

Session #5: God's Gift Economy: Learning to be a Community of Forgiveness

Review

Focal Question What can we say about the distinct shape of God's in-breaking reign to which we are called to be embodied witnesses/signposts?

God's Economy The dynamic at the heart of God's reign: an economy of the open hand that entails first *receiving* God's good and transformative gifts and then *keeping them in circulation*.

Mt 10:7-8: "As you go, proclaim this message: 'The kingdom of heaven has come near. ' Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received; freely give.'"

Preeminence of Love "God is love. . . .We love because God first loved us"(1 Jn 4:7-21

Agape: The relentless pursuit of the well-being of another through the giving of oneself.

The Gift of Faith as Trust Rom. 4:3-5 "Abraham trusted God, and it was credited to him as righteousness." 4 Now to the one who works, wages are not credited as a gift but as an obligation. 5 However, to the one who does not work but trusts God who justifies the ungodly, their trust is credited as righteousness.

God's economy: We trust because God first trusted us. (Ponder all that God has entrusted to us as stewards.)

The Gift of Forgiveness

A few preliminaries about what forgiveness is and isn't.

Matthew 6:9-15 9 "Pray then in this way: 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 do not bring us to the time of trial, but rescue us from the evil one. 14 For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; 15 but if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

Matthew 18: 21-35 21 Then Peter came and said to him, "Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?" 22 Jesus said to him, "Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times. 23 "For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. 24 When he began the reckoning, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him; 25 and, as he could not pay, his lord ordered him to be sold, together with his wife and children and all his possessions, and payment to be made. 26 So the slave fell on his knees before him, saying, "Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.' 27 And out of pity for him, the lord of that slave released him and forgave him the debt. 28 But that same slave, as he went out, came upon one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and seizing him by the throat, he said, "Pay what you owe.' 29 Then his fellow slave fell down and pleaded with him, "Have patience with me, and I will pay you.' 30 But he refused; then he went and threw him into prison until he would pay the debt. 31 When his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their lord all that had taken place. 32 Then his lord summoned him and said to him, "You wicked slave! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. 33 Should you not have had mercy on your fellow slave, as I had mercy on you?' 34 And in anger his lord handed him over to be tortured until he would pay his entire debt. 35 So my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart."

Ephesians 4:31-32 31 Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice, 32 and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you.

Colossians 3:12-15 ¹²Therefore, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. ¹³Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. ¹⁴Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. ¹⁵And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful.

Matthew 5:7 "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy."

Reflection Questions:

1. If all the marks of the kingdom are forms of love, where love is understood as relentlessly pursuing the well-being of another, then this raises a very specific and possibly uncomfortable question: Can we love another person (with God's love we have received) without being willing to forgive them?
2. What difference does it make that God is not asking you to forgive others in your own strength but is rather asking you (with the Spirit's empowerment) to offer to others what you have first received?
3. How has your need for forgiveness, your receiving of it, and your offering of it to others played out in your own life? Where do you struggle most with issues of forgiveness?
4. What if we read Matthew 5:7 above through the "Parable of the Talents" (Matthew 25:14-30), which isn't primarily about financial resources, but about all the life-giving gifts God has given us? Perhaps we have a parable here about God's economy: God commends those who keep what has been entrusted to them in circulation, while being disappointed with the one who plays it safe and takes the gift out of circulation. What do you think?