**The Bondage of Broken**

Matthew 5:23 So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, **24**leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. **25**Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are going with him to court, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you be put in prison. **26**Truly, I say to you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny. (ESV)

Often these verses are lumped together with the preceding verses we discussed last week about anger. This is because that word “so” connects them. Jesus connected them. But I felt it best to split them into two separate sermons, because although they deal with the same subject, one deals with the root, the other deals with the cause. Two weeks ago we discussed the root of broken relationships and that is often anger, bitterness, unforgiveness, hatred, and envy. We discussed how to avoid broken relationships and how to live in such a way that division does not happen. But now we must consider that this is simply not always the case. Now we must deal with what to do when relationships are broken.

It is an undeniable fact that relationships are not invulnerable. We are human beings and human beings have a tendency to get angry, bitter, hurt, to misinterpret, to misunderstand, to seek revenge, to hold grudges, etc. Humans are so good at breaking relationships because the first one we broke was with God. We broke our relationship with a perfect, holy, loving God. How much easier is it to destroy relationships when those on each side are imperfect, self-centered human beings? God always wants a restored relationship, sometimes humans don’t. When it comes to reconciling with God we have an advantage. He wants us to be reconciled to Him. He even made a way for us to be reconciled to Him by His Son’s atoning death on the cross (2 Corinthians 5:18) But when we seek to be reconciled to other people they do not always want that to happen.

Jesus mentions reconciling with another before giving your offering to God because God will not accept the offering of someone that is mistreating others. When we come to God in worship, but we are at odds with another person He is not pleased with us. When we lift our hands in worship and sing the songs so loud and pray the prayers so long, but we have something against somebody God is not pleased with us. God spoke this message through the prophet Amos in the Old Testament.

Amos 5:21 “I hate, I despise your feasts, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. **22**Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them; and the peace offerings of your fattened animals, I will not look upon them. **23**Take away from me the noise of your songs; to the melody of your harps I will not listen. **24**But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream. (ESV)

God wanted the people to understand that it didn’t matter if they gave all their money to Him, or lifted their hands in worship, or read their Bible everyday if they did not do what it says and treat others with love and compassion demonstrating justice and righteousness. Martin Luther King Jr. quoted Amos 5:24 in one of his speeches. The whole point he was making is that believers have a responsibility to reconcile race relations. God was looking for people to call for justice amongst the people and not just be content to read their Bibles and attend church every week. When we don’t treat others correctly it affects our relationship with God. HE doesn’t accept our worship anymore. He doesn’t accept the money we give. When we damage our relationship with others, we damage our relationship with God.

Not only does our relationship with others affect our relationship with God, but the opposite is true. If we truly love the Lord and serve Him it will change who we are on the inside. We begin to become like Him. God is a God of reconciliation and restoration and we will be people of the same mind and attitude. We will treat others according to our relationship with God. If we have a broken relationship with God we will tend to break or let relationships remain broken between us and others. If we have that restored, saving relationship with God we will seek to restore relationships with others in our own lives. Ultimately, our relationship with others is a reflection of our relationship with God.

If we have that strong, righteous relationship with God we will be natural restorationists. We will seek to restore relationships with others. Paul expressed this very sentiment in 2 Corinthians 5:

2 Corinthians 5:17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. **18**All this is from God, who through Christ **reconciled** us to himself and gave us the ministry of **reconciliation;** **19**that is, in Christ God was **reconciling** the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of **reconciliation**. **20**Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be **reconciled** to God. (ESV)

In the same way the God seeks to mend the broken relationship we have with Him, He desires that we mend broken relationships with others. God has saved us from our sins, but He has also saved us to do good works (Ephesians 2:10) and the primary good work God has called us to is to restore people to God and the second is to restore people to each other. Reconciliation is a true mark of a Christian because God has called us to the ministry of reconciliation. But if we are going to lead others to reconciliation we must first do what Jesus said and be reconciled to others ourselves

It all comes down to this: division and unforgiveness are nothing less than bondage. They are a prison with only you locked inside. The longer you wait to reconcile with someone, the worst your bondage becomes. It keeps us from doing simple things like being kind and it keeps us from doing the things God has called us to do. It is spiritual prison. When you’re in prison the person you hate and despise is not hurt by your bondage, only you are. Living in hatred and unforgiveness hurts you more than the person you hate. It is time we let those things go.

Someone will say that they are not the reason relationship is broken. Someone else did something horrible and unforgivable. Or they might frame it the other way: the other person doesn’t want to reconcile. They have something against me, not me against them. It doesn’t matter who is wrong or who is mad, reconciliation is the responsibility of the believer. Jesus even said, “If you remember someone has something against you”. Even if they’re mad and they don’t want to restore the relationship, God has called us to try at the very least.