

How Jesus Forgave



Sabbath Afternoon

MEMORY TEXT: “And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more” (John 8:11).

THE CROSS is the means by which God could be just and, at the same time, forgive our sins. That is quite a feat, because justice, by nature, demands being given the punishment you deserve, while forgiveness demands the opposite, being given what you *do not* deserve. Justice and forgiveness, then, seem mutually exclusive: You can have one or the other—but not both. Yet God, through Christ, accomplished both at the Cross.

This week we will look at one side of this amazing paradox—forgiveness, as it was revealed by Jesus when here in the flesh. Remember, Jesus came to show us the Father, a God who wants to forgive us our acts, no matter how bad. No wonder that Jesus was constantly offering forgiveness to those who would accept it. He was merely expressing His Father’s will for us all. Let us look at some examples of how Jesus forgave and see what lessons we can learn.

THE WEEK AT A GLANCE: What was the main reason why Jesus healed the paralytic? What does that story teach about the link between forgiveness and healing? What does forgiveness have to do with human self-esteem? What can we learn from the different accounts of how Jesus forgave Peter? Why did Jesus forgive the woman caught in adultery? Was Christ’s prayer for those who crucified Him answered?

*Please study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 26.

THE FORGIVING OF THE PARALYTIC (Mark 2:1-11).

A powerful illustration of how Jesus forgave is found in the healing of the paralytic (Mark 2:1-11). Mark 1 ends with the news being spread far and wide of Jesus’ ability to heal the sick, so that people from everywhere were coming to Him (Mark 1:45). In this context, the story of the paralytic appears.

Read the first five verses of Mark 2. By all indications, what was the reason they brought the sick man to Jesus? Was it to secure healing for their friend, or was it to secure forgiveness of his sin?

Using the typical Jewish understanding of the relationship between sin and sickness and between healing and forgiveness, Jesus proclaimed God’s new kingdom by first forgiving this man his sins and then healing him.

What significance, if any, is found in the fact that Jesus first forgave the paralytic his sins and then healed him? Does forgiveness always precede healing, or is the other order more common? Or, perhaps, less important than the question of order is the fact that healing and forgiveness are linked. What do you think?

It is important to remember that whatever good Jesus did ministering to humanity and whatever good He does for us now, without the forgiveness of our sins and the hope of eternal life that come from His forgiveness, any healing, any restoration, any comfort that we derive from the Lord is only a temporary measure, one that doesn’t solve our ultimate dilemma. In other words, Christ did *not* come to earth in order to spend three and a half years just healing and comforting people. On the contrary, one could argue that the healing and ministering and comforting were all for a greater purpose, and that was to point people to Him as the Sin Bearer and to God’s forgiveness.

Read Mark 2:6-11. “But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (he saith to the sick of the palsy,) I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy bed, and go thy way into thine house” (vss. 10, 11). Was the healing of the paralytic an end in itself? Where was the Lord seeking to lead those who saw what happened with the paralytic? In the context of this story, Ellen White wrote, “It was to manifest His power to forgive sins that the miracle was performed.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 267. Why did Jesus want people to know that He had the power to forgive sin?

FORGIVENESS AND SELF-ESTEEM: PART 1 (Luke 5:1-11).

Of all the Gospel writers, Luke seems most interested in how Jesus dealt with the “sinners” of Jewish society and in how He interacted with individuals whose self-image was so poor that they despised themselves. Not only were they rejected as religious and social outcasts but they often faced numerous verbal and nonverbal messages that made them feel even more filthy and unworthy. Included in this group were peasants who did not keep the law in all its details, such as Simon Peter, the fisherman.

With this background in mind, read Luke 5:1-11. Jesus got into Peter’s boat and preached to the crowd. When He finished speaking, he told Peter to let the nets into the water. Though Peter expressed skepticism about catching anything, he was apparently impressed enough by Jesus that he obeyed anyway. The rest is history.

Read verse 8. Peter says to Jesus, “Depart from me,” because I am sinful. Is it not precisely because we are sinful that we would want Jesus to be with us? What do these words reveal about Peter’s ignorance (however understandable at the time) regarding Christ’s mission? (Compare Peter here to the Peter who wrote 1 Peter 1:18, 19.)

How fascinating that according to Luke, after Peter declared his sinfulness, Jesus said nothing about Peter’s sins being forgiven. Instead, He says to him, “Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men” (vs. 10). In other words, the first thing Jesus does is tell Simon Peter the work He is going to have Him do. Perhaps Jesus, knowing Peter’s lack of self-esteem, immediately told him of his important task in order to help Peter understand that, although he was a sinner, Christ not only accepted him but was going to trust him with important work.

Thus, one result of being forgiven by God is that we should learn to respect ourselves as His children and feel good about who we are by His grace. Sure, Peter was a sinful man, and he knew his sinfulness. Yet, imagine what it must have done for his sense of self-worth to be told by the Master that instead of now catching fish he would be working with Him to win souls. Talk about a career promotion!

How do we strike the right balance between, on the one hand, being aware that we are sinners in need of God’s grace and, on the other, having a healthy sense of self-worth? Are these two concepts mutually exclusive? Can we have both? If so, how?

FORGIVENESS AND SELF-ESTEEM: PART 2.

After accepting Jesus as Lord, Peter emerged as one of Christ’s closest and most loyal disciples, boldly proclaiming his faith that Jesus was the Messiah (Matt. 16:16; John 6:69) and his firm intention to stay faithful to His Master, even until death (Luke 22:33).

Notice the transition from the Peter of Luke 5:8 to the Peter of Luke 22:33. What could have brought about such a tremendous change? Which Peter do you think was probably in better spiritual shape, and why?

The story of Peter’s blatant betrayal of Christ (Luke 22:55-62) not long after his boastful claim of loyalty is well-known. Of course, Christ forgave him for his denial. What is interesting, however, is the manner in which Christ manifested His forgiveness to Peter.

Read the account in John 21:1-17 and answer the following:

- 1. What similarities appear both here and in the account of the time when Jesus first called Peter (Luke 5:1-11)? What are some of the differences?**
- 2. What symbolism, if any, can be found in the fact that their nets were now full of fish? (vs. 6).**
- 3. Look at Peter’s actions when he first heard it was the risen Christ on the shore. Did he act like someone who felt afraid to see Jesus, even after the betrayal? What might have accounted for Peter’s attitude?**
- 4. Jesus told Peter three times to feed His sheep. In what ways were Christ’s words to Peter an indication that He had forgiven Him, even without specifically saying so?**
- 5. Though Christ could have forgiven Peter for his shameful betrayal, why did He give him such an important task? Couldn’t it have been said, and justly so, that though Peter was forgiven, his act disqualified him for any major role in the church?**

THE ADULTEROUS WOMAN (John 8:1-11).

Read the story of the woman caught in adultery. Though the account is rather brief, a few background thoughts may help put it in perspective.

First of all, how can a woman be caught in adultery without a man being caught, as well? Yet, where is the man? Why is only the woman brought to Jesus? Second, according to Jewish law, it was almost impossible to prove that adultery had occurred. Requirements of evidence were so strict that someone would all but have to be set up to be caught. Proof demanded several witnesses who had no prior knowledge or suspicion that the act would be committed. Jewish law also stipulated that if anyone even believed someone else was going to break the law, he or she had to do all within his or her power to prevent the transgression. In other words, catching one in the act was supposed to be completely accidental. There should, ideally, be no plotting to ensnare someone in sin. However, the fact that the man caught with the woman was not accused when she was brought to Jesus indicates entrapment. In fact, Ellen White wrote that the Pharisees who brought her to Jesus “had themselves led their victim into sin, that they might lay a snare for Jesus.”—*The Desires of Ages*, p. 461.

Entrapped or not, the woman still committed the sin. She had no excuse for her actions. And yet, look at how firmly and unequivocally Jesus forgave her. Notice His words: “Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more” (John 8:11). Just like that, she was forgiven. What did the woman do to deserve such a complete and firm pardon for her sins?

Notice, however, that Christ’s words to her did not end with pardon. He then admonished her not to sin again. He did not say to her “Don’t do it again, and then I will no longer condemn you.” Instead, the pardon came first and then the call to obey. Is this not how the Christian life works? God first forgives our sins, an act of total mercy on His part (as it was for the woman caught in adultery); then, as a result of that forgiveness and pardon, we are motivated and empowered to live in obedience, not in order to be forgiven but because we have already been forgiven. If it were any other way—that is, if works and obedience came first, with forgiveness following as a result—then forgiveness would be not by faith but by works.

Why, in order to have any assurance of salvation, must forgiveness precede good works?

FATHER, FORGIVE THEM (Luke 23:34).

Few words in Scripture have echoed through history with the power and intensity of Christ’s quick prayer that the Father would forgive those who were crucifying Him. What a powerful testimony to His unceasing, unconditional love for all humanity. With that utterance, spoken under the most incredible conditions, Jesus gave the world the great example of true forgiveness.

Read Luke 23 and then answer these questions:

1. Did the Father unconditionally answer Christ’s prayer? Were those people automatically forgiven? If not, why not? See Rom. 3:28; 8:1; 1 John 1:9.

2. Though Jesus specifically stated that these people didn’t know what they were doing, He still asked the Father to forgive them. What does this imply about ignorance of the full implications of our wrong deeds not being a valid excuse for those deeds?

3. By praying to the Father in behalf of these people, what role was Jesus already, in a sense, assuming? How does what He said here help us understand just what He does for us in that role? Rom. 8:34; Heb. 8:1; 1 John 2:1.

Christ’s prayer in their behalf becomes even more remarkable when we realize just how unfairly He had been treated. Having spent three and a half years doing nothing but good, having given, time and again, remarkable evidence of His work and mission, having over and over showed His willingness to love and minister to even the most corrupt among them, Jesus nevertheless faced their undeserved scorn. The sheer injustice of it all remains incomprehensible. Thus, if anyone had the right to be angry with them, it was Jesus; if anyone had the right to call out for God’s vengeance on them, it was Jesus; if anyone had the right to want to see these people punished for their deeds, it was Jesus. *Instead, He cries out for God to forgive them?*

This same Jesus, who asked the Father to forgive those who were crucifying Him, is the same Jesus who now ministers in heaven for us, who is just as eager for our sins to be forgiven. How can you use this account to help anyone struggling with the fear that, perhaps, their sins are too grievous to be forgiven?

FURTHER STUDY:

The Saviour made no murmur of complaint. His face remained calm and serene, but great drops of sweat stood upon His brow. There was no pitying hand to wipe the death dew from His face, nor words of sympathy and unchanging fidelity to stay His human heart. While the soldiers were doing their fearful work, Jesus prayed for His enemies, ‘Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.’ His mind passed from His own suffering to the sin of His persecutors, and the terrible retribution that would be theirs. No curses were called down upon the soldiers who were handling Him so roughly. No vengeance was invoked upon the priests and rulers, who were gloating over the accomplishment of their purpose. Christ pitied them in their ignorance and guilt. He breathed only a plea for their forgiveness,—‘for they know not what they do.’

“Had they known that they were putting to torture One who had come to save the sinful race from eternal ruin, they would have been seized with remorse and horror. But their ignorance did not remove their guilt; for it was their privilege to know and accept Jesus as their Saviour. Some of them would yet see their sin, and repent, and be converted. Some by their impenitence would make it an impossibility for the prayer of Christ to be answered for them. Yet, just the same, God’s purpose was reaching its fulfillment. Jesus was earning the right to become the advocate of men in the Father’s presence.

“That prayer of Christ for His enemies embraced the world. It took in every sinner that had lived or should live, from the beginning of the world to the end of time. Upon all rests the guilt of crucifying the Son of God. To all, forgiveness is freely offered. ‘Whosoever will’ may have peace with God, and inherit eternal life.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 744, 745.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. How does one reconcile Christ’s prayer for His persecutors with Romans 12:19?
2. Read the quote above. How do we understand the words that upon all “rests the guilt of crucifying the Son of God”?
3. At the same time, Ellen White also states that “to all, forgiveness is freely offered.” Notice that she does not say that all are forgiven but that forgiveness is offered to all. What is the difference between the two concepts?
4. Read Galatians 2:7-14. What does it tell us about Peter again needing forgiveness?



Cuban Revolution, Part 2

Charlotte Ishkanian

Hector Soque and his wife, Doris Sanchez, moved to Tacajó, a city of 40,000 in eastern Cuba, to start an Adventist church. They began making friends with their neighbors and invited them to a Bible study meeting in their little home on Sunday evenings. And people, hungry for spiritual food after years of communism, came.

As the group grew, Hector and Doris added weeknight meetings, as well. Eventually they invited people to worship with them on Sabbath mornings. However, they knew that many people could not come on Sabbaths because of their work, so the couple continued the evening meetings. In the first year, 16 people were baptized. The new believers are humble and eager to learn.

One woman told Hector about her husband, Eulogio. “He is an honest-hearted Christian,” she said. “If you invite him to your meetings, he will come.” Hector visited Eulogio and invited him to the Sunday-night meeting. Eulogio challenged Hector, “If you show me the truth in the Bible, I will accept it.” Eulogio began attending the Bible studies and discovered clear Bible truths. His teenage daughter joined him, but his wife did not come for fear of losing her government job.

Eugenio worked on a farm, but his boss wanted him to work on the Sabbath. In faith he quit his job, and God provided another job cutting grass along the roads in town. “My new job pays the same as my old one,” Eugenio says, “but I do not have to work on the Sabbath.”

Alex is 11 years old and had a heart problem. His mother began attending the Adventist meetings then took Alex. Now several members of the family attend and are preparing for baptism. When church members learned of Alex’s heart problem, they began praying for him. The boy, who once could not run or even walk without becoming tired,

now can run and play with his friends as if nothing was ever wrong with his heart.

“God took a humble truck driver and called me to work for Him,” Hector says. “I can never imagine doing anything else.” Because of dedicated lay people like Hector and Doris, work in Cuba is moving forward rapidly. Keep these faithful believers in your prayers.



Hector Soque and Doris Sanchez (left). Charlotte Ishkanian is editor of Mission.

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