

How forgiving are you? Forgiving just like Christ.

Eph 4:32; Col 3:13 Key to Our Own Forgiveness

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Light on the Rock

by Philip Shields

SUMMARY: This is a new and updated version of the sermon on the same topic, but different material today, than the one I gave in 2008. Salvation at its core is about forgiveness and the new life we have in Christ. True forgiveness – at least the way Christ forgives us – is very hard. Truly forgiving others gives the forgiven one and the one doing the forgiving a new lease on life plus many blessings. But without it, *we're* not going to be forgiven either. We can't forgive the *consequences* of *sin*, but we can release any resentment, hate, bitterness and lack of love for what others have done to us or we to them. This is a very, very important topic.

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(Throughout most of this sermon I refer to God our Father as 'Abba' as Christ often did, and I refer to Christ as Yeshua the Messiah. Yeshua is his Hebrew name meaning "Salvation".)

Hello brothers and sisters in Messiah, members of the Household of Abba, our dear Father God Almighty. Welcome to Light on the Rock, from Orlando FL.

This sermon is going to test you – and me. It's a topic we've heard many times, but I don't see many of us truly applying it to the degree we're commanded to. So listen carefully. Tell me afterwards if you needed this topic or not.

We've just recently been reminded of God's gracious love, forgiveness and acceptance in the Passover a while ago. So that's the backdrop to this message.

Let me start by talking about the lessons from one of my favorite songs – “*Tie a Yellow Ribbon 'Round the old Oak Tree*”. Many of you probably know it well. It's about a convict who has served his time for some horrible crime and had been released, but doesn't know if his wife or girlfriend is going to accept him back. In many parts of the world, there are so-called “honor killings” – where often another family member executes someone who has brought shame or dishonor to the family name. Often it is for a violation of “sharia law”. Often it's a brother, father or uncles, usually a male or group of males – doing the “honor killing” of a female – usually a sister or niece or someone. My point is: the family is now ashamed of that person and wants them permanently out of their lives.

So the song – “Tie a Yellow Ribbon...” starts out “I'm comin' home, I've done my time...” and goes on to say “If you've received my letter telling you I'd soon be free, then you'll know just what to do IF you still want me...”

And the lady was supposed to tie a yellow ribbon around their old oak tree and if he didn't see the yellow ribbon, “I'll stay on the bus, forget about us and put the blame on me...”

How sad. How tragic. But it's what plays out many times a day all around the world. No yellow ribbon, no acceptance back, no forgiveness, no celebration that you've come home. Remember the father of the prodigal son? That father ran out to welcome home the son personally.

Forgiving yourself is so hard, especially as you hear what people say or write on Facebook – (for example, that certain ones should hang for their crimes), it's quite common for people to feel totally rejected by society, by their family and by loved ones.

So in the song the man is so apprehensive that he asks the bus driver to look for him, "Cuz I couldn't bear to see what I might see." Then what happens when you aren't forgiven or haven't forgiven yourself is what he talks about next:

"I'm really still in prison and my love, she holds the key
A simple yellow ribbon is what I need to set me free, I wrote and told her please..."

Then there's a long harmonica solo to hold you in suspense as the bus comes closer to his house. Then the song slow down and this is where I shed tears myself:

"Now the whole d... bus is cheerin' and I can't believe I see...
A HUNDRED yellow ribbons 'round the ole oak tree."

YES! YES! She accepted him back, she affirms her love for him in spite of his crimes – and wraps a hundred yellow ribbons 'round the ole oak tree. She got it. She realized she held his life in her hands and wanted to set him free from his mental prison of torment, regret, sense of failure, sense of "what's the use?" -- and she used her power to forgive.

Brothers and sisters in Messiah Yeshua, or Jesus Christ as most people say – you have the power to also tie a hundred yellow ribbons, as it were, for people in your life, to set them free, to show them what true believers are all about. Think for a moment: who could use a warm call or note from you? I suspect most of you hearing this probably would give yourself an A- to an A+ for how well you forgive, but the standard of the kind of forgiving we must be doing is very, very high. I doubt there are very many true A+ performances out there. So listen in please.

What the Passover story is really about

We recently remembered the Passover season where we rehearsed the most magnificent act of individual and group forgiveness in the universe: where God so loved the world so much, that before we were all repenting of our sins, He had already planned to – and did send – His only son to shed his blood in our behalf.

Let me say that again: **Passover is NOT primarily about God delivering Israel out of Egypt.** Yes, you heard me right. Sure, in the Old Testament, that was the major story. Passover is about what that deliverance out of Egypt really pictured: God Most High seeing the innocent lamb's blood over their doors - pointing to the real Lamb of God's blood over US, over our lives, that allows God to forgive us and cancel our sin debts *and to pass over* our sins.

With us and God, it's not yellow ribbons – but the guiltless blood of the Creator God splashed all over our bodies – that God sees and that we see on ourselves – and on each other. This sermon is about the forgiving blood we should be seeing on each other!

THAT'S the real meaning of Passover: the incredible FORGIVING of our sins; Passover – please, we must understand this – **Passover is about what Yeshua (Jesus) did for us much more than it is about leaving Egypt.** Do you remember what the Creator-as-a-man said as he broke the bread and passed his cup of red wine around? Do you?

Did Christ say, “In the new covenant Passover, be sure you are thinking about the Exodus” - - or did he say, **“Do this in remembrance of ME”?** (Luke 22:19; 1 Corinthians 11:24)

Our Passover season and our lives should be about Yeshua. If you do a Seder meal at Passover, be sure you point everything back much more to Yeshua than you do to the shadow – to the Exodus. Yeshua is what the lamb’s blood was all about. Yeshua was what the leaving of Egypt was all about.

Then that night Yeshua was tested heavily in the garden, then illegally arrested, beaten, spit on, then the brief trial with Pilate – and the brutal scourging as those who hated him cursed and belittled the CREATOR of the Universe!

And at the end of the day, what do we hear Yeshua saying? From the cross or tree, He looks up to Abba in heaven and pleads, **“Abba, Father, FORGIVE them, for they know not what they do.”** (Luke 23:34)

Now several years ago I gave a full-length sermon on a sermon with a similar title. Even if you heard it recently, this sermon is from a different angle, so listen to this one too. The last one on this topic several years ago was an inspired sermon, with all the scriptures about how we must also forgive. In that sermon I even give signs that show if you’re not as forgiving as you might have thought. So there’s a lot in that sermon. I’d recommend you hear it. But I want to cover that topic again – but this time *not* from the head knowledge of having all the right scriptures and points – though we’ll have many today – but this time we’ll cover it from the heart. I want to ask and discuss our day to day examples and see if we’re applying what we’ve been taught.

So this sermon is not primarily about how God has forgiven US, but how we must now in turn – forgive one another in the SAME WAY as God has forgiven us. One of the most difficult commands of scripture is that we must forgive one another – from the heart – or we ourselves will not be forgiven by God and we remain in our sins. I don’t want to remain in my sins.

At Passover, we should have been reminded of how costly true forgiveness is. If you forgive a debt of money, you’ve lost that money. Forgiving and moving on is also costly. Even for God. He had to give up his life for us. It cost him a lot of pain – severe physical pain and emotional pain – and death of the worst kind. He had to swallow a lot of “pride” when he refused to the power available to him to call down angels and blot out the taunters and executioners from existence. Oh yes, truly forgiving is expensive and costly.

*But that cost has been expended on YOU, and Yahweh our Father now expects you and me to extend this very same kind of forgiveness, this same attitude of forgiveness, as hard as it is at times, on his other children or future children. **And he expects us to extend this forgiveness the way Christ did it, and doing it from our hearts.** So that’s what we’re talking about today and let’s see how well we’re doing.*

A key point to this sermon: Just as YOU and I got a new lease on life by being forgiven by God, we can help people come to repentance when they see us, we children of God, accepting and forgiving them, no matter what they have done in the past! NO matter. Especially when that person realizes you know their sins, you know their issues – and you—like God – STILL love him/her in spite of everything you know. You’re mature enough to realize that we are the sum total of all our experiences, even the “bad” ones. Those bad times in our lives also mold us and shape us. They mature and mellow us in many cases. So we love one another no matter what the forgiven past is.

When we forgive like God forgives, people will find it easier to forgive THEMSELVES, to MOVE ON with their lives, to understand they can still be loved and lovable. SO MANY people feel their lives are ruined, are over – largely because people who claim to be God's children won't accept them, won't forgive them, don't want to be seen with them. Those same people can experience God's love and forgiveness more easily if you – dear brother or sister in Christ - - will just be the embodiment of God's love and forgiveness. Love, forgive and ACCEPT these repentant sinners - especially if you know their issues.

And never, ever, forget how much YOU yourself have been forgiven of. We've all been forgiven of a ton of sin and if we really understood that, we'd have no problem forgiving others.

So especially when someone has done something heinous – and repents – that person needs to be forgiven and have love affirmed to them again. (Story of the sex offender in Corinth; put out of the church; Paul asks them to bring him back and affirm their love for him – lest Satan take advantage.)

2 Corinthians 2:6-11

“This punishment which was inflicted by the majority **is sufficient** for such a man, so that, on the contrary, you ought rather to **forgive and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one be swallowed up with too much sorrow.** **8 Therefore I urge you to reaffirm your love to him.**

For to this end I also wrote, that I might put you to the test, whether you are obedient in all things. Now whom you forgive anything, I also forgive. For if indeed I have forgiven anything, I have forgiven that one for your sakes in the presence of Christ, **11 lest Satan should take advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices.”**

Do YOU want to be forgiven?

Turn to the sample prayer that Jesus taught us in **Matthew 6**, as we look at today's topic:

Matt 6:12-15

“And **forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.** (Yes, forgiving debts costs!)

13 And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.

For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

14 "For IF you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.

15 But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.”

If we're not forgiven, we're still in our sins. But to be forgiven, we have to forgive one another, or we won't be forgiven. Yeshua made that very clear. **In the next scriptures we get to see the level of forgiveness required.**

I'm going to be preaching to myself throughout this sermon, as the level of forgiving in the Scriptures is way beyond what we normally think. When we have been wronged, when someone does an “unforgivable” deed against our family or children – it's hard to let go. It's hard to let someone move on. We want them to suffer for what they did, as we call that the natural consequences of their sin. We want to lash out with a barrage of words about how bad that person is. With social media like texting, Twitter, Facebook, email, etc. – we can spread manure about someone to thousands and thousands of people within seconds!

Is that not the case? I've been the one *dishing* out the barrage at times in the past (and we all have done that to some extent) – and I've been the *recipient* of the barrage of hateful words. Neither one is pleasant. What I'm going to speak about today will bring healing to your soul if someone has badly hurt you or your family and you're feeling bitterness and hate. For some of you, it's your own husband or wife or ex-husband or ex-wife's actions, maybe due to adultery or other sins, that you just can't seem to let go and forgive. Maybe there's something between you and your daughter or son, or your dad or mom. Or maybe it's someone you work with, or attend church with... who?

The bar set for us is high: we must forgive or we won't be forgiven. Where's your maximum tolerance for forgiveness? At what point will you not forgive someone? Let's examine it.

The LEVEL AND KIND of forgiving we've been called to do

Be turning now to Ephesians 4:29-32.

It must have been hard for early Christians to forgive **the apostle Paul** for all the brutality he dished out against the early Christians. He was the one supervising the stoning of **Stephen**. He had to ask forgiveness, and even forgive himself. Can you imagine what it will be like when Stephen and Paul get together in the resurrection?

And then the resurrected Yeshua himself appeared to Paul (Saul, at the time) on the Road to Damascus to persecute more believers in Messiah. Paul had his own personal encounter with God. He repented. He was blinded. Ananias, a local believer in Damascus was asked to go see Paul. After resisting at first, when he saw Paul, his first word – the **FIRST** word to Saul was, "BROTHER!". "Brother Saul..." (**Acts 9:12-13**). Now that's forgiving and affirming love from the heart.

Paul at this point had no good proven track record. Just a few days had elapsed, but he's being called "brother". Ananias passed the test. Would you and I have passed it? Are there people out there you feel you simply *can't* forgive, or couldn't possibly be a brother or sister in church with you?

After all Paul had done – and had been done to him, look at Paul's gracious words in Ephesians 4:29-32.

Ephesians 4:29-32; 5:1-2

Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it **may impart grace** to the hearers. 30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. 31 **Let ALL bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice.** (repeat) 32 And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, **forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.**

And now continuing into the next chapter:

Eph 5:1-2

Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. 2 And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma.

Paul is teaching us that *our* forgiveness has to be just like the forgiveness – from the heart – that God offers us when we sin against him. (God forgives sin; we can't. So don't misunderstand me. We can forgive the malice, hate, the emotions caused by the sin.) And we've just read Paul's words and Yeshua's words earlier – urging us to forgive one another. So obviously we can forgive one another.

Chapter 5:1 says to copy that level of love, walk in love... and so on. The God-family kind of love. The God-level kind of forgiving. And by the way, I call God a family because if God is not a family, why would he ask us to call him “Father”? That would make no sense. God is growing a family and we are his real children. We are not going to be angels, but members of the family of God in the resurrection.

Colossians 3:12-16

Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on **tender mercies**, kindness, humility, meekness, **longsuffering; 13 bearing with one another, and forgiving one another**, if anyone has a complaint against another; *even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do.* 14 But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection. 15 And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful.

WHY is this message so important? Because as God has said to us, if we don’t forgive others as Christ forgave us, we are still in our sins and are not forgiven! We just read that in Matthew 6:14. We can’t just ask God for forgiveness and insist on holding malice and grudges against anyone. Anyone. Forgiving “most” – but not all – just won’t cut it.

James 2:12-13

So speak and so do as those **who will be judged by the law of liberty**. 13 For *judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy*. Mercy triumphs over judgment.

I find the wording in James 2 very interesting. We want to be showing mercy, don’t we? And James says there is liberty when you not only receive forgiveness – but give forgiveness – from your heart. You really feel it. You really mean it. You really want to extend it. And you’re happy when it’s received.

Matthew 18:35

"So My heavenly Father also will do to you *if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses.*"

“From his heart”. We have to feel and know our forgiveness is real. There is no more grudge, no more hate, no more resentment for that person. As part of the Beatitudes, our Savior taught us:

Matthew 5:7

“Blessed are the merciful, For they shall obtain mercy.

The implication of this last verse is that it’s the merciful who receive mercy – and ONLY the merciful, only they, receive mercy. I hope GOD has captured your attention. I say that, because if we’re truly honest, we can all easily forgive small slights, but when someone has ruined your life or the life of people precious to you – that is hard to forgive. But forgive – from the heart – we must!

Pause the sermon for 2 minutes and stop and think: who do you still hold a grudge against? What former employer or work-associates? What in-law, what family member, what church member, what pastor, what neighbor... who? Surely there’s someone you must still forgive from the heart.

So back to what I said in the very beginning: Passover is about the forgiving grace of God. *Our true God is all about forgiving – and so are His “kids”!* So forgiving is also about you extending your own grace, and God’s grace in you – to others who have hurt or defamed you.

Remember FOOTWASHING? It’s about being a servant, sure. It’s about being humble, sure. But it’s also about acknowledging that you also see this person in the chair whose feet you’re washing – as having been washed by the Master. So you’re also rinsing away the spiritual dirt he/she picked up since last Passover, acknowledging they are cleansed by our Master.

In the footwashing, you’re humbly showing you’re willing to wash and cleanse a brother or sister. Just like Christ did. Or, another way of putting it: you’re willing to acknowledge the cleansing he/she has already received from our master.

Now let’s apply it to our everyday living. Just recently I overheard someone talking to someone else about me and that really hurt my feelings. In my case, some of what he said were true. But it still hurt. I did talk to the person about it, but frankly I wanted nothing to do with him for a while. I didn’t want to hear him speak, or be in the same room, or eat with him, or have anything to do with him. I was hurting. But then God’s spirit in me started to say, “Be like Christ. Forgive like HE did”.

Whose Child are you?

The point that Yeshua and the apostles are all making is: if we are a child of God, we will ACT like a child of God. If we act like a child of Satan, then how can we claim Abba, Our Father God Most Most High—as our heavenly Daddy?

When we pray to Abba, our dear heavenly God Most High, we come to the throne of grace, to the “Mercy seat”. That’s what the throne He sits on is called: the Mercy Seat.

Look how God describes himself. And remember – Yeshua and God the Father act completely the same way, as one. WE – the “other children of God”, will act more and more like God the Father and Yeshua as well.

When Moses went back up Mt Sinai to plead for Israel to be forgiven after the gold calf major infidelity and sin, here’s how God describes himself as gracious, merciful, quick to pardon. There are SO many verses that speak of God that way. Especially in the New Covenant, each one is now responsible for his own sins and life – to give them to God – whereas in the Old Covenant the sins of the fathers could be penalized for many generations afterwards.

Here are a few scriptures that describe our God. If we are God’s child, we will look more and more like our Father.

Joel 2:13

So rend your heart, and not your garments; Return to YHVH your God,
**For He is gracious and merciful, Slow to anger, and of great kindness;
And He relents from doing harm.**

He is so forgiving! Even of the most evil of men who came humbly after God’s rebuke... at least for a while. Remember God even forgave Ahab – evil Ahab – when he put on sackcloth and walked humbly!

If you seethe with anger for days and days – or months and months – that's not God's spirit.

As we read about YHVH ("the LORD" in most of your Bibles), put your name in there to see if this would describe you, as you let God's spirit grow in you:

Psalms 103:8-14

"YHVH is **merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in mercy.**

9 He will not always strive with us, nor will He keep His anger forever.

10 He has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor punished us according to our iniquities.

11 For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward those who fear Him;

12 As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us.

13 As a father pities his children, So **YHVH pities those who fear Him.**

14 For He knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust."

The way we forgive – or not forgive someone – identifies whose child you are.

GOD'S CHILDREN PRAY FOR their enemies

Here's what I mean:

- Yeshua said when we pray for those who are badly treating us, when we forgive one another, when we act nicely and kindly to those who aren't being nice or kind to us... we'll let's let Christ himself say it:

Matthew 5:43-48 Holman Apologetics Study Bible

"You have heard that it was said, Love your neighbor and hate your enemy. 44 But I tell you, love your enemies and **pray FOR those who persecute you,** 45 **so that you may be sons of your Father in heaven.** For He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. 46 **For if you love those who love you, what reward will you have?** Don't even the tax collectors do the same? 47 And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing out of the ordinary? Don't even the Gentiles do the same? 48 Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect."

Romans 12:14 – Paul teaches us to "Bless those who persecute you. Bless them. Don't curse them."

Romans 12:20-21—"If your enemy is hungry, feed him. If he's thirsty, give him a drink. We overcome evil with good."

Are we doing this? Or are these just pretty platitudes to us? Can you name people and times recently where you've done that? Maybe you have, and just can't remember. That's fine too – because we're not supposed to be proudly thinking of how good we've been. But neither are we to keep a record of someone else's wrongs.

1 Corinthians 13:5-- a child of God, with God's love, "keeps no record of wrongs". ("...thinks no evil" in some translations).

But how well can we recount all the times someone has failed us, hurt us, been rude to us, done evil to us – or ones we love? Some people who claim to be children of God even compile a packet of information and spread them to others. How does that match with anything I've been reading? Don't be involved in that kind of garbage, dear brothers and sisters.

Or would you rather have God keep a list of your misdeeds and wrongs – instead of burying them in the righteous blood of His perfect Son?

There are many verses that say when we repent deeply, ALL our sins are washed away and not remember again. There are also verses that say –if we haven't properly received that forgiveness and offering it to others – then everything will be brought to light and revealed and we will have to give accounting.

Those are not contradictions. One applies to those who have accepted the forgiveness of God – and give forgiveness to others. They have no sin on their record now. I hope that includes you and me. The others who have to give account – have to do so because they haven't really let God take that sin debt and pay for it all. Nor do they forgive others completely.

Let's apply 2 Cor 5:21 – and let Christ who knew no sin become sin for us, that WE might (in him) become the righteousness of God himself, as God's free gift to us, as Romans 3,4,5, end of 9, etc. all clearly explain. Also Philippians 3:9-11.

In terms of PRAYING FOR someone who wants you dead, who dislikes you very much, who has been very unkind to you...

We know Yeshua on the cross pleaded for those who were torturing him – “Father, forgive them...they know not what they do.”

We know **STEPHEN** – as rocks were crushing down on his head and body, and as he died, pleaded, “Lord, do not charge them with this sin.” **Acts 7:57-60.**

We certainly know the story of the Father of the prodigal son – Luke 15:17-24, especially v 20... while he was a long way off, the father sprinted to him.

But perhaps a less familiar story for you of interceding for sinners:

Num 16:19-22 **The story of Korah's rebellion—along with other leaders --** has a great lesson besides the usual one about authority that this passage is used for:

19 And Korah gathered all the congregation against them at the door of the tabernacle of meeting. Then the glory of YHVH appeared to all the congregation.

20 And YHVH spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying, 21 *"Separate yourselves* from among this congregation, that I may consume them in a moment."

22 Then they fell on their faces, and said, "O God, the God of the spirits of all flesh, shall one man sin, and You be angry with all the congregation?"

God told them to get away from those rebels, *but Moses and Aaron did NOT immediately obey God.* They didn't separate themselves but first prayed for them, among people who wanted to kill them, in order to protect them from God's wrath. God was touched by that.

Of course the 250 rebelling elders were killed by God. You can read that yourself. My *main* point is yet to come up!

Num 16:41-50 "On the next day all the congregation of the children of Israel complained against Moses and Aaron, saying, "You have killed the people of YHVH." 42 Now it happened, when the *congregation had gathered against Moses and Aaron*, that they turned toward the tabernacle of meeting; and suddenly the cloud covered it, and the glory of YHVH appeared. 43 Then Moses and Aaron came before the tabernacle of meeting."

44 And YHVH spoke to Moses, saying, 45 "get away from among this congregation, that I may consume them in a moment." And they fell on their faces.

(Brethren, they didn't immediately get away. Watch what happens instead. They stopped right there and prayed for them instead for the people. They prayed: "No God! NO God! Don't God. These are your people, the sheep of your flock, they are people we love....Please God, don't destroy them."

46 So Moses said to Aaron, "Take a censer and put fire in it from the altar, put incense on it, and take it quickly to the congregation and make atonement FOR them; for wrath has gone out from YHVH. The plague has begun." 47 Then Aaron took it as Moses commanded, and ran into the midst of the assembly; and already the plague had begun among the people. So he put in the incense and made atonement for the people. **48 And he stood between the dead and living; so the plague was stopped.** 49 Now those who died in the plague were fourteen thousand seven hundred, besides those who died in the Korah incident. 50 So Aaron returned to Moses at the door of the tabernacle of meeting, for the plague had stopped."

Remember Moses and Aaron did this for people who were about to stone them. They had to be forgiving, in order to be able to do what they did and stop a deadly, dangerous plague from God. They ran right into the midst of where the plague was killing people. That's incredible.

Could you and I have been as forgiving – or would we have stood on the sidelines cheering God on as a few more thousand collapsed in death and dying? Be honest. It took a ton of conversion and presence of God's spirit in them to be able to do this. You and I will have a similar opportunity in the years ahead, just wait and see, when we too will be tested to see if we can forgive and pray for people doing very cruel things against us. The end time tribulation is called the worst time the world has ever seen. We will all see at least a part of it, I believe.

A great catastrophe is about to happen in Ezekiel 22. Please turn there. God is seeking someone to "stand in the gap". It's written there for our admonition. Are you even praying for our President, for our country, for our leaders – that Almighty God be merciful to us all? Are you? You may not like any or most of them – but pray for your enemies, forgive them.

Ezekiel 22:29-31

"The people of the land have used oppressions, committed robbery, and mistreated the poor and needy; and they wrongfully oppress the stranger. **30 So I sought for a man among them who would make a wall, and stand in the gap before Me on behalf of the land, that I should not destroy it; but I found no one.** 31 **Therefore I have poured out My indignation on them;** I have consumed them with the fire of My wrath; and I have recompensed their deeds on their own heads," says the Lord (Adonai) YHVH"

We should not only forgive someone who has hurt us, or sinned against us, but pray for them – even before they have repented, as you will soon see in Scripture. Please note: we are not to associate with spiritual *brothers and sisters* who persist in a continuing life of sin (1 Cor. 5:11-12), but we still have

to have a conciliatory attitude of hoping they will see their error and repent. In the meantime, we have to remember we also have had so much we've been forgiven of too.

We already know that in Rom 5:8 it says "... God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that *while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*"

Luke 22:31-32

"And the Lord said, 'Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat. 32 **But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail;** and *when you have returned to Me*, strengthen your brethren."

Jesus even knew Peter would turn on Him, would deny him... as he says in the next 2-3 verses, but was *already* praying for him. That is our example. Even if we know people are conspiring against us or on a track that will hurt us, we still need to be praying for them as Jesus did for us.

JOB: interesting account here. Be turning to Job 42, which recounts Job's repentance before Yahweh. God is going to ask Job to do something extraordinary. We start with Job's words of his own repentance in Job 42:6, then God tells the friends of Job that they need to have Job pray for them. But even here, God is offering his reconciliation.

Job 42:6-10

6 *Therefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.*" 7 And so it was, after YHVH had spoken these words to Job, that YHVH said to Eliphaz the Temanite, "My wrath is aroused against you and your two friends, for you have not spoken of Me what is right, as My servant Job has. 8 Now therefore, take for yourselves seven bulls and seven rams, go to My servant Job, and offer up for yourselves a burnt offering; **and My servant Job shall pray for you.** For I will accept him, lest I deal with you according to your folly; because you have not spoken of Me what is right, as My servant Job has."

[How easy would it be for us, had we been Job, to pray for "friends" like these, after all the mean things they had said to Job?]

9 "So Eliphaz the Temanite and Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite went and did as YHVH commanded them; for YHVH had accepted Job.

(We lose the meaning in the KJV: "the Lord turned the captivity of Job..")

10 **And YHVH restored Job's losses when he prayed for his friends.** Indeed YHVH gave Job twice as much as he had before SKIP TO V 12: Now YHVH blessed the latter days of Job more than his beginning;"

This is a good place to start as we learn to forgive the way God does. Pray *for* our adversary. Pray **FOR** the person you've had a fight with. Ask for good things for them. Pray for their weaknesses and for your own shortcomings too, while you're at it. Thank God for that person – even if that person is your very own spouse or offspring or parents.

When we pray for one another, miracles happen in our relationship. WE get blessed! Like JOB!

Be willing to forgive anything, of anyone!

Many refuse to really forgive because **they've concluded certain sins can never be overcome**. We need to grow in godly forgiving if we buy in to the world's belief that certain sins can never be overcome. We give up on God in those cases. Typically we apply these to alcoholics, homosexuals and sex offenders especially – and this justifies us thinking we can remain harsh against such people, “because they'll just re-offend eventually anyway”. Be turning to 1 Cor. 6:9-11.

My personal conviction is that this is a slap in God's face when we think that way. God in us, that's what the Holy Spirit is, can overcome and conquer all sin, all bad habits and addictions. Notice the list of sins in the list below, put into the past tense. “Such were some of you...” Many of the sins listed in there are ones that society says can never be overcome.

1 Corinthians 6:9-11

“Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor **homosexuals**, nor **sodomites**, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor **drunkards**, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. **11 And such WERE some of you.** *But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.*”

Remember again 1 Cor 13, the love chapter: “Love never fails, Love always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.”

What if God had given up on ME, or on you? People might. People *have* given up on others. Thank God He doesn't!

I've often heard some people even claim about some sins: “That sin he did, was simply unforgivable!” So we aren't merciful. I remind us all, from God's lips -- mercy will be shown to the merciful. Forgiveness will be shown to the forgiving. Don't put yourself in the place of God to say something is forgivable or not forgivable. The forgiving will receive forgiveness. I want to keep repeating that.

Yahweh forgives us of ALL our sins. If we're to forgive as God forgives, as Yeshua forgives, we must learn to do the same thing: ALL sins. There's little chance of a sin being truly “unforgivable” – except the sins we don't repent of, or those for which we refuse the workings of the spirit of God.

When we don't forgive, often it's because we **really, really want “justice done”** – and by that we really mean, if we're honest, that we want to see **vengeance** – or punishment -- done on someone. True justice is vital. But remember God himself tells us that ‘mercy triumphs over justice’ (James 2:13). And before that, we're told God won't be merciful to someone showing no mercy. Vengeance belongs to God. Watch your heart on this point.

A sign you're growing: you give the benefit of the doubt more and more and pray for God to handle the justice.

Other WAYS we may need to grow in forgiveness

Let's look at some other ways we may need to grow.

Do you like the gossip tabloids or TV shows? Do you listen to others talk about others? Then you're being an accomplice to the hurt and the sin of lacking forgiveness.

1 Corinthians 13:4-7 Wherever it says “love” – put in your name. See how true it rings, or not. Remember “God is love”. So we can also think “God” where we see the word “love”. And then try your name in there to see if we’re growing in godly love or not.

“Love is patient; **love is kind**. Love does not envy;
is not boastful; is not conceited;
5 does not act improperly; is not selfish;
is not provoked; **does not keep a record of wrongs**;
6 **finds no joy in unrighteousness, but rejoices in the truth**;
7 bears all things, believes all things,
hopes all things, endures all things.
(Apologetics Holman Study Bible)

What records and notes do you have “on” someone? Anyone? Go shred those notes. And make peace with the person, as much as peace is possible, live in peace. Some of us may have no notes, but we keep the offenses fresh in our minds as we rehearse the evil deed done against us over and over. That’s wrong too. *Let it go. Let the sinner be released from your jail! Let them see you’ve put up a yellow ribbon round their ole oak tree – and let them be free from their mental prison.*

Quit torturing them – and frankly, quit torturing yourself. You and I will live more happily, more freely, more healthily – if we truly forgive the worst of the worst offenders against us.

And again, **that also shows whose child you are**. And again: show that you are worthy of being forgiven because you are forgiving others, all others.

Are You QUICK TO RECONCILE – OR do you SEETHE?

How does God forgive us?

Psalms 103:8 – he is slow to anger and **Psalms 86:5** says YHVH is “ready to forgive”... he’s right there, no hesitation. In Isaiah 1, He pleads with us to return to him so he can make our sins, though they be as crimson, as white as snow. Nehemiah 9:17-20 tells us that God did not withhold his manna or providing shade for them by day – *in spite of* all their sins and rebellions. You and I really need to ponder that one! What would WE have done if we had been YHVH?

God’s children will be acting more and more like our Father.

When someone has annoyed, offended, hurt or sinned against us – we tend to want them to hurt a bit too. So they get the silent treatment. Or we won’t eat with them. **Or wives won’t sleep with him for a while, or vice versa, as sex is withheld, against God’s teachings, by the way. See 1 Cor. 7:5.** It says there we are NOT to deprive one another except for consent or for periods of fasting – which surely would be usually 1-3 days maximum. How many of you fast for more than a day?

1 Corinthians 7:3-5

“Let the husband render to his wife the affection due her, and likewise also the wife to her husband. 4 The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. And likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. 5 Do not deprive one another except with consent for a time, that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again so that Satan does not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.”

Or sometimes we quit eating together with someone who offended us. In the Old Testament peace offerings, the one offering it sat down at dinner with God and the priest. They ate together, after the sin had been forgiven through the burnt offering or sin offering. God does not hold the grudge! God's children won't either.

Other times we decide we can forgive, but we just don't want to hang out with that person. That's not forgiving. That's another example of seething. **Again, our standard is God himself.** After everything every one of us has done against Yah, what does he offer us? What does He say? "I want to be with you – all the time – for forever." He offers us eternal life and gives us access to HIM at any time, all the time. That's our standard. I'm not there yet. But that's the standard.

Or we grade ourselves as not being too bad because we can cite all kinds of examples where we have forgiven people. **But – whom have you left out of your reconciliation?** Does God offer forgiveness just to some, or just to most, or to all who will receive His offer?

Godly Forgiveness must be total, for everyone

God so loved the whole world, that even while we were all deep in our sins, he was offering the way to be forgiven. ALL who will accept him and his forgiveness will be forgiven. He is not willing that any should perish. Some will not accept that offer and they will die in their own sins.

God wants to forgive all. Forgiving only most who have hurt you won't "cut it". It has to be ALL.

When praying... and realize someone is offended: God wants us to take steps to reconcile or our prayers may be meaningless.

Matthew 5:23-24

*"Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that **your brother has something against you.** 24 leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. **First** be reconciled to your brother, and **then** come and offer your gift". (or pray)*

Mark 11:25-26 (This time YOU are the one with something against someone)

*"And whenever you stand **praying**, if **you** have **anything against anyone**, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you *your* trespasses. 26 But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses."*

So forgive quickly. Especially family members and loved ones who frankly may not be with us at any given moment.

My dad's story (on the AUDIO)... Do it while you can. I felt badly about my dad. I held a grudge inside though we had spend time together because of the hurts he had caused me. One year I wrote a really nice complimentary letter about all he had done and how I admired him.

Got a letter back from my dad. He wrote that he had had no idea I felt so positively about him and he had wept as he read my letter. It meant so much to him to know I didn't hate him and in fact respected him. It made me feel so good too, to hear we were reconciled, happy and thrilled.

Two days later, I got a phone call from my mother. Her news: my father had just passed away that day. Just two days after I heard he knew I had forgiven him.

HOW ABOUT REPEAT OFFENDERS?

OK, what about forgiving someone who repeats the offense against you or others? That's so hard, isn't it? But again, our standard is God himself. How many times have we had to repent for the same sins? Sins of not really keeping sabbath faithfully. Or gossiping (when was the last time you repented of that?). Or losing patience and losing our temper. Or for lust. Or for all the coveting we do. Or for our very own private sins that we haven't fully overcome yet? How many times have you had to rely on the God's incredible gracious forgiving nature? Should we not be the same for each other?

Matthew 18:21-22

"Then Peter came to Him and said, 'Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?' 22 Jesus said to him, 'I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.'"

Luke 17:1-4 "Then He said to the disciples, 'It is impossible that no offenses should come, but woe to him through whom they do come! 2 It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown into the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones. 3 *Take heed to yourselves. If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. 4 And if he sins against you seven times in a DAY, and seven times in a day returns to you, saying, 'I repent,' you shall forgive him.*'"

After all, this is what God does for us! Again though – most of us would claim a person who has sinned against us seven times in one day and says he repents, can't really be repentant by our estimation of the fruit. However, Jesus' words are clear: "you *shall* forgive him."

After Passover, let's grow in this vital characteristic: Being a person who is *quick* to forgive. You won't be forgiven if you don't – and you'll receive many blessings for it if you do.

Don't just forgive – but reconcile, pray for, bless and leave a blessing!

So finally – if we're going to be like God in forgiving, leave a blessing for those you've forgiven, like God did for Job. Job ended up with much more after he was forgiven. Also look at what God says in Joel 2. Here too is where we can grow.

God also often leaves behind a blessing with His forgiving. Notice Joel 2's wording.

Joel 2:12-32

12 "Now, therefore," says YHVH, "***Turn to Me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning.***" 13 ***So rend your heart, and not your garments; return to YHVH your God,*** for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness; and He relents from doing harm.

14 Who knows if He will turn and relent, and leave a blessing behind Him-- a grain offering and a drink offering for YHVH your God? (... I'm jumping now to verse 18)

18 Then YHVH will be zealous for His land, and ***pity*** His people. [now watch the blessings!] 19 YHVH will answer and say to His people, "Behold, I will send you ***grain*** and new wine and oil, and you will be satisfied by them; I will no longer make you a reproach among the nations.

20 "But I ***will remove far from you the northern army,*** and will drive him away into a barren and desolate land, with his face toward the eastern sea and his back toward the western sea;

his stench will come up, and his foul odor will rise, because he has done monstrous things."

21 Fear not, O land; be glad and rejoice, for YHVH has done marvelous things!

22 Do not be afraid, you beasts of the field; for the open pastures are springing up, and the tree bears its fruit; the fig tree and the vine yield their strength.

23 Be glad then, you children of Zion, and rejoice in YHVH your God; **for He has given you the former rain faithfully**, and He will cause the rain to come down for you-- the former rain, and the latter rain in the first month.

24 The threshing floors shall be full of wheat, and the vats shall overflow with new wine and oil. 25 "So I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten, the crawling locust, the consuming locust, and the chewing locust, my great army which I sent among you.

26 You shall eat in plenty and be satisfied, and praise the name of YHVH your God, who has dealt wondrously with you; and My people shall never be put to shame.

27 Then you shall know that I am in the midst of Israel: I am YHVH your God and there is no other. My people shall never be put to shame."

Now watch – God offers HIS Spirit and SALVATION! What a GIFT!

28 **"And it shall come to pass afterward that I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh;** your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions. 29 *And also on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days.* 32 **And it shall come to pass that whoever calls on the name of YHVH shall be saved.** For in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be deliverance, as YHVH has said, among the remnant whom YHVH calls."

Isn't that just amazing? That's the way God wants US forgiving one another: from the heart, and leaving a blessing behind us!

God does the same thing for the Laodecian church at the end of Revelation 3. After warning them to repent, He says if they do He'll share His throne with them, eat with them, and share His life with them.

I'm out of time. The point is: God's family – and anyone who hopes to be in it – will be all about grace, all about forgiveness, all about reconciliation, all about love – for everyone, no matter what has happened before.

Apostle Peter's story ...(briefly discussed how gracious Yeshua was to Peter, in spite of his 3x denial, after they met after Yeshua's resurrection.)

Someday, there will be just the kingdom of God. Satan's rule will end, along with any who refuse to repent and accept Yeshua as their king. Those in the kingdom will be those who love and accept each other and who have become like God – letting people move on, as God has let US move on. We will not be thinking of people by their old sins any longer.

The kingdom is about forgiveness and grace. As co-heirs with Christ, I hope this sermon made you think deeply a few times about how – in this area of our lives – we can grow to become much more like Him: the God of mercy, God of Love, our God who forgives, reconciles and helps us move on.

Praise you Yeshua. Help us become more like you. Praise you dear Abba, God Most High. You are the greatest in your mercy and love and compassionate forgiveness – even after everything we've done to Yeshua, the Creator of all things, who came from you and is with you now.