

St Hilda's Sermon – Sunday 17th September 2017 – Graham Bellamy

Forgiveness

Matthew 18:21-35

Almighty God, we thank you for the gift of your holy word. May it be a lantern to our feet, a light to our paths, and strength to our lives. Take us and use us to love and serve all people in the power of the Holy Spirit and in the name of your Son Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Forgiveness is a central theme of Jesus' throughout the Gospels, yet the word sorry is rarely used in the Gospels.



Slide 1

Today's Gospel passage is sandwiched between Jesus' teaching on church discipline (Matt 18:15-20) and divorce and remarriage (Matt 19:1-12). Both are controversial issues that involve forgiveness. In Matthew 18:21-35 we learn that if we want to stop blocking Jesus' flow of power through His resurrection, we must forgive. (Repeat) After all, this was the reason for Jesus' life, death and especially his resurrection – the forgiveness of our sins.

The subject of forgiveness is one, if not THE mark of a true Christian. It is one of the most important things that you need to learn how to do. The teaching of Jesus Christ on this subject is absolutely powerful and very radical and cuts against our natural self. Jesus is absolutely uncompromising about forgiveness.



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Forgiveness means wiping the slate clean, even when the other person may not deserve it. Forgiveness is not trying to downplay or minimise what has been done. Forgiveness is to look at what was done to you and to wipe the slate clean. Forgiveness is refusing to punish, judge or take it out against the other person.

Why is forgiveness important? Consistently Jesus calls for conversion. He wants people to change from their otherwise destructive behaviour, as individuals and as members of society. He knew that people would hurt each other. He wants them to realise their wrongdoing and relate on the basis of love. Over and over again, Jesus urged the disciples to forgive.

Why forgive? Unforgiveness destroys open communication and undermines respect, care and love. Jesus insists on the priority of forgiving.

Forgiveness is a condition for freedom.

Unforgiveness can easily descend into resentment and ultimately into bitterness – and destroy peace of mind and easily escalate into revenge.



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Matthew records a dialogue between Peter and Jesus: “Then Peter came and said to Jesus, ‘Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?’”

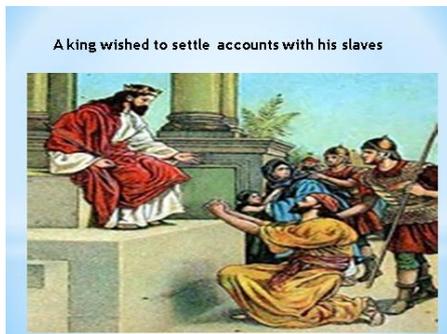
Peter was known as Simon Peter - Simon means "hearing;" Peter means "rock". Among the leading characteristics of Peter were devotion to his Master, even leading him into extravagance. His temperament was choleric and he easily passed from boldness and to temper. The contrast between Peter of the gospels--impulsive, unsteadfast, slow of heart to understand the mysteries of the kingdom--and the same apostle as he meets us in the Acts--firm and courageous, ready to go to prison and to death, the preacher of the faith, the interpreter of Scripture—he is one of the most convincing proofs of the power of Christ's resurrection and the mighty working of the Holy Spirit.

Peter had been around Jesus long enough to know that forgiveness was at the heart of His teaching. For Peter, the issue was how many times he was required to forgive. No doubt, Peter thought he was showing great love and generosity when he offered to forgive up to seven times.

Jesus’ response is not what Peter is expecting, nor what we would expect. Jesus says, “I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.” Jesus goes above and beyond Peter’s “top offer!” He states that disciples are to forgive again and again. Jesus is making a point. He is urging His disciples to practice generous forgiveness when their brothers hurt them. Our Lord’s reply must have startled Peter.

The thrust of Jesus' response is to forgive an unlimited number of times. God's forgiveness of our sins should motivate us "to forgive those who sin against us" – as we will say before we share communion together. We must always remember that we have been forgiven far more than we will ever forgive.

We recognize the magnitude of God's forgiveness in Matt 18:23, Jesus begins to tell one of His most soul-searching parables:



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“For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. When he had begun to settle them, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him”. This is one of the few parables in which the Pharisees are not around. The disciples are here alone with Jesus as He discusses some discipleship obligations.

The “king” in this parable is God the Father; the “slaves” are disciples; and the “talent” was the highest denomination of currency in the ancient world. The word translated “ten thousand” was the highest named numeral. The sum of 10,000 talents would be sixty million day’s wages, an amount that would be impossible to repay. The equivalent dollar amount in today’s currency, with inflation would be billions of dollars.

In Matt 18:25, Jesus says, “But since he did not have the means to repay, his king commanded him to be sold, along with his wife and children and all that he had, and repayment to be made.” Clearly the debt could never be paid. The slave was going to lose his wife, his children, and all his possessions. In a situation like this, the only thing left to do is to beg! “So the slave fell to the ground and prostrated himself before him, saying, ‘Have patience with me and I will repay you everything’”. Two observations are worth noting: The first, suggests that the king is a generous man because he has the slave and his family sold into slavery, whereas a harsher king could easily have ordered the slave and/or his family to be sent to the debtor’s prison or even to their execution. Instead, the king exhibited grace. Second, it is interesting to note that the slave promised to repay the king everything! He did not admit his inability to repay. Given the enormity of his debt, the slave’s promise to repay everything is absurd. This is significant because it shows that he didn’t really appreciate the magnitude of his debt and his need of forgiveness.

Astonishingly Jesus declares, “And the king felt compassion and released him and forgave him the debt.” The king does not merely postpone or reduce the debt—he cancels it. This slave was able to walk away free and clear from the debt. Jesus was showing us that God

is so merciful that He is even prepared to forgive a debt of huge proportions. It demonstrates that your sins are not so innumerable that God's grace cannot wipe the slate clean! This verse stresses the compassion of God! Jesus wants us to know that God freely and lavishly offers us His love. This work of forgivingness is only possible through the person and work of Jesus Christ, who "came to seek and to save the lost" The reason that the Lord can demonstrate compassion and release us from the penalty of our sins is because Jesus took the penalty for us. Always remember, grace is free only because the giver Himself has borne the cost.



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Moving to "Returning the favour of God's forgiveness" (Matt 18:28-35). Jesus continues His parable: "But that slave went out and found one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and he seized him and began to choke him, saying, 'Pay back what you owe.' So his fellow slave fell to the ground and began to plead with him, saying, 'Have patience with me and I will repay you.' But he was unwilling and went and threw him in prison until he should pay back what was owed." This is astounding, isn't it? The very slave that was just forgiven a vast sum refuses to forgive his fellow slave a small amount, the dollar amount today would be about \$6,000. This should have gratefully forgiven his debtor as his king had forgiven him. You've heard the phrase, "I don't get mad; I get even." Well, you can't get even. No one wins when one seeks vengeance or withholds forgiveness—everyone loses.

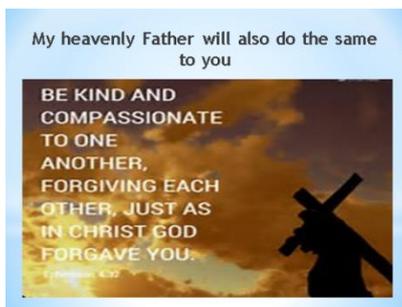


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Often we think of forgiveness as a gift to the other person, but it clearly is a gift to ourselves. When we choose not to forgive, we only end up torturing ourselves.

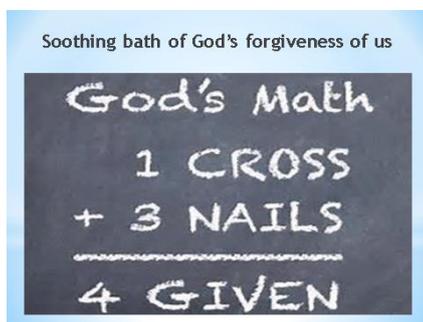
Holding an offense against someone is like being a jailer while the offending party is in the jail. You alone have the key to let them out. The problem is, since you're the jailer, you're stuck there too, but you can't go anywhere either. The only way to set yourself free is by letting the other person go too. But you may say, "I can't let that person off the hook." If you withhold forgiveness, in the end, you are the one that is hurt the most.

As you well know, when someone does something wrong, word eventually gets back to the boss. Matt 18:31:says “So when his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were deeply grieved [“outraged”] and came and reported to their king all that had happened.” Jesus intends for us to react to His story with distress and anger and we are supposed to sympathize with the slave that has been thrown in jail. The unforgiving slave is the villain of this story and deserves to be disciplined by his master. This is exactly what happens: “Then summoning him, the king said to him, ‘You wicked slave, I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave, in the same way that I had mercy on you?’ This slave experiences a radical role reversal. He went from being forgiven much, to experiencing the consequences of refusing to forgive his debtor.



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The bottom line of this parable is found in Matt18:35. Jesus concludes with these sobering words: “My heavenly Father will also do the same to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart.” Jesus sees no incongruity in the actions of a heavenly Father who forgives so bountifully and disciplines so ruthlessly, and neither should we. The discipline takes place in this life and the purpose is to help the believer appreciate God’s forgiveness. Like any good parent, God disciplines all of His children Yet, God’s chastening is compassionate and never cruel. He wants to teach disciples the importance of forgiveness.



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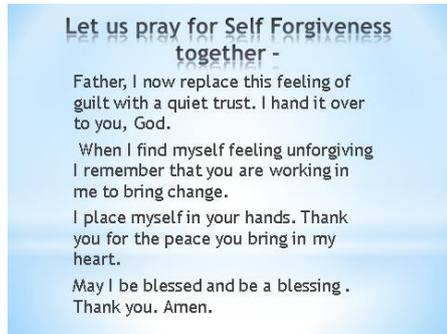
The only way for us to become truly free of the offense and to forgive others is to bathe in the soothing bath of God’s forgiveness of us. When we finally fathom the extent of God’s love in Jesus Christ, forgiveness of others is a natural outflow.

Our responsibility is to “release” the sin and our desire for revenge and give it to the Lord. James 2:13 teaches that those who have been merciful to others will receive special mercy at the judgment seat of Christ.



Slide 9

Receive the free gift of God's grace and forgiveness. Trust in Jesus Christ's death and resurrection to deliver us from the debt of our sin.



Slide 10

Let us pray for Self Forgiveness together –

**Father, I now replace this feeling of guilt with a quiet trust. I hand it over to you, God.
When I find myself feeling unforgiving I remember that you are working in me to bring change. I place myself in your hands. Thank you for the peace you bring in my heart. May I be blessed and be a blessing . Thank you. Amen.**