

ARE YOU SERIOUS

“Like Now!”

October 1, 2023

INTRO.: This past Friday we had the privilege of hosting Football Chapel, which is always an exciting opportunity. Pastor John asked what they did during the off-season to get ready for the season. Of course, one of the things they do is to get into the weight room. As you press those weights up on the bench, it’s not easy but that’s how you get stronger. You don’t get stronger by doing easy things; it’s that last repetition when you don’t think you can do it. Pastor John shared what the Apostle Paul said about the hard things in the Christian life. Paul’s goals in life can be seen in Philippians 3:10-11.

Philippians 3:10–11 I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like (present, passive, participle: to be conformed) him in his death, 11 and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.

Yet, he knew that he hadn’t accomplished all his goals, just as the football team hasn’t accomplished all their goals. Paul knew he had more to go through, more challenges, difficulties, pain, and even heartache to become more like Jesus. Let’s read together what he says in the next few verses.

Philippians 3:12-14 Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

What are some of the difficult things?

*Recognize I haven’t arrived (haven’t obtained: a work in progress)

*Press on (present tense) I don’t need to *press on* if it isn’t difficult

*Don’t consider I have arrived (not taken hold). Sometimes teams that have won a championship don’t repeat even though they have the same personnel. They become complacent.

*Forgetting what is behind (present tense participle)

*Straining toward what is ahead (present tense participle) You can almost feel the effort.

*Press on: (present tense) Same word used in verse 12!

Paul knew the Christian life wasn’t meant to be easy! This doesn’t mean we are saved by our own effort. Our salvation comes through the death and resurrection of Christ. Since Jesus went through all this, why should I think the Christian life will be easy? It’s impossible apart from God! It’s why we titled this series, **ARE YOU SERIOUS**, which is about forgiveness. Forgiving others is not easy!

The first week was this idea of **INCONCEIVABLE**, that apart from God forgiveness doesn’t make sense and we have no reason to forgive. Forgiveness is based in the character of God, for He is forgiving in His nature. This doesn’t mean that sin is overlooked or just brushed aside. The source of forgiveness is Jesus Christ, for in and of ourselves we are unable to forgive. Finally, Jesus Christ is the pattern for forgiveness. We need to get to know God better if we are going to understand forgiveness. Two weeks ago, we looked at **EXPLAIN**, that is, what forgiveness is. Forgiveness is God’s idea, Costly, therefore not easy, and Possible through Christ. We also looked at what forgiveness is not. It is not Pretending it didn’t happen, it is not sweeping it under the rug, it is not adding “But” (therefore excusing sin), and it is not continuing to allow abuse to continue. That brought us to this question last week, **REALLY?** answering the age-old question, **WHY**, that is, “Why should I forgive?” Again it is because of the forgiveness of God (forgave us ALL our sins), it affects my fellowship with God (if I don’t forgive what makes me think God will forgive me), and because forgiveness sets me free. That brings us to this morning with this thought, **LIKE NOW!** When does God want me to forgive others?

It reminds me going to class and you receive the syllabus giving you all the assignments. As you read through it you quickly notice you have to write several papers. What are some of the things you want to know? The topic, how long does this paper have to be, and when is it due? When I was doing my grad degree, I decided I might want to take one of those mini-courses. I was still working full-time had a family, but I figured I could do a short course. I went to the first class, looked at the syllabus, saw the reading, number of papers, when they were due, and never went back to another class. When does God want us to forgive? Pastor, *like now?* You must be kidding! Well, remember what I said earlier

about the Christian life and forgiveness? This is not easy, but let's look at some things we need to do. Now, remember, apart from God we have no hope of accomplishing these things.

Three things:

I NEED TO DECIDE

I NEED TO REALIZE

I NEED TO UNDERSTAND

I NEED TO DECIDE

What do I need to decide? You and I must decide that we need to forgive. We have gone over some of these verses but let me come back to them and have them serve as a reminder.

Colossians 3:13 Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.

"bear with:" present tense participle (to endure, to bear with, to put up with)

"forgive:" present tense participle (to show favor, to forgive)

"forgave:" past tense (to show favor, to forgive)

I'm not saying that you just say it and it happens. I am saying that this is a conscious decision of the will that must be empowered by the Holy Spirit. Look at what Jesus says in Matthew 5:23-24.

Matthew 5:23-24 "Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, **24** leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.

Somebody comes to present their gift at the altar. Some believe Jesus is making reference to people bringing their animals to the priest on the Day of Atonement. It definitely was a time of worship. So, if the person comes to worship the Lord and remembers his brother has something against him what does Jesus say must be done?

"leave:" this is a command!

"go:" this is a command!

"be reconciled:" this is a command

God wants things right between His children before we come to worship! It doesn't matter how wonderful our music is (and I love music), how beautiful the church is, how wonderful our prayers sound, how great the preaching is, if our relationships with our brothers and sisters in Christ are messed up.

Many people never even get to the place where they make that decision to forgive. Go to the Lord and admit your struggle. Ask Him to show you the need to forgive and give you the desire to forgive. He has promised, through the Holy Spirit, to give each of us the power to forgive. It starts with a decision and maybe that's where you're at today. This decision is the beginning of the journey. Not only do I need to decide but secondly:

I NEED TO REALIZE

I believe that there are at least three things that I need to realize:

**It May Take Some Time*

As we said a few weeks ago, forgiveness is not pretending it didn't happen or sweeping it under the rug. The pain and the hurt is real. The Apostle Paul realized the Christian life was a journey. The deeper the wound the more challenging is forgiveness.

Think back to what Paul said in Philippians 3, that he was continuing to press on, forgetting what was behind, straining toward what was ahead. Can I plead with you not to give up on this journey of forgiveness. As you forgive others God will use that in your life to minister to others.

**I May Need Some Help*

What do I mean by that? I don't mean I go tell it to a bunch of people. It means that I become willing to go to a Biblical counselor who will walk me through the unraveling of the hurt, anger, bitterness, and damage done to me. Sometimes we have given this idea that nobody should ever have to do that if they're a mature Christian.

Can I tell you that I've gone for counseling? I needed to lay it out to someone who was willing to ask me some difficult questions and work with me, pointing me to God and what His word has to say. I needed somebody who could point me to Scriptures such as found in 2 Peter 1:3-4.

2 Peter 1:3-4 His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. **4** Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.

One caveat: Not all counseling will point you to what God has to say in His Word so choose wisely.

**Some may not recognize their need for forgiveness, may be in denial, or may not even care*
Think about what Jesus said on the cross. Let's take a look at Luke 23.

Luke 23:32-43 Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with him to be executed. **33** When they came to the place called the Skull, there they crucified him, along with the criminals—one on his right, the other on his left. **34** Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." And they divided up his clothes by casting lots. **35** The people stood watching, and the rulers even sneered at him. They said, "He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Christ of God, the Chosen One." **36** The soldiers also came up and mocked him. They offered him wine vinegar **37** and said, "If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself." **38** There was a written notice above him, which read: THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS. **39** One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: "Aren't you the Christ? Save yourself and us!" **40** But the other criminal rebuked him. "Don't you fear God," he said, "since you are under the same sentence? **41** We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong." **42** Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." **43** Jesus answered him, "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise."

How could Jesus say that? As much hatred as they had for Jesus I don't think many of them thought about the significance of killing the Son of God. Only one person in this account was willing to recognize who Jesus is. Your forgiveness of others is a response of obedience to God.

I need to decide to forgive, I need to realize it may take time, I may need some help on the journey, and some people may not recognize their need for forgiveness, might be in denial, or might not even care. Thirdly:

I NEED TO UNDERSTAND

**This is a spiritual battle*

Come on, Pastor. Really? It is interesting to read through the description of people in the last days.

2 Timothy 3:2-5 People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, **3** without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, **4** treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God— **5** having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with them.

"unforgiving:" irreconcilable (they don't forgive and don't want to be forgiven: John MacArthur)

What is Satan's goal for the believer?

1 Peter 5:8-9 Be self-controlled (command) and alert (command). Your enemy the devil prowls around (present tense) like a roaring (present tense participle) lion looking (present tense participle) for someone to devour. **9** Resist (command) him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings.

Satan wants to destroy me and the church. Compare this to what Jesus says in John 13:34-35.

John 13:34-35 (NASB95) — "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. "By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

What does Jesus say is to be the characteristic of His followers?

"love one another:" present tense (agape love: empowered by God)

"must love one another:" same word as above

"you are:" present tense

"have:" present tense

What's the identifying features for an unbeliever to recognize a Christ-follower? It is our love for one another!

Can you think of a better way for Satan to destroy the church than through unforgiveness in the body of Christ resulting in anger, bitterness and gossip? The enemy wants to destroy the unity of the church to split it wide open. This battle is real!! Forgiveness is supernatural and only possible through Christ.

Ephesians 4:26–27 “In your anger do not sin”: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, **27** and do not give the devil a foothold.

“do not let the sun go down:” present tense command

“give:” present tense command

You and I are not fighting against each other. We're in an all-out war with the enemy, so we must fortify ourselves as we see in Ephesians 6:10-18, putting on the spiritual armor. I am absolutely convinced that Satan does not want these series of messages preached! Please keep praying for me.

Not only do I need to understand that this is a spiritual battle but I also need to understand:

**I will need forgiveness from God and others*

The Christian life is difficult and everyone of us will fail. We will hurt people and will need to ask for their forgiveness. I have heard people say, after getting hurt by someone in the church, “I will never serve there again,” or “I am going to go to another church.” We will hurt one another! We shouldn't try to do that but we will say things we shouldn't, we will do things we shouldn't do, we won't do things we should do.

Paul talks about this in Romans 7.

Romans 7:15 I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do.

Near the end of his life, he says:

1 Timothy 1:15 Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst.

We are a very imperfect body of believers who remain in desperate need of forgiveness!!

SO WHAT???

It was in a church in Munich that I saw him, a balding heavyset man in a gray overcoat, a brown felt hat clutched between his hands. People were filing out of the basement room where I had just spoken, moving along the rows of wooden chairs to the door at the rear.

It was 1947 and I had come from Holland to defeated Germany with the message that God forgives.

It was the truth they needed most to hear in that bitter, bombed-out land, and I gave them my favorite mental picture. Maybe because the sea is never far from a Hollander's mind, I liked to think that that's where forgiven sins were thrown.

“When we confess our sins,” I said, “God casts them into the deepest ocean, gone forever.”

The solemn faces stared back at me, not quite daring to believe. There were never questions after a talk in Germany in 1947. People stood up in silence, in silence collected their wraps, in silence left the room.

And that's when I saw him, working his way forward against the others. One moment I saw the overcoat and the brown hat; the next, a blue uniform and a visored cap with its skull and crossbones.

It came back with a rush: the huge room with its harsh overhead lights, the pathetic pile of dresses and shoes in the center of the floor, the shame of walking naked past this man. I could see my sister's frail form ahead of me, ribs sharp beneath the parchment skin. Betsie, how thin you were!

Betsie and I had been arrested for concealing Jews in our home during the Nazi occupation of Holland; this man had been a guard at Ravensbrück concentration camp where we were sent.

Now he was in front of me, hand thrust out: “A fine message, *fräulein!* How good it is to know that, as you say, all our sins are at the bottom of the sea!”

And I, who had spoken so glibly of forgiveness, fumbled in my pocketbook rather than take that hand. He would not remember me, of course—how could he remember one prisoner among those thousands of women?

But I remembered him and the leather crop swinging from his belt. It was the first time since my release that I had been face to face with one of my captors and my blood seemed to freeze.

“You mentioned Ravensbrück in your talk,” he was saying. “I was a guard in there.” No, he did not remember me.

“But since that time,” he went on, “I have become a Christian. I know that God has forgiven me for the cruel things I did there, but I would like to hear it from your lips as well. *Fräulein*”—again the hand came out—“will you forgive me?”

And I stood there—I whose sins had every day to be forgiven—and could not. Betsie had died in that place—could he erase her slow terrible death simply for the asking?

It could not have been many seconds that he stood there, hand held out, but to me it seemed hours as I wrestled with the most difficult thing I had ever had to do.

For I had to do it—I knew that. The message that God forgives has a prior condition: that we forgive those who have injured us. “If you do not forgive men their trespasses,” Jesus says, “neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses.”

I knew it not only as a commandment of God, but as a daily experience. Since the end of the war I had had a home in Holland for victims of Nazi brutality.

Those who were able to forgive their former enemies were able also to return to the outside world and rebuild their lives, no matter what the physical scars. Those who nursed their bitterness remained invalids. It was as simple and as horrible as that.

And still I stood there with the coldness clutching my heart. But forgiveness is not an emotion—I knew that too. Forgiveness is an act of the will, and the will can function regardless of the temperature of the heart.

“Jesus, help me!” I prayed silently. “I can lift my hand. I can do that much. You supply the feeling.”

And so woodenly, mechanically, I thrust my hand into the one stretched out to me. And as I did, an incredible thing took place. The current started in my shoulder, raced down my arm, sprang into our joined hands. And then this healing warmth seemed to flood my whole being, bringing tears to my eyes.

“I forgive you, brother!” I cried. “With all my heart!” For a long moment we grasped each other’s hands, the former guard and the former prisoner. I had never known God’s love so intensely as I did then.

And having thus learned to forgive in this hardest of situations, I never again had difficulty in forgiving: I wish I could say it! I wish I could say that merciful and charitable thoughts just naturally flowed from me from then on. But they didn’t.

If there’s one thing I’ve learned at 80 years of age, it’s that I can’t store up good feelings and behavior—but only draw them fresh from God each day.

*Have I come to know the forgiveness of God?

*Have I decided to forgive?

*Do I need to seek biblical counseling?

*How am I preparing for the spiritual battle?