

Good morning,

This morning the passage is entitled the unmerciful servant Matthew 18 v 21.

Reading

The passage itself begins and ends with the question of forgiveness.

Peter says how many times do I have to forgive my brother who sins against me 7 times? No Jesus says up to seventy seven times and the passage ends on forgiveness when it says “This is how your father will treat each of you if you do not forgive your Brother from the heart.

I think it's great to have a passage on forgiveness during the summer holidays, family holidays are reputed to be one of the most stressful times of the year, as you see each other all day, every day for two weeks.

At the start of our holiday was one of those stressful moments, when you hear those fateful words from the back of the car, no “not, are we there yet, but daddy I feel sick”

You suddenly try and do an emergency stop, and hand your child a plastic bag. Only to find when you stop he has missed the bag, his change of cloths are at the bottom of the suitcase, which is at the bottom of the car boot. And when you get out the car it starts to rain. Just great!

But you have one of those peace and forgiveness moments when you see how upset they are and you try and consol them, but other things that happen on holiday are not quite so easily forgiven!

So today I want to look primarily at forgiveness and touch upon being merciful. If I am honest I am struggling with certain areas of forgiveness. (which is why I have the work in progress up) We can read this passage and it's pretty obvious why we should forgive and the consequences of not showing mercy or not forgiving someone are clear, when we read it in the middle of a sermon. And the Lords prayer reminds us to forgive those who trespass against us.

But if forgiveness was so simple the world would be a better place, if we all forgave one another all the time, but unfortunately we live in a fallen world and it's a little harder to put forgiveness and mercy into practice,

our human emotions get in the way of what we know is the right thing to do, which is why I think we can struggle with forgiveness.

Have you ever wondered why Peter said how many times should I forgive my brother? Do we think Peter had it all sorted out? Have you ever wondered how long Jesus gave his disciples to work it out these parables?

I think we can sometimes look for quick solutions to issues in our lives, when the events we read about happened over 3 years.

You have to admire his boldness though, he new who Jesus was, the Son of God and yet he still asks him the question not knowing what the answer could be.

What would he have done if Jesus had agreed with him and said 7 was enough?

What would he have done? Rolled up his sleeves in a beefy fisherman type way to find his brother and teach him a lesson. We have to remember that they were still living in a time when the punishment fitted the crime an eye for an eye a tooth for a tooth, no mention of forgiveness in the main or what we would understand as true forgiveness.

I think we can therefore assume Peter had an issue with forgiveness, but do we think he had a big chart on the wall with all the disciples names on it, which he looked at every day, know that John he has only sinned twice against me, from my records Barnabus is up to five, but that Judus well he is off the scale. I need to sort him out.

But Jesus say not seven but seventy seven times, and but don't be fooled Jesus did not pick 77 as a random number out of the air, it refers to Genesis 4 v24. Basically the guy in the passage was declaring complete independence from God, I can do all things in my own strength independent of God. Rather than an eye for and eye I will pay back a person 77 times who offends me which was contrary to Gods laws. Jesus was therefore making the point; in him Gods forgiveness is limitless. Jesus was proclaiming the complete opposite of the cultural norm. However we can only fully understand true forgiveness like this through an understanding of Christ's death and resurrection and what he has done for us all on the cross.

It may sound a bit silly having a chart, but sometimes we can all hold onto hurts that we shouldn't we many not have the chart up on the wall, but the hurt is there. **If we don't forgive we are in danger of letting bitterness or anger gain a foothold in our lives.**

If we don't let go past and current hurts we are in danger of being handed over to the tortures.

"Jesus doesn't explain what they are (tortures) in this passage of scripture, but the root word means to experience pain, toil, or torment, and to toss or vex. Clearly then, the phrase "the tortures" is referring to those natural or supernatural forces that cause intense pain and turmoil of the body and soul"

Frederick Buechner said it about as pointedly as one can:

"of the seven deadly sins, anger is possibly the most fun. To lick the wounds, to smack your lips over grievances long past, to savor to the last toothsome morsel both the pain you are given and the pain you are giving back. In many ways it is a feast fit for a king. The chief drawback is that what you are wolfing down is yourself. The skeleton at the feast is you"

There is only one way out of the bondage of bitterness and that is by forgiving from the heart.

Another quote

Resentment is like taking poison and waiting for the other person to die
Malachy McCourt.

Quotes from: Getting anger under control, Neil Anderson & Rich Miller

If it was Judas, Peter was cross or angry with, which I can only guess, I wonder if Peter's thoughts were along the lines of, who does Judas think he is, everything I do is not good enough, just because **he holds the money** bag does not put him in charge. And another thing I've seen him dip his hand into the money bag and take a bit extra for himself, he is just like my uncle Jethro I could never do anything right in his eyes.

Its just no fair!

Now you could then ask the question who was Peter upset with Jesus or his uncle Jethro?

And for me this is the first area where forgiveness can become confusing what or who do we need to forgive?

Deep emotions can lie dormant beneath the surface of a person and a current situation reminds us of that past hurt and our emotions come flooding back to the surface. The deeper the past hurt the stronger our emotions will be.

So I would suggest when we try to forgive sometimes we are trying to deal with past emotions, rather than the current reality of the situation.

In dealing with forgiveness we have to be real with ourselves and think through what's really upsetting us. **And perhaps change our perception of that past event.**

God says we have to be "transformed by the renewing of our minds" **we have to hold the current and past situation against the truth of God's word and who we are in Christ.**

God loves us all exactly as we are however we feel about ourselves, and part of understanding forgiveness is forgiving ourselves.

Nikki and I did an interesting exercise on a fostering course the other week on our names. Where did our names come from, who gave them to us, did we like them.

One lady said that when she got married and took her husband's name it gave her a new start in life she could leave the old person/ name behind.

When we become Christians we need to remind ourselves that we **can forgive ourselves and leave the old person and its hurts behind. We have been adopted into Christ's Family we are a new creation. We are no longer alone, we have to believe we are saints redeemed not sinners in slavery to un-forgiveness.**

But it's still hard; I read a quote the other day it said "bad things happen to good people" somewhere in our lives we have experienced difficulties or bad things happen to us. **God doesn't promise to fix our past but set us free from it.**

When Jesus cried out on the cross “it is finished” he meant it the pain we sometimes carry around with us can be taken from us in Christ, we can draw a line under things and say it is finished.

Again I am not saying it's easy to do but with God's help over time all things are possible. And it will take time because even though we may forgive the hurt is still there.

The deeper we have been hurt the longer and harder it may take to truly forgive from the heart.

As I said earlier I am still working my way through some areas of forgiveness and I can recommend quietly going through the 8 steps to forgiveness which is in Neil Anderson's book “Getting Anger under control” and some of you may have gone through this on “Steps to freedom in Christ course”

I did this on holiday and found I still had to forgive someone from at least 10 years ago.

But coming back to the passage do you notice that the king did not forgive the Servant a second time? I think sometimes we are always expected to forgive and everything will always be ok, because of this **wonderful gift of forgiveness that will sort everything out.**

I think there is also a danger in getting caught up in **false forgiveness?** What do I mean?

Well when we try and forgive someone and we just can't manage it and we are left feeling guilty.

I think we can get caught trying to forgive the actions or the act caused by the person rather than the person, we need to separate the person, from the act. We should not forget the horrors of war and condone it but we can forgive an individual who repents of their involvement in it. And sometimes we have to name the act that been perpetrated against us in order to forgive.

I think sometimes we can put ourselves under false pressure and guilt to forgive when really we should be forgiving with God's help but not forgetting what happened and not let it happen again.

It's interesting that this parable comes directly after the passage about how we **should deal with bad behaviour**. I believe a lot of hurt and unforgiveness is created when we don't deal with conflict and anger in a Godly way and problems become larger and larger until something snaps.

Mathew 18 v 15 -17

I am not sure if it's just a quirk of being British but I guess some of us hear would **find it difficult** to go up to someone and say you have hurt me, or I did not like the way you did that.

Now we have to be careful not to go off unloading our problems onto people in a thoughtless way, but if we are going to be real in our relationships and speak the truth in love, it might be an area we need to pray through and address with people.

A good course that helps to resolve conflict is the **couples alive** course. Which I can recommend to any couple and it's safe for men to do! It looks at how to resolve and deal with conflict and understand our differences.

But did you also notice in the passage it says but if he listens to you, sometimes issues can be resolved **before they need forgiveness, it is as much about listening as it is about finding a solution**. Sandra Warner ran a great course with our Men's small group about the importance of listening as an act of encouragement to the other person.

My wife would testify I have a long way to go yet at least I have started on the journey.

I may have painted a picture the forgiveness is hard to put into practice and it is if we try and do it in our strength

And for those who may struggle with forgiveness or unresolved anger like me, I think God would be saying I understand just walk with me.

Ephesians Chp 2 v 4-7

Our God is not like the king in the passage his mercy is not limited he will show us mercy time and time again when we mess up, if we come back repentantly to him.

If truly want to learn how to forgive from the heart God will help us , the question may be are we prepared to let go of the debts and the hurt others have caused us and start the journey? Or are we going to let ourselves be handed over to be tortured for the rest of our lives?