

February 27, 2000

Sermon: Dispense Forgiveness Regularly

Scripture: Matthew 18:21-35

Amazingly, he found none. It seems that while we talk a great deal about forgiveness, really in society we don't practice it very much, or even write about it. Yet, we are coming to recognize more and more of how we need to get back to what the Bible says about it because just as we have closed this past century, we have come to recognize that we have killed more people in hatreds and in wars in this century, than in the rest of history put together. When you begin to think about all of the wars and conflicts that are going around the world, you recognize that it is because of these old animosities and all problems that have been there, that have been going on for thousands of years, because we have never, never, never learned how to forgive. That is the reason surprisingly enough President Carter and Bishop Tu Tu have been in the business recently of raising ten million dollars to try to deal with how can we get forgiveness out among the various nations. The John Templeton Foundation, which is the largest religious foundation in America, has just commissioned twenty-nine scholars to study forgiveness and how can it be applied to the society in which we live. Everybody in this room has had to learn how to deal with forgiveness because everybody in the room has something that has been done to you. How we need to come back in our own life, in our society, and in our world to get back to the basic Biblical message, which is the message of forgiveness. We wanted to talk today about how can we begin to dispense forgiveness on a regular basis. The passage of scripture that we read is from the book of Matthew 18 verse 21. Peter came to Jesus and he said, "Lord, how many times should I forgive my brother." "Should I do it seven times." You need to understand that the Jewish religion said you do it three times. Simon said I will double it and add one to it. He would make good points with the Lord. Jesus answered "I tell you not seven times but seventy times seven." Four hundred ninety times which simply is a way of saying I want you to be a person who is always dispensing forgiveness. Then he told this story. "Therefore the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wants to settle accounts with his servants. As he began a settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him." We don't understand that measurement of money so let me tell you what that means. That would mean more than the national government of Israel took in, in a year. How that man owed him that, I don't know but he owed him all of this money. Listen to him. "Since he was unable to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all he had be sold to repay the debt. The servant fell on his knees before him and said, "Be patient with me he begged. I will pay you back everything." Well the answer is, no he couldn't. If he lived to be seven life times, he could not pay it back. The servant's master took pity on him and canceled the debt and let him go. When the servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denari, that is pocket change. He grabbed him and he began to choke him. "Pay me back what you owe me," he demanded. His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him. "Be patient with me and I will pay you back". He refused. Instead he went off and had the man thrown in prison until he could pay the debt. I never have figured out how a man in prison could pay the debt, but that is what they did. When the other servant saw what had happened they were greatly distressed and went and told their master everything that had happened. Then the master called the servant in. "You wicked servant. I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Should you have mercy on your fellow servants just as I have had on you." In anger his master turned him over to the jailers to be tormented until he could pay back all he owed. This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart. You do not have to live very long until somebody will do you wrong. We live in a broken world with broken people and soon you will be treated unfairly. Little children cry out to one another. "You are not fair." Adults begin to realize that people have used ingenuity to do malicious things against them. So you will not live very long until somebody will treat you unfairly. The question that all of us have to answer is how are we going to respond to what people do to us. Are we going to fill our lives with revenge and vengeance and bitterness or are we going instead to learn how to forgive. Jesus taught us clearly in this story that what He wanted us to learn how to do was to be people who understood about forgiveness and how to be able to dispense it. I have understood from this passage of scripture that you will never understand forgiveness until you kind of see forgiveness in the perspective of this story. Let me show you how we usually see it. Here you are, here is the person who has done

something wrong to you. All that you can think about is this level. All you can think about is that person, think about yourself, that person, think about yourself. When Jesus told the story he said, the only way you are going to learn how to give forgiveness, is that you are going to have to add a third party in the diagram and that is God. Let me tell you about God. Everyone of us owe a debt to God that is beyond our comprehension. Yet God has reached out and forgiven us. What God has done for us is so far greater than what we are dealing with. We are not even talking about the same thing. Yet, God has reached out and said "I will forgive you." What that brings us to is here you are again not as a wounded party, but as a broken sinner before God. Here I am God with all I have done wrong. Let me focus on me and not so much on the other person. One of the problems that all of us have, we can see more clearly what other people do wrong than what we do that is wrong. Remember Jesus talked about seeing the speck in your brothers eye but not seeing the log in your own eye. When you get the perspective that Jesus gave, you begin to see things yourself through God's eyes. You begin to understand how deep your wrong is. How many people you have hurt, how you have hurt God. So you are not so judgmental towards other individuals within your life. When you stand before God as a broken sinner, then you begin to understand out of your brokenness, how you can pass that forgiveness on to others. Take the picture, put instead of a hurt person, put instead of it, a broken sinner before God. As you see that, then you are able to reach out and to give that which God has so freely given to you. If you have never experienced forgiveness, you can't give forgiveness. But if you have experienced it in your life, and you have begun to understand who you are and the kind of person you are, then you can reach out to them. Let me just give you a definition of what forgiveness is. Forgiveness is turning towards the person who has hurt you, and you offered them positive, good will and say I am not going to retaliate. I am not going to try and get even, I am not going to try to get back, I am going to say to you, as best I can, I am going to rid myself of bitterness and hurt and I am going to try and rebuild our relationship again. Notice some of the things that does not mean because I think it is so important that we understand what we are trying to do. It doesn't mean, it doesn't matter. It does matter. I have people who sometimes come to me and say "Well, I know they have done me wrong but it doesn't matter." Oh yes, it does matter. Until that other person begins to see that it does matter, that they have hurt you, then they are just going to keep on doing the same thing over and over again. When you come to them, sit down with them, and say "Oh listen, you have hurt me." Let us see what we can do about it, let us try and work on it, then you can begin to start rebuilding a relationship. To say it doesn't matter, all you do is push it down, then it is going to come back, push it down and it comes back. You are going to have to get rid of it and you don't get rid of it by saying, "Well, it just doesn't matter." You need to understand also that what it may or may not mean is that the relationship may be like it was before. Forgiveness is your part, they may not want to accept your forgiveness. It may not mean that everything is going to be wonderful. It does mean that you are not going to drown in your bitterness and you can say before God, "I have done everything I can do to rebuild this relationship." You also may come to recognize that forgiveness doesn't mean that we just wash off the past and immediately everything gets along okay. My home town is one of the best known for the home of a TV evangelist in America. Several years ago he was caught in public sin. His church that he was ordained with said to him "You need to take a year off and you need to get counseling and you need to do Bible study and you need to confess. You need to do everything you can do and then after a year, go in front of your peers and sit down and then we will see if you are ready to go back." The TV evangelist said, "No!" He got up the next Sunday and said, "I want everybody to forgive me", and he started preaching the next Sunday. What he didn't recognize was, nobody was listening anymore. What he didn't recognize was that in an auditorium that sits six thousand people, there were sixty people there. What he needed to understand was it takes time to get well. You need to deal with the wrong. You need to deal with the problem that is in your life and out of that people may begin then to have the opportunity to listen to what you have to say again. Forgiveness doesn't want to leave the impression, you just go out and the past is taken care of and everything is wonderful. In forgiveness it means repentance, it means brokenness, it means saying I want to start over. To get on television and say everybody forgive me, without ever saying I need help, I need strength, is to miss what forgiveness is really about. Why would all of the brokenness that is in your life, why would Jesus turn to you and say you need to forgive. Let me tell you. You need to forgive for your own self. You have an option of harboring in your life revenge, bitterness, brokenness, get even. I often wonder about these folk who say I am going to get even. They come to me and say this is rotten, terrible, person who has done me wrong and he is lower than a snake.

What I want to do is get even with him. Or you have the opportunity to be able to say I am hurt enough, I am not going to let all of this bitterness continue to hurt me. Many times it is the bitterness and the revenge that hurts worse than what the person does. You need to understand that bitterness is really like acid in a container. It will eat your insides out. It literally will seek to destroy you. If you walk around saying, "Well, I can hardly wait until I can get even, you are going to find all of your life is going to be destroyed. Really what it does, it glues you to an event. You will always live in the past. You will never be able to get past it to go on in life. You will just be stuck in time. I understood that years ago when I moved to a new area. I had not been there very long when two men came to see me. One of them turned and said, "I guess you have heard about", and he told me this long story. I said "No, I don't know how I missed that, but I missed that." They took forty-five minutes of my life to tell me this terrible story. The anger, bitterness, hatred, it just went on and on. They turned to me and said, "I want you to understand it for you are going to have to take sides while you are here." I said, "If I am going to be involved in all of this, when did this happen?" They stopped just for a moment. Listen. It happened twenty years before. I thought it happened last Tuesday. Twenty years, they had been walking around with it, for twenty years!. This video tape playing it over and over. All of this animosity. When they told it to me, they said, "Well, I am going to go out and remind somebody else." Then they got other people involved in it and it just kept going on and on. My how tragic. How tragic to be stuck in the past, to not be able to move on, not to be able to put it behind you and go on with the rest of your life. The second reason you need to learn how to forgive is because it is the very essence of what your faith is about. It will open doors that the old animosities and feuds will never open. Do you not admit that with those people that you would like to rebuild a relationship, you are stuck. You can't move because bitterness does not let you move. But my, when you begin to say listen, I want to talk about forgiveness and I want to come instead of hatred, I want to bring good will to this. You are going to find defenses begin to go down.

Let me tell you a remarkable story. If I mention the name to you _____ most of you wouldn't know who this is until I told you. Miysoto _____ was the lead bomber of the Japanese armada that hit Pearl Harbor. Then you would say, "Oh, him." He was wounded later in the war and was captured and in an American hospital. The person who was his nurse was Mildred Harun. What you need to know about Mildred was that Mildred's mother and daddy were missionaries in Japan and put in a concentration camp and died. If the lead bomber of the people who brought you in the 2nd World War was your patient, how would you have responded? Let me tell you how Mildred responded. She came to him and told him the story, expressed to him how hard it was for her to be able to minister to him. Then with tears in her eyes said, "But in the name of Jesus Christ, I want to do it. You may not know that he ended up being a Christian and spent the last years of his life as a Presbyterian evangelist. What changed him? Forgiveness. What can change it in your life? Forgiveness. You tried everything else. Nothing else has worked. Why don't you try what Jesus told us to do? The third one. If we don't learn how to dispense forgiveness, we are going to damage our relationship to God. Isn't that what the story said? You have come to God broken hearted, before Him saying, "Oh God, forgive me." You get up and don't offer that to others. Jesus said the man who offered forgiveness became angry. He said how can you come to me and ask for forgiveness and then you are not willing to give it to others. Do you understand that it is no longer the old diagram of you and the person. It is you and God. If you want to continue to build that relationship with Him, you are going to have to learn forgiveness.

I keep using the word learn because that is what it is. It is not something I can snap my fingers and you are going to walk out and say, "Well, I am going to forgive." It is something you say, "Lord, I want this is my life. You have offered it to me. I want it in my own experience." You can't offer forgiveness in the brokenness of your life until you have come with brokenness before God and accepted His forgiveness. Have you ever knelt before Him and said, "Lord, I can't pay you back? I can't work my way back to you. Lord, the only way you and I can have a relationship is through brokenness and I come to ask your mercy. Then when that happens, you can get up off of your knees and go offer it to others. I wanted to challenge those of you who are here today with those hurts and wounds to revenge that bitterness to somehow be able to give it over to God and let Him take care of it. Listen to what He said. Repaying belongs to me, let me do it. Give it to God and let Him take care of it. Don't feel like you have to go around with a star on your shoulder and say I am the sheriff of the world I am going to make you pay. Give it to God.

