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**Briefing 31: Wednesday 23<sup>rd</sup> September, 2020.**

Dear friends,

Before we get to the next line in the Lord's Prayer, can I encourage you to make sure that you fill in the **important survey** you'll read about at the top of page 2. The more people fill in the survey, the better our plans will be! Thanks!

**Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us.**

We looked at the first part of that sentence last week, thinking about our need for forgiveness and our sad reluctance to ask for forgiveness. But as this sentence continues, it's clear that Jesus assumes that those who do ask God to forgive their sins are already practising forgiveness themselves, by forgiving those who sin against them. The point is a simple one: those wanting forgiveness from God should practise forgiveness of others. Those who have received forgiveness from God need to continue to practise forgiveness of others.

And do you notice what's missing? There's no get out clause. Jesus doesn't say that we should forgive those who sin against us in small ways, but withhold forgiveness from those who really hurt us or do us harm. The assumption that those wanting forgiveness will forgive others has no exclusion clauses! Why? Since God promises to forgive all who truly repent, no matter what we have done, no matter how serious our offences, so he expects his children, those who have received such a great gift from him, to do the same.

In Matthew chapter 18, Jesus teaches a parable that rams this command home. In the story, Jesus tells of a servant who has run up a massive bill with the King. Since he cannot pay it back, the king orders that he and his family and everything he owns be sold to repay the debt. The man is horrified, falls to his knees and begs for mercy. Stunningly, the King agrees and lets the man go, cancelling his debt. On his way home, however, the forgiven man sees someone who owes him a just a few pounds. And when this man begs for mercy and time to repay the debt, the forgiven man refuses, and throws him into jail. When the king hears about it, he is rightly furious. He reverses his decision, turning the man over to the jailers until he had paid off his entire debt. Jesus concludes with these words: **"this is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart."**

Forgiveness of others is not optional. If we have been forgiven **all** of our sins, we have a moral obligation, as well as a divine command, to forgive **all** those who sin against us, no matter what they have done.

Now let me clarify, forgiveness isn't saying that what somebody did to you wasn't important. God takes sin seriously, and so should we. Neither does forgiving someone mean that must keep silent about what they have done. If someone has broken the law, then they need to face justice. Justice and forgiveness are not incompatible: we can see that at the cross! Neither does forgiving someone mean that we must trust them again. If we have been hurt or abused, it is almost certainly wise to keep the perpetrator at arm's length. What we must do is forgive them.

That means that we no longer hold a grudge against them or want harm to come to them or harbour a desire for revenge. As a Christian we can and must forgive them, confident in the knowledge that God will be their judge.

That kind of forgiveness isn't easy. In fact, I'd almost say that it was impossible without the love of God and the mercy of God first piercing our hearts. But once it has, once we have been forgiven ourselves, we have no other option.

***If you are struggling to forgive someone, why not pray something like this...***

*Heavenly Father, you know what this person has done to me and the pain they have caused. Thank you that their sin is not hidden from your sight and that you are a righteous judge who holds all sinners to account.*

*But heavenly Father, you also know my sins and failings, and the pain and anguish I have caused to you and to others. So just as you have forgiven me for all my sin, help me now to forgive this person for what they have done to me. May the compassion that you have for me, fill my heart, that I might have that compassion for them. And when anger rises in my heart, remind me again of your grace to me, and help me to forgive them from my heart. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

## OTHER NEWS:

**IMPORTANT SURVEY:** St Nicholas has been full over the past few Sundays, and we've had to close our bookings or turn people away. So to help us plan the way forward, we've prepared a short survey. Please fill it in if you have been coming to church AND if you have yet to return. It is for people from BOTH churches. It should take no more than 3 minutes to complete. The link is here: <https://forms.gle/Ui84cqQvrX8W7qNe7> The survey will close on Monday 28<sup>th</sup> September at 9pm- please complete it before then! Thank you.

**WOMEN'S AFTER BREAKFAST COFFEE ZOOM:** If you want an invite to the virtual women's after breakfast coffee zoom on Saturday 26<sup>th</sup> September, please contact Judy Brown on [mrsvicar16@gmail.com](mailto:mrsvicar16@gmail.com)

**PRAY WITH US!** Next Tuesday morning we'll be praying again via ZOOM from 7am-8am. Contact Dave for a link.

**EXPLORING CHRISTIANITY:** Over the autumn, we are planning to run another course for people to explore the Christian faith. **The Identity Course** (*more information here:* [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GJ691ji\\_6-0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GJ691ji_6-0)) works through the gospel of John to explore who Jesus was, why he came and what it means to follow him. The 7 interactive sessions also cover some of the big questions people ask, such as why does God allow suffering, how can I believe the Bible and why do I have to go to church? For more information, please email me.

**BOOKS ON FORGIVENESS:** if you are struggling to forgive someone, let me recommend 2 books. The first is a Christian classic – 'Total Forgiveness' by RT Kendall. It's available in various formats here: [https://www.amazon.co.uk/dp/034075639X/ref=rdr\\_ext\\_tmb](https://www.amazon.co.uk/dp/034075639X/ref=rdr_ext_tmb) The second is an autobiographical account of how a victim of abuse came to experience God's forgiveness and was therefore able to forgive his abusers. 'The Creaking on the Stairs; by Mez McConnell <https://www.10ofthose.com/uk/products/25350/the-creaking-on-the-stairs>

**OPERATION CHRISTMAS CHILD.** The shops are already selling Christmas cards, so that's the signal to start thinking about our shoe boxes to send to children around the world. The new video about the campaign can be viewed here! Do take a look, get inspired, and start your shopping! <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E5VVDymhGr4>

This year St Nicholas will be acting as a local hub, with churches, schools and individuals bringing their boxes to us to put in large cartons to send to the UK depots. Stuart Marshall will be heading up that team- but he needs volunteers to help him from 9<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> November. We are also looking for people to act as drivers to collect boxes from individual locations to bring to church. If you would be willing to help with that, please contact Stuart, who will give you more details. His email address is [stuart.j.marshall@ntlworld.com](mailto:stuart.j.marshall@ntlworld.com)

**THIS SUNDAY'S SERVICES:** The 9:30am service at St Nicholas will include sharing the LORD's Supper. The service at St Mary's Graveley at 11:30am will be a short service of the Word, followed by our APCM. The talks this week will focus on the comparison between Jesus and John the Baptist, and the evidence for making up our minds about who to follow. The main reading will be Matthew 11: 1-19, why not read it before you come.

If you are yet to book in, you can do so here: <https://forms.gle/3boJBs3gov9p37HeA> If you're not able to make it, do make sure you join us either live on Facebook or catch up later.

## ARE YOU BEING CALLED TO SERVE IN THESE WAYS?

**CHURCH CLEANERS:** Could you join the rota of people who will Hoover and dust inside the worship space at St Nicholas Church? (email [Stephen.bamford@talktalk.net](mailto:Stephen.bamford@talktalk.net)) or the rota to clean the kitchen, toilets and parish rooms? (contact Judy on [mrsvicar16@gmail.com](mailto:mrsvicar16@gmail.com)) Each clean should take no longer than 2 hours.

**WEBSITE MANAGERS:** St Mary's AND St Nicholas both need website managers, to keep our websites and 'a church near you' sites functioning and our information up-to-date and to develop our on-line presence. If this is you, please speak to me.

There will be a further short update on Friday. Until then, may God bless you and your families.

Yours in Christ,

*Dave*