

STANDARD A: WHO IS JESUS AND WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO FOLLOW HIM?

Lesson 5: Why Is Forgiveness Important?

Introduction

Jesus is the One who reconciles sinners to God through His death and resurrection. All humans have turned away from God their Creator and have lived in disobedience. Disobedience separates us from God. But Jesus offers forgiveness, reconciliation, and transformation for all those who trust Him. He also offers reconciliation with one's neighbor. In fact, God wants to reconcile and transform His whole creation.

Jesus was rejected by the Jerusalem authorities and crucified by the Roman governor. He was wrongly accused and viewed as a dangerous person. He died as the worst of criminals. He died utterly abandoned and as an outcast. While He was suffering, He prayed for God to forgive those who were killing Him (Luke 23:34). Jesus cried out to God on behalf of His enemies and tormentors. And He did so while He was dying. This final expression of forgiveness was appropriate for Jesus' life. Throughout His ministry, Jesus offered forgiveness to sinners.

A. Jesus Expressed Forgiveness.

One day some men carried a paralyzed friend to Jesus for healing (Luke 5:17-26). Some of the religious leaders of the Jewish people were listening to Jesus. The men could not get their friend to Jesus inside the house because of the crowd. They went up on the flat roof of the house. They removed some of the roof tiles and let the paralyzed man down through the opening. He was right in front of Jesus. Jesus saw the faith of the men. He declared to the paralyzed man, "Friend, your sins are forgiven" (Luke 5:20).

The religious leaders heard Jesus' words. They thought to themselves, "Who is this fellow who speaks blasphemy? Who can forgive sins but God alone?" (Luke 5:21). Jesus knew what they were thinking. He asked them, "Which is easier: to say 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up and walk?'" (Luke 5:23). When they gave no answer, Jesus said to the paralyzed man: "I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home" (Luke 5:24). Jesus connected forgiveness and healing. The man was transformed or changed both outwardly (he could walk) and inwardly (he was forgiven). The power of forgiveness was demonstrated in this miracle.

Jesus also spoke forgiveness to the sinful woman who anointed His feet with ointment as He attended a dinner (Luke 7:36-50). Jesus' host at the meal questioned in his mind why Jesus would allow this sinful woman to touch Him. The man thought, unlike the woman, he deserved to be near Jesus (Luke 7:39). Jesus knew what the host was thinking. So, Jesus told a story about two men who owed debts to the same man. One owed a large amount. The other owed a small amount. The creditor canceled both debts. Jesus asked His host which man would love the creditor the most. Of course, it would have been the man who had the larger debt (Luke 7:40-43). Jesus then characterized the sinful woman's generous act as an expression of great love. He said to her, "Your sins are forgiven" (Luke 7:48). His final words to her were: "Your faith has saved you; go in peace" (Luke 7:50). The power of forgiveness was demonstrated in this situation. The woman was profoundly changed. Because of Jesus' forgiveness, the woman was moved to acts of love and caring. She received from Jesus the divine blessing of peace. Jesus' forgiveness changed her. But the host who thought he was already good, heard no such good news.

Question:How did Jesus show forgiveness?

Question:Why should we believe Jesus has forgiven us?

B. Jesus Taught Forgiveness.

One of Jesus' disciples asked Him to teach the disciples to pray (Luke 11:1). The disciples had observed Jesus in prayer. Jesus responded by teaching them what has been called the Lord's prayer (Luke 11:2-4).

"Father, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come.

Give us each day our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us.

And lead us not into temptation."

The third petition of the prayer is "Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us." In this prayer Jesus emphasized human beings' need for the forgiveness of God. He also recognized the need for human beings to express forgiveness to one another. For disciples, being forgiven by God makes it necessary to be forgiving of one another.

At another time, Jesus taught the disciples about the extent of the love they must show to others. He spoke to them for a long time about how and whom they must love (Luke 6:27-36). His followers must love their enemies, just as God loves His enemies. They must do good to those who hate them, just as God does good to those who turn against Him. They must bless those who curse them. They must pray for those who abuse them. Jesus commanded His followers to go out of their way in working to overcome evil with good. Doing so will demonstrate they are children of God (Luke 6:35). They are to show mercy just as

God the Father shows mercy (Luke 6:36). Their actions and attitudes should come from a transformed character.

Question:Why are we supposed to forgive and love our enemies?

Question:What are some practical instances in life that call for forgiveness?

C. God Provided Forgiveness and Reconciliation.

Jesus spoke for God when He forgave sins. He taught with God's authority when He commanded His disciples to love and forgive. God was the focus of all that Jesus said and did. Jesus revealed God's character and nature through His human life and ministry. The earliest disciples understood that Jesus expressed and revealed God's mercy and grace. It was God himself who forgave and loved in the very person of Jesus. Through Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, God presented His offer of forgiveness to all persons.

Another word for describing God's action of providing forgiveness in Jesus is the term *reconciliation*. Reconciliation means "bringing enemies together as friends." Early followers of Jesus understood that God had acted in Jesus to do just that. Sin had made human beings enemies of God. Jesus was God's way of overcoming the separation between humanity and himself. Through Jesus, God changes human beings from enemies to friends (see Romans 5:8-11). This was the clear demonstration of God's immeasurable love. God's love in Jesus overcame the power of humanity's sinful separation from God. God made clear that people could be restored to relation with Him. "God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them" (2 Corinthians 5:19).

Question:What does reconciliation mean?

Question:How can people be reconciled with their enemies?

D. Disciples Share Forgiveness and Reconciliation

Jesus called His disciples to love their enemies. He called them to receive forgiveness and to be forgiving. When followers of Jesus accept His forgiveness, they can then forgive others. They become living examples of the transforming power of God's forgiving and reconciling love. They participate in the forgiving and reconciling work of God in the world. God has committed to them the "message of reconciliation" (2 Corinthians 5:19). Followers of Jesus, by their own lives, become ambassadors for Christ. God makes His appeal to the world through them: "Be reconciled to God" (2 Corinthians 5:20). Disciples are commissioned to share the joy of bringing peace, restoration, and transformation, in accordance with God's purpose and plan.

God's reconciling work in Jesus revealed His goal for all things, "whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross" (Colossians 1:20). The final goal is to bring all the reconciled ones into the very presence of God. God will present them "holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation" (Colossians 1:22).

Question:How do love and forgiveness go together?

Question:Why should Jesus' disciples receive forgiveness?

E. Christian Baptism Is a Sign of Forgiveness and Reconciliation.

One of the most important ways that followers of Jesus show their radical commitment to Him is by being baptized. Jesus set the example for His disciples when He was baptized by John the Baptist (Luke 3:21-22). John baptized Jesus in the Jordan River. The meaning of Jesus' baptism is that He showed His total willingness to obey His Heavenly Father. This event happened in public so all could see His commitment.

All Christians should be baptized. They are baptized in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. In baptism Christians show they have repented of their sins. Their old lives have been crucified with Christ. The old is gone. In baptism they are buried with Him. In baptism they show that Christ has given them new life. They now live in Him. Baptism means a person identifies with Christ. Baptism should happen only if we are repentant and earnestly seek to do Christ's will. In Baptism Christians also show their identification with Christ's Church.

Sometimes an infant is baptized. When this happens, it means that the parents intentionally place the infant in the care of God's grace. They show they intend to be instruments of God's grace in raising their child. The Church recognizes its responsibility to nurture the child in Christian faith, even as the Holy Spirit nurtured the child Jesus. Parents also recognize their responsibility to nurture the child in Christian faith, so he or she will grow up to accept Christ. He or she will then fully own the meaning of baptism.

Most Christian churches practice the sacrament of baptism. (A sacrament is a special act Christians do as a sign of grace. It is an outward sign of an inward grace given by Christ to Christians.) The sacrament of baptism is a sign and seal of saving grace. It is a symbol that God has made the sinner clean. It is a public testimony that a person has received Christ as His Savior.

When Jesus was leaving the world, He told His followers to make other disciples. As a sign, the new Christians were to be baptized in the name of the Father and

the Son and the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19). This is a sign that they are now one of Jesus' followers.

Conclusion

One time Jesus talked with an expert in the Jewish law. Jesus said that the command to love God and to love one's neighbor are the most important commandments (Luke 10:25-28). Then the law expert asked Jesus to tell him who his "neighbor" was. In response, Jesus told the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-35). Jesus then asked the law expert, "Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?" (Luke 10:36). The law expert replied, "The one who had mercy on him." Jesus said, "Go and do likewise" (Luke 10:37).

The power of God's reconciling grace in Christ enables those who are human enemies to be reconciled to one another. Being restored to relation with God must lead followers of Jesus to restore and renew human relationships within their families and other relationships. Peace with God spills over into peace with other persons.

Activity: Think about all the things for which God has forgiven you. Say a prayer of thanks to God.

Activity: Pray for your enemies this week.

Activity: Memorize the Lord's Prayer. (See the lesson for the "Lord's Prayer.")

Activity: If you haven't been baptized, seek Christian baptism by a Christian minister. You should obey God by giving a public testimony of your decision to follow Christ.