

Forgive Us Our Sins sermon 5/19/2019

On **June 14, 2017** 24 Republican congressman gathered to practice baseball at a field in a Washington suburb in preparation for the annual Congressional Baseball Game for charity. Suddenly, without warning, a gunman began spraying the field with bullets. Four of the congressmen were struck with bullets. **Congressman Steve Scalise**, was the most critically injured and was rushed to the hospital where for several hours they weren't sure if he would even live. They were able to save his life but his life will never be the same. Over the past two years, he has needed multiple surgeries, still undergoes regular physical therapy and now walks with a cane.

A week ago, **Representative Scalise** and **vice president, Mike Pence**, flew down to Louisiana to meet with 3 pastors from predominantly black churches which were intentionally set fire to and destroyed recently. Scalise, shared with the press that he went to give encouragement to these pastors in light of their devastating losses, but also while there Scalise sought counsel from these pastors on how to go about forgiving the gunman that tried to kill him. One of the pastors in particular, **pastor Gerald Toussaint** of the **Mount Pleasant Baptist Church** shared that he had already forgiven the man who torched his church.

Scalise shared that he's "***never internally forgiven the shooter. It's something I've struggled with as a Catholic. I mean, part of my faith is forgiveness and I'm working to get there.***" While he didn't share details of their talk, he did share "***Pastor Toussaint's faith is really helping me in my faith journey towards forgiveness.***" And they've agreed to meet again to discuss the process of forgiveness again.

The portion of the Lord's Prayer that we're looking at this morning speaks to this very issue. Jesus said:

Matthew 6:9-13 (NIV) *"Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. **And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.** And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one, for yours is the kingdom and the power and glory forever. Amen."*

After ending this model prayer, Jesus felt it important enough to make an additional comment on just this aspect of forgiveness. Jesus adds this comment.

Matthew 6:14-15 (NIV) *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.*

It's pretty evident from Jesus' teaching throughout his ministry that he understood the importance of us forgiving those who have hurt us.

At one point Peter asked Jesus how many times we have to forgive someone who hurts us and Peter throws out a suggested number - "*up to seven times?*" Jesus' response blew Peter and the other disciples minds when he said: "*I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-times seven.*" In response the disciples said: "*Lord, increase our faith.*" They realized how hard, virtually impossible, this was going to be and I'm pretty certain many of you would agree with Peter. Many of you have been hurt deeply by individuals and have struggled mightily with forgiving them, just like Congressman Steve Scalise is. And I'm convinced that part of the challenge is realizing what forgiveness is and what it isn't.

Misconceptions About Forgiveness:

1. Forgiveness isn't a feeling that happens in an instant but is a choice that involves a process. Many times in life we allow ourselves to be controlled by our feelings. We become angry and in the heat of an argument say things we wish we could take back. Or someone hurts us and we try to figure out how to get even – but that rarely ends up well.

If you're a follower of Jesus, part of your belief system needs to be that God created us and therefore, as our Maker, He knows what's the best way for us to live. Therefore, if He repeatedly tells us that we need to forgive those who hurt us then there must be something important in the process of forgiveness.

Also, with some hurts you need to realize, like Congressman Scalise, that forgiveness can take time and a process. Sometimes **forgiving too quickly** doesn't allow you to heal through a proper process and you end up just stuffing your feelings.

2. Forgiveness means forgetting

People have often lived with the misconception that as long as I remember the hurt someone caused me then I've not really forgiven them. That's totally not true. There's some pain that others have inflicted upon you that you'll probably remember the rest of your life. The challenge in forgiveness is not striving to forget that pain but to move past it in a Christ honoring way.

3. Forgiveness means re-establishing a relationship with that person.

God wants you to have a safe and healthy boundaries with others.

Romans 12:17-18 (NIV) *Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. 18 If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.*

The context of this verse is someone who has done evil to you. But verse 18 admits that it might not be possible, or even wise or safe, to live at peace with some people. Some of you have been abused: physically or verbally by others and it might not be possible, or safe, to live at peace with them. There is a difference between forgiving someone and reconciling with someone. You can't build a relationship unless there's a mutual understanding of truth and trust.

4. Forgiveness means overlooking justice.

God is a just God and requires consequences for our actions. When David sinned with Bathsheba it cost the life of their baby. Sometimes we struggle or refuse to forgive someone because we don't want to let them off the hook of punishment. But look at the next verse after God tells us to strive to live at peace. Romans 12:19 (NIV) *Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord.*

I like how one preacher put it. He said, "*forgiveness is not letting someone off the hook, but taking them off of your hook and putting them on God's hook.*"

So a large part of forgiveness is trusting that God will administer His justice, if that's required.

Truths about Forgiveness:

1. Forgiveness is about setting yourself free

When you refuse to forgive someone what exactly are you doing? From a salvation sense, only God can wipe away the stain on a person's soul that every sin creates. You don't have the capacity to wipe away that stain, only God can do that. So, what exactly do you do when you forgive someone? You reach a point where you make a decision to no longer hold what they did to you against them. You choose to no longer hate them or desire for them to suffer, but instead you begin to move towards releasing them from that hate and bitterness and desires for revenge. You put all of that in God's hands. **Christian author, Lewis Smedes**, wrote what many consider the classic book on forgiveness entitled "**The Art of Forgiving**". In it he makes many great statements, but no doubt my favorite is this: "**To forgive is to set a prisoner free, and discover that prisoner is you.**".

Think about that and let it sink in for a moment. I've known several individuals who were hurt so badly that they refused to forgive that person. And it ended up eating away at them day and night. They became consumed with bitterness and revenge. And they felt like forgiving that person was to minimize the pain they had caused this individual and they wanted them to suffer longer. But the truth is, the person who harmed them had moved on with life and they are the ones stuck in a cage of unforgiveness. The only way to move on from that is to release the offender by genuinely forgiving them. Then you can begin to focus on the good things in life and begin to seize control once again.

2. You can forgive someone without them repenting

Some people falsely believe that true repentance can't happen unless the person who hurt you comes to a point of remorse and asks you to forgive them. Just one quick comment. Jesus did – on the cross Jesus said, "*Father forgive them for they don't know what they are doing.*" And if Jesus asked for forgiveness for those who demanded his crucifixion, then the pain others have caused you must be less than that. Going back to point one, if forgiveness was contingent upon the offender asking you for forgiveness – then they are in charge of whether you move on with life or not. However, when you realize they don't hold that power over you, then you can release them from that power and release them from revenge.

3. Christ forgave your debt, therefore forgive others.

Colossians 2:13b-14 (NIV) *God forgave us all our sins, having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross.*

The Apostle Paul, states that each of us, because of our many sins, owe God a legal debt. He uses imagery from the accounting world and paints a picture that God has an accounting register in which He keeps track of all of our sins. And we all have a large list of debts we owe Him. But the reality is that we could never do enough good deeds to pay off our debt. So, Christ came and died on a cross to pay that debt you and I owe.

Someone wrote: "**Jesus came to pay a debt he did not owe, because we owed a debt we cannot pay.**"

So, hold on to that thought and add in the teaching expressed in the next chapter in Colossians.

Colossians 3:13 (NIV) *Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.*

Notice that little word "as". That little tiny word sets the standard for how we should forgive those who hurt us. Forgive others just as, or to the full extent, that Christ forgave you. What extent did Jesus go to forgive you – he left heaven to come down to us in order to cancel the debt you owe by dying on a cross. That sets the bar for our forgiveness of others pretty high.

The Process of Forgiveness:

This is where I leave you hanging, just a bit. Tomorrow night at Life Group, which meets here from 6:30-8pm, we're going to be discussing this process of forgiveness. So, I invite all of you to come join us right here in the Welcome Center. And if you can't make it I'll be posting the details about this process on our website on Tuesday morning. If you struggle with unforgiveness then you might want to make every effort to attend tomorrow night.

God wants each and every one of us to live in the fullness of forgiveness – His forgiveness of you and your forgiveness of others. Jesus claimed that he came to set the captives free and for some of you, your brand of bondage is the shackles of unforgiveness. Perhaps you've lived with it for many years and has often stolen your joy of living in the fullness of God's goodness and many blessings. God wants to set you free from those handcuffs. Please join me in a closing prayer.

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