

“The Forgiveness Effect” – Pr Jim Sprengle – Pentecost 16 September 17, 2023

- I. **Matthew 18:23-35** – The Parable of the Unforgiving Servant
- II. **The forgiveness of sins is at the heart of our faith life.**
 - a. Nothing is more important than forgiveness because it means that we are okay with God... Or, more clearly, God is calling us okay by Him!
 - b. The challenge for many people out there today is recognizing... or realizing that they are sinful and in need of forgiveness.
 - c. I used to watch a street evangelist named Ray Comfort who approached random people walking down the sidewalk.
 - i. He would first ask, “Do you consider yourself a spiritual person?”
 - ii. If the answer was yes, then the next question was along the lines of the old Evangelism Explosion method, “If you were to die tonight, why should God let you into heaven?”
 - iii. Most of the people would answer that they weren’t *that* bad, or they don’t really sin... or they aren’t a murderer or anything.
 - iv. The follow up questions were along the lines of, “Ok, have you ever told a lie? Have you ever stolen anything at all? Have you ever used the Lord’s name in vain? Have you ever lusted after another person?”
 1. Of course the answer to these simple questions is yes, and so the response would be, “So, you have admitted to me that you are a lying, thieving, blaspheming, fornicator... and God is going to judge you... are you innocent or guilty?”
 2. Well, when you put it that way, I guess maybe we are all sinful and in need of forgiveness...
 - d. Many, many times I have explained that we have a problem with looking at ourselves and the sin in our lives.... And believe me when I say, it’s that bad!
 - i. From the first lessons in Confirmation and Christianity 101, we look at the Ten Commandments.
 - ii. Inevitably, when I ask people if they learned something new, they say yes and are more aware of the ways we sin against God and our neighbor – in both the things we do... but also the things we don’t do that we should.
 - e. Again, it’s a case of misjudging ourselves, as we go about our lives thinking we are doing better than average, or better than the other guy.
- III. **Jesus tells a parable that points to human nature and self-awareness.**
 - a. A man is forgiven an incredible debt – some estimates in the billions of dollars in today’s money.
 - i. He’s in big trouble, because there is no way to get out from under that kind of debt – no bankruptcy courts existed in those days.

- ii. So, he begs for mercy and says he will pay back the impossible sum... and that's the point – there is no way to pay back this debt.
 - iii. Most people can't even save a million dollars in a lifetime, so this man is in debt for thousands of lifetimes.
 - iv. It says the master had compassion on the man and showed him mercy... forgiving his debt and allowing him to live in freedom.
 - v. What a gift! Not only will the man's family be saved, but he will walk through life without the constant reminder of a never-ending debt.
 - b. The story changes to another scene – where the forgiven servant sees one of his fellow servants.
 - i. This guy owed him a hundred days' wages – or \$10,000-12,000... no small amount.
 - ii. So the forgiven servant chokes his debtor and threatens him...
 - iii. Notice that the servant's debtor falls to his knees and begs for mercy in exactly the same way as he did, but it does no good because the forgiven servant's heart was hardened.
 - c. The parable ends as the master hears about the unforgiving servant and calls him back to account for his behavior... how could he be unforgiving of \$10,000 when he was forgiven billions?
 - i. The result is what we would expect, the master sends the man to be jailed and tortured forever – because he has no hope or chance of ever paying back what he owed.
 - d. The result is the same for any followers of Jesus... if we are unwilling to forgive our fellow brothers and sisters, we will be called to account.
 - i. Jesus says earlier in this same Gospel of Matthew, just after the Lord's Prayer, “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.” (Matthew 6:14-15)
 - ii. The point is clear... we cannot be forgiven by our Father through the work of Jesus Christ when we withhold forgiveness from others...
 - 1. We cannot blow off the billions of dollars He forgave us so we can try to collect ten grand from someone who trespassed against us.
 - e. It seems that being forgiven should influence a person so that they live in gratitude for their freedom... a forgiveness effect.
- IV. **Unfortunately, we don't always reflect the amazing grace of our Lord.**
- a. It's easier to believe we're doing pretty good... that the sin Jesus paid for on the cross for us wasn't as bad as the other guy's sin.
 - b. I suppose the point is that we tend to minimize sin so that we don't have to own up to it... face it head on.

- c. When I teach the purpose of the Law in our classes, one of the purposes is to be a mirror... When our sin is before us and we realize just how bad it is, we don't like what we see.
- d. We are nothing more than dirty, rotten, stinking sinners... and our debt is beyond our ability to pay back... we deserve a life sentence.
- e. The sin debt was and is so great that it could not be forgiven by just anyone... it had to be God.
 - i. God came to be with us in human flesh – and the debt each of us owed was placed upon Him.
 - ii. Anyone who says they aren't that bad, or their sins don't compare to the bad things others do, are unwilling to look in the mirror.
 - iii. Jesus became the sacrifice that paid for those so called, little sins – because it's all sin and it all had to be paid for.
- f. And now, as He brought us out of the pit of sin and an inconceivable debt... we are able not only to see the sin in ourselves and repent, but also to forgive those who sin against us.
 - i. The forgiveness effect is God's forgiveness given to us, and the way it opens our hearts to forgive those around us.

V. **How can we possibly harbor resentment and unforgiveness?**

- a. I know that people hurt us, cause all kinds of spiritual, physical, and emotional damage... and that seems like a debt that's too big... they must pay up or suffer.
- b. Yet, forgiveness doesn't mean we pretend nothing happened, or that the harm done to us was acceptable... or even that they don't have consequences to face.
 - i. Forgiveness means we are willing to let it go... to see the person through the blood of Jesus... and that we will allow God to be the one to deal with judgment.
 - ii. Sometimes, when we forgive someone else, the effect brings them to Jesus and His forgiveness too.
- c. I've told the story a few times before, but my mom was killed in a car accident when I was in my teens...
 - i. Someone left a gate open, and some horses got out – and my mom didn't see them in time.
 - ii. My dad went to visit the lady who left that gate open, and she was pretty sure she would be yelled at for being careless... told what kind of damage she had caused our family... and end up in a lawsuit for negligence leading to a death.
 - iii. But my dad forgave her that day, letting go of the right to punish, and she walked away forgiven of an unforgivable debt.
 - iv. And the effect it had on her?

1. She showed up to church that Sunday... and she said that if Christians were willing to forgive like that, she needed to know the God of the Bible.
- d. The forgiveness effect is powerful indeed – and it all begins with our Savior Jesus Christ – the very heart of our faith life.
- e. Go forth in forgiveness as you have been forgiven. Amen.