"Father, Forgive Them": The Call to Forgive

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References: Luke 23, Luke 23:33-34; Matthew 5:43-44; 1 Peter 2:20-21; Matthew 6:12; Matthew 6:14-15; Matthew 18:21-22; Ephesians 4:32; Colossians 3:13; Job 42:10

An Encouraging Remembrance

Good morning. I want to start in Luke chapter 23. Luke 23.

But before I do, I don't know if I've shared this with you in the past, but it just came to me and I love to share it. And I think I'm speaking to a room full of beloved saints.

So my mother passed away in January, January 20th. Very gratefully that she was able to go; she lived probably a year or two of not quality of life also. But the point I want to get to is, on her deathbed in the palliative care part of the hospital, my wife and I and her sister were there with her during her last hours. And probably about an hour before she passed, she was left laying there. As, you know, as she did—she was passing—also she lifts her hands or arms: "Look at all the flowers!"

And then maybe half an hour after that, her sister's sitting beside her, holding hands, and my mom looks up again: "Huh, I see like it's a big mirror, and you're all there."

And her sister says, "Is Jesus there too?"

"Yeah, Jesus is there too, and you're all there."

That was the last word she said.

Amen. So that was all said to encourage you, beloved brothers and sisters. I was—I mean, we were just so, I don't even know the right adjective to use, how happy we were to be there at that moment and to witness that.

Christ’s Example at Calvary

Okay, Luke 23, verse 33. Luke 23, verse 33 says:

> [Luke 23:33-34 NKJV]
> [33] And when they had come to the place called Calvary, there they crucified Him, and the criminals, one on the right hand and the other on the left. [34] Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do." And they divided His garments and cast lots.

Father, we're trusting You now to help us to not only teach Your word, but understand Your word and have a deeper appreciation of Your love for us. Trust You with that in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. Amen.

When we were at the Bible camp in Morning Star, in Kelowna in the summer, there was a request made to think of or to meditate on some of the aspects or characteristics of our Savior that we as disciples should also be portraying. And I took on the topic of forgiveness. So I'm going to share that with you this morning.

As disciples, as believers in Christ, we can echo or take upon ourselves also the words that our Savior would say to the new ones, whoever He was encouraging. And anyways, the words are, "Follow Me." So that didn't mean just walk behind Me and I'll show you where we're going. That meant watch Me. And listen. Learn from Me, and follow Me in My actions and in My attitudes and My response and all this—like how Christ lived. And one of them would have been what they witnessed here in Calvary in regards to forgiveness.

Then Jesus said, verse 34, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." Well, that's big. Jesus looked down from the cross, and there's the crowd that has just called out to crucify Him. The Roman soldiers are there, the ones that have nailed Him to the cross. The religious leaders are there, the ones mocking Him. People are blaspheming Him. And as He's lifted up, He says, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do. Father, forgive them."

I just find that absolutely—a level I probably won't ever attain, but He did say, "Follow Me."

Surrounded by the most unworthy lot, Jesus prayed, "Father, forgive them." Even in His agony, His concern was for the forgiveness of those who were causing Him all that agony. He asked the Father to forgive the thieves on the cross who jeered at Him. He asked the Father to forgive the Roman soldiers who were mocking Him, spat on Him, beat Him, pulled at His beard, whipped Him, crowned Him with a crown of thorns, and nailed Him to the cross. And He asked forgiveness for the angry mob that mocked Him and called for His crucifixion.

It is important to note that Jesus' prayer means that Jesus was willing to forgive them, and that forgiveness was in fact the reason He was on the cross. "Father, forgive them." Because He was putting into principle—putting into practice, I should say—what He taught His disciples.

Turn with me to Matthew chapter 5. Sermon of the Mount, Matthew chapter 5, and verse 43. Matthew 5:43:

> [Matthew 5:43-44 NKJV]
> 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, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you,

On the cross, "Father, forgive them." He's putting into practice what He taught His disciples.

1 Peter 2. 1 Peter 2. 1 Peter chapter 2, verse 20:

> [1 Peter 2:20-21 NKJV]
> 20 For what credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God. 21 For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps:

Ultimately, Jesus' compassionate phrase, "Father, forgive them," helps us see Jesus who He truly is and can inspire us to love others in the same way as He did.

Forgiveness and Fellowship

Now, the reason I'm emphasizing this thought on forgiveness and the depth of the need is, I think, within practically every gathering of Christians, there's animosity and distance—I'll say that—between Christians. And it grieves the Father. It grieves the Lord Jesus Christ. This is His body; this is His church. And yet, we have issues with one another. I just can't see myself calling myself a disciple of Christ if I have something against another and I can't forgive them.

Matthew chapter 6. Matthew 6:12, passage that we alluded to or was read even this morning. Matthew 6:12:

> [Matthew 6:12 NKJV]
> And forgive us our debts, As we forgive our debtors.

So if we want the Father to forgive us, we need to forgive others.

I just want to—okay, I'm going to add a little extra here. This is just on the side. As we were talking about the Lord's Prayer, and it's actually He's teaching His disciples to pray: "Lord, teach us to pray." It's not, "Lord, teach us how to pray." "Lord, teach us to pray." That's the way I see it.

And yet in the garden, He's sweating, as it were, great drops of blood in agony, praying, "Lord, if it be possible, take this cup from Me. Nevertheless, not My will but Thine be done." He prayed earnestly, and yet He had to go to the cross. He had to finish the will of the Father. He accomplished an amazing, great victory that we rejoice in, in the remembrance of the Lord, in our lives, our redeemed lives, our glory-bound destiny, because He prayed, "Not My will but Thine be done."

And as He walks back, there's three disciples sleeping. What did they accomplish? They ran away. They denied Him. He prayed with great drops of blood. "Lord, teach us to pray." "Not My will be done, but Thine be done." "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

In fact, Jesus instructs us to build into our prayers a request for God to forgive us in the same way that we are to forgive others, or in the same way we do forgive others. If there are those we have not forgiven, when we ourselves pray for forgiveness, then practically speaking, we are asking God not to restore a right relationship with us after we sin.

To emphasize the importance of restoring broken relationships with our brothers and sisters, Jesus states that asking for God's forgiveness for one's own sins, all the while withholding forgiveness from someone else, is hypocritical, if not even bizarre.

If you—it's still in Matthew chapter 6, just look at verse 14. It says:

> [Matthew 6:14-15 NKJV]
> [14] "For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. [15] But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

An unforgiving spirit is a serious sin and should be confessed to God. If we have unforgiveness in our hearts against someone else, then we are acting in a way that is not pleasing to God, making our prayers and our relationships with Him and others strained, if not impossible. God will not hear our prayers unless we also show ourselves ready to grant forgiveness. We cannot possibly walk with God in true fellowship if we refuse to forgive others. And you can read about that in 1 John 1. Our fellowship is with the Father. Yet, if we sin, we need to confess our sins and be cleansed of our unrighteousness to restore our fellowship with God the Father and our fellowship with one another.

What Forgiveness Really Is

So then I ask the question: what really is forgiveness? What is that? What's a practical—from a biblical perspective, I think forgiveness is a release or a dismissal of something. For some people, forgiveness may seem like weakness or testing—or, I'm sorry, weakness or letting an undeserving person win—but it has no connection to weakness or even to emotions. Instead, forgiveness is an act of the will. Forgiveness is not granted because a person deserves to be forgiven. Forgiveness is a deliberate act of love, mercy, and grace. Forgiveness is a decision to not hold something against another person, despite what he or she has done to you. To forgive those who sin against us requires patience and forbearance.

There's something deep within us, in our human fallen nature, that thirsts for revenge or even retaliation. I confess it. We naturally want to inflict the same type of injury on the other one who injured us. An eye for an eye seems like a good will. But in Christ, however, we have been given the power to love our enemies and do good to the haters, bless the cursers, and pray for the abusers.

Seventy Times Seven

If you still have your Bibles open in Matthew, turn to chapter 18. Familiar passage here. Matthew 18, verse 21:

> [Matthew 18:21-22 NKJV]
> [21] Then Peter came to Him and said, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" [22] Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.

Now in the Old Testament, the rule, the Jewish rule, was to forgive someone three times. So here Peter thinks he's being very, very religious, let's say. "Seven times, Lord?"

No, seventy times seven.

The limit of the amount of times to forgive someone—the limiting of the amount of times to forgive someone shows a lack of understanding of what forgiveness really means. That is why Jesus said 70 times 7, or an unlimited number of times, because forgiving is forgiving.

Now, then it goes on to talk about a parable from verse 23 on, and I won't read the whole thing. But the parable is, which you'll recognize, is somebody owed a ruler an insurmountable amount of money, and the ruler forgave him. And then he went out, and there was someone that owed him a minor little minuscule amount of money, and he wouldn't forgive that person. It reminds us of the debt we owe to God the Father, and how minuscule the debt owed to us by others. So Jesus says to Peter, and He says to us: forgive, and just keep forgiving.

Forgiveness versus Reconciliation

Okay, now I think within almost every heart listening, there is an episode in your life that is traumatic or maybe even insurmountable of what's been perpetrated to you—some deep, deep hurts. So I'm going to propose and say that the phrase "to forgive and forget" is not a biblical phrase. I didn't find it in the Bible. Forgive, yes. But to forget?

I'll admit even in my own life, I have some deep scars, some deep hurts that raised their ugly head every once in a while, but I have forgiven. I'm not going to allow that issue, or whatever the offense was—I'm not going to allow that to continually ruin and ruin my life. I forgive. I move on. I don't forget. I still hurt. But I move on.

The offender may not desire or even deserve forgiveness, but that doesn't change anything. I still forgive. Ideally, the offender will seek reconciliation, but if not, then the one wronged, he still decides to forgive.

And what my mind thought of then right away again was right at the beginning: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." What He was being put through at that moment, and to be able to say, "Father, forgive them."

Forgiveness involves not holding a sin against a person any longer, but forgiveness is different from trust. It is a wise thought or a wise way of living to take precautions. And sometimes the dynamics of a relationship will have to change. But you can still forgive. And so when we forgive, we free ourselves from the bondage someone else's wrong has created for us. It is impossible to live in complete obedience to God when someone else controls our emotions.

Forgive, not necessarily forget. Forgiveness is not the same as reconciliation. We can forgive from the heart while keeping betrayers at a distance. Forgiveness does not allow unrepentant abusers back into our lives. But it does allow the peace of God back into our hearts.

Walking in Restoration

Ephesians chapter 4 for conclusions. Ephesians chapter 4, verse 32. Ephesians 4:32 says:

> [Ephesians 4:32 NKJV]
> And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.

And Colossians chapter 3, verse 13. Colossians 3:13:

> [Colossians 3:13 NKJV]
> bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do.

Jesus said to His disciples, "Follow Me." We need to follow Him in this aspect for sure, so our fellowship with God the Father and our fellowship with one another can be restored. Thank you.

And when I was thinking of this and finishing it up, a thought came to me that someone told me years ago. We all know the story of Job. Job went through some really hard, hard times.

And his friends gave him a hard time as well. But we know that Job got restored. But in verse 10 of chapter 42:

> [Job 42:10 NKJV]
> And the LORD restored Job's losses when he prayed for his friends. Indeed the LORD gave Job twice as much as he had before.

That's amazing. What Job all went through and what his friends portrayed. And yet he prayed for his friends and the Lord restored him. Amen. Thank you. I find that an amazing level to reach.

One last little thought before I conclude the prayer. There's a teaching out there on marriage. And someone asked the fellow doing the teaching, "Well, if we have this battle between husband and wife, and we're supposed to restore and forgive, which one of the two should be the first to start the process?"

And I loved his answer. He says, "The one of the two of you that is more spiritually mature, you start it."

Well, I don't think that wants to be me then! I'm the spiritually mature one, hopefully. It was just such a good challenge. It's up to me to restore fellowship with God the Father and others.

Let's pray.

Father, we've been thinking of some pretty serious thoughts here, some pretty deep thoughts. We've even probably stirred up some emotions and some hurts from the past. And we confess to You, Father, that these things are very difficult for us to forgive others when the hurts have been so deep.

So help us, Father. Help us to follow the Lord Jesus Christ and forgive others—not to forget, not to say that everything is okay, but to release it. Release and to forgive and to move on, and to see just bright blue skies ahead and above us again. Not to have the weight of the wrongs that others have committed unto us.

We're just trusting You, Father, with these thoughts. Help us to sift through them. And You know the individuals; You know the individual issues. And we just trust You, Father, to work through them in the individual lives, according to Your will and for Your glory. Amen.

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