

“FORGIVEN BY THE MASTER”
Psalm 130, Acts 13:38-41, John 8:1-11
July 10 & 11, 2021

“The manager of an IBM project that lost \$10 million before it was scrapped was called into a meeting at the corporate office.

“I suppose you want my resignation?” he asked.

“Resignation nothing!” replied his boss. “We’ve just spent \$10 million *educating* you.”¹

Oh, the power of forgiveness! To have the huge debt of \$10 million erased from your conscience is life-changing. While the boss could have hung this manager out to dry, demanding repayment, putting him on the corporate black list, and then firing him on the spot, grace was shown in its place. When retribution could have been sought, forgiveness was extended so that the manager could learn from his mistakes and go on to do better with the company in the future.

Similarly, the burden of sin in our lives can get very heavy - like a canvass bag over our shoulders that weighs over five hundred pounds. But the things we’ve done to others, in word or deed, **may not be** what weighs down that bag. It is probably the things that **others have done to us** that weights down the bag and makes it unbearable sometimes. And that load of unforgiven sin can be absolutely devastating to our lives. Left unresolved, that sin burden can completely destroy us to the point of no return.

To carry that burden of sorrow, anger, hatred, guilt and revenge takes its toll on us. Many people become burned out because of the daily burden of carrying their bag of unforgiven sins. In fact, “according to the Minirth and Meier book *How To Beat Burnout*, **resentment** is far more responsible for burnout than overwork. They say, ‘In our counseling ministries, we have seen literally hundreds of examples that verify a close connection between bitterness and resentment and the experience of symptoms that we call burnout...Bitterness leads to burnout...and freedom from bitterness is necessary for effective recovery from burnout.’”²

¹ (Robert J. Morgan, *Stories, Illustrations & Quotes*, [Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2000] pg. 320)

² (Frank Minirth, Don Hawkins, Paul Meier, and Richard Flournoy, *How to Beat Burnout*, [Chicago: Moody Press, 1986] 48)

Bitterness comes as we fail to forgive others for the things they do to us or against us. That anger builds and boils within us, often making our life so unbearable that it makes us physically sick. Wanting some kind of retribution for the stuff others do against us will consume our thinking, affect our performance at work, and degrade our relationships with others. Wanting revenge can burn us up. Forgiveness is essential for any healing to take place or new life to begin.

Bitterness, while a sin on its own, can lead us to the point of greater sin as we begin to let that bitterness take control of our lives, and change us into different people. When bitterness settles into our lives, it changes the way we think, the way we act and the way that we treat others. Then the bag on our backs begin to fill up with the sinfulness that WE have done out of the bitterness within our own hearts.

Always looking at the faults of others can also burn us up, trying to make ourselves look better than another. When we put ourselves in the position of being the “watch keeper” over the population around us, we can easily begin to see the sin that is prevalent around us. We can easily get to the point where we begin to judge the sin of others as being grievous enough that we feel the need to expose that sin and deal with it ourselves.

Listen to a situation that Jesus encountered, and how He taught us to forgive. This is John 8:1-11. (READ John 8:1-11).

Whenever I read this account, I am amazed that the Pharisees and teachers of the Law only brought in one of those caught in the act of adultery. Adultery always takes two people, yet only the woman was brought before Jesus. Her sin was exposed to everyone, right there on the street, her bag of sins laid out for everyone to see. How humiliating! And those who brought her to Jesus had already pronounced her sentence – guilty! And the punishment for that sentence was also laid out – death!

Well, the penalty of sin is death. Romans 6:23 tells us, “*The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.*” Sin brings a penalty, and the Pharisees recognized and labeled it. HOWEVER, they were so in tuned with the sins of that particular woman, that they forgot their own sin, which also was punishable by death if in fact the wages of sin is death.

They were bringing this woman in as a trap for Jesus, and to make themselves look better than the common, ordinary citizens of the city of Jerusalem.

But Jesus' response suddenly exposed the foolishness of their wanting the death sentence for this woman, yet they wanted freedom for themselves. If they were going to pass the death sentence onto her, they should also apply it to themselves. "*Whichever one of you has committed no sin may throw the first stone at her*" (Jn. 8:7). WOW! That hits US right between the eyes, or it should at least. How can we pass judgement on others, condemning them of their sin, when we are just as sinful in different ways!

Now, please understand, Jesus was not condoning the sin that this woman was caught doing. Sin is sin. What Jesus was doing was exposing the hypocrisy of the leaders of the church condemning her when they were just as guilty of sin, deserving the same penalty. Ours is not to be about pointing out other people's sins until we, ourselves, are pure and holy, without sin in our own lives. And when that happens, when we are pure and holy, we probably won't be here to judge others.

True, the woman (and the man left out of this account) needed to make changes in their lives so that they no longer fell into sinfulness. There was no denying that by Jesus. Upon confronting those who wanted her blood poured out on the street, Jesus then turns to the woman to bring guidance to her. "*Where are they? Is there no one left to condemn you?*" *'No one, sir,' she answered. 'Well, then,' Jesus said, 'I do not condemn you either. **Go, but do not sin again**'*" (Jn. 8:10-11).

You see, Jesus did not come to condemn us – we already do a pretty good job of doing that against ourselves by sinning. Jesus came to release us from the baggage of sin so that our lives may change and reflect the forgiveness that He gives to us. Jesus came to unlock the chains of slavery to sin so that each one of us can be free from the weight of that bag around our necks. AND in the process of our finding release from our own sins, we are to begin to release others from their sins by forgiving them.

Something that I always wonder about in this passage that has never been answered, is what did Jesus write in the dirt while the others were pronouncing guilt upon the woman? You ever wonder,

about it? Was He drawing a picture? Or just scribbling? Or something else?

Robert Rasmussen uses this part of the account to help us to see the need for us to learn about forgiveness, too. As he puts the account into story, Rasmussen considers the response of one of the Pharisees that had brought the woman to Jesus for His verdict upon her. After the accusers had all gone away, realizing that their lives were just as sinful as the woman's was, one returns, curious about what was written by Jesus. Rasmussen puts it this way, speaking from the Pharisee's point of view;

“Later, after the street had cleared of spectators, I returned to the very spot where I had thrown the woman to the ground. My eyes were drawn to the place nearby where Jesus had written in the dirt. It was still readable enough. He had written her name, at least originally. He had then drawn a cross through her name, and on the side he had written *charis*, grace.

“A rush of blood went to my head. My knees felt weak. I pictured myself plotting to catch her in sin, admitting to myself that it had somehow gratified my own lust. I remembered my selfish zeal and my hatred as I readied myself to throw stones at her.

“Kneeling now, I realized that she and I were just the same, equally in need of forgiveness. I reached out, and under the word *grace* I wrote my own name.

“I guess it was my way of apologizing. My way of saying I would never, ever, do it again. The words I had overheard rang in my mind, and I somehow knew they were also true for me: ‘Go, and sin no more.’

“I rose, a free man.”³

The Apostle Paul has it correct, as we heard in our New Testament lesson of Acts 13:38-41. Paul says, “*All of you...are to know for sure that it is through Jesus that the message about forgiveness of sins is preached to you; you are to know that **everyone who believes in Him is set free** from all the sins from which the Law of Moses could not set you free.*”

Imagine for a moment being forgiven of your sins by Jesus! What grievous acts have you

³ (Robert Rasmussen, *Imagine Meeting Him*, [Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers, 1998] pg. 172)

performed in your life that were not in accordance with God's Laws? What words of condemnation have you uttered from your own mouth passing judgment upon someone else? What sordid thoughts have you percolated in your mind that were clearly not in line with God's ways? Imagine being right there, standing before Jesus, caught in your own sin, surrounded by your accusers, ready for judgment to be passed on to you. Your bag of sins laid out for everyone to see. You're guilty of every accusation! You have no defense! All it would take is one word from His mouth and you are forever condemned.

And then, Jesus stands in front of you and tells you the words, "...*I do not condemn you either. Go, but do not sin again.*" What transformational words! What new life! But would it make a difference in the way you treat others? Would you be less judgmental toward others; or would it give you a free pass to judge them even more harshly, since you are now forgiven?

You need to understand that this is exactly what happens when we come before Jesus and confess our sins to Him. Jesus came to the earth to release all of us from our bondage to sin and death. When He went to the cross, He willingly took all of our sins upon Himself and paid the price for those sins with His death, so that we might not have to face that very consequence of our own sin.

Jesus didn't die on the cross for us so that once freed from our sins, we could go right back at it and sin even more. NO! It's the words spoken clearly, "GO, BUT DO NOT SIN AGAIN" that calls us to let His sacrifice for us make the change in our life so that we become different people, free from our own sin, and free to forgive others of their sins through Jesus Christ.

And think about it. To have someone step up to carry that burden of our sin for us is often unthinkable. First, we have to confide in someone enough to let them know the burdens we are carrying, and then we have to feel comfortable enough for them to lift those burdens off of our shoulders and put it onto their own. Many times we find it so hard to let others know the hurt we carry around with us, but to let someone else carry our burden? That's almost inconceivable.

But I John 1:9 tells it very clearly, "*If we confess our sins, He (Jesus) is faithful and just to forgive our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*" God is the only one who can ultimately

forgive us of our sins. But I can have a part in that reconciliation by forgiving others of the sins they have done against me. It's what Jesus commanded us to do in the words that we say every week, "...and forgive us our trespasses AS WE FORGIVE those who trespass against us." How can we expect God to forgive us of our sins if we are not sharing that forgiveness with those around us? Let me give you a couple examples of what I mean.

"In his delightful volume, *The Other Side of the Hill*, F. W. Boreham calls forgiveness 'one of the highest arts of life,' and he suggests that some people are good forgivers, and others are poor forgivers. He gives an example of both from history:

"When John Wesley was traveling by ship to America he heard an unusual noise in the cabin of General Oglethorpe, the Governor of Georgia. Wesley stepped in to inquire. It turned out that Grimaldi, the Governor's servant, had devoured the entire stock of the great man's favorite wine. 'But I will be avenged!' cried the Governor, who ordered the poor man tied hand and foot to be carried away for severe punishment. 'For you know, Mr. Wesley,' stormed Oglethorpe, 'I never forgive!'

"In that case, sir,' replied Wesley, 'I hope you never sin!'

"The General was quite confounded at the reproof, and putting his hand into his pocket book, took out a bunch of keys, which he threw at Grimaldi, saying, 'There, villain, take my keys and behave better in the future.'

"His forgiveness, such as it was, was poor indeed.

"Boreham contrast that with the example of William Gladstone, Prime Minister of England. Once, when Gladstone was Chancellor of Exchequer, he sent down to the Treasury office for a sheaf of statistics on which he based his budget proposals. Now it happened that, in compiling the statistics, the clerk had made a mistake that vitally affected the entire situation. The blunder was only discovered after Gladstone had elaborated his proposals and made his budget speech in the House of Commons. The papers immediately exposed the fallacy, and for a moment the Chancellor was overwhelmed with embarrassment. He was made to appear ridiculous before the entire nation.

“He sent down to the Treasury for the clerk to come to him at once. The clerk duly arrived, trembling with apprehension, and expecting instant dismissal. He began to stammer out his apologies, and his entreaty for forgiveness. Mr. Gladstone stopped him. ‘I sent for you,’ he said, ‘because I could imagine the torture of your feelings. You have been for many years dealing with the bewildering intricacies of the national accounts, and you have done your work with such conscientious exactness that this is your first mistake. It was because of your splendid record that I did not trouble to verify your calculations. I have sent for you to compliment you on that record and to set you at ease.’

“If the New Testament means anything,’ commented F. W. Boreham, ‘it means that a man who can forgive with such gallantry and chivalry is a very great Christian indeed.’”⁴

Our world is in desperate need of Christians who forgive, those who realize the enormity of their own sins forgiven by Jesus at Calvary, who no longer search out the sinfulness of others, but rather begin to relieve the debt of that sin with forgiveness to others. There’s so much hate and anger and bitterness in the lives of people today that is making horrible news every day. Murders, rapes, domestic violence, adulterous affairs, attacks against those who believe differently than we do, judges giving life sentences for a few mistakes made, tit-for-tat fighting, attacks on people who are of different nationalities – it’s in the newspapers, on the television, on the radio, on the internet. When will it all stop? When we begin to see how sinful we are in ourselves, we can begin to guide and direct others to the same forgiveness of Jesus Christ in order to free them of their sin, with the challenge, “Go, but do not sin again!”

Only as we recognize our own sinfulness can we realize the immensity of the words of Psalm 130, “*From the depths of my despair I call to You, Lord. Hear my cry, O Lord: listen to my call for help! If You kept a record of our sins, who could escape being condemned? But You forgive us, so that we should stand in awe of You*” (130:1-4).

Instead of condemnation against one another, pray for those who persecute you; pray for those

⁴ (Robert J. Morgan, *Stories, Illustrations & Quotes*, [Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2000] pg. 320)

who spitefully use you; seek God's transformational forgiveness for those who hurt you; forgive the one who judges you; have grace upon those who condemn you. Pay back evil with good! Let the only revenge you give to another be the loving kindness of Jesus Christ. Let the bitterness inside you melt away at the forgiveness of your own sins. Step into the shoes of the other person for a few moments to find out what is hurting them so much that they have to hurt you, and then love on them in such a way that they are bewildered by your kindness and become changed by your forgiveness.

Folks, the changing of the world starts right here with us. As the great hymn of Sy Miller and Jill Jackson states, "Let there be peace on earth and let it begin with me..." (UMC Hymnal #431). Forgiveness starts with us giving our sin burdens to Jesus so that He can relieve them from us, and then it continues as we extend that forgiveness to those around us, in the name of Jesus Christ.

Let's pray. "Almighty and most merciful God, we have erred and strayed from Your ways like lost sheep. We have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts. We have offended You as we break Your holy laws. We have left undone those things which we ought to have done, and we have done those things which we ought not to have done. But You, O Lord, have mercy upon us. Spare those of us, O God, who confess our faults. Restore those who are penitent, according to Your promises declared in Jesus Christ our Lord. And grant, O most merciful God, for Jesus' sake, that we may hereafter live a godly, righteous, and sober life; to the glory of Your holy name. Father, You are faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleans us from all unrighteousness when we come before You to confess our sins. So enable us to be about Your great work of Salvation as we live for Jesus, and forgive like Jesus. This we pray in Jesus' precious and holy Name. AMEN.