

The Gospel According To Luke
"A Jesus Who Forgives"
Luke 17:1-19
Pastor Duane Smets
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I. Forgiveness Hears
II. Forgiveness Hurts
III. Forgiveness Heals

Today we're back in The Gospel According To Luke, moving on to chapter 17 in a sermon I've titled for this morning, "A Jesus Who Forgives." Perhaps the most powerful story I've ever heard of forgiveness is the story of Corrie Ten Boom.

Corrie was the daughter of a watch-maker in Holland, born in 1892. Corrie's family were Christians and when Hitler invaded Holland in the early 1940's the Boom's harbored and hid Jews in their home to protect them from the Holocaust. Eventually they were caught, taken to a prison camp called Ravensbruck and Corrie lost her dad and sister to the hands of the Nazis.

Years later, Corrie was in at a church service in Germany and afterward a man came up to Corrie to introduce himself. At the sight of his face, she became horrified as she recognized him as one of the men from the prison camp who had forced her to walk naked and degraded throughout the camp as she and many others awaited their death.

The man then said to her, "I was a soldier at Ravensbruck. However, after the war I became a Christian. God forgave me. Will you forgive me?" And he reached out his hand to ask for her forgiveness. Corrie tells the story of that moment and how she felt little emotion of forgiveness, she had a thousand reasons to hate this man, but at the same time she knew of how much God had forgiven her in Christ. So she extended her hand toward the man and spoke the words, "I forgive you."

The teachings and stories of Jesus we are going to look at today are all about forgiveness. So why don't you stand with me in honor of how special and significant they are as I read the text from the Bible.

Luke 17:1-19 "And he said to his disciples, "Temptations to sin are sure to come, but woe to the one through whom they come! It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck and he were cast into the sea than that he should cause one of these little ones to sin. Pay attention to yourselves! 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 apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith!" And the Lord said, "If you had faith like a grain of mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it would obey you."

"Will any one of you who has a servant plowing or keeping sheep say to him when he has come in from the field, 'Come at once and recline at table'? Will he not rather say to him, 'Prepare supper for me, and dress properly, and serve me while I eat and drink, and afterward you will eat and drink'? Does he thank the servant because he did what was commanded? So you also, when you have done

all that you were commanded, say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty.'"

On the way to Jerusalem he was passing along between Samaria and Galilee. And as he entered a village, he was met by ten lepers, who stood at a distance and lifted up their voices, saying, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us." When he saw them he said to them, "Go and show yourselves to the priests." And as they went they were cleansed. Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice; and he fell on his face at Jesus' feet, giving him thanks. Now he was a Samaritan. Then Jesus answered, "Were not ten cleansed? Where are the nine? Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" And he said to him, "Rise and go your way; your faith has made you well."

- Pastoral Declaration: This is the Word of the Lord.
- Congregational Response: Thanks Be To God.

What we've got here in the chunk of text for today is first a teaching from Jesus about forgiveness in verses 1-6, an illustration about the posture of forgiven people in verses 7-10 and then a real-life miracle of Jesus where He heals and forgives a dude. So there's three things I want to walk through today from what we just read: "Forgiveness Hears", "Forgiveness Hurts" and "Forgiveness Heals" and the one thing I hope we walking away believing this morning is that, "Being forgiving comes from being forgiven." Being forgiving comes from being forgiven.

I. Forgiveness Hears

Let's jump into this first point, "Forgiveness Hears." One of the things we see in this section of Luke teaching on forgiveness is that it is always interpersonal. Forgiveness has to do with the stuff of relationship. Whether it's in relationship to God, other people or even towards our own self, forgiveness is an interpersonal dynamic.

What Jesus sets up in the first section is what causes the need for forgiveness which he says is when this thing called "sin" takes place. There's a number of ways to define and understand sin, which we talk about in depth in our Theo 101 class, but for today I'll just simply say it's wronging a person, whether it God, another human or yourself.

But no sin happens out of a vacuum. Jesus says there is this thing called "temptation" that happens first. He experienced it Himself for forty days in the desert before He started His ministry, so He knew about temptation intensely.

And the way temptation works is through hearing. We hear something from somewhere that when we listen to it begins to lead us away from what is good. So in verse 3 Jesus says the way to avoid temptation is to "Pay attention to yourselves!"

It's sort of like saying listen to what your hearing and don't be led astray. For me there have been some core Bible verses that have sort of stuck with me and guided me in the trajectory of my life from the time I was a new Christian, young college students to now, over twenty years later as an adult male. One of those verses for me has been Proverbs 4:23 "Guard your heart, for out of it flow the issues of life."

It's another way of saying listen and pay attention. There is the voice of the Holy Spirit of God, telling us and reminding us to love and obey God and His Word and there are many other voices out there telling us to feel and do other things. And when we listen to them it's bad. So bad Jesus says it deserves being drowned with this huge rock around your neck.

When we don't hear the voice of God and when we spread different truths and voices than that of God's, then we need forgiveness and Jesus explains what that process looks like. Let's look at it together, verse 3 "If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him."

Okay, so I'm going to just walk us through this. First off, "brother" which can also be "sister" here implies some type of relationship. Jesus' call isn't for us to go around to everyone everywhere just pointing out people's faults. I call those people "fruit checkers" who whenever you get together with them just want to know what sin you have to confess and repent of.

Those kind of people are annoying. Because what comes across is that they don't really care about you as a person and what that kind of relationship breeds is a very moralistic and legalistic lifestyle.

If find yourself being one of those kind of people then my encouragement to you would be to invest deeper into brotherly and sisterly like relationship with the person you're concerned for so that you build trust and earn the right to speak into their life.

Now the second thing Jesus says is you're to "rebuke" them. He's using shorthand here to explain a delicate process He and other people in the Bible unpack in other places. To rebuke someone doesn't mean when they blow it you walk up to them and say, "I rebuke you in the name of Jesus!"

Galatians 6:1 explains it this way, "Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted."

So you got to be gentle and understand your own sinfulness and ability to blow it just as much. And make no mistake about it. When I was a younger Christian I used to think, "I can't believe these people that say their Christians but then end up doing these heinous and hurtful things." Now, walking with the Lord for some time. I've come to see the temptations and realized that there's no sin that given the right circumstance and situation that my sinful heart won't adopt.

Jonathan Edwards, the great Puritan Pastor, Evangelist and Theologian of the 18th century had 70 personal life resolutions he lived his life by. His eighth resolution was this,

"Resolved, to act, in all respects, both speaking and doing, as if nobody had been so vile as I, and as if I had committed the same sins, or had the same infirmities or failings as others; and that I will let the knowledge of their failings promote nothing but shame in myself, and prove only an occasion of my confessing my own sins and misery to God."

So in light of that, when we rebuke others, we ought to be gentle. It's because the only reason we should even be talking to them is because we care for and love them. That's why Ephesians 4:15 says it has to be done in love.

Love is what compels us to go to a person to talk to them about something off in their life due to some sin. The best thing I've read on this is from a book titled, "Instruments In The Redeemer's Hands" by Paul David Tripp. He writes,

"Confrontation is rooted in a submission to the first great commandment to 'love the Lord your God.'" We confront biblical (or not at all) because we love something else more than God. Perhaps we love our relationship with this person so much that we don't want to risk it. Perhaps we prefer to avoid the personal sacrifice and complications that confrontation may involve. Perhaps we love peace, respect, and appreciation more than we should.

Confrontation is also rooted in the second great commandment, to 'love your neighbor as yourself.' A rebuke are of unrighteous anger is a clear sign of biblical love, but I am afraid we have replaced love in our relationships with being 'nice.' Our culture puts a high premium on being tolerant and polite. We go so far as to convince ourselves that we are not speaking because we love the other person, when in reality we fail to speak because we lack love.

Please don't misunderstand. Sure love is not offensively intrusive or rude. But the Bible repudiates covering sin with a facade of silence. The truth is that we fail to confront, not because we love others too much but because we love ourselves too much. We fear others misunderstanding us or being angry with us. We are afraid of what others will think. We don't want to ensure the hardship of honesty because we love ourselves more than we love our neighbors."

We need to learn this. To often we don't actually care about one another enough to get together one on one and sit down and have real talk. Instead we like to post stupid things on Facebook. We live in this culture that is afraid to confront in person and I think it's unbiblical and wrong.

It's also why I think we don't see a lot of progress with that route. Because rebuke, repentance and forgiveness always works best in the context of relationship. And when it's in relationship repentance and forgiveness, begets relational restoration, not just being right. That's the goal.

To receive rebuke means being willing to hear a person out. And when we really hear a person, usually what happens is repentance. Now there's two things to repentance. One is a sorrow. 2 Corinthians 7:10 says "Godly sorrow brings repentance." So sorrow is on the road to the repentance which is the actual change. That's what it is to "repent", that's what the word means, "change".

All of this, this whole process requires a lot of hearing. It requires being open. Open to God and open to others. And this is what we see in Jesus. He's open.

In the story with the ten lepers, they are crying out, verse 13 says they were "lifting up their voices" and Jesus heard them. He paid attention and listened to their cry for help.

The first step toward forgiveness is being open. It doesn't seem like you can forgive someone who isn't sorry and who doesn't repent but you can stand ready to, ready, open, wanting, willing and waiting.

So forgiveness hears. It hears the voice of the Holy Spirit of God calling us to be forgiving toward others, it hears the voice of the person repenting and confessing their heart, and it hears the need and desire for relational restoration. In light of that real talk.

Are you open to forgiveness? Deep down many of us have some deep wounds and hurts and the idea of even just hearing a person out that has hurt us sounds like too much. I get that. If that's where you're at just pray for God to work in your life.

Are you open to being forgiven? Do you see yourself as having it all together or do you recognize that you have blind spots and that God wants to use other people in your life to see them so that you can move into greater wholeness and health as a human person and as a Christian?

The life of a Christian in many ways is simply one where we are being forgiven and are forgiving towards others. Being forgiving comes from being forgiven.

Well, let's move on to our next point, "Forgiveness Hurts."

II. Forgiveness Hurts

So Jesus outlines the process of forgiveness and then adds this antidote in verse 4 saying, "If he sins against you seven times in the day, and turns to you seven times, saying, 'I repent,' you must forgive him."

First off, after going about it in the way we just outlined it in the previous point can you imagine doing that seven times in one day? That'd be exhausting. It happens though. At least in my house with my kids. They'll go through whole process, talking it out, forgiving each other, hugging and then BAM! Five minutes later they're fighting over something and being mean to each other again.

But I don't think Jesus is just saying seven times is the limit, like when it's eight then sweet, don't worry about it, you don't have to forgive anymore. In Matthew 18:21-22 Jesus said it this way, "21 Peter came up and said to him, 'Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?' 22 Jesus said to him, 'I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven.'"

That's four-hundred and ninety times. So what Jesus is saying is if someone repents we're to forgive them every time, as many times as it takes. And that's hard. Forgiveness takes a toll on you, it takes it out of you. Which is why when Jesus says this, the disciples respond in verse 5 saying, "Increase our faith!"

Their response is basically, "That sounds impossible Lord! We need help to be able to do that. We need faith for that because there's no way we'll be able to otherwise."

Now, one thing I haven't said or done yet in this sermon is defined "forgiveness." I intentionally waited until now. Because here's my definition of forgiveness: "Forgiveness is absorbing sin to give another love."

You see forgiveness always involves an exchange of some kind. You give something for some purpose. Tim Keller in his book "The Reason For God" says when someone wrongs you there are really only two options.

One, you can withhold relationship either actively or passively wishing for pain in the person's life that has wronged you. You can do this by saying harsh things to the person or gossiping about them and then begin to feel some sense of satisfaction.

The problem however with this option is you tend to become more cold, hard, self-pitying, self-absorbed, more cynical and develop prejudices.

Two, you can forgive and not make the person pay for their wrong doing.

The problem however with this option is it's degrading, there's a loss, sometimes of money, reputation, happiness and the opportunity of somehow getting back. It's really a form of suffering and it hurts, a lot.

You see what happens in our souls when we're wronged is we really don't want forgiveness what we want is retribution or revenge. And to forgo it and absorb it hurts. You see you pay for forgiveness. It costs. A lot.

KJ Golden is a black female hip hop artist and she writes for “The Witness” which is a Black Christian Collective of artists, theologians, and activists. On it she actually wrote an article titled, “Forgiveness Hurts.”

“I had played this day out in my head for what seemed like forever. Hypothetical questions would run through my brain. What would I say? Would I be angry? What will his voice sound like? Would he even say sorry? My whole life had been spent without any existence of my biological father and when the unknown number appeared across my iPhone, I knew it was him.

Forgive and forget. We are all so familiar with this cliché. Honestly, will we ever forget the wrong someone did to us? What if someone raped you? Abused you? Cheated? Neglected you like I felt from my father? We will never forget those things no matter how forgiving we are.

I fell off my bicycle when I was younger. I was trying to do one of those BMX tricks and instead became friends with the pavement. I gashed up my knee pretty bad. Ten years later, I still have a scar on my knee. The pain from that day may no longer be there, but that scar sure is.

As I’m learning to forgive my father, I am learning to be honest not only with him but with myself. We can get so caught up with hurrying to forgive, that we never actually deal with our true feelings. I don’t know where we have received the idea that showing any emotion besides joy is sinful. It’s not. God can handle our pain, our anger, or whatever else we are feeling.

Being honest also allows room for healing. We can spend years thinking we hate someone but in actuality we just long to tell them that they hurt our feelings. I searched my heart and realized I wasn’t angry with my father, but I was hurt. I was hurt because he missed out on my whole life and would never get those memories back. I had to have a heart-to-heart and confess to my father how I really felt.

Years have passed since I first spoke to my biological father, but that first conversation still plays out in my head. It’s been one of the hardest things I have had to work through.

God wants us to forgive. I remember telling my dad, “I forgive you not for you but for me.” I want to experience all that God has for my life and I can’t do that if I’m holding on to the baggage of my biological father not being there. Yes, forgiveness hurts, but it’s ultimately freeing.”

Two options: Make someone pay or pay yourself. Forgiveness is hard, it hurts, but it’s worth it. Is there someone this morning God is wanting you to forgive? If so, I get it. It’s hard. But it’s worth it.

Being forgiving comes from being forgiven. And I really believe the only way we can truly extend forgiveness is by being forgiven. So let’s move on to our final point for today, “Forgiveness Heals” and unpack how that works.

III. Forgiveness Heals

I want to start off this point by looking at the story in our text where Jesus heals the ten lepers.

To begin with you’ve got to know and understand some stuff about lepers and leprosy. Leprosy was an ugly contagious skin disease and to protect it from spreading the Jewish people had strict laws about it. Here’s what they had to do:

Leviticus 13:45-46 “

The leprous person who has the disease shall wear torn clothes and let the hair of his head hang loose, and he shall cover his upper lip and cry out, ‘Unclean, unclean.’ He shall remain unclean as long as he has the disease. He is unclean. He shall live alone. His dwelling shall be outside the camp.”

So these ten guys are part of this group of outcasts who live outside the city, have to wear torn clothes, with their hair down and when anyone comes near put their hand in front of their mouth and call out “unclean, unclean.” Imagine what that would do to the psyche of a person.

On top of it, verse 16 says at least one of them was a Samaritan and the Jewish people despised Samaritans. We talked about it earlier back when we were in Luke 10 together for the Parable of the Good Samaritan. One ancient Jewish writer recorded the sentiment well saying, “Samaritans are a half breed race with a perverted form of worship. A foolish group not even to be recognized as a real people.”

So this leper has been physically suffering and socially suffering systemically from racism and prejudice. And what he wants from Jesus is mercy. The dominant idea back then was if you had leprosy you had done something wrong, sinning against God. If you were cleansed and the priest verified it, then it was a sign that you were forgiven.

Last week we looked at a passage where Jesus told a story about a rich man who failed to have mercy for a man covered with sores. Now we see a man covered with sores calling out to Jesus for mercy. And Jesus sees him, hears him and heals him.

Now Jesus healed 10 lepers but only this one turns back to give thanks. Let’s look at it. Verses 15-19 “15 One of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice; 16 and he fell on his face at Jesus’ feet, giving him thanks. Now he was a Samaritan. 17 Then Jesus answered, “Were not ten cleansed? Where are the nine? 18 Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?” 19 And he said to him, “Rise and go your way; your faith has made you well.”

What Jesus makes clear here is his goal in healing the lepers was not just to heal their physical bodies but even more so to heal their souls, to heal them spiritually. But only one recognized Jesus, praising Him as God and giving Him thanks. He, Jesus says had faith and received forgiveness.

Earlier when the disciples realized the challenge of forgiveness they realized they needed faith. And Jesus said if they had faith like the tiniest tree seed, the mustard seed that it is strong enough to rip out a mulberry tree, which has roots that go down and last for up to 600 years.

His point is it doesn’t take much. Faith isn’t something you can conjure up or amass, it’s a simple, childlike recognition of one’s need and truly turning to God for forgiveness. You see it’s not so much about having great faith but having faith in a great God.

What I think happened with the one leper is when he was healed, he truly saw it as the forgiveness of God toward him, so the healing went past his skin and down into his heart. And this is where the story leads us. Every time we read a story of Jesus it’s helpful to ask who are we in the story?

With this one there’s only two options. You’re either Jesus or a leper. We know we’re not Jesus so we’re lepers. We’ve got spots, we have this disease called sin and we need mercy and forgiveness. What Jesus came to show is that God is a God of mercy and forgiveness. Daniel 9:9 says this, “To the Lord our God belong mercy and forgiveness, for we have rebelled against him.”

This is the hardest part, to admit we've sinned against God and need His forgiveness. Forgiveness is about relationship and relationship with God is the one we've all messed up the most. When we truly realize how bad all we can do is cry out for mercy because we know we don't deserve anything, we're unworthy.

That's why Jesus tells that short story about the unworthy servants in verses 7-9. Unworthy. Deep down if we're honest with ourselves there's so much fear, guilt and shame lurking beneath the surface. We're afraid God can't love us or wouldn't want to. We feel guilty about the things we've done. Or shame about who we are thinking we're not enough.

Are any of you Metallica fans? Pretty much whenever I'm working in the garage or doing yard work at my house I'm either listening to AC/DC or Ozzy Osborne or Metallica. Just the way God wired me. I like metal.

I couldn't help but think about the song Unforgiven by Metallica when I was working on this sermon. It tells the story of a child growing up and increasingly subdued. He fights for worth but loses the battle. And so the chorus rings,

What I've felt,
What I've known
Never shined through in what I've shown.
Never free.
Never me.
So I dub thee unforgiven.

What the forgiveness of God does is hears our hurt and our pain and our sin and then frees us so we can be forgiven. Then when we experience that, like the unworthy servants in Jesus' story we're just delighted to be at the table. It makes us forgiving toward others, which we simply see as our duty as forgiven people.

Here's how it works, how it heals. Jesus, while hanging on the cross cried out "Father, forgive them."

Ever wondered why Jesus had to die? Like, why couldn't God just wave His hand and say, "your forgiven"?

The reason is as we learned earlier, forgiveness always costs. On the cross Jesus absorbed onto His own body our sins and the sins done unto us so that we might be forgiven. Forgiveness is costly suffering, so Jesus suffered on our behalf so we could know the love of the Father and be restored to Him.

And because He was not only fully human who could stand in for us but was also God in the flesh, His one death is of infinite worth and sufficient for all of our sins. So we can keep coming and coming to Him for forgiveness and we will never be turned away.

I can't tell you how many times in my life I failed God. I'm sure I passed the four hundred and ninety mark a long time ago. But what keeps me coming back and what's making me love God more and more is that through Christ He forgives and receives me every time.

It's one of the most wonderful and precious truths and gifts of the cross.

Ephesians 1:7 says, "In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace."^[1]_[SEP]

1 John 1:9 says, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

Jesus is a Jesus who forgives. He forgives us of so much. And that's what enables us to be forgiving towards others.

It's not summarized better anywhere else than Ephesians 4:32 "Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you."

So today Resolved Church, know there is nothing you can't be forgiven of and there's no limit on how many times you can be forgiven of it. There is forgiveness upon forgiveness upon forgiveness.

Forgiveness heals. It makes us whole again. It mends together what got torn apart. It puts back into place the broken and lost pieces of our soul. The forgiveness of Christ and forgiveness towards others heals.

The well of forgiveness is deep, so drink up, be healed and then praise and thank our God for His mercy.

What do you need forgiveness of today? Come to Christ, He forgives in full measure.

Who do you need to forgive today? Come to Christ, He gives forgiveness for one another.

Conclusion

Forgiveness Hears, Forgiveness Hurts and Forgiveness Heals.

I started out the sermon telling the story of Corrie Ten Boom. Put yourself in that story. Who are you in the story?

The truth is we're not only Corrie, who had been heinously sinned against but we're also the soldier who horrifically sinned against her and the God of heaven and earth.

But in and through Jesus Christ, who absorbed our sin and the sins done to us on the cross we can be forgiven, cleansed, restored and made whole. Our Jesus is a Jesus who forgives.

Well, why don't you stand with me. We're going to read some words of Confession followed by some words of pardon and Assurance. Then I'll pray and we'll go to the table of Jesus taking a piece of bread as His perfect life, the only one who resisted temptation every time and then dip it in the wine or juice as His perfect blood, spilled on the cross to absorb the cost of all the times we've given into temptation and led others into temptation.

Confession

Lord, we confess we're lepers who need your forgiveness and need faith to forgive others. Cleanse us and heal us we pray.

Assurance

Through Jesus Christ our Lord we are forgiven of our sins. To you Lord we give thanks!