

FRIDAY 13 May 2022 "Forgive or not?" (Matt. 6:12,14,15)

Hello my "Walking with Jesus" friends,

Some people are a bit superstitious when the date on the calendar is 13 and it occurs on a Friday? Are you one of those folks? *If you have a relationship with God, and Jesus Christ is your Savior and the Holy Spirit of God lives vibrantly within you, then my friend, superstition is just that... myth, and I urge you to embrace this day, Friday the 13th of May!* Head out into this day expecting to see God at work in your life as He leads and empowers you to be **'salt and light'** in your world for God's glory, today!

This week we've been walking slowly, line by line, through one of the most important statements ever made in history. Jesus said it, on a hillside near the town of Capernaum, overlooking Lake Galilee, to a huge throng of people who had gathered spontaneously to listen to Jesus in the early days of His fame. Matthew, one of Jesus' disciples, records for us what Jesus said that day, and we're in Matthew 6:12 today: **"And forgive us our debts, as we also forgive our debtors."** Perhaps you recognize that as one line in a prayer often called "The Lord's Prayer". *Jesus was inviting these people to consider the great privilege they would have to speak directly with God at any time, for Jesus was going to pay our sin price to be forgiven by God for our sins, adopted by God into His family, and then given an open door of access TO God at any time.*

It was a remarkable concept, and Matthew records that when Jesus hung on that cross, on that Friday afternoon, at the time He gave up His Spirit to God, having said **"It is Finished"**, the great veil in the Temple which separated the Most Holy Place from the rest of the Temple, was torn by an unseen hand of God, from top to bottom. *That tearing was powerfully symbolic for it opened the place of prayerful encounter with God to anyone at any time!* No longer would a priest, even a High Priest, be required as an advocate, or mediator. Paul wrote this explanation: **"There is one God and one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for all people."** (1 Tim. 2:5,6) No longer would the blood of sacrificed animals be required. *God accepted Jesus' sacrifice of His life, and thus opened His throne room to all humanity who will come to Him through Jesus.* Hebrews 10 explains this powerfully.

Here on this hillside Jesus is explaining this prayer privilege and inviting us to not only understand it, but *engage with God in prayerful conversation... often.* Each line has been very significant, and now this one about forgiveness was of great interest to the people. Everyone then and now knows sin is an all too frequent part of our human experience, all of us. *And almost always our 'sin' involves doing or saying something which hurts someone else.* And once we've sinned, our greatest desire is to somehow find forgiveness, especially from God.

But... what price can we pay to earn that forgiveness, especially from Holy, Almighty God, has been the question all people wrestle with? And even if we somehow attain forgiveness from God, what about the people we've hurt, especially if we see them often in the normal course of life? *How do we find forgiveness from them so we can live at peace with them again?*

So, when Jesus spoke of forgiveness as being part of our normal prayer experience, everyone perked up their ears. I can see them nodding their heads, maybe even saying 'yeah, that's right', when Jesus said it is very appropriate for us to pray to God, **"Our Father, who art in heaven... Forgive us our debts..."**. I wonder if He paused right there. If only it were that easy, to simply ask to be forgiven and all would be made right, all forgiven. But those people that day and every person who has ever lived understands **forgiveness is not free or easy**. True forgiveness is experienced only when restitution has been made, the damage done has been made up for. Is that right?

As Matthew sat reflecting on these powerful words and so many other teachings, he and the other disciples had heard Jesus speak, I think Matthew started to understand. Jesus had demonstrated the full love of God by NOT retaliating against those who slandered Him, mocked Him, spit at Him, hit Him, unfairly accused Him, and even crucified Him! Jesus had actually said **"Father forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."** (Luke 23:34) *Jesus had paid, with His sinless life, the full price required for God the Father to forgive ANY sin, committed by ANY person... IF, they would repent of their sin and turn back to God seeking God's restoration of their relationship with Him.* God would accept Jesus' death payment as payment in full, and declare the sin pardoned because Jesus' death paid that sin debt price in full. *But it's important friends we realize pardon is not extended without repent!* For those who sin and do NOT repent of their sin, but continue sinning in rebellion against God, *even though pardon and forgiveness has been earned by Jesus' death on the cross, pardon is NOT extended to the sinner without repentance!*

John the apostle who stood at the cross and watched Jesus die, wrote: **"No one who is born again of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in them; they cannot go on sinning because they have been born of God."** (1 John 3:6,9) John also wrote **"If we claim to have fellowship with Him [Jesus] and yet walk in the darkness [evil], we lie and do not live by the truth... If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and truth is not in us."** (1 John 1:6,8) John is clear, isn't he, my friends? There is no person who is perfect, sinless, but *the person who continues to sin repeatedly and without repentance, is giving evidence they do not have a legitimate relationship with God through Jesus Christ. If they did, the Holy Spirit would be convicting them of their sin and they, in their love for Jesus, would repent.*

So Jesus added another statement of clarity to the prayer instruction He is giving: **"Our Father, in heaven...forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors..."** Oh, my friends, that's a powerful added condition to forgiveness, isn't it?

Then Jesus said to the people: ***'For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins against you, your Father in heaven will not forgive you.'*** (Matt. 6:12, 14, 15) That seems quite clear to me... *the UNconditional love of God is extended to us through Jesus Christ and His suffering and death taking upon Himself our punishment for our sins. But the pardon of God, the forgiveness of God is Conditional, depending upon our repentance of our sin to God AND our forgiveness of others who sin against us.* How wrong it would be for us to receive God's forgiveness but refuse to then extend to others the forgiveness we have received from God.

So, friends, once again I close with some questions to help us practically apply Jesus' teaching to our lives:

1. *How quick are we to recognize when we've said or done something that is NOT God honoring, therefore it is sinful in God's eyes, an offense to God, and then how quickly do we repent to God for that sin?* What might it mean if you don't recognize sin in your own life, or recognizing it, you refuse to repent of that sin seeking God's forgiveness?
2. *What did we see today about those who sin repeatedly without any repentance?*
3. *And what did Jesus teach, happens to the person who sins, repents and seeks God's forgiveness... but then refuses to forgive the person who has sinned against them?*

Oh, we have much to think about don't we, my friends? Do you have your journal handy so as you now take some time to pray you can jot down what the Holy Spirit says to you about God's forgiveness?

I think I've found a song to help us in this matter of Jesus style forgiveness. God bless you today my friends and let's learn how to live this forgiveness well...

Today's Scripture is Matthew 6:12-15.