

Sunday 20th September 2009 Sermon - King's Centre Christian Church, Sheffield, UK

Forgiveness and relationships

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Intro

- Do you want to live life well?
- Do you watch the world around you, the bitching, the power plays and politics, and do you wish you knew a better way?
- Do you look at others' lives and feel resentful, or jealous, or just that somehow 'that's not fair' and life has dealt you a bad hand?
- Would you like to learn from the smartest, kindest and most radical person ever to walk the earth just how He lived a life to navigate around these kind of hurdles?

Today – Importance of righteous relationships & forgiveness

Today, Marjorie and I feel it's important to remind ourselves of some of Jesus' core teaching on the significance of working for right relationships among Christians in community and within your life in general as a follower of Jesus.

- what the New Testament teaches about resolving to live in good relations with other people and sorting out our differences in a holy manner as Jesus taught. We'll look at Matthew 7 and Matthew 18 shortly.

Helpful reminder time

This is the time of year, as things start up again after the summer, when it's important to remind ourselves of some of the fundamentals of our faith, and what our community is about at KC - before the students return and we begin a longer preaching series – Romans – which we're very excited about.

3 Keys to living free and living well

Thinking about relating well to others, all of the time. How? Instead of judgement and tension.

1. First we need a revelation of how big God is – how nothing is impossible for Him

- Recently we as a community, and I pray that this applies to you as an individual or small group/mission community, have begun to see God moving powerfully in his Kingdom through us
 - signs, wonders, healings, dramatic conversions,
 - and plans for more as we think about pioneering healing on the streets, bringing the presence and power of God into the Nether Edge Fair very publicly and so forth.
- Very important to us that as a community we continue to press forward for the kingdom, for the 'greater things' that Jesus said we would do and see, 'preach the good news, heal the sick, raise the dead, cast our demons, cleanse the lepers'.
- *We often call this revelation of how big God is – the kingdom*

2. Second, we need a revelation of how loving He is, how much he cares for us.

Seek the presence and love & identity of your Father in Heaven, through the Holy Spirit.

This has been the focus of recent times – renovation of the heart, identity & Father, prodigal Father parable Luke 15, 'Waiting on God' time

- Very important to us that we at KC & Philly are known as a community of love, inclusively, welcome and peace in the midst of it a crazy world
- The ‘Sabbath rest’ that Paul spoke about a couple of weeks ago.
 - a. A busy life, but an atmosphere of peace – both inwardly, and between ourselves
- *We often call this revelation of how loving He is Covenant*
 - a. God’s call is always to be covenant first, then kingdom.

3. Thirdly we need a revelation of how we can walk in that love, and give it away.

We want to be able to allow the truth of those 2 principles to flow through us increasingly – greater identity, security, greater love for all people – community transformation will follow

- Out of that will come the correct motivations for transforming the world in his power!

2 TRIANGLES

Mike Breen once explained something very key, which I’ll never forget. As usual, it was simple and it was profound.

- Using these 2 triangles, which you are probably familiar with, he simply said that when one aspect of our Christian experience begins to hot-up, or take precedence – either Kingdom, or Covenant – then we also need to ensure we balance it out by concentrating, or not neglecting, the other.
- The simple reminder to us all is this
 - As the kingdom breaks out and expands around us – don’t neglect what it means to live as a covenant community.

And the other way....

- If you are in a season or a group which is strong on community, enjoying the fellowship & love of other Christians, feeding on the word of God, learning to live in the love of our Heavenly Father.....
 - then the natural outworking of that needs to be that you work from that strong basis of love and identity and **turn it into Kingdom, outward-focused activity.**

Don’t just concentrate and enjoy Covenant.

Don’t just concentrate and enjoy Kingdom., at the expense of Covenant.

READING – Matthew 7:1-5

Judging Others

¹"Do not judge, or you too will be judged. ²For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.

³"Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? ⁴How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? ⁵You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.

Basic Biblical Foundation

Thinking biblically - You all know that we live in a world that is constantly affected by the presence of evil, and a fallen nature to the way humans all think and operate. Genesis 3 & 4 explains that with the

entrance of evil and sin into this world, came a break in relationship & communication with God, and with others. That's the default situation you and I find ourselves in today.

The good news is that God doesn't write-off mankind for its mistakes.

- He is in the turn-around business, redemption, reconciliation, restoration.
- He re-establishes covenant community and it comes to its fruition in Jesus.
- There is a radical reworking by Jesus & his example of kingdom – coming against the status quo powerfully, saying 'don't judge, bless your enemies, pray for those who persecute you, let love for all be your foundation – and leave the justice to me.
- And of course, its more than just words –he laid down his own life in a supreme act of humility and selflessness, showing us the way to live
 - And He leaves us with the power to do so too

Jesus radically different way of living

Jesus is our model – fully human and had human needs, yet was without sin (Heb 4:15)

- primary relationship & identity was with God (as it should be for us)
- intimate relationship with others (saw them as 'friends' by the end) (John 15:15)
- but not defined by others (his identity was in God the Father's view of him).
- He accepted, he didn't judge by outward situations, he saw the potential in everyone (think of Mary Magdalene).

What we model is so important. What we model is what draws people to Jesus.

- You can do lots of mission, but if you have hatred or greed in your heart, the people *will* see this. If you genuinely love others, people will see this. It all gets equated.

Jesus says 'Don't Judge'

Think of the questions I posed at the beginning

- Do you watch the world around you, the bitching, the power plays and politics, and do you wish you knew a better way?
- Do you look at others' lives and feel resentful, or jealous, or just that somehow 'that's not fair' and life has dealt you a bad hand?
- Jesus says, in the middle of all this, **Be careful of Judging.**

Matt 7 1-3. “¹Do not judge, or you too will be judged. ²For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. ³Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye?”

4 key reasons to be careful not to judge.

1. If you judge others, you open yourself up to judgement by God

a. ²*For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.*

2. Judging is very negative

“We instinctively judge much of the time, and when we judge, we are usually negative, biased and unfair.” (JA p9)

- Negativity comes from the devil, and the fallen nature of the world & our condition – not from God

- We have the fruits of the spirit in us – and should let them out more! (Gal 5:22)
- Holy Spirit wants to turn us away from judgement – instead to bless & forgive so that life will flow
- There are times when we ought to directly confront the **behaviour and beliefs** of others.
 - But always in a spirit that best represents how Jesus sees them
- Our aim is to LOVE without judging. To point people towards Jesus, who can reform and redeem every human.

3. Pronouncements have power

- a. Watch your tongue – it has tremendous power (to do good, or do evil)
 - i. Reckless words pierce like a sword, but the **tongue** of the wise brings healing. (12:18)
 - ii. The **tongue** has the power of life and death, and those who love it will eat its fruit. (18:21)
 - iii. If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his **tongue**, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless. (James 1:26)
- b. Bind/loose

Issue – what you bind on earth, you bind in heaven & so on (Matt 18:18 – we’ll read it shortly)

- There is power in words – negative & positive
- There is power in unforgiveness – holding not only the other party captive, but holding yourself captive too
 - Rom 12:14 – “**Bless** those who persecute you; **bless** and do **not curse**.”
 - “if you don’t have anything nice to say, don’t say anything at all” Mum’s advice

4. Judgement comes from the Orphan Heart – not the Heart of a Child of God

“For out of the overflow of his heart his mouth speaks.” (Luke 6:45)

If you haven’t yet grasped it; as a follower of Jesus, a child of God, we get: family, inheritance, promise, protection, resources, love and security.

- Example – the older brother in Luke 15 parable
 - Eg. Comes more naturally to some people – Marjorie naturally positive, gentle, Nick analytical mind – speaks his mind – needs to be careful not to be negative (judgemental) and remember where my bread is buttered – CHILD.

Jesus’ teaching on how to resolve genuine differences

There are times when we ought to directly confront the **behaviour and beliefs** of others. But always in a spirit that best represents how Jesus sees them

The good news is that Jesus does teach directly on how to resolve genuine differences.....

Matthew 18

The Greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven

¹At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?"

The problem is right there – judgement. Seeking own glory ahead of others.

²He called a little child and had him stand among them. ³And he said: "I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. ⁴Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

⁵"And whoever welcomes a little child like this in my name welcomes me. ⁶But if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea.

⁷"Woe to the world because of the things that cause people to sin! Such things must come, but woe to the man through whom they come! ⁸If your hand or your foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life maimed or crippled than to have two hands or two feet and be thrown into eternal fire. ⁹And if your eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into the fire of hell.

The Parable of the Lost Sheep

¹⁰"See that you do not look down on one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven.^[a]

¹²"What do you think? If a man owns a hundred sheep, and one of them wanders away, will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hills and go to look for the one that wandered off? ¹³And if he finds it, I tell you the truth, he is happier about that one sheep than about the ninety-nine that did not wander off. ¹⁴In the same way your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should be lost.

A Brother Who Sins Against You

¹⁵"If your brother sins against you,^[b] go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. ¹⁶But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.'^[c] ¹⁷If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector.

¹⁸"I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be^[d] bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be^[e] loosed in heaven.

¹⁹"Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. ²⁰For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them."

The Parable of the Unmerciful Servant

²¹Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?"

²²Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times."^[f]

²³"Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. ²⁴As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand talents^[g] was brought to him. ²⁵Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt.

²⁶"The servant fell on his knees before him. 'Be patient with me,' he begged, 'and I will pay back everything.'²⁷The servant's master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go.

²⁸"But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii.^[b] He grabbed him and began to choke him. 'Pay back what you owe me!' he demanded.

²⁹"His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay you back.'

³⁰"But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt.³¹When the other servants saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed and went and told their master everything that had happened.

³²"Then the master called the servant in. 'You wicked servant,' he said, 'I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to.'³³Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?'³⁴In anger his master turned him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed.

³⁵"This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart."

Unpacking Matt 18

V15-18 are all about how to deal with confrontation/issues appropriately with someone

- Matt 18:15
 - ¹⁵"If your brother sins against you,^[b] go and show him his fault, just between the two of you.
 - **Biggest stumbling block, and most common thing people haven't done first** – in our experience of pastoral care within KC
- People struggle with this the most – gossip – getting people on your side. Talk to everybody else, except the person themselves!
 - Go first to the person
 - Human feeling – I need people on my side – actually this can turn into gossip, or power
- 9 times out of 10, this sorts out the issue. Nips it in the bud.
- Sometimes, we even find that I AM THE PROBLEM
 - X is really annoying me, X does this & that..... actually the issue becomes I have really sinned against X.....

We need to be quick to forgive

- **This requires Discipline in our hearts & minds – deal with those first thoughts quickly**
 - So you don't get to the point of judgement
 - Want to avoid Matt 18 – nip in bud – attitudes first, not living with judgement first, remedial action second
- Turn quickly to the truth – grace & love you are receiving from your Heavenly father for yourself, and for that person
 - To be strong enough so that the, perhaps legitimate issues, don't take YOU captive. Unforgiveness will take YOU captive too.
 - ME – I know I often annoy people – sometimes I'm a bit rash, or perhaps off-hand
 - Maturity – 'he's under pressure' etc, I know he didn't mean it maliciously....

Be quick to forgive others – it frees them, and it frees yourself. Can be a hard process, sometimes only with God’s help.

The goal in conflict is always reconciliation.

- You go to the cross with it – so Jesus can bring resurrection
 - Sometimes it takes great humility to seek the godly outcome of reconciliation
 - Apartheid South Africa ‘Truth & Reconciliation commission’
- Not the case that you say your bit so you can see justice. Maybe you choose NOT to say your bit (or allow Jesus to bring justice – conviction through the Holy Spirit) so that instead the outcome isn’t conflict, but is reconciliation
- Marjorie & I, & KC pastoral team, will always drive for this

Work really hard to keep your relationships right – righteous

The importance of knowing God’s unconditional love & giving it away

The only sure way to live like Jesus, not like our default, is to know God’s unconditional love and seek to give it away – Just like Jesus did

Our default is to seek to control others though our interpersonal relationships

- Because we FEAR and so we want to CONTROL
- Jesus taught the opposite
 - Don’t fear (perfect love drives it out – strong identity in God)
 - Prefer others, serve others, be humble (phil 2)
 - Not a door-mat, but living out these kingdom principles, because your identity is strongly ‘not of this world’
- The more we can get hold of the Father’s love for us, his adopted children – the more we can live free
 - Just like the returning son in Luke 15 – we are secure in the Father’s embrace for us – despite our own stinking condition, living in a smelly pig-sty ourselves half the time
 - We are confident in our inheritance – all the goodies of the kingdom of God, all the safety of the family of God are yours
 - So you don’t need to look at other people, you don’t need to fret and get jealous if others seem to do well, you don’t need to take responsibility to get justice, to get back, at those who are sinning.
 - Instead, you live out of who you are – “For you died, and your life is now **hidden with Christ in God.**” (Col 3:3)

Jesus – mercy triumphs over justice (James 2:13)

- because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment!
- He took what we deserve upon Himself, on the cross. (Covenant exchange)
 - – bringing us into life, freedom, forgiveness, peace, eternal security, and the ability to free others
- When we seek to judge others – we’re really operating out of our own insecurities – fear, desire to control, desire for justice (sometimes people really have been awful to us)
 - “The only safe response is, “Lord let there be mercy. Let mercy triumph over judgement (James 2:13). You have forgiven me all this great debt of mine. Now that

- you have given me the keys to the kingdom, I am going to forgive everybody who owes me anything or has hurt me in any way.” (JA .p14)
- Then love really can cover a multitude of sins.

Hurt people, hurt people.
Free people, free people.

Jesus came for freedom – that’s the good news!

- From Control & fear
- To free others
- To be free in ourselves

Today, in your hearts and lives, let mercy triumph over judgement.

Response

Might need to forgive

Might need to repent & ask for forgiveness – from God for your attitudes & behaviours, from other people for your attitude & behaviour to them.

Might need to ‘take your thoughts captive’ – by coming in the opposite spirit to the way of the world.

- Repent & Believe
- Change your mind, change your behaviour as a result.

Might need more of the child heart – less orphan heart

Always need Holy Spirit empowering & to grow in the knowledge & experience of the love of our heavenly father. That’s where the security to be able to do this comes from.