



Sermon

29th October 2023

The Freedom of Forgiveness

1 Samuel 24:1-12; Matthew 6:9-15

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When we go on SOMA Mission trips, we teach them principles we have learnt about healing ministry and gifts of the Spirit. We have taught these in seminars here but many of you have not heard them. I think I need to make sure you all hear them so I have taught you all that I have learnt over the years so I will include them from time to time in the preaching programme.

David and Saul at En Gedi

We have just heard the story of David and King Saul in the cave at En Gedi. This is David who as a boy was secretly anointed by the Prophet Samuel to be the next king. At about 15 years old, he fought and killed Goliath the giant. This made him the hero of the Israeli people and he went on to lead successfully the army against the Israel's enemies. But King Saul became insanely envious of him. He had tried to kill David and had hunted him with his army in the dry desert lands of the Judean wilderness.

I have been to En Gedi. It is a spring from which water cascades down a narrow valley to the Dead Sea. All around is dry parched land. But the valley has green trees and bushes and pools of water you can bathe in. It is a most welcome oasis in the desolate surroundings. There is a cave behind a waterfall there. It is that cave where this story happened, the noise of the waterfall would cover the sound of a stealthy movement.

By the time of our story, Saul had tried to kill David at least seven times and he is again hunting him with 3000 soldiers.

David and his men were hiding in a cave, when King Saul came to that same place and stepped into the cave by himself to relieve himself. David's men urged him to kill the King.

David crept forward – carefully, quietly, don't rattle a stone, don't make a sound on the rough floor of the cave. He raised his knife and cut ... the corner off Saul's robe. Then quietly, quietly, he crept back away from Saul.

After that, he regretted even that because the robe represented the king's authority - even by cutting the corner he was symbolically taking away from his authority.

When Saul had left the cave and gone some distance away, David called out to him. This was a huge risk because he and his men were outnumbered five to one. If Saul had not responded well, they would all have been killed.

David showed the piece of the robe he cut off as proof that although he could easily have killed Saul, he was loyal. As the story continues, Saul came to his senses and agreed that David is faithful and that he had treated him badly. Peace is established between them – at least temporarily.

Lord's Prayer

In the prayer Jesus taught his disciples, we say, "Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us." I remember when I was at primary school wanting to separate those two things. I wanted to find a way to be forgiven without forgiving others. But there is that little word "as" - in the same way. Hmmm!

If we don't get the point from the prayer, he makes it again:

Matthew 6:14-15 For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

So forgiveness is really important. It is a command from Jesus. Now if I command you to fly, can you do it? No! So it would be a stupid command for me to give.

When Jesus tells us we must forgive, he is not being stupid - it must be possible. So how do we do it? The story we have heard about David and Saul gives us four principles. Saul had falsely accused David and was actively trying to kill him. What did David do?

1. He confronted Saul with his wrongdoing.

He was respectful while saying, "I have not wronged you, but you are hunting me down to take my life."¹ We don't always need to do this but for there to be reconciliation as well as forgiveness, it is necessary.

2. He acknowledged where he had also done wrong.

Often when we are hurt by someone we react badly and sin against them. We in turn need to ask forgiveness for those things. That may be from God alone, or we may need to ask forgiveness of the other person.

3. He trusted God to judge Saul.

"May the LORD judge between you and me. And may the LORD avenge the wrongs you have done to me, but my hand will not touch you." (verse 12). God says in Romans 12:19 "It is mine to avenge; I will repay..." When we forgive we stop being the judge and allow God to judge. We are not built to be judges – it corrodes our souls and we become bitter.

People sometimes say that if they forgive the other person will get away with it. No, they won't – for God will judge. When we try to punish someone by not forgiving it is like the person who wants to poison another person, by drinking the poison himself. He is the one who suffers – the other person is not affected at all.

So OK, we are to forgive but how?

There is a secret: **Forgiveness is an act of your will not a feeling.** You have to decide to forgive and the feelings will follow the decision.

Model

1. Decide to forgive and declare it aloud. Be specific rather than general.
2. Release the person from your judgement into God's judgement (as we saw David did.)
3. Ask God to bless that person – even find a way to do good for them. Jesus said,
Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who ill-treat you."²

You might pray:

Father, In the name of Jesus, I choose to forgive So-and-so, for such-and-such. I release him from my judgement into yours. I ask you to bless him and show me how I may do good for him.

Tips

- **Forgiveness does not mean what they did was all right.**
You know it was an offence to you – otherwise you would not need to forgive.

¹ Verse 11

² Luke 6:27-28

- **Memories surfacing**

You may find after doing this that memories keep surfacing. Don't despair - simply take it that you are being shown memories of specific actions that still need to be forgiven. You have done the general covering forgiveness, but some particular memories may need attention. Pray forgiving that specific action and leave it at that.

- **Forgiveness does not mean you must trust the other person.**

If the person has hurt you, they may do so again. Forgiveness is granted. Trust is earned. That is the fourth principle from David. The last verse of the chapter is: "Then Saul returned home, but David and his men went up to the stronghold."³

David did not go back with Saul. He went to his stronghold – his fortress, a place of safety and defense against enemies. He did not trust Saul and he was right not to since Saul would before long resume his pursuit of David.

- **Forgive yourself.**

A useful tip is that you can apply to yourself. If you discover you need to forgive yourself, the same prayer will work. Father, in the name of Jesus, I choose to forgive myself for I release myself from my judgement into yours and ask you to bless me. Amen.

So let's do it. I am going to give you an opportunity to allow the Holy Spirit to show you someone you need to forgive. Then we will pray the prayer putting that person's name in with the offence you have taken.

So first, let's quieten ourselves to give the Holy Spirit an opportunity to remind us of anyone we need to forgive. If no one comes to mind, that is OK. Be grateful that you don't need to forgive anyone. Let's close our eyes and be still.

Holy Spirit, please bring to mind anyone I need to forgive. Amen.

Now, when you pray this prayer put in the person's name and what offended you:

Father, In the name of Jesus, I choose to forgive [So-and-so] for [such-and-such]. I release him from my judgement into yours. I ask you to bless him and show me how I may do good for him. Thank you. Amen.

It can be very hard to forgive. But it is a question of our willingness not our ability. If we struggle, perhaps we can pray, "Father, help me to be willing to forgive," and move on from there.

God bless you as you come into the freedom of forgiveness.

³ Verse 22b

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