

A Journey Through The Lord's Prayer

"Forgive Us Our Trespases..."

[Matthew 6:9-13](#)

We began this sermon series, "A Journey through the Lord's Prayer," 4 weeks ago, and today we come to a phrase about forgiveness. Shall we say it together? "Forgive us our trespases as we forgive those who trespass against us."

By including this phrase in the model prayer he taught his disciples, Jesus was asking them to pray for God's forgiveness every time they prayed. And they would have done this three times a day, like any other Jewish people of their time: once in the morning, once during the day, and once in the evening. Throughout our current sermon series on the Lord's Prayer, many of us have been praying the prayer twice a day for the last several weeks. But, do you know what you are praying when you say this phrase about forgiveness? What did Jesus mean when he asked his disciples to pray, "Forgive us our trespases as we forgive those who trespass against us?"

Today, praying for forgiveness two or three times a day does not seem to make sense to many of us. We might wonder, "Why do I have to pray for God's forgiveness so often? I don't break any laws. I don't cheat. I pay honest taxes. I drive at a reasonable speed limit. I work hard. I take care of my own family, and I help out other people. Of course, I am not perfect, but I have not done anything terribly wrong, either. Over all, I am a pretty good person. So, what am I to be forgiven for?"

And I think our president, Mr. Donald Trump, shares a similar viewpoint. In one of the interviews he had as the Republican presidential frontrunner three years ago, he was asked, "Have you ever asked God for forgiveness?" To which he answered, "... I am Protestant. I am Presbyterian. And I go to church, and I love God, and I love my church..." In another interview, answering a similar question, his response was, "I like to be good. I don't like to have to ask for forgiveness. And I am good. I don't do a lot of things that are bad. I try to do nothing that is bad." He further explained how he usually tries to correct his error without getting God involved when he has done something wrong.

Many people who heard the president's views on forgiveness criticized him for not knowing the Christian understanding of forgiveness, despite his claim to be a church loving person. But, honestly, what he said in those interviews is not far from what many Christians would say about praying for forgiveness. Yet, we are praying for God's forgiveness every time we pray the Lord's Prayer. So, let's take a closer look at this petition: "Forgive us our trespases as we forgive those who trespass against us." Otherwise, we risk turning this model prayer Jesus gave us into empty words we pray out of habit.

First, you might have noticed that not all Christians use the same words for this particular line of the Lord's Prayer. Some say "trespases" and "trespass," while others say "debts" and "debtors." And, still others say "sins" and "sin" instead. So, why these different words for this particular line of prayer?

As we learned on the first Sunday of this sermon series, there are two versions of the Lord's Prayer. A longer version is recorded in the Gospel of Matthew than the one found in the Gospel of Luke. You have to remember that Jesus spoke Aramaic, while the gospels were written in Greek. And when translating the Aramaic word which had a dual meaning of debts and sins, Matthew used the Greek word for debts when he wrote, "Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors." But, Luke managed to include both meanings in his translation by using two different Greek words when he wrote, "forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us." Scholars believe Matthew's version is the more accurate translation.

Then, where do the words, trespasses and trespass come from? In the Gospel of Matthew, right after the Lord's Prayer, Jesus further explains this petition about forgiveness: "For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." (Matthew 6:14-15)

In 1526, the English Reformer, William Tyndale, used the word "trespasses" instead of "debts" when translating Matthew's version of the Lord's Prayer. He probably did this based on the additional commentary Jesus gave on this line about forgiveness in the prayer. Twenty years later, the Anglican Book of Common Prayer used Tyndale's translation for the Lord's Prayer. And, over the years, it became the more commonly prayed version of the Lord's Prayer.

The Greek word that is translated as "debts" is *opheilema*, and it means financial debts. In the world of the first century, when people could not pay what they borrowed, they either became slaves or were thrown into prison. Jesus often talked about this matter in his parables. The only way for debtors to be set free from slavery or prison was to find someone who could pay off their debts. Such a person was called a redeemer, and the process, redemption. Now, you can see why Jesus is called the Redeemer. He is the one who has paid off our debts to God and freed us from our slavery to sin and death.

Then, what does it mean to be indebted to God? When we ask God to forgive our debts, what debts are we talking about? God created everything in heaven and earth and gave them to us as gifts. God gave us life. All we need to do as God's creatures and children is to obey God, the Creator. How do we obey God? The Israelites said by keeping all the laws of Moses, including the Ten Commandments. Jesus summed them up in the Great Commandment: "to love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength. And to love your neighbor as yourself." Jesus also taught us how to live as citizens of God's kingdom, especially in his Sermon on the Mount.

So, when we fail to fulfill what God requires of us, when we fail to love God and our neighbor as instructed, when we fail to live up to the obligations and duties of the citizens of God's kingdom, as God's creatures and children, we are indebted to God.

But, this petition to forgive us our debts comes with quite a challenging clause: "as we forgive our debtors" or in the version we say, "as we forgive those who trespass against us."

Do you realize what you have been praying for with this particular line of the Lord's Prayer? We are asking God to forgive us in the same way we forgive those who have wronged us. In other words, we are saying, "God, I understand that you will not forgive me as long as I bear a grudge against someone." What a bold prayer!

Jesus knows the destructive effects of unresolved conflicts, grudges and resentments, He knows the negative toll hatred and anger takes upon us personally, in our bodies, minds, and souls, as well as socially. So, with this prayer, Jesus calls us to let them go. Just let it go -- all those grudges and grievances you hold onto, all the bitterness and resentment that keeps you up at night, all the anger and hatred, all your hurts and pain -- all the things that pull and tug at us and chips away at us physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Jesus calls us to let them go. And this can happen only when we forgive.

Kenneth Bailey writes in his book, *Jesus through Middle Eastern Eyes*:

Through forgiveness, the bitterness, anger, hatred, and desire for revenge are drained out of the struggle and the person contends with those for whom he or she may now be able to feel genuine compassion... After the offered forgiveness, the struggle for justice continues, but now there are things the person will not do. The day of victory or defeat will not become a day of vengeance. In his second inaugural address, delivered as the American Civil War was winding down, Abraham Lincoln said, "With malice towards none; with charity for all; ... let us... do all which may achieve and cherish a just, and lasting peace." Only after forgiving the enemy is it possible to commend such a path of Action.

Eva Kor found this truth through her own act of forgiveness. Eva was a Romanian-born Holocaust survivor. With her twin sister, Miriam and about 3,000 other twins, she was subjected to unspeakable human experimentation under the direction of Josef Mengele at the Auschwitz concentration camp during World War II. Both Miriam and Eva survived the unbelievably demeaning medical experiments, though their parents, grandparents, siblings, uncle and cousins were all killed. Let's take a look at this short video clip about this woman of incredible courage.

(Show the Video Clip About Eva Kor)

When we feel wronged and offended by the actions of others, we must pray this prayer Jesus our teacher and savior taught us to pray: "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." But, forgiving someone who has wronged us and offended us is not an easy thing to do. We all know that. It can be very difficult at times. In those moments of difficulty, you might struggle to say this particular line in the Lord's Prayer, to actually mean the words you pray when you say, "Forgive us as we forgive those who trespass against us."

Actually, there was a time in my life when I really struggled to say this prayer of Jesus. As I have shared with you before, my mother-in-law and I did not get along. And, during those years of struggling with her and having a broken relationship with her, it felt too hypocritical of me to say this prayer, as I could not forgive her for all the trouble and heartache I believed she had caused me. 'How? How can I forgive her? How can I forgive her when she does not even ask me to forgive her, when she doesn't even acknowledge how much pain she has put me through?' I wondered.

Of course, it is difficult to forgive those who have wronged us and those who have offended us. Forgiving certain offenses seems like an impossible task. But, remember that we do not do this alone. God never leaves us alone with the work of forgiveness and reconciliation. Our Redeemer, the One who has redeemed us from our debts, goes before us and asks us to follow him. He knows the pain of betrayal, he knows the hurt of rejection. He knows the weight of suffering unjustly, of being subjected to demeaning and dehumanizing treatment. He knows us and he knows how difficult it is to forgive.

And, Jesus is asking us to follow him. To follow his way of love and forgiveness, which leads to peace, not only within ourselves, but peace in the world. Maybe you are not there yet. Maybe you are not ready to join Jesus as he prays for the Father to forgive us as we know not what we do... Would you then ask for the willingness to forgive? Would you invite the Holy Spirit into the stony places of your heart, those places where you are not ready to let go, and ask for the willingness to forgive? Because it is possible. Even the deepest pain, the deepest hurt, the deepest brokenness can be redeemed and restored. With God, all things are possible!
Amen.