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Prayer is Penitent, Part 1

Matthew 6:9-15

Pray then like this: "Our Father in Heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in Heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil."

For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

If you're here today and you've ever battled with the challenge of releasing offenses that you've experienced, or the granting of forgiveness in your life toward yourself or others, or maybe even toward God, this time today is for you.

Of all the things in the human heart that wreak havoc on our world, when you think of what the Bible says about the human heart and the love of money being the root of all kinds of evil, or the lust for power being something that tramples other people in its process, or the selfish lusts of the flesh being something that caused wounds to other people, near the top of the list with those three biggies has to also be what we might call the scourge of unforgiveness and the fruits of unforgiveness that come out of a heart, the fruits of resentment or bitterness, grumbling, the desire for revenge.

If you have ever battled with unforgiveness, you know what a challenge it can be, how debilitating it can be. Unforgiveness eats away at the very fabric of our humanity. It eats away at our spirit, our soul, and even our flesh. It keeps us stuck in the past. It can hinder the flow of God's grace in the present and can keep us from reaching God's full potential for us in our lives.

If we are housing unforgiveness in our hearts, our lives shrink down. We start to focus on something in the past, and we miss things in the present. We become idolatrous of the negative that we've experienced, and we start to live in a smaller and smaller world, and we miss all of the potential around us.

Because God understands the debilitating effects of unforgiveness in the human heart, he addresses this so often in His Word, very clearly in many ways. And in his teaching on prayer, he separates one part out just to talk about forgiveness. And we just read it, Matthew chapter six, verses 12 through 14.

Now, before we look at it, I want to just mention this to you. The prayer is being offered by children of God. When we offer the word Father to God, we're saying we've been adopted into his family and we are his sons and daughters. When a person is saved, the spirit enters in them and they start to cry out, ABBA, father! And that is a testimony to the fact that we have been saved.

And so when Jesus is telling us to pray this prayer, he's not talking about salvation. He's talking about the flow of grace in our lives and the intimacy that we have with him, the very personal fellowship we have as we walk with God and walk with one another. To come into Christ and to trust Christ is to have our sins completely forgiven, past, present, and future. To be in the process of confessing sins as we experience them is to maintain fellowship and harmony with God, so the power of His Spirit can work in us. And that is what I believe Jesus is driving at when he's talking to us about praying this way when we pray.

He said, when you pray, pray like this: Father, forgive us our Trespasses or debts or sins, as we also forgive our debtors or those who trespass against us. And then Jesus added at the end of this teaching on prayer, for if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their trespasses, you won't be in the flow of his grace. Your heavenly father will not forgive you in that way.

Jesus said in a different way in Mark's accounting of a different time, when he was speaking on prayer, he said this: whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, if you have anything against anyone, notice the totality of the statement, anything against anyone, forgive them. Forgive them that your father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses. If you do not forgive, neither will your father in heaven forgive you. You'll be stuck in your spiritual journey.

Jesus told a parable at one point about this. He said there once was a king, and this king had many servants, and they owed him from what he'd lent them. And so he started to call the servants in to talk to them about the debt that they owed. And one of the servants he brought in owed him. And the Bible says it in different ways, but in one version it says owed him 10,000 bags of gold. And he said, I'd like to have my debt repaid.

And the servant said, I can't pay it. I just don't have the money. And so the master said to the other servants around him, take this servant, his wife, his children, and everything he owns and sell it to someone else so I can get some of my money back.

And this servant, Jesus said in this story, fell prostrate before the king and said, King, have mercy on me. Give me a little more time and I'll repay my debt. And in this story, Jesus said, the King had compassion on his servant, forgave his entire debt, and let him go.

And as this servant left and went on, the story continues. It's found in Matthew chapter 18. It says this, verse 32 through 35: when the servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him 100 silver coins, much less. He grabbed him and began to choke him and said, pay back what you owe me, he demanded. And then he threw his debtor in jail until he could repay.

And then the master called in this servant again, the original master. And he said to him, you wicked servant, I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant, just 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. And then at the end of this story, Jesus said, this is how my heavenly father will treat each of you, unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart.

Unless you release the people who have sinned against you.

If you're here today and you're having trouble forgiving someone, and actually when I walked in this morning I heard a story about someone who's dealing with this very thing about a person who's already passed on and they're having trouble forgiving them, then I want to give you some encouragement here today.

Forgiveness. What is it? It's the voluntary or deliberate act of intentionally deciding to let go of some offense that you're harboring, to release or cancel a debt that someone owes you. It includes the letting go or releasing of festering resentments and the right or desire to punish someone who has done you wrong. It's the idea of just saying, I'm letting it go. I'm canceling the debt. I'm not counting this against them anymore. I'm just releasing it. I'm wiping it out. I'm forgiving it. Surrendering my right to get paybacks. Working through and surrendering the murmurings and the grumblings and the complainings that I've been housing in my heart. It's a releasing.

But let me just say this about forgiveness. It is not saying what happened to you didn't matter, or that it wasn't wrong, or that it didn't hurt. It's not saying that. I've mentioned before here a time when I was younger and I got a three Wheeler stolen from me. It was wrong. I can tell you it hurt. I can also tell you this, I still remember it. But I can also tell you this. I've forgiven the man or woman. I've forgiven him.

It is not saying that it didn't matter or wasn't wrong. It didn't hurt. It's not saying you'll never remember. It's what we do when we remember. It's that intentional decision to release again.

It's not even saying this, that you will trust that person again right away, or you want to grow in a relationship with them and you want to be friends with them. It's not even that. That's reconciliation. And there's two different things. Forgiveness is different than rebuilding in a relationship. Forgiveness is just saying I am not counting it against them anymore. Whether they're dead, still alive, somewhere else in the world, I am turning them over, forgiving them, letting it go. The intentional decision to release, cancel, and also release my festering resentments, my desire to punish, so that I can be free and it doesn't shrink my life down anymore.

Now, if you're battling with unforgiveness, as all of us do from time to time, I want you to know three things this morning.

Number one, I want you to know that you're not alone. You're not alone. There is a lot of hostility in our world today. People taking offense on every front. Harboring anger and rage and bitterness and pursuing justice and vengeance on their own. It's all around us. And Jesus said it would be. He said in every gospel account we have record of Jesus saying, in this world we're going to face unfair betrayals, mistreatments, tribulations, offenses, troubles would come into our lives. Hurts will come into our lives. They will come again and again and again.

And as a matter of fact, there's evidence in the scriptures that if you name the name of Jesus, you might just experience more of those things rather than less. You might encounter more of them. At one level or another, God has said, in a fallen world you're going to take hurts, you're going to be mistreated, you're going to suffer pain at the hands of others.

Consider Joseph. If you're having trouble forgiving, consider this young man in the Old Testament whose brothers didn't like him. His very kin didn't like him. He was his father's favored son. Gave him a special coat. It nauseated his brothers. They were so annoyed by him. One day when he showed up around them, they threw him in a pit and were debating whether or not to kill him. And one brother spoke up and said, let's not kill him. And there was a caravan going by at this time. They said, let's sell him to the caravan. And so they were in Israel at this time, and they sold their brother to a caravan of people going to Egypt. And so off went Joseph to Egypt, disowned by his own family.

And he got to Egypt and God was with him. The Bible says he wasn't harboring. I'm sure he was struggling, but he wasn't harboring hard heartedness against his brothers. And he sort of escalated and became a right hand man of a man named Potiphar. And then he was falsely accused of Potiphar's wife and thrown in jail for numerous years. An innocent man in jail, unjustly treated.

And then one day a king had a dream, the Pharaoh in Egypt. And God gave Joseph the power to interpret the dream. And Joseph was brought to be the second hand leader in Egypt. And the dream said there's going to be a famine all around in the land for seven years. You're going to have plenty, and then seven years there's going to be a famine. And the king said to Joseph, why don't you help me prepare for the famine? And Joseph helped prepare all of Egypt for this coming famine because he was available to God and the grace of God was flowing him. He wasn't harboring bitterness and resentment.

And two years into the famine, the Israelites were suffering so much that Joseph's brothers came to Egypt. And they came before him, and Joseph recognized them. And there were his offenders right in front of him, his own kin who sold him.

Genesis 42 verse 24 says this. When Joseph saw them, he turned away from them and began to weep. It hurt him. Deep pain. Forgiveness is not ignoring the pains that we've experienced. As a matter of fact, you can't hardly be fully cleansed from the offense until you experience the full pain of it before God.