15. True forgiveness is not easy

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British General Oglethorpe during the American Liberation war once said to a great preacher John Wesley, "I never forgive and I never forget." To which Wesley replied, "Then, Sir, I hope you never sin."

Christianity starts with forgiveness of our sins from God. However, it does not end at the forgiveness from God only. We are told to forgive one another, just as He has forgiven us. Many times we have hard time forgiving those who hurt us deeply.

We who refuse to forgive – we who live in the gall of bitterness – will become victims of torture. If we nurture feelings of bitterness we are no better than inmates of an internal concentration camp. For your sake, let me urge you to put away all bitterness now. The escape route is clearly marked. It leads to the cross where the only One who had a right to be bitter wasn't.

A. JOAB'S INTERCESSION

> *2 Samuel 14:1-3 So Joab the son of Zeruiah perceived that the king's heart was concerned about Absalom. 2 And Joab sent to Tekoa and brought from there a wise woman, and said to her, "Please pretend to be a mourner, and put on mourning apparel; do not anoint yourself with oil, but act like a woman who has been mourning a long time for the dead. 3 Go to the king and speak to him in this manner." So Joab put the words in her mouth.*

David was obviously troubled by his estranged relationship with Absalom. Joab, David's chief general, noticed this.

I don't believe one moment that Joab cared about Absalom's well being and tried to intercede on behalf of him. Joab who had been around David's family long enough to know the volatile character of Absalom. He just wanted to prevent any possibility of a revolt by Absalom against David.

In the case of Absalom and the king, the relationship remained virtually deadlocked, neither side having the spiritual incentive to break it.

Tekoa, the hometown of the prophet Amos, was on the edge of the hill country, about six miles south of Bethlehem.

> *2 Samuel 14:4-11 And when the woman of Tekoa spoke to the king, she fell on her face to the ground and prostrated herself, and said, "Help, O king!" 5 Then the king said to her, "What troubles you?" And she answered, "Indeed I am a widow, my husband is dead. 6 Now your maidservant had two sons; and the two fought with each other in the field, and there was no one to part them, but the one struck the other and killed him. 7 And now the whole family has risen up against your maidservant, and they said, 'Deliver him who struck his brother, that we may execute him for the life of his brother whom he killed; and we will destroy the heir also.' So they would extinguish my ember that is left, and leave to my husband neither name nor remnant on the earth." 8 Then the king said to the woman, "Go to your house, and I will give orders concerning you." 9 And the woman of Tekoa said to the king, "My lord, O king, let the iniquity be on me and on my father's house, and the king and his throne be guiltless." 10 So the king said, "Whoever says anything to you, bring him to me, and he shall not*

touch you anymore." 11 Then she said, "Please let the king remember the Lord your God, and do not permit the avenger of blood to destroy anymore, lest they destroy my son." And he said, "As the Lord lives, <u>not one hair of your son shall fall to the ground</u>."

Joab got her to play upon the feelings of David by telling him her sad story.

The punishment for murder was death according to the Law of Moses. The issue seemed clear but the consequences for the woman were intolerable. The woman used a graphic picture of the extinction of her family. The end of a surviving remnant or family line were crucial matters to the Hebrew people.

The woman of Tekoa speaks of the custom of the "avenger of blood". The "avenger of blood" had the responsibility of avenging the death of a member of the family. The cities of refuge mentioned in Numbers 35:9-34 were meant to protect someone guilty of manslaughter, not like Absalom's premeditated murder, from being killed by an avenger of blood before the case could be heard properly.

As we all know Joab is behind this woman's story and they waited to hear this approval from David. Now David ignores the cause of justice for the sake of family sympathy. In personal relationship it is a good and glorious thing to be generous with forgiveness and mercy when we are wronged.

But David had a responsibility as the king and chief judge of Israel, and he was being sorely tempted to forsake that responsibility. He guaranteed safety at the expense of justice.

Let's face the situation according to the law of God said:

1) Should David have executed his son Amnon who raped his own half sister?

Yes, a thousand times YES! Then why didn't he do it? Probably, he remembered his own past with Bathsheba.

2) Should David have punished Absalom for his premeditated murder of Amnon?

Yes. Then why didn't he do it? Being an indulgent father who felt guilty for not spending his time with his children enough. It was easy for him to escape to his business – in his case, it is ruling the nation – than handling his family situations.

A lot of mom and dad escape their duty and privilege of being parents by getting more involved with their jobs and businesses, because it is easier than facing challenges in the family. They also tend to pamper their children with extra amount of indulgence to smoothen the lack of their presence in their children's lives.

Remember what we learned in last Bible study?

Hosea 8:7 They sow the wind, And reap the whirlwind.

B. WHAT ABOUT YOU?

2 Samuel 14:12-17 Therefore the woman said, "Please, let your maidservant speak another word to my lord the king." And he said, "Say on." 13 So the woman said: "Why then have you schemed such a thing against the people of God? For the king speaks this thing as one who is guilty, in that the king does not bring his banished one home again. 14 For we will surely die and become

like water spilled on the ground, which cannot be gathered up again. Yet God does not take away a life; but He devises means, so that His banished ones are not expelled from Him. 15 Now therefore, I have come to speak of this thing to my lord the king because the people have made me afraid. And your maidservant said, 'I will now speak to the king; it may be that the king will perform the request of his maidservant. 16 For the king will hear and deliver his maidservant from the hand of the man who would destroy me and my son together from the inheritance of God.' 17 Your maidservant said, 'The word of my lord the king will now be comforting; for as the angel of God, so is my lord the king in discerning good and evil. And may the Lord your God be with you.' "

The woman of Tekoa speaks boldly to David, confronting his sin of not initiating reconciliation with Absalom. Because he was estranged from David and growing more and more bitter, Absalom became a threat to Israel and David allowed it.

If David approached Absalom he might be rejected, but he still had the responsibility to try. Yet as king, chief judge of Israel and his father, he had a responsibility to both initiate reconciliation and to do it the right way.

God had a way to bring us back to Himself. But not at the expense of justice. God reconciles us by satisfying justice through the blood of His Son Jesus Christ who paid the atoning sacrifice on behalf of us, not by ignoring justice.

C. DOES JOAB HAVE ANYTHING TO DO WITH US?

2 Samuel 14:18-20 Then the king answered and said to the woman, "Please do not hide from me anything that I ask you." And the woman said, "Please, let my lord the king speak." 19 So the king said, "Is the hand of Joab with you in all this?" And the woman answered and said, "As you live, my lord the king, no one can turn to the right hand or to the left from anything that my lord the king has spoken. For your servant Joab commanded me, and he put all these words in the mouth of your maidservant. 20 To bring about this change of affairs your servant Joab has done this thing; but my lord is wise, according to the wisdom of the angel of God, to know everything that is in the earth."

David somehow knew that this subtle plan had to come from the hand of Joab.

D. A HAPHAZARD FORGIVENESS

2 Samuel 14:21-24 And the king said to Joab, "All right, I have granted this thing. Go therefore, bring back the young man Absalom." 22 Then Joab fell to the ground on his face and bowed himself, and thanked the king. And Joab said, "Today your servant knows that I have found favor in your sight, my lord, O king, in that the king has fulfilled the request of his servant." 23 So Joab arose and went to Geshur, and brought Absalom to Jerusalem. 24 And the king said, "Let him return to his own house, but do not let him see my face." So Absalom returned to his own house, but did not see the king's face.

Joab got what he wanted and what he thought was best for the nation of Israel. He hoped that Absalom's reconciliation with David would prevent a rebellion.

David was over-indulgent with his sons in the past. Now David is too harsh with Absalom, refusing to see him after he had been in exiled in Geshur for three years. When parents don't discipline properly from the beginning, they tend to over-compensate in the name of "toughness." This often provokes the children to wrath and makes the parent-child relationship worse.

Ephesians 6:4 And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.

David may have given Absalom the finest house to live in, money to spend, and servants to meet his needs. But he didn't give him the one thing his son needed most: a relationship with his father.

Instead of burying the hatch all the way, we have a tendency to bury it a half way. When the time comes, we would pull that hatch out to hack that person with it again.

The day after the this year's election night, John Kerry urged his supporters to work with President Bush to build a better America. I have a feeling that it is going to be rather difficult for Democrats to embrace President Bush's policies that stand against theirs in most, if not every case. I am not just talking about the Democrats, but also the Republicans. How do I know? I've been living in this country for last 23 years and I've seen how the political weather turns.

When God forgives, He forgets. He is not only willing but pleased to use any vessel – just as long as it is clean with true repentance today.

> *Isaiah 43:25 I, even I, am He who blots out your transgressions for My own sake; And I will not remember your sins.*

God's will is to forgive sinners. The divine example is set in significant contrast with David, who had refused to forgive his son Absalom.

Forgiveness to others shows the depth and strength of individual spiritual maturity.

However, does it mean the person who hurt you deeply must be restored as before? Forgiveness is must, but restoration is depend on the situation. Let's make an example: a husband's friend started to advance himself to the wife. The husband found out and confronted this friend. The friend apologizes. Does it mean the husband should take him back as his friend again? No, I don't believe so. It would be very uncomfortable with his wife and himself. As born-again believers, forgiveness is mandatory, but restoration is optional.

E. MR. G.Q. OF ISRAEL

> *2 Samuel 14:25-27 Now in all Israel there was no one who was praised as much as Absalom for his good looks. From the sole of his foot to the crown of his head there was no blemish in him. 26 And when he cut the hair of his head--at the end of every year he cut it because it was heavy on him--when he cut it, he weighed the hair of his head at two hundred shekels according to the king's standard. 27 To Absalom were born three sons, and one daughter whose name was Tamar. She was a woman of beautiful appearance.*

This begins to explain why Absalom was popular in Israel. Israel was attracted to King Saul because he was a very good-looking man.

Remember when John F. Kennedy was running for the presidency of the United States in 1960, the majority American people were wooed by his charming appearance and charismatic characters over the grumpy looking Richard Nixon? People tend to go for outward appearance more than inner strength.

Absalom had such a great set of hair that he cut five and one-half pounds of hair off his head every year. He was extremely proud of his long hair, and he lost his life because of it.

F. A MAJOR ATTITUDE AND MENTAL PROBLEM OF ABSALOM

> *2 Samuel 14:28-33 And Absalom dwelt two full years in Jerusalem, but did not see the king's face. 29 Therefore Absalom sent for Joab, to send him to the king, but he would not come to him. And when he sent again the second time, he would not come. 30 So he said to his servants, "See, Joab's field is near mine, and he has barley there; go and set it on fire." And Absalom's servants set the field on fire. 31 Then Joab arose and came to Absalom's house, and said to him, "Why have your servants set my field on fire?" 32 And Absalom answered Joab, "Look, I sent to you, saying, 'Come here, so that I may send you to the king, to say, "Why have I come from Geshur? It would be better for me to be there still." ' Now therefore, let me see the king's face; but if there is iniquity in me, let him execute me." 33 So Joab went to the king and told him. And when he had called for Absalom, he came to the king and bowed himself on his face to the ground before the king. Then the king kissed Absalom.*

When some people don't get attention they want from others, they would do anything to get it including doing wrong things. This is the case in point. Because Absalom was ignored by Joab, Absalom ordered his servants to set fire on Joab's field. This guy has a major attitude and mental problem.

Absalom thought his crime could be justified as a revenge. He has not learned that there is a consequence for his wrong behavior.

David offered Absalom forgiveness without any repentance or resolution of the wrong.

David's forgiveness of Absalom was completely inadequate, leading to a further outbreak of sin. But God's forgiveness of a man's soul is completely adequate, and a great deterrent to continued sin.

David made a blunder in not forgiving his son as God had forgiven David. He will live to regret it.

G. APPLICATIONS

1) Our God is a God who forgives. And we should do the same.

> *Galatians 6:1 Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.*

It appears that many of us don't read that verse correctly. We think it says, "If any man be overtaken in a fault, take a baseball bat and hit him over the head!" We are reluctant to forgive, and we can be very mean at times, very unloving, and critical. There are times when the truth should be spoken, but when forgiveness is asked for, it should be extended immediately and completely.