

Limitless Forgiveness

Genesis 50:15-21

Introduction

In our Gospel lesson, Peter asks Jesus, *“Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?”* Seven’s a good number; it’s the number of completion. But Jesus replies, *“I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times.”* Some translations render that “seventy times seven.” Either way you look at it, it’s not a numerical answer. Jesus doesn’t want Peter to count to seventy-seven times, let alone 490! He’s expanded that number of completion to tell Peter that forgiveness isn’t ever complete—it’s limitless. I’m sure Peter was not overjoyed when he heard this. Forgiveness is possibly the hardest lesson for us to learn as we follow Jesus.

Forgiveness Is Tough

The problem is that our carnal nature is focused on itself and it wants to defend itself. When it is wronged, it demands payback. This is what Jesus illustrates in his parable of the unforgiving servant. When his fellow servants saw what he had done, they were *greatly distressed*. Yet, I wonder how many of them, if they were in his shoes, would act the same way, giving into the fallen nature. It’s easy to look down on someone else’s sin and gloss over our own. So, let’s not be too quick to judge. And let’s not be too quick to judge Peter, either. After all, some people are hard to forgive once. So, we turn to the story of Joseph and his brothers in our Old Testament reading.

Joseph and Forgiveness

When Joseph had forgiven them before, they thought he had done it for the sake of their father. Now, Jacob was dead. The brothers decided to concoct a plan to ensure their forgiveness and their lives. They lied. They told Joseph that their father had commanded Joseph before he died to forgive them. But Joseph’s forgiveness was not coerced; it was genuine. He humbly and lovingly comforted them and told them he’d even take care of their children. But how could he be so forgiving after all they had done to him? He put it all into perspective, by seeing it from God’s point of view. *As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today (Genesis 50:20).*

Seeing the Big Picture

It was obvious in Joseph’s case that this was all part of God’s plan. No one else knew to prepare for the famine. People would have squandered the harvest during the seven years of plenty and starved during the famine. Not only were the people of Egypt and the surrounding area saved, the family that would produce the Messiah was saved. But there’s more to it than just God’s master plan.

God Is in Control

The story of Joseph tells us that God is in control. Even when things aren’t going our way and it seems like people are out to get us, God is still in control. You’ve seen the hat I have that says, “God is good all the time.” Those aren’t just words. God is good all the time. And all the time, God is good. Paul says in **Romans 8**: *And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those*

who are called according to his purpose. (Romans 8:28). Notice, he doesn't say that all things **are** good, but that God works everything together **for** good. God has a plan for each of our lives. We don't know what it is, but He will work it out.

Putting It into Perspective

God is making a needlepoint out of our lives. From His point of view, it **is** beautiful. The problem is that we see it only from the underside. When it comes down to it, this life we live on this earth doesn't really matter. People think I'm not taking it seriously when I say that. But nothing could be further from the truth. The only way to take this life seriously is to see it in perspective of the next. This life is temporal; the next life is eternal. This life is transient; the next life is permanent. The only way this life matters is that the way we live this life determines how we'll spend the next.

Forgiven and Forgiving

Don't get me wrong. We're not forgiven because we forgive. We are to be forgiving because we are forgiven. The forgiving attitude we have is a sign of the forgiveness we have received from God. Saving faith changes the life. About the **LORD'S PRAYER**, the FIFTH PETITION, Martin Luther says in his **Large Catechism**, that it is a sign, like the Sacraments: *this sign can serve to confirm our consciences and cause them to rejoice. It is especially given for this purpose, so that we may use and practice forgiveness every hour, as a thing that we have with us at all times.* When we hear the Word and receive the Sacrament, we are reminded of God's **LIMITLESS FORGIVENESS** toward us and that He is in control. This changes our perspective on how others treat us and what happens in this life. Then we are empowered by the Holy Spirit to be able to forgive others.

*May the peace of God,
Which passes all understanding,
Keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.*
