

## Radical Disciples for Jesus (2): Themes from the Sermon on the Mount-FORGIVENESS

### Introduction

*'Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God.'* **Matthew 5 v 8.**

**PURE:** The word in Greek for pure means, 'an undivided heart.' It means His way and no other and the Sermon on the Mount gives us these choices or 'roads' (**Matthew 7 vs 13-14**) where we are asked to consider the choice of His way or the world's.

**HEART: Proverbs 23 v 26, 'Give me your heart my son.'** In Hebrew thinking, reflected in the Old Testament, the heart is the seat of our emotions, our conscience and our moral character. It is 'gut' related. The heart is the fountain of man's deeds and the inner part or motivation of his actions. God says in **Psalm 51 v 10** He tests the heart as man can't understand it (**Jeremiah 17 v 9 & Ezekiel 36 v 26**).

In the New Testament the word used in the Greek for the heart is 'Kardia' and it is used figuratively for the hidden springs of our personal life. According to **Matthew 15 v 19-20** sin sits at the centre of man's heart and then defiles the whole circuit of his action. The heart is the real man, his her true character (**1Peter 3 v 4**). Jesus says that it is out of the inner condition of the heart that we speak (**Matthew 12 v 34-37**)

The heart is also the sphere of divine influence. If God can capture our heart how we live can be dramatically changed (**Romans 2 v 15**).

Jesus asks that our righteousness should exceed that of the religious leaders of His day (**Matthew 5 v 21**); an outward form of religion with no real heart. We can be the same today in our Christian walk and attitude.

### Matthew 5 vs 21-24

**Jesus here is talking about anger with murderous intent.** Cursing your brother/sister 'Raca' name calling, dragging someone down. 'Raca' is an angry word meaning 'you fool'. Bonhoeffer suggests in this passage that any word of anger about a brother is a lack of respect and can cause others to despise him/her. It erects a barrier between God and the curser and therefore the person no longer has access to worship and prayer.

**Worship cannot be divorced from the service of our relationships.** If we despise our brother it is in contradiction of our worship and is unacceptable to God. If we enter worship with others as a congregation holding grudges it causes a barrier to the flow of God's Spirit when we meet together.

**When you worship, be reconciled first,** if you think someone has something against you. Put it right and take responsibility. If you have anything to say, say it and don't get resentful, keeping it inside or assume things which you do not know the truth of.

Communion- unworthiness and judgement; there is a link and it can cause physical illness (**1 Cor. 11 vs 26-34**). That is why we often have a prayer of confession before communion as this is an act of worship. However, Jesus is saying clearly from this passage that we need to put it right even before we come together for worship.

**Matthew 6 vs 12-15 '... forgive us our debts as we forgive those who have sinned against us.' **Matthew 5 v 7, 'Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy'****

### **What is forgiveness?**

- The verb for forgive in the New Testament generally means to, 'send forth', 'send away', 'remit' and 'completely cancel' or 'release'.
- In John's first letter the word forgive has a stronger and more specific meaning in the Greek (largely due to the later date of the letter) (**1 John 1 v 9 & 1 John 2 v 12**). In regard to our own sin it means the remission of the punishment due and the complete removal of the cause of the events.
- Another Greek noun for forgive means to **bestow favour on someone unconditionally** (**Ephesians 4 v 32, Colossians 2 v 13 & 3 v 13**).

- The Greek noun for forgive in the New Testament means a **dismissal or release** (*Mark 3 v 29; Ephesians 1 v 7; Colossians 1 v 14*) and the meaning is strongly tied to the Hebrew meaning connected to the year of jubilee in the Jewish calendar. Jesus uses the same word in *Luke 4 v 18* when he uses the words, "**He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives...**"

**What forgiveness does:** It is related to binding and releasing-*Matthew 16 v 19*. Forgiveness releases you and releases the person to God so He can do His work. If we do not forgive we bind up both ourselves and the person who has hurt us and things will not change and in fact things may get worse. We can choose to release or bind people up by our words which can be a curse or a blessing.

**RT Kendall defines for us what forgiveness is not;** approval of or excusing or justifying what they did; pardoning what they did; reconciliation; denying or being blind to what has happened and pretending we are not hurt.

**When people have hurt us it may take time for us to trust people again and that does not mean we have not forgiven them.** Ideally we should be able to communicate that to the person who has hurt us so they both understand our behaviour towards them but also helps them to realise the consequences of their actions towards us.

**RT Kendall defines forgiveness as:**

- Being fully aware of what someone did and still forgive them
- The choice to keep no record of wrongs (*1 Corinthians 13 v 5*). (We often keep a record of wrongs so that we can use it against others at a later date).
- Refusing to punish or take revenge or 'get even.'
- Not telling what they did to other people with the intention of hurting their reputation; therefore, wanting the other person to be blessed and honoured
- It is forgiving God as we can be resentful that God has allowed this to happen

The word 'debt' in the Greek means 'what is owed' and the word is used interchangeably with 'sins' in most of the New Testament. When you forgive you choose to protect and honour those people who have hurt you.

**Unforgiveness challenges both the things Jesus is trying to talk about and asks us if our hearts are right and pure before Him:**

- **OUTWARD FORM OF RELIGION:** Giving the impression that we are alright with people when we are not and keeping this hidden. It is a form of hypocrisy. *Psalms 62 v 4b, 'They delight in falsehood. They bless with their mouth, but inwardly they curse.'*
- **IDOLATRY:** Unforgiveness is a barrier to God, it is an idol and it gets in the way of our relationship with Him-*Matthew 6 v 15*

**Consequences of unforgiveness: What if you don't forgive?**

*Matthew 6 vs 14-15*, God will forgive you if you forgive others. According to RT Kendall our refusal to forgive demonstrates:

- **An indifference to the greatest thing God has done for us**
- **An interruption of God's purpose in the world to reconcile people to Himself and He has called us to do that as His people (2 Corinthians 5 v 19)**
- **Ingratitude; which God hates**

**We can temporarily lose fellowship with the Father** and lose connection with Him. This doesn't mean we lose our salvation as we are saved by Grace and not good works, nor that God stops loving us. It is not the unforgiveable sin. However, unforgiveness limits the flow of the Spirit in our lives and the rewards that God wants to give us in eternity.

**The downward spiral of unforgiveness:** When we have not forgiven we hold a grudge, become resentful; this leads to a bitter heart inside and we can become preoccupied with hate, self-pity and revenge (**Ephesians 4 v 30-32**).

**This can also eventually lead to psychological or even physical illness.** According to Carsten Wrosch, an associate professor of psychology at Concordia University in Montreal. Feeling bitter interferes with the body's hormonal and immune systems. Studies have shown that bitter, angry people have higher blood pressure and heart rate and are more likely to die of heart disease and other illnesses. Dr. Charles Raison says, 'Physiologically, when we feel negatively towards someone, our bodies instinctively prepare to fight that person, which leads to changes such as an increase in blood pressure; we run hot as our inflammatory system responds to dangers and threats..... the problem with bitterness is that it goes on and on. When our bodies are constantly primed to fight someone, the increase in blood pressure and eventually take a toll on the heart and other parts of the body.'

### **Application: How to Live in Forgiveness**

#### **What should be our motivation for forgiveness?**

**GOD HAS FREELY & UNCONDITIONALLY FORGIVEN US:** The scriptures are clear about this. In our unworthy state, God chose to forgive us. The more we realise God's love and our own sins we can be merciful others. Choosing to remind yourself of sin you have committed towards another in a similar way and have been forgiven for, can help us to forgive. Jesus says that if we give mercy, we receive it back and we give mercy back to others (**Matthew 5 v 7**).

The most powerful way to walk in love and forgiveness is to experience afresh the love that God has for us; if God can forgive us we can make room to release others. Paul prays for the Ephesians that they would know the love of God which surpasses all knowledge (**Ephesians 3 v 14 – 21**).

We love Him because He first loved us- **1 John 4 vs 19-21**; Even when we were sinners, Christ died for us- **Romans 5 v 8**; **Romans 5 v 10** says "For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His son, much more, having been reconciled we shall be saved by His life." Paul says that the purpose that we have been reconciled to God is so that we can be reconciled to each other in **2 Corinthians 5 v 14 – 21**.

**JESUS FORGAVE:** Jesus said, '*Father forgive them for they know not what they do.*' (**Luke 23 v 24**).

**Jesus therefore knows what it is like to be REJECTED, WRONGLY ACCUSED, REJECTED BY HIS RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY, ASSUMED HE WAS MAD BY HIS FAMILY, BEING DESERTED, BEING LET DOWN BY HIS FRIENDS AT THE TIME HE NEEDED THEM THE MOST, BEING BEATEN, BULLIED, HARRASSED, HAVING HIS WORDS CHALLENGED, NOT BEING HEARD OR LISTENED TO, NOT BEEN TAKEN SERIOUSLY, BEING SIDELINED, BEING CURSED. But in all this He did not sin or seek revenge.**

**If we experience any of this from others, we need firstly to push into Jesus as he knows the hurt. You are fellowshipping in His sufferings and from Him you can draw His strength to forgive.**

**JESUS PAID THE ULTIMATE PRICE FOR OUR SINS:** Hebrews 9 v 11 - 14 tells us that the blood of bulls and goats and animal sacrifices could never remove sin. The forgiveness of sin in the Old Testament was a deliberate shadow of what was to come in the ultimate sacrifice that Jesus made for sins once for all time.

However, even in Old Testament Law it was expected that when people brought animals for sacrifice that they outwardly transferred their guilt from them to their animal by placing their hand on the animal's head. There was also a heart expectation inwardly that the person was repentant of the sins they had committed and the sacrifice was the physical demonstration of that. **The parallel for us as Christians is that of baptism.**

**In the same way the sin of all mankind was transferred to the head of Jesus on the cross and His crown is a symbolic picture of that.** Like the animal which was brought for sacrifice so was Jesus the innocent Lamb of God who came to take away the sin of the whole world; **John 1 v 36**.

Jesus confirms this at the Last Supper when He declares that the **wine is the representation of His blood that is poured out for the forgiveness of sin (Matthew 26 v 28)**. As a result of all this we have been reconciled to God and forgiven of our sins through the death of Jesus, who has taken our sins upon Himself and the punishment for them **Romans 5 v 10 – 11/6 v 28**.

### Practical Steps to walking in forgiveness

#### 1) Confess your sin to God and each other:

**1 John 1 v 9 and James 5 v 16** tell us this in plain terms so we can remain right with God and each other. This is basic Christian living and it is access to LIFE! **Apologise when we have done wrong. BE HUMBLE; have an intention to put things right.** Our culture tells us we do not have to apologise if we choose not to. The fact we do not apologise when we have genuinely hurt someone can often be related to our pride and the shame we feel. Jesus wants us to be brave here and lay aside our excuses which are often the shield for the shame we feel.

**We need to take responsibility for our own actions when we have unforgiveness towards others.** Jesus makes it clear that the outworking of our forgiveness towards others has to be consistent with our heart motivation. That is why Jesus says in **Matthew 5 v 37 "Let your 'yes' mean yes and your 'no' mean no"**.

#### 2) Struggling with forgiving:

**Admit you cannot forgive or love.** It goes back to being honest towards God, that of yourself you cannot forgive. Jesus says, **'Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven.'** (**Matthew 5 v 3**)

**Matthew 5 v 43 – 48** -Jesus says we are to love our enemies and pray for those who have hurt us. It is easy Jesus says to love those who we find lovely, it is a challenge to walk in love towards people who have hurt us and also continue to hurt us. **Allow Him to love them through you. Let Him show you who the person really is.**

**What is behind unforgiveness?** It is about revenge and vengeance. Getting our own back, demanding our rights for retribution. However, God tells us to leave that to HIM- **Deuteronomy 32 v 35 & Romans 12 v 19**.

**Ask for others to help you and pray with you; do not be a 'resentful island.'**

#### 3) Being Peacemakers:

Jesus calls us to be peacemakers with each other (**Matthew 5 v 9**) but that does not mean we agree with each other and it may mean that we agree to differ. We cannot forsake the truth of God for the sake of making everyone happy. The need to make everyone happy can often be based in our need for people to like us which is a basic human need but often motivated by pride. It can also hide our fears about really sharing what we feel with others who have offended us; an outward appearance not matching our hearts.

#### 4) Being Wise:

**Jesus was asked a question about how many times should we forgive,** his answer was seventy times seven, meaning forever and ever, time and time again (**Matthew 18 vs 15-35**). (This question was asked in context of a brother sinning against us and them not acknowledging this in the context of Church discipline and there is a clear process with this- **Matthew 18 vs 15-18**).

**However, we need to be wise with people who have hurt us.** Do not go back into a situation where you know that you are going to be deliberately abused again and again by the same person. Putting a space between you and the other person for a time, does not necessarily mean that you have not forgiven them (**1 Corinthians 5 v 11**).

**So you might ask, what about Jesus? Didn't he deliberately go into situations again and again and was abused and persecuted?** Jesus went into these situations because God had called Him to do so and in the

same way if God has called us to go into situations knowing we are going to be hurt we need to obey. It is then in His strength that we learn to love. God knows which battles He wants you to work with Him on.

### **5) FORGIVING and FORGETTING**

**1 Cor 13 v 'Love keeps no record of wrongs...'** Just because we remember what has happened to us does not mean we have not forgiven someone. However, we can choose not to remember them or bring them up again and use them against the person in the future.

**'.....but literally to forgive and forget may not be realistic; it might even be impossible. We may, owing to a deep trauma temporarily forget things. But the only way back to sanity is to try to remember everything-in detail. Love doesn't erase our memories, furthermore is a demonstration of great grace when we are fully aware of what they did- and still choose to forgive totally. Deep hurts may not be eradicated as though they never happened. The truth is they did happen. We cannot easily forget them. We certainly must not dwell on them but we cannot always forget them. Even God doesn't literally forget our sins; He chooses to overlook them. He knows full well what we have done and what He has forgiven us of- every sordid detail. But He chooses not to remember, so that He doesn't hold it against us (Hebrews 8 v 12). That is precisely what we are to do, choosing not to remember while may be not forgetting.'** From 'Total Forgiveness' by R.T Kendall

### **6) What if people do not realise they have hurt you?**

**None of us are mind readers. Jesus says in the passage we read earlier, that if you know someone has something against you, you need to go to that person. However, if you do not know you cannot do anything with this.** In the reverse, if you have been wronged by someone and they do not know, it is your responsibility to go to them direct and talk to them. This prevents a 'root of bitterness, growing up inside you (**Hebrews 14-15**).

### **Conclusion**

We are blessed if we have our hearts pure and show mercy.

### **References:**

**Total Forgiveness by R T Kendall**

**The Cost of Discipleship by Dietrich Bonhoeffer**