

The Absolute Necessity of Forgiveness

Call to Worship: Psalm 29

1st Scripture: Matthew 18:21-35

2nd Scripture: Matthew 6:9-15

Hymn #81- *A Mighty Fortress*

Hymn Insert- *The Power of the Cross*

Hymn #86- *Now Thank We All Our God*

Introduction

We've been working through this section of the Sermon on the Mount, where our Lord has been addressing the ungodly *actions* of the religious leaders, most particularly involving actions that are associated with worship. We've looked at "charitable deeds" already, and last time, we finished addressing the matter of "prayer."

Before moving into "fasting," we find our Lord bringing out, what we might consider to be, a parenthetical statement, in the text that we will be seeking to consider this morning. The fact that He includes this additional statement here, which was clearly taken from the "model prayer" that He had just given, definitely presents us with a certain sense, that this matter is extremely important to our Lord. In other words, He is, beyond the shadow of any doubt, seeking to emphasize and highlight just how important it is, for us to ensure that we do, indeed, forgive others, if we expect to be forgiven by God. The parable that we read in our first Scripture reading, further attests to the serious nature of this matter. And so, as we consider this text for this morning, we want to ensure that we take this matter deeply to heart, without speeding past these words, as if they are of little importance.

I. The Absolute Necessity of Forgiveness

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

Again, when our Lord begins this statement with the word, "For," clearly, He is referring back to the portion of His prayer, within which, He had addressed this matter: "And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors." And so, as we've already seen, our Lord intentionally goes

out of His way, to highlight this particular area of importance, before moving into addressing the matter of “fasting.”

And furthermore, we also see the importance of this matter, by the way in which, our Lord deals with it from both the positive and negative standpoints. This is generally done for the purpose of bringing forth emphasis. You may recall, in John’s Gospel, John does something similar to this, when highlighting the eternal and divine nature of our Lord, as the universal Creator. In John 1:3, we are told, “All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.” In a very real sense, the positive affirmation, which declares that “all things were made through” Jesus, provides us with enough information to recognize, that we are dealing with eternal God here. But then, to cover all angles, and to ensure that the point is well-driven home, by way of emphasis, he adds, “and without Him nothing was made that was made.”

Well here, likewise, our Lord uses both a positive and a reverse negative declaration to get a sobering hold of our attention, so that we won’t miss the significance of what He is stating here. Positively, He states, “If you forgive others, your Heavenly Father will forgive you.” And then, negatively, He adds, “But, if you don’t forgive others, your Heavenly Father will not forgive you.”

That said, let us then carefully consider the substance of our Lord’s declaration here. “If you forgive men their trespasses, your Heavenly Father will also forgive you.” And so, clearly, our Lord sets forth a direct connection here, concerning how we relate to others, and how He relates to us. And this is not overly surprising, because, if you think about it, even from a legal standpoint, the Ten Commandments contain two portions, dealing first with our relationship to God and then our relationship to others. And in reality, by way of necessity, as one works to fulfill the first table of the Law (dealing with our relationship with God), inevitably, it will lead to fulfilling the second table of the Law (dealing with our relationship with others). In fact, a good gauge of discerning our obedience to God (whom we cannot see), is to consider how well we are relating to others (whom we can see). Unfortunately, people try to deny this connection, thinking, “Well, as long as I love God, that is all that matters.” But, God says, “You cannot possibly love Me, if you are not loving others, and indeed, if you love Me, that will be clearly

seen, by the way, in which, you express love to others (or not). You cannot divorce the two relationships from this inevitable connection. God has ordered things to function in this way.

And so, it is no wonder that our Lord emphasizes this relational connection, when dealing with the matter of forgiveness. Now, for a few moments, let us consider exactly what “forgiveness” is, and how it is granted, before moving on any further. If this matter is as important as we have seen, then we ought to make sure, that we clearly understand what it entails.

First, when we think of “forgiveness,” the term “debt” ought to come to mind. From a financial standpoint, you might think of someone who has incurred some form of a legal debt to someone else; maybe they borrowed money or they received something, for which, they had promised to repay a price (of some sort), at some later time. And forgiveness comes into play, when the individual who has borrowed money or who has received some item on loan, finds himself incapable of paying back whatever he owes, and seeks forgiveness for the debt. To this end, the loaner can, if he/she so chooses, forgive part or even all of the debt. And, of course, this means, that the individual who had incurred the debt, would no longer be obligated to pay it. They have been freely forgiven the debt.

Now, from the standpoint of our present text, and from a general *spiritual* standpoint, forgiveness still involves a “debt,” but this particular debt has been incurred because of some form of an offense. The Scriptures teach us that when we wrong someone; when we sin against someone, we become indebted to that individual. The wrong we have done to them ought to be recompensed back to us. And furthermore, we incur another debt, as well. Our sin has not only affected our relationship to the individual (whom we have offended), but furthermore, it also affects our relationship with God, because having violated His Law, we have incurred a debt to His justice. God must remain just, and when injustices take place in His creation, those injustices must be recompensed accordingly, which brings us into debt then, as well.

To this end then, we would seek “forgiveness,” recognizing that, to pay back such debts would require us receiving (at least) the same form of injury/pain that we have inflicted on the offended party. And so, being sorrowful for our offense, we seek forgiveness (we seek pardon

for the debt that we have incurred), both, from God and those whom we have personally offended.

Now, it is important to also understand, that in every case, whenever we sin against and incur such debts to others and God, that the debt that we incur with God is far larger and far greater than the debt that we have incurred with the offended party. This is the case because our God is infinite and uniquely holy, and the offended party is our peer. And so, the forgiveness which God grants, when He grants forgiveness, is always, infinitely greater in weight, than the forgiveness that any of us grant to one another. [Ill: Federal offense vs. personal offenses]

This is important, because it brings us to understand the weight of our Lord's point, in our present text. All of us have incurred a massive; infinitely massive debt, to God, in every way that we have violated His Laws. The payment for this debt can only be remitted by our bearing the wrath of God, forever. And yet, God has sent His beloved, divine Son, into this world, to become man, so that, He could bear the full weight of that debt for us. He absorbed the full cost of our debt, so that, by His bearing hell, we can experience eternal glory in heaven, forever. That is the extent that God went, to deal with the debt that we have incurred by our sins. And so, when we are sinned against, by others, where they have incurred a debt with us (only infinitely less than the debt that we have incurred with God), it is a gross offense, and disregard for the grace which God has given us in Christ, to be unwilling to pardon the far lighter debts that others (that our peers) have incurred with us (by sinning against us).

This is why our Lord says, "If you don't forgive one another; if you harbor bitterness and unforgiveness toward each other, God will not forgive you. And if you desire and expect God to forgive you, then you better be willing to forgive one another.

Why then is this matter so important to our Lord, such that He is compelled to emphasize it in our text? Let me give you a handful of reasons:

1) To refuse to forgive someone who has sinned against you, is actually an outright denial of the very Gospel itself. One cannot proclaim (or even embrace) the Gospel of Christ in truth, which is grounded in the whole reality of God forgiving sinners (and us) in Christ, while refusing to forgive others at the same time. Furthermore, to state that someone is not worthy of your forgiveness, is to put yourself in a higher position than God even, who went to such a great

extent (in the giving of His Son) to forgive us. All in all, it shows that you cannot possibly understand the true nature of the very Gospel, you proclaim to believe.

2) Forgiveness is a product of grace, and one of the core attributes which God has preordained to reveal (in this creation), concerning His own righteous nature, is His grace. Our God is, by nature, a gracious and merciful God. And that grace is exhibited by the way in which He forgives unworthy sinners. And so, when we fail to forgive others, we are expressing one of the clearest displays of “ungodliness.” It is un-Godlike, to be unwilling to forgive those who seek our forgiveness.

3) In the building of Christ’s church, it is necessary, on this side of heaven, that sinners who are united to Christ by faith, must also strive to be visibly united to one another in Christ. And it is the unity of the church, which helps provide one of the greatest, visible evidences of all that God is actively accomplishing in this world. A divided church does great harm to the call of the Gospel, leading unbelievers to deny the reality that God has sent His Son to reconcile sinners to Himself. If the church cannot remain unified, how will unbelievers witness the power of our God, who offers reconciliation and union with Him, through His Son? That is why one of Satan’s greatest desires was to “sift” the Apostles like wheat. If he could divide the church (especially at the foundation, in that case), he could distort and contaminate everything that is associated with the purity and power of the Gospel. This is why Satan still does all that he can to create schism and to divide the body today. It is one of the most effective means of countering God’s plan of redemption.

And when we fail to forgive one another, we foster a spirit of disunity. An unforgiving church; a church that does not recognize the importance of, and intend on fostering an atmosphere of continual forgiveness (amongst unredeemed sinners), is doomed to utter disunity and schism. That is why the Lord Jesus Christ spent so much time commanding His Apostles to love one another, even as He had loved them. And that is why the entire New Testament is laced with commands to love one another, to forgive one another (as God, in Christ has forgiven you), to be patient and willing to forebear the offenses of others, to be long suffering and gentle and kind, and to strive to preserve the unity of the Spirit (the unity, which the Spirit calls for), in the bond of peace. Unity is essential to God’s entire plan of salvation. And the union of sinners,

necessitates “forgiveness” (the willingness to freely pardon debt offenses), which is a critical engine in the entire machine work of unity.

4) Finally, beyond the shadow of any doubt then, one of the essential evidences of having a genuine faith in Christ, is that we are willing to forgive those who offend and sin against us. If love of the brethren is an evidence of the work of the Holy Spirit in us, then, at the very basic level, one must be willing to forgive the brethren (continually), as one expression of the love that we have for one another. Harboring bitterness toward others, and especially against those who are seeking our forgiveness, and especially against the brethren (fellow “blood bought” children of God), is a sure sign of a hypocritical faith. How else ought we to understand our Lord, when He states that God will forgive us, if we forgive each other, and God will not forgive us, if we don’t forgive one another? It really doesn’t get any plainer or clearer than that, does it?

“For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses” (Matthew 6:14-15). And so, the connection is undeniable, and the importance of the matter is beyond clear.

II. Concluding Thoughts

When we think of those sins which are especially grievous in God’s sight, we tend to think of murder, adultery, fornication, theft...etc. But, when we consider the severity of our Lord’s statement here in our text, brethren, we ought very much to place an unforgiving and resentful heart, among those sins that we would consider to be especially grievous. It is that serious.

And so, when our Lord includes in His model prayer, the clause, “as we forgive our debtors,” we ought to ensure that during our prayer times, we take inventory in our hearts, to see if we are harboring a spirit of bitterness or unforgiveness toward anyone. It is also interesting to note again, that at the end of the parable that we read in our first Scripture reading (from Matthew 18), our Lord concluded with the following summary statement, “So My Heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, *from his heart*, does not forgive his brother his trespasses” (Matt. 18:35). Remember, the Lord is speaking to His disciples there. And so, first,

He personalizes the address by saying “each of you,” and then he adds, “from his heart,” must forgive his brother, if we are to avoid eternal condemnation. And does this not go hand in hand with what we have been seeing throughout the Sermon on the Mount? God is always concerned with the heart. It is not enough to say, “I forgive you,” to the one seeking forgiveness. But, there must also be, within the heart, a conscious determination to really forgive that individual. And this inward reality will make its way out, to be seen by how we treat those whom we have allegedly forgiven.

Remember, forgiveness assumes that the debt has been paid, and you will no longer hold the offending party accountable for their offense. What ever happened; whatever they did to you, you are determined to treat the individual, as if the offense has been completely removed. You will not bring it up, and as it comes up in your own mind, you will recall that the bill of debt has been taken care of, by your act of forgiveness. Again, consider how God treats us, when He forgives us, and let that be your guide. He tells us that our sins, are as far from us, as the East is from the West. He also tells us that He has buried our offenses into the deepest depths of the seas. And this reflects how He now relates to us, as His beloved children. That is the model of forgiveness, which we need to apply to our own hearts, as we seek to forgive others, who sin against us.

If you are not a Christian here, this morning, there is something so important for you to grasp. The reality is that you are presently separated from your God, because of your sins. We are born offensive to God, because we have inherited a sinful nature from our first parents. And that must be rectified. Your sins must be dealt with, because our God is a righteous and holy God. But, the good news is that God has sent His Son into this world, to redeem sinners from the penalty and power of their sins. God is a gracious and forgiving God, and He is more than willing and able to pardon you, if you would but come to Him through His son, Jesus Christ. God offers forgiveness and salvation in His Son. He so loved the world that He sent His Son into this world to die, as a means of redeeming it. But, you must take Christ as your own personal Lord and Savior, if you are to be forgiven and saved. God has provided the way of reconciliation to Him, but it is also the only way of reconciliation to Him. If you reject Christ; if you don't repent of your sins and believe into Christ, then you will die in your sins. And at that

point, it will be too late, forever! The offer is now available, but when you die, the offer dies with you, and your eternal destiny is sealed forever. There's no turning back, then. Don't die in your sins, friends. Come to the fountain of forgiveness, procured by the Lord Jesus Christ, who died for sinners, and rose from the grave three days later, declaring His victory over sin, and on behalf of His people.

Amen!!!

Benediction: Jude 1:24-25