

Prison Break: on the inside

Reconnect – October 2, 2011

Text: James 1:19-25; Ephesians 4:31-32

Key Thought: God has good reason for pushing us to forgive, including our own best interests.

Understand this, my dear brothers and sisters: You must all be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to get angry. Human anger does not produce the righteousness God desires. So get rid of all the filth and evil in your lives, and humbly accept the word God has planted in your hearts, for it has the power to save your souls. But don't just listen to God's word. You must do what it says. Otherwise, you are only fooling yourselves. For if you listen to the word and don't obey, it is like glancing at your face in a mirror. You see yourself, walk away, and forget what you look like. But if you look carefully into the perfect law that sets you free, and if you do what it says and don't forget what you heard, then God will bless you for doing it. James 1:19-25, NLT

Pre-Intro: video Prison Break S01E01

Intro: "Staging"

- We're trying to sell our house, and yes, it just happened all at once
- And in doing that, we've become very acquainted with the concept of "staging" – which is, changing your house around to make it look as if your house is lived in, but by actors, not real people
- You can't have clutter, you can't have too much stuff, it has to be more decorative than functional, and you hide all the spots you'd rather not have people poke around in
- In short, it has to exude perfection, but you can't have any pictures of people in your family lying around
- Now – this is a very useful thing, and demonstrated to help you sell your house more quickly for a better price – and let's face it, we've all got stuff lying around we don't need and should get rid of, not including family members
- But in some ways, it's an exercise in deception – "we're great because this is a great house" – even the word "staging" is about the theatre, is about the careful position of items on a set

Staging your life?

- Staging a house is one thing – but what if you staged your life? What if you convinced yourself and everyone else that everything was great with you, while there were some structural problems that were actually threatening to bring the whole thing down?
- I heard on the radio yesterday morning that because the last 3-4 months were so dry, that you have to be careful of tree roots hurting the foundation of your house – because when it's dry, trees spread out their roots more to try to get as much water as possible
- If there's something eating away at your foundation – whether your house or your life – you need to know so that you can do something about it

Not forgetting, not forgiving either

- For so many people – maybe all of us – that problem is a refusal to forgive
- But I want to back up this morning as we begin this Prison Break series
- We need to dig down a little deeper – and I think that it starts with **anger**
- Anger is one of our basic human emotions – something designed to help us combat evil, to help us protect ourselves and others around us

- But it gets distorted – into resentment, into bitterness (after the fact), into grudges that we hold against people
- We like the idea of forgiveness and being people who forgive – and we each are very good at forgiving – we’ve forgiven many people thousands of times in our life – the ones we love
- The problem is not that we don’t know how to forgive – it’s that we choose to embrace anger towards some people and love towards others
- We seem to think that we have mental powers – that our resentment or bitterness or anger towards someone has some kind of destructive force that we can use against them – like mental voodoo – but we’re only sticking the pins in ourselves

A prison cell

- Unforgiveness is a prison we don’t know we’re in – we don’t know we’re shackled and that we’ve given up our freedom
- The door to our cell is open, but we must walk through – and it’s only big enough for us to get through ourselves, scraping ourselves up as we go – we can’t bring any grudges or resentment or bitterness with us, because otherwise, we stay in the cell – a prison of our own making

Prison Break – he chooses to give up his freedom, consciously, while everyone else around him is mystified and horrified at his decision to do so

“make believe starts to be a problem when you start believing it”

“Unforgiveness” – a comfortable word

- “Unforgiveness” vs. “refusal to forgive” – third person passive, something you have, like a crooked toe, as opposed to something that you choose, like a shoe
- We tend to see forgiveness as an option, but that’s where we differ from God – He sees it as a refusal to forgive, a choice that we make after being hurt to further diverge from the path he has for us

Understand this, my dear brothers and sisters: You must all be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to get angry. Human anger does not produce the righteousness God desires. So get rid of all the filth and evil in your lives, and humbly accept the word God has planted in your hearts, for it has the power to save your souls.

But don’t just listen to God’s word. You must do what it says. Otherwise, you are only fooling yourselves. For if you listen to the word and don’t obey, it is like glancing at your face in a mirror. You see yourself, walk away, and forget what you look like. But if you look carefully into the perfect law that sets you free, and if you do what it says and don’t forget what you heard, then God will bless you for doing it.

James 1:19-25, NLT

- He has our best interests at heart... (expand)

Stories that wound... us

- You see a refusal to forgive up close when you hear some people talk about the hurt that has been done to them
- Now, the hurt is going to be evident – sometimes it's raw, sometimes the years have softened the pain
- But when the story is told, you either hear them wounding themselves, or choosing to let things go
- It's like having a super-sharp knife with no handle in your kitchen that you get out every once in awhile
- Instead of getting rid of it, you take it out and hold it for awhile – and you cut yourself, and then put it back – weird, right?

My Story? - the longer I spend thinking about those people – well, it only hurts me, not them

Monkey see, monkey do

- **“to err is human, to forgive, divine” – Alexander Pope**
- In other words, we imitate God when we forgive – God is the ultimate forgiver
- No-one has been more hurt by how his children have treated each other – we each individually feel the sting of the injustice done to us – but he feels and witnesses not only our own hurt but the hurt of everyone else as well – and yet, He chooses to respond in love
- Children – the ultimate forgivers – every day is a new day, but somewhere along the way we lose that innocence – and so Jesus said we had to be like little children to inherit the kingdom of heaven, to come with hands open and free of burdens and grudges – because sometimes kids are much closer to the truth than we are, the grownups
- Free to imitate our Father in heaven

Key Thought:

God has good reason for pushing us to forgive, including our own best interests.

Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of evil behaviour. Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you. **Ephesians 4:31-32, NLT**

Conclusion: a journey – will you make the break?

- Getting out is a journey – but to get out, we need someone on the inside, and that's Christ
- He came to earth as a person to show us the way out – He's our guide, our example, the one who gives us the strength to climb the walls we've built to keep ourselves away from the rest of the world and them away from us
- Christ is our perfect example of forgiveness – he opened his arms and died, and he was satisfied with nothing less, even on the cross

Response: prayer/meditation