

**26<sup>th</sup> March 2023**

## **Genesis 4:19-24**

<sup>19</sup> Lamech married two women, one named Adah and the other Zillah. <sup>20</sup> Adah gave birth to Jabal; he was the father of those who live in tents and raise livestock. <sup>21</sup> His brother's name was Jubal; he was the father of all who play stringed instruments and pipes. <sup>22</sup> Zillah also had a son, Tubal-Cain, who forged all kinds of tools out of bronze and iron. Tubal-Cain's sister was Naamah.

<sup>23</sup> Lamech said to his wives, "Adah and Zillah, listen to me; wives of Lamech, hear my words. I have killed a man for wounding me, a young man for injuring me. <sup>24</sup> If Cain is avenged seven times, then Lamech seventy-seven times."

## **Matthew 18:15-35**

### **Dealing With Sin in the Church**

<sup>15</sup> "If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over. <sup>16</sup> But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.' <sup>17</sup> If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector.

<sup>18</sup> "Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.

<sup>19</sup> "Again, truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. <sup>20</sup> For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them."

## The Parable of the Unmerciful Servant

<sup>21</sup> Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?"

<sup>22</sup> Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.

<sup>23</sup> "Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. <sup>24</sup> As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand bags of gold was brought to him. <sup>25</sup> Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt.

<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, canceled the debt and let him go.

<sup>28</sup> "But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred silver coins. He grabbed him and began to choke him. 'Pay back what you owe me!' he demanded.

<sup>29</sup> "His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay it back.'

<sup>30</sup> "But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. <sup>31</sup> When the other servants saw what had happened, they were outraged and went and told their master everything that had happened.

<sup>32</sup> "Then the master called the servant in. 'You wicked servant,' he said, 'I canceled 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."

## Forgiving a brother or sister (Genesis 4:19-24 & Matthew 18:15-35)

G'Day Church Family

Please have your Bibles in front of you – opened at Matthew 18:15-35

There's the usual **outline** for you to **take notes** – if that helps you **concentrate**.

Let me ask **God** for His **help** and **guidance** first – let's **pray**...

### Intro

I'm sure we have all had times when someone has sinned against us and **hurt us**? We might even have said "*I'm never going to forgive them!*"

How do we deal with someone who has sinned against us?

(pause)

I'm sure there may **have been times** when we were the one who **hurt someone else** – and **sinned against them**. We might have even said "*I'm never going to apologize, they deserve it!*"

How do we go about righting that wrong?

(pause)

Hopefully Matthew 18:15-35 will help?

We're going to look at **three scenarios** this morning

1. How to deal with someone who has sinned against us
2. How to deal with a repeat offender
3. How to properly forgive someone

Then we'll finish up with two unanswered questions about forgiveness

## How to deal with someone who has sinned against us (Matthew 18:15-20)

First then – how to deal with **someone who has sinned against us?**

[Slide 1-Heading]

Let me tell you about **William and Harry**

They go to the **same church**

One day **Harry** was **offended by** some **comments William** made –

Harry felt **William** had said **some cruel and hurtful things** – William had even said some unsavoury things about **Harry's wife, Meg.**

Harry found it hard to **deal with the things** that had been said to him.

Harry did think about just letting it go – He knew **William** was from a **very high-profile family** – and there were **a lot of pressures** on him

But Harry – **just couldn't** let it go. Afterall **William** had been **very hurtful and spiteful.**

What should Harry do?

Well in our NT passage from **Matthew 18:15-20** – we're **given a process to follow** when a **Christian brother or sister sins against us**

[Slide-1A]

**Step 1** – in v15

*If your brother or sister sins [against you] – you go and point out their fault – just between the two of you.*

So, Harry must go to William and **explain the offence**

**Just between the two of them** – **no gossiping** to other people – **no** need to alert the **media** – **no** need to go on **TV and complain** – **no need** to **write it in a book** and get it **published!**

The purpose of the **chat** – still in v15

Is for **William to listen** – in the original Greek – it means **more than listen** – it means to **comprehend** and **understand** what is being said

And the purpose of the chat is also - for Harry to **win** William over – in the original Greek – to **win over** here - means to “**spare someone from evil**”

So, the **purpose of the conversation** between the two of them - is **for reconciliation** to take place – it's not to **punish** or to **reject!**

And it's the same for us – if we have been sinned against – we **must take the offence to our brother and sister** – in private – and **pray** that **they listen** – and that there can be repentance, forgiveness and reconciliation.

If it can't be resolved – and **they won't listen** – and they don't necessarily agree they have done anything wrong – then...

[Slide 1B]

**Step 2** – in v16 - *take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.*

So, **Harry must bring a couple of witnesses** with him and go back to William.

The purpose of the **witnesses** is - not to **gang up William** and **bludgeon** him into **apologizing**

The **witnesses** should be level-headed fair-minded Christians – who might even see that William and Harry have both done things wrong – or they might even see that actually it's Harry who's got it all wrong?

Practically speaking it **would also be fair** – if there is a **support person for William** – so it doesn't seem like everyone's **ganging up on Him**

The idea of having witnesses comes straight **from the Old Testament** – where **the law required** that someone could not be accused without two or three witnesses establishing the truth (Numbers 35:30; Deut 17:6; 19:15). We even use this system in our **law courts today!**

Again, the **purpose** is still to **win the person over** and for reconciliation.

If the problem still can't be resolved – and they **won't listen** – then...

[Slide 1C]

**Step 3**, in verse 17 - *If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church*

So now **Harry must involve the church members**.

Now depending on the church denomination and the alleged offence – this **might be the whole church** – or perhaps some leaders of the church. In our Church, we'd most likely send some of the **elders...**

So, **Harry and the church/elders must go back to William** – and **pray that William will listen** and that reconciliation can **take place!**

But if it still can't be resolved –

[Slide 1D]

**Step 4** – see the rest of verse 17 - *if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector.*

Treating them as a pagan or tax-collector is basically saying – they are **put out of fellowship with the church**.

But this should not necessarily be seen as a **negative**.

## How did Jesus treat pagans and tax-collectors?

He loved them into a relationship with Him.

So the idea of putting someone out of fellowship – is still to win them back – when they repent?

And notice – the **matter is covered in prayer** in verses 19-20. As **two or three gather in the name of Jesus; Jesus** promises to be **with them** – and they can ask God for forgiveness and reconciliation to take place. Ultimately, isn't God's will for us to forgive one another?

This is a **really godly process** to follow.

Sometimes in my position as a minister – people come and tell me that a brother or sister has hurt them – and they ask me to go and talk to the offending party.

I nicely say – *'I'm sorry – I can't do that for you – you must follow the process of Matthew 18 – and sort it out between the two of you first'*

Sometimes the offended person might have **already told several people about the offence** before talking to the offending party. The danger of this is – **lots of people may then have an opinion about the offender** – without - really knowing the full story. What if the offended person has got it wrong and there's a simple explanation or it's just a misunderstanding?  
(pause)

## How to deal with a repeat offender (Matthew 18:21-22; Genesis 4:19-24)

[Slide 2-Heading]

Second then – *how to deal with a repeat offender* – see verses 21-22

What if William has wronged Harry many times – and each time William apologizes and Harry forgives him.

How many times should Harry keep forgiving William?

That's the question the Apostle Peter asks in v21 - "*Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?*"

In Jewish culture, Rabbis taught that people should **forgive three times** and that was enough (Amos 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 13; 2:1, 4, 6?)

Peter doubles that number and adds 1 – for good measure.

[Slide 2A-77 times]

But **Jesus' answer** in verse 22 – is **extraordinary** – Jesus says - "*I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.*"

Some translations say 70 x 7 = 490 times rather than 77 times.

This number is not literal

Assuming it was 490 times. It's not like we would say to someone on the 491<sup>st</sup> time they've sinned against us and apologized - "*Sorry, you've apologised 490 times – that's it – no more!*"

By the time we have forgiven that many times – we're in the habit of forgiving.

[Slide 2B-1 Cor 13]

As 1 Corinthians 13:4-5 say: "*love is patient (long suffering)*" and "*love keeps no records of wrongs*".

In our Old Testament reading from Genesis 4 – the **context** is that Cain had killed his brother Abel and God's punishment on Cain was that it **would be extremely difficult** for Cain to get a living from the field of crops he worked and so he would be a restless wanderer of the Earth.

Cain was **worried** that as he wandered the Earth someone would find him – and take revenge for what he did to Abel - and **kill him**. But **God promised that that no-one would touch Cain**; if they did, they would **suffer revenge seven times over**.

Then a few generations later, we **pick up the story in v19-24** where Cain's great great great grandson, Lamech, boasted about taking revenge on someone who wounded him by murdering them, and Lamech even promised a greater retribution than God had done for Cain.

Lamech says in v24, he will be avenged seventy-seven times, rather than Cain's seven times. This shows the progressive **degeneracy** of humankind at that time; no wonder **God sent a flood**.

As well as the clear connection with the reference to seventy-seven times like in Matthew's story

We have a **remarkable contrast here** between what Lamech is thinking and what Jesus is teaching.

[Slide 2C-no limit]

**Rather than REVENGE over and over** like Lamech wants – **Jesus is teaching FORGIVENESS over and over!** Wouldn't the world be a better place – if we forgave over and over?

For us it means – there must be **NO LIMIT** on how many times we forgive **someone** – who comes and says sorry to us!

(pause)

### How to properly forgive someone (Matthew 18:23-35)

[Slide 3-Heading]

Third -then – **how to properly forgive someone** – that's **verses 23 to 35**

To illustrate how forgiveness works, **Jesus** tells a **parable**.

The parable is about a **servant who owes his master a huge sum of money**.

The sum of money is **10, 000 bags of gold** (or **10,000 talents**). A **talent** is worth **20 years of a laborer's wages** – so the servant owes **200, 000 years of wages**.

The point is the **debt is so HUGE** – it is **literally unrepayable!**

The master orders that the **servant's wife and children be sold as slaves** to repay the debt.

[Slide 3A-1<sup>st</sup> servant]

The **servant begs for the master to be patient** and to give him more time to pay it back – but if we think about it – **he'd never be able to pay it back!**

Amazingly - out of mercy, the master cancelled the debt altogether and let the servant go.

But when the servant is released, he went to one of his fellow-servants who **owed him a small debt of 100 silver coins** (100 days wages) and **demanding this servant repay the 100 silver coins**.

[Slide 3B-2<sup>nd</sup> Servant]

When the second servant could not repay the 100 silver coins, and begged for more time, the first servant had the second servant thrown in jail.

The **first servant's cruel actions** were reported to the master.

The master was so angry with the first servant and had him thrown in jail because he did **not** show **mercy** to the second servant, as the master had shown him!

The parable shows us how much of a **huge DEBT - we have been let off**. Our **huge debt of sin has been paid for by Jesus** – remember the Bible says the wages for our sin is DEATH – **but Jesus pays our debt of dying - by His death on a cross** – so that we get let off the debt of dying – **by having eternal life** – **so we don't really die** – and instead - go to Heaven.

The parable is telling us to be forgiving and merciful, just as God has been forgiving and merciful towards us.

[Slide 3C-Problem]

The problem is the unforgiving unjust servant had received forgiveness but had not truly experienced forgiveness in his heart because he was just simply glad to be "let off the hook". And because he hadn't truly experienced forgiveness in his heart, he wasn't willing or able - to share that forgiveness with the second servant.

It's the same for us – **we need to truly understand** – **the debt Jesus has let us off** – He's let us off with the punishment for our sins – which is death – AND – He's kept us from Hell – **shouldn't we want to share that forgiveness with our brother and sister who has sinned against us?**

And maybe, our forgiveness will change the other person's heart too?

And isn't the parable saying – if we don't show mercy and share the forgiveness we have received – then God **won't show us mercy?** And **that's not something we're going to like.**

(pause)

### Unanswered Questions

Now – in preparing for this week – and in our Bible Study – there were **two unanswered questions** – that weren't really covered by the passage – so I think it **would be helpful** to address them

#### [Slide 4-Heading & Q1]

1. 1<sup>st</sup> unanswered question - ***How do we forgive someone who doesn't say sorry?*** Can we truly forgive without the person who hurt us apologizing

Let me give you a personal example

A few years ago – I was deeply wronged and hurt by someone – they said some terrible untrue things about me – and even called into question my integrity as a minister.

The harsh words and actions against me – really wounded me deeply.

**I couldn't get it out of my mind.**

**I wrestled with it month after month.**

**Mainly because - one of my core values is justice – and this was so unjust.**

My thoughts were often bitter and angry – and I had no peace.

I couldn't change what the other person did – nor could I make them apologize – as far as they were concerned – they wouldn't listen to me or any witnesses – to them I no longer existed – and they didn't see they'd done anything wrong – so there was no need to apologize.

**Something** had to change.

And the **only person I had control over changing** was myself.

[Slide 4A-let go]

In this passage the **Greek Word for forgive** [*aphiemi*] – means to **let go of a debt**.

[Slide 4B-pray]

The debt I was owed **was an apology** – so I prayed as Jesus tell us “*pray for those who persecute you*” (Matthew 5:44) and then I decided to let go of the debt – **let go of the apology** – write it off as paid – and forgive the person.

Once I did – I truly had **peace in my heart** (see Philippians 4:6-7)– instead of anger and bitterness – and I also prayed for God to change the other person’s heart.

And I **honestly forgot** about the incident.

It wasn’t easy – it took a long time!

Two years later – out of the blue – I came across the person who had wronged me – and they said “*Paul, I want to set something right between us – I have wronged you and I am very sorry; will you please forgive me!*”

**Wow!**

Of course, I forgave them! I already had.

Even if they had never apologised - I’d **forgiven** them.

My view is - **forgiveness** - is a **two-part** transaction

**Part 1** - is **me forgiving the person** – that’s the attitude Jesus had on the cross “*forgive them Father, they don’t know what they are doing?*” (Luke 23:34)

**Part 2** – is if they choose to repent and apologize – if they do, **it means I can let them know I’ve forgiven them** – and importantly there can now be reconciliation.

If only part 1 of the transaction happens – **then there can’t be any reconciliation.**

If you like – **my forgiveness is unconditional** – it doesn’t require the **other person to apologize.**

Now before we raise an objection – and say - **God’s forgiveness IS conditional** – we must clearly repent before we are forgiven of our sins – and **that’s true of course.**

But my forgiveness of a fellow brother or sister - is forgiveness in the context of a human relationship – whereas God’s forgiveness is in the context of a relationship between a sinner and a holy God – and has to do with the salvation of souls– and a place in Heaven. Therefore, rightly God’s forgiveness has to have the condition of repentance. God has made provision to let go of the debt of our sin – by sending Jesus – and all we have to do is admit our sin and say sorry – and acknowledge that Jesus has paid the debt of our sin in full.

I believe my unconditional forgiveness is Biblical – here’s some verses to support my view:

[Slide 4C-bitterness]

Doesn’t Paul say in Ephesians 4:31-32 - *“Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.”*

[Slide 4D-peace]

And doesn’t Paul say in Romans 12:18 – *“if it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone”*

How can I live at peace with everyone? – If I’m carrying grudges and anger and bitterness against someone?

(pause)

2. 2<sup>nd</sup> unanswered question - ***How do we forgive ourselves?***

[Slide 5- Heading & Q2]

Sometimes even though we’ve repented –and said sorry to God – and **said sorry to the person we sinned against.**

**We can’t forgive ourselves?**

We are reminded over and over what we did wrong?

Let me ask – who’s reminding us? Is it God?

[Slide 5A-sin]

No -God says - *as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.* (Psalm 103:12)

**It’s not God reminding us of our sins– but Satan loves to remind us.**

So, let's hang on to this verse from the Apostle Paul

[Slide 5B-no condemnation]

Romans 8:1 says: *Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus*

If God doesn't condemn us because we now belong to Jesus – then why are we condemning ourselves?

## Challenges

[Slide 6-Heading]

Let me leave us with **two challenges** then...

[Slide 6A-]

1. Is there someone we've sinned against – and we haven't said sorry and we've been putting off? **Say sorry, today!**

[Slide 6B-]

2. Is there someone we need to forgive but we're holding a grudge? **Forgive them today!**

*Let's pray...*

*Father God, thank you that Jesus laid down His life so we could be let off the debt of our sins and be forgiven and gain eternal life.*

*Help us to grasp the full measure of your amazing grace and mercy; and in the same measure – remove all bitterness and anger from our lives – and truly forgive others as you have forgiven us. In Jesus name, AMEN.*