"Forgiveness can often break the cycle of blame and pain... breaking the chain of un-grace. Forgiveness offers a way out. It does not settle all the questions of blame and fairness – often it pointedly evades those questions – but it does allow for the possibility for a relationship to start over."

Jesus, in John's gospel, refers to believers as being not of this world just as he is not of this world.

Believers are members of the heavenly kingdom and aliens to this world... but still in this world.

We understand this... We are aliens of this world... but we want to be friendly and loving aliens.

I remember a favorite television show from my early years called *"My Favorite Martian"*.

It featured Ray Walston as Uncle Martin who was a Martian who crashed outside of Los Angeles.

Uncle Martin was not scary... He was a very friendly and loveable alien...

Well... If I must be an alien of this world, I want to be a friendly and loving person like Uncle Martin...

Don't you also want to be an alien who is a friendly and loving person like Uncle Martin?

Forgiveness is Hard Work! But guidelines in Scripture can forge a path and make a way... be a vaccine...

We need to focus on living in God's mercy and grace, forgiving as God has forgiven us...

And. By that... drawing others to God by our example...