

Forgiveness

by Paris Reidhead

Paris Reidhead's sermon emphasizes the transformative power of forgiveness rooted in our recognition of personal brokenness and God's grace.

Duration: 36:18

Scripture: Matthew 5:20, Matthew 18:15-20

Topics: "Forgiveness"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of forgiveness and the heart attitude behind it. He uses the parable of the unforgiving servant to illustrate his point. The parable tells the story of a servant who owed a huge debt to his master but was forgiven, only to turn around and refuse to forgive a fellow servant who owed him a much smaller amount. The preacher highlights the immense forgiveness that God has shown us through the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross, and emphasizes that we must also forgive others from our hearts. He concludes by explaining the process of addressing and resolving conflicts within the church community.

Transcript

Will you turn please to Matthew chapter 18. We've read the portion together. May I remind you that verses 15 through 17 are Christ's provision for the possibility of broken fellowship in the Church.

Verses 18 and 19 is Christ's provision for authority to his Church. Verse 20 is one of those key verses that stands in contrast to the 20th verse of the fifth chapter. You recall that in Matthew 5:20 you read, except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and the Pharisees, you shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.

Our Lord has from that point been proceeding to show that everything in his Church is other, completely different, altogether of a new and higher order than anything that's been known in the past. The Pharisee system had grown up during the 400, largely during the 400 years from Malachi to the beginning of Matthew, with its synagogues and its system of thinking. Of course it was antedated that by a good while, but it had become the expression of Judaism largely at the time of our Lord.

And he is trying to tell the people to whom he speaks that what he is doing is all together of a different sort and nature than anything they've seen before. And so that key statement to the book of Matthew, except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall in no case

enter the kingdom of heaven. Now in verse 20 of this 18th chapter, he puts the strength of the assembly on an entirely different basis.

The importance of the system of the synagogues and the whole pharisaical religion of the day was in numbers, influence, money, power, and all of these things which men coveted and sought after. And our Lord, following this same thought of showing to his hearers how completely new is this thing he's doing, takes the irreducible number, two or three, and he is saying that it's not in a sacred building any longer that the strength lies. It's not in a large organization any longer.

These things that the Pharisees have sought after, these things which have been the measure of success, do not prevail as standards any longer in the thing that he is doing. But there's, it's not the number that is of the utmost importance. You'll see that he has established a principle here upon which the strength of the Church, yea, the meaning of the Church, rests.

For where two or three are gathered together in my name, this is far more than simply using the name of Jesus at the end of prayer. This is far more than simply having it over the door or on the bulletin or in some other conspicuous place indicating that the people are gathering in the name of Christ. But we could put it in this type of a paraphrase, where two or three are gathered together, totally agreed that their whole purpose of gathering is the glory of God in Jesus Christ.

On account of his reputation, on account of his praise, there has to be some basis and foundation. So he provides a foundation for the strength and the authority in the ministry of the assembly. Then Peter, again the spokesman, who has a very poor average up until now, the first instance he was right, as you will recall, he said, thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God, but since that time he hasn't been nearly as accurate, suggesting first to the Lord that he could escape the cross, suggesting to the Lord that they should build tabernacles on the Mount of Transfiguration.

Well, now at least he's approached it from a little different point of view, and he's asking a question. But it's still characteristic of the thinking of a man who tries to enter into the spirit of what the Lord is doing. Now, you recall that he'd been brought up under Judaism, an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.

This was the law. And by the way, when Moses gave that, it was a great improvement. Now, trying to sympathize with what the Lord is doing, Peter asks a question, as much as to say, Lord, is this the type of thing that you're doing? Is this the way you're doing it? No, Lord, I want to just show you how generous I am and how far along I am in understanding this.

How oft shall, if my brother shall sin against me, shall I forgive him? Well, now remember, forgiveness was quite unknown. It was, as I said, a law of reprisal, an eye for an eye, but only one eye, not two. It used to be a life for an eye and a life for a tooth, and the Lord is, as I say, improved on it.

Well, now, Lord, is this your heart? Suppose I should forgive a brother seven times, seven whole times, Lord. Is this the principle? And the Lord says, no, it's seventy times seven, and just carries it completely away. He says, you've misunderstood the matter, Peter.

It's not a matter of a numerical consideration. It's a matter of a heart attitude. This new thing that I am doing has in it a new kind of people, a people that have had something radical and transforming and glorious take place within them.

And then he proceeds to give an illustration, a story, which brings this matter into focus and to a point. He said the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, which would take account of his servants. Then he proceeds to present the one who owed a hundred talents, a tremendous sum of money by any calculation that you would wish to use.

And the man, unable to pay, falls before the Lord, entreating that he be not sent to prison, but be given an extension of time. And the master graciously gives the extension of time, and then he proceeds to forgive the entire debt, an immense amount of money. And this man, going out relieved now and reinstated, finds someone that owes him not a hundred talents, but a hundred pence, the smallest unit of money, just a mere bagatelle, nothing, no significance at all.

And he grabs him by the throat and shakes him and puts him in prison till the debt be paid. Now he was within his legal rights, but in so doing he completely violated all the principles that are set forth by the example of the good master who forgave the immense sum. This was carried back to the Lord who called his wicked servant before him and demanded their full payment, and then had him put into prison.

And the answer is at the conclusion, so likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if from your hearts ye forgive not every one his brother their trespasses. Now the analogy is not difficult to see. You came to the Lord with a mountain of guilt.

The accumulation of your spiritual debts were beyond calculation, certainly far beyond any numeric figure represented by a hundred talents. And of such a nature were they that a lifetime of obedience could not have served to atone for one sin. Do you realize the nature of sin when I put it in this fashion? Sin is of such a horrendous quality and nature were you to, from this day on, perfectly obey God in everything that he asks and demands.

Your perfect obedience from today until the day you die would not acquire enough merit to atone for one sin, because there's no merit in obedience. Obedience is that minimal law that God demands, and simply doing what is demanded carries with it no merit. And a lifetime of obedience would not provide merit sufficient to atone for one sin.

What will you do with the myriad of your sins? How will you ever deal with them? And so he is bringing us face to face with the fact that the only possible way that sin can be dealt with is by the forgiving grace of God. Now, in this sense, the good man can forgive the debtor because it's money, but sin had to be dealt with on an entirely different basis, because it was not simply God's character and reputation and honor that was involved. It was the very foundation of moral government of the universe.

God said through Moses, the soul that sinneth, it shall die. This is an irrevocable law, a law that even God could not abrogate and still retain his place of moral government in the universe. It was necessary for this law to be fulfilled, and thus the only way it could be fulfilled was for God himself to become flesh, dwell among us, identify himself with us, die for us, and not only to die for us, but to die as us.

He not only died for you, but he died as you. Since he was there for you as your representative, in the eyes of the Father, it was you that died, and thus the law is fulfilled. The soul that sinneth, it shall die.

When you come to the cross, realizing that you ought to have died, realizing that Christ died for you as your representative and as your substitute, realizing that the sword of God's justice was driven to his heart and the arrow was plunged into his very being, and that he died as you with God's law poured out upon

you in and you thus embrace Christ, you are forgiven, but you are forgiven of your sins. The sin itself was paid for in Christ. You can be forgiven of your sins because your sins were paid for by a substitute, but sin as such must be paid for.

And so the only way that this immense debt that you had accumulated could ever be satisfied was for God himself to die. Now we've raised our illustration to an entirely different level. It's not mere money that a man can part with at whimsy and never feel the loss if he has sufficient remaining.

This was God himself dying that the of your sin might be paid, dying in your place and in your stead. And the only way that you could ever know forgiveness was to come broken and bankrupt, hopeless and helpless to the foot of the cross, there seeing Christ die as you in your place and in your stead. Now, dear heart, do you then the strength of what he is saying? Someone sins against you, as in the terms of Peter's question, seven times or a one time.

What are you going to do about it? You say, well, he can't do that to me. Yes, but now let's define me. Who is this me that is taking umbrage now and feel that he can't thus be dealt with? That me is one who came and stood at the cross, a self-confessed criminal, laden with a mountain of guilt, utterly unable to do anything to help himself.

Not one good thing to commend him to God, not a place on him as big as the lobe of his ear that he could say, Lord, this has not been defiled and this is clean. No, that me that now is taking offense, saying you can't do that to me, just a little while ago stood in the presence of God, beating the breast, God be merciful to me a sinner. But now he's forgiven, now he's pardoned, now he's a child of God, and now he is saying, but I have my rights.

Whence are your rights? Whence came this me? The only kind of people that God has ever saved are lost people. Lost people, broken people, helpless people. When did you ever lose the character of bankruptcy? When did you ever lose the character of lost? When did you ever lose the character of hopeless and helpless as far as you were concerned? Forgiveness did add nothing to your intrinsic worth or mine.

When we stood there and pled for mercy and mercy was granted, we were no less the paupers after the mercy was granted than we were before. And yet how is it that now we can become so sensitive and so insistent upon our rights and so demanding of our dues? My dear, if we insist upon our due from others, God will insist upon his due from us. And where are we? Hopelessly ensnared again.

And consequently, he is saying that in my house, in this new thing, in my church, are only broken people, only helpless people, only people that at the end of themselves, it's no longer a matter of seven times, Peter. It's a matter of having seen yourself and thus having seen yourself incapable of being offended. This is what he's trying to say.

Because you've seen yourself the debtor whose debt can never be paid and could only be pardoned by the other's payment. And therefore, thereafter, it's not a question of seven times and now, the other cheek and now, and then retaliation and vindication and self-defense. Oh no.

He said the only kind of people in my house are broken people. People that have become hopeless and helpless and at the end of themselves. Now, is this the thing we find? Is it true that Christian people and church members are generally characterized by such brokenness? No, I'm afraid not.

Because I'm afraid that too often there are people that have had an intellectual ascent to the plan of salvation and an emotional response to the joy of escaping from hell. And they've substituted their comprehension and their emotional relief for meeting God. And they've never truly broken.

He has broken people. Now, he understood in his initial statement that there would be problems. He knew that people were people and they'd still be capable of having problems.

But the whole presumption in the instructions that he gives in verse 15, this provision that he makes for the possibility of broken fellowship, assumes that people are of one mind in this matter and that their hearts have been broken. This is only applicable to broken people. This is only applicable to people that have stood before him with an immense debt that they never could pay and have been forgiven of it all and carry with them the recognition that they are by nature paupers.

And so he said in verse 15, if thy brother shall trespass against thee, he realizes there is a possibility and he realizes that it could happen even in the church with broken people. And he realizes that you could be the trespasser and so the instructions are both for you who might trespass and you against whom the trespass is leveled and aimed. What is his word? If thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone.

Why? Because underneath both of you is the fact that you both stood at the cross, both were helpless, both were hopeless, both were broken, both were bankrupt, and neither wants to hurt anybody. The assumption is that it was done, if it was done deliberately, and we'll allow that it does carry this possibility, that it was done without all the facts or it was done under impulse, it was done by falling into sin. We do not see in this a calculated long-term intention to hurt somebody, but carried by feeling, by emotion, by circumstances, by situations, someone has had another trespass against him.

So what does he do? He's the one that's at fault, he's the one that's been hurt rather, and so he goes. If thy brother trespass against thee, go and tell him. Elsewhere we find if thy brother hath ought against thee, go to him.

But now in the other way, if thou hast ought against thy brother, the Lord is not allowing any escape from me. The going is always on my hand. What are you going to do, dear heart? What are you going to do? Are you a broken person? The evidence of the genuineness of God's preparatory work in your heart is seen by your response to this scripture.

This is what, he says, this is what my people do. This is what my people do. Others may do something else, but my people behave this way.

If somebody trespasses against them, my people go to the one who did the thing alone so that it won't be spread and it won't hurt and it won't infect. Go alone. The assumption is both are broken and both want to do what is right and both want to please God.

Now let me ask you, is this your habit in relation to things when someone trespasses against you? Is this your response? If this is the test as to whether or not you are a child of God, are you from this a child of God? If he is saying as he is in fact, my children do thus, are you his child based on what you have done in the past? When someone has trespassed against you, have you done as the Lord instructed and gone directly to the person? Oh, you said there wouldn't be any use, they wouldn't hear me, they're arrogant and proud and haughty and you can't talk with such a person as that. Well, that Lord also understood that

possibility, that someone had under false colors gotten into the place of testimony and was called a brother who wasn't. And so he said if he shall not hear thee, take with thee one or two more.

Go first alone and try and settle it so thou hast gained thy brother. This is what my people do. But it may be that someone is professing to be mine who isn't.

Now this should be made clear because in the church there are to be only those that are his. And so if you go alone and you're not received and the matter isn't settled, then he said my people will take two or three more and go back to the same person over the same issue. And then it will be considered and discussed.

And if the person has the same attitude in the presence of the two or the three that he had when you came to him alone, you now have evidence to take to the church. And then to go before the church and out of the mouth of three or four witnesses the matter be established, then the church is to take the responsibility of dealing with this unbroken, unyielding, unbending person. This is the way the Lord said his people would act.

This is the instruction that he gave in the possibility of broken fellowship. Down at Mahaffey Camp meeting about five years ago, I spoke on the matter of the fruit of the spirit and made the statement that in my experience and estimation, opinion, that probably 95 percent of all the problems on the mission field were personality adjustment problems. When I finished at lunch and Mr. L.L. King, our foreign secretary, sitting next to me said, you know, brother, you were in error this morning in your statistics.

Well, I'd used others and wasn't, couldn't recall at the moment which ones. And he reminded me. Well, I said, I am sure that this is the case, at least in my experience and those with whom I've conversed.

I said, I am sure it's this. I always said the error isn't that it's not that high. He said, it's my opinion that it's probably much higher.

I would like to suggest probably 99 and 44, 100 percent of the problems on the mission field on the part of missionaries are personality adjustment problems. Well, whether the statistics are true or not, the fact still remains that whether it's at home or abroad, this is the source of Satan's greatest handhold in destroying the church and the work and the testimony of Christ. And Christ has given specific instructions.

And he says, this is what my people do. Now, when you do something other, for instance, it might be that someone trespasses against you. And instead of obeying the scripture and going to the person, you go to others about the person.

You are by this saying, I am not Christ. I refuse to submit to the Lordship of Christ in the church. I absolutely refuse to bring myself under his governorship.

And though I profess to be saved, I am a hypocrite because I do not mean what I say when I have confessed Jesus to be Lord. This is what is being done whenever you go to someone else about an issue without having first gone to the person, and if they've not been received, taking two or three others, and if not having been received, carried it to the church. If you go to another before you've done these three things, you have said, though I claim to be a Christian, I am not Christ.

This is what Christ's people do. This is what broken people do. This is what the Lord is saying.

He's saying you've got to have some criteria, some means of judging, some manner of testing. And this is the way it's to be done. My people have stood before the door of grace, hopelessly helpless in the weight of their sin and their guilt.

And because they've been broken, they assume that everybody else that's in the faith is equally of similar intent to please God. And if they've trespassed, the trespass has been done without determined intent to pursue it. If they are determined to pursue it, they give evidence that they're not a child of God.

Now, this is, I say, what the Lord has said. This is the implication we draw from it, and we are going to have to adjust our life to it, because we see that in this particular disobedience to this particular scripture and prescription of the Lord, we have given place to Satan to wreak, make havoc in the church for 400 years since the time Martin Luther began to bring us back out of the awful wilderness of Rome. Now, we are 400 years and more since the time Luther declared by the articles on the door at Wittenberg Cathedral the Reformation.

Now, we're here. Does the church have the power it ought to have? Does it have the victory it ought to have? Does it have the authority it ought to have? Why? Why did the Lord put the authority in this context? Because it is one of the areas where Satan is most successful in thwarting the purpose of Christ through his church to bring victory to the glory and cause of Christ. So notice, verily I say unto you in verse 18, whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven.

Here, Christ provides authority for his church in spiritual battle and conflict. And beloved, if there ever has been a day when Satan has been seeking to extinguish the light of every testimony that stands solidly for the word of God, it's today. The only grounds of authority rests upon obedience to the Lordship of Christ.

And Christ has made this matter of fellowship with brethren and dealing with problems the basis for that unity on which the authority of the church rests. Therefore, though however much we might understand the authority of the body and the authority of the believer and the authority of Christ, there is no exercise of that authority and no manifestation of that authority unless the church is submitting to the authority of Christ in relation one to another. And so the whole victory of Christ through his church can be stopped.

And when the church is dealing on the basis that he's prescribed of confidence in the integrity of others and elimination of those who do not merit that confidence, then there can be the authority of the body brought back again to the place where it would be true that whatever is bound on earth should be bound in heaven. He makes also this matter of fellowship in the body of Christ and unity among the believers on the level that he's outlined the grounds for the answer of prayer. If two or three agree as touching anything, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven.

There you have the matter in strict and clear outline and focus. If two or three shall agree as touching anything. But the assumption is that they've agreed to the lordship of Christ in the matter of relationship.

They've done what he has expected them to do. There's no broken fellowship. There is that unity.

For he said here, if two or three are agreed as touching anything, there can be this agreement only on the basis of agreement with one another about each other and about the Lord and about the church. And it's this unity that is the true spiritual ecumenism for which our hearts ought to yearn. While other men can give their time to a horizontal amalgamation of the denominations and trying to get power to counter that of Rome, it's simply an erection of a monolithic system of religious organization.

And it will have the same effect that every other such system has had. It will sooner or later come under the hammer of God's wrath and God's destruction. And while some can worry about this and fret about this and work on this, it seems to me that we of another opinion ought to be working on that true spiritual ecclesia, that calling together of one basis.

What is that? The glory of God in Jesus Christ, where you have come as a bankrupt sinner to the door of grace. You've been pardoned. You've been forgiven.

And now you want to have the sweetest unity and fellowship with everyone else of the same mind and heart. And should trespass come against you, you immediately submit to the word to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace. This people on this basis have authority over principalities and power and they have authority in prayer.

Prayer is answered for this unity releases God to work in the church. And I plead with you today to make absolutely sure, perhaps even you have unconsciously, and I attribute no other motive, done just exactly contrary to what the word prescribes. Jens, will you have had someone genuinely trespass against you? I'm not speaking of cantankerousness now and meanness and criticism as a general principle and attitude of the mind.

I believe this must be dealt with as the crass carnality that it is. I'm talking about a real occasion when someone has trespassed against you and you have not gone to the person involved, but you've gone to others. Then I submit to you that I, we will assume that you've done it in ignorance and done it thoughtlessly.

And you haven't had a tent intended to be a rebel against God and destroy the church, but whether thoughtlessly or determinedly, it's had the effect of making powerless the church of Christ. Will you not therefore accept the word for this relationship, this church in any place that you may be and wherever you may go? And remember that he has said, if a brother trespass against you, go to the brother. If he won't hear you, take two or three.

If they won't be heard, then carry it to the church and let the church deal with it. Are you prepared to deal with it on this basis? Then you truly own yourself to be his, at least in this. And if you don't, then you will have this full word of the father through with which you must ever deal.

So shall my heavenly father do also unto you. If you're from your hearts, you forgive not everyone his brother, their trespasses. The Lord loves the church and he's very careful about anything that touches it.

He wants to preserve it for himself, spotless and pure and holy, that he can use it, that it can be the means of exercising authority and bringing answer to prayer. You don't want to be responsible for hurting the church, his body. Then let this be the rule in your life.

Shall we bow in prayer? We know our father that as thou we came to the door of grace, sinners with a mountain of guilt, that enormous accumulation of our crimes against thee, we saw the wounded lamb, we saw the cleansing blood, we plunged and received forgiveness. But father, should it be that some of thine own, thy dear children, have unconsciously or whatever the motive might be, thou knowest, sinned against the church and sowing discord and dissension by failing to walk in the light of our Lord's clear prescription. Oh, we know there's forgiveness for this if we will but break before thee and deal with it.

And so we plead the precious blood. We're coming to the table this morning. We're coming to this table of the Lord.

And there we see that cup is the testimony of his shed blood and the wafer is his broken body. Might we before thee as broken people come. Might there be in our hearts just now that time of searching, meet us, minister to us, make thy name to be great and glorious.

We're trusting thee to meet us now, bless us richly. Give, we pray thee, Lord, hearts of courage to deal with everything that needs to be dealt with, that we come not with guilt to the table of our Lord while our heads are bowed and our eyes are closed. Look well to your heart.

We all have problems, personality adjustment problems aren't peculiar to the mission field. Have you been dealing with them the way the Lord prescribed? Do you love his church? Do you love his body? This is the way he would have it done. Do you call him Lord? This is the way you'll do it.

Have you been born of him? This is the way you want to do it. If you haven't, won't you set it right? Won't you go to whoever you may have involved with you in your sin by reporting trespass to them instead of to the one? For you involve when you talk to another, you involve them. Oh dear heart, won't you make this the rule of your life from today on? You love him as Lord.

Father, search us out. There's so much you want to do, so much you have. Take such a little fox to pull down the vines and spoil the grapes.

We do want our lives to count for eternity, count for thy glory. We want thy church to be what it ought to be, mighty as an army with banners. And so we ask thee to deal with us right here at this point.

For Jesus' sake, amen.

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