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(P. outline)

"FORGIVE US OUR DEBTS"

Matt. 6:12

Has anyone more right to speak about forgiveness than Jesus. There is nothing that is harder for a new driver to do, than to park both ends of a car.

Back of what Jesus said, is what he did. As we think today about an eraser, we think about something that is imperfect. Man can make a mistake and still produce a perfect result. Here is a blackboard. A professor can dispose of an error in less time than it took to make it. Here is a secretary or a clerk, they can do away with the evidence of a blunder, in a matter of moments with an eraser. Tape recorders are equipped with erasers - and many unfortunate word or noise can be corrected. It costs so little, but it helps so much to be able to correct something.

But mistakes are easier to erase on a blackboard than they are in a person's life. It is simple to take and erase a pencil mark or an ink blot - than it is to erase the error in moral choice. A faulty sentence in a magnetic tape is erased without any trace. But a sentence spoken in haste or in hate against a brother - may leave a scar too deep for even time to remove. Many a marriage or a business would welcome an eraser for errors in judgement.

I believe God has provided for man - allowing for a margin of error. He has given man a Christian eraser. Some of the mightiest of the mighty have used it. Joseph, Peter, Paul - to find that it was available for their use. Of course we do not call it an eraser - but we call it forgiveness and it is available only from God. And I might add, available only to the person who wants to ask for it. We are very fortunate today that we have such a help. Sometimes it may seem that the standards of forgiveness which Jesus ask - others follow - are mighty high. Let us look at this part of the prayer today and I want to say three things about it.

First, man's gigantic plea. Second, man's gruesome plague. Third, man's grandest

possibility.

I. MAN'S ^{Gigantic} MOST PLEA

Forgive us is the plea. A man needs daily bread - he has been instructed to pray for daily bread. Now he is instructed to pray for daily forgiveness. There is a daily plea that is so clear.

In New York State there is a cemetery which has one mysterious grave marker. There is no name on it, no date - there is but one word . . . forgiven. There is no other mark. Just a word. It gives us something to consider. What was behind that one word. Perhaps there was a son that brought shame and disgrace upon his family. It could have been a daughter who bore the seed of a moment's passion in her body that cost her her virtue. It could have been a husband because of his undisciplined way of life. He brought heartache and sorrow to his wife. And he had not taken marriage for better or for worse.

Now the secret is sealed with that stone - there is only the word "forgiven". But that word has in it a miracle - it really has a touch of Heaven. Forgive us our debts.

Thus we are faced with the most (fundamental problem) in life - the problem of sin and the great plea for forgiveness.

Now this is a Scriptural part of this prayer that (we cannot) do God's work without the supply of our physical needs - give us our daily bread. And it is sure that we cannot do God's work unless inwardly we are in right relationship with him. Hence, we pray - forgive us of our daily sins. Daily (pardon) is necessary.

When you think of our lives honestly, the great majority of us will have to admit that we do not pray for daily pardon as often as we do for daily bread.

What is the reason? We have not the sense of sin within us. (Johnathan Edwards) could preach a terrible sermon. "Sinners in the hand of an angry God." And he caused his congregation to weep and to agonize, and to come to repentance. Because in that day, men and women had a far greater recognition of their sin than we do today.

The sense of sin is not strong in our generation. We may not break into tears over any social or natural symptoms.

There was a young Doctor interning in New York City - in effect, he said, that the church meant a great deal. But he always found himself in rebellion. The fact is, that ministers in the sermons talked about sinners who needed forgiveness. Honestly, he wrote, (I do not think of myself as a sinner) I work as hard as I can all day. And sometimes into the night into the hospital - trying to help suffering people. I try to make life count in service. And when I come to church, I resent being called a sinner. Now there are (plenty of people) in this generation that will find themselves in accord with that young Doctor. They have not the sense of a sinner.

(Forgiveness) what a word it is. What a mortal thing it is to offer to those who have wronged us. What a wonderful word to hear from those whom we have wronged. This is the message of the Christian Gospel. And sin and guilt feelings are found in every life. And the heart cries out for relief. This is a gigantic plea. (Where) shall forgiveness be found.

(Nature) could not do it. It will pervert. The (laws) of the universe cannot do it. And even the (conscience) an accusing conscience cannot bring about forgiveness.

Many times we cannot even forgive ourselves and forget. Judas went out and hanged himself. And that's what Tennyson wrote in one of his plays - shall I kill myself - what help is that. I cannot kill my sin. If soul be soul - nor can I kill my shame. No, nor by living can I live it down. The weeks will grow into months. The months will add and make years. The years will roll into centuries. And mine shall be a name that is scorned. My sin, my sin. Who shall deliver me from the body of this depth.

Nature has not the answer to this plea. Nor the law, nor even conscience.

Jesus said, thy sins be forgiven thee. Go in peace. The hymn writer wrote, " there is a fountain filled with blood, drawn from Immanuel's vains, and sinners plunge beneath that flood, lose all their guilty stains.

The dying thief rejoiced to see that fountain in his day. And there may I, though vile as he, wash all my sins away.

This plea that we have is the answer to the horror of the cross. And it is not easy to find forgiveness. God will pardon because this is part of God's job. Forgiveness, no wonder America has an easy conscience. We think that because we say love is wonderful.

Think about what this plea involves. How can God forgive anyway. There is no cheap forgiveness. Every parent will probably understand this. Every parent gets the impression that the child thinks forgiveness is simple. When his father says, I'm sorry and Daddy pats him on the head and he turns around and goes right back to the wrong doing. The child gets the idea that his Daddy is mighty easy - no matter what happens. He says, o.k. son, it's forgiven.

Such easy-going indulgence is cheap forgiveness. And it can ruin a character.

And growing children take advantage of the good nature.

But I pray to God - that forgiveness on the cross was not cheap. It was a painful costly thing.

I want you to know that one who forgives is one who suffers. And one who offers their pardon, he draws the guilt of our sin to his own heart. He bears them in his own soul. And there was no cheap forgiveness here. Nor does it permit me and you an easy life of sinning.

I need to underscore this. When I see what sin has cost God - I can never go out and indulge in sin lightly again. There is no possibility of taking advantage of God's goodness. It cost him his life blood. And an offer of such forgiveness constitutes the heart of the Christian message. To the rich, the poor, the good, the bad, the educated, the uneducated. Even though the love of God is as wide as the ocean.

Since man's sin destroys the relationship to God - then his great plea is that he is unable to find the proper relationship anywhere else. And the will of God is powerless in his life. And that's why the forgiveness is something that he calls for. In (praying) for forgiveness - man acknowledges God as Lord and judge. He confesses the holiness of God. He submits to the standards in his kingdom. And he prays for forgiveness, of sins - and this glorifies God.

God forgives the sins of those who ask for it. And we plead for it. Thus bringing us into fellowship. This forgiveness puts us in the kingdom.

Since we are in danger daily, every day we can violate God's will. If it is necessary to pray for the forgiveness of sins.

It is a delusion for people to believe that they can work in God's service without the forgiveness of sin. It must be accepted by God before we can confess it in our own lives. This gives the impulse and the power and enables us to serve.

If church vocations and church work suffers today - it suffers from lack of people and leaders who neglect daily praying for forgiveness. There is no longer a reality in their lives. *Amos + Andy - Man strike Andy across chest each time mit- el' fix him, put stick Pyramite in my vest - Next time he strikes man, get his hand blown off - (not think Blow his heart out) -*

But in the new order of things, this was one thing here that Jesus taught his Disciples to pray - to forgive us. And this is not a one-sided spiritual experience as we shall see later on.

I do not believe that any church or fellowship can survive if its members do not make forgiveness a basic part of their common life among them.

Eph. 2:11, 22 -

As the Disciples came to the Lord's supper, there was to be the acting of the forgiveness of sin in order that they might honor the Lord. Matt. 18:21. They must be prepared to confess and repent.

Yes, the church fails in her mission. Rom. 10:1. Need to pray this prayer of forgiveness. The faithfulness of God never fails. Let us proceed a step deeper into this prayer.

Man & wife were returning to their seats after a movie intermission - when a voice of concern He asked a man at the end of a row, "Did al step on your toes on the way out?" "yes, you certainly did, respond the man angrily - "all right, he said, turning to his wife, this is our row."

II. MAN'S GRUESOME PLAGUE - OUR DEBTS

Here is a malignancy - we have tried to fix in our minds the gigantic plea for forgiveness. Forgive us, (our debts) And this fits the point - on the great plague.

that is in the human heart and in the human race. This puts the spotlight on the great debt that man has.

Shaw the playwright said (forgiveness was the beggars refuge). We must pay our debt.

Many times people dismiss their debts and their sins with abandonment. God will forgive us they insist - it is his business. Why not let God do it. We error, we have divine forgiveness.

But every crook would say - I like committing crimes and God likes forgiving them. And by the world's standards, according to that play by Auden - would be an admirable arrangement.

Anyone could say - eat and drink, and then be merry. And blow the smoke in God's face. Why it's no skin off of your back. You could be expounded with a license to commit any kind of sins. But the prayer is - our debt. It is the plague.

Frankly there are too many people who think that religion is letting them off easy.

And they can on and dismiss 40 years of wallering in sin and say I have been a failure--it sounds so easy, doesn't it. It sounds almost too good to be true.

Now I am sure that God's love is always with us. And he never said - depart from me.

But people who have the morals of a rabbit - and if you calculate their way in an itemized account, and to think that by some means of witchcraft you can just

~~unload those things without any penalty and go scott free.~~

(McDonald) said, "our religion hurts." Christ on the cross is not something that is just pious. And forgiveness is a hard experience. God forgives you and it is God's business. And only in his infinite mercy does he do it.

But God's forgiveness is not a premium on a commodity that you can pay for or pick up at will.

People have an attitude today and they miss the point that sin is the greatest peril and plague in their lives. Does anyone need to stand up and tell us today that we are caught in the greatest time of social sins. It is a time of international sin. And no nation has yet shown any sincere repentance. And yet all of us have had a part in all of that sin. We have helped create public opinion. We profited from war time businesses that have flourished. We have distorted standards of conduct. The moving pictures and the newspaper are telling us about wives and husband re-marrying casually like changing an old overcoat. The character of hundreds of young girls who are lured by the fascination of a silver screen. The lowering of moral standards. Yet, we all have to share in it. And people go to the pictures that produce this and furnish them with money to make such life possible.

Think of the personal sins. Does anyone need to tell us about sins of the flesh. By lust, or brute force, or of selfishness, or irresponsibility, prejudices or lack of generosity.

You know the way that people play Satan. They pinch some other person. Outright suggestions by shallow life.

Think of the sins of omission - have I been as enthusiastic for the good causes

as I might have been. Have I been ready to accept the position of leadership in my church and be a real follower of Jesus Christ. Have I done all for myself that I could do. So that now I am able to serve Christ as best - as he would have me to serve. Have I done all that I could to help others. Have I rid my heart of bitterness of emity. In Christ's parable on the last judgement, he talked about things we ought to have done and things we ought not to have left undone.

Our debts are gruesome - it is like a plague. We cannot undo the wrong we have done. We have been squeezing - just like squeezing toothpaste out of a tube. We cannot push it back in again. Always our sins have made some ^{ONE} else be nailed to the cross. And remorse drives some people out of their mind.

Now Matthew ~~uses~~ debts here. The book of Luke uses the word sin.

It is also translated as transgression. And we come to realize that this is a prayer that men need to pray. We all agree that a burglar, a murderer, or a fowl mouthed person is a sinner. Look at this. It means missing the target. Like to failed to hit the mark. You pull back the bow, shoot the arrow, and let it go. And if it misses the bull's eye - he is a sinner.

Are we as good as we might be. Are you as good a person as you ought to be. Are you as good a wife as you could be -- a son, daughter, workman, or employer. Sin means to fail to hit the mark. It also means to step across. To cut across and not stay on the right side of the line. That divides between honesty and dishonesty. There was never such a time of petty dishonesty in the lives of people. It divides truth and falsehood.

There are those who slip across the line.

When we think about trespassing - we think about lawlessness. Man knows what

is right and what is wrong. It says of the old soldier who wanted to be shipped out - East of sea ~~grey~~ where there (aren't any Ten Commandments.)

Debts - I owe no man anything - you might say. But you and I are so much in debt. The national debt which is powerful. Several thousand dollars per person. The roads we ride on have been paid for by somebody else. We pay some taxes but we don't pay for them. Now we go to a school. Now you come to this church - but your parents did not build this church. You go to college - somebody else paid for that school. You can't say I don't owe a man anything.

As someone quipped - "I don't think my wife was charge anything at the store today". But I owned it.

In Jesus' day - Matt. 18:23-35 a poor debtor was grabbed by the throat. And he demanded that he pay up. So far as we know, that was standard procedure. The debtor was thrown into prison and he had to stay there until the last penny was paid.

When Jesus included the word debt in this prayer, he called up the background of the scourgings, the enslavement, the prison sentences. In that one word - that he attaches the word debt on our inner spiritual condition. The dark side of life. That makes it so uneasy for us. That happened in the life of Adam and Eve - and it is a common characteristic in us. All of us have sinned - and we all fall short. The prodigal son in the far country is a familiar story. But we know better than anyone else that our attitudes and our lives are far from being perfect.

The classic - Noby Dick - Captain Ahab was named by a vicious white whale. He spends the rest of his life searching for his enemy. His concern was destroying the enemy. But he, himself, becomes evil. And that is a dramatic thing that happens

to most of us. You identify the resentments that you have in your life, and they are hurtful. Think about these wounds of a lifetime. Is this a good idea to dredge these up. These bruises and festered resentments. It is like a Dentist who uncovers decay in your tooth. And leave it there. Forgive us our debts. We must be willing to look at them - not just read over them or to leave the long submerged grudge where it is. But we must offer this plea.

This thing really hurts us to ask for - when you are asking for forgiveness. This is something that really stings a person.

You don't have to touch a live wire, to get an electric shock. You just open your monthly bill from VEPCO. And you don't have to really look for a shock - but it really hurts you when you come to the point that you are going to ask for forgiveness. How often as a Christian do you petition someone for forgiveness. How often have you done it. If I should stop right now, count up the times - the fingers on one hand when you have admitted you were wrong. And oh how that hurts. A man will do almost anything in order to avoid that. He will conceal his guilt, and a man will hide his sins, or even blame somebody else for it. Or he retreats from it. But he is forever playing hide and seek. He'd rather lose his faculties than to face up to himself. So we avoid our sins. And we try to live by trickery.

We use the word (delinquency). That sounds so harmless. We use the word conflict. Now that could apply to anybody. Or (misdemeanor). That one little small slip.

But say I was wrong - forgive me - what a tender word that is. When we first practice that and try to keep the humiliation of the cross away from us. Why did Jesus die. Because he was a revolutionary or a nuisance.

Why did Peter weep when he denied Christ. Why did Paul say I rebuke sinners. David said create in me a clean heart. Be merciful to me a sinner.

When we have seen what we have done - it really hurts. And when we come to ask God to take away - indeed, we learn about forgiveness.

III. MAN'S GRANDEST POSSIBILITY

(As we forgive our debtor.)

We have talked about man's great plea - gigantic plea for forgiveness. We have touched briefly on man's gruesome plague. The debts and sins - transgressions that he has asking daily pardon.

Now we come to a (definite plan) of man's grandest possibility - it unfolds before us.

(Robert Louis Stephenson) lived on a South Sea island. He conducted family worship in the morning, in his household. He always concluded with the Lord's Prayer. One morning in the middle of the prayer - he rose from his knees and he left the room. His wife followed him - thinking that he was ill. Is there anything wrong, she said? Only this, said Stephenson, "I am not fit to pray the Lord's Prayer today."

No one is fit to pray the Lord's Prayer - so long as the unforgiving spirit holds sway within his heart. If a man has not put things right with his fellowman, he cannot put things right with God.

That's why it is necessary to understand this prayer. And to learn how to live and to get this right. It is a grand opportunity.

It is a hard sentence to say - ("I'm sorry.")

And then, it is a hard sentence to say - ("You are forgiven.")

Wherever you find the word forgive them - you find a choice.

There was a legend about the prodigal son coming home. And his old father standing there in the lamplight that night. And as the prodigal son slept on and he awoke the next day and he looked out upon the sunlight, the old familiar fields and he saw his father working. The first thing - that his father's hair had turned completely white. It really hurts just to forgive - but the prodigal had recognized that he had hurt his daddy. Even though his Daddy had forgiven him.

Lord, as we forgive - forgive our sins.

Now that is in my Bible. I don't know whether that is in your Bible or not. But that is Christianity and I didn't invent it. There it is, right in the middle. "Forgive us our sins, our debtors, as we forgive our debtors, those who sin against us."

There is no slight suggestion that we are offered forgiveness on any other terms. It is perfectly clear - if we don't forgive, we cannot be forgiven.

Did anybody ever tell you that forgiveness was easy! Does that sound easy. That is a little bit demanding, isn't it? That a man cannot unload all of his hostilities upon somebody and then crawl away into a neutral corner. Unless we can forgive - we cannot be forgiven.

One time an angry man said to John Wesley - "I never forgive". The answer that the minister gave him was this - "Sir, I hope you never sin."

When someone offends you don't waste your life on grievances. It hurts to come to forgiveness and to sit forever in perpetual self-judgement.

Don't waste your life on grievances - it hurts. There are some people who cannot forgive themselves but God has forgiven them. But they cannot keep their eyes off of it. They are disgusting. Like a woman in a New York hospital. She felt so guilty about her immoral conduct and her immoral life - her soul was sick. And she confesses - I know the reason I have sinned. I have stopped sinning but I can't forgive myself.

But what right have you to go on judging yourself once God has forgiven you.

Sir J. V. Simpson first used anthesia in child birth. He was asked upon his death bed - what has been the great discovery of your life. He made this reply - "that God forgives." The second half of this petition was a real challenge to the Christian. As we forgive our debtors. But this is where Jesus has something especially to say.

Read v. 14 and 15 he said, for if you forgive men that trespasses, your Heavenly Father will also forgive you. If you forgive men not their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive you. Only the forgiving are forgiven. So divine forgiveness depends upon human willingness. Now that sounds like it is kind of hard, doesn't it. But it states the fact that it is impossible for God to do any forgiving until you get your attitude right. Wrong spirit towards another person

Ask yourself, what forgiveness means? Sometimes we like to say about some little wrong that we have done - oh, forget it. It is done. It is alright. It is nothing. May not hurt him but it is certain to destroy my own soul.

But God cannot say that about sin. He knows that sin is terrible. And to remove that - the barrier must be removed that has been erected.

If you had the chance to say a few words to this old suffering world today, what would you say. Think about the animosity and suspicion, jealousy, and the

bitterness harbored in the hearts of people. Petty grudges, feelings that are bad. You do not want to say the word forgive - it is a great possibility here. But somebody will say I can't forgive a man, unless he is really sorry for the wrong he has done. I can't forgive my neighbor - he goes around with a proud head in the air. Then he can't forgive us and restore us. True as this is. What is a Christian to do. Is he to simply sit down and wait for those who have wronged him to come and repent before him. No, there is something that can be done.

Christ will not wait for repentance - the real follower will set out, by good will to try to lead repentance. In fact, he'll go the second mile and follow that principle. It may break his heart.

That's what they used to say about Henry Ward Beecher. No one ever knew the full extent of his kindness. ^{until} when people had done him wrong. Paul says that it is good for Christians to give food and drink to the enemy.

Here is a man who visits someone in prison for embezzlement - he is a crooked and hard-hearted person of humanity. He could not be moved to repentance but when asked what could be done for him. He suggested, go visit my mother. So the man went to visit her. He found her sleepless and she was bitterly ashamed and there was pity in her heart. What had she to be ashamed of. And when we look at her, we think surely he hath born our griefs, carried our sorrow, chastisement of our peace is upon him. By his stripes we are healed. We have gone astray.

Unforgiveness, and hatred and resentment harbored in a man's heart shuts out the love and the good that God would do to him. He resents all of God's ways in his midst. And sometimes we pass the buck and we lay the blame on somebody else's doorstep. We look for somebody to be our goat. Forgive my debts. I am guilty.

I am the one that is guilty. I bear some of the blame.

When Andrew Jackson was President, he had many opponents that made personal attacks upon him. Years later after he had retired. He was going to unite with a church. The minister said to him prior to his baptism - in view of the many quarrels and feuds that you have come through, there is one more question - can you forgive all your enemies? There was silence. My political enemies, I can truly forgive. But as for those that abused me when I was serving my country in the field, and those who slandered my wife, that's a different case. The minister made it clear to the general, than none of the ill feelings against other human beings could make a sincere profession of faith. He was again silenced - until the aged candidate said, I will try Doctor. To forgive all my enemies. Yes, we have no business cherishing the old debts. I also must forgive - or else I live in open rebellion. Someone has wronged me. But it does not take me long to recognize that forgiveness is a simple way of balancing the wrong. We must pay and get things right.

I'm more sinner than sinned against.

I think this is something that every wronged wife needs to pray, every suffering parent knows, and here is the miracle of forgiveness. In spite of what has gone on before, Calvary is the best picture. Love redeemed had a terrible price. Father, forgive them.

We are redeemed in order to be redeemers. We can only know the sin bearer as we are able to bear the sins of others even though it costs. We must be forgiven. This Christian challenge is to all of us. To forgive wherever and whenever we can. We extend this to our enemies.

Why should we forgive. Because God has been so ever-lastingly willing to forgive us.

There is the story of the debtor of the man who owed 10,000 talents - to get a good idea about how much he owed. And he plead with the king and the king forgave him of the debt. Now the law would have sold him as a helpless debtor, his wife, his family - everything, but the king set him free. The forgiven went out in the king's court and there was a man who owed him just a hundred. A trifling sum and when he could not pay, he thrust the man into prison with the full penalty.

Think about the people against whom we hold a grudge. And we say we no longer consider them friends. And then we hear God say, I forgave thee among payable debt.

Why should we forgive - because of the good it will do. Nothing is so powerful in persuading others about the value and the reality of the Christian life, as we ourselves, followers of Christ give this impression. Non-Christians can hear Christ on the cross prayed - Father, forgive them. For they know not what they do. Now the unbeliever doesn't know what he is doing.

When you bring your gift to the alter and there is a brother that you have aught, put your gift there and wait. Leave there and get thy gift in order by going to your brother. Take the initiative. To be reconciled. That is hard.

Dr. Gabbheart told a story once about a student who was a good student, and sang in the choir. And he had stopped in his car at a traffic light and when it turned green, he proceeded in the opposite way. And the young man who was drinking came through, hit his car, and knocked it 60 feet. Pushed him through the windshield. And he lived four hours. The father was a minister of music at Woodmont Church in Nashville. And he was told that he was not going to make it. Now it was a football player driving the other car. So the parent went to

the chapel and while they were there, the father of that - or rather the mother of that boy took the hand of that football player and said, the next time you play football you'll have to play for him - he loved sports. He never touched alcohol. And the next time, I want you to think about and recognize the evil of alcohol.

He was a good student - and I want you to put the first things first as a student. He was a Christian, active in his choir. And I think my son would want you to become a Christian.

And then she said this remarkable thing - because he was a Christian, he would forgive you. And because he would, and I would forgive you."

That's is the fulfillment of this prayer. It knows like a cancer - and the only way to get it out is through forgiveness.

Court of Kaposvar, Hungary.

Once in court, there was a farmer who had sued his neighbor and the judge said couldn't you settle this matter with a hearty handshake. "You never know when you will stand before the highest judge. Asking for his forgiveness for your trespasses." The judge of that high court in Hungary said to old John Sandor, a farmer, who had just sued his neighbor as a result of a petty quarrel.

"You are right judge, we never know when our moment comes, said the old man. And withdrawing his writ - he shook hands. On leaving the court, old Sandor collapsed on the threshold and died of a heart seisure in the same minute. "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven." Ps. 32:1.

If you forgive men who trespasses, your Heavenly Father will also forgive you.

Forgive him 70 times and 7 - for all the blessed souls in Heaven - are both the

forgivers and forgiven.

Scandalous thing to set self as Judge - Rom 12:19 - Vengeance is mine

Plea - Forgive

Pledge - debts

Possibility - What is my worst failure?
Have I lived up to my obligations?

What is one way I have mistreated another person?

What is one sin I have committed?

We all stand convicted?

(Are you willing to forgive others, you will be able to receive God's forgiveness of you!)