**Joy of forgiveness** dkm Mar2024

Have you ever forgiven anyone in a serious way? Did you find it easy? Have you ever seriously asked for forgiveness? Did you find it easy? Forgiveness is not a word we see in the headlines very often. Why? Because it is not very common in our society. Pride makes it hard to admit sin, and pride makes it hard to forgive anyone who asks to be forgiven. But the word ‘forgive’ or ‘forgiven’ is found throughout the Bible, especially in the NT. In fact, forgiveness is at the heart of gospel of Jesus Christ. Forgiveness is what the cross of Christ is all about.

What does it mean to forgive someone? It means that that person has wronged us or hurt us in some way. If they have taken something tangible we expect them to return it, and then we forgive them. But what if they have hurt us with words or attitudes? The truth is, we have all said and done wrong things, especially with regard to the God who made us and who loves us.

Forgiveness in the Bible is almost always in the context of our relationship to God. God is perfect and holy so we do not forgive him, but we are sinners and our sin cuts us off from God (Isaiah 59:2, Rom 3:23). To be in the right with God or to be righteous, our sin has to be removed. Please do not start thinking you have not sinned, or that your good works will somehow remove your sin. My car does not clean itself, and the pig does not clean itself either. Someone must clean us of our sin.

David was the greatest king of Israel. He defeated all his enemies and was a ‘good’ man. But David sinned as we all do. And David tried to cover up his sin, as we all do. In doing this he committed more sin. David refused to repent before the Lord even though he knew he had sinned against God- all sin is against God (Psalm 51:4). It wasn’t until the prophet Nathan came to him that he acknowledged his sin - he was guilty of adultery and murder and other sins.

Before Nathan came, David had sunk into living a miserable life. ‘I was groaning all the day long’ and ‘my strength was sapped’ is what he later writes in Psalm 32. He had trouble sleeping and often soaked the pillow with his tears. Guilt can be a heavy load to carry. Are you feeling the weight of guilt, of unconfessed sin? David says that God’s heavy hand was upon him. God disciplines those he loves; he wants us to confess our sin so he can forgive us.

Psalm 32 begins, ‘Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered’; ‘transgression’ means breaking the law, God’s law, which is what sin is. Sin is serious. God will punish us for our sin unless we ask him for forgiveness. And this is what David eventually did. It was not easy for a king to admit his sin- it is not easy for us to admit our sin either. But with God’s help, David humbled himself and admitted his sin. He asked God to forgive him, and you know what? God did!

The Lord told Moses that he was ‘merciful and gracious, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin’ (Exodus 34:7). David knew this, and because the Lord does not lie he knew he was forgiven. His problem was not with God forgiving him; his problem was with his asking for forgiveness. When he did ask, and he was forgiven, his life changed from one of misery to one of blessing and joy and rejoicing in the Lord in the presence of God’s people. Has this been your experience?

David knew that this forgiveness came at a cost, not to him but to the Lord. God is loving but also just. The words ‘merciful and gracious’ point to the cross where his only beloved Son died bearing our sin- if we accept his gracious provision of forgiveness, of being set free from sin and the guilt of sin. John declares, ‘If we confess our sin he [God] is faithful and just to forgive us and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. But if we say we have not sinned, we make him [God] to be a liar’ (1John 1:9, 10). What will it be for you? Confess and be forgiven and know the joy of the Lord, or stubbornly refuse to confess, making out that God is a liar and therefore being ready to suffer the wrath of God?