

Forgiveness Part 1 – Dealing With Hurt We Never Deserved

- *Matthew 18:21-35*

- **Over the next several weeks, I will be speaking on Sunday nights about the subject of forgiveness.**
 - We will attack this subject from several different angles, but I believe it is important that we seriously examine what the scriptures have to say about this important step in our life.
 - **In each of our lives, at some point, someone has hurt us tremendously. Perhaps in their eyes it was justified; nevertheless what we have to understand as Christians is the importance of learning to forgive.**
 - I am afraid many Christians are suffering discouragement & despair in their Christian life b/c they have never learned the value of forgiveness.
 - One of the things that I have seen over the years is just b/c you choose to forgive someone, doesn't necessarily mean that they will change, but that is also not the point of forgiveness.
 - If you are wronged & you forgive someone and in the process they make some changes in their life, then just thank God for it.
 - The goal of forgiveness is to release you from the bondage that anger & bitterness has on you.
 - In many cases, people don't even realize that they are resentful against a person until years down the road.
 - **So over & over through the next few weeks as we talk about forgiveness, I will be bringing you back to the point of releasing them so YOU can be set free.**
 - "But you don't know what he did to me."
 - "They lied about me over and over again."
 - "They attempted to destroy my career."
 - "You can't imagine what I've been through."
 - "If you knew what this has done to my family, you would be angry too."
 - "They deserve to suffer like they've made me suffer."
 - "I'm going to make them pay."
 - "I will never forgive those people."
 - C. S. Lewis made this statement: "Everyone says forgiveness is a lovely idea until they have something to forgive."
 - **There are two areas of forgiveness I want us to look at tonight, especially in regards to Hurt We Never Deserved.**
- 1. Forgiveness Is A Christian Virtue.**
- Look at Luke 6:37 – "Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned: forgive, and ye shall be forgiven:"
 - In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said it very plainly in Matthew 6:14-15 – "For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."
 - In Ephesians 4:32, Paul said, "And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you."
 - Let me also read Colossians 3:13 – "Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye."
 - It is very difficult at times to forgive other sin our life, especially when we have been done wrong, yet Peter says in I Peter 4:8 – "And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins."
 - One other passage & we will continue tonight. In I Corinthians 13, Paul even went as far to say that, "love ... keeps no record of wrongs".
 - I Corinthians 13:5 – "Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil;"

- What this verse tells us is that love does not keep score when it comes to forgiveness. It finds a way to forget the sins of others.
 - Perhaps a great example of this is when Peter asks Jesus how many times he should forgive his brother when he has wronged him. He asked if seven times was enough!
 - Now quite honestly, seven times would even be a stretch for many of us, right?
 - Jesus' response was ... "I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven."
 - The key principle here is, "as many times as is needed."
- When Jesus hung on the cross, condemned to death by evil men who plotted to murder him, who produced lying witnesses to convict him, as he surveyed the howling mob assembled to cheer his suffering, Jesus the Son of God, the One who knew no sin, the only truly innocent man who ever walked this sin-cursed planet, in his dying moments uttered words that still ring across the centuries: "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." (Luke 23:34).
 - Those 10 words sweep away all our empty excuses to the side. They unveil our unrighteous anger and show it for what it is. Many of us say, "If only the people who hurt me would show some remorse, some sorrow, then maybe I would forgive them." But since that rarely happens, we use that as an excuse to continue in our bitterness, our anger, and our desire to get even.
 - Consider Jesus on the cross. No one there was sorry. Even as he said those words, the crowd laughed, mocked, cheered, jeered. Those who passed by hurled insults at him. They taunted him. Pilate washed his hands of the whole sordid affair. The Jewish leaders hated him with a fierce hatred. They were happy to see him suffer and die. Evil was in the air that day. The forces of darkness had done their work and the Son of God would soon be in the tomb.
 - No one said, "I was wrong. This is a mistake. We shouldn't have done this." And yet he said, "Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they are doing."
- That is precisely what we must say if we are going to follow Jesus.
 - We must say it to people who hurt us deliberately and repeatedly.
 - We must say it to those who intentionally attack us.
 - We must say it to those who casually and thoughtlessly wound us.
 - We must say it to those closest to us, to our husband or wife, to our children, to our parents, to our friends, to our neighbors, to our brothers and sisters, to our fellow Christians.

2. Forgiveness is difficult because we do not understand it properly.

- At this point, I want to be clear about what forgiveness is and what it is not.
- There are some misconceptions about forgiveness which leads many people to say, "But I just cannot forgive them." What we are discussing tonight is Biblical forgiveness. Let me list a few things forgiveness does not mean:
 - It does not mean approving of what someone else did.
 - It does not mean pretending that evil never took place.
 - It does not mean making excuses for other people's bad behavior.
 - It does not mean justifying evil so that sin somehow becomes less sinful.
 - It does not mean living in denial of other's sin.
 - It does not mean letting others walk all over you.
 - It does not mean refusing to press charges when a crime has been committed.
 - It does not mean forgetting the wrong that was done.
 - It does not mean pretending that you were never hurt.
 - It does not mean that you must restore the relationship to what it was before.
 - It does not mean that all negative consequences of sin are canceled.

- If you are out one night, you go to a bar, you get drunk, and you get in a big fight, you injure a few people & you wind up getting arrested & sent to jail.
- You may come to me, your spouse & even the church and ask for forgiveness, and I would hope that in your sincerity we could forgive you for your sin.
- However, there are some significant penalties that you have to pay.
 - You have sinned against God & He deserves Your repentance.
 - Your reputation & your witness are severely damaged & you will lose much of the respect from others.
 - For the injuries you have caused, you will be expected to make some retribution for those expenses.
 - And b/c all of this was done in a moment when you lost control, you forfeited your freedom & you now must serve time in jail.
- Forgiveness may be offered, but the consequences remain.
- Forgiveness is essentially a matter of the heart. This is a hugely important point because most of us think forgiveness is primarily about the words we say. If forgiveness was as easy as saying, “I forgive you”, a lot more people would be willing to forgive. But it is much more than words. It is a choice that we make. Forgiveness begins in the heart and eventually works its way outward. There is a profound sense in which all forgiveness, even forgiving someone who hurt you deeply, is a matter between you and God.
- Forgiveness is a conscious choice to release others from their sins against you so that you can be set free. It doesn’t deny the pain or change the past, but it does break the cycle of bitterness in your own life. Forgiveness allows you to let go and move on.
 - You can forgive even when other people make no confession.
 - You can forgive when the other person has done nothing to earn forgiveness because forgiveness is like salvation—it is a gift that is freely given, it cannot be earned.
 - Jesus told a story about a man who owed his boss a vast debt that in today’s terms would be something like \$50 million. Somehow he had run up this enormous debt and somehow he had managed to spend all the money. When the boss demanded his money, the man unashamedly begged to be forgiven. He even promised to pay the money back. But the boss forgave him the whole debt. Just wiped the slate clean.
 - Soon after that, the man who had been forgiven such an enormous sum saw a fellow who owed him a tiny debt—something like \$100. When the fellow couldn’t pay, he had him thrown into jail. But people heard about it and told the boss who got angry and had the first man thrown into jail to be tortured until he paid back the amount that previously had been forgiven.
 - The Bible tells us that he was turned over to the “tormentors.” The moral of the story is very clear: “What happened to that man will happen to you unless you learn to forgive and forgive and forgive.” The tormentors will come and take you away and torture you.
 - What tormentors?
 - The hidden tormentors of anger and bitterness that eat your insides out, the tormentors of frustration and malice that give you ulcers and high blood pressure and migraine headaches and lower back pain, the tormentors that make you lie awake at night on your bed stewing over every rotten thing that happens to you.
 - The tormentors of an unforgiving heart that stalk your trail day and night, that never leave your side, that suck every bit of joy from your life.
 - Why? Simply b/c you refuse to forgive from the heart.
 - In essence, we are like the unforgiving servant. We stand before Almighty God with our sins piled up like a mountain. The mountain is so tall we can’t get over it, so deep we can’t get under it, so wide we can’t go around it. That’s every one of us. Our sins are like a \$50

million dollar debt we could never pay in our lifetime or in a thousand lifetimes. We come as debtors to God, come with empty hands, and we say, "I cannot pay." God who is rich in mercy replies, "I forgive all your sins. My Son has paid the debt. You owe me nothing."

- Then we rise from the pew, leave the altar, walk outside the church humming "Lord, I Lift Your Name on High." And before we get to our car we see a man who has done us wrong and we want to grasp him by the throat and say, "Pay me right now!"
- No wonder we are so tormented. No wonder we are so angry and bitter. No wonder we have problems. No wonder our friendships don't last. No wonder we can't get along. We have never learned the secret of forgiveness. work.
- If you really want to show genuine forgiveness towards others, it will require you to do just as Jesus commanded in Matthew 5:44 when He said, "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you;"

➤ **This is the first sermon in this series. There is a lot more we will be talking about, but as we close tonight, let me summarize tonight:**

1. Forgiveness is not an optional part of the Christian life. It is a necessary part of what it means to be a Christian.
 - a. If we are going to follow Jesus, we must forgive. We have no other choice.
 - b. And we must forgive as God has forgiven us—freely, completely, graciously, totally. The miracle we have received is a miracle we pass on to others.
 2. We will forgive to the extent we appreciate how much we have been forgiven.
 - a. The best incentive to forgiveness is to remember how much God has already forgiven you.
 - i. Think of how many sins he has covered for you. Think of the punishment you deserved that did not happen to you because of God's grace. Jesus said in Luke 7:47, "to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little."
 - ii. Your willingness to forgive is in direct proportion to your remembrance of how much you have been forgiven.
- **If you have been forgiven by God, you have experienced genuine, unadulterated forgiveness that was real. But perhaps tonight you are still under a heavy load of refusing to let go & forgive. Why don't you come to Jesus tonight & be honest enough to ask Him for the strength to help you forgive.**
- **If you are committed to this & you want to learn to forgive as Jesus forgave it will require a soft heart and courage.**
- Some of you have been deeply hurt by the things others have done to you. People have attacked you, mistreated us, abused us, ridiculed us, publicly humiliated us, and they have done it deliberately, repeatedly, viciously.
 - In response you chose to become hard on the inside to protect ourselves from any further pain. But that hardness has made it difficult for you to hear the gentle call of the Holy Spirit. We need soft hearts to hear his voice.
 - And then we need courage. Only the brave will forgive. Only the strong will have the courage to let go of the past.
- **May God soften our hearts to hear the truth. And may God give us courage do the hard thing and let go of our bitterness, give up our anger, turn away from our resentment, stop keeping score, and enter into the miracle of total forgiveness.**