

# Prison Break: fight the law

Reconnect – October 23, 2011

**Text:** Matthew 6:9-15; Luke 6:37-38

**Key Thought:** Like it or not, God demands that we forgive others if we want him to forgive us.

*If you forgive those who sin against you, your heavenly Father will forgive you. But if you refuse to forgive others, your Father will not forgive your sins. (Matthew 6:15, NLT)*

## **Pre-Intro: Robert Downey Jr. asks forgiveness for Mel Gibson (video)**

### **Intro: Told to forgive**

- Most of us probably don't need too much context on this video – but Mel Gibson over the last few years has had a series of very public meltdowns and embarrassing revelations, including anti-Semitic ravings and abusive behaviour
- The reaction to Downey's plea has been very interesting – some people say "that's great that he did that, BUT..." and others say it should make no difference
- It's too early to tell whether or not this will make any difference to Gibson's failed career and status as a pariah in Hollywood
- Either way, it's pretty rare to hear someone telling others to forgive – poignant and messy all at the same time

### **Background**

- Two weeks ago we started talking about forgiveness – the choice, or refusal, to forgive – and how our refusal to forgive effectively becomes our own prison, where we relive the hurtful events, or experience, or relationship, over and over again
- And how we are there as long as we choose to be – we hold the ability to escape, if we will use it
- We ended that morning with a time of silent reflection – asking God to inform our thoughts as to if there was someone that we were refusing to forgive
- Last week we looked at the struggle to keep on forgiving – not just seven times, but umpteen times, because we have all needed forgiveness many times too
- And again, we ended with the same kind of reflection, on those we were "in the process" of forgiving
- This morning we look at another facet of forgiveness – this idea that perhaps, just perhaps, forgiveness might not be just a private matter

### **"It's private"**

- We teach kids about what's "private" pretty early on – because up until that point, they draw no distinctions about what they tell and what they talk about

### **Q: What sorts of topics do we consider "private" in terms of how we instruct our kids, and otherwise?**

- So, they blurt out things like "Mommy says we have no money" and "Daddy makes funny noises in the morning" in polite company or to near-strangers or people that they just met

- (Actually, some attention-seeking adults are like that too, come to think of it...!)
- And we then sit them down and tell them that “some things are private” – that there are certain things that we don’t talk about outside our family, like finances and flatulence and who we vote for
- As we get older, we add to that list – and we arrive at a list, shorter or longer, of people who we will or would like to talk about those things with
- One of the things on that list, especially coming out of our Western, independent culture, is forgiveness – specifically, that forgiveness is a personal choice that no-one else can make, and that no-one else can really have much influence in
- Sure, the choice to forgive is seen often as a noble one – and at times, even a strange one or an unhealthy one – but the refusal to forgive, when it is talked about, is still met with nothing but understanding and support – the “of course, I can totally understand that, I would be the same way”
- Which makes it all the more difficult for us when we come to the section of the Bible we’re looking at today – which seems to be totally upside down from what we’d expect, even though the words might be pretty familiar

**Read text: Matthew 6:9-15, NLT**

[Jesus said,] “Pray like this:

**‘Our Father in heaven,  
 may your name be kept holy.  
 May your Kingdom come soon.  
 May your will be done on earth,  
 as it is in heaven.  
 Give us today the food we need,  
 and forgive us our sins,  
 as we have forgiven those who sin against us.  
 And don’t let us yield to temptation,  
 but rescue us from the evil one.’**

**If you forgive those who sin against you, your heavenly Father will forgive you. But if you refuse to forgive others, your Father will not forgive your sins.”**

**Matthew 6:9-15, NLT**

- Jesus is responding to a request from his closest followers to teach them how to pray – to give them a model, a template, that will help them “do it right” and “be more successful” at it
- And it’s a request that makes sense – here you have someone with an obvious, extremely deep connection with God, so why not try to learn from that?
- But interestingly enough, prayer is a fairly private topic – the disciples are taking a bit of a risk here, launching out into some deep waters

- So Jesus gives them this model prayer – it talks about building a relationship with God, about giving God honour and respect, about asking for God to bring his order and ways to our messy world, about provision and spiritual guidance
- And it's also about... forgiveness
- Pretty common theme when it comes to interacting with a deity, I guess – looking for spiritual redemption, spiritual absolution – the feeling of a fresh start despite history and past conduct and previous mistakes
- But Jesus definitely throws them a curveball – because first he teaches them to pray with a condition, or a caveat – the ONLY condition in the prayer

**and forgive us our sins,  
as we have forgiven those who sin against us.**

**Q: This is a pretty familiar line from the prayer - what are your thoughts on this? Any reflections?**

- It's disconcerting in a way to think of God's forgiving of us to be anything but *carte blanche* – we want there to be no strings on God's forgiveness, because, well, we just want there to be no strings on it
- That's pretty much like anything else we are given – we don't want them to try to control it, we just want to receive it and that's all
- I know that many times in my life I have needed God's forgiveness and it's been a major theme of my conversations with Him – but the second part of it has only been an afterthought – OR, something that comes after much reflection, as a prodding back from Him
- Like we talked about last week with the story of the servant who had been forgiven a huge amount and then couldn't seem to remember that when dealing with another servant who owed him much less, I seem to have a blind spot when it comes to "paying it forward" – or would it be "paying it backward"?
- Just in case we might be tempted to skip over one line in the prayer, Jesus drives it home after the fact – the one commentary after the prayer on what he had just prayed is this:

**If you forgive those who sin against you, your heavenly Father will forgive you. But if you refuse to forgive others, your Father will not forgive your sins."**

**Can what's coerced be genuine?**

- When I see this, I think "coercion" – something that's forced – and I've always thought that if something like this is forced, or pushed at all, that it takes away from the genuineness of it
- We consider that to be true for love, so why not forgiveness?
- And why is Jesus being so harsh. Anyway? Surely we'll get around to doing the right thing at some point, won't we? We'll realize in due time that we should forgive and do it, right?
- Unfortunately, we're much better at moving on and continuing to hold the grudge, rather than dealing with the situation one way or another
- Without coercion, perhaps the "refusal to forgive" lingers and stays long after

- We consider forgiveness to be a private matter – we don't want other people sticking their noses into our choice to forgive or to refuse to forgive – and so we figure that God will respect the same sort of social convention as everyone else
- And yet... there are times when coercion is necessary and even helpful – like working out with a friend to keep you accountable – or paying down debt on a schedule – or having help to redesign your diet for health reasons, like sodium or cholesterol
- For things that are hard to do but necessary for your life and health and wellbeing, it's nice to have help and support – maybe it's even crucial to our success

### Is it fair?

- It's ironic that we love to tell other people our problems and our hurts – we love to have sounding boards in those moments and for those topics – but when it comes to resolving them we figure we're OK on our own
- Is it fair for God to tie his forgiveness to our forgiving others? Doesn't that seem unfair?
- On the other hand, is it fair that we're forgiven at all ourselves? The very act of Jesus coming to earth and dying for the people He created doesn't seem very fair to HIM, after all
- If we focus on the command, resentment tends to fester very quickly – another emotion we can associate with the struggle to forgive, like anger from the first week, and patience/humility from last week
- What if God didn't expect us to forgive the way we have been forgiven? (consequences...)
- Like a credit card that would pay itself off – would you use that card less, or more...? – the awareness of the cost of forgiving teaches us that it's better not to sin against God or others in the first place – it becomes an object lesson in how much we hurt God and others in the ways we behave and the choices we make

### Key Thought:

**Like it or not, God demands that we forgive others if we want him to forgive us.**

Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.” Luke 6:37-38, NLT

## **Conclusion: no getting around it**

- We can look for reasons not to forgive, or resent God for putting it into being in the first place – but if there's anyone who understands forgiveness, it's God – no-one has ever forgiven more than He has
- And our rationale for forgiveness comes down to seeing the world the way He does – that His children only continue to hurt and hurt each other without the choice to forgive in their lives

“There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. Nations, cultures, arts, civilizations – these are mortal, and their life is to ours as the life of a gnat.

But it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub, and exploit—immortal horrors or everlasting splendours.

And our charity must be a real and costly love, with deep feeling for the sins in spite of which we love the sinner – no mere tolerance, or indulgence which parodies love as flippancy parodies merriment.

Next to the Blessed Sacrament itself, your neighbor is the holiest object presented to your senses.” - C.S. Lewis, [The Weight of Glory](#)

- When we hold grudges, when we refuse to forgive, we dehumanize people – they are monsters, not people – they don't love, or hope, or have any qualities other than what has hurt us or will hurt us in the future – they have no true friends, no-one worthwhile who loves them

## **Response:**