

## WEDNESDAY 04 May 2022 "Forgiveness" (Matt. 5:23, 24)

Good morning my "Walking with Jesus" friends,

*I wonder if you've ever been caught in the web of 'unforgiveness'?* I'm sure you know what it feels like but let me ask you, which is worse... you carrying a grudge and refusing to forgive someone for the wrong they've done to you OR you feeling the weight of someone who refuses to forgive you for what you've done to them, no matter how many times you've tried to apologize?

In these days we are working through Matthew's record of a powerful message Jesus spoke to a large crowd of people in the early days of His ministry. I believe as Matthew and the other disciples reflected on what they'd witnessed in those months with Jesus, things took on much deeper significance after that Easter weekend and the shocking death, burial and resurrection of Jesus, especially as they grappled with the mission Jesus had entrusted to them... *to teach others what Jesus had taught them.*

So, let's rejoin Matthew as he wrestles with these powerful words of Jesus: ***"If you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift."*** (Matt. 5:23,24) Oh my, that's quite clear isn't it, yet it makes us feel very uncomfortable, because each of us can probably think of someone who has some 'angst' toward us, or at least it seems to us that they do.

Throughout this message on the hillside, *Jesus was calling His listeners to raise their expectations of themselves and each other in how they lived life, especially if they claimed to believe in God and have a relationship with God!* I'm sure you've heard the phrase "keep short accounts with people". We understand it, right? That's exactly what Jesus was talking about here. But did you notice the place Jesus was urging us to consider if we have someone with whom we need to reconcile? Why didn't Jesus use the home or the workplace or the public market as the place, why did Jesus focus on the worship experience?

Have you noticed it's one thing to try ignoring the Holy Spirit's conviction when it happens at work or when we are driving or sitting at home watching TV or enjoying time with family or friends? But when God puts His finger on our conscience during our worship time, oh my, that's an entirely different experience, isn't it? *So, the big question is... what do you do when you sense the conviction of God regarding reconciling with someone?*

Do you see what Jesus instructs us to do? Can you imagine what a difference that would make in torn relationships if we really took the action Jesus describes here? As Matthew reflected on this, I wonder what was happening in his soul? How many people had he cheated as a tax collector? How many people resented him, maybe even hated him because of his corruption.

While Matthew doesn't tell us, I have a feeling these words of Jesus penetrated deeply into his soul and I want to believe Matthew didn't ignore it, didn't argue with the Holy Spirit, but found a way to do something about it and make things right. Perhaps you remember the story of Zacchaeus the CHIEF Tax Collector who had a life changing encounter with Jesus in his hometown of Jericho, and then he made this profound statement: **"If I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount."** (Luke 19:8) It's very possible Matthew knew Zacchaeus and was there, with Jesus that day, in Zacchaeus' home, and witnessed this dramatic heart change. I've often wondered how it impacted Matthew?

So, it's time to ask us to look deeply into our own lives. When the Holy Spirit of God reminds us of someone that we can presume has something against us, what has been our pattern of response? Jesus instructs us to do something about it, right away! In our day of cell phones that's fairly easy, isn't it my friends. Pick up the phone, text a message, make a phone call! But of course, quickly rising up inside of us will be various excuses why we should ignore the notion of apologizing or trying to reconcile. *That, of course, is a spiritual attack of the dark kingdom which would prefer that you remain in the bondage of shame or fear or resentment or bitterness or unforgiveness for the rest of your life.* Yet if you've ever worked through apology, forgiveness and reconciliation with someone, I'm sure you remember the feeling of freedom when all is forgiven, right?

When Jesus announced His life purpose in His hometown, He quoted from Isaiah 61:1,2. He said **"The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners, and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor."** (Luke 4:18,19) My friends, can you see how this declaration of Jesus' life purpose describes how Matthew reports Jesus invites us all to live? *Do we see how taking the initiative to reconcile brings freedom for prisoners, recovery of sight to those blinded by unforgiveness and resentment, and release for those oppressed by the burdens of shame?*

Seems to me this matter of reconciliation was a big deal for Matthew, for he records for us a special moment he overheard Peter ask Jesus a very important question about this matter of forgiveness and reconciliation. **"Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?"** (Matt. 18:21) Now I think that's a very fair question, what about you and me my friends? In fact, if the truth be told, my guess is neither you nor I would have the patience to extend forgiveness to the same person 7 times, would we? I'm glad Matthew doesn't tell us how Peter reacted when Jesus answered his question: **"Jesus answered Peter, 'I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.'"** (Matt. 18:22)

In other words, Jesus was challenging Peter to live a 'no limit on forgiveness' lifestyle! Of course, when they were having this conversation Peter could not have imagined that he would deny that he even knew Jesus, not once or twice but three times within a few minutes, on the night Jesus was arrested, tried, beaten and condemned to death! (Matt. 26:69-75) *But when Peter experienced Jesus' forgiveness for those denials, oh my I think this conversation became very precious to Peter!*

I think we see some evidence of how these words of Jesus, and Peter's personal experience, profoundly changed his life when we look at what Peter wrote in his letter to the Christians being persecuted all across the Roman Empire: ***"Rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy and slander of every kind. Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation... You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light... I urge you as strangers in this world to abstain from sinful desires which wage war against your soul. Live such good lives among the pagans that though they accuse you of doing wrong, they will glorify God... For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the talk of foolish people..."*** (1 Peter 2:1,2,9,12,15)

*So, what about this matter of forgiveness and reconciliation my friends, how important is it to you? How passionately do you pursue it and how strongly do you avoid any evidence of 'unforgiveness' in yourself? **Have you discovered the secret to forgiving someone who has not asked you for forgiveness?** I find it in Hebrews 4:13, where we learn that the eyes of God have seen everything and we will all be held accountable to God for all we have ever thought, said or done. *Thus, as we forgive someone, we no longer hold them responsible for the pain they caused us, and we refuse to look for any chance to get even, rather we turn them and what they did to us over to God and we release them, we forgive them, entrusting them to God's justice.**

As Matthew reflected on these powerful words of Jesus and then reviewed his own life, I wonder what conclusions he drew and what action plan he developed? What is the Holy Spirit saying to you and me, right now, about how the risen Jesus would like us to live forgiveness and reconciliation at this level, for the rest of our lives? Let's take some time right now to talk with Jesus about this, and here's a worship song to help us consider these powerful truths.

**Today's Scripture is Matthew 5:23,24.**