

## **The Importance of Forgiveness** *Mark 11:25-33, Matthew 18:23-34*

Good morning.

Doctor Karen Swartz of Johns Hopkins Hospital, said about unforgiveness, *“There is a physical burden to being hurt and disappointed,*

*Chronic anger puts you into a fight-or-flight mode, which results in numerous changes in heart rate, blood pressure and immune response.*

*Those changes, then, increase the risk of depression, heart disease and diabetes, among other conditions.*

*Forgiveness calms stress levels, leading to improved health.”*

She also said, *“Forgiveness is not just about saying the words. It is an active process where you make a conscious decision to let go of negative feelings whether the person deserves it or not.”*

As you release the anger and resentment, you begin to feel empathy and compassion for the person who wronged you.

Studies have found some people are naturally more forgiving; consequently, they tend to be more satisfied with their lives and to have less depression, anxiety, stress, anger and hostility.

People who hang on to grudges, however, are more likely to experience severe depression and post-traumatic stress disorder, as well as other health conditions.

Please open your Bibles to the *Gospel of Mark 11* as we continue in a verse-by-verse study of that Gospel.

Last week in *Mark*, Jesus cleansed the Temple, and we also learned more lessons about the Fig Tree.

The Temple went from being a place to meet with God, to a mockery, where the Jewish leaders were out for personal gain.

After Jesus witnessed the abuse of His people in the Temple, He flipped over the tables and drove out the money changers.

Jesus had the heart of a shepherd and when He recognized His sheep being abused, He acted with righteous anger because of the religious leaders **hindering** people from coming to God.

Then we spoke about the roots of the Fig Tree.

The withered Fig Tree was a picture of Israel having no fruit.

Israel's roots had *withered away*, because they **disconnected** themselves from the True and Living God.

As Christ followers, we need roots that go deep into the heart of God Himself.

Then we learned about the kind of faith that works as we learned that faith is not a force; faith is trusting the Word of God.

Jesus taught that mountain-like issues, which hinder God's kingdom, can be moved by trusting the Lord.

Today, we will learn about forgiveness and Jesus' authority, as the King of the kingdom.

## I. Forgiveness affects prayer.

Read *Mark 11:25-26*

This is a sobering passage, because at face value, it seems to communicate, if I am unwilling to forgive someone else, then the Lord will withhold His forgiveness from me.

Therefore, many have concluded that this passage about forgiving others makes salvation conditional.

We have to have proper context here; this is in no way teaching that we will lose our salvation if we don't forgive someone.

*Titus 3:5 not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, NKJV*

*Mark 11* is not teaching that our eternal destiny is contingent on forgiving others, but it teaches that our relationship and prayer life with God can be **hindered** if we refuse to forgive others.

Scripture is very clear teaching the Lord forgives our sins and makes us Children of God by grace alone, through faith alone, based on Christ's work on the cross alone, and not by works.

If we are in Christ, He has forgiven us and since He has forgiven us, we are in no place to withhold forgiveness from others.

***Ephesians 4:32 be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you. NKJV***

Keeping forgiveness from others will cause a person to miss the joy of grace, as they refuse to extend grace to others, because unforgiveness causes **bitterness** and it will bind a person up.

Last week, we learned how Jesus said the miracle of the withered Fig Tree happened because of faith.

Just as a lack of faith is an obstacle to effective prayer; refusing to forgive or holding on to bitterness, can also hinder our prayer.

Forgiveness is an area where we need great faith. Sometimes a hard and unforgiving heart, is bigger than any mountain.

Notice Jesus said, ***“Whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone...”***

When we go to pray, we should make things right with people we have conflict with first, and then continue on in prayer.

***Romans 12:18 If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. NKJV***

Notice, ***“If you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses.”***

Jesus, speaking of the woman who brought an alabaster jar of fragrant oil and washed His feet, said in...

*Luke 7:47, “I say to you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much.” NKJV*

The forgiven heart will automatically desire to forgive others. If we have hard, unforgiving hearts, it calls into question if we have ever received or appreciated the forgiveness God offers us.

Like a lot of sin, unforgiveness affects other people in our lives as well, through our attitudes, actions, and **heart** conditions.

Withholding forgiveness is like allowing a tumor to grow in our body while ignoring the necessary medical treatment.

Unforgiveness allows a bitter root to grow, hinders healthy relationships, and binds us in a prison of anger, suspicion, resentment, and fear.

When we forget how much we have been forgiven, we want justice for our offenders, but mercy and grace for ourselves.

We discover the worst **prison** we can find ourselves in, is one of our own creation, by choosing not to forgive others.

Forgiveness is a choice and for us to live free we need to choose not to dredge up past hurts and relive them over and over again.

God has forgiven such a great debt, that any debt owed to us is absolutely insignificant in comparison.

Even though the Lord is all knowing, He still chooses to forget our sin when we repent and come to Him for forgiveness.

***Hebrews 8:12 For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more." NKJV***

No one can possibly offend me to the extent that my sins have offended God.

The point of this passage is: we cannot have a dynamic prayer life and relationship with God if we are bound by unforgiveness.

We might have to go through the exercise of forgiveness nearly every time we approach God in prayer.

## **II. Jesus' authority questioned.**

Read ***Mark 11:27-28***

The day after Jesus cleansed the Temple, the King arrives at the Temple, His own royal house, once again.

The Lord said in ***1 Kings 9:3, "I have consecrated this house which you have built to put My name there forever, and My eyes and My heart will be there perpetually."*** NKJV

Within this same narrative in the Gospels of ***Matthew*** and ***Luke***, we are told that Jesus came into the Temple and began to teach and preach the Gospel.

The religious leaders ask the King, what right He has teaching and ministering within the Temple.

In other words, the religious leaders were saying, You have no authority Jesus, we are the ones with the authority here.

At first glance, the religious leaders questioning Jesus seemed legitimate, because they were supposed to make sure anyone claiming to have knowledge of God, was teaching correctly.

But their motivation was previously exposed.

***Mark 11:18, the scribes and chief priests heard it and sought how they might destroy Him; for they feared Him, because all the people were astonished at His teaching. NKJV***

James Edwards said, “*In the most authoritative place and before the most authoritative body in Israel, Jesus opens a window of understanding into His own authority.*”

Jesus didn't want to debate the religious leaders; He was at the Temple to teach the people about the Kingdom and the Gospel.

True to form, these religious leaders were more concerned with the power and position they had, rather than seeing people saved by the King.

The day before this scene, Jesus knew what was awaiting Him later in the same week, but He still went to Jerusalem and drove out the corrupt merchants from the Temple courts.

Here Jesus was teaching at the same Temple and the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders wanted to know what right He had to cleanse the Temple and teach the Gospel.

### **III. Jesus answers with a question.**

Read ***Mark 11:29-30***

Jesus was often questioned throughout His earthly ministry, by the religious leaders, by seekers, and even His own Disciples.

But the religious leaders had ulterior motives for why they questioned Him.

Most of the religious leaders' questions, were asked in order to try and trap Jesus, or to get Him to break the Mosaic Law.

When Jesus spoke, He spoke with one having authority, unlike the religious leaders of His day. Jesus spoke with God's authority, because He is God in the **flesh**.

Because Jesus knew the motivation of the religious leaders trying to entrap Him, He often answered their questions with a question of His own.

But like Vizzini having a battle of wits against Wesley in the movie Princess Bride, the religious leaders were no match for Jesus in this battle of wits.

Jesus told the religious leaders if they would answer His one question, then He would in turn answer them about where His authority came from.

The **question** was, “*The baptism of John — was it from heaven or from men?*”

Warren Wiersbe asked, “*Why take them all the way back to John the Baptist? For a very good reason: God does not teach us **new** truth if we have rejected the truth He has already revealed.*”



The Lord wants us to believe and act upon the things He has already revealed to us; if we are **stuck** spiritually, maybe it is because we haven't acted upon the truth He has already given.

The Pharisees refused to repent and receive John's Baptism, so Jesus decided to reveal their disobedience to them, beginning with John the Baptist's ministry.

***John 7:16 Jesus answered them and said, "My doctrine is not Mine, but His who sent Me.***

***John 7:17 If anyone wills to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God or whether I speak on My own authority. NKJV***

The British preacher F. W. Robertson said, "*Obedience is the organ of spiritual knowledge*".

Jesus was not evading their question; He was hoping they would use a little deductive reasoning.

If John the Baptist was sent from God, then he was right with what he taught about Jesus and Jesus was indeed the Messiah.

If what John the Baptist said before he was executed was true, then Jesus had all **authority** over the Temple, the Word of God, and over their lives as well.

But if these religious leaders would not accept the words from God through John the Baptist, why would Jesus give them any further revelation.

***Luke 12:48 For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required. NKJV***

If John the Baptist was correct, then the religious leaders should submit to Jesus' authority.

If the religious leaders said John was not from God, they would lose favor with the general people in Jerusalem.

Like Elvis would say...

#### **IV. Caught in a trap.**

Read ***Mark 11:31-33***

Imagine this scene for a moment; the Creator God of the universe came and visited Israel in the flesh.

This is the God who owns everything; the same God for whom they built the Temple. He was right there with them, and they had the audacity to question where His authority came from.

This was only the beginning of their questioning of the King, as the religious leaders hope they would catch Jesus in a trap and gain enough evidence to have Him executed.

Again, Jesus asked them a question instead of a giving them a straightforward answer.

F. W. Robertson said, *“It was not a dodge, but a home thrust that cleared the air and defined their attitude both to John and Jesus. They rejected John as they now **reject** Jesus.”*

Notice what these religious leaders did once they were faced with the question from Jesus. They huddled up and discussed how to manipulate the answer.

This was a lose-lose question for these power-hungry religious leaders, so they say, "*If we say, 'From heaven,' He will say, 'Why then did you not believe him?'*

*But if we say, 'From men'" — they feared the people, for all counted John to have been a prophet indeed."*

The religious leaders tried to trap Jesus with a question about where His authority was from, but they were the ones who ended up in a trap.

*We do not know* was their response to His question and this showed that these men were not sincere seekers of truth.

They were more concerned about winning a debate and trying to please the crowds, rather than knowing the truth.

William Barclay said, "*The whole story is a vivid example of what happens to men who will not face the truth.*

*They have to twist and wriggle and, in the end, get themselves into a position in which they are so helplessly involved that they have nothing to say."* (Barclay)

If we want answers from Jesus, we have to accept the truth that has already been revealed to us; we do not get to manipulate God's Words to fit our **agenda**.

These men knew that John the Baptist said Jesus was the Messiah, so they could not say John was a prophet without also admitting Jesus is/was who He said He was.

Jesus, while praying to the Father said in *John 17:17, Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth. NKJV*

It is more difficult to face the truth and admit we are wrong, which forces us to conform to the truth; but clinging to the truth, is the only path to the abundant and eternal life with Christ.

Please turn to *Matthew 18*

## **V. Practical Application.**

Just as a lack of faith is an obstacle to effective prayer; refusing to forgive or holding on to bitterness can also hinder our prayers.

Unforgiveness can also affect our mental and physical health as well, so, as a way of practical application.

Read *Matthew 18:23-34*.

This Parable teaches us several things.

- How enormous our sin debt was, prior to Christ.
- How enormous God's forgiveness is towards us.
- What a small thing most offenses are, in light of our sin.
- How the life of the forgiven should live, with a life marked by forgiveness.

Dr. Swartz said, “*Forgiveness is a choice; you are choosing to offer compassion and empathy to the person who wronged you.*”

The Johns Hopkins website offered some steps to help develop a forgiving attitude and have better emotional and physical health.

- Reflect and remember.

That includes the events, how we reacted, how we felt, and how the anger and hurt have affected us since.

- Empathize with the other person.

If your spouse grew up in an alcoholic family, then anger, when you have too many glasses of wine might be understandable.

- Forgive deeply.

Surface forgiveness won't work, we must be sincere.

- Let go of expectations.

If you don't expect an apology from the offender, you won't be disappointed.

- Decide to forgive.

Once you make that choice, seal it with an action. If you don't feel you can talk to the person, write a letter, record it in a journal or talk to someone trustworthy about it.

- Forgive yourself.

The act of forgiving includes forgiving **yourself**, so, after you have made it right with the Lord and other people you offended, then you let it go!

Though the first servant in *Matthew 18* had his debt forgiven, he did not realize the full cost of having his debt cancelled.

So, we cannot extend Grace and Mercy if we have not fully comprehended the cost of it:

In order to offer forgiveness and love to others, we must let God's love flow into our hearts and overflow to the world.

The most important reason we forgive others is because of who we are in Christ...

*Ephesians 4:31 Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice.*

*Ephesians 4:32 And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.*

One reason we resist forgiving is that we don't really understand what forgiveness is, or how it works.

We must also give ourselves permission to forgive and forget, letting go of the bitterness while remembering very clearly your rights to healthy boundaries.

While God commands us to forgive others, He didn't tell us to allow those who violated us, to repeat it. After forgiveness, we maintain proper boundaries with people, who will not **repent**.

We can and should, hold others accountable for their actions or lack of actions, while choosing not to hold onto bitterness.

Keeping forgiveness from others, will cause a person to miss the joy of grace, as they refuse to extend grace to others, because unforgiveness causes **bitterness** and it will bind a person up.

Just as a lack of faith is an obstacle to effective prayer; refusing to forgive or holding on to bitterness, can also hinder our prayer.

Forgiveness is an area where we need great faith. Sometimes a hard and unforgiving heart, is larger than mountains that need moving within our lives.

When we let go of unforgiveness, it removes walls we have placed in our relationships, **including** the most important relationship, the one we have with the Lord.

So, we forgive others because the Lord told us to, in order to maintain a healthy relationship with Him, but we also forgive for our own mental and physical sake as well.