

**Sermon by Canon Jim Holbeck. 6pm Healing Service at St Andrew's Cathedral Sydney. Wed
15March 2006**

Readings: Mat 6:14-15, Mat 18:21-35. Topic: "The Release from Forgiving Others"

Mat 6:14 For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, 15 but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

Is Jesus saying that if we want to be forgiven by God all we need to do is to forgive other people? Some might take it that you could do all the evil in the world to other people but as long as you forgave them their sins God would have to forgive you of your sins! That would be nonsense wouldn't? What did Jesus mean?

We need to understand the big picture of God's forgiveness of us and also the smaller picture of our forgiveness for one another. Jesus told us the Parable of the Unmerciful servant so that we might understand what forgiveness and unforgiveness are all about. The story is of the contrast between 2 men.

The first was a king who was merciful and forgiving to a servant who owed him a debt he could never repay. *Mat 18:24 When he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. 25 And since he could not pay, his master ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made. 26 So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.'*

The forgiving merciful King forgave the man. *Mt 18:27 And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt.* We see here the three components of true forgiveness:- **i.** A decision to show mercy. **ii.** Cancelling the debt of all the sins committed against us. **iii.** Letting the person go free.

The second man was the servant who had been forgiven of billions of dollars by the King. But he would not show mercy to a fellow servant who owed him a very small debt of say \$5. *Mat 18:28 But when that same servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii, and seizing him, he began to choke him, saying, 'Pay what you owe.' 29 So his fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you.' 30 He refused and went and put him in prison until he should pay the debt.*

Here we see unforgiveness at work. **i.** A decision not to show mercy. **ii.** A decision not to cancel the debt the man owed him. **iii.** A decision not to let the man go free.

In the parable the King represents God who abundantly pardons, who freely forgives.

The unmerciful servant is everyman like you and me when we refuse to forgive.

If God has forgiven us of all our sins against him, then we should forgive others of their much lesser sins against us. Otherwise we will be imprisoned and tortured in our bitterness and unforgiveness.

Let's see how the parable relates to you and me.

1. THE BIG PICTURE OF FORGIVENESS. God's forgiveness of us.

The big picture is the picture of what God has done for us in making forgiveness possible for us to enjoy.

A. What He did for us on the cross of Christ

i. He chose to have mercy on us as those indebted to Him, as guilty sinners who have violated His laws especially to love Him and to love one another. He sent His Son to save them. *Jn 3:16 "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.*

Eph 2:8 For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, 9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

ii. He cancelled the debt by sending Jesus to come and die on the cross for our sins.

Jesus the Perfect One came and died for sinners. Paul wrote in Rom 5:6 *For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. 7 For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— 8 but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*

Let me tell you some challenging truths.

- There would be no forgiveness for any sin if Jesus had not cried out on the cross, “**My God my God why have you forsaken me.**” He was made sin for us who knew no sin. 2 Cor 5:21 *For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*
- We sometimes think sin doesn’t seem to matter and that by and large we are pretty good sort of people. But every wrong thing we have ever thought, said or done helped nail Him to the cross.
- There would be no forgiveness of your sin and my sin against Him and against others if He had not cried out on the cross, “**It is finished!**” *At that moment* the curtain of the temple was torn in 2 from top to bottom, signifying that access into the presence of God and forgiveness of sins were now available through Him.

iii. He let the sinner go free owing nothing. The debt had all gone. Jesus bore our sins on the cross so that we might be forgiven.

Paul wrote that God cancels our sins and erases our debts through what Jesus did for us on the cross. Col 2:13 *And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, 14 by cancelling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross.* We have sinned against perfection in sinning against Him, yet when He forgives He erases the whole record of them. The record of our debts has been set aside nailed to the cross. He doesn’t hold those sins against us ever again.

B. What Jesus did for us through His resurrection

He made possible for us to receive forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit. Acts 2:32 *This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses. 33 Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing.*

How did they react when they realised they had crucified their Messiah? 2:37 *Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?” 38 And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.”* As they repented of their sin and committed themselves to Christ, there would be forgiveness for their past and the gift of the Holy Spirit to make them different. Many of us know what a blessing it is to know that our sins are forgiven and that we have become different people to what we were before we accepted Christ into our lives.

C. We can live new lives by the presence and power of His Spirit in our lives

We are new people. 2 Cor 5:17 *. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. (Kainos radically different and not neos recent.)*

We can love with His love. Rom 5:5, ... *God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. His love in us is a manifestation of the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives, The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace etc. Gal 5:22.*

We can forgive as He forgives us in Christ. Eph 4:32 *Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.* Giving people what they could never deserve as an act of grace to them.

We can become more like Jesus. 2 Cor 3:17 *Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. 18 And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.*

You and I have an incredible capacity to change as His Spirit transforms us.

Remember that the Lord’s Prayer is a prayer for believers, for the children of God to pray as they address God as “*Our Father in heaven*”. Now in Mat 6:14, 15 it is the believers who are being addressed, *Mat 6:14 For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, 15 but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.*

2. THE SMALLER PICTURE OF FORGIVENESS. OUR FORGIVENESS OF ONE ANOTHER

It's in the light of that bigger picture of God's forgiveness of us that we look at the smaller picture in terms of our forgiving one another. The unforgiving servant in the parable didn't follow the elements of forgiveness.

i. He chose not to show mercy. *Mat 18:28 But when that same servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii, and seizing him, he began to choke him, saying, 'Pay what you owe.' 29 So his fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you.'*

How often do we close our hearts to those who hurt us. "You must pay!"

ii. He refused to cancel the debt. *30 He refused and went and put him in prison until he should pay the debt.*

How often have we had the attitude, *You owe me and you will pay. I'll never forgive you! I'll never let it go!*

iii. He refused to let the man go free. *30 He refused and went and put him in prison until he should pay the debt.*

Someone has written, *Forgiveness sets the captive free. When I forgave I realised that the captive was me.*

When we refuse to forgive we bind ourselves in our resentment, bitterness, and unforgiveness. Forgiving others set us free from our crippling negative emotions.

So we look at those words from Mt 6:14,15, *For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, 15 but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.*

You and I may be Christians but while we refuse to forgive those other people we will not know or experience God's blessing or His peace in our lives. The freedom of forgiveness is available for us in His Son, but it's only as we forgive that person or those people or that group that we experience that freedom.

In the big picture when we ask God to forgive us in His Son He forgives us completely. It's as though He says, "*You are free. I no longer hold that sin against you.*" The Almighty God forgives us of our sin against Him.

In the small picture ought we not forgive those who by comparison have done so little against us? If we refuse to forgive that other person we are belittling what Christ did for us on the cross.

As we forgive we **i.** Make a decision to show mercy to that person who hurt us or our loved one. **ii.** Cancel the debt of all their sins against us. **iii.** Let the person go free, off the hook of our unforgiveness.

Otherwise we are bound, outside the will of God, unable to experience the deep joy and release of forgiveness.

The decision for you and me is not CAN I forgive that other person. The decision is WILL I? OR WON'T I?

Let me lead you in a prayer of forgiveness as you forgive someone you really need to forgive to become more open to God's healing power.