

Alderwood Community Church
March 28, 2010

Forgiving: The First Move Is Always Yours!

Ephesians 4:32; Matthew 5:23-24, 18:15-35

Intro: This week is called “Holy Week” or “Passion Week” and it marks the most important week in the life of Jesus Christ, the person who was the most central personality in all of history.

Listen to how one writer puts it: "More than nineteen hundred years ago, there was a man born contrary to the laws of life. This man lived in poverty and was reared in obscurity. He did not travel extensively. Only once did he cross the boundary of the country in which he lived, and that was during his exile in childhood.

He possessed neither wealth nor influence. His relatives were inconspicuous. In infancy he startled a king. In childhood he puzzled lawyers. In manhood he ruled the course of nature, and he hushed the seas to sleep. He healed the multitudes without medicine and made no charge for his service.

"He never wrote a book, and yet all the libraries of the world could not hold the books that have been written about him. He never wrote a song, and yet he has furnished the theme for more songs than all the songwriters combined. He never practiced psychiatry, and yet he has healed more broken hearts than all the doctors far and near.

"Once each week all over the world, wheels of commerce cease their turning and multitudes wind their way to worshiping assemblies to pay homage and respect to him.

"The names of past proud statesmen of Greece and Rome have come and gone. The names of past scientists, philosophers and theologians have come and gone. But the name of this man abounds more and more. Though time has spread nineteen hundred years between people of this generation and the scene of his Crucifixion, yet he still lives.

"Herod could not destroy him. The grave could not hold him. He stands forth upon the highest pinnacle of heavenly glory... proclaimed of God, acknowledged by angels, adored by saints, and feared by the evil one.. as the one living, personal, incomparable Jesus Christ."

Max Lucado, in his excellent book *No Wonder They Call Him The Savior*, writes of the beauty and grandeur of God’s dramatic display of love on the cross.

“Nearing the climax of the story, God, motivated by love and directed by divinity, surprised everyone. He became a man. In an untouchable mystery, he disguised himself as a carpenter and lived in a dusty Judean village. Determined to prove his love for his creation, he walked incognito through his own world. His calloused hands touched wounds and his compassionate tongue touched hearts. He became one of us...”

But as beautiful as this act of incarnation was, it was not the zenith. Like a master painter God reserved his masterpiece until the end. All the earlier acts of love had been leading to this one. The angels hushed and the heavens paused to witness the finale. God unveils the canvas and the ultimate act of creative compassion is revealed...God on a cross.

The Creator being sacrificed for the creation. God convincing man once for all that forgiveness still follows failure.”

1. God's Complete Forgiveness Of Us.

Big Idea #1: *Not until we fully accept and appropriate God's infinite and complete forgiveness on our behalf can we carry out our responsibility to forgive others!*

*Stand and Read: Psalm 103:1-14 (Focus on vrs. 3, 10, 12- God's infinite forgiveness)

*Look up: Micah 7:18-19 (Just as God hurled Pharaoh's army into the sea!)

*Look up: Ephesians 1:5-8 (Begin with "*In love he predestined us...*")
Aphiemi- forgiveness- "to send away", Used as a legal term it meant to repay or cancel a debt or grant a pardon.

*Look up: John 1:8 – 2:2

We need to: Understand it. Believe it. Accept it.

2. Our Complete Forgiveness Of Others.

A. When you are the offender. *Look up: Matthew 5:23-24

Worship was a major concern of the scribes and Pharisees, directly or indirectly the focus of almost everything they did. They spent much time in the synagogues and in the Temple. They made sacrifices, offered prayers, gave tithes, and carried on religious activities of every sort. But it was all heartless external ceremony.

Therefore refers back to Jesus' point that sin, just as righteousness, is first of all internal. As long as there is internal sin, outward acts of worship are not acceptable to God. Jesus continues to focus on the particular sin of hatred against someone else, a brother in the broadest sense.

Reconciliation must precede worship.

Every Jew realized that sin caused a breach in one's relationship with God, and that the sacrifices and offerings were intended to restore a right relationship with Him. Unresolved conflict has priority and must be settled. Therefore, settle the breach between you and your brother before you try to settle the breach between you and God. Not to do that is to be a hypocrite.

- (1) Stop "*Leave your gift there...*"
- (2) Go "*First, go...*"
- (3) Reconcile "*Be reconciled to your brother.*"
- (4) Return "*Then come and offer your gift.*"

B. When you are offended. *Look up: Matthew 18:15-35:Principle stated:18:15-17, 21-22
Principle illustrated: 18:23-35

Forgiveness is not natural to man. Because it is so foreign to fleshly human nature, people find it very difficult to forgive others. King Louis XII of France articulated the feeling of many people when he said, “*Nothing smells so sweet as the dead body of your enemy.*”

Yet nothing so characterizes the new nature of Christians as forgiveness, because nothing so characterizes the nature of their Lord. Jesus’ most striking and humanly incomprehensible words from the cross were, “*Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing*” (Luke 23:34). After being betrayed, falsely convicted, beaten, spat upon, and unjustly nailed to a cross to die an agonizing death, the Son of God harbored no hatred for His tormentors but instead offered them forgiveness. Following his Lord’s example, Stephen’s last words were, “*Lord, do not hold this sin against them!*” (Acts 7:60). He was at that moment being pummeled to death by stones for having committed no greater crime than preaching the gospel, yet his heart was not filled with bitterness but with compassion for his executioners. Forgiveness is the stuff of true godliness.

Forgiveness reflects the highest human virtue, because it so clearly reflects the character of God. A person who forgives is a person who emulates godly character. Nothing so much demonstrates God’s love as His forgiveness. A person who does not forgive is therefore a person lacking in godly character and without Christ like love, no matter how orthodox his theology or how outwardly impeccable his morals appear to be. A Christian who will not relinquish a hateful, resentful attitude toward someone who has wronged him is a person who knows neither the true glory of his redeemed humanity nor the true glory of God’s gracious divinity. An unforgiving Christian is a living contradiction of His new nature in Christ. It is central to the heart of God to forgive, and only the Christian who radiates forgiveness radiates true godliness.

Considering forgiveness from another direction, Christians need to forgive because they themselves need forgiveness. They are spiritual children and, like all children, are ignorant, weak, selfish, disobedient, and regularly in need of forgiveness, both from God and from each other. Forgiving is a give-and-take issue of life.

Forgiveness is therefore the key to spiritual unity in the church, because it is the key to love and the key to all meaningful relationships. Only forgiveness can break down the barriers that sin continually and inevitably erects between people, including God’s people. “*A man’s discretion makes him slow to anger, and it is his glory to overlook a transgression*” (Prov. 19:11). Christians are at their best when they are forgiving. Because they themselves have been forgiven so much by God, they, of all people, should be most forgiving of others, especially of fellow believers. Christians are most like their Lord when they forgive “*each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven*” them (Eph. 4:32). Paul declared the same truth to the Colossians, telling them to bear with one another and forgive one another, “*just as the Lord forgave you*” (Col. 3:13). Because they have been forgiven every sin by Christ, believers should be willing and eager to forgive each other in everything.

Christ's story in verses 23-35 is to illustrate to Peter God's forgiveness of us and the importance of our forgiving others. In today's currency, the first slave owed approximately \$10,000,000 and the second slave owed only \$20.00.

C. Three reasons we ought to forgive:

(1) To refuse to forgive is hypocritical!

Illus: A man was talking to a friend about an argument he had with his wife. He said, "I hate it every time we have an argument, she gets historical". The friend replied, "you mean hysterical." "No", he insisted, "I mean historical." Every time we argue she drags up everything from the past and holds it against me."

1 Cor. 13:5 says "*Love does not take into account a wrong suffered.*" Love doesn't keep score.

Illus: A friend of Clara Barton, founder of the American Red Cross once reminded her of an especially cruel thing that had been done to her years before. But Miss Barton seemed not to recall it. "Don't you remember it?" he friend asked. "No", came the reply, "I distinctly remember forgetting it." You can't be emotionally free and happy if you harbor grudges. The Scripture instructs us to "*Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger...forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.*" Ephesians 4:31-32

(2) To refuse to forgive inflicts inner torment on us!

This is an expressive phrase to describe what happens to us when we do not forgive another. It is an accurate description of gnawing resentment and bitterness, the awful gall of hate and envy. It is a terrible feeling. We cannot get away from it. We feel strongly this separation from another and every time we think of them we feel within the acid of resentment and hate eating away at our peace and calmness. This is the torturing that our Lord says will take place.

(3) We are commanded to forgive! *Look up: Ephesians 4:32

D. How to actually forgive:

(1) Focus fully on God's forgiveness of you!

(2) Deal directly and honestly with any resentment you currently hold against anyone.

Illus: Aaron- the seminary student who was beat up by a bunch of thugs while driving a bus...

Big Idea #2: Remember: When it comes to forgiveness: The First Move Is Always Yours!

Who do you need to talk to? Write down the names of people whom you need to go to and forgive or ask forgiveness.