

Matthew 6:9-13; Psalm 103

"Forgiveness of Sins"

Introduction

Brothers and sisters, do you enjoy eating? I have a very surprising survey report to share. It's on the Japanese people's perception of food and guilt, where 76.8% replied that they feel guilty when they eat. They responded that while they want to enjoy eating their meals, they feel guilt when they consume high-calorie, high-fat foods or sweets, considering their health and diet. Because of that some people suffer from eating disorders. Don't you find it surprising that there are this many people who associate guilt with something that was intended to be pleasurable, such as eating?

Why is it that we end up feeling this kind of guilt? According to Scripture, it's because we feel guilt deep down inside from drifting away from God and sinning, and our relationship with God is broken. Because of this, whenever we make a mistake or fail at something, we blame ourselves and feel guilt-ridden, or blame others.

In other instances, we criticize rules, as if they are fundamentally flawed, and completely ignore them. The Bible shares the Gospel, which is the only way to free us from guilt through forgiveness. Today's Scripture holds the key to what will free us from our fundamental sin, and it will enable us to properly deal with sin and guilt by receiving forgiveness from God.

Matthew 6:9-13.

⁹ Pray then like this:

"Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.

¹⁰ Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

¹¹ Give us this day our daily bread,

¹² and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

¹³ And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

Psalm 103

¹ Praise the Lord, my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name.

² Praise the Lord, my soul, and forget not all his benefits—

³ who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases,

⁴ who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion,

⁵ who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.

⁶ The Lord works righteousness and justice for all the oppressed.(N)

⁷ He made known his ways to Moses, his deeds to the people of Israel:

⁸ The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love.

⁹ He will not always accuse, nor will he harbor his anger forever;

¹⁰ he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities.

¹¹ For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him;

¹² as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.

¹³ As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him;

¹⁴ for he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust.

¹⁵ The life of mortals is like grass, they flourish like a flower of the field;

¹⁶ the wind blows over it and it is gone, and its place remembers it no more.

¹⁷ But from everlasting to everlasting the Lord's love is with those who fear him, and his righteousness with their children's children—

¹⁸ with those who keep his covenant and remember to obey his precepts.

¹⁹ The Lord has established his throne in heaven, and his kingdom rules over all.

²⁰ Praise the Lord, you his angels, you mighty ones who do his bidding, who obey his word.

²¹ Praise the Lord, all his heavenly hosts, you his servants who do his will.

²² Praise the Lord, all his works everywhere in his dominion. Praise the Lord, my soul.

1. The need for forgiveness

Jesus, when teaching us to pray, taught us to seek forgiveness in the latter half of the Lord's prayer: "Forgive us of our debts." The "Debt" here refers to being in a state of default. The reason Jesus makes this comparison to debt is to highlight the reality of sin to His listeners.

Being unable to pay off debt puts you in a state of guilt, unrest and fear. And there is no way around this debt; it must be paid off. All of us are debtors of sin before God. We have lists of sins from Jesus (Mark 7:21-23) and from Paul (Galatians 5:19-21).

7:21 For it is from within, out of a person's heart, that evil thoughts come—sexual immorality, theft, murder, 22 adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. 23 All these evils come from inside and defile a person."

5:19 The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; 20 idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions 21 and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

We could choose to ignore these kinds of sins and go on pretending we are upright people who don't sin. Or we might think we could somehow compensate for the bad that we did by doing something good. Perhaps we create excuses saying that our sins and evil are not as nearly bad as those of others.

According to a business magazine called "Toyo Keizai ONLINE," many people subconsciously feel guilty for the sins they've committed. There are many people who think "I'm a bad person" and deem themselves the most unforgivable person in the world.

According to one counselor, there are seven types of guilt. Guilt cunningly seeps into our hearts, and rears its face whenever it has the opportunity to do so. This isn't just once or twice, but on a daily basis. Guilt attacks us and prevents us from being truly happy.

Brothers and sisters, the only way we can escape from sin and guilt is through forgiveness from God. Repent each and every sin that comes to mind verbally. Even if it's a relatively light sin, there's no way to hide anything from God. To start anew, acknowledge your sins and pray for forgiveness.

You may wonder, "But aren't Christians those whose sins have been forgiven already? If so, why must we keep seeking forgiveness?" Surely, Christians will never be condemned for their sins. Your sins have already been forgiven, and you are loved as the child of God. However, what Christ is saying is, even those who have become children of God through the blessing of His forgiveness, continue sinning as they live in this world, which is why they need to keep seeking forgiveness.

If you are born as a prince or princess of a country, even if you sin or make a mistake, you aren't stripped of your royal authority or status. However, your relationship with the king may falter. If you acknowledge your sins and apologize, you could revive your relationship with the king and enjoy your privileges again.

How then should we deal with sin? If you have realized your sin, confess it to God and seek His forgiveness. "He will find he is no better than others and that in the presence of God everyone must duck his head and come into the joy of forgiveness only through the low door of humility." (Martin Luther)

1 John 1:8-9 If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

2. God's Forgiveness

Fortunately, as it is written in the Bible, those who come before the Lord confessing their sins are assured forgiveness and healing. Let's give thanks for the blessing of God's great and compassionate forgiveness. The Lord reveals his truth and goodness through His forgiveness. Even in today's Scripture in Psalm 103, the blessing of forgiveness is linked to praising God's greatness and glory.

Psalm 103:3-4; who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion...he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities.

The Psalmist focuses on the forgiveness of sin out of all the great things that God has done for us because whatever sin it may be, it is associated with the underlying evil that destroys not only our minds and minds, but also our bodies. And sin is solved only by forgiveness.

This is why Jesus in Mark 2:5 tells the paralyzed man brought to Him by his four friends,, "Son, your sins are forgiven." The more serious and fundamental problem was not his ailing body, but his sins. Thereafter, Jesus also healed the paralyzed man's body with His authority.

However, we are prone to think, "If God is true and just, wouldn't He judge us when we confess our sins? If He's true and just, He probably won't forgive us until we confess our sins, repent, and suffer something commensurate with our sins."

(Example) When Jesus visited Zacchaeus, the tax collector, in Jericho, He saw Zacchaeus had climbed up on a tree in hopes of seeing Jesus. Jesus tells him to come down immediately and allow Him to stay at Zacchaeus' place that night, announcing that his sins have been forgiven. As soon as He did that the villagers became angry that Jesus forgave such a sinner like Zacchaeus without having him pay a commensurate price for his sins. Everyone thought that he should be rightfully judged by God, who is just. It closely resembles how we are prone to think in the present.

However, brothers and sisters, who among us can stand before the Lord to face His judgement. Which one of us actually deserves to be forgiven by Him? Wouldn't the entire human race be condemned as a result of our sins? We are all debtors with debts in amounts that can never fully be repaid.

But here we see that precisely the opposite takes place. The true and just God forgives and makes us holy again, rather than judging us. When we pray, "Forgive us our debts," He forgives us and purifies us according to His blessings. This means that those who have been forgiven will have their hearts changed (purified). They will thank God for forgiveness and walk righteously, seeking what is holy.

In the same way, Zacchaeus' heart was changed after he received the Lord's love and forgiveness. He therefore declared that he will gladly pay for his own sins by giving half of his wealth to the needy, and returning 4 fold to those who he deceived or swindled in the past. Essentially, he only needed to add 20% more in restitution, according to the laws of the time (Leviticus 6:5), but he was willing to pay 300% in restitution, which was far more than what was required of him. What an astounding transformation and turnaround this was!

But it was actually Jesus who paid the price behind the scenes. He took on the criticisms from the villagers on behalf of Zacchaeus. He also sacrificed Himself on the cross on our behalf, becoming sin when He knew no sin and paying the price for our sins. We were forgiven at the cost of Jesus' suffering and death.

And there is no other explanation for this than that God our Father loved us so.

When we humble ourselves and call upon the name of Jesus, asking for forgiveness in prayer,

God answers our prayer because of what Jesus did for us. God's blessings far exceed our wildest imaginations and expectations.

Psalm 103:11-13 For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us. As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him

3. The power of forgiveness

Perhaps still some of you may not be able to feel the reality of God's forgiveness or feel it at all. Even though it's written in the Bible, it may not be easy to fathom the meaning of complete forgiveness given to us by God through the Gospel of Christ's death and resurrection on the cross.

Let's go back and take a look at the words of Jesus once more. The original Greek version of Matthew 6:12 is probably best translated as, "Just as we forgive our debtors, please forgive us of our debts." In essence, Jesus is using an everyday example of people forgiving each other and being forgiven by each other to exemplify the reality of God's forgiveness.

Brothers and sisters, I'm sure you all have forgiven someone in the past too. How great and refreshing is it when we make up after a fight and renew our friendship? Or do you have the experience of committing a wrong to a friend, which led to the friend getting mad and the friendship ending? What a relief and a huge burden off your shoulders when you are forgiven by your friend? Nothing can take the place of the joy of reconciliation. In the same way, God forgives us of our sins, entirely on top of that.

Of course the forgiveness we give each other isn't complete. And of course, Jesus isn't teaching us that God only forgives us under the condition that we forgive others. According to Jesus, our acts of forgiveness to each other are simply mirroring the eternal forgiveness bestowed to us by God. God's forgiveness is something real and concrete, and it fills us with joy. The Spirit pours this kind of joy into our hearts and enables us to feel the reality of God's forgiveness.

For this reason, even if you confess and repent of your sins, if you still feel uneasy or frustrated, your relationship with God may not be right. Perhaps you're not relying on the forgiveness of God as it is told in the Gospel. Even if you periodically confess your sins, you don't feel this kind of joy in your daily lives, and the gradual increase of confidence, perhaps you're not fully understanding the essence of faith, which is salvation through grace.

Jesus gives us a very interesting example here to show that God's forgiveness and forgiveness are inseparably linked.

Matthew 18:21-35

A man owed a large sum of money to the king, but when the king asked to be paid back, he couldn't pay off the debt even if he sold everything he owned. The king took pity on him and forgave his entire debt. However, this same man ran into a friend who only owed him a fraction of the amount and demanded to be paid back. When his friend couldn't, the man had him jailed. When the king found out, he punished the man by putting him in jail too.

Brothers and sisters, it's clear what Jesus is trying to say to us. Those of us who have received His grace and had our hearts changed are able to forgive others, and so we must. Once we have been forgiven by God, our natural inclination will be to want to forgive others as well. Even when it's difficult to forgive, we are bound to pray asking for a heart of forgiveness. That

is the very power of forgiveness and the amazing mechanism of forgiveness.

Matthew 6:14-15 For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.15 But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

That's why if we don't see and repent of our sins, seeking the astounding forgiveness of God, we won't be able to forgive others either. It's once you taste the joy of God's forgiveness that you are fueled with the engine to forgive and accept others. When that happens, you'll be able to see the good and beauty in even those who persecute and wrong you.

An economic analyst wrote a column in the Asahi Shimbun saying that there is power in forgiveness. By Forgiving others and forgiving yourself, you become able to think about the future and escape from negative influences. You can liberate yourself from anger towards pessimistic things and become neutral in our thinking. We are able to understand others by thinking in their shoes. We also need acceptance in acknowledging the particular circumstances that caused one to wrong us, thereby being able to forgive them. This is how the power of forgiveness becomes manifest.

Brothers and sisters, every single one of us needs forgiveness. And the Gospel gives us God's full and complete forgiveness. Brothers and sisters, let us be able to experience the forgiveness of God through Christ on a daily basis.

(Prayer)

Our Heavenly Father, we praise Your Holy name. We thank You for cleansing us of our sins through the death of Your Son on the cross. We thank you for Your forgiveness and love. Please give us humble hearts that acknowledge and repent of our sins. Please enable us to reflect on the Gospel and forgive others, even if we ended up getting angry at them for their sins. Please forgive us though we repeatedly sin against You. Please guide us through the Holy Spirit to be able to taste the joy of forgiveness upon true repentance. We pray these things in the Name of our Lord Jesus. Amen.