

The Chokehold of Unforgiveness

(Matt 18:21-35)

2/1/17; Wed PM Pine Grove

Introduction

The Christian life is a race to be more like Christ.

We are born separated from God due to sin, and we head farther away from God as we sin against Him in our youth...

Salvation, which brings the forgiveness of sin, closes that separation from God, and we continue to move toward Him after salvation.

As we move to be more like God, what actions best demonstrate our closeness to Him?

In other words, what do that most resembles the God we love?

When are we most like God?

Some would say that we are most like God when we love others...

Some would say we are most like God when we help others...

Some would say we are most like God when we show compassion to others?

But what would you say?

When do you think you are most like God?

Is it when you sacrifice yourself or give of your worldly possessions?

Is it when you bless those that curse you?

Is it when you suffer unjustly?

And while all those things are good, Godly, Christ-like actions, I would offer this...

You are most like God when you forgive others...

And here is why...

Lack of forgiveness will prevent you from doing any of things I just mentioned...

Lack of forgiveness will prevent you from loving people, from helping people, from showing compassion to them...

Lack of forgiveness will prevent you from serving others and sacrificing for them...

In short, lack of forgiveness will hinder any growth toward being like God...

Because if you can't forgive, you can never be like God who is filled with the ability to forgive...

God forgives and forgives and forgives because it is his nature...

And we are like him when we are filled with forgiveness toward others...

Now, here's the question we all answer...

What makes us so unforgiving as people...

What makes us desire to hold grudges...

To live in bitterness toward others for years even?

Well, its the sin of pride...

We dont want anyone to take advantage of us and get away with it...

We don't want anyone to think they can hurt us and not pay, right?

We don't want anyone to offend us and not pay for it, right?

So how do we make them pay?

Well, we hold their offense against them...

We make them live with their sin...

In our fallen minds, that will teach them..

And you want to know the irony of that?

You are most likely sinning against them in your unforgiveness than they sinned against you...

Their sin against you was a moment in time, but your sin against them goes on and on and on...

And will continue in eternity unless you forgive them..

Needless to say, that kind of commitment to not forgive is not from God..

The Holy Spirit does not empower you to hold grudges...

He does not give you the strength to continue in your bitterness...

God is not a part of your resistance to forgive...

You and your sinful fallen nature is part of it..

When you don't forgive, you are acting like someone who doesn't know God at all because you are acting contrary to His nature...

And maybe that is best illustrated in a parable in Matt 18 that we will look at tonight...

Now Matthew 18 is a sermon by Jesus..

The only interruption to the message is a question asked by Peter in verses 21-22...

But other than that, Jesus is preaching here...

And he is talking about the need to be like children in our faith and trust in God...

In the first part of the sermon, Jesus talks about believers who sin...

First, there is a need to go after another Christian in sin like you would chase after a lost sheep...

Then, Jesus talks about what to say to that sinning Christian when you catch him...

And how to forgive and restore him...

Then in verse 21, Peter interrupts the message to ask Jesus a question...

21 Then Peter came and said to Him, “Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?”

Now, Peter is the ordinary outspoken Southerner that we all know has a foot shaped mouth...

In his attempt to interrupt Jesus, he wants to appear really spiritual, so he asks a question to make him very intellectual, gracious and mature...

And the subject of his question is a good one...

Jesus, how often should we forgive and restore sinning Christians?

Seven times?

Now Jews thought that forgiveness should be offered 3 times...

They based this reasoning out of book of Amos, where God forgave Israel's enemies 3 times before destroying them...

So, Peter wanting to appear like he was this really gracious and nice guy bumped that number up to 7...

In his mind, Jesus was a really great guy, so moving forgiveness up to 7 times would probably make him smile....

Let's read Jesus' response...

Verse 22...

22 Jesus *said to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.

I can only picture Peter asking the question and turning to his friends and smiling looking so spiritual and caring...

And then hearing the words of Jesus...

No, not 7 Peter, but 70 times 7....

In other words, Peter you are to forgive others an immeasurable number of times...

There is no limit on how many times you are to forgive others...

Some look at this and say...

Well, that's not true...70 x 7 is 490, so 490 times is the limit on how many times I must forgive someone else...

And they hang up a chart in the house and start marking them off...

But they miss the point, Jesus is trying to shock Peter with his answer...

Peter, you think 7 times is enough?

Well, how about 70 times 7?

And I am sure the color left Peter's face and his smile turned into a mouth wide open...

And the pat on the back he was expecting became a kick in the pants...

In God's kingdom, forgiveness knows no end...

And then Jesus continues in his sermon by giving an illustration of the need for forgiveness in a parable...

So, let's listen with the disciples to see the need to be eager to forgive in the kingdom of God...

I have divided this parable into 4 sections..

I. The Unpayable Debt (23-27)

23 “For this reason the kingdom of heaven [v]may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. 24 When he had begun to settle them, one who owed him [w]ten thousand talents was brought to him. 25 But since he [x]did not have the means to repay, his lord commanded him to be sold, along with his wife and children and all that he had, and repayment to be made. 26 So the slave fell to the ground and prostrated himself before him, saying, ‘Have patience with me and I will repay you everything.’ 27 And the lord of that slave felt compassion and released him and forgave him the [y]debt.

In this parable, Jesus is going to relate a truth about God’s kingdom to a real world example....

Parables are earthly stories with heavenly meanings...

And the earthly story in this parable has a setting and some characters...

You have a kingdom, a king and some slaves in that kingdom...

This isn’t a slave in the sense of unpaid forced labor....

This would simply be the a servant of the king...

Most likely it would represent a government official under that king...

It could be a leader of section of the king's kingdom, and his job is to collect taxes from his area and give it to the king...

And time for collecting these taxes has come...

This would be familiar to all of Jesus' audience who lived in the Roman kingdom but had local authorities...

Well, time for giving the king his share of the taxes has come, but there was a problem...

One slave couldn't produce what was owed to the king from his territory....

Maybe he has stolen or spent it or lost it, but it was no ordinary amount...

It was 10,000 talents....

Now a talent was a large number...

It would be very similar to a trillion in our day...

The Gross Domestic Product of the US is about 17 trillion...

The slave of this region owed 10,000 trillion to the king....

In other words, it was an immeasurable number...

He owed more to the king than he could ever pay...

Maybe he has been stealing from the king for decades...

Whatever the reason, he is now way behind in payments...

So, he goes before the king, who decides to sell him and his family into true slavery and try to recover some costs...

Well, the slave doesn't like the sound of that, so in verse 26 and asks for mercy...

He even says that he will try to pay back the debt...

Well, that would make the king laugh for sure, but it was worth a shot....

And in that desperate attempt to save his family, the king was moved with compassion for that slave and does the unthinkable...

He forgives the slave of his unpayable debt and sets him free...

It was clearly an incredible act of mercy, and it was also clearly a reference to God who forgives sinners an immeasurable debt in salvation...

The disciples around Jesus would have understood this in their own lives as Jesus had called them in their sin...

And forgiven them and had begun teaching them...

I am sure they were “Amening” at this point and seeing the incredible forgiveness of God in this parable so far...

But their joy probably turns to sorrow real quick as we move from the unpayable debt to...

II. The Unmerciful Act (28-30)

In verse 28, we exchange the beauty of forgiveness for the ugliness of unforgiveness...

Verse 28...

28 But that slave went out and found one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred [z]denarii; and he seized him and began to choke him, saying, 'Pay back what you owe.' 29 So his fellow slave fell to the ground and began to plead with him, saying, 'Have patience with me and I will repay you.' 30 But he was unwilling [aa]and went and threw him in prison until he should pay back what was owed.

In one of the greatest examples of irony in the Bible, the forgiven slave goes out enjoying his forgiveness...

In search of someone who owed him some money, and he finds him...

Now the amount owed to the slave was a 100 denarii..

This would be equivalent to 100 days' wages...

Lets say \$10/hour at 8 hours away...

\$80 a day times 100 would make this debt 8000 bucks in our day...

Though that is a large amount of money, it is possible to pay it back....

And this slave did exactly the same thing that the forgiven slave did...

He falls down and asks for patience and mercy...

But you know what happens...

The forgiven slave won't hear of it...

Though he just was the recipient of incredible mercy, he has no desire to extend mercy and forgiveness....

Instead, he throws him into prison until the debt is paid...

Well, you know how this works...

Gossip gets around the world before good news gets out of bed...

So word gets back to the generous of what had happened and this is what we find in verses 31-34...

III. The Undone Action (31-34)

Verse 31...

31 So when his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were deeply grieved and came and reported to their lord all that had happened. 32 Then summoning him, his lord *said to him, 'You wicked slave, I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. 33 Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave, in the same way that I had mercy on you?' 34 And his lord, moved with anger, handed him over to the torturers until he should repay all that was owed him.

Take note of a few things here...

First, the action of the unforgiving slave grieved the other slaves who witnessed his choke hold and lack of mercy to their friend...

And let me tell you...

When you are an unforgiving Christians, it grieves your fellow brothers and sisters in the Lord...

You not only commit sin...

You not only hurt your victims...

Your grieve the entire body of Christ...

Because they know that you have been forgiven in Christ, yet you refuse to act like Christ and forgive others...

So, these slaves go to the king with this horrible news...

And the king sends for this slave and scolds him for not showing mercy when he himself had just been shown mercy...

And he hands him over to torturers until he pays his own debt..

So, that is the picture of a Christian who wont forgive someone else...

God disciplines them until they come to see their sin and repent...

This man had been forgiven a debt he couldn't pay.

Therefore it was sin to now demand payment from someone who owed him...

And as long as he continued in that sin, the king would continue to discipline him until he repented of that sin...

This isn't a picture of a God who forgives and then unforgives....

Rather, it is a picture of a God who freely forgives but expects those he forgives to forgive others in return...

And when they refuse to forgive, God disciplines them until they see their sin and offer their forgiveness....

The final part of the parable is to get the heavenly meaning...

IV. The Unmistakable Principle (35)

Verse 35...

35 My heavenly Father will also do the same to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from [ab]your heart.

The heavenly principle is this...

The willingness and act of forgiving others is a sign of true salvation...

People often argue with this verse and say that it teaches a works salvation...

That if a person doesn't do the "work" of forgiveness, God will not save them...

Well, we all know there is no work required for salvation...

God saves on the basis of repentance and faith alone...

What this is teaching is that those who refuse to forgive others show their lack of salvation in that refusal...

And those who practice forgiveness prove that their salvation is real...

You are most like God when you forgive those who have wronged you..

God is a forgiver.

God is merciful..

Likewise, you are most like Satan when you hold other's sins against them..

The devil is an accuser...

The devil loves to lay on guilt upon guilt.

Practice forgiveness and prove that you are a child of God...

Conclusion

Let's finish with a couple thoughts on this parable to help us all out when it comes to forgiveness...

#1 - Forgiveness is necessary.

We love Peter because we often have the same questions as Peter...

However, notice what Peter asks...

“Lord, how many times should I forgive my brother when he sins against me?”

Good question, right.

Yes, but asked from the wrong perspective...

The most humble way to ask this question is..

Lord, how many times should my brother forgive me when I sin against him?

In asking his question, Peter overlooks the most obvious truth...

You better put the number high Peter because you need as much forgiveness as you are willing to offer...

The sad part about our fallen nature is that we are blind to our own sin...

In our view of the world, everyone else is the problem..

But in a biblical view of the world, we are the problem..

My grandma kept a lot of kids, and one day one of them got in trouble for spitting at one of me...

So Mimi asked me, how many switchings does he need for doing that?

I yelled out 10 with a smile..

She said, "That's a fine number. That is how many you will get next time you get in trouble."

I quickly said, "Just one will probably do."

One reason to be forgiving is that you will need forgiveness one day as well...

#2 - Forgiveness is needed.

The most offensive part of the parable is this...

How can a man who was just forgiven much refuse to forgive so little?

So, I ask you...

How can you as a believer who has been forgiven so much refuse to forgive someone who has done so little to you?

Families split over who hosted Christmas dinner....

Churches split over the color of the carpet in the sanctuary...

Friends split over a few words spoken in anger...

I remind us all that the sins God forgave us are far far greater than the sins that will ever be committed against us...

This is why the Christian can forgive someone who murdered their children...

Because as bad as that sin is, it doesn't come close to the level of forgiveness that God has given them at the cross...

How can you be like the man in the parable and try to choke someone in your unforgiveness when God saved you from death row?

How can you possibly be forgiven and set free from death row and go out and try to strangle someone else by not forgiving them?

And unless we be fools, let us not that this parable only applies to someone we know and not to us...

3 - *Forgiveness is possible.*

No one would tell you that forgiveness is easy...

It is difficult to pardon those who have wronged us..

But it is possible to forgive for those who are saved and have been forgiven...

So, where does forgiveness start...

IT starts as we view the one who has offended in love...

I often tell people that it is hard to hold grudges against someone who you are praying for...

And it is hard to pray for someone if you don't love them...

So, if you want to get bitterness and unforgiveness out of your heart, pray for that person...

And don't pray about the crime they committed against you...

Pray for their souls...

If they are lost, pray for their salvation.

If they are a believer, pray for their spiritual growth...

And do that continually and do that from the heart expecting God to save them or grow them....

Eventually, what they did to you will fade to the background if you sincerely love them and care for what God is doing in their lives...

And in that process, you will want to forgive them...

Second, see your own sins that have been forgiven and then go to them and forgive them for those one or two sins they committed against you..

Third, and this is very important, reaffirm and celebrate your forgiveness of them...

Here is what happens, Satan will remind your flesh of their sin against you...

And you will be tempted to re-open the sin and dive back into unforgiveness...

When that happens, first of all, expect it.

It isn't realistic to think that you won't forget what happened to you...

And it isn't realistic to think that your flesh and Satan won't use that against you..

But here is what you do when you remember those sins....

You celebrate the fact that you have already forgiven them...

You rejoice in the forgiveness and refuse to go back to the sin...

Look, Satan is an accuser...

He accuses the saints before God day and night, according to Revelation 12:10...

Satan is constantly in God's ear throwing our sins against God before his eyes, hoping that God will remove our forgiveness and send us to hell with him...

Yet God simply looks to the cross..

He looks to His Son, the Lamb slain who now stands...

When Satan tries to take God back to our sin, God celebrate the forgiveness that came through Christ..

The same is true for us...

When we remember past offenses against us, we dont rush back to unforgiveness, we rush to the cross and to the fact that we have forgiven those things because Christ has forgiven us much worse...

Unforgiveness will ruin a church, a family, and your entire life...

Forgiveness will bless a church, a family, and your entire life...

I pray that God will make us all forgiving people since we have been forgiven much.

Let us pray.