

This message was prepared by Mr. John Brown for the People of Prayer of the Tontogany Presbyterian Church for Sunday, the fourteenth day of July in the year of our LORD two thousand and nineteen.

Matthew 6:1-15

"Beware of practicing your piety before others in order to be seen by them; for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven.

"So whenever you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be praised by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward.

But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your alms may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

"And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward.

But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

"When you are praying, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard because of their many words.

Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

"Pray then in this way: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.

Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

And do not bring us to the time of trial, but rescue us from the evil one.

For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

“How Can We Forgive All That’s Wrong?”

The scripture is from the Gospel of Matthew. Matthew, of course, was chosen by Jesus to be a Disciple. When Jesus approached him, he was known as Levi, a tax collector. As many tax collectors were in the day, commentators say he was a corrupt one. He was wealthy and not well liked by the populace or the other disciples. However, when asked, he did not hesitate to leave his wealth and comforts behind and follow Jesus because he loved him from the start. We aren’t sure if Levi changed his name or if Jesus gave him the name Matthew which means “Gift from God”. He was uniquely qualified as a disciple because of his accurate record keeping abilities and his keen observance of people and of course, his unfaltering faith in Jesus.

So in Matthew, Chapter 6, verses 1 through 15 is Jesus's instructions and charges to us:

Jesus warns us about showing our piety to be seen by all as a show. He tells us not to do our alms or deeds so as to brag before others. Do not be like the hypocrites in the streets who want you to say "What a great man". No, he tells us not to let your left hand know what your right hand is doing. Go to your room and shut the door and pray to God sincerely and openly. Say what your heart means and do not go on and on to justify your faith.

He says God already knows what you need before you ask, so pray as He says to honor God. Hallowed be your name. May your kingdom come soon to earth so that your will be done here as it is in heaven. Give us enough each day, not just bread and drink to sustain our mortal life, but gives us the sacramental bread and drink to live eternally. Help us avoid the temptations of the flesh and keep us from the evil one. Yes, that seems enough to ask for and thank our Father for giving us. Mission accomplished.

But wait a minute, there is a part we passed over. We unknowingly pass this part more often than we think. We ask God to forgive our debts, trespasses and inequities as we forgive our debtors. Those who trespass or sin against us. Are we asking God to only forgive us to the degree that we forgive others? Or do we ask God to forgive us wholly and unconditionally?

Or as told in Matthew chapter 18, are we like the story of the servant who owed his master 10,000 talents, which as research shows, was an enormous sum of millions of dollars. When the master demanded payment and the servant didn't have the means to repay him, the master ordered the servant and his family and all his belongings to be sold to repay the debt. The servant fell to the ground and pleaded with his master to spare his family. The master felt compassion and freed the servant of all his debt. After receiving this forgiveness, the servant went out and found a fellow servant who owed him 100 denarii, which was a small amount of about \$15, and demanded repayment. When the fellow servant pleaded for more time, the servant took him by the throat and threatened him and had him cast into prison until he could pay. Some in the crowd who witnessed this went to the master and told him of the incident. The master went to the servant and admonished him saying, I forgave you all your debt and you could not do the same for your fellow man. For that, I shall take back my forgiveness and send you to prison until you can repay me. Will God do the same to us? Jesus said God will forgive you if you forgive others. And He will not forgive you if you cannot forgive others.

I have heard many people say, myself included, I can forgive, but I cannot forget. Is this true forgiveness? I am under the belief that it is. Aren't we really saying, I can forgive you, but I can't trust you right now. If you verbally or physically abuse me, I can forgive the abuser but I won't put myself back into that arena because I can't trust it won't happen again. No, forgiveness is unconditional, but trust must be earned. It says in John chapter 2 verses 24 and 25:

“But Jesus on his part, was not entrusting Himself to them (them meaning the many who followed Him) for He knew all people, and needed no one to testify about anyone: for He Himself knew what was in everyone.” In other words, He knew people were weak and faulty at times.

What about those who break the civil law such as murder, assault or theft? Yes, we can also forgive them, but we may still be angry and resentful toward them. We must turn our anger and resentment of them over to God or to State, who as a minister of God exercises justice over the wrong doers as stated in the 13th chapter of Romans. God will extract his vengeance or the State will. Not us.

Unforgiveness puts a yoke on your shoulders and puts a burden of a joyless and sour life on you. We do not feel worthy. It eats us up from the inside out. We become angry, untrusting, critical of others. The bread of life tastes a little stale and the drink a little sour.

Or maybe we forgive only those things we feel deserve our forgiveness. If someone takes our parking spot or jumps in line ahead of us, we will be the bigger person and forgive them. What about the person who strikes us or a loved one! Or steals from us or talks badly to others about us? Do we forgive them or do we get even or just hate them? Is all our forgiveness based on the gravity of the sin? Unfortunately, I feel this is probably closer to you and I than we want to believe. Sometimes, our forgiveness is about how we look to others. But that’s not what forgiveness should look like. **IT IS ABOUT OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD!**

As a parent and a grandparent, forgiving is a foregone conclusion. Even though over the years, **GET READY FOR THIS:** Our children and grandchildren do some not so nice things in thought and deed. After some discussion as to why we are concerned with their actions or deeds, we forgive them with open arms. We can forgive them 7 times 70 and never lose an ounce of love for them. This is exactly what God does for us, His children. His love never wavers.

As we gain all our worldly knowledge and have been around the block a time or two, we know it can’t be that easy. It is a little more complicated than just love and forgiveness. After all, we have CNN and the National News media telling us about politics, the economy, climate change, illegal immigrants, the World Series, the Super Bowl, The Voice, The Bachelor and The Kardashians. So many important things to worry about. Boy, isn’t it tiring? God doesn’t complicate our lives, **WE DO!**

Remember God’s love for us is beyond anything we can comprehend or imagine. To follow Jesus, the son He sacrificed for us, is our only way to eternal life and peace. His way is forgiveness. Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.

Forgiveness at the highest level is the hardest thing we are asked to do! But to truly follow Jesus, we, you and I, must continue to spread out our love and forgiveness on a wide table. So, can we forgive all that’s wrong? (Pause) That is between God and you and God and me!