

10-29-23

Sermon: So You Just Let Him Get Away with It?

Scripture: Romans 12:9-21, CTW: Psalm 142

Hymns: 73, 74, 75

Theme: When we have been wronged, we all are faced with a choice. We can demand justice, holding onto our blame and demanding punishment and restitution from the guilty party. Jesus says we need to choose mercy and the path to forgiveness.

In 1994, one of the worst atrocities in history took place in the tiny African nation of Rwanda. In a span of one hundred days, more than 800,000 men, women, and children were brutally killed by their own neighbors. It was an unspeakably brutal genocide between people whose heritage was different tribes—but people who knew and lived among each other. The losses were devastating. Hatred flowed long after the bloodbath.

I. What is the Price of Forgiveness?

What happens after such widespread, rampant evil? Is there any way to heal and rebuild?

A. Is forgiveness an option? Apparently, it is.

Rwandans have faced a long, hard road over the past twenty-nine years. There has been a long process to restore justice and bring accountability. But what has been remarkable through that process has been Rwandans' ability and willingness to reach a place of forgiveness and reconciliation.

It's impossible to capture all the complexities of such a process in a short example but let me read you this quote from a Rwandan survivor named Evasta. In the genocide, she was

attacked by men trying to kill her and her child. They burned her house, but she managed to escape.

Years later, her attacker, a man named Godfried, was released from prison and returned to their village. Finally, he came to Evasta to ask for her forgiveness. This was her response as told to *The New York Times*: "I used to hate him. When he came to my house and knelt down before me and asked for forgiveness, I was moved by his sincerity. Now, if I cry for help, he comes to **rescue me**. When I face any issue, I call him."¹

Wow. Can you imagine? Is deep and real forgiveness possible? Yes.

Today, we are confronting the difficult question lifted to God by many people when they have been wronged by another person. "So you just let him get away with it?" Another way we might ask it is, "God, you want me to forgive *who*? Of *that*?" How would you respond?

II. We Need to Understand How God Calls Us to the Healing Trail.

A. This is the toughest challenge: Forgiveness. Jesus said, "Love your enemies" (**Matthew 5:44**). But in our humanness, we want the people who have hurt us to hurt for what they did. We want God to hurt them. But it doesn't work that way.

We want justice. We want accountability. And there's nothing wrong with that. Nobody gets away with anything. Everything bears consequences.

We see echoes of Scripture in Paul's statement to the Galatians: "Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows" (**Galatians 6:7**).

But we also must look more closely. Whose responsibility is justice? Paul tells us in Romans: “that role belongs to God”:

“Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: “It is mine to avenge; I will repay,” says the Lord. On the contrary:

“If your enemy is hungry, feed him;
if he is thirsty, give him something to drink.
In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head. Do not be overcome by evil but overcome evil with good.” **(Romans 12:19–21)**.

B. When we have been wronged, we all are faced with a choice. We can demand justice, holding onto our blame and demanding punishment and restitution from the guilty party. Or we can choose mercy and the path to forgiveness. **The reality is that what we choose will come back to us.**

Here’s how Jesus described it: “Forgive, and you will be forgiven. Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you” **(Luke 6:37–38)**.

How does that work? It’s a form of doing unto others what we would have them do unto us. **It’s a matter of reaping what we sow.**

C. It also calls us to take an honest look at the bigger picture. In our narrow focus, we like to think of ourselves as innocent, blameless. How could we be anything other than the victim of unfair treatment? None of us wants to see our own guilt, but in eternal reality, we are all guilty and we all deserve separation from God. **Romans 3:23** says, “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”

Even when we acknowledge our sinful nature, problems arise because we want mercy for ourselves—but not for the other guy who has done us wrong. If they’ve hurt us bad enough, we

want them to suffer for what they've done—but we don't want to suffer for **what we have done!**

D. Fortunately, God has a bigger view. God is righteous, and He judges fairly. He can do it no other way. He doesn't play favorites, and He doesn't overlook sin and evil. Everything has consequences, and no one gets away with anything. But God **loves** because it's His nature.

That means He loves each and every one of us equally, and as **2 Peter 3:9** says, He wants all of us to be restored to Himself: "The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead, he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance."

Jesus told a parable about a man who owed ten thousand bags of gold to a king. The parable was prompted by this question from Peter: "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?" Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy times seven" (**Matthew 18:21–22**).

That probably wasn't the answer Peter was looking for. He was thinking seven times sounded like a lot to let a person off the hook. But Jesus went on to illustrate.

"This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart," Jesus finished (verse 35).

How can we not extend mercy and forgiveness to others when we have received so much mercy and forgiveness from God?

III. God Simply Says "Trust Me!"

A. But forgiveness is hard. There's no denying that it can be a difficult step to take, whether the offense is minor or the crime is grievous. And the worse the offense, the harder it gets to forgive. As typical humans, we want to hold onto the power to

judge; we want to condemn. But Jesus said that's not a role we hold or a power we can possess.

The problem with unforgiveness is that it's like us drinking poison, hoping that it hurts the other guy. We are the ones who suffer from it. The longer we hold onto our blame and hate, it grows like cancer inside us, darkening and spreading and consuming us from the inside out.

So how do we do it? How do we forgive?

B. Isn't that what it all comes down to for us?

The answer lies within our view of and experience with God. If we have tasted and seen that the Lord is good (**Psalm 34:8**), we can fall back on our experience to stick with His individual plan for each of us.

If we have encountered the heart of the Father, we can draw from the fullness He has poured into our hearts.

IV. Learn that God is with You, Always

A. Our God is a God of presence. Not just omnipresent in a vague sort of way. He is *with us*—He is real, personal, and close. He cares about the moments of our lives. Jesus said He knows the number of hairs on our heads (**Luke 12:7**). **Psalm 139** paints a beautiful picture of God's intimate knowledge of us from before birth:

Where can I go from your Spirit?

Where can I flee from your presence?

If I go up to the heavens, you are there;

if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.

If I rise on the wings of the dawn,

if I settle on the far side of the sea,

even there your hand will guide me,

your right hand will hold me fast. (**verses 7–10**)

It's no coincidence that Jesus is called Immanuel, "God with us." This name was prophesied about Him centuries before He came to earth. Its importance can't be understated. When the angel appeared to Joseph to let him know about the extraordinary plan unfolding around him, the angel used the name Immanuel (God with us).

B. Jesus embodies the miracle of God with us. He was God come to earth to take on human form and make a way for us to be truly reunited with our Heavenly Father. His presence remains with us because of the Holy Spirit.

While He was physically here on earth, He promised In **John 14** "And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever—the Spirit of truth.

We don't have to forgive alone. We don't have to do life alone. God is still here—with us....and He will help us!

Amen? Let Us Pray!