

Keynotes from Pastor Tim's am Sermon on 20/12/2020

Mini Series – “Making Disciples -Learning to pray”

Part Seven - Matthew 18 v 21-35 “Assurance of forgiveness”

Matthew 18:21-35 ²¹ Then Peter came up and said to him, “Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?” ²² Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times.” ²³ “Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. ^[g] ²⁴ When he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. ^[h] ²⁵ And since he could not pay, his master ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made. ²⁶ So the servant ^[i] fell on his knees, imploring him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.’ ²⁷ And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt. ²⁸ But when that same servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii, ^[j] and seizing him, he began to choke him, saying, ‘Pay what you owe.’ ²⁹ So his fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you.’ ³⁰ He refused and went and put him in prison until he should pay the debt. ³¹ When his fellow servants saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their master all that had taken place. ³² Then his master summoned him and said to him, ‘You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. ³³ And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?’ ³⁴ And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers, until he should pay all his debt. ³⁵ So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.”

At this time of year, the season of Advent leading up to Christmas, we usually focus on the incarnation, the truth that the Son of God added a human nature to his divine nature, so that he was both truly God and truly man. You might be wondering what Christmas has to do with the Lord's prayer, which is said by many throughout the year, not just at this time when we celebrate the birth of Christ.

We have been studying this prayer because, no matter how long we've been Christians, we need help in our praying. **Luke 11** records Jesus praying, and when he had finished, one of his disciples said to him 'Lord, teach us to pray'.

- Perhaps seeing Jesus pray, the disciples realised they had never really begun to pray.
- Perhaps seeing God the Son in fellowship with God the Father, they saw a reality in prayer that they wanted.

Jesus' response is to give them the Lord's prayer, recorded by both Luke and Matthew. Jesus shows that prayer is about centring our heart on God and particularly on his name, his glory, his kingdom and his will. Only when we have done this does Jesus expect us to ask 'give us', 'forgive us', and 'lead us'.

Jesus didn't give us this prayer for preachers to have material for sermons – **he gave us this prayer to pray.**

While we need to understand what it means, we study it so that we will actually pray it and use it to structure our prayer lives. The only command that Jesus gives here is **'Pray then like this'**.

Please take time out over Christmas to make use of this prayer, thinking about what it means:

- To pray to God as Father, and ask for his name to be hallowed
- To seek his kingdom and pray for his will to be done
- To ask him to supply your physical needs
- To pray for his forgiveness and to seek his leading into righteousness

As you think and the Holy Spirit prompts you, then pray. Make it a daily habit to use this structure to fellowship with God and pray about the things that concern him, bringing our requests for ourselves in line with what he wants us to pray for. As we look at the next request (**Matthew 6:12**) and the associated verses (**v14-15**), we will come to see

we can have assurance of forgiveness from God for ALL our sin.

The request to **forgive us our debts as we also forgive our debtors** teaches us two things:

1. We ALL need God's forgiveness

As Christians, we might think that we don't need to pray this request, because all our sins, past, present and future

were dealt with, the moment we believed in Jesus. Jesus evidently felt that we did need to. He is speaking to those who are truly members of God's family, born again by the Spirit of God. Jesus starts this prayer with 'Our Father'. He is teaching those who know God as Father, and telling us that we, who are God's children, need his forgiveness on a daily basis. Writing to believers, the apostle John tells us the same thing in **1 John 1:8-9**.

⁸ If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. ⁹ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

As God's people we need forgiveness on a daily basis, and so we are to ask God to forgive us.

If God has dealt with all our sins through the death of Jesus, then why do we still need to ask forgiveness? To answer this, we need to understand the difference between justification and sanctification.

- a) **Justification** – this is God's declaration that he has dealt with our sins in full in the person of Jesus Christ.
- Every sin we have committed, and will commit, has been dealt with by Jesus.
 - God has imputed to us the righteousness of Christ, and now regards us to be righteous in him.

This happens the moment we put our trust in Jesus and is a once only event that stands for all eternity.

Jesus is not talking about justification in this request, but is dealing with our ongoing sanctification.

- b) **Sanctification** - our conformity to Christ and to the standard of holiness that God expects from his people.
- We aren't yet fully what we shall be when Jesus returns
 - Every day we pick up the dirt and stain of sin
 - Every day we do wrong things and fail to do the right things we should do
- On a daily basis we need to confess that to God and ask his forgiveness.**

When we don't do this, we lose our fellowship and enjoyment of God, as we see in 1

John 1:5-7:

⁵This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. ⁶If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. ⁷But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.

We enjoy fellowship with God by the agency of the Holy Spirit, but when we sin, we grieve God's Spirit, and lose the sense of God's presence that the Spirit of God gives. That is one of the reasons why we feel so rotten when we sin against God and it is a good thing to feel this way about the effect of sin in our lives.

- We know deep in our heart that we have grieved the God who loves us, and who we love
- We feel the pain in our hearts that things between God and us are not what they ought to be

If you are currently acting in a sinful way but are not grieved in your soul, feeling deeply the loss of fellowship with God, then it is highly probable that you aren't truly saved.

When God's people sin, they feel deeply the loss of fellowship with God.

Their desire is to put things right with God, and Jesus tells us that the way to do that is to say '**Our Father in heaven,... forgive us our debts**'. This is a corporate prayer and there is a place in church life to confess sin together and to seek God's forgiveness, as well as doing this in our own individual prayers.

We ALL need God's forgiveness

2. We have the assurance of God's forgiveness.

When we understand our need for forgiveness, and ask God for it, then we can have assurance that we have been forgiven. Remember that it is Jesus, God incarnate, who is teaching us to pray this request, and therefore we can be sure that God will not refuse to give us something he has taught us to ask for. Jesus is teaching us to ask for forgiveness precisely because God is willing to forgive. The request for forgiveness in **v12** doesn't ask God to forgive **because** we have forgiven our debtors, but rather **as** (in the same way) that we have forgiven them.

Jesus is making the point that the children of the kingdom are a forgiving people who:

- keep short accounts with God, because our relationship with him is important
- keep short accounts with one another because our relationships within the church are important

When we truly realise the enormity of our debt of sin, and understand how much we have been forgiven by God, then we cannot withhold forgiveness from others, whose debt towards us is much smaller.

The life of God in our soul:

- will not allow us to act with unforgiveness towards others
- gives us the life of forgiveness towards others

You can see this in the original reading (above). **Matthew 6:14-15** makes the same point. Having experienced the grace of God, our hearts have been broken and cannot remain hard to one who seeks forgiveness. When we find we have forgiving hearts towards those who have sinned against us, Jesus says 'your heavenly Father will forgive you'.

Jesus assures us that with God there is forgiveness, and that message is written throughout the Bible.

Two of the many examples from the Old Testament are found in **Isaiah 55:7** and **Psalms 130:4** (see over for text)

When we sin, which we **ALL** do and will until we are called home to be with the Lord, we need to know:

- there is forgiveness with God and he will abundantly pardon those who repent of their sin.
- when we sin, and are aware of it, we don't need to stay away from God, though Satan will try to tell us that.

Jesus says instead 'Come and ask for forgiveness'.

What does all this have to do with Christmas?

Luke 2:10-11 ¹⁰And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. ¹¹For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord.

The reason God can forgive is because his Son:

- came to earth, born as a man, and lived a life of perfect obedience to his Father
- died as a sacrifice for our sin in our place, and has been raised to life

In his humanity, we know that Jesus prayed the Psalms, many of which contain confession of sin, and a desire for forgiveness (see examples overleaf). There is nothing to suggest that he avoided these Psalms, though they did not apply to him as he himself was sinless. Rather he prayed them on our behalf as our sin bearer. He prayed them knowing that he would take our sin on himself, and pay the price our sin deserves. With our sin atoned for through his death, real forgiveness, where God no longer holds our sin against us, was made possible for everyone who comes to God through Christ.

It is through Jesus, and through him alone, that we are able to be forgiven for all our wrong.

The apostle John wrote: if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.

1 John 1:7

Jesus says to us this morning:

When you pray say, Father....forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors

Bible verses:

Jesus assures us that with God there is forgiveness, and that message is written throughout the Bible

Isaiah 55:7 let the wicked forsake his way,
and the unrighteous man his thoughts;

let him return to the LORD, that he may have compassion on him,
and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.

Psalm 130:4 But with you there is forgiveness, that you may be feared.

In his humanity, we know that Jesus prayed the Psalms, many of which contain confession of sin, and a desire for forgiveness – some examples:

Psalm 32:5 I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity;
I said, “I will confess my transgressions to the LORD,” and you forgave the iniquity of
my sin

Psalm 38:8 I confess my iniquity; I am sorry for my sin.

Psalm 51: 1-2 and ff Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love;
according to your abundant mercy

blot out my transgressions. ²Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse
me from my sin!