

“If They (We) Only Knew” – Pr Jim Sprengle – Lent 2 February 24, 2024

- I. **Romans 5:8** – ⁸ but God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.
- II. **All of us have seen or read about stories** of forgiveness that amaze us.
 - a. Something about these stories fascinate us, partly because we put ourselves in the situation and wonder, “Could I forgive someone under those circumstances?”
 - b. Beth Moore is a Christian author who once wrote about watching a TV show featuring the parents of a young college student, along with his killer.
 - i. The killer of this couple’s child was his best friend... and he killed their son by driving drunk and getting into a terrible accident.
 - ii. What made this story so captivating was that the parents had forgiven their son’s killer... and even beyond that, took him in as their own.
 1. This young man now sat at the table and in the chair that was once their only son’s place.
 2. He slept on their son’s bed... He worked with the father, teaching seminars on safety... He shared their fortune and supported their causes in life.
 3. He talked about the son he had killed in ways that only someone who knew him well could have.
 - iii. So why in the world did these parents do something like this?
 1. Because it gave them peace.
 2. Moore writes, “The interviewer was amazed; I was amazed. I kept trying to put myself in the parents’ position—but I could not. Then, as the tears streamed down my cheeks, I heard the Spirit of God whisper to my heart and say: ‘No wonder you cannot relate. You have put yourself in the wrong position. You, my child, are the driver.’ God was the parent who not only forgave, but also invited me to sit at His table in the space my Savior left for me. As a result, I have peace.”¹
 - c. It’s profound to think of the forgiveness that people are capable of offering, despite the terrible wrong committed against them.
 - i. It’s even more profound to think of the forgiveness that God offers, despite the terrible wrongs committed against Him.
- III. **No one wants to admit that they are sinners or ungodly.**
 - a. I suppose St. Paul puts us in the right frame of mind when he uses words to describe us like weak, ungodly, sinners, and enemies of God.
 - b. Ouch... how can he be so nasty and mean?
 - i. Doesn’t he realize that he could hurt people’s feelings by calling them names like sinners and ungodly?

- c. You see, it's easy to point to others and talk about how they are sinners and horrible people, but rarely do we point to ourselves.
 - i. It's easy to look at others and think, "If they only knew how bad they really are... if they only knew how sinful they are!"
- d. Paul is very skilled at pointing out that no one lives by God's standards.
 - i. In the first chapter of Romans, he lists out all the terrible things people do as they sin against God and each other... and that God gives them over to their sin and rebellion as they turn away from Him.
 - ii. However, the moment we feel justified for not being like all those awful sinners in chapter 1, Paul says, "...You have no excuse... because you, the judge, practice the very same things." (Romans 2:1)
 - iii. Who... me??? Yes. You.
 - iv. No one can boast, and no one can claim innocence, because we all sin and fall short of the glory of God. (Romans 3:23)
- e. One of our greatest challenges as God's people is to recognize that we are the sinner... we are the ones who practice all kinds of evil.
- f. During our season of Lent, we consider our sinfulness and the ways we fall short of God's glory.
 - i. The blessings of this time of year is that we do an honest assessment of our shortcomings... our pet sins that we don't want to give up... our judgment toward others... our lack of commitment toward God.
- g. Perhaps we have some blind spots and cannot imagine that we are sinning against God.
 - i. It's a little like King David in 2 Samuel (chapters 11-12), as he committed these terrible acts of murdering a man and stealing his wife... and the prophet Nathan goes to David and tells him a story.
 1. A poor man had a lamb that he loved so much it was like his own child, but a rich man came to town and instead of using his own lamb for a feast, he stole the poor man's lamb.
 2. David was furious and demanded the rich man's death... and Nathan said – "you are that man..." You did this awful thing...
 3. As David realized he was the sinner, it reminds us of Peter as he realized he denied Jesus three times... they were both so prideful they never saw it coming.
- h. What might Nathan the prophet come to you and open your eyes about?
- i. Sure, you might say that you aren't doing anything like murdering someone or stealing their wife... but that is just sin talking.
- j. Jesus tells us that our sins of thoughts and words are just as bad as deeds...
 - i. So, what kind of thoughts are floating around in your head that you won't tell anyone about?
 - ii. What resentments are you carrying against people in your life, even people who are close to you?

- iii. When do you look down on the plight of others and assume they deserve what they're experiencing because they are the "sinners"?
- iv. Or how about when you lack trust in God to care for you... so you hold back from God the best of your giving – in your time, talents, or your treasure?
- v. Maybe you are ashamed of Jesus and being a Christian and avoid talking about Him with anyone.
- k. I don't know your blind spots, or even your outright rebellion against God, but I do want us all to consider how our sins are not simply discounted or shrugged off by God...
 - i. His goal is never to minimize sin and its effect on our lives and those around us... not to mention its effect on our relationship with Him.
- l. Considering our thoughts, words, and deeds, it's quite profound that God still sent His Son to die for our sins and reconcile us to Him.

IV. **The love of God came to us through Jesus.**

- a. I've said it before, but our God did not just say He loves us, but He showed His love in the action of sending Jesus to die for our sins and rise again for our forgiveness.
 - i. "...God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." (vs 8)
- b. The cost of our freedom was the horrible torture and crucifixion of the only man who never sinned, was never an enemy of God...
 - i. Yet, the Father knows how terrible sin is in our lives... how destructive and deadly it can be... I'm sure He regularly wonders, "If they only knew how bad sin really is."
 - ii. His answer to save us from being separated forever from Him was to take the most radical course of action imaginable, giving the life of His Son.
 - iii. That's how serious and significant sin is... Jesus, the perfect Son of God, was slaughtered like an animal to deal with it.
- c. Yet, that is also how big God's love is for us – while we were still sinners, Christ Jesus willingly went to the cross to make us right with God and repair our broken relationship.

V. **Each and every one of us is a sinner saved by grace.**

- a. Lent is about understanding the profound love our God has for us as we walk toward the cross of Good Friday, and the miracle of the open tomb on Easter Sunday.
- b. As we are tempted to look at others and point the finger at their sin, remember the work of Jesus in bringing us forgiveness, life, and salvation.
- c. No one is worthy, we are all the weak, the ungodly, the enemy, the sinner... but God is able to redeem us anyway.
- d. We're all in need of God's forgiveness and salvation, but thankfully we know that His love has no limits. Amen.

¹ Source: Beth Moore, *Living Beyond Yourself: Exploring the Fruit of the Spirit* (LifeWay Press, 1998)