

## Enrolling in the School of Prayer – Class 4 of 6

2020-10-25 Sermon by Major Brian Coles

*The Mission* is a film set during the 1800's when Jesuit missionaries set up missions independent of the Spanish state to teach Christianity to native peoples.

At the beginning of the movie, a Jesuit missionary is lashed to a cross by the Gwar'-a-nee Indians who live above the spectacular Igwa'-su Falls.

The missionary is sent over the falls, cross and all, while praying fervently to God.

His martyrdom inspires another Jesuit, Father Gabriel, [played by Jeromey Irons] to scale the hazardous falls in order to reach the tribe with the gospel.

Initially the Gwar'-a-nee warriors prepare to kill him, but after Father Gabriel plays an unforgettable solo on his oboe, they allow him to live, and he gradually wins their trust.

Meanwhile, below the falls, a mercenary and slave hunter, Rodrigo Mendoza [played by Robert de Niro],

makes his living kidnapping Gwar'-a-nee and other indigenous peoples and selling them as slaves to nearby plantation owners.

Mendoza is shown to have a human side, however, caring deeply both for his brother and his fiancé.

But when he finds his brother in bed with his fiancé, Mendoza stabs him in a jealous rage and then spirals into extreme guilt and depression over what he has done.

He seeks repentance from the Jesuit missionaries.

So Father Gabriel takes Mendoza's armour and weapons, ties them in a large net, and attaches the net to Mendoza's waist.

In one of the movie's most memorable scenes, he assigns Mendoza to scale the 82m high Igwa'-su Falls in an act of penance with this heavily-laden net.

Mendoza, still proud and bitter despite his guilt, refuses help and proceeds to scale the falls until finally,

having reached the tribe's camp at the top of the falls, he collapses. Then this happens. **[run video]**

Apart from the obvious non-scriptural nature of the penance performed by Mendoza, deflecting, as it does, from the atonement of Jesus,

when one member of the tribe cuts the rope and throws the net into the falls, that act symbolizes the tribe's forgiving him.

And when Father Gabriel **runs** to embrace Rodrigo Mendoza, we witness one of the most vivid images in the whole NT.

These days all kinds of people run to stay fit. But in Jesus' world, the older you were in a community, the less likely you were even to walk fast.

In fact, for an older person to run showed a complete lack of dignity.

So when Jesus tells a story about an older man running, this is designed to have the same effect on his audience as we would experience if, say,

her majesty Queen Elizabeth were to show up for a visit to Canada wearing a bikini and doing cartwheels. It's a complete lack of dignity.

And when we discover **why** this man is running, the effect is even more shocking.

This man is running to welcome home someone; someone who has put a curse on him and who has brought disgrace on his whole family.

We call it the parable of the prodigal son, found in Lk. 15, but it might also be called the parable of the running father.

For only when we understand why this man is running will we really understand what Jesus means when he teaches us to pray;

“Abba’ Father... forgive us our debts, as we also forgive our debtors.”

So what is Jesus getting at with this parable of the running father?

And how can we turn that story, and the reality to which it points, into prayer, the prayer Jesus taught us –

“Forgive us our debts, as we also forgive our debtors”?

Before we answer that important question, I want to clarify that Matthew does indeed use the word ‘debts,’ not ‘trespasses,’

which is the word we usually say when we pray this prayer. Why is that? All you history buffs may find this of interest.

I checked out other translations and guess what?

There is almost universal agreement among all the major translations – they all have “debts” and “debtors” like the NIV.

More contemporary translations, like the NLT, have “sins” or “wrongs.” But none of these, along with the more established translations, have “trespasses.”

So where in the world did the word “trespasses” come from? It came from *The Book of Common Prayer*.

In its very first edition in 1549, “forgive us our trespasses” is what’s used.

But that raises another question. Where did the 1549 edition of the Book of Common Prayer come up with the word “trespasses?”

The 1549 edition of the Book of Common Prayer used the Tyndale Bible published in 1526.

William Tyndale is credited with being the first person to translate the Bible from the original Hebrew and Greek languages into English.

And he translates the Greek word for debt, ὀφείλημα, as trespasses.

This was the translation used in the 1549 *Book of Common Prayer* and somehow it has made its way into church usage ever since.

Whichever word is used - debts, trespasses or sins - we need to remember that we are asking Abba, Father, for forgiveness.

Now, as we have already discovered in this course on prayer, Jesus announced that God's kingdom, God's his rule and reign, arrived with his advent.

"The kingdom of God has come upon you" Jesus says in Mt. 12.28.

And Jesus tells a story in which the arrival of God's kingdom, of which the forgiveness of sins plays a vital role,

looks like a father running down the road to welcome home his disgraced, exiled son.

Furthermore, when Jesus makes the shocking announcement on several occasions in the gospels, 'your sins are forgiven',

he is offering something that was normally done through the Temple sacrifices,

but is now available through him as the one who has inaugurated the kingdom of God on earth as it is in heaven.

And so we read stories in the gospels of Jesus sitting down to eat with tax-collectors and sinners;

acting out the open welcome of all people into God's kingdom through the forgiveness of sins.

When Jesus' opponents challenge him about his 'undignified' behaviour,

he tells a story about a father who threw his dignity in the dumpster and ran down the road to welcome home his disgraced son.

That story is telling us that the forgiveness of sins is happening because the kingdom of God is here, though not yet here in all its fullness or completeness.

Whenever people respond to the call of Jesus to follow him, Jesus gives them instructions on how to live as kingdom people;

instructions we find in the prayer he taught us to pray.

It's worth noting in this prayer in Mt. 6, that the request for forgiveness comes right after the request for daily bread.

The point being that daily life requires both bread and forgiveness. As John Wesley points out, forgiveness is a daily, ongoing need.

In addition to that, when we receive Abba Father's forgiveness ourselves, we are to then practice forgiving others.

"Forgive us our debts [our sins]," Jesus taught us, "**as we also** forgive our debtors [those who sin against us]."

To not practice forgiveness towards those who have sinned against us, means we haven't really understood what it is to be forgiven by our Abba Father ourselves.

When we refuse to forgive someone who has sinned against us, we are saying in effect,

"I don't really believe the Kingdom of God has arrived. Therefore, I don't believe forgiveness of sins has actually occurred."

Failure to forgive others isn't a matter of failing to live up to a new bit of moral teaching, says Tom Wright. It is cutting off the branch on which you are sitting.

The only reason for being kingdom-people, for being followers of Jesus, is that the forgiveness of sins is happening.

If you don't practice forgiveness, you are denying the very basis for your own new life in Christ.

Claiming this blessing of the kingdom - God's forgiveness of our sins - only makes sense if we are living by that same blessing ourselves and forgiving those who sin against us.

When others see us living out that message, it will cause them to ask questions to which the proper answer would be

a story about a father running down the road to embrace and welcome home his disgraced son. That's what forgiveness looks like.

So how might this prayer impact us in our own lives? There are 2 ways it can impact us.

**1<sup>st</sup>, we can ask our Abba Father to forgive us our sins.**

That's what the first clause of the prayer Jesus taught us is all about – “forgive us our debts [sins].”

So ask Abba Father to search your heart and reveal any unconfessed sin. Acknowledge those sins to him and thank him for his forgiveness.

As John writes in his 1<sup>st</sup> letter, 1.9, “If we confess our sins, he [our Abba Father] is faithful and just

and will forgive us our sins and purify us [cleanse us] from all impurity [unrighteousness].”

Furthermore, confessing our sin and receiving our Father's forgiveness revitalizes our continuing responsible growth in holiness –

our being transformed into the likeness of Jesus in our character and conduct in ever-increasing measure.

As John Wesley points out, no matter how much growth we may experience along our X'n journey,

we never outgrow our need for our Father's forgiveness as part of the Way of Salvation.

What then, is the 2<sup>nd</sup> way this prayer can impact our lives?

**2<sup>nd</sup>, as we experience our Abba Father's forgiveness, we begin to discover that it is possible for us to forgive others.**

*"Forgive us our debts **as we also forgive our debtors.**"*

What does it look like to forgive others? Here's a couple of examples.

On July 15<sup>th</sup> 2013, a family was driving along the highway when they were rear-ended by a semi-tractor trailer, crumbling their van like an accordion.

While the husband was incapacitated for the moment, having sustained a head injury, his wife, Nikki,

managed to free their children from their car seats and hand them to other drivers who had stopped to help.

In the midst of all the chaos, Nikki noticed the driver of the semi. His name was Roger.

He was curled up into a fetal position, leaning against the concrete highway divider, weeping uncontrollably.

Nikki walked over to Roger to embrace him and began to pray with him.

When the ambulance arrived, Nikki's son, Cadyn, was immediately sent to the ICU where they received news

that he had suffered a severe brain injury; one that could kill him, or if he survived, severely impair him for life.

A few days later, to everyone's surprise, Cadyn woke up. This set into motion a recovery process that astonished doctors and defied medical explanation.

That same day, Roger, the driver of the semi who hit their van, contacted Cayden's parents, and they invited him to come see their son.

Cayden couldn't talk yet, but he could write. And so Nikki asked Cadyn if he wanted to forgive Roger.

He thought about it for a moment, then gave a thumbs up.

With construction paper and a crayon, Cadyn wrote: "Roger, I forgive you. Love, Cadyn."

That's one example of what living out the 2<sup>nd</sup> clause of this prayer Jesus taught us looks like, even though the sin was unintentional.

Another example comes from the pen of author and theologian Walter Wink about a sin that was intentional.

A team of people were on a peace-making mission in Poland a few years after World War II.

They asked some Polish Christians, "Would you be willing to meet with some Christians from Germany?"

They want to ask for forgiveness for what Germany did during the war and begin a new relationship."

There was a long silence. Then one of the Polish Christians said, "What you ask is impossible.

Every stone in Warsaw is soaked with Polish blood that they spilled. We cannot forgive." The team understood the emotion.

As they finished their conversation and were getting ready to leave, they decided to close their time together by praying the prayer Jesus taught his followers.



So they knelt down and prayed, as Christians have done in every country, through every century, for almost 2,000 years.

“Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our debts, as we also forgive our debtors.”

No sooner had they uttered that last phrase than they stopped praying. There was dead silence.

And the person who spoke earlier saying he could not forgive said, “I must say ‘yes’ because if I don’t forgive, I can no longer say this prayer.

I can no longer call myself a Christian if I don’t forgive. Humanly speaking, I cannot do it. But God will give us his strength.”

18 months later, those Polish Christians met German Christians in Vienna and established lasting friendships.

“Forgiveness,” says Tom Wright, “is like the air in your lungs.

There’s only room for you to inhale the next lungful after you’ve breathed out the previous lungful.

It is our privilege, as followers of Jesus, to breathe in true forgiveness from God day by day, as the cool, clean air which our spiritual lungs need

instead of the grimy, germ-filled air that is pumped at us from all sides.

Once we start inhaling God’s fresh air of forgiveness, we will start to breathe it out on others.

If, however, we insist on holding our breath and refuse to breathe out forgiveness on someone who may have sinned against us,

not only will we be unable to take any more in, we will also suffocate very quickly.”

Here's what I'm going to ask you to do. If you'll look at the screen, the words of the prayer are going to come up.

I'm going to ask you to pray them with me. But this time we're going to stop after we say, "Forgive us our debts, as we also forgive our debtors" [**read together**].

Now, in the moments of silence that follow, I want you to do two things.

1<sup>st</sup>, ask Abba Father to search your own heart and reveal any unconfessed sin. Confess these to him and then thank him for his forgiveness [**pause – silence**].

Now, 2<sup>ndly</sup>, I want you to ask Abba Father to bring to mind any debtor, anyone who has sinned against you, with whom you may have unfinished business.

Ask Abba Father to bring to mind any hardness of heart, any lingering bitterness or enmity,

any act or work of forgiveness that has to happen in your life, and then resolve that you will forgive that person [**pause – silence**].

I understand you may have some very deep hurts. Maybe there is pain in your heart because of a family member, a relative, a friend or workmate,

but you need to forgive them; to "Forgive as the Lord forgave you." Col. 3.13.

But maybe you feel you just can't forgive right now. The hurt is too deep.

Abba Father will help. He may use a trusted friend or X'n counselor to do it.

But start asking Abba Father to help you forgive that person the way that he *has* forgiven you and *continues* to forgive you.

When Jesus was being crucified on the cross, while they were pounding the spikes in his hands and feet,

he looked at them and said, “Father, forgive them for they don’t know what they do.” Does that give you something to aim for?

One of the most important things that Jesus ever taught his followers to pray was, “Abba Father, forgive us our debts, as we also forgive our debtors.”

As you experience his forgiveness, you will begin to discover that it is possible to forgive others also.

I invite you to sing with me the words of the song *Forgive our Sins* as our united prayer this morning [OSB 572 / NTB 78, Horsley, P]