

BITTERNESS AND ITS RELATIONSHIP
TO ANGER AND FORGIVENESS
Scripture: Esther 6:1-12
Message 4

INTRO: In our last message we considered the subject of forgiveness, and especially conditional verses unconditional forgiveness. Some years ago my wife heard an account which gave a very interesting definition of forgiveness. When I did the last message I could not find the definition my wife wrote down as she was listening and writing and driving at the same time. This week I found it and called my daughter and asked her to search on internet for more information and I thank her and Wendy for doing that.

On the evening of December 1993, in a tavern in South Africa some blacks took revenge on whites and a hail of AK 47 gunfire ended the life of the daughter of Ginn Fourie, along with two other women. Six were injured inside the tavern and one escapee was shot outside and another injured there as well. Three young men were detained and taken to trial and Ginn Fourie was at that trial. Ginn says that during the trial she sent a message via an interpreter, and I quote, "...that if they are guilty or feel guilty I forgive them." Now listen to this from Ginn herself, "However, I also depended on the law to avenge my loss and was relieved when all three were convicted of murder and sent to prison for an average of 25 years each." I ask you, is that really forgiveness?

Ginn then goes on to say, "Many could not countenance my forgiveness of Lyndi's killers, but as a Christian I cherished the role-model of Christ forgiving his murderers." There is the common understanding of what Christ said on the cross, which of course He did not say as we saw last Sunday. Then she gives this most insightful statement, the one my wife wrote down as she was driving: "Since then I have come to understand forgiveness as a process which involves the principled decision to give up one's justifiable right to revenge..." So, in her understanding forgiveness is giving up the justifiable right to revenge. And I would say that is the wrong definition of forgiveness, but it very accurately describes what you do when forgiveness cannot take place because there is no repentance, but you deal with it in your own life in such a way as to not become bitter. She simply gave

up the justifiable right to revenge and thus ceased to carry a grudge.

Then she adds to this like this, "...to give up one's justifiable right to revenge - for to accept violation is a devaluation of self." If you just accept wrong without justice happening, personhood is devalued. Ginn Fourie is one insightful lady, though in my estimation she calls forgiveness by the wrong name. She gave up the right to revenge and ceased to carry a grudge. The men were still unforgiven and guilty of murder. Giving up one's justifiable right to revenge and thus no longer carrying a grudge is the secret to victory over bitterness when one is wronged and repentance by the offender does not take place.

Well, I thought I had finished main point Roman Numeral II. Words Related to Bitterness. In the sharing time last Sunday I realized I should also have included pride in that list. For those who were not here for the series of messages on Job, you may wish to ask for that series because I think that is the primary purpose of that book.

H. Pride

Well, let us consider this subject of pride. The gravest sin of the universe is pride. It is a sin we are all prone to. And how is pride related to bitterness? When we ever come close to recognizing and dealing with bitterness, pride puts us in its prison and will not let us out. Only the low door of humility will let us out of the prison of pride.

The NT word is *huperephania*. It comes from the preposition *huper*, meaning *above, beyond* or *over*; and *phaeeno*, meaning *to appear* or *seem*. Someone who appears or seems to be above or beyond or over others. This word does not occur often in the NT. Its opposite, *humility* occurs more often. The NT word for humility is *tapeinofrosunee*. It is a rather long word for the Greek language. My computer program says of this word that it is, "not the making of one's self small when he is really great, but thinking little of one's self, because this is in a sense the right estimate for any human being, however great."

This same program notes also the word *praotees*, which we translate meekness, and says it, "is founded upon

this idea, and goes beyond it. It is the attitude of mind and behavior which, arising from humility, disposes one to receive with *gentleness* and *meekness* whatever may come to him from others or from God." Now there is a word that if practiced would certainly would go a long way to keep one from bitterness, if not overcome it entirely.

There is another word translated pride once in the NT, the word *alazonia*, but there is a word not translated pride that I think means pride. It is found twice in Corinthians and is translated 'puffed up'. The word is *phusioo* and literally means to puff up, like a balloon. A balloon can look yet so big, and yet there is nothing to it. And so, like the word *huperephania* it appears much larger than it actually is.

Look at Colossians 2:18 for a look at this word and how it operates (read). Here is a man who acts like he knows things which he has not even seen, and thus he is 'vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind.' The word vain means empty. Like a balloon, he is all puffed up by a fleshly mind. But prick this balloon with the truth and 'poof'.

Now, how are bitterness and pride related? Bitterness puts the iron bars of a grudge around one. Now these bars do not reach to the ground. They do not need to. Once one is puffed up inside these bars, one will not let him or herself down to get out. Pride has puffed one up inside. The only way out is underneath, and to get underneath, one must first be deflated. That high appearance has to go. And this deflation is extremely painful. Lou Sutera said no one ever died swallowing his own pride yet. And everything inside the proud person seems to scream that you must not let yourself down. If you do it will destroy you. Yet the only way up on the outside of these bars is down inside of these bars. Pride is the deadliest sin in the universe.

I am told you can catch monkeys by putting a hole inside something they can get their hands through. Then you put something inside they want. When they reach in and grasp what they want they will not let go and you can go pick up your monkey. One of my

brothers lived close to a little lake that had crayfish in it. They are like a small lobsters. You put some meat on a string for bait, you don't need a hook. Then you let it down to the bottom and you watch until the crayfish has a hold of the bait with his claw and then you pull him up. He will not let go. You lift him right out of the water and put your container underneath and then drop him in your container. So in bitterness, we will not let go of our pride and there we are stuck in the cage of our anger.

Now, in the word *tapeinophrosunee* is the word *phreen*. It is the part of the mind where thinking occurs. Pride is high thinking of oneself. Humility is low or thinking of oneself. I am in agreement with this quote on humility, that it is: "not the making of one's self small when he is really great, but thinking little of one's self, because this is in a sense the right estimate for any human being, however great."

Now go with me to Philippians 2, one of the greatest passages in the Bible on humility. (Read verse 3). We are not to do anything out of selfish ambition or conceit. The word conceit here is vainglory. "...but in lowliness of mind..." There is the word for humility. In humility we are to esteem, that is to reckon others better than ourselves. I think it means we are to consider them more important than ourselves.

(Read verse 4) Now these verses are not hard to obey. They are impossible to obey, unless we truly live as Christians. (Read verse 5). This verse says we are to let a certain mind be in us. The word for *mind* here is the same root as the root of the word *tapeinophrosunee*. It is lowliness of thinking. Now what kind of thinking was in Christ Jesus. There is a very interesting point in verse 6. Before He was born on earth He existed in the form of God. That is *morphie*. He was actually God in His inner being. The NKJV says He did not consider it robbery to be equal with God. I will not take time to make all the explanations here, but I think, along with others, that it means He did not think equality with God something to be grasped and clung to. Something which He could not let go. He could let this go and become

man and even suffer the most shameful death ever invented. There was no pride. There was lowliness of mind, humility. That is why He could become man. He did not think others were better than He. He considered them more important than all His glory with the Father. There is the supreme example of humility. He could let go.

III. THE CAUSES OF BITTERNESS

We are now ready to move on to the causes of bitterness. Let me give once more the definition I gave in another message for bitterness: "Bitterness is a state of unresolved anger caused by violated rights or thwarted desires which causes a bitter taste in the soul." In that definition I give two causes; violated rights or thwarted desires.

So in that sense, bitterness wants to happen when I get what I don't want; or when I don't get what I want. When my rights are violated, I get what I don't want, and I can become bitter. When my desires are thwarted, I don't get what I want, and again I can become bitter.

A. Violated Rights

There are certain rights that are God given. No parent has the right to be abusive to their partner or to their children. It is the God given responsibility for a husband to love his wife and for a wife to reverence her husband. It is the God given right of a child to be loved and cared for by their parents. Parents who do not do that, violate the God given rights of their children. No parent may withhold a legitimate marriage from their child. God said in Genesis 2:24, "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh." Marriage is a God given right. There are parents who want to control whom their children marry and when they marry and so on. But no couple has the right to bring children into the world and not allow them to marry or not let them marry because they do not like that person. There are certain rights parents have in the matter of the marriage of their children, just as there are certain responsibilities they have toward that.

When a couple has a child, they have certain God given responsibilities towards those children. Those responsibilities become rights on the part of the children. Parents have the responsibility to feed and clothe their children. Food and clothing become a right of the child. Parents have the responsibility to discipline their children, but they also have the responsibility to keep that discipline in line with the Word of God.

I grew up with a young man whose dad had passed away when he was a young boy. His mother remarried and his step dad was brutal. Sometimes this step dad would take this little boy and whip him with a siphoning hose so that he could not sit for days. He grew up in fear of his step dad. His dad overworked him and abused him so that his body was physically affected when he grew up. This young man's rights had been violated to an incredible degree. And as a young man, he became a bitter man. I did not blame him for being bitter. And yet, when we become Christians, God says, "Let all bitterness be put away.."

If the stories of violated rights just in this community alone were told, it would take many books to tell them and these stories would break many a heart. There may be here in this service those whose story has never been told and they never want it told. And the question comes: How can such a person overcome bitterness? If we would hear some of these stories, we would say, "They have every right to be bitter!" But the Bible says, "Let all bitterness be put away.."

If you are such a person here this morning, let me just say, give yourself time. Read the Word of God. Live the Word of God. Philippians 2:14 says, "Do all things without murmurings..." or as the NKJV says, "...without complaining..."

Some time ago I visited my uncle George. Now if there is any man who has the right to be bitter and complaining, I think he qualifies. But I cannot detect any bitterness in him. And I said, "Uncle George, what is the secret to staying away from bitterness?" And he had not given this thought I

could tell, but after some thought he said, "Don't dwell on things."

Now let me show you another verse out of Philipppians. In 3:12 he speaks of what I would call the goal of the Christian life; Christ-likeness. And in verse 13 he says, "Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended..." I am not yet like Christ. I do not view myself as having arrived. Then he says, "...but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are before..." Now you see, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward are two things, not one. The one thing he does is found in the next verse, "...I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus."

Now there are two things he does to achieve Christlikeness. First, he forgets those things which are behind, and second he reaches forward to those things which are before. Now let me make a very important point here. These are present tense participles. When he says '...forgetting those things which are behind...' he is not saying, "having forgotten those things which are behind." He says he is forgetting, present tense. I am forgetting, and it comes back and I say no, I will not dwell on this. No. No. No. I am forgetting. Day by day I forget. I refuse to dwell on the past. Now there are times when there are things to take care of from the past. Take care of them and then forget them. Some counselors dig and dig and dig in the past. If there are things to take care of, take care of them and then forget, forget, forget.

Second, Paul seeks to be conformed to the image of Christ by reaching forward. It is hard to work forward when you are looking back. Maybe you are here this morning and violated rights have made you bitter, and you keep looking back. Well, maybe there is something you need to do with regard to the past. Do it and then move on. If there is not, forget and keep forgetting and when it comes, put it away. Forgetting is not getting rid of it as a historical fact, one you cannot recall. It is not letting it occupy my mind, and thus run or ruin my life.

B. Thwarted Desires

There is another cause for bitterness. It is what Henry Teichroeb, who worked with the Suter's for some years, called thwarted pride and I call it thwarted desires. I think such was the case with Simon the magician. Look at Acts 8 (read verse 9). No question from this verse but that he desired to be viewed by others as someone great. We are not given more of his history before he became a magician, but he may have tried many things to gain recognition. He may have failed many times and finally tried magic to achieve his desire. He may well have been in the gall of bitterness by the time he was acclaimed by the people as, "...the great power of God."

Then came the Gospel. And the Gospel was so powerful, many of his admirers became Christians, and Simon himself came under its power. And he believed and was baptized (13). And now he is a new Christian and the old desire to be someone great is still there and so he offers money to buy the power that on whomever he laid his hands, these people would receive the Holy Spirit. And the Apostle Peter said he was thinking very wickedly and that he must repent of this kind of worldly thinking. And then he said, "For I perceive that you are in the gall of bitterness."

Our desires may be thwarted by other people. Maybe I wanted to be the valedictorian of the class but someone else was chosen. I may become bitter towards all those involved because my desires have been frustrated. I may desire to be a great preacher or deacon or any other kind of position and someone else is getting that recognition, and I can become bitter. I can desire to be a big farmer, but somebody else becomes that, and I can become bitter.

Let me give you an OT example. In the book of Esther we meet a man by the name of Haman. He wanted the position of top man with the king. He did everything and anything to get recognition. When people bowed to him, then he was fulfilled. But, there was an obstacle on his road to achieving his desires. It was a dirty, stinking Jew by name of Mordecai. Oh, how he would have just liked to wring the life out of this offensive little Jew! But this offensive little Jew,

like Shadrach, Meshek and Abednego, he would not budge, he would not burn, and he would not bow!

Now at the bottom of such desires lurks pride. And the Bible says God resists the proud! And one day the king could not sleep. Let's read the account in Esther 6:1-9. Now you see, Haman thought the king was talking about him. And Haman thought about what he would like to be done to himself. And he chose the highest experience he could think of and the king liked his idea. Now let's read verses 10-12. Well, because his desires were frustrated by this little Jew, a nationality of people he could hardly bear, he became extremely bitter towards all the Jews and tried to exterminate them, just like Hitler did. And at the bottom of it all? He was in the gall of bitterness! He lived with a few successes and many thwarted desires!

Such bitterness can be towards God or man. We are bitter towards those we think stand in our way. I may be counting on a good crop this year and then next year I can do thus or such. And then, out there in my field is a beautiful crop. Every day I check it and it looks more and more promising, and then it begins to ripen, and then... it hails! And my crop is flat. It is ruined! Now instead of profit, I count losses. Some people come so low from these thwarted desires, they commit suicide.

So, the two chief causes of bitterness, as I see it are thwarted desires and violated rights.

CONCL: So, in conclusion, we considered pride. This sin, like high blood pressure is the silent killer. Maybe you are in the prison of bitterness, and it is pride that holds you in. Oh the pain of dealing with such things. Maybe this morning you need to say, "Lord, I believe. Help my unbelief. I will do what You ask."

Then I gave two things that I view as the causes of bitterness; either violated rights or thwarted desires. And it seems to me that God does not seek to keep Christians free from violated rights or thwarted desires. These are some of the very best tests of our Christian character. 1 Peter 1:7 says that the trial of our faith is much more precious than gold that perishes. I believe that means it

is precious to God. We do not like it but He gets something of far greater value than gold that perishes.

Were the rights of Jesus Christ violated? They were violated on every hand and He died the most unjustifiable death any man has ever endured. He got what no human deserves, never mind that He was God Almighty manifested in the flesh.

Did He experience thwarted desires? In the Garden of Gethsemane, He was given a cup to drink and He had one incredible, immeasurable desire, and that was to not drink that cup. He was in such agony over this that He sweat as it were, drops of blood. That night He was to drink it, when He was tired from a long day, He plead with God for three long hours. Blood oozed out of His pores and His heart was fairly wrenched out of its place before He gave His desires over to God Almighty and said, "Not my will be done, but Thine." Violated rights, and thwarted desires on every hand, and yet no bitterness!

The one characteristic we need to cultivate and which is most helpful in overcoming bitterness when one's desires are thwarted or one's rights are violated is meekness. When I become meek, I can say with the Apostle Paul in Philippians 4:11-13, "Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, *therewith* to be content. I know both how to be abased, (thwarted desires) and I know how to abound (fulfilled desires): every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me."