

Psalm 19:14 Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer.

1 Timothy 1:2 ...Grace, mercy, and peace, from God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord.

My sermon today is based on our Gospel lesson – Matthew 18:21-35

“Oops...I Sinned Again”

Introduction

Ever since I was young, I would lay in bed at night thinking about the day that had just passed. Often I think about what I had done during the day and I think about the things that made feel guilty: a snide comment at some else’s expense, passing on a bit of unflattering information, anger over past injustices that just won’t go away.

If I can stay awake long enough, I bring those things before God in prayer. I ask God to forgive me for my failings. I ask God to give me the strength not to repeat my errors the next day.

When I wake, sometimes these prayers are still near me. Again I ask God to help correct my life. I might continue trying to live a pure life when I leave my house for work.

While I drive my car, I might be patient with slower driver in front of me. I might let someone go first at the four-way stop. But then that jerk with no tailpipe cuts me off and oops...I sinned again.

Your pet sin might not be the way you drive. Maybe it is something else. Maybe it is your pride. Maybe it is a desire to be in control. Maybe it is a refusal to let go of the hurts in your past. Whatever it is, we all sin everyday whether we are aware of it or not.

We all know the solution. We should forgive others as we wish to be forgiven ourselves. Yet, how good are we at doing this? I know I am not.

Forgive and Be Forgiven

In today's gospel lesson, Jesus comes to us with urgency. His language is harsh. If you don't forgive, you will be tortured until you pay back every penny. In a society that rejects torture as an acceptable moral option, Jesus' demand that we forgive or face torture is offensive. "How dare he threaten me with torture?" says the secularist.

As Christians, we struggle with this kind of threat too. We don't like torture. We don't like the doctrine of hell. Many pastors skip preaching on hell. It doesn't bring in the crowds. It doesn't satisfy the crowds. People go to church to hear something happy, not old doctrines about hellfire and brimstone.

Yet as pastors, we can't be silent where scripture speaks. As theologians, we can't focus attention on the easy texts and distract people from the ones that upset people today.

So today I need to emphasize Jesus' words:

34 In anger his master turned him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed. 35 "This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart."

How well are you doing on forgiving others as you have been forgiven? For a little thing like someone cutting you off in traffic, it is relatively easy to forgive. By the time you are eating lunch, you will have forgotten about the guy who cut you off early in the morning.

But what about those big hurts? What about that grudge against your mother or father you have been carrying around? What about that grudge against an ex-wife or ex-husband that you keep nursing in your thoughts? What about that co-worker you have never forgiven? Some day we will have to give account for all these careless thoughts.

Massive Grace and Ruthless Justice

I know what I am saying sounds harsh. You may be saying to yourself, “God is merciful, therefore, he would not be that demanding.” To that I say, “You are half right.” God is merciful but because he is so merciful he must be just. Big mercy requires big justice.

Would it be merciful to allow people who will not forgive into heaven? What kind of heaven would that be? Because God is so merciful, he won't allow those who refuse to be merciful near him. He won't allow those who won't forgive to ruin the eternal happiness of his people.

Conclusion

I began this sermon by telling you how easy it is for me to slip into sinning. We all slip into sin without realizing even when we are trying hard not to do it. The good news is that our sins are forgiven because Christ died for us. It is a great relief to know that God is not keeping track of them anymore.

As Christians, we should do the same for our neighbors. Stop counting their sins like God stopped counting yours. Be free from the counting, your sins and your neighbor's sins. Jesus has set you free so be free.