

“Forgiveness: Burdensome but Such a Blessing”

A 32-year-old milk truck driver named Charles Robert was living with his family in the Nickel Mines, Pennsylvania, where the Amish people lived. Charles was neither a Christian nor an Amish, and the people in the neighborhood called him a quiet milkman. But one day in October 2006, his quiet demeanor suddenly changed. He was furious with God because of the death of his first child.

He ran into an Amish sect school near his home for no reason and held several people hostage at gunpoint. He freed the boys and the adults, but tied up ten girls tightly. He eventually shot at the girls with a gun, killing five and injuring the remaining five. Then he turned the gun on himself, committing suicide.

The Amish Church was devastated by this horrible act of violence. Initially, they could not help but channel their anger and sadness towards their number one public enemy, Charles’ family. They were harmed by indelible scars, yet they refused to harbor bitterness in their hearts. They practiced forgiveness immediately.

They worked together to alleviate Charles' family's misery. Charles' family gathered at his home following his funeral. At the time, an Amish man came to the house and embraced Charles' father in his arms, saying, "We will forgive you."

Amish leaders visited Charles' wife and children to express their condolences and express their forgiveness, help, and love. About half of those who attended Charles' funeral were Amish church members. The Amish invited Charles' family to attend the funeral of the murdered girls.

In this crisis situation, they kept themselves in faith, and a deep peace came upon the Amish community. They decided to distribute a portion of the donations for the victims' families to Charles' wife and three children because they thought they were also victims of this terrible tragedy.

A local resident explained the result of the tragedy very impressively: "We were all speaking the same language, which was not just English. Instead, we were speaking in the language of care, the language of the community, and the language of service. Yes. It was a language of forgiveness."

People say, "Forgiveness is a gift that a person can give to himself or herself that makes them free." But sometimes, compared to the worth of its fruit, there is no bigger burden or painful process than forgiveness. Where does real forgiveness come from? Let's look through the scriptures today.

Let us consider David, who weeps at the death of Absalom the traitor. First David said in the Old Testament text, verse 5, before the war began with Absalom and his army, "For my sake, don't harm the young man Absalom." Absalom, of course, was a promising son to David for the future. However, this young man eventually rebelled against his father, organizing an army in opposition to his father, David.

I'm sure many of us have sons who have given us grief by getting into fights, not studying, or many other things. But can you imagine if your son said, hey dad, I'm going to gather an army to hunt you down? Talk about a bad son!

Why did David ask his servants not to kill Absalom before the battle began? Was it because he couldn't judge the situation correctly? Did David think Absalom's plan was merely a joke? Is it because he did not want to lose the most capable son among many of his sons?

But Joab, the general, with his ten servants, struck down Absalom and killed him (vv. 14, 15). Of course, he heard King David's request not to kill Absalom, but he did not care. Upon Absalom's death, it was time for both David and his army to celebrate victory and burst out in cheers. But David said, "My son Absalom, if only I had died in your place, my son!"

So, Joab expressed his displeasure with David when King David was grieving that Absalom was dead. He said, "You would be quite happy if Absalom were alive today and all of us were dead" (19:6). Joab's words were from a position of common sense, morality, and patriotism. That is why the world calls such a soldier a hero.

We would like to speculate on what would have happened if Joab had obeyed David's words and Absalom had lived instead of being killed. But the focus is not on what would happen if Absalom survived, but rather it allows us to imagine on how David could be so sad about the death of Absalom, who is more evil than his enemies.

Why did David cry out when he heard of the death of Absalom in battle? In the face of the national crisis, David is very emotional and seems very indecisive in determining the state of affairs. David, however, has seen Absalom's death entangled with the great theme of "God's forgiveness." David saw his own sinfulness revealed before God through the rebellion of his son, Absalom. He was a rebel against God who killed his loyal Uriah and took his wife.

David now wants to be a faithful spiritual hero who embodies God's forgiveness, not a hero who wins in the war. And now David wants to have the heart of God, who forgave him when he rebelled against God. Just as God did, David wanted the opportunity to forgive his son. David's tears show what the true heart of our Heavenly Father is toward man.

Let us remember that our forgiveness is possible only through the merits of the love and sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. Today, the Apostle Paul emphasizes that we should forgive one another in faith in Ephesians' verse 32. But in that forgiveness, there is a clear principle required of us. It is "to forgive one another as God has forgiven you in Christ."

We are the first to be forgiven, and we must forgive. And we must entrust the right to this forgiveness to God. In fact, no human being can be the subject of forgiveness. God gives us the autonomy of forgiveness only when we are freed from our sins by the merit of Jesus' blood. We are allowed to use the power of forgiveness, but we have no ownership. It is still in the Lord.

But we always want to forgive only as much as our hearts allow. We are just as afraid of death as the command to "forgive one another, just as God did." It is easy to say that it is impossible when human beings try to forgive within the limits of their abilities. But if we are willing to forgive in faith, God pours His power on us so that we can carry out the forgiveness.

Let us find out why we have so much trouble forgiving others. The first reason is that I do not know that I am a sinner who has committed a greater sin than the sin that another has committed against me. The second reason is that I do not understand that I have already received greater forgiveness than I can forgive others.

In other words, we do not understand what sin is or who Jesus is. Also, we do not know what kind of grace I have received because of Jesus or how many of my sins have been forgiven. As a result, the Christian cannot forgive because he did not realize the grace of forgiveness he received from Jesus.

Let's see one example. If today, Brother Ted dropped and broke my \$500 smartphone I bought yesterday, if so, I can ask him for compensation for my damage. However, at that very moment, I remembered when I got into an accident while driving his car, causing an accident that led to his car being totaled at a loss of \$50,000.

At that time, Ted had not asked me for any compensation. If so, I will never ask for compensation for the smartphone I lost today. Also, you cannot even ask for it. Just like in this case, we all owed our lives to Jesus Christ.

"Forgiveness" is a very touching word when it is received. But "forgiveness" becomes very difficult and burdensome when it is us who have to give it to another person. But at this point, forgiveness becomes a gift that sets us free in the end.

How, then, could the Amish Church forgive its perpetrator? Is it because the sorrows that the Amish collectively experienced were distributed amongst many and therefore light enough to bear? No. Never. They had a willingness to obey the Bible's word rather than their situation and emotions. We can see that David wanted to forgive Absalom with such a heart.

When we forgive someone, we do not have to focus on what happens after forgiveness. After forgiveness, we should not worry about things getting worse or harder than they were before. We focus only on the teachings of God, who commanded us to "forgive one another." As long as you take the initiative to forgive, God will bless you.

We must look at God's example and his promise, not our own will, to learn how to truly forgive. Just as we can forgive because we believe in God, we depend on God's work thoroughly for everything that comes after forgiveness.

Always leave a place in your heart for forgiveness. And accept it when you feel the opportunity has come. God will use it with joy and you will surely produce good fruit. Amen.

Reflections and Applications for Today's Sermon:

- 1) Let's recall memorable events in which you have been forgiven by others and in which you have forgiven others. What spiritual lessons have they taught you?
- 2) As you meditate on Ephesians 4:31, "as God has forgiven you through Christ," what spiritual burden or courage do you experience in relation to forgiveness? What will transform that burden into courage?
- 3) Let's distinguish between the standards and boundaries of forgiveness emphasized by those seeking modern mental health and psychological stability and the fundamental difference between God's forgiveness emphasized through the Bible.