

67 Mark 11:11-25

Forgiveness

22 And Jesus answered them, "Have faith in God. 23 Truly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be taken up and thrown into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says will come to pass, it will be done for him. 24 Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. 25 And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses."

Introduction

"All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness." However, that does not mean that we always spend equal time in each passage. This in no way belittles one part of scripture or raises another. Different genres must be approached differently. Poetry is not meant to be picked apart as a collection of logical syllogisms, nor are we to casually read didactic literature to see what kind of impressions it makes on us. Different genres are to be read in different ways. Also, some portions of scripture are more heavily weighted with significance than other portions requiring more time to extract it all. Finally, some parts of scripture require greater study simply because of how they may have been abused. Different parts of scripture will be attacked at different times and will need to be more carefully studied during those attacks.

As it turns out, our passage is both weighty in terms of its eschatological and ecclesiological significance as well as being a passage that is often abused or at least misunderstood in our time. This is now our fourth and final week in this text.

We ended last week with a brief look at corporate prayer. I want to fill that out just a bit more this morning and then move on to a more detailed study of this passage. It will get pretty involved at times so if you may want to give this message some extra attention.

Praying Corporately

Individualism is just part of our culture. Burger King, "Have it your way." Albertsons, "It's your store." Billy Joel, "I don't care what you say anymore this is my life, go ahead with your own life leave me alone." The sense of corporate belonging is absent from us. In this section on praying corporately, I am going to be relying heavily on Edmund Clowney's article, "A Biblical Theology of Prayer."

God's covenant was never exclusively individual. At Sinai, all the people redeemed from Egypt entered into covenant with the Lord. Indeed it was God's covenant that formed a nation, a people of God, from the mixed multitude that came out of Egypt. God's words, mediated

through Moses, were addressed to all the assembled people.

The consciousness of God's dealings with Israel colours the prayers of individual Israelites.

The prayer of Hannah is suspect to the critics: it seems more appropriate as a hymn for the nation than as the thanks of a simple woman to whom God gave a son (1 Sam. 2:1-10).

The

hymns of the first chapter of Luke have a similar cast, reflecting, as they do, Hannah's song.

Yet we fail to appreciate how deeply the consciousness of God's promises to the people were

woven into the piety of each member of the community. Indeed, the deeper a person's trust in

the Lord, the stronger is the awareness of God's covenant promises .

In the Psalms that same corporate consciousness is present. Many of the Psalms are 'we' psalms, addressing praise and petitions to the God of Israel in the first person plural. But the

individual psalms are also corporate. They appear in the Psalter, not as samples of private poetry, nor even as the prayers of typical Israelites. Rather, the individuals speak as representatives of the people of God. This is particularly clear in the psalms of David, who writes as the king, the royal servant of the Lord. His tribulations are troubles for all the people

of God; his enemies are the enemies of God and of the nation; his victories show the outstretched hand of the covenant God. Other individual psalms are also the words of servants

of the Lord. Their cry is one in which all the people of God may join.

God's judgments on Israel's sin brought destruction and captivity. The prophets, however, promised that a remnant would be spared and that renewal would come. The winnowing process pointed to an Israel within Israel: a small but faithful number who would be circumcised in heart and renewed in spirit. As a refining process, the captivity put a new emphasis on prayer, and on individual prayer. Daniel prays faithfully in personal devotion. Yet

Daniel prays facing Jerusalem (Dan. 6:10). His prayer is corporate in language and in burden

(Dan. 9:3-20). Like Moses, he intercedes for the people of God.

Jesus prays alone, and teaches the need for private prayer. In contrast to the publicity-seeking

Pharisees, the disciples are to pray to the Father in secret (Mt. 6:5,6). Yet Jesus also chides his disciples that they could not watch with him in prayer in Gethsemane (Mt. 26:40). He teaches them to pray together, 'Our Father, which art in heaven . . .' In the new covenant as in

the old, the people of God join in praise, confession, petition and thanksgiving. The revelation

of God's full and final salvation in Christ binds those born of the Spirit in a fellowship of prayer.

Individual prayer is not put above corporate prayer as more spiritual, more profound, or

more
pleasing to God.¹

Many people have seen the striking correlation between this passage and the Lord's prayer. Both of them in the plural seek God's forgiveness as we forgive others. It seems that Jesus is here teaching this part of the Lord's prayer in a slightly modified form. Philip Ryken, commenting on the Lord's prayer, states, "As a general rule, the Holy Spirit does not come in his reviving power until a church confesses its sins *as a church*."²

Although this is true, there is enough ambiguity that I will devote more time to this passage on an individual basis shortly. But for now we need to see this flow of redemptive history. We can see and address the characteristic biases of our own culture when we look back in time. Our individualism is definitely an abuse of our age. We tend, depending on the family, to see our family as a unit. When we are at war, we tend to view ourselves all as Americans. A sports team, when it is playing well, views itself as a team and not as a group of individuals. When you were in school, there was a certain amount of pride wrapped up in that. This is my school, these are my colors. There is a loyalty and dedication that exists there. And for what reason? The only ties you have are there because your parents happened to move into a certain city which had certain school districts zoned out, one of which you attended.

There should be an even greater sense of belonging and loyalty to the body of Christ. We are all brothers and sisters. These bonds with which we are joined in Christ are stronger than familial bonds alone (at least they should be). Unlike our zeal for our school which is largely accidental, we as Christians are genuinely united to one another in a real, purposeful, eternal way. We need to start seeing each other in this way. And one major step in that direction is to start praying corporately and involving ourselves in corporate prayer.

Praying in Christ

23 Truly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be taken up and thrown into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says will come to pass, it will be done for him. 24 Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.

Praying in Jesus as the new temple or house of prayer entailed living out and praying according to God's will. Jesus ties in forgiving a brother with prayer. How we live makes a difference in the efficacy of our prayers. There are many passages that speak to this reality.

Psalm 66:16-19, "16 Come and hear, all you who fear God,
and I will tell what he has done for my soul.
17 I cried to him with my mouth,
and high praise was on my tongue.
18 If I had cherished iniquity in my heart,
the Lord would not have listened.
19 But truly God has listened;

1. Edmund Clowney, "A Biblical Theology of Prayer" 12

2. Philip Ryken, "Corporate Aspects of the Lord's Prayer" available at http://www.9marks.org/partner/Article_Display_Page/0,,PTID314526|CHID598016|CIID2386894,00.html

he has attended to the voice of my prayer."

Proverbs 15:29, "The Lord is far from the wicked, but he hears the prayer of the righteous."

Isaiah 1:15 When you spread out your hands,
I will hide my eyes from you;
even though you make many prayers,
I will not listen;
your hands are full of blood.

1 John 3:22, "and whatever we ask we receive from him, because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him."

1 John 5:14-15, "And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. 15 And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him."

James 1:6, "But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind."

James 5:16, "Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working."

John 9:31, "We know that God does not listen to sinners, but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does his will, God listens to him."

John 15:4-8, "Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. 5 I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. 6 If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. 7 If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.

8 By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples."

John 15 brings much of this material together. The problem with Israel as exemplified by the fig tree, was lack of fruit. On the heels of the cursing of the fig tree for lack of fruit, and the anticipated destruction of the house of prayer, is this teaching on prayer which says to ask in faith and it will be done. It was the faithless generation that could not cast out demons because they did not pray to God. Jesus desires a fruitful generation. But we cannot be a fruitful generation without abiding in him. But if we abide in Christ - he is the new temple, the new house of prayer - if we abide in him then ask whatever you want and it will be given to you.

Example of Not Praying in Christ

And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses.

Harboring division is not abiding in Christ. Thus we need to forgive one another if we desire to have effective prayers. If you harbor hatred in your heart and pray to God, "He will not listen for your hands are full of blood." If you slander another person, you cannot expect to receive from God what you ask, for you did not "keep his commandments" nor "do what pleases him." If you desire to triumph over someone, you will not be heard for you ask with impure motives and cherish iniquity in your heart.

Future Justification

To understand what is said here, we need to distinguish between future and present justification. You may not be aware that there is such a thing as future justification. Tom Wright has brought a massive amount of light to this subject recently. Let me quickly qualify that I believe he has gone too far and has caused great damage by his teaching. However, N.T. Wright is no slouch, and as with most errant teachings he has shed new light on this aspect of the faith that has been largely overlooked.

Jesus says in Matthew 12:37, "for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned." Further, in Matthew 25:31-35:

When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. 32 Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. 33 And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. 34 Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. 35 For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me,

These passages teach that there will be a judgment in the future. At that time we will be justified. As is clear in these texts, this justification references our works. I am choosing my words carefully here so please pay attention. You really need to focus on this. This is precisely where Tom Wright errs. He considers our future justification to be based on works. Moreover, he considers our present justification to merely anticipate this future justification based on works. I believe this is massively wrong.

It is abundantly clear that our present justification is by faith alone in Christ alone. It is not based, in an anticipatory way, in a future works-based justification. Our faith unites us to Christ, and so we are saved on his merits alone.

The Basis of Forgiveness

So how do we make sense of these passages? We cannot simply dismiss them. We cannot say, "My verse trumps your verse." We need to let them say what they say. So how do we allow them their full weight and yet maintain harmony between the present and future justification texts? The Reformed position is that our future justification confirms the reality of our present justification. The present is not based in the future (it is odd to even say it). Rather, the future judgment will make known the reality of our faith-based justification in Christ.

The question now before us is, "How will this future declaration confirm or make clear the reality of our faith-based justification? The answer is, it will point to works. It will point to works, not as the basis of our justification, but as tangible evidence of our justification. A man who commits murder is guilty by the very act. However, it is made known that he is guilty by the evidence. A bloody glove with his DNA all over it serves, not as the basis of his guilt, but as the evidence of his guilt. Do we have any biblical support for this notion? Yes.

Hebrews 3:6 states, "but Christ is faithful over God's house as a son. And we are his house if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope." We are not made part of this house after a life of holding fast. Rather, we are currently part of this house and the evidence is

that we persevere. The passage we looked at earlier in John 15 states the same thing, "By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples." We are not his disciples by doing, rather our fruit proves what we already are.

Coming back to our passage, we read the following:

And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses."

This seems to have in view a future forgiveness. The tense is actually aorist which does not specify a time frame, however, the construction seems to indicate that God's forgiveness follows our forgiveness. Because of the ambiguity of the tense, I will present two options that seem viable. Our future justification will present evidence for the reality of our faith such as a heart that forgives, or it will produce evidence that our faith was not real such as an unforgiving heart. Ephesians 4:32, "Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you." We see that God's initial work of justifying us, or forgiving us, is the basis for our subsequent forgiveness of other people. This future forgiving of one another, which is possible only because of God forgiving us, will be referenced at the day of judgement. In essence God will say, "Look! This man lived a life of forgiveness. This is not something that an unregenerate, self-centered individual can do. This proves that he was my disciple."

Application

These passages were intended to carry some weight. It is hard to simply pass over Jesus statement that we should forgive others so that we may receive forgiveness from God. We are intended to feel the weight of these verses.