

Matthew 6:14-15 - Forgiveness is Essential

Before we wade into the deep end of the pool, let me make a quick note about something you may or may not have noticed in the Lord's Prayer. Some of you probably noticed that we missed a verse in our passage which would be at the end of Vs. 13: "for yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen." Some of your Bibles have that in a footnote. Suffice it to say that those words were added in some later Greek copies of the book of Matthew and found their way in the KJV and NKJV. But the earliest copies of Matthew, the earliest commentaries on Matthew, and earliest quotes of the Lord's Prayer in books and letters by Christians never have those words. So if your translation does not include those words, don't be alarmed, they weren't in Matthew's original version which is why I didn't address them last week.

That's a very odd way to begin a sermon - it feels a little like grinding the gears when someone is learning to drive a stick shift. But let me just say that anytime you're listening to a sermon or talking with someone about the Bible and they deliberately ignore passages or skip over verses, that should be a huge red flag. Usually people ignore verses they don't like or don't want to have to explain. Here, "yours is the kingdom and power and glory. Amen" is a beautiful ending, but I think more recent translations have been honest by leaving them out of the text.

With that said, I want to spend the rest of our time doing a deep dive into **Vss. 14-15** of Matthew 6 looking at the issue of forgiveness. I mentioned last week that the most convicting part of the Lord's Prayer is the line: "Forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors." "God forgive us, in the same manner that we have forgiven those who have sinned against us." That's a tall order. And unless someone is simply blinded to their own sinfulness, I think everyone pauses when they consider the gravity of that prayer.

And almost as though he knows we're going to have trouble processing that part of the prayer, Jesus circles back around to this issue of forgiveness and debt and how we are to forgive one another. And I think it's safe to say he doesn't ease our concerns. He doesn't back track on what he touched on in the prayer. Really, he doubles down on the supreme importance of forgiving one another.

He just got done teaching the disciples how to pray. Most of it I think is pretty straightforward. We need bread, we don't want to sin, we want God's Kingdom to come - those are all probably fairly intuitive for the people of God to pray.

But when Jesus teaches about how we ask God for forgiveness there was this massive curveball. The question becomes: Why should we pray like *that*?" **Vss. 14-15** answer the question.

If we don't forgive others, we have no forgiveness from the Father. To put it as clearly as possible: If we refuse to forgive other people, we will go to hell. I don't know how to be any clearer than that. When Jesus is talking about the Father forgiving us, eternal life or eternal torment is on the line. The stakes could not be higher.

And maybe you're wondering: why is that? Why is this one thing so critical to Jesus that he would threaten our eternal destiny over it? This is why: Because forgiveness of sins is at the very center of everything that God has planned from all eternity past. It's the very center of everything that Jesus came to do.

Jesus is named "Jesus" according to **Matt. 1:21** because he will save his people from their sins. How does he save us from our sins? By dying for our sins, thus securing our forgiveness.

Matt. 26:28: when Jesus is instituting the Lord's Supper he says "this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins."

The covenant that God has established with us through the sacrificial death of Jesus is all about forgiveness. That was Jesus's entire mission. The reason the Son was sent into the world was to save the world. It was a mission of forgiveness.

And I want to take a few minutes to expand on this because I think it's important to understand just how central this whole thing is to God's heart. Forgiveness is this is not only the plan of God and the mission of Jesus. But this is the **eternal** plan of God and the **eternal** mission of Jesus. **Turn to Eph. 1:3**

At the very beginning of **Eph. 1** Paul lays out all these amazing eternal and spiritual blessings that we have in Christ. This plan of God to save and forgive and choose a people for himself. And these spiritual realities are all wrapped up in forgiveness. **Read 3-4**

So we see the eternal plan of God - before the foundation of the world:

- Blessed us with every spiritual blessing
- He chose us that we should be holy and blameless
- Predestined us for adoption

All of this, **Vss. 5-6** say, is according to his own will so that we would praise him. **Read 5-6**

- We've been adopted according to his will
- To praise his grace.

In the midst of all these amazing blessings is the blessing of forgiveness. **Read 7-10**

So part of this eternal package of grace that we have through Jesus is redemption and forgiveness. We were redeemed by his blood. And our trespasses - our sins - were forgiven. Those blessings that we have were the eternal plan of God. Forgiveness is a massive deal.

You ever get a care package in college or at camp? You open up this box and there's just stuff coming out? All these goodies and treats and goodness. This is like the eternal care package that God has planned and sent to us. It's like the package is Jesus and all the stuff inside are these good things we've received as a result of having Jesus. Of being "in Jesus."

And because forgiveness the eternal plan of God, there's a sense in which the need for forgiveness drives the entire storyline of the Bible. God creates everything in **Gen. 1-2** and calls it "very good." In the very next chapter we have Adam and Eve sinning against God, violating his command. And the rest of the Bible is God providing a way in which sinful humanity can somehow have their sins forgiven and enter back into a right standing with God.

Sacrifices for forgiveness start early in the Bible. They are primitive with the head of the family basically acting as the priest of the family. Remember Job offers sacrifices after every feast his children had in the off chance that somehow they had sinned and cursed God in their hearts. Here's this ancient dad slaughtering animals so his children could have forgiveness.

Then with Moses and the Tabernacle we have a more systematized way that the people of God could have their sins forgiven. They offer the blood of bulls and goats to purify themselves. Of course, we know that the blood of bulls and goats can never take away sin. They always looked forward to Jesus. But the people offering the animals as a sacrifice in faith were forgiven. That was the whole point of the sacrificial system.

Jesus comes, his whole mission is about forgiveness. He died on the cross, in our place, for our sins. To purchase our forgiveness. When Peter is preaching the gospel to Cornelius and his family in **Acts 10:42-43**, Peter says: And he commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead. To him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name."

And in **Rev. 5** we see Jesus in heaven as a lion that rules and lamb that has been slaughtered. For all of eternity future, it seems, we will be reminded of Jesus's death to purchase our forgiveness.

Say: "Jason, why are you going on about all this?" Because I want you to see that the architecture of all of history - eternity past, everything from creation until now, and all eternity future - revolves around forgiveness.

This is the grand design of God: forgiving people for our sins against him, not because of our works, but because of Jesus who died to purchase us. This is the grand plan of God.

So, when you have someone who says they love God and love Jesus, but can't bring themselves to forgive other people what you have is someone who is missing the entire picture of God's eternal plan through Jesus. This is not skimming over the footnotes of God's plan. This is missing the title of the book.

It'd be like a kid who loves the Seattle Mariners, has all the gear, watches all the games, has posters all over her room, wears Mariners jerseys. And a friend comes over and says: Hey, you wanna play catch? And she says: Nah, I don't really like playing baseball. What?! The point of the Mariners is not cool jerseys and hats and paraphernalia. The point of the Mariners is baseball. And if you don't love the game of baseball, you're missing the whole point.

That's why Jesus threatens eternal life back in **Matt. 6**. Everything that God has planned and done in history. Everything that Jesus came to accomplish all revolves around forgiveness. And if we say "Nah, I'm not really up to forgiving that person" we're missing the whole point. We're missing the big picture.

So let's go back to **Matt. 6** to look at this passage. Here's the passage, very straightforward. **Read 14-15**

Now, I just want to point out some relatively obvious things.

1 - This is a conditional statement. A conditional statement is an if/then statement. If you do your chores, then you can go play outside. The second thing hinges on the first thing. If you forgive, then your Father will forgive you.

And just to drive the point home, it's not just forgive so that you'll be forgiven...and then maybe there's some grey area if we don't forgive. No it's conditional both ways: forgive to be forgiven, and lack of forgiveness results in lack of forgiveness. Jesus makes it 100% clear that on the last day when we stand before God, if we refuse to forgive our sins still remain on our account.

So there's no way on the Day of Judgment that we can stand before Jesus with having lived a life of sinful grudges and honestly say to him: oh, I didn't know forgiving other people was such a big deal. "I didn't know I had to forgive." No, every time you prayed to God you knew you had to forgive.

2 - Forgiveness is a choice! Forgiveness is an action that we can either choose to do or refuse to do.

This is so important. Forgiving someone is a choice that we make. If you're taking notes write that down and underline it. Forgiveness is a choice. It is not a feeling. It is not warm fuzzies you feel toward someone when everything is made all better. It's actually a choice to absorb the damage that someone has done to you and not charge them for it.

That's actually why Jesus uses the language of debt in **Vs. 12**. When we sin against someone, we cause injury. We cause damage. And we owe them morally. But in many cases, there's no way to make that up.

If you speak harshly to you wife, it's not like you can just say something really nice to her and all is better. You can't just give her \$5 and she'll be happy. Some of the things we say echo for years. If someone does something and it accidentally injures someone or kills them, there's no way to make that up. There's this outstanding debt that cannot be paid.

So what is forgiveness? It is the choice to release that person from the moral debt they owe you. How do we do that?

4 things: I took from a pamphlet called "When your marriage goes sour" touching on the issue of forgiveness, but it's helpful in all forgiveness situations.

1 - Do not treat them as though they've done anything to you.

2 - Do not talk about it with them.

- 3 - Do not talk about it to other people.
- 4 - Do not dwell on the issue yourself.

I'll qualify some of these things in a bit, but just know that these are essential. When you forgive someone, you are saying that the moral debt they owe you has been cancelled.

If I were to default on a loan at the bank and they forgave the loan, it means they wouldn't keep asking me for the money. And they wouldn't treat me like some chump who owed them money. They'd treat me as though nothing happened. Now, maybe they wouldn't lend me money again but they would treat me with kindness and gentleness.

They also wouldn't bring it up anymore. You ever had an argument with someone and they brought up something from back in the day that you had thought had been forgiven? They throw the past in your face even though you worked it out? That's unforgiveness. Forgiveness means we don't talk about it anymore - at least not in a way that's used against the person.

And we don't talk about the issue with other people. Sure, maybe you don't bring up the issue anymore with your friend, but you talk about it to 5 other friends. That's not forgiveness. And I'm not talking about "Hey, help me move on. Help me with my callous heart." I'm talking about gossiping with our friends about how we've been hurt. That's not forgiveness.

And we don't dwell on the issue ourselves. There are times when I can't be alone in silence because I start thinking about past things. Things people have done that have hurt. And I dwell on them and agonize over them. And I start having these make believe conversations in my head with them. And it drives me nuts so I have to listen to a book or podcast or something. Just to get my mind on something else.

We have to train ourselves to do those things. And, as Jesus makes clear, we have to do this with multiple people. If you forgive others. Not just 1 person or 10 people. Our ledger should be clear with everyone in our life. And if it's not, then we strive to work through the steps praying that God would forgive us like we forgive them. I'll bet if we actually prayed like that - seriously prayed like that - it would speed up the forgiveness process.

Look over at **Matt 18:21-35**. It is essentially the exact same teaching but in the form of a parable. It's a story to illustrate that forgiving one another is essential. If you remember this parable comes on the heels of the issue of church discipline. How patient should we be with those who are caught up in sin. And the answer - for the most part - is very, very patient. When someone sins against us our knee jerk reaction should be to forgive them. **Read 25-27**

So the parable is pretty easy to put together. God is the king, we are the servant who owes God a thousand talents. Jesus again frames sin in the image of debt. We owe this debt to God. And it's an impossible debt. A talent was about 75 pounds of material. We don't know if it was gold or silver, the text doesn't say. But Gold is about \$1700/oz. - there are 16 ounces in a pound, times 75 lbs in a talent is \$2M for every talent of gold. How many talents did he owe? With 1,000 talents you're at \$2B this guy owed the king. Why did the king lend him the money and how did he waste it all? He didn't. It's a story, it's fiction. There's no king. The point is simple that the guy owed a debt that was impossible to pay off just like we owe God a debt that is impossible to pay off. What happens? He begs the king for mercy and the king grants it. Free and clear.

Now you would think someone who owed the king \$2B and was forgiven all of it would be a changed man. You'd be wrong. **Read 28-31**

So the guy is walking home from the king's palace and there's a guy who owes him 100 denarii. And instead of extending mercy - like he was just shown mercy - he strangles the guy and has him put in debtor's prison where he will never get out.

Now, something to keep in mind is that 100 denarii is not a small amount of money. A denarii is a day's wage for a laborer. This 100 days' wages - maybe \$17k in our day. That's not nothing. What I think Jesus is driving at

is we are often called to forgive substantial things. Massive injuries. **But** they still pale in comparison to what we've been forgiven.

That's why the people who saw this all go down were grieved. They knew 100 denarii was a lot. But it was nothing compared to 1,000 talents and the forgiveness this guy had just received. **Read 32-35**

This is the same lesson just in parable form. The unforgiving servant received the same sentence he passed on to his debtor. He was forgiven the exact same about he forgave.

See, what makes forgiveness so hard is not the theoretical concept - we know we should forgive. It's actually doing it. Actually living it out. Especially when we feel so justified in not giving it. There will always be a million reasons not to forgive. There will always be a million reasons why it's easier to just move on. But there's one reason why we shouldn't: our own forgiveness from God is on the line.

Now, this leads to some inevitable questions. Some of you asked these questions last week. So let me touch on these briefly.

1 - What if someone isn't sorry for what they've done? This can be really hard. See, in the Bible, forgiveness is viewed as a transaction. When we see it played out the person at fault asks for forgiveness. And I think that's really healthy. When we do something wrong, we don't just say "I'm sorry." We say "I'm sorry for raising my voice, will you please forgive me?" That's transactional. It means you are now at the mercy of the other person. You've acknowledged your wrongdoing and are now requesting that the ledger be cleared. Now it's all up to the offended person.

Luke 17:3-4: If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him, and if he sins against you seven times in the day, and turns to you seven times, saying, 'I repent,' you must forgive him."

The forgiveness transaction requires acknowledgement and a desire to repent.

But if the offender doesn't acknowledge what they've done, it gets really hard. If a friend steals \$20 bucks from your house but then denies it, it's different than if they steal \$20 and confess. If they don't confess you might never trust them again. If they do confess, there's a path to reconciliation. As Christians, if we are wronged and the person doesn't confess or acknowledge what they've done, there's no technical forgiveness because there's no transaction. That does not mean we hold a grudge against them or hate them. What it does mean is that we stand ready to forgive them. We desire them to confess and repent. We desire to begin reestablishing trust. So we want that, we work to that end. But if the other person doesn't even acknowledge what they did, it's hard to work down the road of forgiveness.

Imagine the sin is worse than stealing \$20. Imagine it's adultery or abuse or a secret gambling addiction and the other person doesn't even acknowledge it. How would you forgive them if they don't acknowledge it? To forgive someone, they have to actually acknowledge their need of it, and we should stand ready to forgive.

2 - What if someone has asked forgiveness but we're really struggling to forgive them? That's where I think this prayer is so powerful. This prayer is something we are to pray daily. "Give us **this day** our daily bread." Jesus anticipates that we will pray this daily. So if we're praying this daily then we are reminded every day that we need to keep the register clean with other people. It forces us to daily consider who we might have not forgiven and do the hard work of forgiving.

And if we're still having trouble, we need only look to the cross. We look to the 1,000 talents of debt that the Father has forgiven us to realize that in the cosmic scheme of things, the sins committed against us are fairly small.

Paul flips the Lord's prayer in **Eph. 4:32** Forgive one another, just as God in Christ forgave you.

Forgiven people forgive others.

3 - Does this mean that if I don't forgive I have lost my salvation? The answer is no: someone who is justified by God through faith in Christ will never be condemned. But the reality is that someone who does not forgive has no expectation of forgiveness on the day of judgment. Jesus says, "if you don't forgive others, neither *will* your Father forgive your trespasses."

Forgiven people forgive other people. That's just what we do. To ask "Do I really need to forgive other people" is like asking "do I really need to stop lying / stealing / being greedy?" Yes! Of course you do!

1 Cor. 6:9-10: Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.

We are to put those things to death. Will we do it perfectly? No. Neither will we forgive perfectly. But we should strive for perfection. We should strive to forgive just like God forgave us.

But, let me be clear: Those who live a life intentionally withholding forgiveness or ignoring forgiveness, were never forgiven in the first place.

This is a ledger book. It records names, dates, items and what is owed. And I suspect that when we stand before God in judgement the conversation will go something like this:

God: So you want in?

Us: Yes, absolutely.

God: Did you believe in my Son, Jesus, to pay for your sin and impute to you righteousness?

Us: Yes, absolutely! Your Son saved me by grace alone through faith alone. My ledger is clear - my sins have been erased from the record.

God: Really; let me see you ledger book.

Us: My what?

God: Your ledger book. The record of sins you've hung onto.

Us: Oh well, here you go.

God: You know it's interesting. It looks remarkably similar to my ledger of your sins.

Us: What? I thought I was forgiven.

God: Clearly you don't understand what forgiveness means.

But imagine God asked to see our ledger and it looked blank.

God: So you want in?

Us: Yes, absolutely.

God: Did you believe in my Son, Jesus, to pay for your sin and impute to you righteousness?

Us: Yes, absolutely! Your Son saved me by grace alone through faith alone. My ledger is clear - my sins have been erased from the record.

God: Really; let me see you ledger book.

Us: Uh, here you go. There's no much to look at.

God: Interesting. It looks remarkably similar to my ledger of your sins.

See, we're not saved because we forgive other people any more than we become a Seattle Seahawk by putting on a jersey. But if God has saved us, the evidence of that will be in our ability to forgive debtors, just as he has forgiven our debts.

Pray