

Matt. 18:212-35; Luke 11:4

**Forgive Us, As We Forgive (Part 1 of 2)
LORD, Teach Us to Pray – Part 6**

It is has become popular in some New Testament circles to argue against the traditional Protestant explanation that Jesus came into the world to save us from our sins. Paul proclaimed:

¹⁵ It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost *of all* (1 Tim. 1:15).

It is this idea that Jesus came into the world to die on the cross for our sins so that we can be forgiven and accepted by God that is no longer considered the true gospel. That simply isn't enough to tell the gospel. It might be part of the gospel, but its no longer what defines the gospel. It is no longer up in front and central to what the apostles went into the world to proclaim as the good news from God.

So what then is the gospel according to this new understanding? It is that Jesus has come into the world to rule as the Messiah and the LORD in fulfillment of what God promised to Israel! God had promised Israel that He would return as King and He has now fulfilled that promise in Jesus the Messiah. Israel's most pressing need was not a Savior but a King! In his recent publication, *The King Jesus Gospel: The Original Good News Revisited*, Scott McKnight argues:

Remember that the fundamental solution in the gospel is that Jesus is Messiah and Lord; this means that there was a fundamental need for a ruler, a king, and a lord. The pressing need of the Jews of Jesus's day was for the Messiah-King and the Messiah-King's land" (KJG, 137).

N. T. Wright argues in a similar manner in his latest work, *The Day the Revolution Began: Reconsidering the Meaning of Jesus' Crucifixion* (Kindle Locations 6565-6568):

And with all this we lift up our eyes and realize that when the New Testament tells us the meaning of the cross, it gives us not a system, but a story; not a theory, but a meal and an act of humble service; not a celestial mechanism for punishing sin and taking people to heaven, but an earthly story of a human Messiah who embodies and incarnates Israel's God and who unveils his glory in bringing his kingdom to earth as in heaven.

But if you think about it long enough you will soon realize that the proclamation that God has returned to earth in the person of Jesus the Messiah is not good news in and of itself, certainly not for us sinners. To say that a holy God has returned to "the place where sinners live in rebellion to that king" is in no way good news – it is terrible news! As the author of Hebrews warns, "It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Heb. 10:31). The idea that Jesus is King or Jesus is LORD is certainly not good news in and of itself, especially if God is returning to reward the righteous and punish the wicked. Do you really think for a second you will be numbered among the righteous? If you do, it is a sure sign that you are NOT among the righteous! The fact that you are a

sinner and Jesus, the King, is on His way back is the worst possible news you or I could possibly hear! That Jesus is LORD looks something like this:

¹¹ And I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse, and He who sat on it *is* called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and wages war. ¹² His eyes *are* a flame of fire, and on His head *are* many diadems; and He has a name written *on Him* which no one knows except Himself. ¹³ *He is* clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God. ¹⁴ And the armies which are in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white *and* clean, were following Him on white horses. ¹⁵ From His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it He may strike down the nations, and He will rule them with a rod of iron; and He treads the wine press of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty. ¹⁶ And on His robe and on His thigh He has a name written, "KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS" (**Rev. 19:11-16**).

And when those enemies see Jesus coming to bring terror upon them, their prideful levity will turn to dreadful, gut-wrenching mourning before Him:

¹² I looked when He broke the sixth seal, and there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth *made* of hair, and the whole moon became like blood; ¹³ and the stars of the sky fell to the earth, as a fig tree casts its unripe figs when shaken by a great wind. ¹⁴ The sky was split apart like a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island were moved out of their places. ¹⁵ Then the kings of the earth and the great men and the commanders and the rich and the strong and every slave and free man hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains; ¹⁶ and they said to the mountains and to the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; ¹⁷ for the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to stand? (**Rev. 6:12-17**)"

Or,

the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, ⁸ dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. ⁹ These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power (**1 Thess. 1:7-9**),

I beg you this morning not to be so eager to rush into God's presence without FIRST being divinely protected by the blood of Jesus covering you and dressed appropriately in His meritorious robe of righteousness which only He can put on you! Like most Americans, you do not rightly fear God because you are foolish enough to believe that you are far more pure and holy than you truly are. You have forgotten that your best, righteous works are only filthy rags. You have forgotten to enter into God's presence beating your breast and wailing before Him, "God, be merciful to me, the sinner!" (**Luke 18:13**).

It is easy for each of us to become complacent and apathetic towards God's mercy and kindness and

forget that truly **there is NO greater gift** that God could give us than the forgiveness of our sins. If you doubt this it is only because you haven't yet stood before Him in your sins.

Forgive Us Our Sins, For We Ourselves Also Forgive Everyone Who Is Indebted To Us (11:4; Matt. 6:12; WSC 105 – Fifth Petition)

Forgiveness is not a normal topic of polite conversation these days. One wonders if it would even be mentioned in our culture had it not been for the tremendous influence Christianity once had among us. The meaning of the term is simple enough, which is “the releasing of someone from an obligation or debt that is owed.”

In our passage this morning, **debt** is central to the later half of the petition, “we forgive everyone who is **indebted** to us” (Luke 11:4). In **Matthew 6:12** the release of debt is even more prominent as we are told to pray, “forgive us our **debts**, as we also have forgiven our **debtors**.” We can easily see how “**debt**” is related to sin by how Jesus connects them in the parable of the unforgiving servant (cf. **Matt. 18:21-35**). The idea is that God, as both our maker and redeemer, is worthy of our complete love, honor, and obedience. If you doubt this, just take away one of those glorious gifts He has given to us.

In other words, where would you be today if God did not make you? And furthermore, where would you be had He not redeemed you? Because of those two gifts, you owe Him literally your whole life!

But you have chosen instead to rebel against Him by using His gifts for your own selfish ambition and then you chose to glory in and honor yourself as if you gave yourself those gifts. In doing so, you have incurred an **eternal debt** against God because you chose to sin against the God who Himself is everlasting. By saying that your debt is eternal or infinite is to stress that **it is far too great, infinitely so, for you ever to pay back what you owe your God**. That is the idea of the first servant in the parable Jesus told when he owed his lord “ten thousand talents” (one talent was worth 15 years of labor for a slave; cf. **Matt. 18:24**).

When you begin to understand the immensity of what you have done to God and therefore what awaits you when you will certainly stand before Him, then you will begin to appreciate more fully what He has done for you in Jesus Christ to forgive you of your sins. The weight of what the apostle John says will most certainly overwhelm you:

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (**1 John 1:9**).

Forgive Us Our Sins

We don't have time this morning to spell out everything that needs to be said about our passage but there are at least two points I want to begin to draw out here. One I will spell out immediately, but the second I will return to later, perhaps next Sunday, D.V..

The first point I would like to stress here is that this petition of asking God to forgive us our sins is very much tied to the former, “give us **each day** our **daily** bread” by the coordinating conjunction “**and**” between **vv. 3 & 4**. This makes it likely that the “day by day” should be carried over from **v. 3** and applied equally to **v. 4** so that we can understand Jesus as telling us that we need to come before God our Father each and every day to ask Him to forgive us of our sins. Jesus would then be saying something like, “and as you ask your Father to 'give us each day our daily bread' . . . so ask Him daily '**and** forgive us our sins, for we ourselves also forgive everyone who is indebted to us” (**vv. 3-4**).

This means above all that we should always keep short accounts with both God and our neighbor - that when we end our day today and we ask our Heavenly Father to forgive us for what we have done today against Him and we forgive our neighbor that tomorrow we will again come before Him and ask Him to forgive us for the sins we have yet to commit tomorrow. Then we will do so again the day after that and the day after that, on and on, until we stand before Him finally on the day of judgment.

It makes perfect sense therefore that we would need to come before our Heavenly Father every day to ask Him for daily forgiveness because we sin against our heavenly Father daily. And further because He is our Father we can, without any degree of timidity, boldly and daily come before Him – unhesitatingly - to confess our sins (**cf. Heb. 4:14-16**). There is no shame in being undressed and naked before Him. Though He sees us perfectly, even in our sins, yet He also sees us within the perfect righteousness of Jesus His Son who is now and forever our “Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins” (**1 John 2:1b-2a**).

For We Ourselves Also Forgive

Now, before we move forward with the second point I would like to make, let us take a moment and say a few words about the small conjunction “for,” which joins the supporting clause to the main prayer request (**v. 4** - “for” we ourselves also forgive . . .). We don't usually take an inordinate amount of time to deeply analyze a conjunction, but as you will see, this one is pretty significant.

There are basically two ways of understanding the use of the conjunction here: (1) Jesus could be introducing an explanation given to strengthen or support the the main request – something like “forgive us our sins **as we too - or as it is expected of us – to forgive the sins of everyone**” OR (2) Jesus could be giving the reason or ground of the request – something like “forgive us our sins **because we are forgiving the sins of everyone**”.

With **the first understanding** Jesus may simply be saying that for the community of believers who are asking God to forgive them of their sins **it is natural to expect** that they too are forgiving the sins of others – in fact, we would think they were ungrateful hypocrites if they refused to forgive others. In other words, a community which has in common the forgiveness of God (they live in the sphere or realm of God's forgiveness) will also be a community that is characterized by forgiveness among one

another. In fact it would be quite unnatural to expect to see a group that is receiving forgiveness from God while not practicing that same forgiveness towards one another. **Can you envision being daily released of your burdens of sins while racking up a ledger of your neighbor's sins against you?** When we look at our church, or better yet, when the world looks at our church, do they see a forgiving community which together is not only receiving the forgiveness of God but also gladly extending that forgiveness towards one another within the community?

And because the family-community is a microcosm of the church-community, we might also ask if the world sees within your family, whether husband and wife, or parent and child, the same kind of forgiveness granted towards one another that we see in how God daily forgives us of our sins. Husband do you forgive your wife as God has graciously and kindly forgiven you? Or have you become like the unforgiving servant sinfully and tenaciously holding you precious spouse's sin against them - with bitterness daily growing deep within your heart for something they did yesterday, or even years ago, refusing to forgive or release them fully of their debt?

Child, whether young or an adult, whether your parent is still living or long ago dead, do you harbor bitterness toward your father or your mother for the wrongs done to you? After you have looked into the mirror is it really a shock to you that your parents weren't perfect? Are you keeping a ledger all those mistakes over the years, accounting for every time they failed you or even abused you? Are you eaten up/devoured within by a bitter heart that refuses to let your parent go until they have paid back every cent of your life they stole from you?

In all my years of ministry there simply is nothing uglier than a man or woman plagued with bitterness. It is a poison that rarely affects the person you despise, while it destroys you from the inside out.

As Christians something dramatic has happened to us that has forever changed/transformed how we live with everyone else in our lives - every relationship we have has been transformed by what Jesus has done for us and in us. The apostle Paul says it this way. He begins by quoting that beautiful **Ps. 32:**

⁷ "BLESSED ARE THOSE WHOSE LAWLESS DEEDS HAVE BEEN FORGIVEN, AND WHOSE SINS HAVE BEEN COVERED. ⁸ "BLESSED IS THE MAN WHOSE SIN THE LORD WILL NOT TAKE INTO ACCOUNT" (**Rom. 4:7-8** → **Ps. 32:1-2a**).

Now, STOP and think about that for a moment. In fact, don't move any further in your Christian life until you catch the impact of what these verses are proclaiming. Go and read **Romans 1-8, Ephesians 1-3, Colossians 1-3, etc.** and meditate on how incredibly God has worked on your behalf to forgive you of all your sins, not once or twice, but forever! Not 7 times, but seventy times seven – a full jubilee of forgiveness (**cf. Matt. 18:22**)! The truly BLESSED man is that man whose sin God does not take into account! Do you see? Do you hear what God has said? Again, if you doubt that it is only because you haven't yet stood before the impenetrable light of God's holiness in your sin. When the

saints of the Bible beheld God in all His glory and holiness they wanted to die! One day you all will know truly how **absolutely amazing** is this grace that has been shown to you! But Paul moves from this work of God in Christ for you to say:

³² Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you (**Eph. 4:32**).

To the Colossians he adds for those who are tempted to qualify his forgiveness:

¹³ bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, **whoever has a complaint against anyone**; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you (**Col. 3:13**).

We are community of forgiveness. Why? Because the Trinity is a community of forgiveness towards us who belong to Him! That is what our Triune God has been affecting since the FALL. What is true of our God, who is over us, will be true of His people who serve Him by imitating Him. As He loves us, so we love one another. As He is kind toward us, so we are kind and compassionate toward others. And as He has forgiven us of so much and continues to forgive us, so we too forgive anyone and everyone – whoever has a complaint against anyone - who sins against us. Jesus has not only created our community, but by His example He defines forever that quality or nature of our community of which He is the head and we are His body.

Think of it this way: When Jesus was hanging from the cross, He said something that so wonderfully defines His true being – what is at the core of who Jesus is that has made Him so attractive the world over – while being abused and crucified by His enemies, He looks down upon them and says to His Father, what? “Sick 'em!” “Destroy them forever!” “Pay them back for what they have done to me!” No, that's what you and I would have said. But that is not what Jesus said. Instead, He cried out to His Father, “Father forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing” (**Luke 23:34**)!

Do you understand that kind of love and mercy? Could you ever say that about your abusers? Can you love those who hate you the way Jesus has loved you? Perhaps not perfectly! But we are a people whom Jesus is remaking into His image and we can begin to see even the smallest spark of His life igniting within and through us because of His love and forgiveness for us. Near the end of Paul's letter to the Ephesians he concludes with these words:

¹ Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; ² and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma (**Eph. 5:1-2**).

Amen!

-SDG-