

**Kingdom Series - Autumn 2005 - King's Centre Church**  
**Week 9 – Forgiveness - (07.11.05)**  
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**Introduction**

Forgiveness is a huge topic, with far-reaching implications for us; I can only touch upon some aspects of it today.

One of the most shocking images to come out of the Vietnam War showed a young girl of about eight years old running naked towards the camera, screaming in terror; her clothes had been torn away by the blast of a bomb and her back was badly burned by napalm; behind her, the village was in flames. In adult life, she became a Christian, and she sought out and forgave the man who had bombed her village.



Forgiveness can go to extraordinary lengths; but we also need it in the nitty-gritty of daily life together.

Martin Luther King once remarked, "Forgiveness is not just an occasional act; it is a permanent attitude."

**A Core Kingdom Value**

Forgiveness is a core Kingdom value; it lies at the heart and the foundation of the Gospel: we are a forgiven people.

**Colossians 1:12-14**

*Giving thanks under the Father, who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the Saints in light : who has delivered us from the power of darkness, and has transferred us into the kingdom of his dear Son.*

We are also called be a forgiving people.

**Ephesians 4: 30-32**

*And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, in whom you were sealed unto the day of redemption. Let all bitterness, and wrath, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: and be kind one to another, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake has forgiven you.*

In the Lord's prayer we ask God to forgive our sins, just as we forgive those who sin against us; this is the one section in the prayer which Jesus goes on to underline.

**Double-Action**

There is a double action here, in that we are asked to forgive as God forgives, and we ask God to forgive us as we forgive others.

So which comes first, the chicken or the egg? Genesis 1:28 tells us that the chicken came first.

Genesis 1:1 tells us that God always makes the first move.

#### Colossians 2: 13

*And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, he has made alive together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses.*

What can a dead man do? If we had to meet any condition at all, however slight, however unseen and internal, to qualify for God's forgiveness, then that would mean that what Jesus did on the cross is not enough, we have to add something to it. Salvation would then be a matter of what we do, and not a matter of the grace and mercy of God.

#### Ephesians 2: 4 – 9

*But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, has made us alive together with Christ -- for by grace you are saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God.*

So there are no conditions to be met, no qualifying hurdles to get over. The only thing we need to do to receive God's forgiveness is to admit that we need it.

#### 1 John 1:9

*If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*

The way Jesus places the section on forgiveness in the Lord's prayer right after the request for daily bread suggest that we will need to receive, and exercise, forgiveness everyday.

### **Jesus made the first move**

Jesus can command forgiveness because he is all grace and compassion, and because he has borne the consequences of sin. We cannot command people to forgive, we can only point them to Jesus, to receive his forgiveness and to be led by him into the freedom to forgive; for many of us this will be a process, and as the Holy Spirit deepens our appreciation of God's forgiveness so we will be enabled to forgive in our turn.

When we move in forgiveness it is not to fulfil a legal obligation, but to express the character of Christ being formed in us by the Holy Spirit.

### **Practicing forgiveness**

Jesus calls us to a very proactive approach to forgiveness within the church. It is not just a matter of letting things slide, or pretending that hurts and offences don't matter very much.

#### Matthew 5:23 f

*Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has anything against you; leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.*

Worship, service, ministry -- all must be set aside for the moment in order to seek forgiveness and reconciliation with someone we have offended within the church.

#### Matthew 18: 15 -- 20

*Moreover if your brother shall trespass against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone: if he shall hear you, you have gained your brother. But if he will not hear you, then take with you one or two more, so that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church: but if he refuses to hear the church, letting him be to you a heathen man and a tax collector.*

This is not a disciplinary procedure! The aim is to "gain your brother"

If someone in the church has hurt you, don't bottle it up, don't pretend it's okay really, go and tell them, one-to-one. Sort it out and restore unity.

The second and third stages outlined here are still designed to produce reconciliation, and would be familiar to the disciples from current rabbinical teaching.

"A friend that declares to thee thy faults, between him and thee, whenever he meets thee, is better to thee than a friend, that whenever he meets thee, gives thee a golden penny."

They are also designed so that as far as possible the issue is dealt with privately and confidentially, and need never be referred to again.

Even the final stage is not intended to sever the relationship: how did Jesus treat heathens and tax collectors?

Jesus goes right on from here to speak about the Church's authority to bind and loose, bringing heavenly rule to bear on the earth; and about the power of agreement in prayer.

We cannot escape the inference that unity in the body is vital to spiritual effectiveness.

Peter then barges in, wanting to know how far you should go in forgiveness, and at what point it's okay to administer brotherly correction with the blunt end of a boat hook.

To give Peter credit, in proposing seven times he is going way beyond the rabbinical standard, which essentially was three strikes and you're out.

Jesus proposes 70 times seven, not to give a limit, but to remove any limits. One Corinthians 13:5 "love keeps no record of wrongs" NIV.

## **The Unforgiving Servant Parable**

Jesus goes on to tell the story of the unforgiving servant in verses 23 -- 34.

This is a vivid and startling parable; it's sometimes portrayed as meaning that our debts to each other aren't really important, but I think there's a little more to it than that.

Jesus chooses his figures carefully and I believe with a purpose in mind.

10,000 talents is a colossal sum -- a King's Ransom. The talent was a unit of weight rather than money; it was the heaviest weight in the Jewish system, and here serves to show the weightiness, the heavy burden of debt we are in before God on account of sin.

### **Psalm 40:12**

*For innumerable evils have compassed me about: my iniquities have taken hold upon me, so that I am not able to look up; they are more than the hairs of my head: therefore my heart fails me.*

10,000 may be used as an indefinite number, which is common in the Bible. Were the talents will silver or gold? Various commentators compute the sum to be as much as £72 million Sterling.

The servant had no chance of paying it off. Even if the severe measures of verse 25 were carried out, he would still owe a lifetime of service and more.

"Sin have being committed against an infinite God, contracts the nature of an infinite debt, which cannot be paid off by a finite creature. Christ only was able to pay this debt, and he has done it for his people; silver and gold would not pay our debt, sacrifice and offering would not do it; and our good works are but God's work in us, and cannot make satisfaction; we are without strength, and cannot help ourselves." Matthew Henry.

In verse 27 the King is moved with compassion;

"God's reasons of mercy are fetched from within himself" Matthew Henry. God shows us mercy because he delights in mercy, not because we deserve another chance.

Complete and utter forgiveness results from the King's compassion. Just put yourself in that servant's place for a moment and reflect on how you would feel.

I was once in debt for £2000, and it was a constant nagging burden. I woke up to it, I slept with it, it robbed every day of its joy.

When someone paid it off for me, the relief was indescribable, and my immediate impulse was not to go out and find someone else to put under the pressure that I had known.

Yet look what this man does: he goes out and finds a fellow servant who owes him a hundred denarii, shakes him warmly by the throat, and says "Pay up!"

The grace he's been shown has somehow not penetrated his heart, and he is still determined to claim his rights under the law. And in the end, this is what he will get. His master is far more angry about his unforgiving heart than he was about the 10,000 talents.

If we refuse to reflect in our dealings with each other the mercy we have received from God, we will surely find ourselves in a prison of our own making, and tormented every day - by a restless conscience, by the loss of close fellowship with our Father and our brothers, by the endless gnawing of resentment, like a hungry dog with a dry old bone.

How serious was the debt between the two servants?

The denarius was a day's pay for a soldier or a labourer. With average UK earnings today standing at £21,749, 100 denarii works out at around £18,000.

This is not nothing, and I think Jesus has chosen a fairly high figure quite deliberately. He knows that we run up real debts against each other, we hurt each other considerably, and those hurts are not to be seen as of no importance. Those things we say and do to one another, often without intent, do matter and they can build up to a serious debt of hurt to be forgiven.

### **The point of the parable**

The point of this story is to set those hurts and wrong in the context of the magnitude of God's forgiveness, to see the million to one, or rather infinity to one ratio of what we've been forgiven to what we are asked to forgive.

This is not something for intellectual calculation but a matter of our hearts being touched.

Luke 7 records the story of the woman who wept over Jesus's feet, dried them with her hair, and anointed them with costly perfume. She knew what it was to be forgiven.

We need to spend time with Jesus, to let him show us the extent and the cost of our forgiveness, to allow his love to overwhelm and transform our hard hearts.

### **Practicing & Receiving forgiveness even when it hurts**

Some of you will of been hurt very badly, and find forgiveness very difficult. Just declare your willingness to God, and let him begin to lead you through the process. Allow him to take time over this.

Be honest with God about your hurts. Allow him into that secret place where you play and replay the video of what happened to you -- and a video of the revenge you would like to take.

Forgiveness is not saying, "it doesn't matter." If you are hurt, of course it matters; you're a child of God, he cares about you, he does not dismiss your wounds as being of no importance.

Any parent, finding their child badly hurt by another, will first of all want to attend to their child's injuries, to bring healing and to comfort their child.

In the same way, God the Father recognises our hurts and in compassion moves to bring this healing; his call to forgive comes in the context of his loving care for us. It is not a demand of the law.

Sometimes God will take years over our healing before he recognises that we are strong enough to attempt forgiveness; he does not demand that we immediately get up upon our broken legs and stagger off to forgive the one who broke them.

Seeking someone out to explain that they've hurt you, or asking for their forgiveness, is never easy. It's best done soon, while the issue is still fresh; keep to the issue, be specific: "I was upset when you seemed to ignore me in Sainsbury's yesterday" is far better than "You're always ignoring me!"

### **Accountability**

If for any reason you've had to defer resolving an issue with someone, it may be helpful to talk the matter out with someone you trust, perhaps without naming names, and get their support in prayer. The peace that comes with reconciliation is always a worthwhile result.

Do bear in mind that Jesus's teaching on forgiveness is primarily to be applied within the church, and we can't expect people who haven't yet experienced the grace of God to exercise or respond to forgiveness in the same way.

Sometimes we'll need to forgive someone that we'll never see again, maybe someone who carved us up on the road, someone who has left the country, or perhaps even someone who's died.

Forgiveness means letting the person go into God's hands, not wanting them to pay even the just penalty for what they did. Remember God can forgive without compromising justice because of the cross.

Whenever that person comes into your mind, refuse thoughts of vengeance and pray God's blessing on them.

### **Unconditional forgiveness**

When we forgive, or when we ask for forgiveness, it should be unconditional. We shouldn't make excuses for what we did, nor set limits on what we forgive.

Isaiah 30 8:17 tells us that God puts our offences behind his back, and we should do the same for each other, and then move forward.

Love keeps no record of wrongs, love does not indulge in action replays.

Forgiveness means a fresh start every time.

Also, take today's opportunity – if you need to ask or give forgiveness over an issue between you and someone here – now would be a good time.