

THE KEYS OF THE KINGDOM - PART IV

“You've Been Framed”

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Mark 11:25; Eph 4:31-32

There's an interesting phrase which has come into rather common usage the last couple of years. It is a term which those of you engaged in the more precise physical sciences will recognize immediately. But for those of us who are more closely related to the social sciences, it is fairly new. I am speaking of the phrase: “Frame of reference.” What it refers to are the boundaries governing the approach made to a given problem or idea.

Actually, any problem can be treated from a variety of frames of reference. For instance, we invite a panel of experts to discuss Juvenile Delinquency. The panel includes a psychiatrist, a social worker and a minister. The psychiatrist approaches it from the “frame of reference” of Psychology and discusses the subconscious motivations which make a child delinquent. The social worker approaches the subject from the “frame of reference” of Sociology and discusses the environmental patterns which contribute to the problem. The minister discusses it from the “frame of reference” of Moral Law and emphasizes the lack of religious training as a contributing factor in delinquency. Each of them would be talking about the same thing but from a different “frame of reference” limiting their approach to the subject.

In exactly the same way, everything you say and think and do is governed by your own “frame of reference”. Actually, there is not a single phase of life which isn't colored to some extent by the approach you make to it. Let me see if I can illustrate this for you.

A young couple who had been living under difficult economic circumstances were very excited when the husband was given a fine promotion. The increase in salary was substantial so they decided to celebrate. They had a small baby and on short notice were unable to secure a suitable baby sitter. They didn't want to leave their child with just anyone, and so, to be on the safe side, they took the baby to a nursery school which advertised trained registered nurses in attendance. Because the nursery school was large and many parents were leaving small babies for care, as a safety precaution they were given an identification card to be shown when they came to pick up their child.

They went out on the town and had an enjoyable evening. But when they returned to the nursery school they discovered that, in the excitement of their good time, they had lost the identification card. The nurse in attendance refused to let them even see their baby, let alone take him home. They were told the only possible alternative was for them to wait until the nursery school closed at midnight and if, after all the parents had come to pick up their children there was still one baby left and they could identify him, they could have him.

Well, they sat in the waiting room and anxiously watched parents come and go with their children.

Each minute seemed like an hour. Each hour like a day. Finally, as midnight came and passed, the nursery attendant said, "Well, there is just one baby left. Is there any special mark of identification?" The parents couldn't think of any, but as best they could they described their little child. The attendant went into the nursery and a moment later returned with a tiny baby wrapped snugly in a blanket. When the anxious mother turned back the blanket covering the infant's face, she looked down upon the dark brown skin of an African American child. Do you know what that anxious, young couple did? They took the baby! You see, they were African American, too.

Now why were you surprised when I said that even though it was brown they took the baby? Because the "frame of reference" governing your thoughts about the relationship of parent to child is "white". You are white so you think white. And, unless you had heard the story before, it did not occur to you that these people might come from a different racial "frame of reference".

Does that help you to understand the term? Your "frame of reference" limits the boundaries of the approach you will make to a given problem or idea.

Now then, let's bring this idea of a "frame of reference" into the matter of forgiveness, The Key of the Kingdom about which I want to speak this morning.

When I say, in my sermon title, You've Been Framed I am suggesting that when you think about forgiveness, as a Christian you can only do it within a Christian "frame of reference". And, as a Christian, your "frame of reference" is Calvary.

You cannot think or talk about forgiveness, either for yourself or others, without taking Calvary into consideration. For That Great Event, when divine forgiveness was made available to humanity, now marks the true boundaries of what we mean when we use the word "forgiveness".

Every time you look within and see the appalling needs of your own heart and life and recall the many times you needed to receive forgiveness, you cannot escape the fact that "You've Been Framed" by the limitless love of a forgiving God. For the symbolism of the Cross is that it reaches down, down, down until it touches your life.

Every time you look without and see the deep heart needs of those about you and recall the many times you needed to give forgiveness, again you cannot escape the fact that "You've Been Framed" by Calvary. For the same Cross which reaches down until it touches your life, also reaches out, out, out in an ever widening arch until it touches every other person on this globe.

You've Been Framed, you see, and you can never make skillful use of this Key of the Kingdom called Forgiveness apart from the "frame of reference" called Calvary. For the same Cross which symbolizes the forgiveness you have received also symbolizes the forgiveness you must give.

I can never think of the word "forgiveness" without tying it to another word. Freedom. To me, forgiveness means freedom. Inwardly, forgiveness means "freedom from". Outwardly,

forgiveness means “freedom to”.

Freedom From Judgement

Let's look at those ideas for a moment. I said that inwardly forgiveness means “freedom from”. I think, first of all, it means freedom from judgement. We cannot avoid the fact that “all have sinned and come short of the glory of God” (Rom.3:23). Nor can we deny that “the wages of sin is death” (Rom.6:23). But the epic news which flashes upon the world this morning is that “there is now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus” (Rom.8:1). For while the wages of sin is death, “the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom.6:23).

Now don't think, even for a moment, it was easy for God to forgive. Remember, our “frame of reference” is Calvary! No one can look upon the Cross and turn away with the idea that it was easy for God to forgive sin.

Oscar Levant tells the story of a group of child prodigies who were asked to play for Mr. Paderewski. It was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity and they were anxious to please him. The first four children performed flawlessly. The fifth child, a little girl, stumbled when she came to a very difficult passage. She was so ashamed at having made a mistake in the presence of the great artist, she stopped in the middle of the piece, got up from the piano, and ran out of the room, crying as if her heart would break.

Mr. Paderewski excused himself and followed her out of the room. He found her all alone in the corridor, put his arm around her, lifted her face and kissed her on the cheek. In telling the story, Oscar Levant says, “Paderewski was not indifferent to music. That is why his forgiveness meant something.” And that's way God's forgiveness means something. When He says, “Thy sins are forgiven thee,” we know He is speaking with the full awareness of what sin really is and what sin really does, for He is speaking from the “frame of reference” called Calvary.

Yes, forgiveness is freedom from. Freedom from judgement. “For there is therefore now no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus” (Rom.8:1). “Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they be red as crimson, they shall be as wool” (Isa.1:18).

Freedom From Guilt

Inwardly, forgiveness also means freedom from guilt. A little boy who had been naughty said, “Go away, Mom, I want to talk to God.” His mother said, “Is it something you can't tell me, dear?” The child answered, “No, but you just scold and scold, and God forgives me and forgets.” That's the wonderful thing about God's forgiveness. It's complete. Our sins are not only taken from us “as far as the east is from the west” (Rom.103:12), they are also cast forever into the abyss of God's eternal forgetfulness to be remembered against us no more.

“How many, many things He will forget;
Our every sin, both great and small;
and yet he will remember and reward
The smallest service done for our dear Lord.

Divine forgetfulness, unfathomed grace,
And love which knows no bounds of time or space.”

And you cannot let this titanic news of God's complete forgiveness and forgetfulness sift down into your soul without feeling a tremendous sense of freedom from guilt.

I know there are those who, while they can forgive others and claim to believe God has forgiven them, simply cannot forgive themselves. They feel that somehow they must “pay” for their sins. And so they “scold and scold” themselves. They engage in what psychiatrists call “self censor”. Some of them have such a strong tendency toward self-punishment it actually leads to physical disability.

Guilt is a very personal thing. No one knows when you feel it, but if there is someone here this morning who is bent down by the terrible weight of guilt, and you somehow cannot forgive yourself for what you've done, let me remind you “You've Been Framed”.

Your forgiveness does not depend upon what you do for God, but upon what God has already done for you! The “frame of reference” covering your forgiveness is Calvary when God covered your sin with the mantle of love and you were made to stand before Him as if you had never sinned.

Therefore, there is only one thing left for you to do, and that is to so fill your mind with the fact of God's forgiveness there is no room for “self-censor”. You must learn to take God at his word. God made a promise and He does not lie. God said, “There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus” (Rom.8:1). And He meant it! If you have received Christ as your Savior, you have been forgiven!

Let me quickly add that I think all of us have faced those dark moments when we felt as if we had done something God couldn't possibly forgive and therefore we found it next to impossible to forgive ourselves. I know there was a time when I felt that way. For several months the intolerable weight of guilt literally crushed my spirits. Folks would ask me if I was sick and I'd mumble something about a headache. What I really had was a heartache.

Finally, after punishing myself with feelings of deep self-censor for several months, I came across the story of Jesus healing the palsied man as told in Matthew 9. It just seemed to me as if the words of the second verse leaped out in letters of fire. “Be of good cheer, thy sins are forgiven thee.” It was as if I'd been given a shot of adrenalin. I felt as if that verse had been written just for me. For a moment the clouds lifted and I could see the light after months of darkness.

But satan didn't leave me alone for long. After a while the old feelings of self-censor began to take hold again. It was then that I learned the value of a wonderful spiritual exercise. Every morning, noon and might, and some days a hundred times in between, I said to myself, “Matthew 9:2. I have been forgiven. I have been forgiven. I have been forgiven.”

Slowly, as I allowed it to fill every fiber of my being, the full meaning of God's forgiveness began to sweep into my heart and mind and soul. I felt the burden begin to lift. A sense of inner cleanliness welled up within me. And then, one morning I got out of bed, looked at myself in the mirror, and said, "God has forgiven me. I forgive myself!" In that moment the deed was done. I discovered forgiveness means freedom from guilt.

Yes, inwardly forgiveness means freedom from, but that is not the whole story. Outwardly forgiveness means --

Freedom To Love And Forgive Others.

Because we are free from judgement and guilt, we are free to love and forgive others. As a matter of fact, we are not only free to, we are obliged to. We've Been Framed! As I have already said, the same cross which symbolizes the fact of our forgiveness also symbolizes the fact that therefore we must be forgiving. As Jesus put it, "Freely ye have received, freely give" (Matt.10:8).

You cannot stand alone in the presence of a forgiving God without awakening a desire to be at peace with everyone!. You cannot long open your heart to receive forgiveness without also opening your heart to give forgiveness. When you have been liberated from the appalling weight of guilt, it is impossible to continue holding feelings of hatred and resentment towards others.

We have all met people whose lives are filled with bitterness. People who are bound by malice and rancor. Who stubbornly cling to feelings of resentment towards those who have injured them or those whom they think have injured them.

But I can honestly say I have never talked with a person like that who was really aware of the fact that he or she been "framed". I have never met a truly unforgiving person who looked at others through the "frame of reference" called Calvary. I have never talked with a person who was truly conscious of God's unlimited forgiveness in his own life who found it impossible to forgive someone else.

I do not mean to suggest it is easy to forgive. Genuine forgiveness is never easy. It wasn't easy for God and it won't be easy for you. But when you do the hard thing and practice real forgiveness, you gain one of the mightiest victories possible over satan.

Do you remember those times when you have trampled your pride, sacrificed what you thought were your "rights", and honestly forgave someone who had hurt or injured you? Do you remember how you were more conscious of God that day than you had ever been before? There is nothing which speeds a sense of real intimacy with the Heavenly Father like a forgiving heart.

Nor is there any greater therapy on earth than forgiveness. These human bodies of ours were not made for ill will. They were not made to hold hate, but to hold love. And the vindictive,

unforgiving person pays for his attitude every hour of the day in his body, his glands, his nerves. Conversely, we can never estimate the immensity of the tide of healing energy which flows into the soul, mind, and body whenever Christian forgiveness is practiced honestly.

Just a few days ago a man who is not a member of our church called me on the phone. He said his nerves were frayed and he was physically exhausted. It seemed wise that I talk to him in person, so I made an appointment to see him. After chatting with him for a little while, he expressed an attitude of distrust and hatred for a member of his family. This person had falsely accused him of something very evil. The rancor he felt had multiplied until it almost consumed him.

We talked for some time about forgiveness. We turned to the words of Jesus' prayer, “Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors” (Matt.6:12). I suggested he could never know real inner peace until he asked God to forgive the hatred and malice he held in his heart. That furthermore, Jesus said, “Forgive us our debts *as* we forgive our debtors,” so God could not give pardon to him unless he believed in giving pardon to others.

We had prayer in which he seriously asked God to forgive him for the sinful thoughts he'd had against that member of his family. When we finished he said, “I feel better already.” I answered, “Wonderful, but the job is just half done”.

Then I gave him the “assignment” of going to that individual who had hurt him so deeply to ask that *he* be forgiven for the feelings of resentment he had held against him. Even though he felt he had been wronged, he was to take the initiative and honestly ask for forgiveness from the very person who had wronged him.

Well, that was bitter medicine to take, but he agreed to take it. Less than forty-eight hours later he called me on the phone. There was a song in his voice which had not been there before. “It works,” he said, “it really works! The sun is shining on our house for the first time in months. And do you know something else? Last night was the first time I haven't taken a sleeping pill in months and yet I slept like a baby for twelve long hours!”

Do you see what happened? By asking for and receiving God's forgiveness, he discovered that *inwardly*, forgiveness means freedom from guilt and he could say, “I feel better already!”

More than that, by emptying himself of all that hatred and malice, he made room for love and understanding. He learned that *outwardly*, forgiveness means freedom to forgive others. Even the person who had hurt him most.

Now you, too, can know the miracle of forgiveness. There is nothing mysterious or difficult about it. It is profoundly simple. First of all, you must earnestly repent. That means more than just being sorry for your sin. It means forsaking your sin. It entails doing an about face, turning away from sin and heading back to God.

The moment you do that, you will hear the voice of Jesus saying once again, “Be of good cheer, thy sins are forgiven thee,” and with those words will come the wonderful awareness that *inwardly*, forgiveness means freedom from judgement and guilt.

You will discover You've Been Framed! As you look at others through the “frame of reference” called Calvary, you will learn that *outwardly*, forgiveness means freedom to forgive. Freedom to laugh and love and lift. Freedom to raise your loved ones, including those whom you love but do not like, to a more abundant life of joy and fulfillment.

That is the meaning of forgiveness. *Inwardly* it is freedom from the judgement and guilt of your own sin. *Outwardly* it is freedom to forgive and forget the sins of others.

Tell me this. What experience in life could possibly be more thrilling than the experience of using this Key Of The Kingdom called Forgiveness to blot out sin? Does that seem hard to do? Well, remember, You've Been Framed! As a Christian your “frame of reference” is Calvary. So when you think about forgiveness, remember the words of Jesus, “Freely ye have received...freely give.”

ASSIGNMENT FOR THE WEEK

This week's assignment is divided into two parts and will be most effective if, as a spiritual exercise, it is said over and over as many times a day as needed.

1. For those who have difficulty in forgiving themselves. Matthew 9:2 - “Be of good cheer; thy sins are forgiven thee.” Accept it as a promise from your God who does not lie, and say to yourself as often as possible,
“God has forgiven me. I forgive myself.”

2. For those who have difficulty in forgiving others. Remind yourself “You've Been Framed” by Calvary. The same Cross which is symbolic of the fact you have received forgiveness is also symbolic of the fact you must give forgiveness. Memorize Matthew 10:8 and remind yourself of these words of Jesus when you find it difficult to forgive:

“Freely ye have received; freely give.”