

Home Group study: week beginning 20th July 2020

Jesus Christ: Dangerous Revolutionary 2

2: Forgiveness

In 2016 two peaks were removed from some Toblerone bars in the United Kingdom and larger gaps were introduced between each peak, to cut the weight of the bars and reduce costs. Some people, possibly including some of our Home Group leaders, could never forgive Toblerone's manufacturers for such a wanton act of vandalism (though presumably did when they reverted, under public pressure, two years later!). Can you think of similar changes that have been inflicted on you for which you have never been able to forgive the company or person concerned?

Read: Matthew 18: 21-35

On Sunday Dave split verses 23-34 up into a 'three-act play'. We'll have a look at each section. But let's look at the first two verses first.

In view of what we know of Jesus, we may think Peter's suggestion that we forgive someone only seven times is a bit silly. But how easy is it for us to forgive someone when they do something annoying, hurtful, deceitful or just plain evil to us? How easy is it to forgive them if they go and do it again? Three times? Now what about seven times?

When Jesus tells Peter he has to forgive not seven times but 77 times, this can also mean 70 times seven times. So what is Jesus saying here? That we forgive them 77 times? 490 times? Or something else? What does that say about the way God forgives us?

Discovery

The first 'act' of this parable is verses 23-27. At one level this is a fairly implausible story. Dave told us that just one gold talent was equal to 600 denarii and one denarius was equal to about one day's wages. The average salary in the UK is now around £30,000 a year; say £100 a day. So a gold talent would be worth £60,000, and 10,000 of them would be worth £600 billion! That's quite a big debt.

Actually big numbers in the Bible are often not meant to be a precise record, but stand for 'a lot' or even 'an infinite amount'. Given that the man in the story represents each one of us, and is released from that debt, what does that say about the extent to which God forgives us? Does that begin to give us some idea of how much it cost God to forgive us our sin?

What do you think led the king to decide to write off that enormous debt? How then should we go about getting our debts (sins) 'written off'? How realistic were the man's promises when he begged for forgiveness? What sort of promises might we make in the same situation when we come before God? How does God treat those promises?

How do we react to the second 'act' of this drama, verses 28-30? Would we ever act the same way as the man in the story? In the scale of the debt he has been forgiven, 100 denarii sounds trivial. But if we use the same formula as previously, it equates to about £10,000. So it's not a trivial debt the man is demanding back. Does that change our attitude?

If we change the scale away from a monetary thing to a sin against us, that £10,000 equates to something quite serious that this person has done to us; imagine an act that would be as painful as having been cheated out of £10,000. How easy is it for us to forgive someone who has hurt us that much? Would we stop and think how much God has forgiven us?

Dave mentioned Japanese Kamikaze pilots in the Second World War being prepared to give up their lives in order to get revenge on the USA. However the story that Phil Moore tells in the book 'Gagging Jesus' is of a Japanese Kamikaze pilot whose plane hit an American ship in such a way that the ship wasn't badly damaged. No-one was killed: apart from the Japanese pilot. This apparently was not an uncommon outcome of Kamikaze attacks. When we act in a vengeful way towards someone, and refuse to forgive them, who usually suffers the most, them or us? In what ways do we suffer when we don't forgive someone? Why might this be?

The final act, verses 31-34, is the most tragic. All the weight of the man's original huge debt is cast back on him and he is left to sort it out for himself. It speaks of the King's anger (v34) and not only does he have the weight of all that debt thrown back on him, what else does v34 tell us happens to the man?

Understanding

Even more spine-chilling than what happens in v34 is v35. What is the very stark warning there? Look back at Matthew 6: 9-15. Does verse 12 take on a new significance in the light of this parable? These very familiar words, the Lord's Prayer, embody everything we need to know about prayer. What is the only part of the prayer that is given greater explanation in this passage (see verses 14-15)? Why do you think that is?

We can possibly read v15 without it striking us too seriously if we don't dwell on it: but what happens when we put it alongside v35 of Chapter 18?

Application

We all need to consider carefully if there are people we need to forgive. These may not just be people who are immediately on our hearts; they could be way back in our past. They could, for instance, be people who hurt us in school days and who have had a deep, if subconscious, effect on our lives. Give time for people to consider that in their hearts, to recall people they have never forgiven. None of us wants the warnings in Matthew 6: 13 and 18: 35 to be applied to us. Then pray together:

'Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors'.