

“Livin’ Forgiven”
by Rom A. Pegram (4/24/16)

It seems like each week since we started this series on FORGIVENESS, we’ve at least touched on the story called ‘The Parable of the Prodigal Son’ that Jesus told in Luke 15. And I said it was the greatest short story ever told ... and I still stand by that, so let’s review...

It begins with a father who has two sons and the youngest son is so dissatisfied with where he’s at, he asks his father for his inheritance immediately. So he takes 1/3 of his father’s estate and goes off to a foreign country, turning his back on his family, and greatly insulting his father. He goes to this foreign land and wastes all the money on wild living and as soon as he’s wasted all the money—all of his inheritance, a great famine hits the land and he finds himself taking a job feeding pigs; and he’s so hungry the he ends up eating the same food he fed to the pigs. It was a wake-up call for him. At this point, the youngest son realizes what’s going on and recognizes he’d be better off with his father—even being a servant to his father, so he hatches a plan...

He knows he’s really messed up this whole thing called life, so he decides to go and ask his father for forgiveness and see if his father will take him on as a hired hand. So, he returns home and Jesus says (Luke 15:20, NLT), “...And while he was still a long way off, his father saw him coming...” Then as the father approached the son, *he reached out with his hands, put them tightly around his throat, and began choking his son, demanding that he give all of the money back...* Wait. I’m a little mixed up, aren’t I? That’s another parable... In this one, the father goes, meets the son, and wraps his arms around him. Then the son says to the father (v. 21), “...‘Father, I have sinned against both heaven and you, and I am no longer worthy of being called your son.’” Then he asks the father to take him on as a hired servant, doesn’t he?

BUT ... *the father will have nothing to do with this!* He brings him back home, restores him to full sonship, then has the biggest party imaginable to celebrate his son’s return! And that ends the parable, and they all live happily ever after, right?

You see, I’ve always wondered what happened next; Jesus doesn’t really tell us. The son returned home and received the forgiveness, but ... *did his life change?* I mean, he wasn’t very happy *before* he left home; why would he be happy at home *now*? He’d treated his father poorly *before*; how would he treat his father *this time*? Would he be able to forgive himself for what he’d done? Would he be able to live ... forgiven?

That’s the same question we’re going to be asking today: *Am I livin’ forgiven?* Have I received God’s forgiveness in my life, and if I’ve received God’s forgiveness in my life, has it transformed my life radically as only God’s forgiveness can do? Or am I still living the same life I was living before? Has anything changed because of this incredible gift God’s given me?

This series, just to remind you, began on Easter Sunday. Easter is a reminder that Jesus gave his life for us on the cross, so that our sins might be forgiven. And we're reminded of that again in our scripture for today. Please listen (Col. 1:11-14, NLT)...

We also pray that you will be strengthened with all his glorious power so you will have all the endurance and patience you need. May you be filled with joy, ¹² always thanking the Father. He has enabled you to share in the inheritance that belongs to his people, who live in the light. ¹³ For he has rescued us from the kingdom of darkness and transferred us into the Kingdom of *his dear Son*, ¹⁴ *who purchased our freedom and forgave our sins* [italics mine].

We didn't earn it. We don't deserve it. We didn't purchase it. It's a gift from God. We just have to believe in what Jesus did for us on the cross, ask forgiveness for our sins, and then our sins are removed. It's just that easy ... *for us!* The Bible says Jesus' death removed the sin that stands as a barrier between us and God so *our* relationship can be restored. Look at 1 John 1:9 (NLT) again with me (from last week); it's the one thing we have to do to receive God's forgiveness in our lives...

"But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness."

Because of what Jesus did on the cross, we can ask God for forgiveness, and God wipes the slate completely clean—just like with the Prodigal Son. But what happens next? And here's my big fear today: *I believe—in reality—that most people are not living forgiven lives—Christians included!* Maybe we accepted God's forgiveness; maybe we didn't; either way, our lives don't change! We walk around with a lot of dead weight on our shoulders, a lot of baggage and a lot of hurt in our lives because we really haven't accepted God's forgiveness as God wants us to! We understand it in our heads, but we haven't let that understanding work its way down into our hearts (the longest 18")...

Karl Menninger, the famed psychiatrist, once said that if he could convince every person in a psychiatric hospital that they were forgiven, 75% of them would walk out of the hospital the very next day...

'You know what that tells me about our society? Our biggest problem isn't a psychological one; it's a spiritual one. Our biggest problem isn't a head problem; it's a heart problem! So, how do we deal with this heart problem? How do we begin to live lives that are forgiven—that actually reflect that reality? Well, we need to learn to let go of the baggage that's weighing us down. When we're livin' forgiven lives, God replaces heavy burdens (baggage) in our lives with something better. And I've got FIVE I'm going to talk TO you about today. So, with God's help, I need to let go of...

...**MY DOUBT**. This baggage filled with DOUBT ... needs to go! And, folks, it's only God—through his forgiveness—that can help us shed this incredible weight in our lives. It could be ... doubts about others ... doubts about you ... or even doubts about God!

Here's my definition of 'doubt' today: "Doubt is ... an uncertainty of belief that interferes with decision-making." Did you get that? Doubt is being so uncertain about what I believe that I'm unable to make decisions about the future without doubt interfering. Let me give you an example...

Let's say you're at work. You're offered a promotion, but that promotion requires you step up to another level and you're afraid of that; you have doubts of your ability to do that. You say to yourself, "I don't think I can do that, so I'm not taking the promotion." You're at a certain job you've had for a while, you have a certain pay level, and you feel comfortable there. But God is calling you to take *another job*—more fulfilling/rewarding in your life, more responsibility, and more pay. But, you doubt your own abilities and you doubt that God can take care of you through the transition. So, you pass up an incredible opportunity God has laid before you ... because of doubt...

That happened to me, once, by the way. President Franklin Roosevelt once said, "The only limit to our realization of tomorrow will be our doubts of today." Folks, this baggage we carry all too often is full of doubt—doubt about ourselves, doubt about our abilities or our intellect, doubt about others. This baggage, if we're honest, is also filled from time to time with doubt about God. Does God exist? Does God know I exist? Does and will God care for me and love me, no matter what?

Folks *God doesn't want you living your life in doubt, wondering if his forgiveness and his other provisions are real!* God wants nothing more than to replace your DOUBT with something better! What is it? ASSURANCE is what God wants to replace your doubt with! And God can do it, folks, to the point where your doubts will be gone! So doubt is the first burden God wants to lift off of you; next I need to learn to let go of...

...**MY GUILT.** In this bag is all the guilt we've accumulated from all of our life experiences—things we wish we had a second chance at...

Folks, GUILT can be defined in this way: "Guilt is knowing you've messed up and now you're experiencing the blame for that mistake." And here's the thing about guilt; it always comes paired with another emotion; *the evil twin of guilt is ... shame.* Shame is attached to guilt ... and shame is a humiliating emotion that makes you feel terrible about yourself! And so many of us are carrying around this bag filled with guilt (and shame) over mistakes made in the past...

- Mistakes in our relationships...
- Times we've turned away from God...
- Things we're embarrassed about and we know we messed up...

No matter what we do, we never seem to be able to shake this guilt/shame. Maybe you feel like the psalmist did when he wrote Psalm 38:4 (NLT):

"My guilt overwhelms me— it is a burden too heavy to bear."

For a lot of people, this is the heaviest burden they bear—the heaviest bag on their backs, sometimes too heavy to bear! I want you to know today that God wants to

replace this burden of guilt/shame with his PEACE—as only God can give. Jesus said in John 14:27 (NLT): “I am leaving you with a gift—peace of mind and heart. And the peace I give is a gift the world cannot give. So don’t be troubled or afraid.” Folks, God wants you to have his PEACE, instead of a life of guilt. PEACE, of course, is a total release from those oppressive thoughts and feelings of guilt in your life. So, that’s the second burden. Next, I need to learn to let go of...

...**MY GRUDGES**. We talked about this a bit a couple of weeks ago, but let me refresh your memories, briefly...

This bag, folks, is filled with grudges we hold against other people. So, this bag is filled with hurt feelings, with anger, and with resentment—sometimes hateful thoughts toward another person we think has harmed us in the past. Well, let me tell you, carrying around this bag is nothing but destructive ... to YOU! It’s so easy to get consumed by grudges, because grudges allow us to be totally self-centered ... and we like that, don’t we? But, that’s NOT God’s way! But, we do it ... because we’re human we still sin. Unfortunately, holding onto a grudge, holding onto anger for another person, *never hurts the other person. It only hurts the one carrying the load* (point at bag) ... and GOD DOESN’T WANT THAT FOR YOU!

So, God says ... “Release it (or them) to me!” Let them go, folks. Cut them loose. I don’t know how else to say it, but that’s what we need to learn to do! George McDonald once said, “Forgiveness is the giving and so the receiving of life.” It’s true. In forgiving and releasing others (grudges), I offer them life ... and in letting go I receive new life myself. Folks, God doesn’t want you to carry around GRUDGES; God wants to replace your grudges with FREEDOM. That’s God’s idea. Then I need to learn to let go of...

...**MY REGRET**. The fourth bag we tend to carry around with us is filled with this weight. A lot of us have regrets about past mistakes, missed opportunities, things that have happened in our lives that we wish we could change...

I’m going to define ‘regret’ for you in this way: “Regret is ... sorrow aroused by circumstances beyond one’s control or power to repair.” By its very definition, folks, *regret is worthless!* You can’t do anything about the situation that’s caused you regret. There is nothing you can change by thinking about it, or by replaying the situation over and over again in your mind—nothing you can do to get rid of it... So, what’s got to happen?

You need this burden replaced with *something better!* And that something better God has in mind for you is ... HOPE! Romans 4:7 (NLT) says, “Oh, what joy for those whose disobedience is forgiven, whose sins are put out of sight.” So, past mistakes, sins, missed opportunities ... are all put *out of sight* when God forgives us! And WE HAVE TO DO THE SAME! Alexander Graham Bell once said, “When one door closes another door opens, but we so often look so long and so regretfully upon the closed door that we do not see the one that is open for us.” *Don’t spend so much time looking back with*

regret that you miss the door God has opened right before you! God wants to replace your REGRET with HOPE... Finally, I need to let go of...

...**MY FEAR**. This final weight (bag) is one of the heaviest; it can absolutely paralyze a person! What are we afraid of?

- The future...
- Looking foolish...
- Not being successful...
- Future finances...
- Commitment...
- Finding Mr. or Mrs. Right...
- Losing our marriage...
- And even growing old and/or death...

Sometimes we're afraid of the small things ... and worry over the small things casts a big shadow ... and we're afraid of those as well; fear becomes our norm ... but, is that God's idea? NO! God wants to replace your FEAR with COURAGE! DEFINITION: Courage, folks, is ... the strength to venture, to persevere, and to withstand FEAR... That's what God wants to give you TODAY...

Doubt, guilt, grudges, regret and fear are all symptoms of an unforgiven life! They're weights we carry around with us every day ... and they can become so heavy, they stop us from living life, weighing us down unmercifully! *They can rob us of life!* But, that's not what God wants for you ... or for me. God wants to replace each one of these in your life—with something better. Folks, when God's forgiveness enters your life, it's a powerful thing—a freeing thing. When God's forgiveness comes into your life, it replaces...

- DOUBT with *assurance*...
- GUILT with *peace*...
- GRUDGES with *freedom*...
- REGRET with *hope*...
- And FEAR with *courage*...

Don't leave here today carrying around anymore of this baggage! *Life's too short for that ... and God has a better plan for you.* So, seek God's forgiveness today ... and know the freedom God has for you. Leave your baggage at the foot of the cross today...