

“Holding a Grudge”

Mark 11:25-26

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Introduction:

Certainly most of us here this morning believe in the power of prayer, and hopefully most of us consider prayer to be an important part of our daily lives. Sometimes we pray when we wake up in the morning, sometimes we pray before going to bed at night, sometimes we pray as we work or as we go to school, and probably most of us pray before we eat. And yet if we have been Christians for any length of time, we might admit that there are times when it seems that our prayers are not being heard as they should.

When we run into that kind of problem, our first response should be to go back to the scriptures so that we can carefully consider where the problem might be. This morning, I'd like for us to consider a request from one of our members as we look together at two verses from the eleventh chapter of the New Testament book of **Mark**.

As we look through the entire Bible, we find a number of things that can interrupt our prayers to God. For example, in the Old Testament, we are reminded in the book of **Proverbs 28:9**, that, ***“He who turns away his ear from listening to the law, even his prayer is an abomination.”*** And so if we blatantly ignore the word of God, it appears that God will not listen to the prayers that we offer.

Another obstacle to prayer is the sin of pride. We remember the two prayers offered in **Luke 18**, where the Pharisee stood up in the temple to pray and said, ***“God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.”*** But then at the same time, the Bible says that there was a, ***“...tax collector, standing some distance away, [who] was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, the sinner!’”*** At that point, Jesus said, ***“I tell you, this man went to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted.”*** Pride, then, is a barrier to prayer.

We find in the scriptures that wrong motives can also keep our prayers from being effective. In the New Testament book of **James 4:3**, the Bible says, ***“You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures.”*** And so if we are asking with selfish motives, God has promised that He will not respond to those prayers.

Several weeks ago, we were studying marriage, and we found that God will not listen to the prayers of husbands who mistreat or verbally abuse their wives. In **1 Peter 3:7**, the Bible says, ***"You husbands in the same way, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with someone weaker, since she is a woman; and show her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers will not be hindered."***

But this morning I'd like for us to consider another barrier to prayer, and I should point out that the sermon request from one of our members was not about prayer at all. But as we study the scriptures, I think we'll see that it definitely relates to the prayers that we offer.

Several months ago, one of our members asked for a sermon on the subject of holding grudges—making excuses for not working it out—timelines for forgiveness—and what should be done if the other person holds on to it for much longer than you do. A very interesting concern! ****PPT**** At first, I did not think that the word grudge could be found in the Bible—and yet it is there! In fact, it is found in the first part of a passage of Scripture that Jesus quotes in the New Testament as being the second greatest commandment. The first, obviously, is that we should love the Lord, but the second goes back to **Leviticus 19:18**, where God said, ***"You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the sons of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the LORD."***

This morning, I'd like for us to look at **Mark 11:25-26**. ****PPT**** Starting in **verse 23**, Jesus is teaching a lesson about prayer, and He says, ***"Truly I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be taken up and cast into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says is going to happen, it will be granted him. Therefore I say to you, all things for which you pray and ask, believe that you have received them, and they will be granted you."*** Right here, we have a rather difficult passage in itself, but it seems that Jesus is emphasizing the importance of faith. But then we come to **verses 25-26**, the two verses that apply so well to the question that was asked by one of our members concerning the danger of holding a grudge.

Some of you might have noticed that **verse 26** is not found in every translation. In the footnote of the NASB, the translators explain that the words of **verse 26** are not found in some of the oldest manuscripts. And since there is some doubt, they put the verse in brackets. Apparently the concern is that **verse 26** might have been added by some scribes down through the years. But even in such a worst case scenario, we can be assured that **verse 26** is a true statement, because the same words are found in **Matthew 6:15**. So if you will, please look with me at **Mark 11:25-26**, where Jesus said, ***"Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father who is in heaven will also forgive you your transgressions. But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father who is in heaven forgive your transgressions."***

Back over in Matthew's account, the context is the Lord's prayer, and in a similar statement in **Matthew 5**, the context is worship in general. In that passage

(**Matthew 5:23-24**), Jesus said, ***"Therefore if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering."***

This morning, then, I'd like for us to study the danger of holding a grudge—primarily from **Mark 11:25-26**. And as we study, I'd like to divide our study into several parts—first of all, the definition of a grudge; secondly, the definition of forgiveness; and finally, the importance of dealing with it sooner rather than later.

I. First of all, though, we need to consider WHAT IT MEANS TO HOLD A GRUDGE. **PPT******

And since the sermon request was obviously made in English, we need to start with the word grudge as it is currently being used in the English language. We can go to Dictionary.com, and we find Definition #1, "A feeling of ill will or resentment." Synonyms include: Bitterness, rancor, malevolence, enmity, hatred, and spite. The American Heritage Dictionary defines grudge as, "A deep-seated feeling of resentment." The dictionary explains that the word goes back to a Middle English word meaning, "to grumble or complain," and ultimately goes back to the French word, "grouchier," or grouchy! And so, I guess when we hold a grudge against someone, we are grouchy towards that person! According to another dictionary, the word grudge is defined as, "a resentment strong enough to justify retaliation."

As we look at what a grudge actually is, and as we compare it to our own experience, we might start to realize that holding a grudge is more common than we may think. I have heard a number of people say that they love their jobs, for example, but that it's the people who make it miserable. And just in our work relationships, we realize that people are sometimes hard to work with. Sometimes people make us mad. The same thing goes for school, or home, or even here at church. Sometimes the pain is intentional, and sometimes people do things by accident. People do things without even thinking about it. Sometimes people make mistakes. Sometimes people think we deserve to be treated harshly. But regardless of the reason and the circumstances, those of us who are hurt have to deal with it. We are the ones who are left with the pain.

And certainly one option is to carry a grudge. Someone has described a grudge as being like an internal contract—obligating us to be unhappy and unhealed. It is almost like an agreement that we make with ourselves to hold on to a painful situation. It might have started with a real problem, but often it works its way into our hearts and it gets more painful over time. Perhaps in our own minds, we hold on as a way of punishing the other person. We want them to pay a price for what they have done, and the price is in our minds.

As an illustration of what a grudge can do, I would ask that all of us take our hands and make two fists as tight as we possibly can—if we can squeeze as hard as we can—and let's hold it there for a while—just as tight as we can. How long do you think we can do this? I don't know, but I'm ready to let go. Not only would this hurt

after a while, but it would also be incredibly distracting. We couldn't drive, we couldn't go to sleep, we couldn't pray, we couldn't do much of anything, because our mind would have to focus on keeping those fists clenched as tight as we could. And it seems that the same thing is also true of a grudge. The longer we hold on to it, the more energy it takes and the more distracting it can be.

And so I think we start to see that it may not be a word that is used very often in the Scriptures, and yet there are some definite scriptural ideas that would apply to holding a grudge.

II. Not only do we need to consider the definition of a grudge, but to answer the question we also need to move on and consider THE DEFINITION OF FORGIVENESS. **PPT**

Probably most of us remember being children when our parents forced us to apologize to someone and then the other person was forced to forgive us. But that is not exactly what we're talking about here.

Forgiveness is not denial. We are not talking about just trying to pretend that nothing bad happened.

Forgiveness is not simply waiting so long to deal with it that we forget what happened. We understand that time does not heal all wounds. Time can help, but time and forgiveness are not the same concept.

Forgiveness is not simply excusing another person's sinful behavior. We can't just blame what some other person did to us on alcohol, or a bad temper, or whatever, and then just let it slide.

Forgiveness is not simply tolerance. Certainly there are many irritating little situations that we may just need to tolerate or ignore—especially in a marriage. But not everything should be tolerated.

When we look back at what Jesus actually said in **Mark 11:25**, we find that He uses the word "***forgive,***" and when we look at that word very carefully, we find that it comes from two words meaning, to send away. In other words, when we forgive someone, we are no longer personally holding that sin against that person.

In the context of our study this morning, the word forgive means that we no longer hold on to what that person has done, but when it comes to that offense, we send it away—we let it go. We no longer want the other person to suffer. We no longer want them to be miserable. But instead, we are able to pray for their salvation. We are able to pray for their deliverance.

I should point out that I have the ability to let something go when the other person may still need to answer to God or even to the authorities here on earth. I may be able to forgive someone for putting a dent in my car, but that does not mean that

God will not someday hold them responsible. I may be able to forgive someone for breaking into my house, but that does not mean that my forgiveness should get them out of prison. It simply means that my fists are no longer clenched in hateful memory of what was done. I am no longer hoping that they will have a long and lonely and miserable life.

I should also point out that me not holding a grudge does not always mean that I need to re-establish a relationship with the other person. If my child is abused at daycare, the time may come when I can release my hatred, but that does not mean that I have to send my child back to that facility. After all, if my forgiveness is conditional upon actually restoring the relationship, then it appears that by refusing to reconcile, the other person could actually cause me to be lost against my will. And besides, notice what Jesus actually says—He says, **"Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone."** In other words, at least in this verse, Jesus is not necessarily talking about reconciliation. He's talking about something we can do as we are standing there praying. To me, at least, it seems that Jesus is referring to letting go of the grudge.

As I see it, then, forgiving a grudge (or literally, sending it away), involves turning it over to the Lord. We're telling God that we no longer hold on to it. We are telling God that we will no longer harbor the resentment. We will no longer hang on to that feeling of ill will or resentment. We will no longer be filled with bitterness, malevolence, enmity, hatred, and spite. We will no longer carry the deep-seated feeling of resentment. We will no longer be grouchy in our hearts toward that person. We will no longer carry that resentment strong enough to justify retaliation.

And again, this is different from just excusing someone's sinful behavior. This is turning it over to God. And again, just because someone is off the hook with me does not mean that they are off the hook with God. As the Bible says in **Romans 12:18-19**, **"If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, 'VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY,' says the Lord."**

Many years ago, someone told me something that was said by Clara Barton, the founder of the American Red Cross. Apparently, someone tried to get her to remember some terrible thing that someone had done to her a number of years earlier, and they were surprised that she did not remember what had happened. They pressed her on it, until she finally said, "No, I distinctly remember forgetting it." It seems that Ms. Barton set a great example for us to follow! It wasn't that she accidentally forgot, it wasn't that she ignored the offense, it wasn't that she pretended that it didn't happen, but she made a concerted effort to let go of what was done.

To be practical for just a moment, maybe we should consider the opposite. What would happen if we as Christians refused to let anything go? What if we refused to turn things over to God? What if we kept our fists tightly clenched until the other person came and apologized? What would this world be like? What would the church

be like? What would our families be like? I would suggest that this life would truly be miserable.

And for that reason, the Bible tells us as Christians to reach out and take the first step. After all, taking the first step is exactly what God has done for us. As Paul wrote in **Romans 5:8**, "***But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.***" God took the first step, just as we should also do with those who sin against us. And we should understand that, like with God, reconciliation cannot happen, until the other person sincerely repents.

III. This morning, then, we have looked at what it means to hold a grudge, we have looked at the concept of forgiveness, but before we bring our thoughts to a close, we need to also consider THE IMPORTANCE OF DEALING WITH THINGS QUICKLY. **PPT******

There are several passages in the New Testament that start to give us a clue of how important this kind of forgiveness really is. In the Lord's model prayer, for example (in **Matthew 6:12**), the Lord said, "***And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.***" Right after that prayer, the Lord apparently felt that He needed to explain, and so He said, "***For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions.***" I don't know about you, but that sounds pretty urgent to me!

We can also consider what Jesus said in **Matthew 5**. So far, we've been looking at forgiving people who sin against us, but in **Matthew 5**, Jesus gives the opposite scenario—when we are getting ready to worship and we realize that someone else has something against us. Jesus dealt with that in **Matthew 5:23-24**, where He said, "***Therefore if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering.***" And again, the situation is a little different, but we still see the importance of working things out as soon as we can. Jesus was not telling us not to worship, but He was telling us to work things out as quickly as possible.

Based on what we have learned from **Mark 11**, we know that forgiveness is important so that our Father in heaven will forgive our own transgressions.

Conclusion & Invitation:

This morning, if we are holding something against someone else, if it can be classified as a grudge, I hope we will think about whatever it is in light of **Mark 11:25-26**, "***Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father who is in heaven will also forgive you your***

transgressions. But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father who is in heaven forgive your transgressions."

The greatest example of forgiveness can be found while Jesus is hanging on the cross, when He says (in **Luke 23:24**), ***"Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing."*** At that point, Jesus turned it over to the Father. He was not holding a grudge, but His prayer was that those men would be forgiven. Thankfully, that prayer was answered several weeks later on the Day of Pentecost in **Acts 2**. Peter was speaking to a huge crowd of people, and he said, ***"Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ—this Jesus whom you crucified." Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, 'Brethren, what shall we do?' Peter said to them, 'Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit'" (Acts 2:36-38)***. Just a few verses later, the Bible says, ***"So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls" (Acts 2:41)***.

There may be someone here this morning in need of God's forgiveness. If you have any questions about how that can be done, we hope you will talk to one of us right away. But if you would like to follow the example of those who crucified the Lord and then were forgiven just a few weeks later, if you are ready to turn away from sin and be immersed in water for the forgiveness of your sins, you can let us know as we sing the next song. Let's stand and sing...

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