

The Little Big Things #4
The Table of 490
June 23, 2024

Today I want to share with you a little big thing. I want to look again at a little thing that is very big.

In Luke 15 Jesus tells the parable of the prodigal son. But within that portrait is a clear picture of the Father...it's the ending of that story that reveals a father's heart...

Down from the house the father runs...and up a narrow path the son has struggled.

The two meet at the gate.

You can't see the face of the son; it's buried in the chest of his father. What we can see mud and filth on his clothes, and an empty purse on the ground. When the boy left home he was full of pride...now both the purse and the pride are depleted. In his father's arms he offers all that he has left...

"Father, I have sinned against God and done wrong to you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son." Luke 15:21

Show the DVD: The Prodigal

He feels unworthy of his birthright. Demote me. Punish me.

The boy is content to a hired hand...

There is only one problem...though the boy is willing to stop being a son, the father is not willing to stop being a father.

Though we can't see the boy's face in this portrait, we see the father's clearly. Look at the tears glistening on the leathered cheeks, the smile shining through the silver beard. One arm holds the boy up so he won't fall, the other holds him close so he won't doubt...

Hurry...he shouts. "Bring the best robe and put it on him, put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. And get the fatted calf so we can have a feast and celebrate. My son was dead, but now he is alive again...he was lost but now he is found.

Luke 15:22-24

The boy thought that he'd lost his place in the home. The boy assumed that he had forfeited his privilege to sonship. Jesus tells us with gladness that the father doesn't give up that easily. In the father's mind a son is still a son. The child may have been out of the house, but he was never out of his father's heart.

The debt that is owed by the son, the debt of disrespect, the debt of shame, the debt that causes the boy to be willing to be a slave...all of that debt is wiped away in a moment...by something the father does while he still sees his son far off...he forgives. He forgives the debt owed.

Forgive: transitive verb: to cease to feel resentment against (an offender): to give up resentment: to grant relief from payment of; forgive a debt

In Matthew 18, Peter and Jesus have a little big conversation about forgiveness.

Matthew 18: 21-35

21: Then Peter came to Him and said, "Lord, how many times could my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?"

22: I tell you, not as many as seven, Jesus said to him, "but 70 times 7."

Before we dive into Matthew, I want to take a little side road and define forgiveness and hatred.

As I grow older in the ministry, I am beginning to notice that nearly all of the personal problems that drive people to seek counsel, are related in some way to the issue of forgiveness.

I am finding that as we approached becoming intimate with God that many of God's people are burdened and bound with questions and doubts that not only haunt them when they approach God in prayer, and worship but these shadowy thoughts steal away the joy of their salvation.

Thoughts like this:

"Forgive me? How could God forgive me? You don't know what I've done"

"How could you have done such a terrible thing? You will never be able to forgive yourself."

Then there is the flip side of the coin:

"Forgive! You don't understand. After what he has done to me? I will never forgive.

Never!

The tragedy of all of this is that because we do not grasp the immensity of God's forgiveness, we, the ones who have been set free, actually find ourselves bound. And this is a bondage that stifles our ability to love and accept others and ourselves. It is a bondage that will cripple marriages and friendships alike. It is also a bondage that can be passed on from generation to generation.

This bondage will choke out the abundant life Christ promised to those who would believe. For those of you who want a deeper life, a deeper walk in the Spirit, for those of you who want more of God, there is no deeper well than that of forgiveness.

What is Forgiveness:

If you haven't noticed vengeance is popular today; forgiveness is not. Our world is literally becoming a very unforgiving place.

Road-rage, disgruntled employee rampages, drive by shootings and religious hatred and other crimes of vengeance are the hallmarks of this generation.

Forgiveness is **"The act of setting someone free from an obligation to you that is a result of a wrong done against you"**. It also encompasses releasing your right to revenge.

For example, a debt is forgiven when you free your debtor of his obligation to pay back what he owes you.

Biblical forgiveness then involves at least three elements:

First: there is an injury.

Second: there is a debt resulting from that injury

Third: there is a cancellation of the debt.

Everyone gets wounded; hence everyone must decide: how many payments will I demand? We may not require that the offender write checks, but we have other ways of settling the score.

Silence is a popular technique. (Ignore them when they speak.) *Distance* is equally effective. (When they come your way, walk the other.) *Nagging* is a third tool for revenge. ("Oh, I see you still have fingers on your hand. Funny you never use them to dial my number." "Oh, Joe, nice of you to drop in on us *unpromoted* peons.")

Amazing how creative we can be at getting even. If I can spoil one evening, spoil one day, foil one Friday, then justice is served and I'm content.

For now. Until I think of you again. Until I see you again. Until something happens that brings to mind the deed you did, then I'll demand another check. I'm not about to let you heal before I do. As long as I suffer, you suffer. As long as I hurt, you hurt. You cut me, and I'm going to make you feel bad as long as I bleed, even if I have to reopen the wound myself.

How will the score be settled? How do I break the cycle? How many payments do I demand?

Remember Peter's question? **"Lord, how many times could my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?"**

What Peter is asking is this: Does forgiveness have a limit? I know that a person who commits an offense and repents should be forgiven and restored a few times, but what if he continually falls into sin, over and over again. How often must I forgive them?

Peter then suggests what seems to be a very generous offer. The Talmud mandated that a person be forgiven only three times.

Here's Peter's thinking. I will go above and beyond what the Talmud says and then impress the Rabbi. I'll double the times and add one more for good measure. Here's Jesus answer.

22: I tell you, not as many as seven, Jesus said to him, "but 70 times 7." 490
Here's the little big thing that I want you to see.

The number 490 is a specific number in scripture. Every Hebrew word has a numerical value

because Hebrew is alphanumeric, correspond numbers with letters.

490 is the numerical value for the word "Tom meme". This word means "to be complete or to be perfect".

Question: so what was Jesus communicating to Peter by saying 490?

Here's the Jewish thought. Without forgiving you can never be perfected or complete.

So I want you to see how God tells the story of forgiveness in the Scriptures. The Hebrew word for "nativity" is "mola dottie". It literally means "to be born".

Here's something weird, the name of the place that Jesus was born was "Beit lehem"

Bethlehem. 490 is also the numerical value of the word "Beit lehem" or Bethlehem.

So, the place where Messiah was born in Bethlehem his Nativity both have the numeric value of 490. So what does this have to do with forgiveness?

Bethlehem translated into English means "house of bread". God connects forgiveness and bread together. In the Jewish thought, forgiveness and bread go hand-in-hand.

When Jesus taught the disciples how to pray he said forgive us of our transgressions as we forgive others and give us this day our daily bread.

In the disciples Prayer forgiveness and bread are tied together.

Today we are going to celebrate the forgiveness that Messiah bought for us as we take the bread and the wine.

Jesus said "this is my body that was broken for you"

The bread being broken is significant it signifies the breaking of the Messiah's body his death for our forgiveness.

To forgive is probably one of the hardest acts that we will ever do as servants. Even now I know many of you have suffered from what someone has done to you. Perhaps it was a close friends betrayal, or a trusted leader's lies, or a spouse's abandonment. I do not want to trivialize your pain by patting you on the arm and giving you some preachy platitudes that are supposed to fix everything.

I cannot tell you to forgive. I have no right to demand such a thing. I have not experienced any of your suffering. And you have not experienced mine.

Only one person has. And He alone has the right to come knocking at your door and mine, asking you and me to forgive. That person is Jesus.

He knows the pain of rejection, the violence of abuse, the unfairness of being misunderstood and maligned. Greatest of all He knows the unfairness of having to suffer

and die for sins He did not commit. Jesus already knows the cost of Grace. He already knows the price of forgiveness...and the One who came from the "House of Bread", willingly becomes broken so that we might know the life found in forgiveness.

Selah.