

**Forgiveness Series ET Church**  
**TALK1: Our forgiving God 2<sup>nd</sup> June 2024**

**Introduction-** Feeling guilty, shame and guilt experiences.

**S1.Our forgiving God**

The human heart issue or problem is hereditary; it comes from Adam and the impact of the fall. Forgiveness is a key idea in the salvation and kingdom of God. We fall and rise because of being forgiven and we are free as we forgive. Many of our issues with knowing God deeper can be connected to forgiveness. We can hold deep resentments in our hearts, towards God and others, we have held for years that have never been cleared away and brought into the light. We carry them and they weigh us down to such an extent that we don't know we are carrying them; fullness of life cannot happen. **Eugene Peterson once said of sin, '...it has a full and flattening effect on our lives.'**

The NT Greek noun for forgive means to **bestow favour on someone unconditionally (Ephesians 4 v 32, Colossians 2 v 13 & 3 v 13)**. In other places in the NT it means a **dismissal or release (Mark 3 v 29; Ephesians 1 v 7; Colossians 1 v 14)** and the meaning is strongly tied to the Hebrew meaning connected to the year of jubilee in the Jewish calendar. Jesus uses the same word in **Luke 4 v 18** when he uses the words, "**He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives...**"

God wants us released, mainly from sin and its effects and he offers forgiveness of release for this to us.

**S2.God Forgives: 'The gift that keeps on giving...'**

One of the key things we need to know is that God forgives. **GOD HAS FREELY & UNCONDITIONALLY FORGIVEN US:** The scriptures are clear about this. In our unworthy state, God chose to forgive us. We love Him in response to the fact that He first loved us- **1 John 4 vs 19-21**. Even when we were sinners, Christ died for us-**Romans 5 v 8**.

**Four reasons why God forgives:**

1. **It is His nature to forgive.** The Bible tells us repeatedly that God's character is to love, always to have mercy, slow to anger and forgiving (**Psalms 145 v 8, 103 v 8**). He repeatedly calls people back to himself. In Hosea God expressed through the prophet his heartbreak for Israel by the words, **'How can I give up on you...My heart is turned within me, all my compassions are kindled,' (Hosea 11 v 8)**.
2. **He loves us. 'He is not moody or capricious, He knows no seasons of change. He has a single relentless stance towards us; He simply loves us'** said Brennan Manning. Some of our problems are that we believe deep down we are so unworthy and unforgivable, even unlovable that we are 'too much for God.' God wants to change that. We need to know we are forgiven, loved and accepted. The NT has these three meanings for 'know.' We can know in our head, in our experience and in our hearts. Does knowing God's love affect us deep down and do we really know this in our experience? It is not just words.
3. **He knows the harm and pain sin causes us** and living the life we were not designed to live can have on us and it breaks his heart. **The question is does it break ours?**
4. **He knows forgiveness means release, healing and change for us-** We need to be forgiven.

**S3.Parable of two sons: What's is about?**

**Introduction and Background**

**Context: Luke's gospel** and its message; Jesus came for all people. Eight chapters (**9-17**) records Jesus' journey from Galilee to Jerusalem, his teaching and interaction with people on the way, the longest of all the gospels. At the start of chapter 15, it says the religious leaders gathered, as well as the tax collectors and 'sinners' (generally people who had been excluded from the temple/synagogue for various reasons) and once again Jesus was criticised. There are three stories of lost and found.

**Parable (a story that parallels some truth) of the two sons and the Father;** traditionally the 'Prodigal son,' but that is biblical commentary and the story is far more about just one son going astray. We can miss so much more if we see it through this limited lens.

**Remember this is a story about sons**, they were already sons when the story begins. In this story the two sons each had decisions to make. Both of these people were sons of a Father.

**Jesus is addressing all lost people**, even those who don't think they are lost particularly the religious believers. It's not directed at those who are in and those who are outside the family of God, which is what was part of his audience (the religious leaders with their 'exclusion policies'). That's why Jesus calls them both sons.

#### **S4. The Younger son**

It wasn't unusual for the younger son to ask for his share, this was not the problem. Some customs made provision for it, if they felt they were about to be duped by an older sibling. If this could not be proved the younger brother had to pay a fine. It might be the reason why in the story it says, '...he left after a few days,' as he needed to go to the magistrates court and perhaps pay a fine.

**The youngest son was trying to find purpose in other things.** This was related to relying on himself, what he could have and what prestige it gave him. This is not new and reflected in **1 John 2 vs 15-17**; lust of the eyes, lust of the flesh and the boastful pride of life and the three temptations of Jesus (**Matthew 4 vs 1-11**). The younger son fell for each one. He squanders or misuses what he has been given. It all goes awry and he loses everything. He ends up feeding pigs. It is significant that Jesus uses pigs in the story to emphasise the shame of this man's sin.

**He repents.** The repentant act of the younger son was that he turned towards home and came to a realisation, '**...he came to his senses...?**' His later words to his Father (**v21**) were just a confirmation of the change of heart. It is not in words but only in the act of repentance that change comes. The Bible calls this turning away or change of direction, **repentance**. It is confession, to admit we have done wrong. He did not need to be told he had done wrong and be judged, he already knew. He wasn't expecting mercy but offered to be a servant. What drew him was the knowledge that there was a home for him and a loving Father who would have him back.

The process of confession is mind altering if we were to adopt it in true sincerity. We all go astray and wander to the pigsty whether physically or in our own heads. The process of renewal is ongoing and repentance is part of that. Sin is both deadening and destructive, when it gets hold of us and like the son we squander and take advantage of the grace of free-will we have been given. Unlike the Father in the story Jesus is with us in the pigsty he stands in the midst of the dirt of our shame and is waiting to lift us out of it. The Holy Spirit can bring us to the end of our own capacities to help us realise we need Him, as what happened to the son. (**Psalm 40** – '**...he lifted us out of the miry clay ...**') He never leaves us, even in the midst of sin; because this is where he first found us; in our sin (**Romans 5 v 8**). He waits and calls us out. **We are drawn by his love and mercy not by our fear of His judgement.**

Someone once said the more we go to the cross for forgiveness the more we know of His mercy towards ourselves and others. There is a change which occurs when we repeatedly go to the cross.

We can't have one foot in the pigsty and another in the Kingdom; as a Christian we can't live a double life and separate the Christian bit off, Jesus wants all of us. His Kingdom comes first not anything else and some things have to go (**Matthew 6 v 33**).

#### **S5. The Father**

**The Father shows compassion.** '**But while he was a long way off, his Father saw him and ran...,**' (**v20**). His compassion is evident as he saw him return, he runs to meet him and embraced and kissed him. He'd been looking and yearning for his return. *The original language is stronger, the Father, 'fell on his neck' and 'kissed him again and again.'* Compassion in the Greek, is the word 'splanchna'; 'to be moved to one's inwards,' from belly or gut.

**We are drawn to Jesus not through condemnation.** The Father did not judge or condemn the younger son. Jesus said He came to save but not to condemn the world, (**John 3 v 17**) but by the love, grace and compassion of God; the more we experience it the less we want to go astray. God rejoices over us, when

we return to Him, with 'shouts of joy'. He is always keen to restore us even if we have pushed him away and not listened to his voice (**Zephaniah 3 vs 16-18**).

### **S6. What the Forgiveness of our God means: A Robe, A Ring, Some Shoes**

**A Robe:** Robes were given to people to demonstrate *position and honour*. In the ancient world who gave the robe, its colour and what is meant by it are significant. Think of Joseph and Jonathan. Joshua the high priest is dressed in festal robes as a sign of the covering of his sin, in front of Satan (**Zech 3 v 4**). Robes were usually given to the son when they reached adulthood and it was brought out on special occasions.

**Isaiah 61** says we are wrapped in a robe of righteousness, when we are cleansed by God.

**1 Samuel 18** a parallel. Jonathan gives David his robe belt and sword. He hands over his rights as a king to David. Jonathan knew he would not be king after his father Saul but gave it up to David. Jesus gave up His kingship rights to make us His people. When we become His people our sins are covered and we are clothed in His righteousness. We are lifted up to a place of honour. Psalm **3v3**, *'He is the glory and the lifter of our head.'*

#### **A Ring**

The ring was in the ancient world a sign of *sonship and inheritance*. Sons were given rings when they came of age and adopted sons were given the ring. The ring was a sign of belonging and it carried authority. It was used as an assurance in business dealings and for making agreements. The father shows how much he loves his younger son by restoring him to his previous place and basically says, 'You have my bank account.' The ring represents a full access to all his Father has.

Pharaoh gives Joseph his ring of authority in **Genesis 41 v 42**. This is exactly what Jesus did for us. We have been brought into his family, we have the rights and inheritance of God, to all the riches of the Father (**Ephesians 1 v 11**). **Ephesians 1 & 2**, explains how he raised us up to be positioned with Him; He change our status and restored us to who we were meant to be, as did the father in the story.

**Romans 8 vs 14- 19**, we are told, we are adopted as his children, heir of God and fellow heirs with Christ, we are part of His family forever.

#### **Some Shoes**

Shoes signify a restored relationship. The younger son would have no shoes, he might have sold the ones he had. The Father actually 'puts shoes on his feet.' In the ancient world shoes were graded according to how rich and what status you had in the world. Real slaves, not just servants, would have been in bare feet. Moses took his shoes off, indicating his unworthiness before a holy God (**Exodus 3 vs 3-5**). The parallels here are massive to the gospel. Bare feet indicate that we are nothing until God restores us from being slaves to the children of God (**Romans 8 v 15**). He has given us shoes. Paul talks about our shoes being the peace makers (**Ephesians 6 v 15**). When we are grounded in Jesus, we are at peace and can spread that peace but it has to start with us.

### **S.7 Living in Forgiveness**

#### **1. Deal with sin**

**1 John 1 v9**, *'If we confess (or admit our sins) He is faithful and just to forgive us of our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness...'*

Catch sin early, keep short accounts with God. Continually walk in his presence and keep an open dialogue open to Him. If we don't go to the cross each time we sin we can swing between two polar opposites- self-reliance; I can do this by myself or condemnation and despair. ***We are open to change within as we come to the cross time and time again asking for forgiveness; the Spirit renews us.*** To realise the love of God for us and His forgiveness can lead us to not want to sin anymore.

*'Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God.'* **Matthew 5 v 8**. The word in Greek for pure means, 'an undivided heart.'

**Romans 8 v 1**- There is now no condemnation for us in Christ Jesus because of what He has done.

#### **2. Choose to Live in that reality.**

***Put on the new self - Ephesians 4 v22***

The old man or self is the Adamic nature we have all inherited. That's why the virgin birth is so vital for our salvation. We put on the new self by doing three things which is a daily discipline (**Matthew 16 v 24**):

- Deny
- Take up your cross
- Follow

Eugene Peterson says, '*...the negative is our access to freedom. Only humans can say no. Animals do what instincts dictates. No is a freedom word. I don't have to do what either my glands or my culture tells me to do... Following Jesus means not following your impulses and appetites whims and dreams, all of which are sufficiently damaged by sin to make them unreliable guides for getting any place worth going.*'

### **3. The rooms of our heart; harbouring secret sins and habits.**

The elders of Israel were worshipping idols secretly in the temple (**Ezekiel 8**). We too as God's temple (**1 Cor 6**) can have parts of our hearts that are not given over to God but secret sins we are so ashamed of we don't tell a soul. But God knows what we are doing and holding in our heart and the pain and the slavery it causes us. Jesus said he who commits sin is a slave to sin (**John 8 v 34**). We need to bring these things to the light and not hide them away, as shame grows with hidden things.

If we struggle with sin, having an accountable friend who can pray with us and allow us to confess our faults and sins (**James 5**).

### **S8. Our Forgiving God**

**The sin problem has been dealt with by Jesus Christ.** We can have forgiveness that we don't have to earn (**Ephesians 2 v8**); all God asks is if we admit it. We pick ourselves up wipe ourselves down and move on. We sometimes feel we have to do something to try to prove to God that we are a really a nice person after all! God chooses to remember our sins 'no more'. The example of David is helpful here, (**2 Sam. 12 vs 15-23**) after his son of adultery dies, he refused to wallow in self-pity about his mistakes and their implications, because He knew a merciful God.

**JESUS PAID THE ULTIMATE PRICE FOR OUR SINS.** '*He died that we might be forgiven He died to make us good,*' a line from an old Easter hymn. Jesus said, '*Father forgive them for they know not what they do.*' (**Luke 23 v 24**).

The sin of all mankind was transferred to Jesus on the cross and His crown is a symbolic picture of what happened when people brought animal sacrifices for sin; their hands were placed on the animal (**Hebrews 9 v 11 – 14**). **Jesus the innocent Lamb of God**, came to take on and take away the sin of the whole world (**John 1 v 36**). As a result of all this we have been reconciled to God and forgiven of our sins through the death of Jesus, who has taken our sins upon Himself and the punishment for them **Romans 5 v 10 – 11/6 v 28**.

*'Christianity happens when men and women accept with unwavering trust that their sins have not only been forgiven but forgotten, washed away in the blood of the lamb.....When we wallow in guilt, remorse, shame over real or imagined sins of the past, we are disdaining God's gift of grace. The language of unhealthy guilt is harsh. It is demanding, abusing, criticising, rejecting, accusing, blaming, condemning, reproaching and scolding...Healthy guilt is one which acknowledges the wrong done and feels remorse but then is free to embrace the forgiveness that has been offered. Healthy guilt focuses on the realisation that all has been forgiven, the wrong has been redeemed.'* (p 116) *From The Ragamuffin Gospel by Brennan Manning*

We are significant to God. Let us walk in it. Let's be kind to ourselves. We are loved, accepted and forgiven by one who never changes His mind about us.