

September 13, 2020

God Forgets

Peace be with you from God our Father from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, Amen. This was one of those sermons. A sermon that I had an awful lot of fun working on, but a sermon that also became quite challenging because I went through four different titles. You see as I began working on the sermon, I thought of where I was going and what the message in our scriptures was today. I thought I'm letting go with kind of a catchy title; "It Becomes Alive." It almost sounds like a nice science fiction or monster movie. As I got going, I thought no, it would be better titled "The Great Reversal." and not long after that I thought, no, no, that's not good enough. It should be "The Great Contrast." Then, as I kept on working, I settled on the title, "God Forgets." You might say, 'God never forgets.' Well yes and no.

Let's go back to last week. We talked about how the blood Covenant is thicker than the water of the womb. And part of that blood Covenant, God reconciling us to Himself; calls on us to reconcile with each other and Jesus gave very specific directions on how we are to reconcile with each other, with our brother. And we saw how Paul and Barnabas and Mark evidently went through that, because they split up with a sharp disagreement, sharp contention; and yet later on we see them speaking of each other, relying on each other. Now we need to remember that when Jesus gave these directions in Matthew chapter 18 beginning at verse 15; they are a directive, a command. This is not just advice. You know, that really struck a nerve and that's where I really started taking in and going into scripture and the title began to change.

The very next verse in Matthew chapter 18, following this direction reads like this. "Then Peter came up and said to Him, 'Lord how often will my brother sin against me and I forgive him, as many as seven times?' Let's break that down who was Peter talking about when we look at Luke chapter 6 verse 14, his brother is Andrew; Saint Andrew, one of the first two disciples of Jesus. Now when we compare or contrast these two brothers, we see that Peter is the bold talker. Over the last three weeks we've heard Peter say, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.' Right after that, saying 'far be it from you Lord,' when the Lord

reveals that He's to be crucified. And in a couple weeks, we're going to hear Peter say, 'though all these might deny you I will never deny You.' That's why Peter is called the disciple with the foot shaped mouth.

Now let's take a look at his brother Andrew. Andrew is as those of you who've been in Zion awhile know, is the disciple that I like to call the Nike disciple. He's quiet, you don't hear him talking much. Like the old Nike slogan, *Just do it*, he just did what he needed to do without any fanfare. If you think back a couple weeks, we talked about the feeding of the 5000. Who is it that brought the boy to Jesus who had the five loaves and the two fish? If we look at John chapter 6 verse 14 and we find out it was Andrew who went and found the boy. Who was it that brought the Greeks to Jesus in John chapter 12, when these Greeks, these Gentiles came wanting to see Jesus? Philip came to the other apostles and said what do I do? I've got these Greeks coming here, they want to see Jesus. It was Andrew who went and grabbed the Greeks and several looks let them see Jesus. He just did it.

In fact, if we go to the very beginning of John. John chapter one verse 35 and following; it was Andrew who brought Peter to Jesus saying to him we that is Peter I mean Andrew and the Apostle John. We have found the Messiah! So, you've got Peter the bold talker, Andrew the bold actor and there evidently must some brotherly strife between two brothers, who well they contrast quite nicely. And Peter asked Lord, how often when my brother sins against me and I forgive him, 7 times?

And again, this is critical that we understand the significance of the numbers used in the Bible. Three is the number of God and when we looked to Job 33:29-30; Amos chapter 1:3 and Amos chapter 2:6 we see that according to the Bible, according to typical Judaism forgiving someone three times is a sign of a forgiving spirit. So, when Peter asks, 'do I have to forgive him seven times.' What is seven? Why didn't he say, 'do I have to really forgive him three times?' Which then shows that I have a heart of forgiveness, why did he ask 7? Because in the Bible 7 is the number of perfection. It was in seven days God created the entire world and rested. And the world was perfect, and so in essence Peter is saying to him Lord, how many times do I have to forgive him, the perfect number of times? And if so, what is the perfect number of times?

Jesus comes back and He says to him, "I do not say to you 7 times, but 77 times or 70 times 7. Wow! Now that's a loaded one. It is the numbers game. 3 is the number of God; 7 the number of perfection; 10 is the number of completion as in the 10 commandments. There's the complete law of God. So, if you take 7 times 10 you get 70. 7 perfect, 10 completion=perfect completion. But 70 times 7, or 70 and 7, that would be perfect completion, perfected! Oh, that's as God Forgives. God forgives us perfectly, and gives us the call, the responsibility to forgive as He forgives. And yet with that 77, or 7 times 7 comes the new title of the sermon "The Great Reversal." Why is it the great reversal? Because that forgiveness 70 times 7 is the antithesis of what we find in the very beginning.

If we go back to Genesis. In Genesis chapter 4, there's a very familiar account in the Bible. It's the account of Cain and Abel and you know Cain killed Abel out of jealousy. Why was he jealous? And I really encourage you to listen very carefully because I think you're going to find this part of the sermon oddly familiar, and oddly current. Why did Cain kill Abel? He was jealous. What made him jealous? What caused this? Abel did what was right. He offered the first fruits of his flock to the Lord in the form of a sacrifice. In other words, when the first lamb was born, that's the one that Abel gave to the Lord. Signifying Lord, these lambs are nothing more than a gift from you. I give You the honor the glory the praise. It's not that I'm a good shepherd. It's that you are a good and gracious God and you have given to me what I don't deserve because I'm a sinner. And we read the Lord had regard for Abel; that is, He accepted and respected that offering.

Meanwhile Cain did not do what was right. We don't know exactly what he did that was wrong. It was either that he did not give of the first fruits, he waited until after the harvest was done. He put himself first instead of trusting the Lord to give him a whole harvest. He may have as the Bible says literally given God the fruit of the ground the fruit that had fallen off the trees. It may be that we didn't give a full tithe. Oh, I'll give this much; kind of like Ananias and Saphira who we heard a little bit about last week, they gave a portion but not all. Or it may have been all three. Regardless but for Cain and his offering; God had no regard. and so, Cain was very angry, and his face fell. What does it mean face

fell? 'Poor me,' he felt sorry for himself. Now, how did he know that God had no regard for his offering? It was obvious. God's hand of blessing was not on him. It could have been showing up in terms of his crop just wasn't measuring up to what he thought it should; while Abel's flock was just multiplying like crazy. It could be that things just kept going wrong he had beetles here, he had aphids here, then a fungus here; while Abel's sheep they just keep on proliferating. It could be that he just didn't have peace. But the key thing is and listen carefully; he was measuring his success by comparing himself to his brother and he wasn't keeping up with Abel. Now doesn't that sound oddly familiar in this day and age as we hear about people must pay their fair share. And who is saying that? Well its those who don't have as much as others. Why does it make a difference? They are comparing their worth, their status, to that of others.

How does God deal with this? He comes to Cain, the one who's doing the comparison, and He says why are you angry and why has your face fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? This is common sense and common sense I dare say, is a mark of godliness. But as we look at it, it also brings a lot of common sense and another title change to the sermon. The Great Contrast.

Because when we look at it, we now begin seeing more of a contrast. What happens if you don't do what is right? God tells Cain in advance, "and if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must overcome it. Sin is crouching, it's like a lion ready to pounce. And what is it going to pounce with? Jealousy, rage, followed by violence. Don't give in to it! God says, overcome it! Because if you give into it, well the jealousy turned into rage. The rage turned into violence and Cain killed Able. And then the result is he saw that he had killed his brother and God confronts him. He's still just worried about himself. 'People are going to see that I'm separated God, because you've separated me and they're going to want to kill me.' He's worried about what others will think and what others will do. Again, sound kind of familiar? God did put a mark on him and told him 'not so, vengeance is mine. If anyone strikes you Cain, my vengeance will be on them seven times.'

But now here we go, was Cain sorry? We don't see it. What was his fear? Vengeance of others. What did he pass on? 'Those fears, that vengeance, that comparing himself to others. He passed that on to his children, to his grandchildren, his great grandchildren, his great, great grandchildren; even his great, great, great grandchild named Lameck. Listen to what Lameck says, "I have killed a man for wounding me." That is a great overreaction. He was wounded, maybe the guy slapped him what was his result? Cancel culture, I will cancel you. I will kill you. And he killed a man who hurt him. And then what did he say? get listen carefully if Cain's revenge is sevenfold, referring back to what God said, then Lamech's is 77-fold. Uh huh, do you see it? Here he is boasting in his jealousy, his rage, his violence, his revenge, his sin; playing God. And now we see the mark of man's vengeance. Sin in total domination. Vengeance 77 times, vengeance. Versus God 77 times grace and forgiveness. You see perfect vengeance perfected is also God's responsibility when He says vengeance is mine. And perfect vengeance perfected, well that would be hell.

But there's the opposite side, perfect forgiveness, perfected. And how great is that? And that's what leads then back of the next title God knows all. God remembers all. Jesus tells us in the amount of sermon mount, that God knows the very hairs on the top of our head. He knows if even a sparrow falls. In fact, when it comes to God and God's mind, the Prophet Isaiah tells us in Isaiah 55 verse 9: "His thoughts are higher than our thoughts." And what are his thoughts? Well God throughout the Old Testament is remembering His covenant. A covenant that he began with Adam and Eve in the garden, continued with Noah, started to get very specific with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Judah, Jesse, David, a promise, a Covenant that he would send a Messiah. Ad when that Messiah would come, Jeremiah says, God says I will make a new Covenant through this Messiah, and I will remember your sin no more.

And there you have the title: *God Forgets*. Yep, it's the miracle of miracles. The One who remembers everything, who knows everything who is all powerful is so gracious, so loving that He makes Himself forget our sin. In fact, this is what He says; "I am He who blots out your transgressions for my own sake." "What's He mean, for my own sake? He's creator, we're His creation, He loves His creation, He can't go to bed

at night, He can't rest until He's done everything to save us. I thought of this as I was preparing the sermon, it's why the title change. I had just read an article about the people who were trapped at Mammoth Pool reservoir by the Creek fire this last week. They were going to die, and family members risked their lives, received horrific burns, broken bones saving the family members who couldn't save themselves. You see they knew that if they ran to that Chinook helicopter and just got on board and it took off and they saw their loved one on the ground being burned to death or burned to death; they couldn't live with it because they love that person. It goes hand in hand with greater love has no man than this that a man lay down his life for his friends and that is exactly what God has done. He loves us so much; He didn't get on a helicopter and fly away. No, He sent His Son down to die for us.

And what does he say as a result of that? Isaiah 43:25 “And I remember their sin no more.” This is what the people of the Old Testament look forward to. This was the impetus behind the psalmist who wrote our psalm this morning. “For as high as heavens are above the earth, so great is His steadfast love towards those who fear Him. As far as the East is from the West, so far does He remove our transgressions from us.” What's he saying? It can't be measured! East and West go opposite directions, they never meet. Or as Saint Paul says it, and I just love this. This just hit me so hard this week. Colossians 2 verse 14 says “He, Jesus, canceled the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This He set aside nailing it to the cross.” When Jesus was crucified our sins were nailed to the cross. And when He died and rose the sins were still left on that cross. Left there 2000 years ago and you know what, tomorrow will be even another day further removed from us. A week from now, they'll be another week removed from us, another month removed from us, another year removed for us, for all eternity. That is how great God Forgives!

So, what are we going to do? Well we can be like in the servant in the parable; be forgiven of so much, totally gone and then not forgive others. Or we can live under that amazing grace; and as a result, had the peace and contentment of Able. Then we can do what is right and extend that amazing grace to others. It's right in line with what I said two weeks ago, why are we open? Because we don't fear COVID-19 near

as much as the infection called sin; and the result of it, called eternal death- the second death. We know the cure to that so we must share that cure and rejoice in that cure. We must be here. But in the same way, when we look at this forgiveness and what we see going on in our country today, do we make our total focus about how people react to us and their actions against us or whatever? That's like comparing the Creek Fire to the eternal fire. What really matters is forgiving as we have been forgiven; not comparing ourselves to others but comparing ourselves to God and seeing that we all fall short of His glory; but that He died for all of us and He sent His Son for us and He wants us all to do well. When we do well, His grace is mercy and peace is upon us. And if we don't do well, we are left struggling with jealousy, with vengeance, with violence. So, what we need right now is instead of coming back with vengeance and anger we need to be bringing God's grace and forgiveness into this world.

Back in the late 1950s they found a bear cub that had been burned in a forest fire. It's mother had been killed, as well as the other cub. He became known as Smokey Bear. Do you remember what Smokey Bear said? "Only you can prevent forest fires." The message of reconciliation, the message of God forgets, is the cure to forever fire. And only you, living in Christ, and Christ living in you, can prevent forever fires. In our Saviors' Name. Amen.