

Sermon 9-6-20 - Love Keeps No Record Of Wrongs
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We have been talking about what it means to love with the unconditional love of God and we have talked about some pretty hard things. But, without a doubt, the most difficult challenge most of us will ever face, as we try to love with God's kind of love, is when someone does us wrong, or worse yet hurts someone that we love. I don't know about you, but when that happens it is hard for me to let go of it. It is hard for me to forget. Yet, listen to the next six words Paul adds to the scripture passage we have been studying and learning:

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. – 1 Corinthians 13:4,5

Love keeps no record of wrong. That is a tough one.

This is our eighth week of looking at God's unconditional love. After this week we have only one week left in this series. So, let me remind you again, that this is not just a study about love. Love is a verb. It is something we do. Which is why, each week, we have laid out practical ways that we can live out unconditional love. This morning I want you to try to do more than just learn about love, I want you to listen prayerfully, asking how God would have you live the lesson out in your life.

This morning we are going to focus on six hard words: **“Love keeps no record of wrongs.”** Love forgives. Love is God's grace made practical in our lives. This is important because forgiveness, keeping no record of wrongs, is at the very center of our Christian faith. It is the love that sets us apart from the world and makes everything else work.

That said, keeping no record of wrong is hard. It is hard because it goes against the way our world operates, it goes against our natural instincts, and it makes us both more vulnerable to hurts and wounds and more vulnerable to those who would hurt and wound us.

I once asked some folks what was the most difficult forgiveness issue they ever had to deal with. They responded: “My mom suddenly leaving my dad, brother and me without any explanation as to why.” “The physical and emotional abuse my brothers and I endured from our parents when growing up.” “The betrayal of someone who was once my best friend.” “Being molested by my male cousin when I was 5 years old.” “Forgiving myself. I keep a list of my own wrongs and mistakes running through my head.” Wow, there is a lot of hurt out there.

I want you to ask yourself that same question. What is the most difficult forgiveness issue you have had to deal with? We all have our own answers to that question. There is a lot of deep, raw, hurt out there. We have all experienced things that are hard to forgive. Which is why I don't want to sound like I am in anyway making light of your hurts or that I think forgiveness is easy and something you can just do. I don't know your story. I do not know what you have been through and I do not know what you have to forgive.

That said, I do want to make you aware of the the incredible opportunity that forgiveness brings. At its heart forgiveness is a deep and practical recognition of the Gospel truth that grace is all around us and that not only is it abundant, it is both free and freeing. Forgiveness (not keeping a record of wrongs) is not a burden that God has placed on us. It is really a gift, an opportunity, that God offers to us.

I know that that sounds too good to be true but stick with me and see if it isn't true.

I want to begin by pointing out that there are a lot of misconceptions and misunderstandings about what forgiveness is. The first is that forgiveness is not conditional. True forgiveness is not based on somebody else's response. It's not earned, deserved, bargained or paid for. It's not based on the promise that they'll never do it again. If you say to someone, "I'll forgive you if..." that's not forgiveness, because forgiveness is unconditional.

Nor is forgiveness minimizing. It is not saying, "Don't worry about it. It's not big deal. It's okay." That is not forgiveness, because many times what they did was not okay. We don't have to pretend that things that hurt us were no big deal. Forgiveness is not minimizing the offense.

Nor does forgiveness mean that we simply restore the relationship without change. Before a relationship can, or should, be restored there often must be genuine repentance (change) and time to rebuild trust. Even then it may never be what is once was.

Nor is forgiveness about denying justice. Forgiveness is not about waving the white flag of surrender and giving up on justice. People should be allowed to experience the natural consequences of their behavior. If we don't experience consequences, we are unlikely to learn.

Which means that forgiveness is not weakness. Sometimes it may feel that way, but the truth is that forgiveness is not weakness. Forgiveness takes strength. Keeping a record of wrongs is easy, but letting those wrongs go requires strength.

Think about it. Let me ask you, when was Christ most powerful? I believe it was on the cross. More than that it was when dying, in agony, that rather than calling down angels to revenge himself he called out, "Father, forgive them..." That is real strength.

Despite what you may have been told, forgiveness is not conditional, minimizing, protecting, forgetting, risking or weakness.

In Matthew 18, Jesus tells a parable that speaks powerfully to this concept of grace and forgiveness. It is known as the parable of the unforgiving servant. Peter came to Jesus with a question. It was a natural question. Jesus had just given some pretty hard teaching about hurt, confrontation and reconciliation. It was hard. It may have seemed almost impossible. Trying to place boundaries around what he was being asked to do Peter asked:

Lord, how many times should I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times? – Matthew 18:21.

Understand, Peter was probably expecting Jesus to commend him for being so gracious. After all, Peter was going way beyond any reasonable expectations. The Rabbis taught you had to forgive a man three times and then you could seek revenge.

Peter doubled what he had been taught and generously added one more for good measure. Conveniently he came up with seven, the perfect number. To be fair forgiving a person seven times is pretty commendable. Most of us have a hard time forgiving somebody once. By human standards what Peter offered was pretty impressive. Moreover it was in line with what Jesus had taught them. I was like going the 2nd mile, turning the other cheek.

That said, what Peter was really looking for was a legal limit, a number, after which he could finally say, 'Okay, that's it. No more Mr. Nice Guy.' Nor was Peter alone. My guess is that the other disciples wanted the same thing. My guess is that most of us would like an answer to Peter's question. We want to know how far is too far? How much is enough? When can we let go of grace and seek revenge.

If that is what you are seeking I fear you won't much like Jesus' answer. For Jesus told Peter, **"I tell you, not seven times, but seventy times seven."** - **Matthew 18:22**

Of course Jesus wasn't being literal. He didn't mean that Peter should keep a record of wrongs, counting until he reached 490 times so that he could then do something. Jesus was saying, "Peter, you've got it all wrong. You shouldn't count the number of times you forgive someone. Because forgiveness is unlimited."

That sounds crazy, unrealistic, impossible, unfair. But remember, as followers of Jesus, we live in a different kingdom where grace reigns and where we are supernaturally equipped to live radically different lives. It is a kingdom based not on calculating hurts and getting revenge but on grace and love.

Which is why Jesus said, "Forgive seventy times seven." We hear that and we might even acknowledge that it's true; but somehow it doesn't feel right. If you're the one who's been hurt, if you're the one who's been abandoned, betrayed, mistreated or abused, then it just doesn't feel right. We need something more than just a lawful statement that we should forgive. We need to know why we should forgive. Peter did, too.

So Jesus told a parable to help Peter, and us, get our arms around this truth that grace and forgiveness benefit us more than the one we are asked to forgive.

Jesus began, "Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him. Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt."

This was not an unusual thing in Jesus' time. Imprisonment for debt was common. And this man owed a lot. The debtor owed 10,000 talents. A talent was the largest unit of accounting in the Greek currency. It was worth 10,000 denarius. A denarius was equal to one day's wage. So multiply your daily wage by 10,000, and you discover the value of a talent. Now multiply that by 10,000 and you have what the servant owed.

Jesus' point was that this guy owed a massive debt. One that he would never be able to pay. If you think about it it sounds a lot like us. Think of all God has done for us. Think of all we owe God for every time we sin, every time we fall short of loving and being who we were created to be. Matthew 18 is a reminder that we all owe a huge debt to God, a debt that, like the servant, we can never repay.

Which is when Jesus' story takes a twist. The servant was desperate. He could not repay what he owed, He and his family were headed to prison. So he decided to throw himself on the mercy of his master. He fell to his knees and begged, "Be patient with me, and I will pay back everything."

Understand that even if he worked 365 days a year for the rest of his life he could not possibly repay what he owed. The master knew that his servant could not possibly repay him. Jesus' listeners knew that, too. They also knew how the world worked. If you owe, you pay. You either pay the debt or go to prison, but one way or another you pay. They no doubt expected an axe to fall, for justice to happen, but it never did.

Jesus said that the master was moved by compassion. He looked at this frightened, desperate man, and was moved with pity. Instead of throwing the man and his family into debtor's prison, he simply forgave the debt and let him go.

That said, I want to point out that we are talking about a mountain of debt. That much debt does not just disappear. Somebody had to pay. Somebody had to take a loss. In this story it was the master. The master paid the servant's debt for him. This was unheard of. This was a whole new economy, an economy of grace.

It reminds me of **Colossians 2:13,14: When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross.**

Imagine the scene when the servant in Matthew 18 went home to his wife. He joyously shared that they were not going to lose their home. They wouldn't have to spend their lives in prison. They'd been given their lives back, and they didn't even have to repay the debt, not any of it. And it's all because the master chose an economy of grace and forgiveness rather than requiring payment of all that was owed. It is all because the master took the debt upon himself. Beautiful story. At least up to this point...

However, the story was not finished. Jesus continued: "But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred silver coins." This time the tables are reversed. The servant is the one who is owed money.

What did he do? He grabbed the other servant and began to choke him. "Pay back what you owe me!" he demanded. However, his fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, "Be patient with me, and I will pay it back."

Note, that he was making exactly the same request that the servant had made only moments before to the master. In essence, the second servant was asking the first servant to extend to him the same grace and forgiveness that he had just received (only to a lesser degree).

Now I want you to pretend like you had not heard this story before. Pretend you are watching a Hallmark movie. What would happen next? Well, of course the servant would forgive him. After all, he had just been forgiven far far more than what this man owed him. Of course he would extend the same grace to the man who owed him far less. Right? Wrong!

Instead, he had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt.

Ahh, but the story is not done. When the other servants saw what had happened, they were outraged and went and told their master everything that had happened. Then the master called the servant in. "You wicked servant," he said, "I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?" Then, in anger, his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed.

To emphasize his point, and make sure no one missed, it Jesus then said, "**This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart.**" - **Matthew 18:35**

I realize that some of you may want to push back on that, saying, "Pastor are you telling me that if I don't forgive the person who hurt me, who abused me, who betrayed me, who cheated me, who abandoned me, who lied about me, who owes me so much, that God won't forgive me either?"

No, I'm not saying that. Jesus is. Jesus is saying that it is not okay to receive God's grace and not share grace with others. Jesus is saying, Think of all I have forgiven you. Think of the debt I paid for you.

Remember, I went to the cross for you. Are you really saying that the person you are holding a grudge against owes you more than that?"

There you have Jesus' answer to Peter's question. Jesus answered, "Peter, in case you weren't sure, let me remind you that what you've been forgiven is much greater than anything you'll ever have to forgive." This is not to make light of what some of you have to forgive. It is simply an acknowledgement that no matter how much we have to forgive, God, who champions an economy of grace, has forgiven us much more. It can't be any clearer than that.

It is a matter of what economy we choose to live in. Do we want to live in an eye for an eye economy where people are expected to pay what they owe and grace is never given? Where we are expected to pay what we owe? Or do we want to live in an economy of grace where debts that can never be repaid are forgiven out of love? It is a lot like the line we pray in the Lord's prayer, "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us."

There you have it, the key to forgiveness. The key to forgiving is to stop focusing on the hurts that have been done to us and instead to focus on all that Jesus has done for us. It is really that simple. Don't get me wrong. I'm not saying that's easy. It is hard, simple but hard.

However both Paul and Jesus are clear. Love keeps no record of wrong. Love forgives. So, when the bitterness starts to grow, when the rage starts to set in, when we find ourselves late at night playing and replaying their wrongs, or our own wrongs for that matter, we have to stop thinking about what's been done to us and we need to replace it with thoughts of what Jesus has done for us. Because when we remember what has been done for us by Christ, God will give us the grace to forgive what has been done to us. Like Paul says, "love keeps no record of wrongs." Simple and to the point.

Let's pray.