

Title: Enough Mercy to share
Text: Matthew 6.12
Theme: Debt and Forgiveness.
Series: Matthew #32
Prop Stmt. Mercy drives mercy (A change of heart drives a change of heart.)

Read Text:

It is ironic how so much of Christianity looks so little like Christ. Church life is notorious for putting on a façade. This is not only confusing and potentially devastating to children, it is the opposite of what Christ calls us to be. In his first publicly recorded sermon Jesus really spends a great deal of time on this. When you give (6.2)...when you pray (6.5)...when you fast (6.16)...What kind of a “religion” is this? What kind of a kingdom is this? What kind of a king is this? This is a king whose reign begins in our hearts because he insists on ruling over every portion of our being. The prayer that Christ teaches us to follow reflects this. We are to pray to our Father (God) with a passion for the glory of his name to be spread throughout the earth. We are to pray for his kingdom to come and for the day to come when his desired will is being carried out on earth like it is in heaven. We are pray with a daily dependence upon God for our daily needs, looking to him to supply moment by moment exactly what we need. Well, what are some of those things that we need moment by moment? We need bread to sustain our bodies. And we need forgiveness. We are prone to sin. Therefore, we need to live with a daily sensitivity to God, looking to him consistently for grace and forgiveness. We also need to look to God for grace and mercy so that we will be ready to forgive others when we are sinned against. But, these truths, as straightforward as Christ presents them in this text and throughout his teaching ministry, are today the occasion for a great deal of confusion.

Three lies to confront:

- I need to forgive myself. This presumes two things:
 - o I sinned against myself. (I am the standard)
 - o God’s forgiveness is easier (less costly) than my forgiveness.
- The sins of others are more serious than my own.
- I need to forgive God. (utterly absurd)

A truth to confess

- My sin (even just one) against God is infinitely worse than the innumerable sins of others against me.

Why does Jesus want us to pray this? 1) This is a very big issue! Foundational to everything about what it means to follow Christ is the issue of forgiveness. It is so important that not only does Jesus command us to pray about it, but, then he gives additional commentary in vs. 14-15 about it. Now, it is certainly possible that when Jesus was originally teaching this, that he said other things that Matthew did not record. But, obviously the Spirit of God thought that this was so needful for us, that this additional

explanation on the part of Christ was included. The issue of forgiveness has been muddled so much that many professing Christians are very fuzzy about it. This issue is so important that Jesus spends a very lengthy parable on it, later in chapter 18. I will appeal to that later on in the message. But, not only is this a very big issue, but, 2) I need God's help to realize this. We are so prone to believe the lie that we can pay back what we owe.

I. We are in debt.

Many years ago, my kids were fighting over the TV. If I remember the story correctly one of them had decided that it was time to turn the TV off, which meant that if he was done watching it, then everyone was done watching it. One of the girls, thought differently. Just because he was done does not mean that she was done. So, even though he turned it off, she turned it back on. He then turned it off, and she turned it on. This sent back and forth for a while, until there was this little "pfzzt" and wisp of smoke that emerged from the control panel.

I was reminded of this recently when I was researching a story in one of my books and I came across this piece of paper. (slide) "Dear Dad, I'm sorry for broken the TV. I hope I will somehow pay baack 1,000000 Dollars." I took a picture of this and sent it to my kids and let them know that they could start the payment plan anytime now. The TV seemed like an enormous expense to a child. And while I appreciated the sentiment, my kids did not have the means to pay for the TV.

Former Detroit Mayor, Kwame Kilpatrick was sentence to 28 years in prison for his conviction of extortion, racketeering, bribery and fraud. The 28 years is the easy part of the sentence. The Feds are asking the judge to order him and Bobby Ferguson to pay back 9.6 million dollars. Now think of this. How can he pack back several million dollars when he has no means to earn money because he is in prison? Kwame owes a debt that is staggering, but it is not impossible to pay. I grant you that it is not likely, but it is not impossible. When he gets out of prison, someone could give him the money to pay what he owes. He could possibly write a book, and go on a speaking tour. There may be people who will pay to hear him. Again, it is not likely, but it is not impossible. On the other hand, most of us look at Kwame and think that he is in really deep weeds, whereas, we, are not so bad. We think that man's prison is more serious than God's justice. The fact that we are not in a prison at the moment does not mean that we are not in debt.

Now, some of the effect of the words of Christ is lost on us because most of us are not all that familiar with the concept of a debtor's prison. Jesus talked about this in Matthew 18. A person who incurred debt that he could not pay, was taken by the officials and put into prison, while his home and goods were sold in an attempt to pay back what little he could, while his wife and children had to live with merciful relatives, or in cultures of slavery were sold into slavery to help pay back the debt. Now, we look at that and say, well, that wasn't too smart. Throw the guy in jail and he will never pay the debt off. However, the specter of a debtor's prison was a powerful incentive to people to not incur debt and to be very mindful to pay what they owed.

So, when Jesus is calling us to pray like this, we are to pray, not only in complete dependency upon God for daily needs, like bread, but with urgency for spiritual needs, too. We are in debt and if all things were equal, if everything was really fair, then we would be sentenced and condemned for the spiritual debt that our sin has incurred. We need forgiveness from God. We are in desperate need for forgiveness from God.

II. We need forgiveness from God.

A. What is forgiveness?

Webster's dictionary, contemporary culture, and pop psychology do not define forgiveness for us. Simply put, God does. This is a critical starting point. Forgiveness is not what you feel it is; forgiveness is what God says that it is. So, let's look at how God describes forgiveness.

In Jeremiah 31.34 God is speaking about the New Covenant that he is going to establish with his people, the church. In speaking of us, God says, "*For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.*" The same idea occurs in Isaiah 43.25, where God says, "*I, I am he who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins.*" The AH quotes the Jeremiah text twice (8.12 and 10.17) and in 10.17 he makes a specific point to identify the fact that God promises to NOT remember our sins any more as forgiveness. Therefore, **forgiveness is a promise to remove the offense and to treat the offender as if the sin never took place and that no offense ever occurred.** The one who offers forgiveness is making a promise of choosing NOT to remember the offense. This means that he will not bring it up behind your back, to your face, or treat you in light of it.

But notice in Matthew 6.12 that Jesus is talking about two types of forgiveness. The one is forgiveness from God and the other is forgiveness that we offer another. They are related.

B. How can God offer forgiveness?

This is a critical question because the way that God forgives us, informs and helps define the way we are to forgive others. In fact, we are called specifically to be "*forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.*" (Eph 4.32) So, how as God forgiven us? Ephesians 4.32 tells us. He forgives us IN CHRIST. The only way that God can forgive us is because of Christ. Please, please, please, listen carefully and ask God to help you hear this with your heart. Forgiveness is not pretending that the offense never took place. Forgiveness is not living in make-believe land, or denial mode. True forgiveness describes a specific, intentional decision in real-ville. Forgiveness is not a glossing over of sin because God cannot gloss over sin. God cannot pretend that something did not take place when something took place. God does not live in denial of sin and does not call us to live in denial of sin. God is fully aware of our sin. He is so aware of our sin and so aware of our debt and so aware of our guilt and so aware of our condemnation and so aware of our bondage and so aware of the fact that we cannot rescue ourselves, save

ourselves, pay for our debt, earn our forgiveness, that He sent Christ to live in our place and then die in our place. When Christ died, he died as an offering. He died as a payment. He died as a substitutionary offering. That is, his death was making a payment for your sins that you could not make for yourself. The sentence for your sin was an infinite death. Jesus paid that price, and satisfied that sentence for you. God offers forgiveness for you based upon the life and death of Christ, in your place. There is no pretending, glossing over, or denying our sin. Christ is fully aware of the enormous weight of our sin. He bore it all upon himself. Forgiveness is no light matter. But, Jesus is a bigger Savior than we are sinners. The death of Christ is sufficient to pay for your sins. His grace has planned it all. So, how can we be forgiven?

C. How can we be forgiven?

We can be forgiven by confessing our sins and believing that Christ paid for them. His grace has planned it all, tis mine, but to believe! 1 John 1.9 says, *“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”* This is a conditional statement. That is, the promise of God to remove the offense and to not treat us as if it ever happened, that is, to choose to not remember it is based upon our confession of the sin. Confession is translated from a word that means “to say the same thing as.” When we say the same thing that God does about our sin, that is, when we agree with him and take his view of our sin, both in identifying it and in turning from it (repentance), then he forgives us. This means that God now sees our sin as having been applied to Christ, who satisfied the debt, and therefore the sin is removed. God chooses not to remember. This is different than forgetting. Forgetting is something that happens to you. Forgetting is passive. Choosing not to remember is an intentional decision that God makes.

We need forgiveness from our sins because we are sinners and we have sinned against our Creator and have lived in rebellion against him. But, when we confess that to him and repent of that, and trust in Christ, all of our poisonous, decaying, toxic, septic sin, debt and rebellion is credited to Christ who paid it all and in turn all of his glorious, living, pure, holy, meritorious and infinite righteousness is credited to me. And in that moment of repentance and belief, I am justified. I am declared righteous because I am credited with a righteousness that is not from me, but is now mine forever. I am forgiven! I am free. My debt is paid. I am free. I am free from a debt that I could never pay in all of eternity. I could spend a million years in hell and never pay the debt of my sin. But, Jesus paid it all.

OK, now listen carefully again, because this is another crucial point. When Jesus calls us to pray like this, who is he speaking to? “And when YOU pray...” (v.7). Who is it that can actually say, “Our Father...”? Jesus is talking to people who are his followers. Therefore, v.12 is not referring to the time when you realize your need of a Savior and you come to Christ for salvation. That event, known as “being saved” or “justification” is a specific point of time in your life. Just like physical birth marks the beginning point of your entrance into this world, your spiritual birth marks your entrance into the family of God, or the kingdom of God. Now, the way that you live as a follower of Christ is

informed by how you became a follower of Christ. Growing as a follower of Christ is also known as progressive sanctification. This simply means that over time we will look more and more like Jesus Christ. Justification is the point in time that begins this life. Sanctification is the process of learning and growing and in reflecting more and more of Jesus Christ. The way that I came to Christ informs the way that I grow in Christ. We never outlive our need of the gospel on a daily basis.

Because I confessed and repented of my sins when I trusted in Christ as my Savior, I regularly confess and repent of my sins in order to grow in relationship with Christ. I do not confess and repent of my sins now in order to become a follower of Christ, I am a follower of Christ. I confess and repent of my sins because I am a follower of Christ. When I fail to pray like this (Matt 6.12), I lose the experience, the sense of forgiveness. When I fail to pray like this, I begin to lose my sensitivity of the seriousness of my own sin. When I fail to see how serious my sin is, then I think that the sins of others against me are much more serious than my sins against God. I need to experience the grace of God on a regular basis so that I am in a position to be able to reflect the grace of God to others. The truth is...

III. **We are sinned against.**

Being sinned against puts us in a remarkable position to be able put Christ on display. The fact that Jesus says, "*as we also have forgiven our debtors*" makes it abundantly clear that Jesus knows that you are sinned against. Being sinned against is often grievous. Particularly when you are sinned against by someone that you trusted, or someone whom you invested a lot of love, affection, counsel and trust in.

We are sinned against. David experienced this when he was sick. He wrote about it in Psalm 41 how his enemies were waiting for the news of his death, which he could understand. But then David talks about (v.6) the person who comes to visit him, not because the guy really cares about David, but so that he can get the latest information and tell others in such a way that it sounds like David is dying. But then David says that the thing that hurts the worst in all of this is he had a friend. He describes him as "my close friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted his heel against me." (v.9) Whoa! Think about that for a minute. What does it mean to lift your heel against someone? What is David describing? Do you see it? You can only lift your heel against someone who is already down. So, you are down, and this person comes along, they get close, and then they lift their foot and bring their heel crashing down upon you in order to finish you off.

This is the text (Psalm 41.9) that Jesus quotes in the Upper Room (John 13.18) with his disciples and he is telling them that one of them is going to betray him. What David experienced and wrote about was ultimately fulfilled in Christ. Did David experience betrayal? Yes! Was it real, was it painful, was it embittering, and was it a kick in the gut? Yes! But, as deep as David experienced it, Christ experienced betrayal at the deepest level.

So, when Jesus calls us to forgive those who sin against us, he does not say this dispassionately. He is not saying, “just suck it up and get over it.” He knows this deeply. He knows that we experience this. He knows that we experience the thoughtless of others, the insensitivity, the utter self-centeredness, the intentional rejection, the calculated insults, snubs, sarcasm, scoffing and sins of others. We are impacted profoundly. We feel them deeply. He knows that they do not simply roll off our backs. But, please do not forget this. As deep as the sins of others affect you, and they do, the sins of others, including our own affect Christ even deeper. This statement by Christ is not simply factual. It is deeply personal.

IV. **Others need forgiveness.**

But, here is what Jesus did. He looked beyond your guilt and he saw your need. He looked beyond your rebellion, your hostility, your attitude, your rejection, and he saw your need. He saw your need of forgiveness. He knows that others sin against you because they sinned against him first. When others sin against you, and they will, remember that they sinned against Christ first. So, he says, “*forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.*” Let’s review.

A. **What is forgiveness?**

Forgiveness is a promise to remove the offense and to treat the offender as if the sin never took place and that no offense ever occurred.

This means, that when you forgive a person, you are making a promise that you will not bring it up again to their hurt. You will not talk about it behind their back. You will not use it against them in a future argument. You will not tell others about it. You will not use it to be cold, indifferent, isolated, withdrawn or sullen. If you fail to forgive, you are saying that your standard of righteousness is greater than God’s. If you fail to forgive you are saying that your word is above God’s. If you fail to forgive you are sitting in judgment God. If you fail to forgive you are not simply attempting to be the judge, jury and executioner, you are now placing yourself under the discipline of God. You are not the righteous one, who has been sinned against, you are the one who in your self-righteousness have convinced yourself that you have a right to be condemning, even though the One who had the true right to condemn you, condemned his own Son in your place.

B. **How can we offer forgiveness?**

We can offer forgiveness because we have been forgiven of so much more. God was not stingy with the mercy that he poured out on you. The mercy that God has poured out on you is more than enough for you to share with others. Therefore, because we have been forgiven, we are able to forgive. This is the point that Jesus was making in Luke 7, when he was eating at the home of a Pharisee by the name of Simon and a woman, known to all as a “sinner” began to wash the feet of Jesus with her tears, and wipe them with her hair and then anoint them with fragrance. Of course, the host and the guests were a little

disturbed by the whole deal, but Jesus got right to the heart of it. He asked them if they thought that her display was extravagant? A little over the top? A little too personal? Violating too many cultural taboos and customs maybe? Jesus says that she loves much because her many sins are forgiven. Those who love deep are those who have been forgiven deep. Jesus goes on to say that “he who is forgiven little, loves little.” Here it is now. How can we offer forgiveness? We can only offer forgiveness in proportion to the forgiveness that we have experienced. Therefore, we only struggle with forgiving others, when we lose sight of the significance of the death of Christ for us!

C. How can others be forgiven?

Well, how does God forgive you? We are, according to Ephesians 4.32, to forgive others as God has forgiven us. When does God forgive us? He forgives us when we confess our sin to him and repent. In other words, he forgives us when we ask for it and mean it. Meanwhile God is ready to forgive us. He has provided all that is needed for him to be able to forgive us. Jesus even prayed for those who crucified him to be forgiven. So, how can you forgive others? You can forgive them when they ask. If they do not ask, then you get yourself ready to forgive them by praying for them and asking God to work in your heart in such a way, that you see their sin, their guilt, their need, their mess as being so much more important than what they have done to you.

God does not ask you to pretend that everything is fine when in fact someone has sinned against you. Later in chapter 18 we will see that Christ gives us specific action steps to take because if someone sins against you, it needs to be addressed. But, if you think that you have a right to withhold forgiveness from one who repents, or you have a right to be self-righteous while you wait for someone to repent, then I need to ask you this. What kind of a gospel (God) does your forgiveness preach? Is your forgiveness rich or stingy in mercy? If God forgave you in proportion to how you forgive others, what hope would you have? Mercy received provides mercy to share.

-God, help me be more concerned about my sin against you than I am about the sins of others.

-God, I am fully aware of how much I have been sinned against; it pales in contrast to my own sin against you and perhaps them. I choose to let go of my right of revenge and pray for an opportunity to forgive and reconcile those who have sinned against me.