

The Miracle of Forgiveness

Matthew 18:21-35

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*Disclaimer - this message will include some mature themes, including reference to violence and murder

-Sabbatical travels a year ago

-WW2 - Auschwitz, southern Poland

-Camps 1 and 2, Birkenau- 396 acres, 10 miles of barbed wire, up to 90,000 prisoners at a time, 700 in a house, 80 people in a train car, 1.2 million, maybe more killed there (main location of the Final Solution). *show pics

-considered one of the darkest places on earth, where one of the worst acts in human history took place

And what of survivors...?

Q. Was this unforgivable?

Could God forgive men who participated in this?

How could man be expected to forgive such an act?

And what of the recent shootings in our own community of Muscatine?

*Forgiveness - being forgiven and offering forgiveness is at the very core of the heart of God and the Christian faith. It really is a miracle because it's supernatural

Quote: "Everyone thinks forgiveness is a lovely idea until he has something to forgive." -CS Lewis

Q. How important is forgiveness to the Christian life?

Ephesians 4:32 - Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

Colossians 3:12-13 - Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, **13** bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.

Main Point:

Forgiveness is supernatural because it begins with the heart of God, who then empowers us to forgive.

-If you are here today and experiencing the weight of guilt and shame because of your sin, there IS forgiveness for you that begins in the heart of God!

Psalm 32:1-5 - Blessed are the Forgiven - *Of David*

1 Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.

2 Blessed is the man against whom the Lord counts no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit.

3 For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long.

4 For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. *Selah*

5 I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity; I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord," and you forgave the iniquity of my sin. *Selah*

- Acknowledge sin
- Confess
- Ask for forgiveness
- Repent

Psalm 103:10-12 - *Of David*

10 He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities.

11 For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him;

12 as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us.

1. We must be reconciled to God first and foremost

Romans 8:1 - There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

2. We must be reconciled to our brothers and sisters in Christ

***Opening Prayer**

Context: right after confronting a brother for sin

Text: Matthew 18:21-35

The Parable of the Unforgiving Servant

21 Then Peter came up and said to him, "Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?" **22** Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times.

Luke 17:3-4

Pay attention to yourselves! If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him, **4** and if he sins against you seven times in the day, and turns to you seven times, saying, 'I repent,' you must forgive him."

-Rabbis would discuss such things, and recommended not more than three times
-Peter's *seven times* is therefore generous

"If the church is the community of the forgiven, then all its relationships will be marked by a forgiveness which is not a mere form of words, but an essential characteristic..." -Commentary

-Cultural Christianity does not attract the masses, but Christians acting like Christ certainly does

***Unbroken: Louis Zamperini story** (book and movie) *show pic

1917-2014, loved running (got into mischief), 1936 Berlin Olympics, joined the air force, went to fly in WW2 and got shot down, adrift at sea 47 days, PROMISED GOD HE WOULD SERVE HIM, captured by the Japanese and was POW for 2 years, tortured, sent home after war, married, alcohol, PTSD, GOD PURSUES his wife, she becomes Christian, he resists, GOD CONTINUES TO PURSUE, finally comes to faith at a Billy Graham crusade, GOD REMINDS HIM OF PROMISES, nightmares and alcoholism stop, he decides to forgive his captors and even visit them, story has touched millions...(one in a billion)

*Stories of forgiveness are as old as the Bible (**see Joseph - Genesis 45**). This is not something that began with Jesus but has always been important to the heart of God. However, Jesus always takes things to the next level...

Matthew 6 - The Lord's Prayer

9 Pray then like this:

"Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.

10 Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

11 Give us this day our daily bread,

12 and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

13 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

don't stop there, go to the next level

14 For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, **15** but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

"The point is not so much that forgiving is a prior condition of being forgiven, but that forgiveness cannot be a one-way process. Like all God's gifts it brings responsibility; it must be passed on. To ask for forgiveness on any other basis is hypocrisy." -Commentary

*This kind of unforgiveness toward others of someone who HAS been forgiven is unacceptable...

- Can damage our relationship with God
- Can cause prayers to go unanswered
- Can create distance with God

Quote: “To be a Christian means to forgive the inexcusable because God has forgiven the inexcusable in you.” -CS Lewis

Back to the text of Matthew 18: vv. 23-35 - Jesus tells a parable

Kingdom Parables:

23 Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. **24** When he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents.

v. 23 - the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son or a man who sowed good seed in his field/or is like...a grain of mustard seed, or like leaven, or a hidden treasure, or a search for fine pearls, or a net used for fishing, or a master of a house...

v. 24 - one talent was worth years of wages (15-20), highest number in Greek? “too many to count” or *infinity*. Ten thousand talents= billions/insurmountable

25 And since he could not pay, his master ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made. **26** So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.’ **27** And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt.

v. 25 - sell into slavery

v. 26 - pleading for mercy

v. 27 - “out of pity for him” compare to the compassion of Jesus

“...released him and forgave him the debt.”

-King will go bankrupt, will cost him everything

-The debt doesn't go away, it is paid for or absorbed by the one forgiving

28 But when that same servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii, and seizing him, he began to choke him, saying, ‘Pay what you owe.’ **29** So his fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you.’

30 He refused and went and put him in prison until he should pay the debt.

v. 28 - 100 denarii, 3 months wages

v. 29 - servant says the same thing he said to the king

v. 30 - debtor's prison

31 When his fellow servants saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their master all that had taken place. **32** Then his master summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. **33** And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?' **34** And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers, until he should pay all his debt. **35** So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart."

v. 32 - I forgave you but you weren't willing to forgive

v. 34 - must now pay the debt, will never get out of prison

v. 35 - we must forgive from the heart

When God accepts people, God's grace changes them. A forgiving spirit is evidence that the person has been forgiven.

Morris, L. (1988). Luke: an introduction and commentary (Vol. 3, p. 152). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

Implications:

Q. How many of you actually read "user agreements" and the never ending "terms and conditions" when you sign up for something or buy a new product?

When it comes to your relationship with God and people, you might be thinking...

"I didn't sign up for this"

- In our relationship with God - it's confessing early and often so we don't drift apart from Him
- In our relationships with brothers and sister in Christ - it's seeking reconciliation to show a watching world what true brotherly love looks like (offering an alternative to Cancel Culture)
- In parenting - keeping short accounts with our kids
- In marriage- Getting rid of the scorecard and not using something against our spouse that we told them we forgave them of

2 Common responses: both extreme

1. *Forgive and forget?* (not some form of sanctified amnesia) In Jeremiah, God even says, "I will remember their sins no more"

2. *"I'll forgive but I'll never forget"*

-let it go, not using it against them, not letting it control you

Q. So how do I go about forgiving?

Dallas Willard - The Scandal of the Kingdom (On the Parables of Jesus)

1. Approaching forgiveness too directly may cause you to fail (like temptation). Instead, focus your mind on something else
2. Forgiveness is not a simple act of the will...don't just try to not pay them back, but fill your mind with Jesus Christ and how he responded to those who hurt him

*Jesus and Stephen - as they were dying:

“father forgive them for they know not what they are doing” Luke 23:32, “Lord do not hold this sin against them.” Acts 7:60

3. Pray, acknowledging to God that you cannot forgive another person without his help (Christ is the key)

*Pray sincerely for their good

This doesn't mean being a doormat, this doesn't mean putting up with abuse

-we must be careful when it comes to abuse, especially in the church

Doesn't mean their aren't consequences

(Sometimes restitution is warranted, OT law but also instances in the NT like Zacchaeus paying back those he defrauded)

It can break trust and relationships, leaving people heartbroken

*at some point, God may grant you a gift of grace, taking away the hurt and bitterness

-we remember the pain but aren't consumed by it

Main Point:

Forgiveness is supernatural because it begins with the heart of God, who then empowers us to forgive.

-We live in a day and age when everyone is offended by everything all the time! (people are on edge and volatile)

social media is a hotbed for hate speech, tribalism is at an all time high...

driving in your car, waiting in line

we must learn patience in your circumstances

learn patience with people
is this something you struggle with?

Q. Is there a pattern of anger and impatience in your life?

James 1:19-20

Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; **20** for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.

We must learn to have patience
We must learn to not be easily offended
Choose to be not easily offended

-burning bridges today is as easy and as common as blocking someone on your phone
-ghosting people
-canceling people (personal level or large scale)

*The biggest problem with Cancel Culture labeling certain people irredeemable

Cancel Culture is so prevalent...

Article: Because there is no mechanism in our culture to separate sin from sinners, and thus no forgiveness. Cancel culture seeks to destroy sin, but in the process, it destroys people...

The stories are prevalent but is this truly the way of Christ?

There is a difference between someone having a lapse in judgment or making a mistake or being deceived (or whatever it may be), and someone who has shown a pattern or history of changing their beliefs or convictions (or living in sin) in order to align with culture.

Who are our enemies?

*No longer the people trying to suppress or kill you but those who have differing viewpoints

Love Your Enemies

Matthew 5:43-45

43 "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' **44** But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, **45** so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.

Love is to will the good of the other -Thomas Aquinas

*Praying for them first, seek for their good and well-being

***Botham Jean - murder trial of Amber Guyger**

In 2018, Dallas, Texas, Amber Guyger (off-duty cop) entered an apartment, believed it was her own and that there was an intruder, she shot and killed the young black man, only to realize she was not in her apartment but his.

At the trial, Brandt Jean embraced his brother's (Botham) killer, Amber Guyger

***show video**

withholding forgiveness - thinking we're better, comparing ourselves to other people rather than God, "there is none righteous, no not one"

Q. Do we know better than God?

We must remember:

1 John 1:8-9 - If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. **9** If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

what unforgiveness does to us (spiritually) mentally and physically...when anger, bitterness, resentment build up in your mind and heart, it affects you physically, literally taking years off your life

- constant fight or flight state
- continuous release of stress hormones
- anxiety and depression
- blood pressure and increased risk of heart disease

Q. What is unforgiveness doing to you?

Proverbs 25 - radical

If your enemy is hungry, give him bread to eat,
and if he is thirsty, give him water to drink,
22 for you will heap burning coals on his head,
and the Lord will reward you.

Romans 12:19

"vengeance is mine, I will repay," says the Lord

God will right wrongs (Col 3, Psalm 10, 103)

2006 in Penn.

- *Amish community tragedy - 5 girls killed in a one-room school house
- they attended the killer's funeral and offered support

2023 in Tenn.

**Nashville Covenant school shooters
- funeral was paid for by the victims' families

Main Point:

Forgiveness is supernatural because it begins with the heart of God, who then empowers us to forgive.

Action Steps:

1. Keep short accounts with people

Ephesians 4:26 - Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger,

2. Forgiving the unforgivable may be required of us

Psalm 32

6 Therefore let everyone who is godly offer prayer to you at a time when you may be found; surely in the rush of great waters, they shall not reach him.

7 You are a hiding place for me; you preserve me from trouble; you surround me with shouts of deliverance. *Selah*

***Corrie Ten Boom - The Hiding Place**

A Dutch Christian whose family hid Jews in their home during WW2, she and her sister were arrested and eventually ended up at Ravensbruck concentration camp enduring horrible conditions, her sister Betsie maintained that God was always at work despite their circumstances, teaching Corrie much about love and forgiveness, Betsie died in prison but Corrie was released soon after, just 2 years later she was speaking to a crowd in Munich about God's forgiveness, at the end a man came up and told her he had become a Christian and asked forgiveness, she recognized him as one of the most cruel guards at the camp...she finally shook his hand.

She later wrote that a current of God's love seemed to pass from her shoulder, down her arm, and into her hand. Her hatred vanished, replaced by a deep love for the man. She wrote "Forgiveness is not a human emotion, but a divine gift."

"When He tells us to love our enemies, He gives, along with the command, the love itself." - Corrie Ten Boom

3. Make things right with God and with others today

*Psalm 51 - David's confession

Have mercy on me, O God,

according to your steadfast love;
according to your abundant mercy
blot out my transgressions.

2 Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,
and cleanse me from my sin!

10 Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and renew a right spirit within me.

11 Cast me not away from your presence,
and take not your Holy Spirit from me.

12 Restore to me the joy of your salvation,
and uphold me with a willing spirit.

17 The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit;
a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

*Laboring in Prayer service a year ago

-someone saw another person they needed to ask forgiveness from and made things right

-make things right, send a text, tell God you will go to them, forgive them from your heart or don't participate...

In 1 Corinthians 11 Paul writes...

²⁷ "Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. ²⁸ But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup."

Communion Setup