

Monday Morning Rewind – May 17, 2010

Good afternoon! Do you belong to “The Fellowship of Forgiven Forgivers”? I hope so because only forgiven forgivers can pray the Lord’s Prayer—especially the fifth petition: “Forgive us our debts, **as we also have forgiven** our debtors” (Matt. 6:12).

On Sabbath we continued our series on kingdom secrets revealed in the Lord’s Prayer by considering what Jesus meant by this statement. Shockingly, Jesus takes the golden rule of doing for others what we would want done for ourselves, and applies that rule to prayer. In essence He’s saying “*Grant forgiveness to others as you would have God grant forgiveness to you.*”

Hold on! Why is Jesus dragging our behavior towards others into our personal prayers for forgiveness? Could it be that Jesus did this on purpose so that we’d be confronted with the outrageousness of grace and have our eyes opened to how much *we all* need it?

And just to make sure we understood His meaning, Jesus expands on this petition in verses 14 and 15 and says plainly that our forgiveness from God is dependant on our forgiveness of others. “For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.”

Once again, Jesus shows us that the kingdom is all about relationships. It’s a fellowship (or brotherhood) of those who call God Father and are forgiven themselves so they can forgive others—the Fellowship of forgiven forgivers. And **In the Fellowship of Forgiven Forgivers, how we treat each other is inseparable from how we treat God.** (See 1 John 4:20, 21.)

There are at least three things we’re forced to consider. 1. **You need forgiveness.** Other people may have sinned against you, but you have sinned not only against other men, but against God! Rewind to Matthew 18:25-35 and read the parable of the unmerciful servant. Jesus told this story in answer to Peter’s question about how many times he should forgive someone. The point Jesus was making in this story was that God forgave you at the cost of His Son’s life. Though we owed an incalculable debt, it cost us nothing to have it forgiven, but it cost the One we were indebted to everything. The least we can do is to forgive men their lesser debts to us.

This parable also helps us to take our sins seriously. We tend to minimize our sins and magnify the wrongs done to us by others. The parable helps us see that our sins are not a trifle. The spotless Son of God who breathed the stars into existence went to hell to pay the debt of sin we owed. The penalty fit the crime (“The wages of sin is death”). You don’t give the death penalty for spitting on the sidewalk or for littering. Only a capital offense warrants a capital punishment. Jesus suffered capital punishment for our sins. Most people don’t commit capital offenses against us. They are mainly misdemeanors. If we cannot forgive others their misdemeanors, God cannot forgive our capital offenses.

The second consideration is that the need for **forgiveness is a daily need.** The request for forgiveness is side by side with the request for daily bread. Daily life requires both bread and forgiveness.

A third consideration is that **forgiveness is a family affair.** It’s a characteristic of the kingdom of heaven—a kingdom we prayed earlier would come. Remember this prayer is for disciples. No one else can pray it (or would want to!)

Forgiveness protects the community. If we can’t learn to forgive, we won’t be able to live together. As we forgive one another within the Fellowship, those outside will know we are Christians by our love. Otherwise they will know we are frauds by our hate.

But what if you forgive someone and they mess up again? What then? “Bear” with them. Endure. “Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, ‘Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?’ Jesus answered, ‘I tell you, not seven times, but seventy times seven.’” (Matt. 18:21, 22) Jesus’ point was: **In the fellowship of forgiven forgivers, you don’t keep score. Forgive as needed.** Have patience with them as God is patient with and endures you.

Jesus forgave people who didn’t ask for it. The woman taken in adultery didn’t ask for forgiveness, yet Jesus said “Go and sin no more.” The paralytic lowered in front of Jesus by his friends didn’t ask for forgiveness. He was there for healing. Why did Jesus offer forgiveness to those who didn’t ask for it? It was because He knew they needed it. Many times we think what we need from God is healing or release from a particular problem we have, without realizing that underneath it all is the desire to be free from the guilt of a life of sin. Whether that life of sin was thrust upon you in the form of abuse, abandonment, or some other hurt outside of your control, or whether it was a life of shame from a deliberate choice of your own rebellion against God, it causes untold psychological, emotional, and spiritual brokenness from which we can’t escape. It’s not that we just need healing from the drugs, the affairs, the alcohol, or the rage. We need something deeper. We need to be healed at the core of our being. We need to be set free from the guilt of our life of sin—and that’s what Jesus offers those in the Fellowship.

What if I don’t feel like forgiving? Don’t go any further in the prayer. Jesus says the same when he said, “If you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.” (Matt. 55:23, 24) **In the fellowship of forgiven forgivers, reconciliation comes before worship.** Ask God to show you *you*—to open your eyes to the reason you are asking to be forgiven.

What if they don’t apologize? When Jesus prayed “Father, forgive them” was anyone offering apology to Him? The high priest? Pilate? The roman soldiers? Yet he prayed for divine forgiveness in the midst of their brutality to him. Jesus lived out the second half of this petition and says to each of us, “Follow me.”

It seems cruel and unfair of God to insist on us forgiving others before He forgives us. Why would He make such an unreasonable demand? **Because He wants to change the world. He wants a revolution of forgiveness!**

If we forgive each other instead of hating and taking revenge on each other, the cycle ends, Satan's kingdom crumbles, God's will is done and His kingdom comes! It is the goodness of God that leads to repentance. It was Jesus' prayer of forgiveness and His behavior on the cross that saved the thief and the centurion. His response to injustice and cruelty showed that He was more than a mortal man and they believed.

As we follow our Savior in the path of forgiveness, others will see that we, too, are more than flesh and blood. They will see that we are children of the king who bear the family resemblance, and belong to the fellowship of forgiven forgivers. Then they, too, will believe. Let the revolution begin!—Pastor Randy

p.s. If you want more on this topic, join us this Wednesday night, 7:00 PM at Fresh Encounter.

p.s.s. Thanks to all the Kuna members who came out to see the "Would You Believe?" musical drama last Sabbath evening. It was great to see the Kuna contingent in full force. Pray for the follow-up meetings that begin tonight.

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2 Chron. 7:14

"The need is great. The key is prayer. The time is now."