

# “Forgiveness”

Luke 18:9-14

October 28<sup>th</sup>, 2001 – Philip Siddons

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If you were fortunate enough to have a parallel-printed gospels,<sup>1</sup> you would see that Luke is the only writer to include this parable on prayer and repentance. You would also quickly see that Luke alone included the parable about praying with passion. This is where the widow kept pursuing the callous and indifferent judge, finally getting what she wanted.<sup>2</sup> You would see that Luke (alone) included the story of the one grateful cleansed leper out of ten.<sup>3</sup> How he also included Jesus’ teaching of our mandatory forgiving of others.<sup>4</sup>

To make sure our Bible study is credible in methodology, we also have to look at the context after this passage. Luke next has Jesus telling His listeners that they’re going to see His enemies torturing Him to death.<sup>5</sup> His disciples didn’t understand this prediction but the fact that He was talking about forgiveness and His own coming gruesome death, shows the seriousness of Jesus’ teaching on forgiveness. Remember how Jesus, Himself, asked God to forgive His tormenters because they didn’t fully understand what they were doing.

Luke follows with his unique telling of the forgiveness of the height-challenged Zacchaeus, the thieving tax collector.



It is clear from paying attention to the Luke, as a writer and editor, that he was personally

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<sup>1</sup> Truly the best book deal of your lifetime would be the \$11 purchase of the Synopsis of the Four Gospels (English Edition) from the United Bible Societies ISBN 0826705006.

<sup>2</sup> Luke 18:1-8

<sup>3</sup> Luke 17:11-19

<sup>4</sup> Luke 17:3b-4 While Matthew and Luke are viewing a common source version of the unpublished gospel scholars nickname “Q,” in Matthew’s version he has Jesus telling Peter to forgive 7 X 70, figuratively saying ‘stop counting.’

<sup>5</sup> Luke 18:31-34

interested in Jesus’ teachings on both prayer and personal forgiveness. Luke also showed how Jesus liked to surprise His listeners with unexpected endings to His stories. Take our text.

Two guys head to the temple, one being a devout religious leader, the other a socially resented IRS agent on the occupying foreign governments’ payroll. Everyone expects something good from the Pharisee and nothing good to come from the Publican.

Because Jesus was a great storyteller, He intentionally built the Pharisee up as being passionately devout in his observance of the Pharisaical law. The Pharisee ticks off his own list of goodness; ‘I’m glad I’m not an extortionist, unjust, an adulterer or as bad off as this IRS guy.’ Have you ever found yourself reading about some criminal and saying to yourself ‘Well, at least I’m no bank robber or drug dealer!’?

The Pharisee next starts on the positive side of his merits, at least knowing that it is not the bad things you don’t do but it’s what you do end up doing with yourself that matters. He fasts twice a week (doubling what his Pharisee brotherhood suggested). He gives ten percent of everything he gets to charity and religion. *Not a bad life.* This is clearly a decent, law-abiding citizen; an upstanding man in his community. What more could one ask of him?



It’s clever that Jesus used the words “The Pharisee stood and prayed *with himself*, . . .” saying these things.<sup>6</sup> Talking to himself, perhaps, instead of to God?

So Jesus has His audience primed, holding up this man as someone obviously admired by his religious subculture. Jesus then makes the outdoor theater even more dramatic. In great contrast,

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<sup>6</sup> Luke 18:10

there's the bad guy at the temple actually having the gall to stand there – daring to talk to God in prayer.

But the IRS agent doesn't dare lift his head. Instead, he emotionally grabs his own cloak, beating his chest in remorse, with tears possibly coming out of his eyes. He softly speaks to God (and not in earshot of anyone around), 'Please be merciful to me God, I've screwed up miserably and I'm sorry.'<sup>7</sup>



He wasn't comparing himself to anyone else. He was just stating his misery with his wrong doing and requesting mercy. You don't ask for mercy unless you know that you are clearly wrong and deserve less than merciful treatment.



This parable is about our attitude, your attitude and my attitude. It's our pride that gets in the way of having the right attitude about ourselves. It's the old and pervasive hierarchical thinking that haunts you and me every day of our lives. The ever-present thinking that there are some people who are less deserving of receiving God's forgiveness or our forgiveness is the single thing in our lives, I think, that utterly blocks our spiritual path.

"For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, . . ." <sup>8</sup> in Paul's words.

Elsewhere, Jesus put it like this. When you pray, regularly say something to the extent of asking God to forgive you your trespasses in the same way you forgive others.<sup>9</sup>



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<sup>7</sup> Obviously a paraphrase from the exact translation in order to convey the emotional content of 'God, be merciful to me a sinner!' in verse 13

<sup>8</sup> Romans 12:3

<sup>9</sup> Matthew 6:12

Here's another unique Luke passage about a story of forgiveness in the life of Jesus.<sup>10</sup> Jesus is eating dinner in an open patio at the home of the affluent Simon the Pharisee.

A prostitute comes over to the table at which Jesus is eating and talking. In a second, she's on her knees, weeping on Jesus' feet and wiping them with her hair – even kissing them.

Next, she anoints His feet with an ointment from a jar she's brought. Notice how similar this display of emotion is with the intensity of the emotional remorse of the publican praying at the temple.

In this incident, Simon (another upstanding man in the religious and social community) says to himself that Jesus couldn't be a prophet if He let this sort of woman touch Him. Reading his mind, Jesus tells him the story about the guy who was forgiven of his million dollar debt but didn't learn a thing from his own experience, as he, with a vengeance, went after someone who owed him twenty bucks.<sup>11</sup>

To make absolutely certain that Simon, and everyone else around that table didn't miss His point about hierarchical thinking and judging, Jesus told them exactly what's wrong with their thinking. He said, 'You did not anoint my head with oil but she has anointed my feet with ointment. So, I'm telling you, her many sins have been forgiven because she has shown great love. You see, someone who isn't forgiven ends up loving very little.'

Then He said to the woman, "Your sins are forgiven." But those who were at the table with Him began to say among themselves, "Who is This Who even forgives sins?"<sup>12</sup>



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<sup>10</sup> Luke 7:36-50. Commentators suspect this incident is different from the one mentioned in Mark and Matthew.

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<sup>12</sup> Luke 7:46-49

It turns out that in the context of Jesus' stock teachings, forgiveness was one of His central themes. Take Luke 6:37; "Do not judge and you will not be judged; do not condemn and you will not be condemned. Forgive and you will be forgiven; . . ." This clearly implies that if we're not forgiving people, God will not forgive us – and that should be most sobering.



Jesus was teaching that it's our attitude that is usually the biggest barrier to our spiritual life. The Pharisee wasn't a bad guy but he was spiritually bankrupt. When we go through life thinking that we are a few notches higher on God's list than others, we are crippling our spiritual growth. Our attitude is keeping us in a prison cell of bitterness and pride. It is keeping us from being open and connected with God and others around us.

❶ The first step in our finding forgiveness comes when we change our attitude about ourselves. What that law-abiding good citizen Pharisee had in common with the unforgiving debtor in the other parable and Simon the Pharisee, was a deformed self-concept. The attitude was that he believed he was actually better than others. That self-righteous egocentrism separated him from the tax collector as that same attitude separated Simon from the grateful prostitute at Jesus' feet.



You and I might want to consider looking at our own attitude about others. Is there anything in our view of the world or understanding of ourselves that makes us think, even for one second, that God owes us more than anyone else?

❷ I suggest the second step toward finding forgiveness is in changing our attitude to one of connecting our heart with others. It is about knowing that we are connected to every other person's pain and joy. It is about making our path in life a path of the heart. It is about knowing that



every one of our fears, desires, attempts to enhance and defend ourselves and grasp – is connected to every one else we meet who does the very same things in their lives.

When we forget how connected we are with one another, we don't forgive. We wrongly think that it is they who need the forgiveness, not us. When we remember how connected we are with one another, we go through every second of our day, mindful that the same sense of isolation, shame and brokenness that is working in us is working in everyone else we meet.

This is why, when someone blasts out at us and says things about us that deeply hurt, we can stop in that nanosecond before reacting. Because in that split second before we open our mouth, we can mindfully hold back and reconnect with their pain as being part of our own pain. And miracle upon miracle, God's Spirit can give us that ounce more of psychic strength and emotional fortitude to not blast back at them. We can, instead, let their ranting and cruel judging go. We can choose to do something entirely different – because we are different with God's Spirit within us.

We can embrace their pain, their grief, their throbbing sense of loss. We can see the wounded child within them that was probably emotionally abandoned, neglected, maybe abused by their parents (or others) in their childhood. We can see their wounded spirit within them crying out for release of that life-long pain. We can forgive them because we know that all that pain within them is within us and we need forgiving as much as they do.



It is about living a path with heart. It is about constantly being mindful that every one of us needs as much forgiving and grace and acceptance as everyone else. When we open our hearts to others, we can change history, we change fate and we change tradition because with God's help we can conquer hate, ignorance and intolerance. We give others God's grace, which is exactly what Jesus did every day of His brief life.

He loved the unlovable. He forgave the unforgivable. Every time He opened His heart to someone, He placed a bridge down across those walls of pain, alienation, abandonment and abuse. He touched their souls and stood against the personal and social forces that relentlessly push each of us into loneliness and isolation. Jesus showed us how to walk on a path with heart.

③ Once we change our attitude and mindfully work to eliminate the ever-present hierarchal thinking (that separates us from God and others), it's time to forgive ourselves. There are things we've forgiven in others but not in ourselves. We may still have voices from our past, trying to convince us that we don't have enough worth – that we still don't measure up. We may have experienced *years* of being told that who we are isn't worth the attention or the empathy.

But in looking at that wounded child within us, now it's time to take the hand of our inner child and open our heart to them.



Now, at long last, it is time to open our heart to that core person within us and tell that child that Jesus has opened His heart directly to you. No matter what you've done and no matter what you haven't gotten around to doing yet, who you are, in your core, is holy and deeply loved by God. And nobody can ever touch the core of who you are because God is there.

You are forgiven by God. Forgive others because we are only separated by our attitudes.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> For a life-changing reading of this path suggested, read Jack Kornfield's *A Path With Heart, A Guide Through The Perils and Promises of Spiritual Life* ISBN # 0553372114