

I read this week about a man who was bitten by a rabid dog who chose not to get immediate care. After a few days w/ increasing signs of problems, he went to the hospital, where tests revealed he'd contracted rabies. B/c he had waited too long, his doctor informed him that his condition was now incurable/terminal – and all they could do was make him comfortable. So his doc advised him to get his affairs in order ASAP. The dying man sank into his bed in shock. After some time, asked for pen/paper and set out writing. An hour later, when the doc returned, the man was still writing vigorously. The doc said, “I’m glad to see you’re working on your will.” The man replied, “I’m not working on my will... This is a list of all the people I’m going to bite before I die.

Sadly, far too many of us live and die w/ such a list – written in our minds, if not on paper – a list of people we want to get even w/ or inflict pain b/c we harbor unforgiveness.

Last week we started a series entitled, **How Embarrassing!** looking at some of the ways we embarrass ourselves in our faith b/c we’ve chosen to be so heavenly-minded we’re no earthly good as we choose to do things in God’s name He doesn’t need us to do. To give us insight, I’ve selected (4) events from the life of Peter to help us learn how to follow Jesus w/out embarrassing ourselves.

Embarrassment is that sense of emotional discomfort and self-consciousness before others where you feel exposed, awkward, and possibly humiliated for having a social faux pas or undesirable moment that's witnessed by others.

And we've all been there – done that. We've all experienced the joy of saying/doing something that's turned our faces a red and caused us to wish we could have a mulligan.

Last week, we began the series by looking at the time Peter walked on the water while the disciples sat in the boat – and talked about how *we can embarrass ourselves when we tell others we're people of faith but then pursue life in flesh*. In particular we learned (3) things from Peter about living by faith. First, faith always takes initiative to engage w/ God while flesh sits back and surrenders to intimidation. Next, faith awaits God's invitation to act before moving while flesh tends to jump ahead of God and trust in human ability and ingenuity. Finally, in the event we step out in faith and have our faith falter, faith immediately returns to God for His intervention, while flesh tries to swim back to the boat.

This AM, we're going to turn our attention to a 2nd way we can to embarrass ourselves in our faith in spite of our good intentions. And it has to deal w/ forgiveness. In ***Matthew 18*** – Peter asks a question of Jesus that addresses how *we can embarrass ourselves when we claim to be forgiven but are unforgiving of others*.

Peter came to Jesus and asked, “Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother who sins against me? Up to seven times?” Jesus replied, “I tell you, not seven times, but seventy times seven.” Then Jesus said, “The kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts w/ his servants. As he began the settlement, a man who owed him 10,000 talents was brought to him. Since he wasn’t able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt. “At this the servant fell on his knees before him. He begged, ‘Be patient w/ me, and I will it all pay back.’ The servant’s master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go. “But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a 100 denarii, he grabbed him and began to choke him. ‘Pay back what you owe me!’ he demanded. “His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, ‘Be patient w/ me, and I will pay it back.’ “But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into debtor’s prison until he could pay the debt. When the other servants saw what had happened, they were outraged and went and told their master everything that had happened. “The master called the servant in. ‘You wicked servant,’ he said, ‘I canceled all of your debt b/c you begged me. Shouldn’t you have had mercy on your fellow servant as I had on you?’ In anger, his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed. “This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart.”

Before we jump into this text to understand what Jesus was saying to Peter (and to us) – I think it is important to define and qualify just what is forgiveness.

Forgiveness isn't something that occurs naturally to man – it requires Divine initiative – meaning it's a work of the H.S.

I think King Louis XII of France articulated the feelings of most people when he said: *Nothing smells so sweet as the dead body of your enemy.* **Quote of the Day**

It's been said that *forgiveness is my giving up my right to hurt you for hurting me.* Such a notion sounds nice, but it's incomplete. Forgiveness is so much more than letting someone off the hook or choosing not to seek revenge.

- Forgiveness isn't approving of what someone else did
- It's not pretending that evil never took place
- It's not making excuses for the wrong behavior of others
- It's not overlooking an abuse
- It's not letting others walk all over you
- It's not refusing to press charges when offended
- It doesn't mean the negative consequences are cancelled
- And it doesn't mean forgiveness is easy...

I like agree w/ C.S. Lewis – *Everyone says forgiveness is a lovely idea until they have someone/something to forgive.*

forgiveness (*apheso*) to cease feeling resentment for wrongs and offenses; to pass over the full measure of retribution deserved. To cancel, pay in full, or offer pardon w/ the intent of rediscovering restoration of a broken relationship.

Forgiveness is an activity orchestrated only thru God – it is a work/fruit of the H.S. As the One who authored forgiveness, God embodied grace in Jesus affording our release from the condemnation our sin deserves. The result of such grace allows us to be set free from the required eternal penalty of our sin (not necessarily the earthly consequence). In Christ, our debt has been paid in full and God has chosen to pass over the judgment we deserve. The result of such mercy empowers those forgiven w/ the obligation to give to others what they have received but don't deserve – forgiveness.

I More than an AMOUNT – it's an ATTITUDE

“Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother who sins against me? Up to seven times?” Jesus replied, “I tell you, not seven times, but seventy times seven.”

It's safe to say that Peter thought he was quite magnanimous when he asked this question. Based on a misinterpretation of passage in Amos, rabbinical tradition taught that b/c God only forgave (3) times, we only have to forgive an offender (3) times – and then we too can lower the boom. So Peter thought he was doing well doubling and then adding one.

Jesus wasn't extending the legal limit of forgiveness to (490) – nor was he suggesting we keep a record of the wrongs we've done or had done to us. Can you imagine going thru life keeping score of every action forgivable episode?

Jesus' answer to Peter's question was direct – not (7x) but (70 x 7). Jesus was saying, “Peter, you have it all wrong. Forgiveness isn't a number to be counted – it's an attitude of the heart. And for anyone who's ever experienced God's forgiveness – how can we not be eager to forgive others?”

It's as if Jesus was saying to Peter that *we're never more like God than when we forgive.*

II More than an ATTITUDE – it's an ANTICIPATION

Imbedded in this parable is a single, divine expectation – **we're always to forgive as we've been forgiven – fully and repeatedly – just as God forgives us.**

Is this not the message of the cross? *All of us like sheep have gone astray, and each has turned to his own way, but God has laid upon Him (Jesus) the sin of us all.*

We've all sinned and fallen short of God's glory – and as such, we're all guilty and deserving of condemnation.

There is none righteous... not even one. Romans 3:23

How great is our debt? So great it could never be repaid. At least that's the debt this servant owed – 10,000 talents. A talent was the largest measure of money in Roman world.

1 talent = 6,000 denarii – or 20 yrs of wages

1 denarii = 1 days wages

Avg. worker perform 300 days of labor in a yr.

This servant owed 60 mil. days of work (200,000 yrs.)

Modern – avg. annual salary in U.S. = \$55,775 or \$26.82 per hour or \$214.56 per day for 60 mil. yrs = \$12,873,600,000

All this to say – this man owed a debt he could never repay. And that was Jesus' point. We all owe a debt called sin that can never be repaid – and yet God has made it possible for our debt of sin paid in full thru the cross and our repentance.

And yet, even after having had his debt forgiven, this servant goes to a man who owes him 100 denarii (or 100 days of wages) and refuses to grant this man time to repay his debt much less forgive his debt as his debt had been forgiven.

In this parable, Jesus said this should never happen. If you know/walk w/ Jesus you can't help but to forgive.

While forgiveness doesn't show up in the list of the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians – it is included in what many believe is the fruit of the Spirit in Colossians and Ephesians.

As God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves w/ compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear w/ each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. Col. 3:12-14

Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. Ephesians 4:32

Point – to forgive as God forgive requires salvation and walking in intimacy w/ God. If you're struggling to forgive (or if someone you know is struggling w/ forgiveness) it is either b/c they are unsaved or they're a carnal Christian.

III More than an ANTICIPATION – it's an ACTION

Forgiveness isn't just something we hope/pray for – it's something we seek and offer. Forgiveness requires personal engagement and investment.

Lewis Smedes, *Forgive and Forget*, (3) Keys of Forgiveness

1 When We REDISCOVER Our Offenders Humanity

W/out diminishing their offense, we admit this person is a sinner who makes mistakes just like we're capable of making.

2 When We RELINQUISH Our Right to Get Even

This is hard b/c it is natural to want someone else to pay for all the pain they've caused us. But in the end, we must leave all judgment in the hands of a just/merciful God.

3 When We REVISE Our Feelings to Our Offender

This means giving up our hatred, bitterness, and desire to get even. Ultimately, it means taking Jesus seriously when he said – *Love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you.* Mt. 5:44

Such forgiveness requires the supernatural intervention of God – and this is the point Jesus is making to Peter. **We forgive little b/c God has forgiven us of so much.** But oh how embarrassing it is to us when we claim to have been forgiven but choose to be unforgiving.

Option (Rock Example)

- 1 RETURN Fire
- 2 HOLD On
- 3 LAY it Down