

Crossroads Community Church

Sunday October 5th, 2014

It was a peaceful and solemn morning as we gathered to receive God's message. Worship was uplifting and serene, Pastor Don shared announcements and prayed, "Dear Father God, we come with humble and hungry hearts for your word, forgive us when we harbour unforgiveness amongst each other, teach us to forgive as you forgive in Jesus name, amen."

We can all agree that what happened over 70 years ago in concentration camps was horrid and inhumane; some may even say it was unforgivable. The Nazis practiced unspeakable crimes against human beings; one of them is the well-known Corrie Ten Boom, and her family. The Ten Booms gave refuge to over 800 Jews during World War II and when the Nazis regime found out, Corrie and her family were sent to concentration camps. Most of her family died in the camps but due to an unexplainable clerical error Corrie was released. Many years later, she came face to face with one of her tormentors, she did not feel like forgiving him for the atrocities he put her through however she asked God to give her His forgiveness to enable her to do what all of us cannot do; forgive the unforgivable. When we come to God we are all sinners undeserving of forgiveness for we all fall short of His glory. When we receive His grace and Mercy through his Son we can then forgive as He does but we must ourselves be cleansed of our own sins, (Acts 22:16).

The lesson to learn is to forgive; so why, who and how we should forgive is important to grasp. The only reason we need to forgive someone is because God forgave us first, "... be kind to each other, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you," Ephesians 4:31-32. We may think it's simple but it certainly harder to achieve than we think. When we become one with Christ then we are able to forgive because we possess his love and mercy within us, if we aren't willing to forgive then we show the contrary. We live in a world where retaliation and vindication seems to be the norm, but Jesus commands us to be different; to pray for those who persecute us, (Matthew 5:44). He goes on to say that if we don't forgive we will not be forgiven either, (Matthew 6:14-15). Choosing to deny someone forgiveness equates to denying that we too are sinners and need forgiveness regardless of what our sins may be. Jesus is the perfect example of forgiveness when on the cross he said, "Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they are doing." Luke 23:34.

God is all merciful, He does not withhold His grace and forgiveness, He forgives all who come a heart willing to turn away from their sins. Therefore we should not harbour unforgiveness and resentment towards each other, Jesus died for all of us and He paid the full price for our forgiveness, for our freedom from sin, (Ephesians 1:7). Before Jesus an animal was sacrificed to make retribution for sin, the blood needed to be shed for sin to be washed and forgiven, (Hebrews 9:22). Now Jesus, the Son of God is our perfect sacrificial Lamb who was sacrificed once and for all, his blood was shed for all of us, and so no one is more worthy than the other. Furthermore there isn't any limit to the times we need to forgive. Jesus, wants us to forgive as many times as it takes for we too need ongoing forgiveness for we are far from perfect and still sin, (Matthew 18:21-22). If we allow our hearts to become calloused with unforgiveness then we show we are ungrateful for God's mercy as in the story of the debtor who was forgiven a huge debt but showed no mercy to one who owed him less. (Matthew 18:23-31).

A grateful heart is a forgiving heart, when we choose to forgive those who hurt us according to the power given us by Christ, we not only release them into God's hands, we also free ourselves from the chains of bitterness. Holding grudges holds us and the offender captive to the evil one, we start blaming each other in order to escape responsibility for our own sins consequently we hinder the work of God's Holy Spirit. On the other hand when we forgive we give up our right to feel justified in order to allow the other person to turn to God for forgiveness and their hearts to be changed and to "go and sin no more". God's Forgiveness heals hearts, strengthens spirits and changes lives for the good, (Psalms 147:3-5).

Beloved, if we do not love one another then the love of God is not in us, and if His love is not in us than we cannot truly forgive as He forgives. God has set times apart during this season for introspection, He wants us to examine our actions and our hearts, whether we need forgiveness or need to forgive another. He invites us to draw near to Him to receive grace, mercy and forgiveness through Jesus, the fulfillment of God's forgiveness; our debt is paid in full by His life and shed blood the atonement for our sins. The season of Thanksgiving is upon us, a great opportunity to show our gratitude for what the Lord has done by forgiving one another, when we do we reflect God's love, joy and peace!

Have a Happy Thanksgiving, Asherey Shalom!

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