

PRAYER JOURNAL

January 10, 2021

*And Jesus said,
"Father,
forgive them,
for they know
not what they
do."²*

Luke 23.34



Chapter Eight

Forgiveness and the Future of Your City

The redemptive power of God is released when people forgive each

other. Individuals, families, congregations, and even the atmosphere of a city can change when pardon

is released. When such a display of grace is poured out, the activity of hell is neutralized.

Highland Village Church

Prayer and Fasting 2021

The Power in Forgiveness

Perhaps nothing so typifies the transforming, cleansing power of God as that which is experienced when a soul receives forgiveness. It is the power of new life, new hopes, and new joy. It is the river of life flowing again into the cold, hardened valleys of a once-embittered heart. Forgiveness is at the core and is the essence of revival itself.

Whenever pardon is abundantly given, there is a definite and occasionally dramatic release of life against the powers of death in the heavenly places. Observe the release of life when Jesus, on the cross, prayed, "*Father, forgive them*" ([Luke 23:34](#)). At that very moment every demonic principality and power that had infiltrated man's relationship with God was "disarmed" ([Col. 2:15](#)). As the spikes were driven into the palms and feet of the Savior, and as He pleaded, "*They know not what they do,*" hell's gates unlocked, tombs opened, the veil into the holy place rent, and heaven itself opened—all because of His forgiveness. Even many dead arose ([Matt. 27:51-53](#)). The hand of God shattered boundaries in every known dimension through the power released when Christ forgave our sins.

Jesus, on the cross, "canceled out [our] certificate of debt." By His act of forgiveness He simultaneously disarmed "the rulers and authorities" ([Col. 2:14-15](#)). Likewise, when we forgive, there is a canceling of debts

and a disarming of the enemy. You see, Christ's forgiveness disarmed the devil in mankind's heavenward relationship with God; our pardon of others disarms the enemy in our earthly relationships toward one another.

Consider the last time you experienced full healing in a severed relationship. It is likely that such words as *wonderful* and *glorious* were used to describe the baptism of love that renewed your souls. Can we see that forgiveness is the very heart of Jesus' message?

Several years ago I met an Islamic scientist from India. Islam is a religion based on man's righteousness, and he had stumbled over the lack of "good works" among the Christians he knew. As I witnessed to him, I soon found myself in a debate concerning the credibility of Christianity. As our discussion grew mutually more ardent, two of my children approached; one was crying, the other angry.

To understand what happened next with my Muslim friend, I must explain something. When my five children were little, I developed a procedure for correcting them when they were fighting with each other. I conducted a brief "hearing" in which I judged both sides of the conflict. I ascertained who was the victim and who was the offender, and I then asked the victim to pass sentence on the offender.

"How many spankings should I give?" I'd ask the victim, who knew

that next week the roles may be reversed and he or she may be in need of mercy and pardon. Thus, the wounded child would say, "No spankings." As long as the culprit expressed remorse, the result was that the kindness of the victim led the offender to repentance. The children learned the power of mercy. As the judge, I did not have to punish the guilty because he or she dropped the charges and the debt was canceled. The victim's mercy triumphed over judgment. Enmity was broken, the children were reconciled, and their friendship was restored.

While the trial proceeded, my Muslim friend watched carefully. Now, with the children happy once again, I returned to continue our debate only to find my Muslim friend say, with eyes wide open, "There is no need to continue. I have just seen the power of Christianity!"

Reconciliation

One of the most fundamental truths of our faith is that through Jesus we have received forgiveness for sins, and because of Christ we can forgive one another. Someone pays the price to absorb the offense to themselves, but in so doing they release the power of God, bringing healing to souls. It may rend

the heavens, as Christ's forgiveness did for us, or it may rend the heart when we forgive one another. Whether the result is spectacular or subtle, however, forgiveness is the very life of God.

When Stephen forgave his murderers, a plea for mercy with "Saul of Tarsus" written on it ascended to the heart of God. Could it have been the divine response to Stephen's forgiveness that was instrumental in transforming Saul into Paul, an apostle of God?

Consider the reunion of Jacob and Esau. Esau is known in the Scriptures as a hardened man, one who sold his birthright for a single meal. Yet as Jacob bowed seven times to the ground in repentance, asking forgiveness from Esau, a flow of life from the heart of God flooded the embittered Esau. Scripture tells us there was such a release of grace into his soul that he "ran to meet [Jacob] and embraced him, and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept" ([Gen. 33:4](#)). Esau's heart melted, and he chose to forgive the repentant Jacob. So moved was he that he ran and embraced Jacob, kissed him, and then wept on his neck. When we truly desire to walk in repentance and reconciliation, even a man as hardened as Esau can be touched by God!

We see this divine flow of life again when Joseph was reunited with his brothers. Having been sold by them into slavery, Joseph had every right to be bitter. Instead he chose to forgive. Note carefully the washing of the Spirit of God through these lives as Joseph was reconciled with his brothers: "Then Joseph could not control himself... And he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard it, and the household of Pharaoh heard of it. Then Joseph said to his brothers, 'I am Joseph!' " ([Gen. 45:1-3](#)).

Joseph was so full of love and forgiveness that he actually begged his guilt-laden brothers to forgive themselves. He pleaded, "*Do not be grieved or angry with yourselves ... for God sent me before you to preserve life ... and to keep you alive by a great deliverance*" ([Gen. 45:5-7](#)).

There was no bitterness, no revenge, no angry last word that preceded his forgiveness. There was only the foretaste of Christ's own unconditional forgiveness to every self-condemned sinner. Indeed, like Joseph, every time we forgive, we too "preserve life." We restore our brethren to wholeness "by a great deliverance."

Release Every Man His
Servant

Forgiveness and the Future of Your City Highland Village Church

Forgiveness is the very spirit of heaven removing the hiding places of demonic activity from the caverns of the human soul. It is every wrong made right and every evil redeemed for good. The power released in forgiveness is actually a mighty weapon in the war to save our cities.

Jeremiah 34 unveils the impact of wholesale forgiveness upon a city, revealing what might have happened had the Jews obeyed God's call of release. The account speaks of more than the reconciliation of family relationships. It deals with the entire city of Jerusalem as well as all the cities of Judah. It reveals the wonderful wisdom and love of God in His willingness to save His stubborn, sinful people.

The story occurs at a time when the Israelites were hopelessly outnumbered. Seemingly every enemy who could carry a sword had it pointed at their cities. We read that "Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon and all his army, with all the kingdoms of the earth that were under his dominion and all the peoples, were fighting against Jerusalem and against all its cities" (*Jer. 34:1*).

Is this not our battle as well? Do we not have our own

"king of Babylon" with his hosts set against us (*Rev. 17-18*)? We see armies of demons led by principalities attacking and almost overrunning city after city. The demonic powers of immorality, rebellion, drugs, rock music, Satanism, greed, murder, and fear have all but swallowed many of our larger communities. Unless the Lord acts mightily, will we not continue to be overwhelmed by the dimensions of the battle?

Such was the plight of Israel. Yet hidden in the ways of God was a plan, a strategy that would both rout the enemy and heal their cities. The Lord called them to implement the "Year of Remission," which proclaimed complete and generous release to both servants and slaves. (*See Deuteronomy 15:1-18.*)

"Then Jeremiah the prophet spoke all these words to Zedekiah king of Judah ... that each man should set free his male servant and each man his female servant, a Hebrew man or a Hebrew woman; so that no one should keep them, a Jew his brother, in bondage. And all the officials and all the people obeyed, who had entered into the covenant that each man should set free his

male servant and each man his female servant, so that no one should keep them any longer in bondage; they obeyed, and set them free" (Jer. 34:6-10).

It is one thing to have lost at war and thus become the slave of an enemy, but it is quite another to become the slave of your brother. Yet this kind of servitude was a provision of the Mosaic Law. One's indebtedness could enslave him to another.

However, every seven years Jews who were slaves were to be released, and every fiftieth year all their original properties were to be returned. However, in all the years since the law of remission was issued, Israel had never celebrated this jubilee, and only rarely had an individual released his slaves. Yet at the time Jeremiah spoke this to the king, even with their enemies within striking range, the entire nation set about "to free every man his slave."

How does this story relate to us? Whenever any relationship exists outside the shelter of covering love, it degenerates into a system of mutual expectations and unwritten laws to which we all become debtors. As it was under the Law of Moses, so also it is in the context of human relationships:

indebtedness enslaves. Obviously we do not enact the master/slave relationship, but our unforgiving opinion of the offender enslaves him, together with his offense, in our memory.

It is a basic principle of life: where there is no love, of necessity there must be law. And where there is law, there are both debts and debtors. To counter the debilitating effect indebtedness has upon relationships, Jesus commanded His disciples to maintain love among all men. For love transcends the "ledger sheet mentality"; it refuses to take "into account a wrong suffered" (1 Cor. 13:5).

How shall we deal with debts? Jesus warned we would not be forgiven unless we forgave others. Whenever we are unforgiving, we are also reacting. Those un-Christlike reactions to offenses become our sin before God. To be released from our reactions, we must return to the cause, the first offense, and be reconciled. As we forgive, we are forgiven and restored; life and balance return to our souls.

In our story from Jeremiah, the Judeans did not merely forgive each other; they made a "covenant" before God. They cut a calf in two, and they passed "between its parts" (Jer. 34:18). This was the same kind of covenant relationship

Abraham had made centuries earlier with the Lord. (See Genesis 15:10, 17-18.) They made a covenant with God to release one another!

The redemptive plan of God was this: If the Israelites set free their slaves, they would not be taken as slaves. If they showed mercy, He would show Himself merciful as well. The destruction of their cities would be averted, for "mercy triumphs over judgment" (James 2:13). Although they were sinners, love would fulfill the law and make all things clean for them. (See Luke 11:41; Gal. 5:14.)

Look what happened to the Judeans' enemies as the populace enacted the covenant of remission. Something marvelous was occurring in the spirit realm. Supernaturally the Lord drew "the king of Babylon ... away" (Jer. 34:21). At the very moment the people were being merciful to one another and releasing their slaves, their enemy was drawn away, and their war ended! What they did on Earth was actually being done for them in the heavens.

We are just like the Judeans of Jeremiah's day. Our cities are also under attack, and no program or government aid can help us. What we need desperately are divine intervention and deliverance. We need to see the mercy of God and His convicting power

poured out supernaturally on the people!

Some may say our cities are like Sodom—beyond saving, beyond redemption. This argument usually arises from a heart whose love has grown weak. Yet the first cause of sin in Sodom was a lack of mercy. God said, "*Behold, this was the guilt of your sister Sodom: she and her daughters had arrogance, abundant food, and careless ease, but she did not help the poor and the needy. Thus they were haughty and committed abominations before Me. Therefore I removed them when I saw it*" (Ezek. 16:49-50).

This prophecy concerning Sodom came from Ezekiel, who was Jeremiah's contemporary. He was probably speaking to many of the same people who later released their slaves. The root sin, the cause of Sodom's wickedness, was not perversity but selfishness. It was a city full of wealth but without mercy, refusing to help the poor and needy. Thus, they went on to commit abominations before the Lord. Any society that hardens its heart toward mercy opens its heart toward hell. But when a people become merciful, mercy is allotted to them.

The appeal of God is that we return to love and forgiveness. The Israelites, like the Sodomites, had fallen far

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short of the Lord's standard of righteousness, as we have done also. Yet, for all their sins, God had one more plan, one more divine alternative that might have completely changed the end of the Book of Jeremiah and brought lasting deliverance. It was pure, and it was simple. The Lord called for a covenant of forgiveness; His plan was to flood the heavenlies with mercy. The very mercy the Judeans were giving to each other would pave the way for God to show mercy toward them, and it worked: the king of Babylon, his armies, and every one of Israel's enemies left the nation!

They Fell From Grace

The Lord gave the Judeans one last opportunity, but when their enemies left and the pressure upon them abated, they did something terrible. Instead of maintaining their mercy, they brought their brothers back into slavery.

"But afterward they turned around and took back the male servants and the female servants, whom they had set free, and brought them into subjection for male servants and for female servants" (Jer. 34:11). Under the fear of death they released their

slaves. Now with the threat of death removed, they returned to their selfishness. We need to understand that where there is a decrease of love, there will be an increase of demonic activity in our relationships. The Jews released their slaves, and the enemy left. But like so many of us, when the pressure was removed, they returned to their sin: they took back their slaves.

"Therefore thus says the Lord, 'You have not obeyed Me in proclaiming release each man to his brother, and each man to his neighbor. Behold ... I will give [you] into the hand of [your] enemies, and into the hand of those who seek [your] life, and into the hand of the army of the king of Babylon which has gone away from you. Behold, I am going to command,' declares the Lord, 'and I will bring them back to this city; and they shall fight against it and take it' " (vv. 17-22). The Lord gave them exactly what they gave each other. They made their brethren slaves; their enemies in turn made them slaves. It is ironic that when Israel was finally carried off into Babylon, a number of these very slaves were left in the land. Many of the individuals who had been reenslaved were assigned the

properties of their former masters.

But do not be mistaken. As the Book of Lamentations testifies, this was no happy ending. However, for us the final outcome of the war against our cities is yet to be written. There is still time to flood the heavens with the mercies of God. If there is citywide repentance for unforgiveness, even "Esau" will fall weeping upon the necks of their brothers. If there is a canceling of debts, deliverance can come as it did to Joseph's brothers, even to those who are guilty of betrayal. Wherever love prevails, the strongholds of hell will be torn down, and the spiritual armies surrounding our cities will be disarmed.

This release of divine power is resident even now in our capacity to set one another free from indebtedness. All we must do is forgive our debtors and maintain the attitude of forgiveness. As we release each other, God Himself will begin to release our brethren, our congregations, and ultimately our cities. It is up to us, as individuals, to flood the spirit realms with mercy. For whatever we loose on Earth will be loosed and given back to us in the heavenlies.

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My Prayer of Application

Father, we have sinned against You and against our brethren. By our lack of mercy and the hardness of our hearts toward our brethren, we have allowed the devil access to our congregations and to our cities; we have brought judgment to our land. Forgive us, Lord! In all sincerity we make a covenant of forgiveness with You and all men. We choose, as did Jesus, to absorb the debt unto ourselves and free one another. As we release one another, liberate us from the grip of our enemy. As we show mercy, pour Your mercy upon our cities! In Jesus name, Amen.