

Sermon Series: Forgiveness: The Clean Slate

Sermon Title: What If God Was One Of Us

Sermon Text: Luke 7:36-50

Introduction

Thomas A. Edison was working on a crazy contraption called a "light bulb" and it took a whole team of men 24 straight hours to put just one together. The story goes that when Edison was finished with one light bulb, he gave it to a young boy helper, who nervously carried it up the stairs.

Step by step he cautiously watched his hands, obviously frightened of dropping such a priceless piece of work. You've probably guessed what happened by now; the poor, young fellow dropped the bulb at the top of the stairs.

It took the entire team of men 24 more hours to make another bulb. Finally, tired and ready for a break, Edison was ready to have his bulb carried up the stairs. He gave it to the same young boy who dropped the first one to demonstrate true forgiveness.

After a long sermon, he asked how many were willing to forgive their enemies. About half held up their hands. Not satisfied he harangued for another twenty minutes and repeated his question.

This time he received a response of eighty percent. Still unsatisfied, he lectured for fifteen minutes and repeated his question. With all thoughts now on Sunday dinner, all responded except one elderly lady in the rear.

Ms. Jones, are you not willing to forgive your enemies? Ms. Jones replied, I don't have any. Ms. Jones, that is very unusual. How old are you? She said, Ninety-three. The pastor said Ms. Jones please come down and tell the congregation how a person can live ninety-three years and not have an enemy in the world." She said, "It's easy. I just outlived them all!"

For the past few weeks, we have been looking at “The Freedom of Forgiveness” from Luke 7. There three different levels of forgiveness described in this amazing saga. There is the forgiveness of God as Jesus says to a woman who was stained and scarred by sin, “Thy sins are forgiveness.”

There is the forgiveness of self. Once Jesus forgave the woman, He said to her, “Go in peace,” which reminds us that not only can we experience the forgiveness of God, but, because God has forgiven us, we can forgive ourselves.

Today, we see the forgiveness of others as portrayed in the story Jesus would tell Simon regarding a creditor and two men who were debtor to him. The story reveals that because God forgives us, we can, should, and must forgive others.

I want to reiterate a point that I made last week. God forgives me, that's Grace. I forgive me, that's Peace. I forgive you, that's Fellowship. All three levels make up the freedom of forgiveness. Let's look at this story Jesus told to Simon in verses 40-42 regarding why, when, and how we should forgive others.

I. **The Realization Of Free Forgiveness**

Before I can experience the freedom of forgiving myself, as well as others, I must come to the realization of God's free forgiveness that I have received. The woman in our story illustrates this free forgiveness is:

A. **The Gift of God**

The woman in this story, in no uncertain terms, was a "sinner." In verse 37, we're told that everyone "in the city" knew she was a sinner. In other words, her reputation as a dirty, defiled and depraved sinner preceded her. She was known by her life, as well as her

lifestyle. It was not a secret to anyone, because Simon knew she was a sinner, Jesus knew she was a sinner, everyone “in the city” knew she was a sinner; and, she knew she was a sinner.

But, it was to a despicable and detestable sinner, Jesus says in verse 49, “Thy sins are forgiven.” As far as Jesus was concerned, forgiveness was just that simple. She could not earn it, merit it, or attain it. It is a free gift of God. However, the gift of God is revealed as:

B. The Grace of God

This unnamed woman was a dirty, defiled, depraved, detestable, and despicable sinner. She, like us, was a sinner by birth, and a sinner by behavior. Who she was, and what she had done was stained by sin.

Yet, she hears the Lord Jesus say, “Thy sins are forgiven.” The word “forgiven” literally means, “To take, or send away.” Jesus was saying, “All that you have done is gone. Your sinful past and your sinful practices have all been taken away.”

This woman did not deserve the forgiveness of Jesus. She could not earn it, she would not attain it, and she did not deserve it. It was the free gift of God, and the free grace of God. In gratitude she fell at the feet of Jesus, tears running down her face and dropping on His feet.

Lovingly she wiped those tears from His feet with her hair and anointed them with oil. An old Welsh proverb says, “In every pardon there is love.” In this scene of God’s forgiveness there was a deep expression of love.”

However, it was not her tears that saved her and merited God’s forgiveness. Neither was it her love that earned her forgiveness. Jesus said to her in verse 50, “Thy faith hath saved thee.”

The forgiveness she experienced was not an act of her doing, but rather of the Lord’s doing. Her forgiveness was an act of God’s grace. Chuck Swindoll writes, "Grace means that God, in forgiving you, does not kill you.”

The renowned British expositor, Alexander MacClaren said, “The word ‘grace’ is a kind of shorthand for the whole sum of unmerited blessings which come to men through Jesus Christ. One of those blessings is forgiveness.”

As sinners, we deserve nothing but judgment, condemnation and death. But, God in Christ gave us something we did not deserve to escape judgment, condemnation and death.

It is free to us, but not to God. It doesn't cost us anything, but it cost God everything in the person of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. It is the free gift of God. It is the free grace of God. Because of the realization of free forgiveness, we must then consider:

II. **The Expectation Of Full Forgiveness**

Once we realize the free forgiveness of God, a responsibility and accountability comes with it. In other words, once there is a realization of free forgiveness, there then comes the expectation of full forgiveness.

The story Jesus told, in verses 40-42, was in response to Simon's condemnation of this sinful woman in verse 39, "This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth him: for she is a sinner.."

In verse 40, Jesus rebukes him and says, “Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee.” He then proceeds to tell him a story, which reveals why, and how God expects us to fully forgive others. For one reason, we are to forgive others because of:

A. Our Relationship to Jesus

Paul speaks profoundly in Ephesians 4:32, “And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you.” Do you see that? We are to forgive because “God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven us.”

We are to forgive because of our relationship to Jesus. We are to forgive because we have been forgiven. Forgiving others is expected of those who have been forgiven. However, forgiveness is not a natural tendency, but it is a spiritual responsibility.

Our natural tendency is not to forgive and forget, but to fume and fight. Our natural tendency is not to get over it, but to get even with it. We are a lot like the Quaker who owned an ornery cow. Every time he milked her it was an ordeal.

One particular morning the cow was unusually irritable. The Quaker was determined to endure the session without getting angry. As he began to milk the cow, it stepped on his

foot. He groaned under his breath and pulled his foot free. The cow then swished its tail in his face like a long string whip. He merely leaned away so it wouldn't hit him. Next she kicked over the bucket spilling the milk.

Then to top everything off, it hauled off and kicked him against the barn wall. That was all the Quaker could take. He stood to his feet, marched in front of the cow, pointed his finger in its face and said, "Thou dost know that I am a Quaker. Thou knowest that I cannot strike thee back, but I can sell thee to a Baptist." I think of a classified ad that read:

Wedding dress for sale, never worn.

Will trade for .38 caliber pistol.

Forgiveness, for the Christian, is not an option, but an obligation. It is not left open for discussion or debate, but duty. We are to forgive because we have been forgiven, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you but, not only are we expected to forgive because of our relationship to Jesus, but because of:

B. Our Partnership with Jesus

Jesus tells this wonderful story in verses 41-42, "There was a certain creditor which had two debtors: the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most?"

Simon answers that question in verse 43, "Simon answered and said, I suppose that he, to whom he forgave most. And he said unto him, thou hast rightly judged." Then, notice the conclusion Jesus makes in verse 47, "Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little."

In other words, we forgive because of our relationship to Jesus and our partnership with Jesus. Let me put it this way. We are to forgive, because we are no more like Jesus than we forgive. We did Jesus wrong, but He forgave us. Thus when others do us wrong with Jesus, we are to forgive them as well.

Amy Carmichael said it best, "If I say, 'Yes, I forgive, but I cannot forget,' as though the God, who twice a day washes all the sands on all the shores of all the world could not wash such memories from my mind, then I know nothing of Calvary's love."

Jesus doesn't hold or harbor unforgiveness toward us; thus, if we are in a relationship to Him, and partnership with Him, we do not hold or harbor unforgiveness toward others. Don't you think that if anyone had a right to unforgiveness it would be the Lord Jesus?

He was guilty of no wrong doing, yet, He died to forgive the wrong doers. He was guilty of no sin; yet, He died, the "just for the unjust," to forgive the sinners. Jesus did not have to forgive us, and would have been perfectly right to not forgive us.

But, He did not forgive us because we deserved it; He forgave us because He desired it.

In the same way, as believers in relationship to Him, and partnership with Him, we are to forgive one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you. In essence, when I forgive, I am working in partnership with the Lord Jesus Himself.

But, I am also expected to forgive others if I expected forgiveness from God, and expect to remain in fellowship with God. Jesus said in Matthew 6:14-15, "For if ye forgive men their trespasses your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."

His forgiveness of us was full and free; our forgiveness of others is to be full and free. It may not be easy, but it is expected of those who have been forgiven. The realization of free forgiveness and the expectation of full forgiveness leads to:

III. **The Jubilation of Final Forgiveness**

Someone has said:

To forgive the whole world,

To me is no chore.

My only real problem

Is my neighbor next door?

Once God forgives us, we are expected to forgive others. But, I believe this story shows that once we forgive others, there is such jubilation of final forgiveness that cannot be attained any other way. For one thing, Jesus shows:

A. The Unconditional Basis

I want you to notice exactly what took place in the story Jesus shared with Simon. We read that “a certain creditor which had two debtors: the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty? And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both.” A

creditor was someone who loaned money and a debtor was one who borrowed the money. When someone borrowed money from a creditor, a bond stating the amount being borrowed was in most cases signed by witnesses to prevent fraud.

These bonds contained the name of the creditor and debtor, the amount owed, and the date, together with a clause attaching the property of the debtor. In fact, it was a kind of mortgage.

When the debt was paid, the legal obligation was simply returned to the debtor; if paid in part, either a new bond was written or a receipt given. It was not much different than if you were borrowing money from a bank today, with the exception, one would sign a note for themselves.

In the story that Jesus gave there were two debtors. One owed the creditor fifty pence and the other five-hundred pence. A denarius was the equivalent to a one day's wages. Thus, one debtor owed 50 days worth of wages; and, the other owed 500 days worth of wages.

When it came time for the payment of the debt, neither could pay the debt. They were both broke and "had nothing to pay." What did the creditor do? Instead of calling in his mortgage or having them arrested and thrown into jail, Jesus said, "He frankly forgave

them both.” The amount of the debt was not the issue. In all fairness, if the creditor had forgiven anyone, it would have been the man who owed the lesser debt. But, regardless of the amount owed, the debts were the same, because “they had nothing to pay.”

A 50 pence debt was just as great as the 500 hundred pence debt when you don't have the money to pay either one. But, again the amount of the debt was not the issue. The creditor unconditionally forgave both debts.

The word “forgave” is a different Greek word than the word “forgiven” used by Jesus. The Greek word is charizomai. It literally means, “To grant a favor or pardon.” Instead of the creditor giving these debtors what they deserved, he granted them a favor, gave them a pardon, and unconditionally forgave them.

Jesus told the story to say that when people do us wrong, talk about us, or hurt us, we are to grant them a favor, and give them a pardon. They do not deserve it, but that is not the issue. The issue is unconditionally forgiveness.

They may have amassed a large debt with all the hurt they have caused you, but if you have any hopes of being like Jesus; then, you must be willing to give them what they do not deserve, and unconditionally forgive them.

Someone might say, “If they come to me and apologize and make it right, I will forgive them.” Or, “If they quit doing what they’re doing, I will forgive them.” However, you do not read of any conditions attached to the forgiveness demonstrated in this story.

The creditor did not say, “If you never borrow money from me again, I will forgive. Nor did he say, if you do community service, I will forgive you. No, he frankly forgave them both.”

Our forgiveness of others has nothing to do with what they do, or what they have done.

Our forgiveness of others has only to do with the fact that God forgave our debt; thus, to be like Jesus, we must forgive their debt. But, not only is there an unconditionally basis, but there is:

B. The Personal Blessing

Notice that the by forgiving the two debtors, the creditor did not deny the fact that the debt was no owed. He knew of the debt, and the debtors knew of the debt. Again, forgiving their debt was something the debtors did not deserve; but, he forgave them anyway.

As a result, Jesus seems to say that when our level of forgiveness operates with an unconditional basis, there is always a personal blessing. He asks the question in verse 43, “Which of them will love him the most?”

The obvious answer is the man who has been forgiven the most. The creditor forgave the men to be a blessing, but because of his kindness, he will receive a blessing. I believe that this is where the waters of forgiveness become muddied in our way of thinking.

Forgiveness is not denying the reality of our hurt. Forgiveness is not letting the offender off the hook. Forgiveness not overlooking, or condoning, the transgression. The truth of the matter is that someone always has to pay the debt of offence.

Why? Because an offense always creates an obligation that must be paid. Therefore when we forgive someone of the debt of hurt, pain, and offense, it is not for them, it is for us. Forgiveness is not for the debtor, it is for the Creditor. Forgiveness is not for the offender, it is for the offende

Let me put it this way. When we forgive someone, we are not saying that a wrong did not occur, that their sin was all right, or that they did not hurt us. No, we are saying, what you have done has created a debt, but you don't have to pay me. I forgive you, and the debt

will be settled between you and God. There are people who have offended me, and without ever asking for my forgiveness, I have already forgiven them. If they ever come and ask me to forgive them, it is only a formality, because in my heart, I have granted them a favor, signed my own pardon to stay out of spiritual jail.

I refuse to go through life after I came to the understanding of what God, in Christ, did for me. I refuse to go through life bitter, because I don't want to live in prison, and I want to get right, be right, and stay right with God.

How people think in regard to forgiveness has always amazed me. For some reason, we tend to think that when we are unwilling to forgive that we are really hurting the person who hurt us.

But, the truth of the matter is that our unforgiveness hardly, if ever, has an impact on the other person; but, it will absolutely destroy us. The word "bitterness," comes from a Greek word that literally means, "To bite."

It describes a serpent's bite, where poison is injected into the system. When we refuse, or fail to forgive, the satanic serpent has bitten us, and injected us with all the poison of hell itself, which is called bitterness.

As a result, the bitter person is miserable while the other person is having the time of their life. Fredrick Buechner wrote, of the seven deadly sins, anger is possibly the most fun.

To lick your wounds, to smack your lips over grievances long past, to roll over your tongue the prospect of bitter confrontations still to come, to savor the last toothsome morsel both the pain you are given and the pain you are giving back.

In many ways, this is a feast fit for a king. The only drawback is that what you are wolfing down is yourself. The skeleton at the feast is YOU!" Again, forgiveness is not for them, it is for YOU! It doesn't let them off the hook; IT LETS YOU OFF THE HOOK!

It doesn't set them free; IT SETS YOU FREE. Lewis Smedes said it best, "The first and often the only person to be healed by forgiveness is the person who does the forgiving.

When we genuinely forgive, we set a prisoner free, and then discover that the prisoner we set free was US!"

On the morning of December 1, 1997, a dozen students gathered to pray as they usually did before the beginning of their classes at Heath High School in Paducah, Kentucky. As they closed their prayer time, a 14-year old freshman approached the prayer group and,

without provocation, began shooting into the prayer circle. Three students died immediately, and 5 others were seriously wounded. For weeks, parents, school officials, and the media were at a loss to explain such a vile act.

But, many were equally astounded by the willingness of many of the survivors and family members of the deceased to forgive the shooter and his family. One of the survivors was 15-year old Melissa Jenkins, who expects to spend the rest of her life as a paraplegic because of spinal cord damage from the shooting.

And yet, Melissa, a Christian, sent this message through a friend to the one who had destroyed her life: Because of the grace I have received in my life, tell him I forgive him. Is there someone who has hurt you, mistreated you, talked about you, and offended you?

Is there someone you need to forgive? A husband, wife, son, daughter, friend, loved one, or a church member? The feelings you harbor in your heart may go back for years. When you think of a certain person, those bitter feelings once again surface in your heart.

When you see them, a knot rises up in the pit of your stomach. Our human nature does not want to forgive. Yet, an unforgiving spirit is not worth prison time. You say, "Pastor, they don't deserve it." Maybe not, but do you?