

Opening Scripture

Zephaniah 3:14-17

Zephaniah was an Old Testament prophet. In his book he writes of a time of judgment against God's people for their unfaithfulness to the Lord. But as he brings his book to a close, he writes of a time when God would assure His people that they have been forgiven for their sin. It is a message of joy to know that sins have been forgiven. He concludes this section with words of great joy. God takes great delight over His cleansed children. He no longer speaks words of rebuke. Instead He sings over his children with great joy. As one of God's children today, know that God takes great delight over you.

Opening Prayer

Prayer Time

Scripture

Matthew 18: 15-35

Message Becoming Like Christ – Forgiveness

Becoming the image of Jesus means that we learn that we must Forgive others.

For the past several weeks we have been talking about the topic: **Becoming the Image of Christ**. Our foundation verse for this study is Romans 8:29. Many people are familiar with Romans 8:28. Perhaps someone has quoted it to you when things were not working out the way you hoped. Or perhaps you have quoted it to someone else. I think we need to see these two verses together: ***28 And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, whom he has called according to his purpose. 29 For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. (Romans 8:28-29)***. Verse 29 says that it is God's plan that those who are believers in Jesus, those who are identified as Christians will be transformed so that they will be brought into conformity with the character of Jesus. That is God's purpose. That is God's will for your life. Verse 28 assures us that God is working through all of the circumstances that we go through – good and bad – to bring about that change and transformation. He is working for the good of those who love Him and who He loves. What is good is defined in verse 29 – conformity with the character of Jesus. God is working to change us. God has sent His Spirit to bring about that change. We must submit ourselves to Him so He can display through our lives the character of Jesus.

In this study we have been looking at some stories from the Gospels where the disciples learned what it would look like to be like Jesus. We have learned that:

- Feeding of 5000 - Becoming like Jesus means that we will not send people in need away, but we will look for ways to help them, knowing that God is a God of abundance
- Woman at the Well – Becoming like Jesus means that we will reach out to those who are considered to be “outcasts” to offer them living water
- The Blind man by the road – Becoming like Jesus will mean that we notice those who are in need; We will not shame or blame people for their need, but discern what God wants us to do to meet their need
- James and John – Becoming like Jesus means that we understand that serving others is more important than grasping for power to intimidate others.

There are many other stories in the gospels where the character of the disciples clashed with the character of Jesus and the disciples learned what it would take to become the image of Jesus. Those moments when the character of the disciples clashed with the character of Jesus became transformation moments for the disciples and learning moments for us. I encourage you as you read the Bible, and in particular the gospels that would not just read to be entertained by the good stories. Read the gospels to learn what Jesus was like and to see where you are “un-like” Jesus so that you can allow God to change you until your character conforms with the character of Jesus.

Today we are going to finish this series of messages on this topic of Becoming the Image of Jesus. We are going to look at this encounter between Peter and Jesus to learn about the importance of Forgiveness. **Becoming the image of Jesus will mean that we learn that Forgiving those who sin against us is important.**

This conversation is recorded in Matthew 18. The disciples and Jesus have been traveling together for nearly 3 years. They are traveling toward Jerusalem for the last time. As they are walking together, Jesus is teaching his followers some lessons about the importance of relationships in His Kingdom. We should understand that he is talking about our life together in this world as believers. In verse 15, Jesus gets around to the subject of how we are to respond when a fellow believer – a brother or sister – sins. Jesus knows our nature as humans, and he is aware that there will come times when a break in relationships takes place. Someone says something, or does something that makes us angry, or hurt, or disappoints us. Jesus gives us a formula to follow to reconcile. We must remember that that is Jesus' main desire: that broken relationships be repaired, and restored. While he suggests that there may come a time when we have to make a break, we must try to avoid that. Reconcile – Repair – Restore!!!! You first go one on one, privately, in humility to address the situation and try to repair the damage. If that doesn't work, take 2 others along. If that doesn't work, bring it to the attention of the Church. BUT Winning your brother or sister over is the goal.

As Jesus brings up this matter of how to treat a brother or sister, one of Jesus' followers, Peter is prompted to ask a follow up question. We have been talking about Clash Moments as the Disciples were following Jesus. Those moments when the character and behavior of the disciples clashed with the character and behavior of Jesus. Peter's question reveals another "Clash Moment". And this moment when Peter's behavior clashes with Jesus' desire, becomes a "Transformational Moment", a Change opportunity.

Peter's Question: "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?"

To forgive means to set aside punishment and resentment. IT means that we give up the right to get even. The rabbis taught that a brother or sister might be forgiven if he repented three times; on the fourth there is no forgiveness. (Expositors Bible Commentary). Peter in his "big hearted" way suggest that he would be willing to offer forgiveness seven times! Jesus' response to Peter is "**not seven times but seventy-seven times**" **CLASH!!!!** Peter – seven times; Jesus – seventy-seven times. Now some translations make the number that Jesus suggests seventy times seven. There is some difference in the Greek manuscripts. Some read 77, some read 70 times 7. BUT in either case, it is a lot more than Peter suggests. Not only 77 times, or 490 times. But without limit. Luke 17:3-4, Jesus says:

³ So watch yourselves. "If your brother or sister^{al} sins against you, rebuke them; and if they repent, forgive them. ⁴ Even if they sin against you seven times in a day and seven times come back to you saying 'I repent,' you must forgive them." Then to make it clear that Jesus is suggesting that forgiveness is to be offered an unlimited number of times he tells this story.

The Story: The story is pretty straight forward. A king wanted to settle accounts with his employees or servants. One servant came before the king who owed him an astronomical amount of money. 10,000 bags of gold. We are not told any details as to how he ran up such a high amount of debt. That was not the point of Jesus' story. Jesus wants us to know that it was an amount that this servant was never going to be able to pay back. In today's terms, I have heard that it could have been a billion dollars!! The king ordered that the servant, his wife and children be sold in order to settle the debt. The servant begs and pleads, asking for time to pay it back, which he could never do. For some reason, the master takes pity on him and cancelled the debt and let him go!!! When the servant left the master, he came across and acquaintance who owed him some money. It was an insignificant amount of money, especially compared to his own debt that was forgiven. The servant who was forgiven, had his fellow servant arrested and thrown into prison, until the small debt could be satisfied. Some who were aware of what went on between the first servant and the king were outraged. They went and told the king what they had witnessed. The king called his servant back in and rebukes him: **I cancelled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?"** The king handed him over to the jailers to be tortured until he should pay back all that he owed – never; eternity. Then Jesus concludes the story: **"This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart!"**

As we read that warning once again, it is a sobering statement. Those who have been forgiven much – by God – are expected to forgive. **The forgiven forgive.**

Now, perhaps there will be some push back, some protest. Is that realistic Jesus? We may even ask Jesus, could you do that? And of course we discover the answer. As Jesus is being nailed to the cross He prays: **Luke 23:33-34** ³³ *When they came to the place called the Skull, they crucified him there, along with the criminals—one on his right, the other on his left.* ³⁴ *Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.”*¹

So becoming the image of Jesus means that we will be people who **practice forgiveness**. I wonder today, if there are people in your past or present who you need to forgive. Are you holding grudges. Are you waiting for an opportunity to get even? Are you plotting revenge? Are you withholding love and kindness from someone because they hurt you? What will it look like for you to set them free and forgive them. May God grant you the grace to do that today.

Last week after we concluded our service in the “in person” setting on Sunday morning, one of our members – Kay – share with me something that she had come across that morning. It was a quote by Bob Goff – **“Our problem following Jesus is we’re still trying to be a better version of us – rather than a more accurate reflection of Him.”** What a powerful observation. As we conclude this sermon and this series on Becoming the image of Christ, I wonder if that is something that resonates with you. It sure made me think about my own character and behavior. I don’t want people to see a better me. I want people to see the character of Jesus in my life – in my thoughts, my words, my behavior.

Prayer