

Introduction: We continue this week our extended study of the theme of forgiveness...

Mon/Tues: read Matthew 9:1-8 and Micah 7:18. The reason Jesus is able to exercise His grace towards the lost, despite the hostility of men and devils to this saving work, is because He, as the Son of God and Lord over all nature has been “granted authority” in Mt. 9:6 to forgive sins.

You see, the hateful teachers of the law who accuse Jesus of blasphemy in Mt. 9:3 are correct in one thing: “Only God can forgive sins”. They simply refuse to believe that the One who makes the paralytic walk *in order to demonstrate His power to do the harder thing of granting forgiveness*, is actually God Himself, who will be known above all else by the name, ‘The forgiving God’. Crucify Him as a blasphemer they will do, but to Christ it was worth it even to die in order to do the “hardest thing” of forgiving sin.

The Lesson? Let us worship the Lord Jesus today in His identity as the “pardoning God” of Micah 7:18. Let us appreciate what it cost Jesus to be known as the One “with the power to forgive sins”. Let us sing about the amazing power of His rich and free forgiveness, using the words of hymn #82 in our red hymn books:

*Great God of wonders! All Thy ways
Are matchless, Godlike and divine;
But the fair glories of Thy grace
More Godlike and unrivaled shine,
More Godlike and unrivaled shine.*

(refrain) Who is a pardoning God like Thee?
Or who has grace so rich and free?
Or who has grace so rich and free?

*Crimes of such horror to forgive,
Such guilty, daring worms to spare;
This is Thy grand prerogative,
And none shall in the honor share,
And none shall in the honor share*

*Angels and men, resign your claim
To pity, mercy, love and grace:
These glories crown Jehovah’s Name
With an incomparable glaze
With an incomparable glaze.*

*In wonder lost, with trembling joy,
We take the pardon of our God:
Pardon for crimes of deepest dye,
A pardon bought with Jesus’ blood,
A pardon bought with Jesus’ blood.*

Weds/Thurs: read Matthew 9:1-8 and 1 John 5:18-21. Jesus' commitment to providing forgiveness for sins was no easily bestowed gift, given without cost to Himself. For example, His foes hated Him for this claim to forgive sins, even in what Matthew 9:1 calls, His "own town". The religious leaders there who heard Jesus' words of comforting forgiveness to the paralytic in Matthew 9:1-4, "thought evil in their hearts", accusing Jesus of blasphemy. What a terrible reaction to the good news of forgiveness! But this is the hostility of the world to the goodness and beneficence of God, which Bill Harrell well sums up in his comments on 1 John 5:19:

The true and vital knowledge we have in Christ is that our being of God has aroused against us the hatred of the devil. We know, therefore, that we are at war with him and his minions. In some fashion and to differing degrees, all of the unregenerate in the world arise with their father, the devil, against our Lord and against us (Ps. 2; Jn. 8:44). Yet our God has provided for us spiritual armor for our spiritual warfare (Eph. 6:10ff). When we put on that armor, we stand even in the evil day. The manifold provision of our God enables us to extinguish all of the flaming missiles of the evil one because that same armor was worn by Jesus and protected Him from becoming a casualty to temptation and sin (Isa. 59:15-21; Mt. 4:1-11).

Friday: read Matthew 8:19-9:8 & Matthew 4:12-17. We should marvel at how Jesus dwells among men, though their hearts, and their sin-tainted environment, are so unwelcoming to His holy, saving presence. For example, we saw as Mt. 8 closed, that the citizens on the East side of the Sea of Galilee wanted nothing to do with Jesus. They begged Him to leave their region.

In the same way, because of hostility towards John the Baptist, Jesus has to "withdraw", (after John's arrest in Matthew 4:12), from more populous areas into the less populated region of Galilee - where premature confrontation with the religious and civil authorities would not hinder His work. Yet, even in the comparative quiet of Galilee, enmity arises against Jesus' message of forgiveness. Though He makes His home in Capernaum, the truth is that, as the "Son of Man", Jesus really has no place to lay His head in this unwelcoming world, (Matt. 8:22).

Meditate and Pray: Let us thank God the Father that He protected His Son, despite the hatred of a world which lies under the power of the evil one (1 John 5:19). This was where Jesus found His greatest comfort: Though all men, including His disciples, would forsake Him in His hour of need, the Father would not forsake Him, (John 16:32). May this be our comfort too, as we sing the words of hymn # 84 in our Trinity hymnal:

*Under the care of my God, the Almighty,
Safe in the secret place of the Most High!
He is my Refuge, the Lord is my Fortress,
Him I am trusting when trouble is nigh.*

*(Refrain) Under his wings, under his wings,
Safe in the refuge hide thee;
Trusting his truth and faithfulness,
No evil can betide thee.*

*Be not afraid for the terror of midnight,
Nor for the arrow that hasteth to slay;
Fear not the pestilence walking in darkness,
Nor the destroyer that wasteth by day.*

*Love thou the Lord, surely he will deliver;
He will exalt thee and answer thy prayer;
He will be with thee to honor and give thee
Life without end, his salvation to share.*

Sat/Sun: read Luke 7:40-43 and Matthew 18:23-27. We turn to two other parables on forgiveness to further study God's rationale behind forgiveness. How does God count up sin, and how does He forgive it? Well, we could almost call Jesus' teaching on this subject in Matthew 18... 'forgiveness arithmetic'! Matthew 18: 24-28 expose the cruelty of one forgiven of 10,000 talents who refuses to forgive a paltry 100 denarii! In the same way, this same 'arithmetic' is on display in an earlier period in Jesus' ministry in Galilee, in a similar parable with the same basic point, in Luke 7:40-43:

"Who will love more", Jesus asks, "The sinner who is pardoned of a five hundred denarii debt, or the one who is pardoned fifty"?

Even the cold and cruel Pharisee Simon gives the right answer in Luke 7:43! *"I suppose the one who had the bigger debt cancelled"*.

Meditate and Pray: "Lord, please soften our hearts by giving us each day an ever-increasing ability to compute the size of your forgiveness of our many sins. Help us to see that the only way by which we will increase in our love towards you and each other is by spending the time necessary in the Word of God to properly understand our sinfulness. Thank you that the, "opening of your Word gives light". Let your light shine on our sins, in order to increase our joy in our forgiveness, and our ability to forgive others. Amen".