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SERMON TITLE: How to be Freed from Bondage
SCRIPTURE: Mark 11:20-25
DATE: September 16, 2018
Check out the service at www.fpcd.org.

Why Pray? Series. Read also Genesis 45:1-11

Do you find forgiveness to be one of the hardest subjects in the Christian's life? Yet to Jesus it seems automatic. Jesus seems sort of insistent about it. Do you find that a challenge? The disciples did. Once Jesus said,

"If there is repentance, you must forgive. And if the same person sins against you seven times a day, and turns back to you seven times and says, 'I repent,' you must forgive." The apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith!"

The Lord was relentless:

"If you had faith the size of a mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it would obey you." (Luke 17:3-6)

So there's this strange coupling of forgiving others with faith and answered prayer. Listen to today's passage. READ Mark 11:20-25

Are you following along great, until you get to that last line? "Forgive," he says, "*so your sins will be forgiven.*" It's coupled with effective prayer.

Today we explore that connection. In doing so, we are going to identify forgiveness in broad, general terms, rather than specific personal circumstances. We might even say we are going to explore an *attitude of forgiveness*.

Webster defines forgiveness:

1. to grant pardon for or absolve an offense.
2. to give up all claim to (a debt, obligation, etc.).
3. to grant pardon to a person.
4. to cease to feel resentment against.
5. to cancel an indebtedness

It's Antonym – Maintain hostility

Let's look at one more definition—retribution. Webster defines retribution:

1. requital according to merits or deserts, especially for evil.
 - a. The Bible calls this "an eye for an eye."

It's Antonym – forgiveness, pardon, *sympathy*

So, forgiveness is to grant pardon, cease feeling resentment, let go of retribution and assume sympathy for.

Now before you slam the subject shut and run out of the room, think of this in terms of Jesus. Something had to drive him to forgive us—perhaps sympathy. God and Jesus often have sympathy or compassion for us:

They were like sheep without a shepherd. (Matthew 9:36)

He will feed his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms, and carry them in his bosom, and gently lead the mother sheep. (Isaiah 40:11)

These were people who had turned from God and were following idols. Yet, Jesus had great sympathy and compassion toward them.

Think of our story of Joseph. He has been the recipient of undeserved hostility and abandonment again and again: his brothers, both Potiphar and his wife, and the cupbearer in jail. And yet when he sees his brothers, he has sympathy for them.

That's an attitude of forgiveness built on a lifestyle of forgiveness.

But at first Joseph was very harsh with his brothers. He imprisoned them. (Gen 42:7-17) He wept over the memory of their abuse (42:24, 43:30) He planted his silver cup in their sacks and then falsely accused them of stealing it (44:1-5). When revealing himself to them he cried so loud the whole palace heard him (45:2-15).

But in the process Joseph came to the realization that their evil, despite all the pain they caused, has been turned to good by God, first in his own life and also in theirs.

Scripture does not state that forgiveness is easy nor does it ignore the hurt. Remember Jesus' agony in Gethsemane as he faced the cross. How hard it was. Jesus said to God, *I don't want to do this. If there is any way, please take it away.* The way he handled it was to then put it in God's hands: "Your will, not mine."

Do you have someone to forgive? Consider beginning the process of forgiveness by putting your person or circumstance in Jesus' hands.

That is a step of faith, actually. It might be like moving a mountain to you. It might be too huge a step of faith right now, but just consider the possibility. Consider exchanging a feeling of resentment with a choice of *letting go*.

We are talking about an attitude of forgiveness or a lifestyle of forgiveness.

The Civil War was violent and volatile. Loyalty to one's home state prevailed. For example, for some it was their state against the Federal government. Attitudes were emotional and explosive. You protected your land and your property.

I want to tell you about a nineteen-year-old young man named Richard Kirkland of Kershaw County, South Carolina. He enlisted in the army at the first call for volunteers, at age seventeen. The war began three days later.

He fought in all the major battles in Virginia the next year. By the time he turned nineteen, many of his companions were dead or wounded. Deeply religious, he would write their families to comfort them in their sorrow.

Of course, it would have been great if Americans could have come together and reasoned out a solution to their differences. However, given the circumstances and the continued battles, Richard distinguished himself with his courage and compassion toward those who were injured and his letters to the soldiers' families.

He was involved in a battle at a place called Marye's Heights. The opposition was positioned at the bottom of a hill while Richard's side was positioned at the top, behind a stone wall. As the opposition charged, they met a barrage of rifle fire and began falling wounded or dead. The battle continued, with several thousand men jammed behind the stone wall firing in shifts at the charge of thousands from below. They battled all day with terrific casualties on both sides. Finally the fighting stopped, both armies exhausted.

The ones on the bottom of the hill could not rescue the thousands of their dead and wounded lying in agony on the slope below Marye's Heights. All unhurt soldiers had to lay low, using dead bodies for protection. The other side behind the wall had to stay down and stay alert in the cold darkness. The injured soldiers on the slope were helpless and in terrible pain and unable to get back to their lines. Their fellow soldiers could not come forward to help them without being shot by the opposition behind the stone wall. Agonizing cries for water and warmth filled the air.

Richard Kirkland heard these cries all night. Even though this was the enemy—the other side—the hated ones, these brave men were his brothers. They were fellow Americans, just like him. Richard listened to their cries into early morning with a heavy heart. Finally he could stand it no longer. He had to do something.

He sought out the captain of his company and made a daring, unbelievable request. The captain was not willing to grant him permission but he sent him on to the commander. The commander sent him on to the colonel with his outrageous proposal. The next level authorized him to ask the General.

Throughout this process, Richard never changed his mind. He wanted to gather all the canteens he could carry, crawl out on the field, and give water to each wounded soldier. It would be so risky he most likely would not last one minute. There is no reason why a general would allow one of his men to attempt such a valiant mission in the heat of battle. Yet the general, seeing his determination, granted permission.

He strapped dozens of canteens on each arm and around his neck. He crawled over the wall, filled the canteens at a well, and shielded by dense smoke and fog, with all the courage he could muster, he stepped onto the battlefield. Rifle fire exploded, but he ignored it. He safely reached the first wounded soldier, knelt beside that enemy, gently raised his head, poured water down the thirsty man's burning throat. He straightened the man's broken limb and placed a knapsack under his head. He covered him with an overcoat and left him a full canteen. Taking the soldier's empty canteen he moved on to the next. The bullets stopped. The opposition laid down their rifles and watched in amazement as he went from one fallen man to the next with sympathy and compassion. Like an angel from heaven this nineteen-year-old young soldier relieved the thirst of wounded enemy soldiers.

When his first supply of canteens ran out, he took all the empty ones he found back to the well and filled them again. Shots rang out from both sides. But when he returned, they became silent. His mission of mercy continued for two hours to try to ease the pain and soothe their thirst. He did not quit until every man in the area around him had been taken care of.

Forgiveness is a hard thing when you have been injured. You may not feel willing. But an attitude of forgiveness in your life is an action of sympathy when you encounter an enemy. It can do more to overcome hatred and division than any other attitude, relieving and freeing you from bondage in the process. Jesus offers you this gift; the chance to be free.

At the same time, when you pray with forgiveness as your attitude, your prayers will move mountains. Jesus promises it. Are you willing to trust him?

AMEN