**Calvary Fellowship 10.30.2022 Matthew 18:10-35 “A Life Without Baggage”**

* **How many of U are over packers? That is, when U go on a 3-day trip, U take 7 pairs of shoes, 25 shirts, & 18 pairs of pants**
* How many of U are under packers? That is, U take 2 shirts on a 7-day trip
* I’m more on the under packer side - when I travel I take as little as possible & try to extend it as far as possible - especially when I’m traveling to speak
* But sometimes this comes back to bite U
* My wife & I drove up to Stuart a few weeks ago b/c I was officiating a wedding for a great couple in our church
* We did the rehearsal on Friday night & it was so cool outside b/c the resort was right on the ocean - the wedding was set for 11AM the next morning
* So the next day, we come down to the outdoor area for the wedding & it’s hot
* I mean, crazy hot - then the wedding doesn’t get started until almost noon b/c, well, if I tell U the family is Cuban, does that explain it? OK
* So I start the wedding & I’m sweating like a pentecostal preacher - I start sweating so much it’s in the my eyes & it’s dripping on my bible
* Then someone from the crowd gets me some napkins b/c I look like I’m sweating through my shirt b/c I’m wearing a suit
* Then I read the passage from Ecclesiastes about “how can I keep warm alone?” - I said, “Generally, that’s true, but in this weather you’ll be fine”
* I was so grateful when the bride was reading her vows b/c they were doing them in English & Spanish - now, the vows were beautiful
* So the groom does both - then the bride reads them in English & she says, “I’m not sure I can do this in Spanish too.” - I say, “Listen, I’m sure everyone here who’s melting will give U a pass on that.”
* Well, the wedding gets done & we go back to the hotel room & I have sweat through my undershirt, my dress shirt, my jacket, & my tie
* I wring my ties & it leaks water - and remember, I don’t pack anything more than I need - but I’m asked in sweat - my pants are drenched & so are my socks
* And my wife reminds me that she told me to pack 1 extra outfit just in case
* I say, “Carey, thank U. U really are an amazing woman.”
* She said, “Bob, don’t worry about it. But look, I packed 6 extra outfits w/ shoes to match all of them for a situation just like this.”
* **Do U know why I’m this way? B/c a typical Franquiz vacation when my kids were younger was a nightmare**
* Imagine 3 giant suitcases, 2 med. suitcases, 1 sm. suitcase, A Hello Kitty suitcase, a Lightning McQueen suitcase, a stroller, 2 car seats, my briefcase, a diaper bag & a backpack filled w/ Legos
* By the way, we were the reason airlines charge for luggage
* This is why this week I as in Tampa for a night visiting a couple of friends of mine & I could have fit everything I brought inside a shoebox
* Here’s the point - life is better when there’s less baggage
* **But too many people are carrying around more baggage than they know what to do w/ & it’s keeping from moving on**
* Baggage is usually what keeps us from getting where God wants them to go & becoming who God wants them to be
* **Here’s what happens in the lives of many people - they start out w/ no baggage, but someone hurts them, another person disappoints them**
* Then a relationship goes south, U passed over for a promotion
* It doesn’t happen all at once, we’d notice it if it happened all at once, but subtly, we get weighed down by all this baggage from our past
* **And what do U do when there’s all these hurts, resentments, frustrations & disappointments that have happened to us over the years?**
* Many people just get bitter about life & grow jaded to the point where they can’t even be happy b/c they’ve never learned to let go
* Or U can embrace what might be 1 of the toughest challenges as a Christian
* It’s learning to let go of the baggage - it’s the challenge of forgiveness
* **Before we get into how to forgive, I want to give U 4 things it’s not:**

**#1 - Forgiveness is not Justifying another Person’s Actions**

* When U forgive someone, you’re not saying what they did to U was OK
* U are simply letting go of the baggage that is holding U back
* It’s not about them as much as it is about U being free from their actions

**#2 - Forgiveness is not Waiting on the Passage of Time**

* Whoever said, “Time heals all wounds” is an idiot b/c many times just the opposite is true - I’ve watched time harden people who haven’t forgiven
* Time will help U if you’ve forgiven b/c the passing of time lessens the pain

**#3 - Forgiveness is not Denying You are Hurt**

* When U say, “It’s no big deal”, when U are hurt - that can get under your skin & like a splinter that goes attended, it causes infection & pain
* Forgiveness is about accepting you’re hurt & dealing w/ it in a godly way

**#4 - Forgiveness is not Automatically Trusting Them Again**

* Just b/c U forgive someone, it doesn’t mean U have to trust them
* Forgiveness is a choice we make/ Trust is something a person earns
* Forgive freely, but make people earn trust through wise choices & actions
* **Here’s the reality - sometimes, forgiveness is hard**
* So how do we forgive when someone has deeply hurt us & it’s not that we don’t want to let go of it, it’s that we don’t know how to let go of it?
* This is at the heart of what’s we’re going to talk about today
* We’re in message #28 of our series in the Gospel of Matthew
* We are working our way verse by verse through the life of Jesus & we’re at a point where Jesus wants to talk about dealing w/ conflict & forgiving
* Listen, this could be 1 of the most important messages U hear b/c I can guarantee someone is going to sin against U at some point in your life
* And you’ve got to decide how U want to handle it - U can avoid them, U can cancel them, U can disown them, or U can forgive them
* And here’s what I know to be true - the way to truly be free is to forgive & Jesus is going to show us now…

**———(v. 15-20)———**

**#1 - Forgiveness is the Beginning of Reconciliation**

* **Jesus begins this conversation by creating a scenario - a person sins against another - he says “a brother”, so this is 2 people of like faith**
* Then Jesus outlines 3 steps to reconciling the relationship
* 1 - go to the person 1 on 1 & talk to them/ 2 - bring someone else w/ U
* 3 - talk to the leaders of the church & see if they can talk sense into him
* Do U want to know what the problem is? We don’t do this
* We talk to everyone else & complain & vent & air out our laundry to anyone who will listen, but we won’t talk to the person who can hep us fix it
* B/c here’s what happens - when we talk things out w/ someone who agrees w/ us as we tell our sad story of how we were wronged
* We start to feel better - nothing has changed - but just like when U hav a bad meal & throw up, U feel better
* So same principle applies when U emotionally vomit on someone, U feel a little better b/c someone listened & they validated how U feel
* But that person is neither part of the problem, nor part of the solution
* And the more that we do that, the less appetite we’ll have for real reconciliation
* **I have a friend whose wife put him on a diet - and he resented the fact that his wife decided this for him**
* So he’d throw out the lunch she packed for him & eat whatever he wanted
* Then, on the way home from the office, he’d stop at McDonald’s & eat a Big Mac, fries & Coke before getting home
* 1 day his wife says, “Bob, I don’t get it. He’s eating what I tell him, but he’s still gaining weight. He comes home & doesn’t even finish his dinner b/c he says he’s full. But he gained 5 pounds last week. I don’t know what to do.”
* What do U say? So I said, “Yeah. That’s weird. I don’t know what to tell U.”
* And it didn’t matter what she made - he didn’t have an appetite for it b/c he was already full from something else - the same thing is true w/ conflict
* Lots of people don’t try to reconcile a relationship b/c everyone around them is validating their pain & telling them all of these social media platitudes
* “If they don’t love U at your worst, they don’t deserve U at your best” - shut up!
* Hey, maybe your worst is the problem here - maybe we need to apologize for the dumb things we do & humble ourselves b/c it’s the right thing to do
* B/c our goal should always be to win the relationship over winning the argument
* “All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation.” (2 Corinthians 5:18 NIV)
* In this passage, the apostle Paul is saying that through Jesus, God has reconciled us to Himself - that means reconciliation is at the heart of what we do
* We’ve already experienced it as someone who was in the wrong b/c we’re the ones who did the sinning & God is the 1 who did the forgiving
* And now we have a template for when someone sins against us
* We can forgive & reconcile & watch God transform relationships if we will do in the right way - going to the person, bringing faithful friends if needed
* And if all else fails, as believers, we go to the church for mediation & counsel

**———(v. 21-27)———**

**#2 - Forgiveness is the Basis of Relationships**

* **So my wife & I celebrated 25 years of holy matrimony this year & people ask us how we’ve made it work for 25 years b/c we seem happy**
* And there’s lots of things that make a marriage work, but 1 of them is begin really good at forgiving - the other is …..
* Here’s what I mean: I’m a bit of a thinker by nature, so I get lost in my own thoughts & what’s happening in the outside world kind of fades out
* **So my son & I take the garbage out at my house, but as I’m doing it, I’m thinking about all of the other things I need to do when I get inside**
* So I go back inside & start doing 1 of the things I remembered that I have to do
* For the 1st 15 years of marriage, I’ve never remembered to put in a new garbage bag - what’s weirder is that it took me 15 years to realize
* I mentioned to her, “Do I usually forget to put the new bag in?” - She said, “You’ve never put a new bag in.” - She went 15 years w/o saying anything
* I said, “Why have U never said anything?” She said, “B/c it’s who U are. You’re always so deep in thought & it’s not that big of a deal. If it really mattered to me I would have said something.”
* **The point is, she’s been forgiving me of the same thing 100’s of times**
* And this is how the conversation starts - Peter asking how many times he should forgive someone the same offense - Peter says 7 times
* There was a rabbinic teaching in that day that U only had to forgive someone 3 times & the 4th time it was not forgiven
* So Peter is stretching his mind & saying, “I think I could muster forgiving someone 7 times. Is that enough?”
* Jesus’ answer is, “70x7” - that doesn’t mean that Jesus is upping the quota to 490, but once U reach 491 you’re off the hook & U can punch the guy
* It’s a very Jewish way of saying, “There’s no limit. You just keep forgiving.”
* **Then Jesus tells story of a kingdom who came to town to settle accounts**
* There’s 1 man brought before the king who owes 10,000 talents
* To put it in our currency, this man owed $5.2 billion, which was the entire amount Herod the Great collected in income taxes
* So Jesus is drawing on a real king & what it would be like if 1 person owed him the entire amount of $5.2 Billion
* **He can’t pay, so the king orders that he & his family he sold so that payment can be made - what’s happening here?**
* In the ancient world, there was no chapter 11 bankruptcy or debt consolidation
* U had debts & U needed to pay them when they came due
* If U didn’t have the money, U (and if necessary, your family) would be sold into servitude to pay off your debt
* Now, when critics of the Bible say that the Bible supports slavery, they think it supports slavery like it existed in America & that’s just not true
* Jewish law set limits to the servitude where it could only be for 7 years & once that time expired, the debt was considered paid in full
* “If you buy a Hebrew servant, he shall serve six years; and in the seventh he shall go out free and pay nothing.” (Exodus 21:2 NKJV)
* Just to make the point, slavery by force or through kidnapping was a crime punishable by death according to Exodus 21:16
* If a master mistreated a servant & hit him or her, they were free to go & the debt was considered cancelled according to Exodus 21:26-27
* In Job 31 we learn that a slave can take his master to court is he feels he is being treated unfairly & he could sue for rights he was deprived of
* In Deut. 23 we learn that if U find a slave who has run away from his master, God commands the Hebrews not to send him back - why?
* B/c if he ran away, the situation must have been pretty bad
* Here’s my point - does that sound like slavery in America? No - b/c it wasn’t
* That’s why when people say, “Why doesn’t NT speak out against slavery?” - it shows they don’t understand that slaves were repaying debts
* Bu there’s a detail in the parable that Jesus gives that I want U to notice b/c it’s the key to unlocking the meaning of this entire story
* The man w/ the debt never asks to be forgiven - he simply ask for more time
* He says, “Just be patient w/ me & I’ll pay U everything”
* 1st, this is lunacy - this is the tax revenue of a country & he says, “I just more time. U know, I’ve got some old baseball cards & some Crypto I need to sell”
* But the king is moved w/ compassion & forgives the entire debt
* This should be where the story ends - the man becomes the most loving, generous, forgiving person in the world
* What Ebenezer Scrooge is to Christmas, this guy should become to Tax day
* But it’s not - this is where the story starts to hit home…

**———(v. 28-35)———**

**#3 - Forgiveness is the Behavior of Remembering**

* **When this the king forgives this man of his debt, he wasn’t just forgiving the debt - he was giving this man his life back**
* **the point that Jesus is making - when the king forgave the man, he was releasing the man from a life of misery**
* The same is true for us when we show mercy & forgive
* The only difference is, when we don’t forgive, we’re the ones in prison
* Unforgiveness traps us & keeps us stuck in the place we are
* **I can’t tell U how many times I’ve talked to people who refuse to forgive someone & then blame that person as the reason they can’t move on**
* When a person goes through a painful divorce & doesn’t forgive them, it keeps them from experiencing a healthy relationship in the future
* When a person has been betrayed & they refuse to let it go, it keeps them from ever trusting another person again
* Why? B/c unforgiveness is a prison & U don’t get out until U release the debt
* **When we won’t forgive, we become the man who had been forgiven much, but wouldn’t forgive the person who owed him a little**
* He finds a guy who owes him 100 denarii, or $2,000 in today’s currency, & he won’t show mercy & forgive - instead, he throws the guy into prison
* If you’re a Christian & Jesus has forgiven U, then U don’t have the luxury of withholding forgiveness from someone
* U owed God $5.2 Billion & He forgave U - so when a guy comes along & owes U $2K, U forgive
* Not b/c they deserve it, but b/c it reflects the God who forgave U
* “Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst. But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his immense patience as an example for those who would believe in him and receive eternal life.” (1 Timothy 1:15-16 NIV)
* The power of mercy is that it has the ability to set U free from unforgiveness, from hate, from bitterness, from revenge, from needless pain & regret
* How? Through embracing the Gospel that mercy has been shown to us & now we can be dispensers of mercy
* **I have 3 kids - they are 15, 13, & 10 - and life gotten a lot easier**
* People cared me about having teenagers & I can happily report to U that having 2 teenagers in my house has been an absolute joy
* But there was a time when all of them were under 5 & that was rough
* When they are that young, being a dad is like being a perpetual referee in a hockey game
* I spent much of my time at home breaking up fights, calling timeouts & sending them to the penalty box, which is a chair they have in their room
* Each of the kids has a chair in their room that they get sent to when they misbehave - Honestly, I don’t even understand how this strategy works
* They do something wrong, so I send them to the place where they keep all of their toys so they can learn a lesson
* I wish my mom & step-dad had learned about time-out when I was growing up
* B/c we didn’t have time out - we only had knockout
* 1 of the things we make the kids do when they fight is they have to apologize, then the other person has to say, “I forgive U”
* Then we make them hug for 20 seconds - they hate it, but I love it
* And if they count too fast, I double the time
* **But the other day Xander & Olivia are playing & Xander did something that bothered Olivia & she started to cry & she hit her brother**
* Xander tells us & Carey & I come over & Olivia at age 3 knows what’s coming
* I say, “what happened?” - Xander starts to tell the story & Olivia says, “I’m going” & she puts herself in timeout - I thought it was great
* I told Carey, “They’re disciplining themselves. If we can teach them to cook for themselves, we don’t have to take them on vacation w/ us”
* So Olivia stayed in her room & wouldn’t come out b/c she wouldn’t forgive her brother - I would ask, “Do U want to come out?” “No!” - Ok
* But when she finally decided to forgive her brother, she was free
* But here’s the other thing - Xander was fine - he was playing & enjoying life
* Olivia’s refusal to forgive didn’t limit him in any way
* **Here’s the funny thing about forgiveness - when someone hurts U, U can’t stop thinking about it - U keep replaying the scenes in your mind**
* How do U know when you’ve released the other person? When U stop running the tapes in your mind of what the other person did
* That doesn’t mean you’re going to magically forget it
* But it does mean when you’ve forgiven someone, that after a season of time U won’t think of that incident when U see that person
* **Listen to what I’m going to tell U – it’s not easy at 1st, but once U forgive U realize that the days you spent w/ unforgiveness was a prison**
* U had no peace, no rest – only torment b/c of what someone else did to U - & we let it keep happening to us b/c we refused to forgive
* That’s why bitter people talk about the same hurts over & over - they can’t move past it - but when U forgive, U open the prison & are free
* **Forgiveness takes 3 intentional decisions:**
* **#1 - It Takes Recognizing that it’s about you -** Don’t wait for that person to do something before U forgive - U have to decide to do it
* **#2 - It Takes Deciding to Forgive Right Now** - Don’t wait until next week to think about it - forgiveness begins w/ a decision U make in your heart today
* **#3 - It Takes Being Forgiven to be Able to Forgive** - If U haven’t made a decision to receive the forgiveness of God, today’s the day
* **Once U forgive, that’s when U experience God’s healing in your life**
* “Make this your common practice: Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you can live together whole and healed. The prayer of a person living right with God is something powerful to be reckoned with.” (James 5:16 MSG)
* **Revenge is a powerful force b/c it offers us everything we want, but it can’t deliver the goods**
* Revenge makes us think that if we just hurt someone the way they hurt us that the satisfaction of that will bring healing into our lives
* The truth is, it’s not true - revenge can’t deliver that b/c we were never meant to be God’s agents of vengeance - that’s God’s job
* **When I try to exact revenge, I’m miserable - why? B/c I’m trying to do God’s job & there’s something I’ve learned & that’s that I’m not God**
* So I have to trust that God will do His work & I have to do the thing that will bring healing & wholeness into my life & that’s to forgive
* So who do U need to forgive? Your parents/ a family member/ friend, an ex-spouse/ 1 of your kids/ your boss/ a co-worker? Forgive & be free
* **The question for U to answer is, do U want to be free?**
* Are U willing to forgive someone who hurt U for the sake of U being let out of the prison of your own bitterness, hatred, revenge, & misery?
* **And here’s the other thing about forgiveness that I didn’t realize until I was hurt deeply - that forgiving 70x7 isn’t about something doing the same thing over & over**
* It’s about forgiving that 1 thing that someone did to U
* Sometimes U have to forgive multiple times a day - when it’s multiple times a week - then it’s every other day - then it’s once a month
* But the more U purposely choose to forgive, after a season of time, U won’t think about it much anymore
* And it’s not b/c U accept that what they did was ok - it’s wasn’t ok
* But you’re not in the revenge business - you’re in the freedom business
* And God is inviting U to be free & liv a life that most people only dream of
* A life that isn’t tied down by baggage that keeps U from experiencing all that God has for U - this is what you’ve always wanted & it’s what God offers