

Matthew 6:12, 14-15

Forgive Us

Sunday August 16th, 2015

This petition in the Lord's Prayer that was just read is probably the hardest... most frightening phrase to pray of the whole prayer. "And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors."

This is because it means, "Forgive us our sins to the same degree that we have forgiven those who have sinned against us."

Ouch, or as Jesus said, "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."

The truth of the matter is that some of us would rather not pray this petition at all. This is because most of us have an enemy that we have not, and do not want to forgive. In fact, I know that this sermon will take some of you, in your mind, back to places you don't want to go, and too people you desperately want to forget. But what is offered today for you is freedom. So, stick with me.

A little background first. In the New Testament there are 5 different words that are used for "sin". They cover all the bases so that none of us can claim to be sin free and not in need of forgiveness. We are all sinners!

Hamartia- A missing the mark. Like in archery, you aim for the center and miss. We often miss what we could be and could have been in this life if we would have only followed Jesus better. *Barclay Matthew p. 254* This is the word that is used in Luke's version of the Lord's Prayer.

Parabasis- "literally it means 'a stepping across'. Sin is stepping across the line which is drawn between right and wrong." *Barclay Matthew p. 254*

Paraptoma- “which means ‘a slipping across’”. Not as deliberate as the earlier one but still it is sin. If you fight with addiction or temptation, you know this one. P.254

Anomia- “which means ‘lawless. This is when you know the right and deliberately choose the wrong. P. 255

Finally- Opheilema which means a “debt.’ This is the word used in Matthew’s version of the Lord’s Prayer. It is a failure to pay that which is due. P. 255 The word “trespass” that we use in the Methodist version of the Lord’s Prayer expresses this. We have trespassed into someone else’s garden, crushed their flowers, and that creates a debt, a debt that has to be paid.

A debt that was paid by Jesus on the cross, which we all know, so why does Jesus say, “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.** Confusing? Yes, even scary for we know our hearts.



Now if you understand criminal law in the United States it helps. If you steal a car, you create a debt. You owe a debt to the owner of the car but also to society. When you are caught, you are brought to trial by the State not the person whose car you stole. The charge is always “The State of Arizona” verses The Thief. You offended; created debt, not only with the car owner; but with the state, and it is the state that prosecutes you.

You also have also created a debt with God. This thought is enshrined in verse 4 of Psalm 51, “**Against you (God), you only have I sinned, and done that which is evil in your sight....so you are justified in your sentence...**”

We may have lied, cheated, stolen from our neighbor but our ultimate sin is against God.... The debt we owe is to God!!

Well, we all try to worm our way out of admitting we are sinners and deserve punishment, which is why the New Testament uses 5 words for describing sin. These 5 words cover everything and everyone of us.

But the New Testament uses 3 words for describing forgiveness, and only one act (the Cross) that covers all sin, but let's look at a real example of Christians living out forgiveness in their lives.



You probably remember the shooting at Emmanuel AME Church in South Carolina. The shooter wanted to start a race war. He failed miserably... even after killing 9 Black Christian believers. The Washington Post wrote the following, 2 days after the murders:

“The relatives of people slain inside the historic African American church in Charleston, S.C., ~~earlier this week~~ were able to speak directly to the accused gunman ~~Friday~~ at his first court appearance.

One by one, those who chose to speak at a bond hearing did not turn to anger. Instead, while he remained impassive, they offered him... forgiveness and said they were praying for his soul, even as they described the pain of their losses.



Nadine Collier, the daughter of 70-year-old Ethel Lance, said, “I forgive you,” (to the murderer) ~~at the hearing~~, her voice breaking with emotion. “You took something very precious from me. I will never talk to her

again. I will never, ever hold her again.... But I forgive you. And (God) have mercy on your soul."

Abraham Lincoln during the civil war was criticized for being too courteous to his enemies and was reminded that it was his duty to destroy them. His reply was, **"Do I not destroy my enemies when I make them my friends?"**

An assassin's bullet led to hatred and revenge against the South that even today the effects of which are being felt. The AME members who have absorbed the attack of evil in their very bodies, and refused to turn to anger and revenge, have set themselves and others free.

As the interim pastor of that church said, ***"A Lot of people expected us to do something strange and to break out in a riot. Well, they just don't know us. We are people of faith."***

At Christ Church I became involved with a group of refugees fleeing the genocides in Rwanda, Burundi and Congo. The Rwandan genocide occurred April 7 to July 1994 in Rwanda. In those 4 months members of the Hutu tribe slaughtered between 500,000 & 1 million Tutsi tribe members as well as Hutu who refused to participate in the slaughter.

Christ Church's custodian Pierre, who is Hutu, refused to participate in the slaughter; so, in fear of his and his family's life they fled on foot with the clothes on their backs and a bicycle. 2 of their 8 children died before they reached the safety of Kenya.

I preached at the Goshen Church made up of the survivors of the genocide here in Tucson. They translated my message from English to Swahili. After my first message there they asked me not to mention the words Hutu or Tutsi in future sermons; because even though they are here in America--with members of both tribes attending the same church; the emotions were still too raw. Forgiveness is a long hard-

fought battle in that church that only the presence and the power of the Holy Spirit can overcome.

For them, and for any of us, who have suffered at the hands of others this is the hardest petition prayer. But it is a prayer that if we pray it and live it, it will set us free.

We live in an angry age with many looking for offense and many giving offense. It has seeped into the church and into our lives. We are encouraged not to forgive and forget; but to remember and hold on in anger and seek revenge.

And when we do that as Rev. Stephen Mansfield wrote, **“The devil is trying to shape your life with wounding and offense in order to keep you from a life defined by the purposes of God.”** P. 94 My friends, we are made for better than this.

Rev. Mansfield wrote a book called “Rechurch”. It was about getting over the hurts that people experience in the church and then moving on. I was so impressed I bought about 12 copies and gave them all away.

One of the stories in that book helps us understand why it is necessary for us to let go and forgive in order to be free. As the 4th verse of “O For a Thousand Tongues to Sing” says, **“He breaks the power of canceled sin he sets the prisoner free, his blood can make the foulest clean, his blood availed for me.”**

One word for “forgive” in the New Testament is **“Aphesis”**, in Greek it means to **“to release from prison, to pardon.”** We translate this as **“forgive”**. The importance of this teaching today is that to have an unforgiving heart, it traps you in a prison. The idea is to release the thing that holds you in prison. That’s what God wants for us that he puts so starkly in verses 14 and 15.

When we have an unforgiving heart THAT is what condemns us. We live in a hell of our own making. God doesn't have to do anything.

In his book Rev. Mansfield tells the story of "Little Timmy". He met little Timmy when he worked as an RA on a university campus. Rev. Mansfield got a page on his pager to come to a certain location immediately, and the page indicated the situation was so serious that the paramedics had been called.



Before he arrived at the designated spot of the disaster, he heard the commotion created by little Timmy, his mom, and his dad. All were wailing,... crying,... or shouting at the top of their lungs.

Now the scene that confronted Mr. Mansfield when he arrived was this. Little Timmy was screaming and had his arm stuck in a vending machine. Timmy's dad was shouting about how he was going to sue everybody. Timmy's mom kept looking at little Timmy, bending over at the waist and wailing. And there was a security guard just standing there waiting for Mr. Mansfield to arrive and take over.

After being threatened by the dad, wailed at by the mom, he went over to little Timmy who by that time had a little trickle of blood running down his arm, which made his mom even more hysterical and his dad more belligerent. In the background was the wailing of the sirens from the approaching paramedics.

It was amazing that Mr. Mansfield kept his presence of mind, but he did. He walked over to little Timmy, knelt to examine his arm and then followed his arm up into the machine with his hand to assess where he might have got it caught. As he did this, he realized little Timmy's arm was straight and rigid, not like something had caught him, and he was trying to get away, but like he was holding onto something.

Mr. Mansfield at that point stepped back and looked into the front of the machine and discovered what the real problem was, and then like Moses when he spoke to pharaoh, he stepped back and said, "Son, let go of the candy bar."



The parents looked at Mr. Mansfield as if he had just blasphemed God, but slowly little Timmy released the Snickers bar and pulled his arm out.

Little Timmy had a hold of something he shouldn't have had, and it captured him & brought grief, and injury to him, and everyone around him.

The sin of an unforgiving heart, of holding onto others' debts,... others' sins, does the same to us. It captures us in a prison of our own making, and we hold ourselves there until forgiveness sets us free.

An unforgiving heart damages us spiritually, emotionally and physically. Some people are physically sick, because they do not forgive! I have met people who live in a sliver of time from the past where they were hurt, and their unforgiving heart has pretty much destroyed their lives.

I read once about how to catch a monkey. It is very simple. You find a clear jar or bottle with a small neck and then you place treats or food in the bottle that a monkey likes, can see, or smell, and grasp. The bottle is then tied to a tree.

A monkey comes by and sees what is in the bottle and sticks his arm in to get it. The problem is that once the monkey has grasped the item, he can't get his closed fist back out of the bottle.

As long as the monkey has a grip on the item, he can't get free and then he is captured for good.



The sin of an unforgiving heart, of holding onto others' debts, does the same to us. It captures us in a prison of our own making, and we hold ourselves there... until forgiveness sets us free. God does not need to condemn us; our unforgiving hearts have already assigned us to hell.

As we hold onto our unforgiving hearts, we are entombed in a prison of our own making and would that the damage only be assessed to us.

The aftermath of Lincoln's assassination and the "Reconstruction" of the South is a great negative example. In many cases vengeance was taken, and grace and forgiveness withheld. We learned from that, which gave us a very positive example, which is the aftermath of WWII, when we took two of our greatest enemies and made them our friends!

Ultimately, though, this is still a very scary petition: **"And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors."** For we know the power to do this, in many cases, is beyond our strength. We are caught in a prison of our own making and need the Holy Spirit's power to be set free.

If we choose forgiveness... the Holy Spirit will empower us to give it. If we choose not to forgive, we are left trapped. Indeed, the frightening thing is the choice is ours.

So, let us pray, "Dear God, I cannot find the power within me to forgive. Give me the power that sets the prisoner free. I claim the forgiveness that comes with Jesus' sacrifice on the cross."



Know then you are forgiven and one day will be set free. What is God saying and what are you going to do? In Jesus' name, Amen!