

Forgiveness of the King

1. Problem of Forgiveness

- I can't think of a more practical passage of scripture to look at than this passage where Jesus teaches us about forgiveness and reconciliation
- Because the reality is all of us are either going through or have been through deep personal pain that has been caused by other people that has hurt us
- It happens to
 - Married couples
 - Work colleagues
 - School friends
 - Parents & children
 - Churches
- When we hurt others or others hurt us ... it robs us of joy in life
 - We're made as relational beings > made to be in relationship with others
- But we constantly muck it up
 - We constantly hurt, disrespect, ignore, overrun, dis-empower, demean, ridicule, and betray others
 - That causes great pain ... and undermines our relationships
- But that doesn't mean we just have to put up with fractured relationships
- What we see in this passage today is Jesus gives us the mechanism, resources and power
 - to forgive and reconcile with others
 - to restore relationships that have been fractured
 - to return to that point where we can continue to experience the joy of relationships even after they've been broken and hurt
- And so, Jesus says in v15 ... when someone sins against you ...
 - You ought to go and seek them out
 - Speak to your brother or sister > point out their sin against you
- Whole purpose of what Jesus is outlining here is aimed at seeking to bring reconciliation between two parties
 - This can apply to anyone ... but Jesus is particularly applying this to Christians ... to those in churches

- Because God's ppl ought to be marked by unity
- Disciples of Jesus must be people who are willing to reconcile and restore
- The church is not to be characterized by disunity, resentment, fractured relationships, and bitterness

- But what Jesus is suggesting about this process of reconciliation raises a problem
 - And the problem is our willingness to forgiveness
 - And Peter asks the question that many of us would ask
 - *v21 - "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me?"*

- In particular he's asking ...
 - 'what should we do if a person does it again > and repents > and again ... and repents > and again ...
 - Each time the person is genuine in their repentance > it comes from the heart ... but they hurt you again

- What do you do?
 - Do you continue to forgive?
 - Or is there a limit to our forgiveness?

- Peter offers an answer to his own question ...
 - Says "should we forgive up to seven times?"

- The teaching of the Jewish Rabbis in Peter's day was that you ought to forgive a person three times for a repeated sin ... and then on the fourth occasion, there would be no forgiveness

- So, when Peter asks if he ought to forgive 7 times ...
 - he thinks he's being quite generous ...
 - he thinks he is being big-hearted

- But Jesus says ... No - don't forgive seven times ... but seventy-seven times
 - Jesus not being literal here ... he's not saying that 77 times is the upper limit

- What Jesus is saying is ... forgiveness cannot possibly be limited by frequency or quantity
 - For as the following parable shows ... all of them have been forgiven much more than they will ever need to forgive

- Jesus knows the human heart ... and he knows that we have this problem

- Too often ...
 - We find it hard to forgive
 - We're unwilling to forgive because we've been hurt
 - Our pride has been hurt > our dignity damaged
 - They've hurt our reputation > our self esteem's been knocked around
 - And we're angry

- So, Jesus calls on us to forgive ... but our natural reaction is to say "No – I can't forgive them. They've caused me too much pain"

- But friends there are two problems when we we're unwilling to forgive and reconcile
- It hurts you
 - It hurts you when you refuse to be willing to reconcile
 - It hurts you now
 - It hurts you in eternity

- **Eternal Suffering**
- See in the parable that Jesus teaches how the servant is forgiven by the king, but the servant then refuses to forgive a fellow servant
- King hears about it and hauls the first servant back in and ...
 - v34 – *In anger his master turned him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed.*
- Then the punch line from Jesus to us is ...
 - v35 – *"This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of **you** unless you forgive your brother from your heart."*
- Jesus point is ...
 - If you have an unforgiving heart ... it's going to lead you to eternal suffering

- But you say
 - We're saved by grace of God > saved by the death and resurrection of Jesus
 - Our eternal future doesn't depend on what I do, it depends on what Jesus has already done

- That's absolutely true
- However, the King's point to the servant is
 - When you fail to forgive ... when you fail to open your heart to your fellow servant ... it shows you never really opened your heart to me

- Jesus is saying ... if you refuse to forgive your friend / neighbour / work colleague / fellow student / parents / brother / sister in Christ ... this is a sign that you never really opened your heart to the gospel

- **Illustration – Apple Trees**
- Imagine two apple trees > one bearing fruit, the other no fruit
- What do you conclude about those trees?
 - Assume one is healthy and alive > other is diseased and dying
 - Fruit doesn't give the tree life
 - Fruit reveals whether there's life or not
 - Fruit is a sign of life

- Jesus is saying, there is no better way to see whether you have a real relationship with God or not than the basis of whether you're willing to forgive others or not

- So that's the first problem failing to forgive ... it hurts you eternally

- **Present Suffering**
- Second problem with an unwillingness to forgive is ... it hurts you now
- That is, you become trapped > ensnared > burdened
- When you feel angry, hold a grudge, refuse to forgive ... what happens?
 - You become bitter
 - You have this residual anger that continues to burn within you
 - You become passive aggressive
- And you end up imprisoned by this anger and frustration and hurt
 - You're unable to let go or move on
 - Unable to get any peace or have any joy
- You're a prisoner of your unwillingness or inability to forgive

- So, the problem with forgiveness is
 - Because we've been hurt ... we find it's hard to do
 - Means we often don't want to forgive
 - Leads to present suffering as we harbour anger and bitterness
 - Leads to future suffering as it shows we haven't truly grasped the good news of Jesus

- So, what do you do with that?
 - If it's better that we forgive and reconcile ... how do you move forward with that?

- Parable helps us

2. Parable of Forgiveness

- In the parable the king calls in the servant who owes him a huge debt and he forgives him
- Notice what he does in v27
 - *"The servant's master took pity on him, cancelled the debt and let him go."*

Took Pity on Him

- The first thing the king did was take pity on the servant
 - Take pity is not feeling sorry for the person > much more than that
 - Means to empathise
 - Elsewhere in NT that word is translated "heart went out for him" or "have compassion"
- King's heart went out for the servant
 - It means he was putting himself in his place
 - Having compassion on him and his situation
- To have pity / compassion on a person > for your heart to go out to a person who has wronged you or hurt you ... is to do the hard work of intentionally reminding yourself of how much you have in common them
- You put yourself in their place > you empathise with them
- **Illustration – Parenting**
- Parenting is one of the hardest jobs in the world
 - My kids would agree with me on this
- When they've done the wrong thing ... without a shadow of a doubt ...
 - The times I have parented them well in that situation are the times my heart has gone out for them > when I've shown them compassion
 - The times I have been at my worst as a parent when I have failed to do this
- The difference is when I've remembered just how much we have in common
 - That either I did the same thing when I was a kid
 - Or I am still making the mistakes they are making ... just in adult ways
 - When God helps me to see that ... I'm able to look on them with compassion > my heart can go out to them ... we're able to restore our relationship in a much better way

- What it means to make your heart go out to a person is to deliberately say to yourself ... "I'm not that different > really I'm just the same"
- One writer very helpfully says this
 - *"forgiveness flounders because I exclude my enemy from the community of humanity ... and I exclude myself from the community of sinners"* (Miroslav Volf)
- You see what he's saying
- We'll be unable to forgive a person if we continue to
 - Forget they too are human; and
 - We also are sinners
- You may not do exactly the same thing ... but if you're honest you'll know you have done / still do similar things with others
- And when we exclude others from the community of humanity, we're failing to recognise they too are a person with baggage and pain and brokenness and hurts
- When we fail to recognise these things ... it holds us back from 'our heart going out to them' ... taking pity ... showing compassion
- All that ends up happening is we become ensnared in bitterness, pain and sadness
- That's the first thing ... the king identifies with the servant and his heart went out to him

Cancelled his debt & let him go

- Second thing the king does with the servant in v27 is he cancels the debt and lets him go
- King calls in this servant who owes him money
 - Turns out the servant owes the king 10,000 talents
- Let me just give you some perspective of how big that debt is in today's terms ...
 - Talent in those days' worth 6,000 denarii > roman coin of the day
 - Denarii was a days wage for a laborer
 - Assume an average daily wage today is \$300
 - Means 10,000 talents = \$18bn! (\$1.8m x 10,000)
 - James Packer – worth \$4.5bn
 - Means he owes 4 times what James Packer is worth!!

- And we see in v25 the servant was unable to pay such a massive debt ... and so his whole family was ordered to be sold into slavery
- However, ... this was never going to solve the problem
 - Because the top price for a slave in those days was 1 talent ... and most slaves normally went for 1/10th of that or less
 - So, selling the man and his family into slavery was never going to be able to clear such a massive debt
 - Like you or I promising to give over our pay for the next 40 years of our life to clear an \$18bn debt
 - It's never going to happen
- And so, we see the desperate plight this man is in
 - He and his family would have spent their entire lives in slavery
 - The man was never going to be able to pay off the debt
 - And so, we see in v26 he begs for mercy
- Surprisingly ...
 - the king took pity on him, cancelled the debt and let him go
- Surprising because to do so meant the king has to incur an \$18bn loss in order to pardon the man
 - That's a massive cost to the king in order to forgive him
- But that's what forgiveness is > absorbing the cost of the debt ... rather than making the person pay it themselves
- **Illustration – Cancelled Debts**
- A few years ago, my in-laws lent us their 4WD and caravan for us to go on holidays around Tasmania
 - Melbourne > Ferry > two weeks driving around Tassie > Ferry back
 - Not a scratch
 - Get home and unhook the caravan, clean it all up
 - Park the 4WD on grass off the street out of harm's way
- That night was the crazy windstorms
 - During the night, the basketball ring (on stand) was blown over ... onto the car
 - Damaged the front of the car
 - All that way around Tassie, 3,000km, not a scratch
 - At home > parked > not moving > damaged!
- We offered Liana's mum and dad to pay for it
 - But they let it go > they cancelled the debt

- But just because they forgave us doesn't mean the loss disappears into thin air
 - Either they have to pay to get it fixed or
 - They leave it and lose money when they sell it because its damaged
 - Either way ... they pay instead of me

- When there's a loss ... either the person who incurs the loss pays ... or the person who experiences the loss pays > one or the other

- When someone wrongs you ... you can either make them pay or you pay
- How does that work when we're not talking about money?
- When someone wrongs you ... you experience a loss
 - Loss of pride
 - Loss of respect or reputation
 - Loss of self-esteem or dignity
- There's a cost and you feel it and it hurts > the person owes you

- What do you do?
 - You can make them pay
 - Gossip and slander them
 - Seek revenge and lash out at them or abuse them
 - Ignore them > avoid contact or talking with them
 - Unpleasant > let them know you're not happy with them > make snide remarks to them or in front of them

- Then ... as you see them suffering either from your actions or circumstances in their life ... the debt eventually comes down
 - Only once the debt has been paid because they've suffered enough are you willing to forgive

- But what's this have the effect of doing?
 - It turns you into a horrible person and nothing like the person Jesus wants you to be
 - You become ensnared in your bitterness
 - Constantly mean spirited towards people who wrong you
 - Constantly sniping and grumbling against people
 - You lack joy in your life

- What's the alternative?
- You pay

- You absorb the cost
 - When you want to lash out – you don't
 - When you want to hurt them – you refrain
 - When you want to gossip and slander and grumble about them to others ... you hold your tongue
- You say ... "that'll hurt!"
 - "That's a whole lot of pain you're asking me to swallow there"
- Yes ... you do suffer when you forgive like this
 - As you absorb the pain and refrain from making them pay ... you do suffer
 - Because you're paying the debt instead of making them pay the debt

3. Practice of Forgiveness

- Easy right? Taken some good notes > reckon you can do it?
 - Not easy at all is it!
 - What do you?
 - How do you put this into practice?
- In this passage Jesus gives us two resources to help us
 - He gives us a method and he gives us a motive
- The first is a method ... it's very practical
- In v15-17 Jesus is talking to the disciples and
 - "If your brother sins against you ...
 - Here he's talking about situations where a person from church hurts you, wrongs you, slanders you, offends you ... whatever
- What do you do?
 - You go to him and point out his fault
 - If your relationship with a person is damaged or fractured because of something they've done to you ...
 - The way to deal with that is to go to them and let them know and resolve it
- The way not to deal with it is to
 - Grumble, snipe and gossip and whinge to someone else about it
 - Rather go and speak to the person about what they have done to offend and upset you

- The whole purpose of this is not to tell them in order to make them feel guilty
- The whole purpose is to “*win your brother over*” (v15) > to reconcile ... to restore the relationship

- It’s not rocket science!
- It just means
 - Taking pity, showing compassion
 - Remembering they too are “*part of the community of humanity ... and you too are from the community of sinners*”
- Then ...
 - Going to them in grace and love
 - Explaining how what they did or said has hurt you and fractured your relationship
 - Not to tell them off and make yourself feel better ... but to restore and reconcile

- Notice ... the context of Peter’s question in v21 implies that the person who has caused the offence is contrite and repentant
 - Not talking about forgiving a person where there is a lack of repentance
 - Jesus deals with that separately in v16-17
- But we ought to go to the person wanting to reconcile by playing our part of being willing to forgive

- **Application**
- I reckon this is one the most important teachings of Jesus that Christians and churches need to understand and live out
 - Because the reality is ... churches are full of sinners
 - So, it’s inevitable that you and I will sin against one another
 - Sometimes deliberately, sometimes unintentionally
 - But it will happen
- And so, we need to be good at practicing this
 - But when we don’t ... all that ends up happening is people become
 - Bitter, angry, and resentful
 - Churches lacks unity
 - And we get distracted from living to be and make disciples

- So that’s the first thing ... Jesus gives us a method for practicing forgiveness

Motive

- Second thing and ultimate thing that's going to help us be people who are willing to reconcile and forgive is ... Jesus gives us a motive
- Motive that comes from the compassion and forgiveness of the king

- In v27 we see how despite the massive debt the servant owed the king ... the king's heart went out to the man and he cancelled his debt and sent him away

- It's interesting when you look at that phrase 'took pity' it is used almost **exclusively** for Jesus' feelings towards those he is seeking to heal and comfort
 - **Constantly** we see through the gospels how Jesus' heart went out for **people** > crowds, leper, blind, grieving widow

- Of course, the king in the parable points to Jesus as the ultimate king whose heart goes out to you and I

- If we're going to identify with the person who has hurt us ... our heart must go out to them

- How? It's so hard! How can we do it?
- We remember how on the cross Jesus identified with us
 - Remember how on the cross Jesus showed compassion to us
 - How on the cross Jesus' heart went out for those who were against him when he said, "*Father forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing*" (Luke 23:34)
 - How on the cross he paid the **\$18bn** debt you and I have with God and have absolutely no hope of paying

- We remember how on the cross Jesus absorbed the cost for you and I
 - But it wasn't money he paid
 - It was separation from his Father ... as he experienced the full wrath of God for all the times we have lied, bullied, hurt, slandered, retaliated, cheated and hated
 - **He absorbed that cost** ... so your debt could be cancelled

- You know when that servant is choking his fellow servant ... when he should be humble and generous and forgiving in the same way the king was towards him ... but instead he's acting like judge and king

- Only way you and I are not going to be like that servant and holding onto grudges and refuse to forgive others and acting like judge and king over others...
 - Is to see afresh the **grace of the** judge and king who has forgiven you
- When you do ... and you see how
 - he cancelled your debt
 - he identified with you on the cross
- When you get that ... when you see that ... it will free you to unlock the gates of forgiveness towards others
- **Illustration: Rwanda**
- In Rwanda in 1994, in 100 days more than 850,000 people were killed as part of the Rwandan genocide
- A man called Emmanuel was one of the men who perpetrated the horror
- But then Emmanuel came to know Jesus
 - and he was deeply convicted of his sin
 - and he tells the story of visiting the widow of one of the men he killed
- When he met with her he said
 - "I'm very sorry. I murdered your husband. I used my machete and I chopped your son until he died. I did not pause when I took the life of your daughter. But now I am filled with sorrow. I cannot pay my debt. Yet somehow God has forgiven me. I do not understand it. I don't think I ever will. Somehow, God has given me a second chance. Please forgive me.
- The widow stood there in front of him, looked up and said
 - "God forgives you ... and so do I"
- For the widow ... forgiveness came at a great cost
 - She had to put aside her natural response to hate him, avenge him
 - She had to bear the pain of forgiveness herself
- But she was able to do so as she remembered
 - God cancelled his debt and hers
 - Because on the cross Jesus identified with him and with her
- So her heart was able to go out to him just as Jesus heart had gone out to her

4. Conclusion

- Forgiveness and reconciliation aren't easy > it will mean absorbing the pain and the hurt you've experienced to do so
- But it's the only way you will be able to free yourself from the snare of anger, bitterness and hurt that you will carry around in your heart if you wont

- But when you look to the cross ...
 - And see the size of the debt that the king has cancelled for you
 - And see how his heart has gone out to you
- It will free you to do the same with others

PRAY