

Forgiveness

Time: 25 Minutes

Introduction

Dear brothers and sisters, today is our first English service this year. How have you been so far? Have you cleansed your heart to welcome 2011? Is your heart new or old? Today, let's examine our hearts, are there anyone we could not forgive. If so, let's forgive them in the name of Jesus.

From the news video, we realize that one Coptic church in Egypt was attacked and 21 people died. While they are celebrating their Christmas last week, tensions because Coptic Church and the Muslims rise. There are four Coptic churches in Australia that is under constant threat from Muslim extremist. In my last sermon I mentioned I had three Christmas parties in a week. If one of these bombing happened at one of these events, if any of our church members were killed in such an event, I do not think I can easily forgive those who conduct such behavior.

I have also met a sister who was sexually molested by her dad when she was young. When she asks, "How can I ever forgive my father for what he has done?" When you heard that, you seriously do not know how to answer. Of course the bible is clear what we should do, but is it really that simple?

Many a time you think you know what life is all about, but when you hear these stories, you begin to wonder, is this for real? Consider yourself in their shoes, can we really forgive these people? When you watch a TV series, often you see the stronger the main characters love each other, the greater is their revenge and hatred when they broke up. Why is that? Because when someone you really love hurt you, it really hurts. You would question, "I sacrifice so much for them, why would they treat me this way?" When God seems to be missing to do justice, we become judges ourselves. Those who hurt us deserved to feel our pain. Some more aggressive ones take physical actions, but most will choose to not forgive. I will not

forgive them, so they will feel bad about themselves. Better still, I will make sure they are aware of my hatred, so they may feel guilty for the rest of their life. How could the story of Jesus help us today?

1. The Power

^{NIV} **Luke 22:28** You are those who have stood by me in my trials. ²⁹ And I confer on you a kingdom, just as my Father conferred one on me, ³⁰ so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. ³¹ "Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. ³² But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers." ³³ But he replied, "Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death." ³⁴ Jesus answered, "I tell you, Peter, before the rooster crows today, you will deny three times that you know me."

Forgiveness gives us a new life

Let's try to understand the background of this passage first. Peter is one of the 12 disciples of Jesus. He has been a close follower of Jesus for three years. In verse 28 Jesus said ^{NIV} **Luke 22:28** You are those who have stood by me in my trials. Therefore we learned that he suffers with Jesus. He even fights for Jesus when Jesus was arrested. Yes he is impulsive and he makes mistakes, but no one will doubt his loyalty for Jesus, not even himself. ³³ But he replied, "Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death." He says to Jesus, even if everyone forsakes you, I won't. It is him who suggests Jesus not to allow himself to be killed by the authority. Even though his advice contradicts with Jesus' own plan, we cannot deny his concern for Jesus. But here Jesus is predicting Peter will deny him three times. If you were Jesus, how would you feel? It is like two brothers lived together for three years, and on the day when one is arrested, the other quickly turns his back and pretend he doesn't know his brother. I think Jesus must feel quite sad. Sometimes knowing what is going to happen may make things harder. Jesus knew Peter is going to deny him. He knew exactly when and how. According to his prediction, Peter did deny Jesus 3 times. Do you still remember in the Gospel of John Jesus asked Peter three times if he loves Jesus? Jesus gives him another chance to reverse the guilt and shame of his denial. When Peter responded positively, Jesus said, "take care of my sheep". So Peter did. For the rest of his life he looks after the sheep of Jesus. This is the power of forgiveness. Had Jesus not forgiven Peter, perhaps Peter will remain in his guilt for the rest of

his life, but the forgiveness of Jesus is able to transform Peter inside out. He became one of the key leaders in the church. He would die for the gospel. At the end of second century, a theologian Origen says, "Peter was crucified at Rome with his head downwards, as he himself had desired to suffer." This is why an upside down cross is generally accepted as a symbol of Peter, who would not have considered himself worthy enough to die the same way as his Savior. The power of forgiveness gives Peter a new life. After accepting Jesus' forgiveness, Peter finally realizes his destination. The greatest power in the world is not hatred, but love.

Forgiveness is an attitude of life.

The power of forgiveness can transform people's life. But here we see a deeper meaning of forgiveness. Jesus knew Peter will deny him prior to his denial. Jesus forgave Peter before Peter made this terrible mistake. Perhaps you can still recall when someone asks Jesus how many times one should forgive his brother, Jesus says, seventy times seven. It doesn't mean we should start counting 490 times so we can stop forgiving. If you are married you will know 490 times is not hard to reach. But seven means perfect in the bible, therefore 70 times 7 means you need to forgive always. The fact that Jesus forgives before Peter denies, shows us that Jesus is always prepared to forgive. Forgiveness is an attitude, a way of life. You are always prepared to be hurt by others, and you are always prepared to forgive them.

Example:

2. The benefits of forgiveness

Let's consider, if we do not forgive, who will ultimately suffer? The answer, the simplest answer is ourselves. But I would argue those whom we love and those who love us will suffer as well. We become bombs ready to explode. When we store bitterness in our heart, sometimes we do not even know why we explode, but people around us are often the victims of our anger. Forgiveness is our best remedy to anger.

Remove bitterness

Therefore, The first benefit of forgiveness is the removal of bitterness in our heart. If you really think it through, the person you hate may not even any pain at all, but you continue to hurt yourselves and those around you. Forgiveness helps us remove this bitterness in our heart so we can face this person again.

Reconcile with God

Second, forgiveness brings reconciliation with God. There is a correlation between our relationship of God and our relationship with others. Jesus said, if you do not forgive then God will not forgive you, if you forgive God will forgive you. Therefore when you forgive others one immediate benefit is your relationship with God. Reconciliation with God helps us to remove our guilt and insecurity.

Re-establishing relationships

The third benefit is to re-establish our relationships. When one sinned against others, not only his relationship with others is affected, his relationship with God and with the devil is also affected. In verse

31 Jesus said: ³¹ "Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. ³² But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers."

Do you realize that Satan is seeking to use our mistakes against us? Verse 31 says Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. Have you all seen sifting? Well, all the useless chaff will be sifted out. Satan wants to seize Peter and he nearly succeeded when Peter denied Jesus. But the forgiveness of Jesus prevents that from happening. Jesus prayed for Simon, that his faith will not fail. Therefore forgiveness not only removes our bitterness, re-establish our relationship with those who hurt us, ultimately it brings us closer to God and protects us from Satan's control. Forgiveness is the way to make right wrong relationships.

Example: When I broke up with my second girl friend, I find it hard to forgive. Once a US pastor came to Sydney and urges us to forgive those who hurt us, I decided to take up the opportunity, and to my astonishment I was able to send SMS to her asking her to forgive me. You see, only when you truly forgive those who hurt us you can see your own shortcomings and ask for forgiveness. Since then God has removed that bitterness in my heart completely.

3. The challenge of forgiveness

While all these being said, again, it is easier to say than to do. We know we should forgive, but many a time we simply cannot. Why? Because forgiveness is difficult, even unnatural. It is a challenge for most of us. But what are these challenges?

It is costly Forgiveness is costly. We need to crucify our negative emotions with Jesus. These emotions need to die with Jesus for us to forgive. In order to forgive Peter and others who sinned against him, Jesus paid the ultimate price, death on the cross. In a similar way, you need to be willing to allow your temper, your hatred, your anger, to be crucified on the cross with Jesus. It is human nature to sin, but it is not human nature to forgive, to forgive you need to put down your face.

Accepting unfairness

In this matter of Peter's denial, Jesus has the right to be angry. He has taught Peter three years, yet he can still deny him. But often forgiveness demands us to accept the unfairness, to show the power of love. It is not fair for Jesus to die on the cross, but his acceptance of this injustice demonstrates God's love for us.

I just can't do it

The third challenge is we often rely ourselves to find a solution. But ultimately only God can protect us and forgive us. It is only through the prayer of Jesus Peter is saved from the control of Satan. Jesus prays for his faith, which protects Peter from Satan. If there is someone in your heart that you find it hard to forgive, please make up your mind and pray to God to help you. With God all things are possible.

Conclusion

Please do not bring an evil mind into year 2011. The bible says, ²² A joyful heart is good medicine,

Do you have a joyful heart? You won't if you keep on hating others. Are there anyone whom you cannot forgive? Is there anyone that you do not want to see? Is there anyone that you prefer not to see on streets? Are there anyone that you do not trust because they have hurt you? Is there anyone that you keep on waiting for them to say sorry. Forgiveness is a hard topic, but it has the greatest power. To right the wrong

relationships, to remove our guilt, reestablish our relationships with others, remove the attack of Satan, and reconcile with our God. I guess the majority of our congregation does forgive, but the issue now is how to live a forgiving lifestyle: always prepared to be hurt and always prepare to forgive. True forgiveness comes with actions.

Example: Argument with my mum.