

## Praying the Lord's Prayer

Today's Topic 5, 'Forgive us our Debts as we also have Forgiven our Debtors', is the second issue that relates to us. Last week, it was praying for the provision of our all personal necessities, today, it is about healthy relationships; both with God and those around us. Our starting point is always our heavenly Father, to whom we are addressing these acknowledgements and petitions.

### Topic 5 – Forgive us our Debts as we also have Forgiven our Debtors.

In this little statement, we are confronted with our need to proactively learn how to handle our interpersonal relationships before they handle us. The rationale behind Jesus' teaching on this is to be seen in the light of what our heavenly Father has already done for us!!!

There is a touch of irony here that Jesus is engaging in – I suspect Jesus is, tongue-in-cheek, 'holy-cajoling' his disciples into action by 'presuming' they are already in the regular habit of forgiving their fellows of both outright and perceived offenses against them.

Now, we know, that he had created humanity for the purpose of relationship with him and collaborating with him in both the care of his creation and the administration of his reign on earth. Of course, we also know that purpose got off to a rocky start because of human disobedience, creating a massive debt of sin on our part:

*<sup>23</sup> for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,* Rom 3:23

This 'falling short of the glory of God', or 'not being able to measure up', is what our problem really is. What we are falling short of is the absolute perfection of God's glory – his holy righteousness.

But this also explains the amazing grace of God toward us, in that:

*<sup>8</sup> while we were still sinners, Christ died for us!!!* Rom 5:8

And further:

*<sup>15</sup> For we do not have a high priest who is unable to feel sympathy for our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet he did not sin.* Heb 4:15

So yes, we do have a massive debt that we owe, firstly, to our Lord and Saviour for his extravagant love that he has demonstrated for us, which we did not deserve but, also, are able to receive because of the relationship that our God has brought us back into with himself through his Son, Jesus, and the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

The classic example that Jesus gives us on this issue is in his response to Peter's question, 'How many times shall I forgive my brother?', found in the Parable of the Unforgiving Servant (Matt 18:21-35).

The scenario is that of a King wanting to settle some accounts with his servants. A man who owed him 10,000 talents – in today's money, we are talking about many millions of dollars, in other words, an unpayable debt. He was sentenced to prison along with all his

family as payment. The servant begged the opportunity to repay this impossible amount back:

*<sup>26</sup> 'At this the servant fell on his knees before him. "Be patient with me," he begged, "and I will pay back everything."<sup>27</sup> The servant's master took pity on him, cancelled the debt and let him go.*

But he went out and saw a fellow servant who owed him a few hundred dollars and had him thrown into prison when he could not pay it. The other servants saw this and doxed on him:

*<sup>32</sup> 'Then the master called the servant in. "You wicked servant," he said, "I cancelled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. <sup>33</sup> Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?"<sup>34</sup> In anger his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed. <sup>35</sup> 'This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart.'*

This is tough stuff!!!

### **What Jesus is teaching us through this parable:**

- i) God's willingness to forgive us is out of all proportion to our inability to repay.
- ii) The vastness of our offense against God's perfect holiness highlights the comparative insignificance of any offenses perpetrated against us.
- iii) When we refuse to forgive, we place that individual in bondage to that issue.
- iv) Those whom God graciously forgives are empowered to forgive others.
- v) The refusal to forgive opens oneself to the prison-house of demonic torment, not because God wills it, but because that one gives the devil legal ground.

'To forgive' means – 'To give away or let go of a debt, or an offense';

'To give away all anger, resentment, and the desire to punish'.

Jesus gives us the example as he hung on the cross for our sins that we need to follow if we are to be his followers:

*<sup>34</sup> Jesus said, 'Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing. (Lu 23:34)*

### **An Amazing Example of the Power of Forgiveness**

Before Saul (Paul) became a Christian, Stephen was arrested and spoke to the Sanhedrin, and seriously upset them when he mentioned the vision he had just seen of Jesus standing at the right hand of the Father. As he was being stoned, which Saul was overseeing, he said, "*Lord, do not hold this sin against them*" (Acts 7:54-60).

Through the grace of God, Stephen's forgiveness released Saul the persecutor was to become Paul the Apostle!!!

**It is the Holy Spirit who gives us the grace to forgive the offenses of others.**

**We access that grace to forgive through our relationship with God in prayer!!!**

*<sup>16</sup> Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.*

Heb

4:16