

Title: Forgive us our sins
Text: Luke 11.4a
Theme: Staying current with God
Series: Luke
Prop Stmtnt: Forgiveness (receiving and offering) is in our DNA

Cathi and I were watching a “whodunit” series which had a funeral scene in it that was being conducted at a graveside. The funeral was of the person who had been murdered and just about every person at the cemetery was a suspect. They were suspects because they each had done other bad things and each had a plausible motive to be the murderer and yes, the murderer was there. Each person is vaguely listening to the minister drone on while they are eying one another. It is a tense scene when the minister starts to lead them in the “Lord’s Prayer” and they all pause their suspicious looking start to quote it. I went, “No.” Why? It was just words to them. No one meant it. That is hypocrisy! This prayer is deeply meaningful and was never intended to be a sentimental saying. In this prayer, Jesus gives us words to say that are designed to inform our beliefs and direct our actions.

Jesus gave us this prayer so that we will embrace the truths it expresses and so that we will pray with this understanding. God is our Father who does all things fatherly. His name is glorious and holy because he is glorious and holy and we want God to be known, loved, treasured and trusted all over the world. We want to live for his kingdom and long for the day when it comes in its fullness. That means that we want to live today recognizing that God is at work today in every detail to bring about that day. Therefore, I want to have eyes to see that and wisdom to know what my part is in it, today. As a merciful and generous Father, God supplies our daily needs. I need to be aware of the fact that I am moment by moment dependent on God so that even the air that I just breathed in, God will sustain my life to breathe it out. There is a dailiness, meaning, an ongoing relationship of joyful dependency that we have on God. That ongoing awareness of God, his glory, his kingdom, his provision is going to make me aware of how often I fall short. Being mindful of him daily, means that daily I am aware of my need for forgiveness.

Read Text:

1. **What is forgiveness?**

If you are working at a quick lube facility and you change the oil on a car, you do not let the customer leave until they pay. But once they pay, you “*let them go*” because the debt has been satisfied. If you are working as a customs or immigration officer and a traveler shows you the proper paperwork, you “*let them pass.*” If you are a judge and a defendant satisfies the terms you have set for their charge, then you “*let the charges drop.*” Letting them go, letting them pass, letting them drop are all expressions of forgiveness. In each case the person was under obligation, or being held and then they were released. Forgiveness is releasing the offending party from the offense their sin has caused. Therefore, **forgiveness is a promise to remove the**

offense and to treat the offender as if the sin never took place and that no offense ever occurred.

2. Forgiveness is fundamentally between you and God.

A. We need forgiveness from God.

We need to be released from the debt and offense that our sin has caused. No, we have to be released from the debt and offense that our sin has caused. Jesus teaches us to pray like this because we need forgiveness. We need forgiveness because we sin. We need to think of our sin in specific terms. God, I was unkind to ____ today by withholding affection or praise because they frustrate me. I failed to love them like you love them. I failed to encourage them like you encourage me. I failed to believe the best about them. This is not a mantra to repeat, but a format to follow. You will not ask God to forgive you unless you believe in your heart that you are sinner.

Sin means to miss the mark. God is the mark and he does not grade on a curve. A young man from our church was taking a flight test this week in order to qualify to be a commercial pilot. His instructor told him that if he made one mistake, he would fail and would be out of the program. Several of us know this young man and we are tempted to think, “wow that sounds a bit harsh.” However, what kind of pilot do you want flying the jet you and your family are on? Do you want a pilot who got 80% of the test right or 100%? One mistake could be fatal and when flying a plane, you cannot afford a mistake. One sin makes us sinners. One sin makes us guilty and liable for punishment. We need forgiveness and in fact, cannot live without it.

B. Our need of forgiveness is a serious matter.

This prayer is directed to God as our Father. Jesus is teaching us to pray by literally telling us to tell God to forgive us of our sins. Some of the impact of this is lost on us because many of you are not familiar with the idea of a debtor’s prison. In the days of Christ if a person incurred debts he could not pay or did not pay, then he would be arrested and put into jail while his home, property and possessions were sold in order to satisfy his debt. In fact, the majority of people who were in local jails were there because of unpaid debts. Other criminals were either executed or shipped off to penal colonies. If the debtor was married, his wife and children would have to go and live with compassionate relatives or sell themselves as indentured servants or as slaves in the lands where slavery was legal. We are tempted to look at that and think, well that wasn’t too smart. How is the guy supposed to pay off his debts when he is in prison and cannot work? But since being ruined financially, personally and socially was such a terrifying prospect, the reality of a debtor’s prison was a powerful incentive for people not to go into debt. It would also cause many families to pull together to get the guy out of jail. The idea of not being able to pay what you owe was serious. What is true financially is exponentially true spiritually.

What if you knew that on your way to your car after church, it was possible that officers would be waiting in the parking lot to arrest you and throw you into jail for unpaid debts. Would you be at ease? No! The idea of being arrested in the church parking lot and going to jail would be mortifying. But wait a minute. Do you think that man's prison is more serious than God's justice? Do you treat your sin as a rather light matter with minor consequences?

C. We do not "forgive" ourselves.

Have you heard someone say, "I need to forgive myself." Or say "I know that God has forgiven me, but I need to forgive me." Or, "I'm having a hard time forgiving myself." That is simply not true. When we talk like that, we are believing that obtaining God's forgiveness is easier than our own. Are you more righteous than God? Is your standard of justice greater than God's? The cost of God's forgiveness is infinitely greater than ours. The cost of forgiveness is so great, we could never pay it off, ever. Our forgiveness required a payment made in our place that we could never make. Christ paid for our sins by means of his death on the cross. I know that it is common for people to say it but it actually makes no sense. Fundamentally our sin is against God. God is the standard. We sin against him, not against ourselves.

D. Christ has provided the means for us to be forgiven.

By nature, we are sinners and therefore, we sin. We do things we should not and we fail to do things that we should. Therefore, on our own, we stand in debt to God with a debt that we could never pay. If God was only fair, he could justly deliver us to the eternal prison for unpaid sin. But there is a way of escape. There is a way for our sins to be forgiven. In fact, there is only one way. Christ has made that way and Christ is that way. Christ became the God-man that he might live a perfect life that was perfectly pleasing to God. Then he offered up this perfectly pleasing, debt-satisfying life as the full and final payment for every single sin of every single person who would ever believe in him, when Jesus died on the cross. Our sin cost him everything. The payment that Christ made is available to you by faith alone in Christ alone. You cannot earn it or pay for it. It has to be received by faith. Those who repent of their sin and trust in Christ are followers of Christ. Christ secured your pardon by means of his death. When you turn away from your sin and come to faith in Christ, then you are released from the debt and offense that your sin caused. God makes you a promise not to treat you in view of your sin, but will view you and treat you in view of Christ's righteousness. This is positional righteousness. This is what it means to be a Christian. A genuine Christian cares about holiness. A genuine Christian cannot sin and get away with it. A genuine Christian has a conscience that is being influenced by the Word of God and the Spirit of God. A genuine Christian grows in Christ-likeness and therefore, looks like, sounds like, lives more and more like Christ. Holiness and purity matter to genuine believers. That is why Jesus taught us to pray this. Holiness matters. This prayer is for those who have already become genuine followers of Christ. Positionally, they are declared righteous and are motivated to be in communion with God.

3. Salvation motivates daily cleansing. (4a)

Jesus is teaching his disciples how his followers are to pray. He is teaching us to regularly ask God for forgiveness knowing that God loves to forgive! But, aren't we already forgiven? This is not a perfect example, but it is close. Cathi and I have been married for a long time. We have a good marriage, but not a perfect marriage. There are times when we can get frustrated with each other and we get a little edgy and snippy. Me, of course, way more than her. When we do that, there is some tension. It is wrong. It is stupid. It is immature and completely unnecessary. And once we address it, confess it and offer forgiveness, we move on. That is the point here. Our commitment to a good marriage motivates us to address issues as they arise.

When we come to faith in Christ we have a new standing before God. We have been cleansed by Christ. However, we are not perfect in our practice. That is why *"He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ."* (Phil. 1.6) We are a work in progress with a guaranteed end result. 2 Cor. 3.18 says that we *"are being transformed into the (the image of Christ) same image from one degree of glory to another."* In John 13, Jesus was with his disciples in the upper room on the night he was betrayed and before he went to the cross. He had taken off his outer clothes and was washing the feet of the disciples, when he came to Peter. Peter protests because he knows that this is wrong. Jesus should not be washing their feet and Peter is right in a sense. So, Peter tells Jesus that he won't let him wash his feet. Jesus told Peter that if Peter wouldn't let him wash his feet, then Jesus would have nothing to do with him to which Peter says well then, not just my feet but my whole body. Jesus then tells Peter that he doesn't need a bath. He does not need complete cleansing because he has already received that. He just needs his feet washed. Do you see his point?

A man who has had a bath, and goes over to another's home for dinner will have dirty feet from the walk. He does not need another bath; he just needs his feet to be washed. Remember, this is an earthly parable teaching a heavenly truth. Here is the point. Jesus tells the disciples (with the obvious exception of Judas Iscariot) that they do not need complete cleansing. They do not need a bath, because they have already been cleansed. But, having had a bath, we still need daily cleansing. A person who is concerned about being clean is going to give attention to this. A concern for holiness will continue through our Christian lives. If a person claims to be a believer but has no sensitivity to sin or remorse or disgust at their sin, or dismisses it as not being a big deal, there is good reason to believe this one has never come to faith in Christ.

4. Our forgiveness from God displays itself in a desire to forgive others. (4b)

How does God forgive you? We are, according to Ephesians 4.32, to forgive others as God has forgiven us. When does God forgive us? He forgives us when we confess our sin to him and repent. In other words, he forgives us when we ask for it and mean it. That is the point of this prayer. Meanwhile God is ready to forgive us. He has provided all that is needed for him to be able to forgive us. Jesus even prayed for those who crucified him to be forgiven. So, how can you forgive others? You can forgive them when they ask. If they do not ask, then you get yourself ready to forgive them by praying for them and asking God to work in your heart in such a way, that you see their sin, their guilt, their need, their mess before God as being so much more important than what they have done to you. God does not ask you to pretend that

everything is fine when in fact someone has sinned against you. But their relationship to God is more significant than the hurt we have experienced.

We can offer forgiveness because we have been forgiven of so much more. God was not stingy with the mercy that he poured out on you. The mercy that God poured out on you is more than enough for you to share with others. Therefore, because we have been forgiven, we are able to forgive. Do you remember what happened in Luke 7, when Jesus was eating at the home of a Pharisee named Simon and a woman, known to all as a “sinner” began to wash the feet of Jesus with her tears, and wipe them with her hair and anoint them with fragrance? The host and guests were a little disturbed by it, but Jesus got right to the heart of it. He asked them if they thought that her display was extravagant? A little over the top? A little too personal? Violating too many cultural taboos and customs maybe? Jesus says that she loves much because her many sins are forgiven. Those who love deep are those who have been forgiven deep. Jesus goes on to say that “he who is forgiven little, loves little.” Here it is now. How can we offer forgiveness? We can only offer forgiveness in proportion to the forgiveness that we have experienced. Therefore, we only struggle with forgiving others, when we lose sight of the significance of the death of Christ for us!

Let’s review: **Forgiveness is a promise to remove the offense and to treat the offender as if the sin never took place and that no offense ever occurred.**

This means, that when you forgive a person, you are making a promise that you will not bring it up again to their hurt. You will not talk about it behind their back. You will not use it against them in a future argument. You will not tell others about it. You will not use it to be cold, indifferent, isolated, withdrawn or sullen. If you fail to forgive those who sin against you and ask for forgiveness, you are saying that your standard of righteousness is greater than God’s. If you fail to forgive you are saying that your word is above God’s. If you fail to forgive you are sitting in judgment God. If you fail to forgive you are not simply attempting to be the judge, jury and executioner, you are now placing yourself under the discipline of God. You are not the righteous one, who has been sinned against, you are the one who in your self-righteousness have convinced yourself that you have a right to be condemning, even though the One who had the true right to condemn you, condemned his own Son in your place.

If you think that you have a right to withhold forgiveness from one who repents, or you have a right to be self-righteous while you wait for someone to repent, then I need to ask you this. What kind of a gospel (God) does your forgiveness preach? Is your forgiveness rich or stingy in mercy? If God forgave you in proportion to how you forgive others, what hope would you have? Mercy received provides mercy to share. Are you willing to pray this?

God, help me be more concerned about my sin against you than I am about the sins of others. God, I am fully aware of how much I have been sinned against; it pales in contrast to my own sin against you and perhaps them. I choose to let go of my right of revenge and pray for an opportunity to forgive and reconcile those who have sinned against me.