

Living in The Suburbs of Forgiveness

Text: II Samuel 13:37 - II Samuel 14:1, 14, 24, 28, 32

There is probably nothing that differentiates the Christian from the non-believer more than his or her attitude toward those who hurt them. Our Lord was so dogmatic about loving others that He said in John 13:35: "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another."

The oldest son of David, Amnon raped and disgraced his half-sister, Tamar. Justice was not served against this crime. Tamar was the full sibling of Absalom and he protectively took her into his custody. Two years later, in a vengeful act of careful planning, Absalom orchestrated the death of his brother Amnon. Absalom became a fugitive. He fled to Geshur where he stayed with his maternal grandfather, Talmai. After three years, David began to truly miss his son, Absalom. Joab, taking the initiative to get Absalom back into the kingdom, devised a rather ingenious plan. He gave a script to a gifted and wise woman in Tekoa. She told David the story of two sons fighting. One son killed the other and now their mother's relatives are demanding capital punishment for the remaining son and she lamented to David, "...so they shall quench my coal which is left, and shall not leave to my husband neither name nor remainder upon the earth" (II Samuel 14:7b). It did not take David long to realize that Joab was behind this theatrical performance. After the cover was blown, the woman of Tekoa made a statement that sets the story in the direction of this sermon's application. II Samuel 14:14: "For we must needs die, and are as water spilt on the ground, which cannot be gathered up again; neither doth God respect any person: yet doth he devise means, that his banished be not expelled from him."

David acquiesced and agreed to allow Absalom to come home. A telling phrase surfaces twice in this chapter, "...and saw not the king's face" (II Samuel 14:24b; II Samuel 14:14:28b). This action was at King David's behest. II Samuel 14:24: "And the king said, Let him turn to his own house, and let him not see my face. So Absalom returned to his own house, and saw not the king's face." In other words, David said, "Absalom, you may come home, but not to my home. You must stay in the suburbs." Absalom was forgiven to a degree, but not fully. Two years have passed, and it is now five full years that Absalom has not seen his father's face. He could stand it no longer. After Joab had repeatedly ignored Absalom's request to see his dad, Absalom had his servants set Joab's barley fields on fire. It did not take long for Joab to respond to this act of arson. Absalom's response is found in II Samuel 14:32: "And Absalom answered Joab, Behold, I sent unto thee, saying, Come hither, that I may send thee to the king, to say, Wherefore am I come from Geshur? it had been good for me to have been there still: now therefore let me see the king's face; and if there be any iniquity in me, let him kill me." In essence, Absalom had been consigned to living in the suburbs of forgiveness. And finally Absalom told Joab something to this effect, "Let me see my dad's face, even if he kills me, but I cannot accept living in the periphery of my father's affection."

Isaiah 38:17: "Behold, for peace I had great bitterness: but thou hast in love to my soul delivered it from the pit of corruption: for thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back." Micah 7:19: "He will turn again, he will have compassion upon us; he will subdue our iniquities; and thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea." I Peter 2:21 states: "For even hereunto

were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow His steps." To truly follow the footsteps of Jesus we must fulfil the commands of Ephesians 4:31, 32 and Colossians 3:12, 13.

This is a Bible story that we should all take to heart. We too, can be guilty of placing people in the suburbs of forgiveness. When do we do this?

1. WHEN OUR PRIDE WILL NOT PERMIT US TO UNCONDITIONALLY FORGIVE

Let us once again hear the opening words of Jesus upon the cross. Luke 23:34a: "Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do...." Also, let us hear the first Christian martyr. Acts 7:60: "And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep." Truly, Stephen's words were an echo of Calvary.

Some have said, "I'll forgive them when they ask for forgiveness." Who was asking for forgiveness at the foot of the cross or when Stephen was being stoned to death? Spiritual maturity means that you must take the initiative.

Jesus addressed this in Matthew 18:21-35. Think about how serious our Lord is about the issue. In the model prayer dealing with forgiveness is the only part of the prayer that has an addendum: Matthew 6:12, 14, 15.

2. WHEN WE WANT TO SEE PEOPLE SUFFER FOR THE WRONG THEY HAVE DONE

Matthew 5:38-48; Romans 12:17-21.

It is important to understand that vengeance belongs to God. Examine Genesis 50:15-21. Several years later when Joseph's brothers were still having a difficult time accepting full forgiveness, Joseph had to remind them, "And Joseph said unto them, Fear not: for am I in the place of God?" (Genesis 50:19). When a person takes vengeance into his own hands he or she takes the role of God.

3. WHEN WE SAY WE FORGIVE PEOPLE BUT WE WANT TO HAVE NOTHING TO DO WITH THEM

Examine Genesis 45:1-10: After Joseph revealed his identity to his brothers who had betrayed him many years earlier, he said to his brothers "...come near to me...." Joseph did not place his brothers in a half-way forgiven place. Joseph invited his brothers to come near to him. Our Lord forgives us completely and does not penalize us to the suburbs of Heaven. He says in Revelation 22:4a, "And they shall see his face...." I Corinthians 13:12: "For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known." We don't have to wait until Heaven to enjoy the absolute forgiveness with God: II Corinthians 3:18: "But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord."

Hebrews 8:12: "For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more." This doesn't mean that God develops amnesia; it means God has chosen not remember, to mull over, to bring it up again. The Lord even goes further and encourages us to come boldly into His presence. Hebrews 10:17-19: "And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more. Now where remission of these is, there is no more offering for sin. Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus."

CONCLUSION: Forgiveness sets two people free: the one forgiven and the one who forgives.

-Pastor Pope-