

This is the Day...Thursday

January 13, 2022

The Nature of True Forgiveness

“Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.” (Ephesians 4:32)

I enjoyed my years as a young junior high school student at Grier Junior High in Gastonia. I had lots of friends who had attended elementary school with me, and we were still together throughout our junior high school years. I began playing the trumpet in the school band, was a part of the student council, and enjoyed watching James Worthy play junior high basketball as a young boy. I mostly enjoyed the freedom that came with junior high school. Typically, my dad would drop me off at school in the morning and, since my school was only a mile from my house, I would walk home after school. The walk home was always fun. With another school day over I would stop by the local 7/11 convenience store and get myself a tasty beverage. Sometimes I would stop by the Schiele Museum and walk through the nature trail. It was a great time of freedom to do whatever I wanted.

The only drawback to walking home from school was those cold, rainy days. Mom did not want me walking all the way home in the rain, so it was my oldest brother's responsibility to pick me up and take me home when it was raining. My brother was nine years older than me and very involved in extra-curricular activities (girls) at his high school. So, it did not really surprise me on that cold, January afternoon when my brother did not show up to take me home. I waited for about an hour and when he never arrived, I trudged home in the rain. Later that evening, Mom made my brother apologize to me for leaving me stranded. I had no problem with offering him my forgiveness and moving on.

The problems began the following week when, on a day filled with heavy rain and wind, my brother did not pick me up again. And then it happened again two week later. It is one thing for me to offer forgiveness for one temporary lapse in memory. It is completely something else when someone repeatedly mistreats me.

When we read the Scriptural account of Jesus hanging on the cross, it is interesting to hear Him say, *“Father, forgive them.”* Truthfully, if someone had just pressed a crown of sharp thorns on your head, stripped you of your clothes, punched you and beaten you, driven nails into your hands and feet, lifted you up on a cross to die, spit on you, mocked you, and gambled for your clothes, could you honestly be asking God to forgive them? Are we even capable of that kind of forgiveness? I had trouble forgiving my brother because I got wet!

What is amazing is that the word, “forgive” which Jesus used was a verb in the present tense. In the Greek language that means it is happening continuously. Jesus was seeking continual forgiveness for His killers. It is that same forgiveness which God offers us each day. A continuous grace and mercy. That is the nature of true forgiveness.