



Looking Inwards (15 mins) *Caring For Each Other*

Reflecting on your life at the moment, is there anything you would like to share with other members of your home group which you feel is appropriate (this is an opportunity to share, not something you have to do, however, 'It's the sharing that enables the caring!') for:

Thanksgiving?

Prayer?

Encouragement?

Support in any way?



Looking Outwards (15 mins) *Concern For Others*

Is there anything concerning someone in your: family; circle of friends; neighbours or church, which you would like to share (please be sure not pass on anything that is confidential or which you think the person concerned would not wish to be shared) for:

Thanksgiving?

Prayer?

Encouragement?

Support in any way?



HG168 *The Apostles Creed: I Believe In ...* **The Forgiveness Of Sins**

Matthew 5:38-28 & Romans 5:38-48

Home Group Study Notes

8 July 2018 - Rachel Orford



PLEASE COMPLETE AS MUCH AS YOU CAN
ON THIS WORKSHEET IN PREPARATION
BEFORE THE MEETING!

Don't forget to take your Bible to Home Group with you, along with any previous notes and other resources which might be helpful for your discussions.



Welcome (10 mins) *Ice Breaker*

What characteristics have you "inherited" from your parents? What ones are you grateful for? Which ones are you less pleased about?



Looking Upwards (10 mins) *Worship*

In your time of worship, you may want to sing Songs of Praise; listen to a Worship CD, as well as using Meditations; Bible Readings; Prayers ...

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HG168 *The Apostles Creed: I Believe In ...* **The Forgiveness Of Sins**

Matthew 5:38-28 & Romans 5:38-48

Home Group Sermon

8 July 2018 - Rachel Orford

Introduction If we were about to watch a film or I was going to tell you a story (which I think I am really) I would have to start off with a giant spoiler alert; there's going to be a happy ending. The clue is in the title really. Sin is bad - forgiveness is good. And because it is mentioned right up front we know it's going to save the day. And we all believe in happy ending - don't we?

We need to talk about Sin The word "sin" has had a pretty bad press in recent years because we find ourselves part of a politically correct culture which doesn't seem to like this little word. It considers it to be a rather outmoded religious idea which simply lowers our self-esteem and even "offends" people. But, as we will see when we follow our story for a bit, if we "dumb down" the idea of sin, denying its impact then we effectively also demean the impact of our salvation too, and as Christians, this is more than just important. It is life changing. Sin shows up a lot in our story and so just a warning for the fainthearted – we are going to talk quite a bit about it. And in true presenter style I am going to start with the bard news. Remember though we are going to be OK.

A Sunday School teacher had just ended her lesson and wanted to make sure she had made her point. She said, "Can anyone tell me what you must do before you can obtain forgiveness of sin?" There was a short pause and then, from the back of the room, a little boy spoke up. "Sin Miss," he said.

And though the little boy hadn't quite grasped what the teacher meant. He was right. We all sin. Paul tells us in Romans 3:23 "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." So how did it end up like this? Well, according to Romans 5:12, it all comes down to one man "...sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way, death came to all me, because all sinned." The one man was of course Adam. He was the first human being that God created, and we are all descended from him, so whatever Adam had – we got it too. We inherited it. It is in our DNA.

God tells us in Genesis 3:17 what this first sin was. He says "...you listened to your wife and ate fruit from the tree about which I commanded you, 'You must not eat from it'" Ultimately, Adam's action demonstrated that he trusted the woman more than he trusted God. It was the first example of man living "in the flesh" rather than "by the spirit".

So, God was able to be quite explicit about this, but for the rest of us "sin" is a bit of an intangible concept isn't it? Most of us probably understand it as "doing something bad." The clearest biblical definition of sin is found in 1 John 3:4 where it is described as "lawlessness". So, it is a kind of rebellion, an anarchy if you like where God's law is disobeyed. Later on in our story God gives mankind specific laws to help us understand how not to behave. He set us a standard, a set of rules which when we stick to them, leads to harmony, peace, perfection. Put simply, things just work better. The Greek word for sin (which would have been found in the New Testament) is *hamartia*, which literally means "missing of the mark". And this sums it up well I think; we continually miss the mark and fall short of the standards of perfection.

4. The gospels give many dramatic examples of the power of forgiveness. Can you share examples of how forgiveness has made a positive impact in your life?

5. Ephesians 2:8-9 suggests that the gift of salvation can be received simply through faith in Jesus. What about repentance? Do you think this plays a part in forgiveness?

6. Read Isaiah 43:25 and Hebrews 10:17. Do you believe that God forgets our sins? Should we forget the sins of others when we forgive? If not, why not?



Is there anything you most want to put into practice as a result of this study?



Looking Upwards (40 mins) Bible Study

Read the text for this study, and any references given, then answer the following questions. You may find it helpful to listen to the sermon and/or read through the sermon notes as you do so. Discuss some, or all, your answers with your Home Group and, remember, these questions are only a guide to start your discussions.

1. Why do you think that the term "sin" has become politically incorrect? In what ways might it offend people?

2. Do you think the definition of sin in 1 John 3:4 as "lawlessness" is a good one? How else might you define it?

3. The Old Testament tells the story of the Israelite nation from the fall of Adam to the coming of Jesus. Why do you think that there was such a long period of time before God fulfilled his plan for mankind?

The consequences of Sin – separation from God So, what were the consequences of Adam's sin? Banishment from the garden of Eden, separation from God, from all that he was meant to be, from perfection, from holiness, from all that was good. What a harsh punishment for just one mistake! But rather than a punishment, wasn't it something that was just necessary? The Garden of Eden was heaven. Everything in it was perfect and if Adam had obeyed God he could have stayed there. But he and Eve were no longer perfect. They were no longer holy and for them to remain there would mean that Heaven was no longer perfect either. If a patient with a virulent disease comes into one of our hospitals, the doctors would not just let them remain on the ward with all the other patients, even though this would be much nicer for them. That would be madness. The infection would spread and pretty soon everyone would have it and lives would be risked. They have to be quarantined, put on an isolation ward and taken out of the sterile environment. Ultimately paradise had to be preserved. Imagine having no hope of heaven, because it had been polluted and spoiled. It was ultimately an act of love by God, that he banished sin from paradise, so that it could be preserved for us.

God has a plan Because of course God already had a plan. And this is important to know, because at this stage in the story it looks very much like the enemy has won doesn't it? And we can't ignore the role of the serpent (the evil one) in this. He was the one who deceived Eve in his attempt to divide and conquer – which led to Adam's downfall. But God has acted quickly – he keeps paradise holy. There is still hope. And he tells the serpent what will be the final outcome in a rather mysterious verse – Genesis 3:15. "and I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel". So, what does all that mean?

Well we are starting to fast forward a bit to the good news, where Jesus will enter the equation. Remember that as well as being fully divine, Jesus was also fully human. He was the offspring of a woman. So, God is telling the enemy here that there would be hostility between his offspring and Jesus. And by saying "you will strike his heel" God is foreshadowing all the "flesh wounds" that Satan tries to inflict on Jesus – the many times that the enemy tries to tempt, defeat and overcome Christ during his time on earth. But "...he will crush your head" is a lethal action, a death blow. It refers to the defeat of the enemy when Jesus will rise from the dead and bring salvation. When his blood will be shed for the forgiveness of our sins.

In the meantime, He knows horrible it is going to be for us to live life disconnected from Him. And we need to know it too. We need to realise how much we depend on God, how whenever we try to do things in our own strength and pay attention to another authority than God, things go badly awry. And did they ever! The Old Testament makes the point over and over again. God was not silent or idle during these long periods between banishment from paradise and sending his son to save us.

We have all heard of the nature/nurture debate about human behaviour, haven't we? Do we behave the way we do because it is in our nature or because our circumstances and interactions with others make us that way? Well, although by now sin was in our nature, God did try to nurture us. He wanted us not to fall short of the mark. He gave us the Law through Moses to show us what not to do and how to behave in line with perfection. Paul tells us in Romans 5:13 "before the law was given, sin was in the world. But sin is not taken into account when there is no law." So, in an act of love he gave us the Law, a full set of instructions, to show us how things would work better for us.

But we weren't so good at keeping the Law or learning from the lessons of judgement and redemption that followed his chosen people around throughout the Old Testament. We were not so good at listening to the legion of prophets that he sent to show us the way either. But eventually, when the time was right, at the appointed time when mankind had developed socially and spiritually enough in order to understand and receive the gift of redemption, he sent his son.

Jesus - Our Salvation So, at last we arrive at the good news. Because it was a human who had severed the relationship with God in the first place it had to be a human who would restore it. But because of our sin, our separation from God, none of us would do; we don't qualify. So that is a bit of a conundrum. If there could have been any other way, I am sure God would have done it, but it really had to be Jesus. Remember the plan that God revealed to the enemy right at the beginning? God sent himself in the shape of his son – fully human (the offspring of a woman), but also fully divine – as a sacrifice to be paid for our rebellion. In Romans 5:15, Paul shows us how God's plan neatly fits together. "For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many". All this grief was caused by one man (Adam), and yet one man (Jesus) gave us this ultimate gift of a way back to God.

Jesus' sacrifice on the cross for sin was a once-and-for-all sacrifice. Unlike the sacrificial system of the Old Testament, in which sacrifices were continually made for sin, Jesus paid for sin once. His payment was complete. And how else do we know this? Because he told us. At the Last Supper, on the night before his crucifixion, he took a cup of wine and told his disciples in Matthew 26:28 "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins." This was his sacrifice that was necessary to satisfy God's justice, to crush Satan's head. The sacrifice that had to be perfect and spotless. What an unbelievable gift.

The consequences of Salvation - The Joy of Forgiveness And the forgiveness of sins really is the greatest gift that we can receive. It removes our heavy burden of guilt and put quite simply heals our relationship with God. The word "forgiveness" comes from the Greek word *aphesis*, although its meaning is closer to something like "liberty," "freedom," or "release." It is used of the release of captives and slaves, of the cancellation of debt, or even of divorce. So, when New Testament writers talk about the forgiveness of sins, they have in mind the cancellation of debt or the release of a slave from captivity to sin.

The gospels provide us with many examples of forgiveness and the joy and relief it brought to those who humbled themselves, even to the extent of being cured of lifelong illnesses. In Mark chapter 2 there is the story of a paralysed man who through the perseverance and faith of his friends was lowered through a roof to get to Jesus in the hope of a cure. Jesus told him "... your sins are forgiven...rise, pick up your bed, and go home." And the crowds were amazed to see that he did. In the gospel of Luke, we hear the story of the woman who had led a sinful life who humbles herself and anoints the feet of Jesus with her tears and expensive perfume. What does Jesus tell her? Your sins are forgiven ... your faith has saved you. Go in Peace. In both these stories people questioned Jesus' authority to forgive sins, but in each time the consequence of forgiveness was life changing; a complete cure and the lifting of years of anguish.

And how do we receive this precious gift? Paul tells us in Ephesians 2:8-9 "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God not by works, so that no one can boast." We do not earn forgiveness through our actions. Instead, we only need to believe in Jesus by faith to receive His free gift of eternal life.

Forgiving Others But if we believe in the power of forgiveness it does become a two-way street. We do have an obligation too, to forgive others. If we don't we are hindering our relationship with God. Jesus tells us in Matthew 6:14 "For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you."

Remember though that we are not hard wired to do this and our second reading from Matthew 5 shows this quite clearly. All kinds of laws and customs had grown up about treatment of the transgressions of others and the Laws which God had tried to nurture us with had been misinterpreted. "Eye for eye and tooth for tooth" for example had been taken a means of justifying all kinds of terrible vengeance (and still is) rather than a means of making consequences appropriate and limiting harshness and cruelty; making the punishment fit the crime if you like.

Jesus now gives us new instructions about how to show mercy; in effect he shows us what forgiveness looks like.

In Matthew 5:44 he tells the crowds "love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." This would have been shocking. People were living under oppression and wanted retaliation against their enemies (the Romans). What good would loving them do? They would not have expected this of the anticipated Messiah who they assumed would lead them out of their current situation. It would have been hard for anyone to see how loving their enemies might achieve anything.

This is still a really a hard lesson to learn. What does forgiveness mean for us? Does it mean forgetting? Not necessarily; there may be good reasons and lessons we can learn in not forgetting. Forgiveness means releasing the other from blame, leaving the event in God's hands, trusting Him to deal with it justly, and moving on. It is a decision or choice (not a feeling) we make to give mercy to someone who doesn't deserve it. What God wants is for us to forgive sins committed against us the way He forgives our much greater sins against Him. And we pray for His help to do this in the Lord's Prayer "Forgive us our Sins as We forgive those who sin against us."

Belief in Action So, by understanding the full story of our salvation, and "the gift that came by the grace of the one man," we can appreciate how powerful forgiveness really is, and how our belief that we are truly forgiven can be really life changing. Such a belief can

- Humble us and help us to see just how much God loves us. This in turn can become a real incentive to share the good news with others.
- Make us free to have a deep and loving relationship with God. We no longer need to be separated from Him. This relationship can and must be the one which takes priority in our lives.
- Help us to forgive others. If we can believe that every single one of our actions that has not honoured God can be wiped clean, simply discarded and never counted against us no matter how appalling they might be, surely this must encourage us to do the same when others hurt us. Hard as we find it to do this sometimes, nothing can compare to all that God has forgiven us.
- Make us righteous in God's eyes. We are saved, effectively restored to the way things were meant to be before sin became our default way of behaving. This is what he intended for us and his plan to reconcile us to Him has been fulfilled.

But even at the end of a scary film when the bad guys have been defeated, there is often a tiny little twist isn't there? One seed of doubt that sets up the possibility of a sequel. What was that shadow at the corner of your eye? Is there really nothing in the cellar? There is always the sceptic who thinks it is too good to be true and happy endings don't happen in real life. And by failing to believe, by not trusting in the power of this amazing gift of forgiveness, wouldn't we be a bit like this? So, let's trust instead. Let's not be the sceptic. We don't need a sequel. We just need to believe what Paul tells us in Romans 3:24. Although we have all fallen short of the glory of God, we are "justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came from Jesus Christ."

Emmanuel Church Text for 2018

*For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear,
but you received the spirit of sonship. And by him we cry 'Abba Father.'*

Romans 8:15