

Life and Teaching of Jesus Christ

Lecture 12

Jesus' Teaching concerning Forgiveness in the Kingdom

Introduction

Jesus came to save the lost but more than that, He came to become their King – to share the kingdom with them (Luke 12:32 *"Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom"*) – to lead them out of darkness and into the new life of the kingdom with Christ and God (Col.1:12-14).

What kind of life does God expect us to live as citizens of His kingdom while we are still living in this world? What did Jesus teach His followers about everyday life in their world? The simple answer is: He taught them to live under the rule of their King (Jesus as LORD), to do what pleases Him, and to follow His example (cf. 1 John 2:6).

God's heart and nature is to save. And integral with that truth is His heart to forgive. Jesus came to become the perfect Sacrifice for our sins so that through His death "for us", God may forgive us all our sins. Jesus also came forgiving. It wasn't just a part of His teaching but continually a part of His life – in relationship with His disciples who were continually acting and speaking in ways that were against God's will and truth, eg their unbelief, competitiveness, pride etc. Jesus also forgave the "sinners" who came to Him with a broken spirit.

Salvation and forgiveness go hand in hand – for Jesus as well as throughout Scripture.¹ Yet Jesus' teaching on forgiveness was radical to the thinking of most Jews in His day. See Luke 5:20-24. The thinking of the Pharisees and religious leaders in Judaism was rooted in their superior attitudes towards non-Jewish peoples and also towards Jews who did not keep all their strict rules and regulations, also those who lived in "sin" such as prostitutes, or those who cooperated with the Romans such as tax collectors. Their

¹ This is NOT just a new teaching which Jesus announced – in all His teaching, He was announcing what was already in the OT – see Isaiah 1:18; 43:25; 44:22-23; Micah 7:19; also Ps.32; 51 – we must never forget that Jesus' word is the Word of God, Jesus' life of forgiving others and showing mercy to them is the forgiving heart of the Father.

attitude was one of rejection rather than compassion for the sinner. They condemned the sinners rather than seeking to lead them to God to receive His forgiveness. So Jesus' forgiving those who were steeped in sin – who acted as a doctor towards the “sick” people (see Luke 5:30-32) – was totally offensive and even blasphemous to them.

They didn't “see” that they were “blind”. See John 9:39-41. They believed that they did not need to come to God for mercy and forgiveness because they were already “righteous” in His sight through their keeping the law and their traditions. Whereas Jesus called them “blind guides” (Matt.23:16).

In Luke's Gospel, we encounter Jesus often ministering to “sinners” and people in need of God's mercy and forgiveness. Consequently His teaching has a strong focus upon forgiving the sinner. Jesus forgave those who were steeped in sin whenever they show clear evidences of coming to God to receive His mercy and grace.

Examples in Luke's Gospel include the sinful woman (Luke 7:36-50) and Zaccheus, the tax collector (Luke 19:1-10). By His forgiving these people freely, He was revealing God's heart and longing to forgive sinners in order that they might be reconciled with Him and have the freedom and joy to become His children, entering with boldness and confidence into His presence. (See also Luke 23:34 where we hear beautiful words of forgiveness coming from the lips of Jesus while He is in such profound agony on the cross.)

Jesus both proclaimed this Good News of forgiveness and also lived it. He not only proclaimed the Good News of the Kingdom of God but HE Himself is the Good News – God's King who comes to save and to forgive the sinners.

Passages from Luke's Gospel regarding forgiveness:

- Forgiveness and our sinfulness (7:36-50)
- Jesus' example of forgiving Peter (22:31-32)
- Jesus' teaching concerning sin and forgiving others (17:1-4; cf. Eph. 4:32; Col.3:13)

Jesus forgives a “sinner” (7:36-50)

The scene:

- Jesus was invited to dine with a Pharisee named Simon – v.36 – it could be that Simon had invited some others to join him for this momentous occasion (see v.49) – probably Simon was ready to boast before his friends that Jesus had accepted his invitation to visit his house, thus showing how important he was – it is helpful also to note that Jesus did not decline the invitation just because He had experienced much opposition from the Pharisees or because He was in such strong disagreement with some of their fundamental teachings concerning religion – did not the Pharisees need to experience Jesus’ forgiveness as much as anyone else? – not all Pharisees were against Jesus or hardened their hearts against Him, eg Nicodemus, Joseph of Arimathea; cf. those Pharisees who went out to John to be baptised (Matt.3:7)
- An immoral woman (i.e. a woman with a bad reputation, probably a prostitute = “sinner”), discovering that Jesus was there in Simon’s house somehow found her way in without being invited – a most embarrassing situation for Simon but not for Jesus (EBCNT: *The woman (v. 37) took advantage of the social customs that permitted needy people to visit such a banquet to receive some of the leftovers.*)
- This woman had obviously heard about Jesus, that He was kind and compassionate – the word had gotten around among the women that here was a religious leader who loved women as He also loved men – who did not condemn or reject women just because they were women or because they didn’t keep all the laws and traditions of the so-called “holy men” (Pharisees, like Simon) – and when she heard that He was actually in her town, in Simon’s house (she would have known Simon – Simon would have known her and passed by her in disgust and disdain over and over again), she saw that this was her moment to reach out to God in her deep need.
- This woman brings with her an alabaster vial of perfume and begins to anoint Jesus’ feet using her hair to wipe His feet – and as she poured the perfume on Jesus, she wept with such intensity that her flood of tears left Jesus’ feet soaked or wet – and not only that, but she began kissing Jesus’ feet with the same lips that had kissed many a man in her immoral past
- Jesus didn’t do a single thing to stop her or to rebuke her – He just sat back and allowed her to anoint his dusty feet – why? – because He saw in her heart a broken life – a life full of rejection, not just of sin – He knew her background, how it was that she came into this way of life – possibly she had experienced some

terrible rejection (perhaps she had been married and then left by her husband without any means of support for herself or her children) - there could have been a deep wound in her spirit caused by some equally evil, sinful treatment at the hands of men – so it could have been that she had been so desperate just to survive, the only way she saw to have money to put food on the table for herself and her children was to sell her body as a prostitute – Jesus saw her heart, her deep longing to be free, her thirst to be experience true wholeness and a clean heart and a new start evidenced by her deep remorse over her life (cf. 2 Cor.7:10) – He knew her life through and through, her inner heart, and instead of being repulsed by her, he was drawn to her – because as the Son of God and Son of Man, He hadn't come to condemn sinners but to save them, to rescue them from God's wrath and to give them a new heart and a new life, to forgive them fully – to give healing to those who were sick, to lead those who came to Him for healing of their spiritual sight

- This for Simon was a “worst case scenario” – here's this holy prophet, Jesus, reclining on the floor with a woman whose livelihood was lying with men – it was all unfolding before Simon's eyes – he didn't know how to respond – it was like a situation out of control
- The problem though was that Jesus didn't stop her doing this – which showed Simon that Jesus didn't really know who she was, because if He had known, then He would have told her not to touch Him because her touch (remember that every day she soiled her hands through her immoral sexual behaviour) would have polluted His holy Person (v.39) – or if Jesus knew who she was, then He was definitely at fault in allowing such a sinful person to be there uninvited, ruining such a pleasant dinner engagement:

39-43 *In this masterly narrative, Luke now directs attention to the Pharisee (v. 39). He mulls over the matter and reaches three conclusions: (1) if Jesus were a prophet he would know what kind of woman was anointing his feet; (2) if he knew what kind of a woman she was, he would not let her do it; and (3) since he does let her anoint his feet, he is no prophet and should not be acknowledged as such. But Jesus does let her expend the perfume on him and does not shun her. He shows that he does have unique insight into the human heart, for he knows what the Pharisee is thinking. When Jesus tells Simon his host that he has something to say to him (v.40), Simon, perhaps expecting some stock word of wisdom from his teacher-guest, replies perfunctorily, "Tell me, teacher." The point of the*

incident (vv. 41-42) is clear, and Simon is made to give the conclusion that will condemn him. His "I suppose" (v.43) (EBCNT = Zondervan's Expositor's Bible Commentary of the New Testament, electronic version)

- Jesus however knew what was going through Simon's mind – how foolish it is to imagine that God doesn't know what we are thinking or dreaming – and Jesus wasn't going to let this opportunity pass to speak into Simon's life and also to teach a most significant lesson to His very own disciples who were spectators of this amazing drama taking place before their eyes – note how Simon addresses Jesus with the honorific title "Rabbi" – he seems to be open to hear what Jesus has to say to Him.

Jesus' teaching:

- Jesus uses a parable or story to drive home His message to Simon – in this parable, there were two people who were in great debt: one owed a moneylender money amounting to the equivalent of 500 days of wages (approx. a year and a half), while the other's debt was only the equivalent of 50 days of wages (less than 2 months worth) – they were both forgiven by this kind and compassionate moneylender (N.B. "sin" is like a "debt" that one is required to pay) – then Jesus asks: Which one will be most thankful? Simon could not answer other than the obvious – the one who was forgiven MUCH, to whom was shown great love
- Jesus then speaks directly to Simon and points out his weakness – Jesus compares the actions of Simon and the actions of the woman:
 - no courtesy of washing Jesus' feet when He came to visit in his house – whereas she had not stopped washing His feet with her tears of sorrow and remorse
 - no holy kiss – cf. greetings in that day and even to this day in different cultures and societies
 - no anointing his head with oil – whereas this woman had used expensive perfume (perhaps even the perfume that she might have used in her trade!) to anoint Jesus' feet
- All of these were signs for this woman of her broken heart in the presence of God, whereas for Simon his indifference to accepted customs showed a cold heart towards Jesus as well as spiritual pride and superior thoughts so common among the Pharisees.

- Jesus then drives home to Simon the truth that though the sins of this woman were piled sky-high (she had a huge debt in God's sight far more than she could ever pay in a million years!), nevertheless God had stepped in to forgive her – whereas for Simon himself, he had a very lukewarm love towards Jesus because he wasn't really aware of the depths of his own sinfulness – he hadn't lived a life like that woman and saw himself to be well above average in the eyes of most Jews especially if compared with such sinners.

Jesus' pronouncement:

- Jesus then declares in Simon's hearing and the others who were present including His disciples: "Your sins have been forgiven!" (v.48) – then He added: "Your faith has saved you; go in peace." (v.50; Luke 17:19; 18:42) – what a comforting word that would have impacted her through and through, sending her home a changed and renewed person – the Word of God spoken through God's Servant, Jesus, brings life and healing to the soul – she had come as an act of faith that Jesus would have mercy on her, knowing that she could not hide anything from Him – she had come in order to be set free from her life of sin, and she received far more than she had asked for = forgiveness, wholeness, healing, peace, and an eternal inheritance through her faith in Jesus – the poor went away rich, the rich were left poor
- *The woman receives his pronouncement of salvation--"saved" (sesoken) is in the perfect tense, expressing an accomplished fact--and his benediction "go in peace" (v. 50), traditional and common words that have true meaning only for those who have been saved by faith (8:48; 17:19; 18:42; cf. Judg 18:6; 1Sam 1:17; 2Sam 15:9; 1 Kings 22:17; Acts 16:36; James 2:16). (EBCNT)*

Jesus forgives Peter (22:31-32)

The scene:

- Jesus is soon to be taken to be crucified – He's giving His final words of comfort and encouragement to His beloved followers – He will soon lead them into the Garden of Gethsemane at the Mount of Olives (v.39) – there He will face His final hour of testing before He goes out to meet His captors
- The disciples have just had a heated argument about who would be the greatest in the coming kingdom – they could sense that there was something brewing in

the air in Jerusalem, something that would thrust them into the Kingdom of God – as Jesus' closest friends, they expected that they would be closest to the King when His kingdom was inaugurated – they were thinking in purely worldly terms about who would have number one position and who would sit closest to Jesus – this became a teaching moment for Jesus concerning servant leadership in the coming kingdom (to be discussed in lecture 11)

- Perhaps Peter had been at the heart of this dispute – anyhow Jesus knew what would happen in just a matter of hours when he would deny his Master three times – so He speaks to Peter about his need to be on guard against Satan's desire to grab him and sift him like wheat – Peter heard this comforting message from Jesus' lips, that though he would pass through such a sifting process, even to the point of denying his beloved Master, nevertheless Jesus would not hold that against him – there while in the midst of His own horrific pain, He would be praying for Peter so that he would keep faith and not become overwhelmed by his grief or by the pain of falling so hard

Jesus' teaching:

- Jesus' words were rooted in that kind of "love that covers a multitude of sins" (Prov.10:12 "Hatred stirs up dissension, but love covers over all wrongs.") – Jesus not only forgives Peter totally for his sin but is totally committed to Peter's return and restoration – removing the guilt AND the shame
- Such is the nature of true forgiveness: refusing to hold on to even a sliver of the sin committed against us but instead working hard to see the sinner totally restored and whole – and even more than that, to establishing the sinner (with all the potential for falling again!) in an important ministry to others in Jesus' name, such as Peter was given, viz. to lead and shepherd his brethren – not even such an out in the open failure by one of Jesus' most intimate circle of friends would be deemed a reason to check Peter's name from off the list of Jesus' future kingdom workers – even in spite of Peter's serious stumbling on the night Jesus was betrayed, Jesus' love for Peter would ensure that Peter would be lifted up and put back on his feet emotionally and spiritually, empowered in a totally new way to be a faithful servant of Christ right to the end

Jesus' pronouncement:

- Jesus spoke to Simon Peter before his stumbling: *"Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers."* (Luke 22:31-32)
- When Peter had fallen and denied His beloved Master three times, Jesus looked at him with love – Peter, with a broken heart, went away weeping – Luke 22:61 – with that look of love, Peter pronounced His forgiveness of Peter
- Later after He was raised from the dead, Jesus found Peter one morning out fishing with some of his friends at the Sea of Galilee – He went there with a mission to restore Peter to Himself and recommission him for the work that His Father had prepared for him – John 21:15-17 – in all Jesus said and did, He was pronouncing and declaring His trust and confidence in Peter

Jesus' teaching concerning forgiving others (17:1-4)

cf. Eph. 4:32; Col.3:13

Jesus' teaching/instructions:

- Jesus forewarns His disciples of coming troubles that they will face in identifying with Him = the "skandala" or stumbling blocks – in this particular Scripture, the *skandala* are temptations to sin, not difficulties with the Gospel – see EBCNT: *The "things that cause people to sin" (v.1) are the familiar skandala (lit., "traps," but symbolically whatever causes people to fall into sin) – cf. Jesus Himself would cause people to stumble because they would trust more in their own wisdom than in God's wisdom bringing life through the cross of Jesus (1 Cor.1); they would both stumble on the rock of the Gospel of Jesus and have Him as the great Rock fall on them (in judgment) – see 1 Peter 2:7-8.*
- Jesus then adds a "woe" or a curse upon anyone who would be the main cause for someone falling into sin or falling away from faith, i.e. through whom these *skandala* would come – see v.2 *"It would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a millstone tied around his neck than for him to cause one of these little ones to sin."* (see also Matt.18:6).
"Millstone": A millstone (v. 2) was a stone of sufficient weight to crush grain as it was being rotated in a mill. The "little ones" would seem to be either young or new believers or people the world takes little notice of (EBCNT)

MILL, MILLSTONE. *The oldest and most common method of grinding corn was to spread it on a flat stone slab and rub it with a round stone muller. Such stone querns have been found in the early Neolithic town at Jericho, together with stone *MORTARS (PEQ 85, 1953, pl. 38. 2; for an Egyptian model, see ANEP, no. 149). The rotary quern came into general use in the Iron Age. This consisted of two circular stone slabs, each about 50 cm across, the upper one (Heb. rekeb, 'rider') pierced through to revolve on a pivot fixed to the lower (cf. the illustration of a potter's wheel). A wooden stick projecting from a hole near the outer edge of the upper stone was the handle. The grain was poured through the pivot-hole in the upper stone and crushed as this turned, so that the flour spilled from between the two stones (Heb. rēhayim) on to the ground. It was the woman's task to grind the corn (Ex. 11:5; Mt. 24:41), but it was also imposed upon prisoners as a menial service (Is. 47:2; La. 5:13). Larger types of rotary quern were turned by animals, or by prisoners (Samson, Jdg. 16:21) and were kept in a mill-house (Mt. 24:41, Gk. mylōn).*

Since the Israelite depended on the hand-mill for his daily bread, he was forbidden to give it in pledge (Dt. 24:6). Cessation of the steady, constant sound of grinding was a sign of desolation and death (Je. 25:10; Rev. 18:22, a simile for the old man's teeth; Ec. 12:4). The upper stone was used on occasion as a missile in war (Jdg. 9:53; 2 Sa. 11:21) and as a weight (Mt. 18:6, Gk. mylos onikos, the largest sort of millstone, turned by an ass; Rev. 18:21). A.R.M.²

MILLSTONE

A. Noun.

mulos ^3458^ denotes "a handmill," consisting of two circular stones, one above the other, the lower being fixed. From the center of the

PEQ *Palestine Exploration Quarterly*

pl. plate (illustration)

ANEP J. B. Pritchard, *The Ancient Near East in Pictures*, 1954; 21965

Heb. Hebrew

cf. *confer* (Lat.), compare

Gk. Greek

a.r.m. A. R. Millard, M.A., M.Phil., F.S.A., Rankin Reader in Hebrew and Ancient Semitic Languages, University of Liverpool

²Wood, D. R. W., & Marshall, I. H. 1996. *New Bible dictionary* (3rd ed. /). InterVarsity Press: Leicester, England; Downers Grove, Ill.

lower a wooden pin passes through a hole in the upper, into which the grain is thrown, escaping as flour between the stones and falling on a prepared material below them. The handle is inserted into the upper stone near the circumference. Small stones could be turned by one woman (millgrinding was a work deemed fit only for women and slaves; cf. <Judg. 16:21>); larger ones were turned by two (cf. <Matt. 24:41>, under MILL), or more.

Still larger ones were turned by an ass (onikos), <Matt. 18:6>, RV, "a great millstone" (marg., "a millstone turned by an ass"), indicating the immediate and overwhelming drowning of one who causes one young believer to stumble; <Mark 9:42> (where some mss. have lithos mulikos, "a stone of a mill," as in <Luke 17:2>); <Rev. 18:22> (some mss. have it in <v. 21>, see below).#

(from Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words)

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▪ Examples:

- False teachers who would lead God's children astray (cf. 2 Peter 2:1-3):
 - *c. Not Causing Others to Stumble. Avoiding skandalismós is the point in Mk. 9:42. Here the punishment, i.e., eternal perdition, fits the offense, i.e., causing loss of faith and therefore loss of salvation. A similar eschatological light falls on Mk. 9:43ff.; Mt. 5:29-30; 18:8-9. The meaning of skandalízō here is "to entice into sin" and therefore to plunge into unbelief and perdition. No price is too high to avoid this; hence the relentless demand of Jesus.³*
 - James also speaks words of warning that teachers will be judged with a more severe judgment – Jas.3:1; cf. Paul's words to Timothy admonishing him to guard his life and his doctrine – 1 Tim.4:16
- The strong causing the weak to stumble through their indifferent, reckless behaviour, eg eating food offered to idols

i.e. *id est*, that is

³Kittel, G., Friedrich, G., & Bromiley, G. W. 1995, c1985. *Theological dictionary of the New Testament*. Translation of: *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament*. W.B. Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, Mich.

punishment / judgment – by rebuking (and saving) the sinner (see Jude 23), we are acting in Christ's stead, as His representative on earth, leading that person to repentance and to restoration in the body of Christ (cf. 1 Cor.5 – they act on behalf of Christ, warning the sinner, then forgiving the sinner if the sinner has repented – cf. Matt.18:15ff)

- Jesus' further teaching is equally clear: When the sinner has turned from his sin, God's people are to forgive him/her freely – even to the point of forgiving over and over again on the same day: "If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him. If he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times comes back to you and says, 'I repent,' forgive him." (vs.3-4)
 - Jesus' teaching is referring in particular to a fellow-believer – “your brother” – a common term of endearment for fellow-Christians
 - The inevitability of a brother sinning = “if” has also the meaning “when” or “whenever”
 - Initially Jesus states the more general reference to sin, not specifically to sinning against them – cf. the responsibility of the body of Christ both to rebuke but then to forgive the repentant sinner following the example of Christ (see Col.3:13) – this can be interpreted to mean the sin against Christ or the name of Christ that is not specifically against any individual, eg a fellow-believer's irresponsible behaviour and/or conversation at his work place
 - In particular, when a brother or sister sins against us with their words (either to us, eg anger, or behind our backs, eg gossip), with a sinful act (eg rebelling against our authority or disobeying an order – refusal to submit to a leader), their omission of a responsibility towards us (eg their failure to truly show love and grace towards us) – it is our responsibility to freely and fully forgive them and not to hold their sin in our hearts, see 1 Cor.13:5c “... it (love) keeps no record of wrongs.”
 - We can and should expect that we will be sinned against by our brothers & sisters every day – though this doesn't justify *our* going around sinning against other believers because we know it is the responsibility of other believers to forgive us, as if we should be giving them practice in obeying Jesus' teaching! – our responsibility is to keep on forgiving the repentant brother

- Finally, Jesus' teaching is that we His people are called to show to others the same mercy that we pray He will show to us – our attitude should be one of mercy and willingness to forgive the sinner and never to hold back forgiveness, especially if/when the sinner has already confessed his sin and asked for forgiveness – if we refuse or withhold God's grace of forgiveness to another, we bring our own forgiveness from God under serious question (cf. Matt.6:14-15; Mark 11:25 "And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins.") – this is without doubt a most important aspect of Jesus' teaching related to forgiveness.

Conclusion

Jesus came to save the lost and forgive the sinner who will repent and turn to Him in repentance and with faith. To be saved is to be forgiven.

To follow Jesus is rooted in our being forgiven and is expressed in the fruit of giving and receiving forgiveness within the community of believers. Jesus' teaching (especially clear in His teaching on prayer – see Luke 11:4) is that asking for God's forgiveness and forgiving those who sin against us are inseparably connected. The one is linked with the other.

Consequently, this teaching cannot be a theoretical study for God's people but a continual challenge to practise this teaching in real life relationships – both in families, in the Christian family as well as in all other human relationships. One of the clearest demonstrations of our love for one another in keeping with Jesus' command is to forgive another just as God through Christ has forgiven us (see Col.3:13; Eph.4:32).

Finally, Jesus' disciples were to bear a clear witness to this Gospel of forgiveness to the ends of the world. See Luke 24:47.

These notes were written and prepared by Rev. Graham M. Roberts, M.Th. for the B.Min. "Life and Teaching of Jesus Christ" course at the Asian College of Cultural Studies – February 2004.