

The Path To Happiness And True Freedom

Text : Matthew 18: 21-35

INTRODUCTION :

A. As a youth our farm in West Tennessee was on a hill so we had drainage ditches.

1. The heavy rains would carry debris down those canals with the flood of water.
2. As the water slowed, large floating objects lodged trapping small ones forming dams.
3. We had to clean out those obstructions or they would diver water across the field.

*** When things in our spiritual life begin to slow down, our spiritual lives sometimes get jammed up. Impediments to our development collect.**

B. Through the years I've observed that it's not the large things which obstruct our spiritual grow.

1. We tend to notice our large defects and deal with them.
 - a. We don't Lie, cheat, steal, ...
 - b. People ask me to pray with them about these. (**Church leaders addicted to ...**)
2. Those sins which are not observable are more of a problem.

C. For example, the unforgiving heart is almost in a class by itself

1. We almost feel justified in committing this sin.
2. We've been wronged so we feel just in being resentful. (**hurt, slighted, etc.**)
3. **As we walk through life we tend to be like the small boy who picks up rocks along the path.**
 - a. **He fills all his pockets and then his shirt.**
 - b. **Soon he has neither the strength nor stamina to continue on.**
 - c. **Like the boy ... each time we're wronged we pick up a rock until we're so weighted down we can't run our spiritual race.**

D. ILL.- In the visitors' center of the redwood forest they have the cross-section of one of those giant trees which was harvested.

1. The entire history of that tree is recorded in those rings.
 - a. Events in human history are marked on the rings. (**wars, depression, assassin.**)
 - b. Experiences of the tree are seen in the rings. (**rainy, drought, insects, fire**)
 - c. The tree grew past all that adversity. Man had to cut it down to see these things.
2. If we could make a psychological cross section of men's hearts, it would be similar.
 - a. There would be scars from all manor of trauma, from hurts, from injustices, etc.
 - b. Everyone has negative experiences and the evidence of the wrongs is within us.

TRANSITION :

What we do with those wrongs will largely determine what we are able to accomplish for the Lord, for those we love, and ultimately for ourselves.

In this morning's text Jesus was teaching the disciples how to deal with wrongs suffered at the hands of another.

Establish context

We must be humble like a child to enter the kingdom.

Eliminate anything in our lives that may be a stumbling block to faith.

Parable of lost sheep ... As did Jesus, we must seek the lost.

Seek to settle problems and be forgiving.

Peter asks if we have to forgive as many as **7** times. (**Most would not.**)

This parable explains Jesus' answer to Peter's question.

Summarize Parable (If not read yet, read the text, then paraphrase.)

We all struggle with forgiveness, but until we are able to learn to truly forgive others "from the heart" we will never be able to reach true spiritual maturity.

There are specific steps we must take to develop the ability to forgive.

These are not things that just happen; they must be intentionally done.

We're never going to experience true peace and spiritual growth until we do them.

I. FIRST : We must surrender our self-righteousness.

A. We all have that inner voice which tells us, "I have forgiven them."

1. We justify ourselves saying, "*I don't actively seek to do them harm.*"
2. "*I don't speak evil of them.*" I don't ... I don't ... I don't ...
3. These are all just self-justification, acknowledgements of our self-righteousness.

B. Often deep within our hearts we preserve the memory of wrongs suffered as if desiring the world to bear witness to the injustices we've endured.

ILL. **Quote from Flannery O'Connor's short story :** (about traumatized boy)

"It was as if he wanted to preserve the offense so on that final day of judgment he could present it to God and say, 'Look what he did to me.'"

1. Sometimes the hurt we feel is a result of legitimate wrongs we have suffered.
2. The evil, unforgiving servant was trying to collect a legitimate debt.
 - a. The debt was not a small amount. (**100 days wages**) (**but compared to..**)

- b. The debt really was owed him.
- c. He went through the proper legal process.

C. Realistically, when we judge another do we not do it with a sense that “I’m better than you.”

- 1. *“I would never hurt you the way you hurt me.”*
- 2. This is clearly self-righteousness.
- 3. Self-righteousness denies the gospel message.

D. The righteousness which allows me to stand before the throne of God is not my own.

- 1. It’s imputed to me by Jesus.
- 2. The only way I can get the righteousness of Christ imputed to me is to admit I have none of my own.
- 3. When I hold a grudge against someone else, am I not claiming a righteousness of my own, AND in so doing, am I not denying the gospel.

E. As we surrender our self-righteousness we must also get rid of our sense of entitlement.

- 1. Where did we get the idea that we could ever go through life without being hurt ?
 - a. It’s unreal and it’s unbiblical.
 - b. It never has and never will happen on this earth.
- 2. How did folks ever get such a far fetched idea ?
 - a. How did you come to believe that life could be all honey with no bees.
 - b. Life is not an abundance of roses with no thorns.

F. When we set ourselves up on a pedestal above others, we set ourselves up for :

- 1. An array of negative emotions : disappointment, bitterness, hostility, failure, ...
- 2. These are the tormentors; they replace our joy with pain.

II. SECOND : We must admit our inability to be righteous.

A. This parable is hyperbole, the situation is exaggerated beyond any reality.

- 1. No servant could ever get that far in debt.
 - a. **10 talents** of gold = above **20 million** dollars
 - b. If a servant did owe that much, he could never pay it in many lifetimes.

2. That staggering debt is representative of our sins.
 - a. We don't even have the ability to comprehend how bad our sins are in God's eye.
 - b. We can never repay our sin debt.
 - c. If we could live 100 more years and never sinned again we couldn't lessen it.
3. Every wrong we've ever done was an offense against God.
 - a. If I knew all your sins, it might embarrass you.
 - b. If you knew all my sins, I'm sure it would embarrass me.
 - c. **BUT ... All my sins were not against you.**
ALL MY (your) SINS ARE AGAINST GOD AND HE KNOWS THEM ALL.

B. David understood this.

1. **Psa. 51: 4- Against You, You only, I have sinned ...**
 - a. His primary sin was not against Bathsheba whom he defiled.
 - b. His primary sin was not against Uriah whom he killed.
 - c. His primary sin was not against the nation of Israel whom he let down.
David realized he had sinned against God.
2. **Likewise**, every sin we commit is a sin against God.

C. We don't even have the ability to comprehend the extent of our debt of sin.

1. We cannot comprehend how repulsive our sin is to our pure and holy God.
2. He sees every sin in our lives. (every thought, every word, every deed)
 - a. Past, Present, Future
 - b. All time is now to God. (**He exists outside the sphere of time.**)

D. Sins against an eternal God have eternal consequences. (Heaven - or - Hell)

1. When created in the image of God, man was given an eternal soul by God.
2. When a man dies, his soul does not cease to exist.
 - a. **Ecccl. 12:7- then the dust will return to the earth as it was,
and the spirit will return to God who gave it.**
 - b. Even one's body will return from the dust. (**I Thes. 4:13f , I Cor. 15, Jn. 5**)
3. Death takes one into another realm of existence.
 - a. After death one exists outside the sphere of time.
 - b. When one dies he takes with him the consequences of his life on earth.
4. Stepping outside the sphere of time seals one's relationship with God.

- a. Those at one with God are at one with Him eternally.
- b. Those separated from Him will remain separated eternally.
- c. Thus, one can't even escape a stained soul by dying.
- 5. Sins will be punished in one of two ways :
 - a. One will spend eternity separated away from God in Hell.
 - b. Or his sins will be paid for by the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross.
 - c. ONLY Jesus can pay the price for your sins. **Man cannot pay own penalty.**

III. THIRD : We need to be asking God for grace, not for time to make it right.

- A. **The servant in the parable did not understand the scope of his debt.**
 - 1. Vs. 26 ... The servant appealed for time to pay off his debt. (have patience)
 - 2. He could not have paid 20 million dollars in five lifetimes.
- B. **You and I need to ask God for forgiveness, not for time.**
 - 1. We need to ask for grace (undeserved forgiveness) not just help to be better.
 - 2. No one will enter Heaven as long as he remains stained by sin.
 - * **A drunk who stops drinking will just enter Hell sober unless he is in Christ.**
 - 3. If I had an eternity to do so, I could never pay for the sins I've committed, or yours.
- C. **We need to appreciate how much God has forgiven and share the blessing with others.**

IV. FOURTH : I must be willing to give what I have received.

- A. **Once I have :**
 - 1. Surrendered my self-righteousness.
 - 2. Admitted my inability to be righteous on my own.
 - 3. Received God's grace through my faith in Jesus as my sacrifice.
 - 4. I must be willing to forgive others as much as I have been forgiven.
- B. **Many Christians are guilty of the servant's sin. (Grabbed him by the throat ...)**
 - 1. We would never physically accost someone who transgressed against us.
 - 2. Spiritually we grab them by the throat and demand what we think is our due.
 - 3. We didn't deserve the grace we received and we can't demand others deserve ours.

C. We have to stop keeping the mental tally of their sins against us and erase it.

1. We don't say, *"Pay me what you owe me."*
2. We say, "You ought to _____." (**"Ought" comes from same root as "owe."**)
 - a. You ought to be a better : spouse, child, friend, boss, ...
 - b. You ought to be a better Christians. (**congregation**)
 - c. You ought to be a better Preacher.
3. We go through life running a tally :
 - a. Here's what you ought to have done.
 - b. You hurt me because you didn't do what you ought to do.
 - c. You should have apologized.

D. Too often we go through life self-righteously judging others for what they "ought" to have done, i.e., for what they owe us.

1. The truth is we don't even know what they are doing.
2. Years of counseling have taught me that no person ever really knows all about another. (**his view, her view, public perception, truth**)

CONCLUSION :

A. We must make certain basic choices in life :

1. To grant the grace to others which we have received.
2. To forgive others as we have been forgiven.
3. To set ourselves free from the emotional tormentors.

B. Our enjoyment in life and our spiritual health will never move past our ability to receive and to give forgiveness.

INVITATION :

1. Have you asked Jesus to forgive you of your sins and obeyed His gospel.
2. Are you a Christian who has drifted into apathy and not enjoy your fellowship with God ?
3. Jesus invites you now.

** The core of this lesson comes from old notes taken during a sermon I heard years back.*