



Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer. **AMEN**

Pastor David Sellery said in one of his sermons, "Forgiveness is the essence of Christian love. It is not restricted to overlooking petty faux pas or even gross insults. Forgiveness is the transcendent courage to absorb a despicable blow without being consumed by a bloodlust for revenge. Forgiveness is not a largess we dispense by power of our innate superiority. It is the grace of God transmitted through us. It is the ultimate witness of Christ's love in the world."

Wow, that was a mouthful and to many as difficult to understand as it is to forgive someone. Yes?

Then I came upon a children's sermon that made much more sense to me. Dr Dan Wuori said, "When we forgive others, we make a decision to stop being hurt and angry and we move on. We don't just tell the other person that everything is okay—we decide in our hearts to let things be over." And Jesus tells us that we need to forgive others just as He has forgiven us.

No matter what quote you relate too, I think that we all will admit that forgiveness is a tough thing to do when we are hurt. I wish I could replay for you a series on forgiveness that several of us just finished earlier in the summer. It was just awesome and a great

reminder of how heavy a hurt can be and how we have no other choice than to let our hearts be open to forgive or our lives will be consumed by hatred, revenge, or fear. And wow what a difficult thing that is to do. And we have all experienced forgiveness or lack thereof in one way or another in our lives.

Here is a story I read this week. Roy had the task of finding work for parolees. He seemed to have great success with one particular business owner who would take on even the most hardened criminals. One day this business owner told Roy his story.

He was a young man working for a company in the Midwest delivering goods and collecting money. Over time, he stole several hundred dollars from that company. One day his boss suddenly told him, "Go home. I'll take your route today. Bring your wife and come to my house this evening."

The young man waited at home all day with his wife asking why he was not at work. Later on, he told his wife that those hours were like a living hell. That evening, the young couple went to the boss's house and was greeted warmly by the boss and his wife. After they had visited in a friendly way, the older man turned to the younger one and simply asked him to tell his wife why he had not worked that day. It was an ordeal, but the young man began unloading the grim facts of what he had done. His poor wife broke down and wept. Then the boss spoke again, stressing how morally wrong the man's conduct had been, saying, "I could put you in prison, but I am going to give you another chance."

He instructed the young man to report for work as usual the next day. "We will not let you handle money, yet" he said, "but you will have an opportunity to redeem yourself." So, he went back to work and eleven years later, became president of the company. As he related this story, his eyes filled with tears. It was why he kept giving others a second chance. Everyone no matter what they have done, deserves forgiveness and a second chance.

You know that this section of Matthew's Gospel sure has some heavy requests or lessons to learn about relationships. Take care when dealing with little or vulnerable people and do not cause them to stumble. We must find every lost sheep to restore our flock of 100. Restoring conflicts not only in the church but in life was last week's lesson. Our text for today is calling us to extend forgiveness to others where the outcome is not justice but reconciliation. Giving and receiving forgiveness is difficult. However, it is central to our faith and not only in the Kingdom of God but in the world in which we live. Remember our two kingdoms from last week?

First, we need to learn to receive God's forgiveness. We then can pass on only what we have received ourselves. Experiencing forgiveness at the hands of God and God's people, we are then called to make it possible for others to experience it. This, the circle of Christ's love, expands even wider to encircle those in the world in which we live. This is not cheap grace folks. Jesus is not suggesting that we regard offenses as unimportant. Nor is he suggesting that we just fritter them away. Jesus takes sin seriously and therefore we should take forgiveness equally seriously. After all, Jesus died to sin and

rose again so that we could have forgiveness of all our sins, those realized and those not even known.

To show how important it is to forgive, Jesus tells Peter that we need to forgive 70 times 7. So many times, we would need more than our fingers and toes to count them. Numbers are interesting to me, and I find it fascinating to hear Jesus use the perfect number 7 and multiply it even more by ten times 7. Well, at any rate it is too many times for our hearts to count. So, it must be very very serious to forgive in Jesus' eyes. And not only to forgive but also to take tough corrective action to restore a relationship if we are on the offender side of the sin.

This lesson comes as our parable continues when the forgiven one does not give forgiveness to the one who owes him money. How soon we forget that we are forgiven! And that we should recognize our sin and repent. Sometimes we do glam on to God's free gift of grace and forget that we need to repent of our sins to claim His forgiveness. It is open to all who repent. So, when our second debtor is confronted by the one who was forgiven by the king, he uses the same words to beg or repent his sin. Yet this does not seem to matter to the forgiven one who was owed this money. And the king hears about this behavior not understanding how someone he forgave would not forgive another even for a much much smaller debt. And then the harsh punishment, he was taken to be tortured until he repaid his debt which he could never do even in 200,000 years.

And now the warning that really makes us uncomfortable. "So, my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart." Verse 35 A big wow. A huge warning to us that if we want to enjoy salvation by the grace of God, we are to manifest at least some small portion of that grace in our relationships with our Christian brothers and sisters because our eternal security is at stake.

God's word is not always comfortable. Some of you on occasion has commented to me at the end of worship that what I said made you uncomfortable. I usually comment "great". At least I have made you sit up and think about a facet of your faith. Well, this lesson in Matthew makes us squirm even without my explanation. And if we choose to look there are many places in scripture where God hands out judgement to his children for their actions. Ask any confirmation student and they will say my favorite example is Lot's wife who was told not to turn around. She turned around and became a pillar of salt. Best to leave the judgment for another sermon, but also paramount that we forgive others as we have been forgiven.

And so there you have it. We are to ask for forgiveness or repent of the sin we commit and also be open to forgiving others who do the same, asking our forgiveness. As I was thinking about this command, this week. I thought about it as a pass through. Sometimes I move money from one account to another and then pay it out. Forgiveness passes through our hearts and so we will be able to pass it on to one who has asked for our forgiveness. Make sense? But first, I think it necessary to understand, again in our hearts that God has forgiven us. He sent his only son to die for us on the cross as a sacrifice to atone for our sins. Our death, one sin at a time is linked to His death. And our resurrection is complete when we believe that Jesus gave his life for us, to secure for us, forgiveness, and abundant and eternal life. We need to believe this with all our hearts, not just heads, but hearts. And

once we know that I think we find it right to ask God to give us His grace not only as our forgiveness but in the capacity to forgive those who have hurt us. And God will give us the power to forgive others. When we are forgiven God's power comes into our hearts and transforms us and heals us of our pain of sin. We ask for the same power to forgive others. "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us" we are taught by Jesus to pray.

Easier said than done, you say. Yes, sometimes it is as we are all human. Some nights I go to bed beating myself up so much for being uncaring, rude, or nasty that I cannot sleep. Maybe it is my way of teaching myself a lesson I don't want to repeat. I know I need to be forgiven and God will do that if I just ask. I also feel that the only way to give forgiveness is to recognize it for ourselves as it comes from God. It is our second chance if you will. We are washed by the blood of the lamb, and we are cleansed by the suffering and death of Christ Jesus. We have been forgiven and now we are asked to forgive one another from our hearts. This is the Word of God. AMEN