

"THE FORGIVENESS WHICH WIPES OUT SIN"

Col. 2:14

1:14

INTRODUCTION:

On a tombstone in a cemetery near New York City is just one word - forgiven. No name. No indication whether it was a man or a woman. Nor what the experience in life. So much is missing from the tombstone record. But does anything else matter when you have the word forgiven.

The sermon for this hour has your address on it, it is marked personal. It is true because all we like sheep have gone astray. And we have turned every one to his own way, and the Lord hath layed on him the iniquity of us all. Isa. 53:6.

Quite often when we preach, we are not sure that we are speaking to all of the hearers. There may be someone in the group who may not be interested, in the subject. But the one we are using now, will find its mark in the heart of every hearer.

Quite often you leave a preaching service, and you say - well, that did not get to me. That was not meant for me. Or you go and say, that was good for old so and so, wasn't it. But this sermon on the forgiveness of sins is one that all men will be involved in. And it will be easy for you to say - this means me today.

And this is one of the wonderful things about preaching the Gospel - the reality, that it comes to the experience of being forgiven. And those who need forgiveness.

Micah put out this challenge in chapter 7, verse 18. "Who is a God like unto thee." Men were challenging the very name of Jehovah. But he goes on to say that there is a God who rideth on the wings of the wind. And treadeth in the high places of the earth. There is no God like this God who can pardon iniquity, who can forgive transgressions, and who can bring his forgiveness and mercy. And this is the most amazing thing about God.

The most incompatible experience that any individual has ever had is that of forgiveness.

One great man said that forgiveness of God in my opinion, is the most powerful therapy in the world. That was a statement by Weatherhead. And through every church and every ministry we faithfully proclaim the blood of Jesus Christ. It goes on cleansing from all sins.

The basic needs of man is that he needs to believe in the forgiveness of sins. Ambrose back in the 4th century said - "I will not glory because I am righteous, but because I am redeemed. Not because I am clear of sin, but because my sins are forgiven."

That is a great truth.

Now the word by way of introduction for forgiveness, has great interest because it begins by meaning (to wash over.) It is used like whitewashing the wall of a house.

It is used by wiping out the memory of an experience from one's remembrance.

Cancelling the vote or a law. Or a debt. It is striking a man's name off of a roll or a list. It is wiping out its existence.

Have you ever tried to read a letter in which something had been erased or blotted out. This has the idea of wiping out or blotting out as is translated, for instance, the handwriting of ordinances in Col. 2:14, Paul speaks of Jesus blotting out that which was against us.

And it has a meaning that here is an agreement that a debt, or a bond - that you cannot satisfy. Jesus wipes it out. He lets it be remembered literally no more.

In that day, probably they had ink that was mixed with other elements. Maybe deluted with water. And the characteristic of that ink was that you could take a wet sponge and pass over the surface of the writing and sponge it off. You could sponge it from the slate. Hence, we get the idea. That quite often they had concerning a debt, they used a letter - the capitol "X". To put it across the document. So something had been crossed out. But Paul does not say that Jesus crosses out the record of our debt. But he says that he wipes it out! If you cross a thing out - beneath the cross, the record will remain visible. For anyone to read. But if you wipe it out - the record is gone. It is as if, God for Jesus sake, not only crosses out our debts but he wipes it out. So there are many people who can forgive but they never really forget. But God not only forgives, but he wipes out the very memory of the debt. Now this is the kind of divine forgiveness that we are talking about in this sermon tonight.

There are two or three things that we want to fix in mind -- first, the question of necessity. And second, the question of possibility. And finally the question of practicality.

I. THE QUESTION OF NECESSITY.

We want to first explore the important question - is forgiveness necessary.
Suppose I come to you and say that this is an essential thing - that the Gospel offers forgiveness. That God, for Christ's sake, has forgiven you. But you say, well, that is a mistake. Christ didn't mean that for me. Forgiveness for me. What did I do. Why do I need forgiveness. There are lots of other people who have made a great number of sins in the world. And I am sorry for them. But I really don't need forgiveness.

Now what would you say about such an attitude. Because a man who did not believe that there was the reality of sin. And he would say to you - well, is it really necessary that I get forgiveness. Can't I chose to run my own life the way I want to run it.

In our culture and in our communities, there are people who believe that really - it upsets them, that they are pretty good people in their opinion.

They think that man is a glorious individual. He is making a paradise here on this earth. And they have forgotten that the Devil is in the human heart. That their hearts are corrupt. We minimize sin and we deny the necessity of forgiveness.

Frederick the Great listened once to a sermon, that glorified the idea of progress and man as a marvelous creature. He was making earth a paradise. He grew impatient and he looked scornfully at the speaker, and said - "he has forgotten the sheer Devil in the human heart. The enemy passions of the soul."

But when we come back to man and he minimizes sin and denies the necessity of forgiveness - we have to not quiet down the self-accusing, the bad conscience, etc. It is like a dog shut up in a cellar. He is tireless in his habit of barking and trying to break into the house.

And we know that the nicest and the kindest people who will say they know nothing of the soul of despair or any gratitude.

There are many things that prove to us and answer the question of necessity.

1 - The wickedness of this world proves to us the necessity of the need. To do away with the doctrine of sin is to be blind to the problem. But here is the burden of the fact that the whole world lives in the power of the evil one. I John 5:19. That all the frustration, the corruption, we cannot take ourselves away from this situation. Now I must repent myself. And get back on the right track with God.

2 The very character of Christ is something else that proves the necessity of it. To be indifferent toward the character of Jesus. The Saviour came to live and to die. And it was not a one-sided thing.

The example is out before us. And this proves to us that forgiveness is of a necessity.

When Jesus comes anywhere near to anything or anybody, you immediately see the difference.

Augustine saw himself. And when he saw himself and then he saw Jesus - he was horrified.

He was like Simon Peter, when the Lord turned as the record said - and looked upon Peter. Peter remembered then and he began to cry like a little child. There was his sinful life and he needed forgiveness.

The cross of Christ points men to the great necessity. When you see the meaning of the cross, and you see why he was crucified - then you see the necessity coming more to light.

It brings out the common sins of the day. Self-centeredness, pride, slackness, unkindness. Every temptation is put in another's way. Every wasted opportunity. Every compromise that you have ever made. Of which you are ashamed. When you get in front of the cross, and you see Jesus hanging there - you will hear him say. There is one thing needful. So the question of necessity is out before us. Each of us is guilty of the sins of (commission). We have broken God's holy law. We have done that which is contrary to God's good will.

We have violated our own conscience. Each of us are guilty of sins of omission. We have neglected the worship of God. We have neglected to pray. Refused to serve. Failed to behave as we should.

We have neglected our time, our substance, and therefore - each of us is guilty of sins of disposition. We have been motivated by false pride. That which has been hurtful to others. We have been hypocrites at times - we must confess. There is human selfishness in us. There is the I, the me, and the myself. Who is there able to declare that there is nothing in him sinful. Who is there tonight who would say - well, I'd never have a critical faultfinding spirit. I've never looked for the flaws and the defects in the lives of others.

I've never really hated nor had hostility.

Sin, yes, in various forms. Sin causes men to flee from the presence of God. And it creates despair within the human heart. The miracle of miracles is the necessity that God offers forgiveness.

Some years ago Billy Graham told about a television interview that he was to have in his own home. He said that it was going to appear on nationwide television. And he took great pains to see that everything looked nice. His wife vacuumed, she dusted, she cleaned up the house. He had gone over the living room with a fine-toothed comb. And that is where the interview was to be filmed. The film crew arrived, and they set up their cameras and lights. The wife felt that everything in the living room was going to be spic and span. And they were in place along with the interviewer.

Suddenly, the T. V. lights were turned on and we saw cobwebs and dust where we had never seen them before. In the words of my wife, I mean that room was festooned with dust and cobwebs which simply did not show up under ordinary light.

*Ornaments
wreath -
arrangements - discarded -*

The point of course is, no matter how well we may clean up our lives or think that we have them in order, or think it unnecessary. The light of God's word in the light of holiness and the cross - all of the cobwebs and the dust will show up.

Now, we ought never to forget this. Two brothers were fighting all day. Now that is easy to understand. And that night after they had been washed and polished, and ready for bed the mother took time for a little sermon. She impressed upon one - we will call him Billy. That his refusal to forgive his brother Jim was not nice at all. She was a bit off in her theology but still she stressed that if he were to die during the night, he would not go to Heaven. Surely he wanted to go to Heaven. And Billy was faced with a serious problem. He did so much want to go to Heaven. So he found the solution - alright, he said, I do want to go to Heaven when I die. In turning to his brother he said, "I'll forgive you but if I am alive in the morning - look out."

Did he forgive. Are we anymore sincere in our forgiveness toward others than this.

I don't know whether you have ever heard about the woman who said she had forgiven her husband for some misdeed of his. But she kept bringing it up again - but when I showed you that I was sorry, you said that you would forgive and forget. I know I did, she said. I have forgiven you. But I don't want you

to forget it.

Now forgiveness put the wrong behind us forever. And welcomes us back into a good relationship that had been broken.

Now the question of necessity is very clear - that we need this.

II. THE QUESTION OF POSSIBILITY

Now this is something that we determine concerning this wonderful truth that we have been dealing with here. And it comes out of the depths of a human soul or need. And the question comes to light - is forgiveness possible then. If there is a necessity of it, can a man really be forgiven. Where then can forgiveness come from.

Is there any hope, or any chance of a man getting forgiveness.

When Jesus was here upon this earth - Luke 5:17-26 - a strange thing happened and they let down a man through the roof. Who had been ill for a long time. Jesus said to him - thy sins are forgiven thee. What a man forgiving sins. Who can forgive sins but God alone. This is a strange thing. But here is one who blots out the transgressions as Jesus Christ administers to this man.

It is beyond our control. But we say how can forgiveness come in and redeem

a situation. That is one of the fears of life. And many people have this in their heart.

There are people tonight who say, there is no road back! There is no way to start again! I have made some choices in the years past, and now today I have some things on my hands that I would like to get rid of. And I have chosen this way and the burden has increased.

Now God has given you the freedom to take what you will - but you have to pay for it. And the possibility of whether forgiveness is possible.

Is there any way to restore the broken relationships. If we could get to the point of this definition. Now forgiveness has a possibility of letting us off. Putting away the thoughts that we are still held responsible.

Now we cannot escape all the consequences and the penalties of sin. It does not mean that. The prodigal was forgiven. But it does not mean that he did not have to go through some rehabilitation or that he suffered some penalties for his past life.

But the penalty would be felt very different to the forgiven one. When a man begins to co-operate with God. And therefore the judgement itself would seem transformed. At least, a broken relationship has been restored and now he has forgiveness. But here is a question. Can the lost relationship be renewed. The thing that we enjoyed before - can it ever be the same.

Now, we have what the testimony of those that have been forgiven - we know that this thing is true that God has forgiven us. And we may go on our way singing about the grace of God.

Richard Baxter once said, there goes Richard Baxter, but for the grace of God. And each of us can put his own name into that. Each now knows his own name - but for the grace of God.

What in the world Chalmers said, could I do, if God did not justify the ungodly. Now this is the testimony of men who have been redeemed. This is also the great truth that Jesus worked among those who were in bonds. And brought them forgiveness. Some men have declared that forgiveness is a beggars refuge.

But John Bunyan said, blessed be his grace. When this discovery broke upon him that God had blotted out his transgressions, and that he had been pardoned and forgiven of his sins.

The possibility of forgiveness of sin has been a provision since the beginning of time. Before Calvary, sin was covered as it were by the burnt offering and sacrifices of the blood of bulls and goats. Heb. 10:4. And pre-Calvary forgiveness was accomplished through faith, in the divine substitute of God's provision. A symbol of the perfect sacrifice of the lamb of God. It was in the divine substitute, the same lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world. That post-Calvary forgiveness has become possible.

There are at least two or three possibilities in forgiveness. First, it brings

moral readjustment. Man becomes more conscious of right and wrong.

A second thing it does, the possibility of mental transformation. A man can grow in grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.

A final possibility is the spiritual freedom. He becomes a worshipping man. He becomes a forgiving man. And he becomes a serving man when he gets this freedom.

The possibility of forgiveness then as the term is translated to forgive - means to send away. To remit or to send back - to put them away.

But the question is still, to put them away in what sense. What does it mean to put away sin? To remit sin here, is a figure of speech. Sometimes the matter was thought to be that contrasted with that of a debtor. Jesus thought of this when he prayed - forgive us our debts. We have the impressive statements in the Old Testament, that God puts our sins behind his back. Isa. 38:34. He remembers them no more. Jeremiah 31:34. He casts them into the depths of the sea. Micah 7:19. He washes us and makes us whiter than snow.

It is not true (exactly) to say - that to forgive sin is to make us as if we had not sinned. Now this is true according to the conscience of the forgiven sinner. He can say that. He who has sinned, can never be as if he had never sinned.

Let us look into this possibility. Forgiveness does mean that sin is removed.

As a barrier to our fellowship with God. Sin breaks man's fellowship with God. It is a personal offense against God. Against thee, and thee only, have I sinned and done this evil thing. Your iniquities have separated you and your God. And your sins have hid his face from you so that he will not hear. Isa. 59:2.

But when sin is forgiven, the block to fellowship is removed. The cloud that shut out God's face is blotted out. In that way, sin is sent away. It is like a revival of human fellowship among friends. The loved ones have been separated by wrong done by someone. But forgiveness renews the former love and confidence. And it brings freedom, peace, and joy. Your release from that sense of guilt.

Forgiveness is a personal act that we cannot really explain. The law does not really know forgiveness. It cannot forgive a man. If a man does not believe in a personal God, he cannot be forgiven of his sins. Forgiveness transcends the law. When sin is forgiven, the fellowship is restored. Now as to the consequences of the evil, or the sin - they cannot all be removed. For instance, if a man has sinned and a disease has possessed his body, because of that sin, it does not mean that he is going to be restored to a perfect soundness of body. Because he has been forgiven his sin. If one has wasted his youth, and the strength as a prodigal - God will gladly forgive when the man returns home. But his physical and his mental situation may not all be given back to him. God is willing to forgive David for his awful sins. In that forgiveness, the sword was never departed from David's house. And David shed many a bitter tear over the consequences of his sin, even though he knew the sweetness of God's forgiving grace.

While we will not be delivered from all the consequences of sin, when we are forgiven. We are put in such a relationship with God that even the ills of life