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## Exhortation

# "Let this mind be in you . . ."

## 8. "Father, forgive . . ."

Jim Wood

**T**HIS WAS the Lord's compassion at its zenith. Here was the love of Christ at its height. Tired, racked with pain, fighting temptation, with every reason to despise those who wounded him, roughly treated him, laughed at him and derided him, he seeks his heavenly Father's blessing on them. He asks that they might be forgiven because what they had done to him they had done in ignorance.

Would we be strong enough, compassionate enough, to do the same, even in circumstances not as extreme as his?

Forgiveness is an essential component of the disciple's make-up. The New Testament Scriptures speak of the forgiveness of sins, trespasses, debts, iniquities, wrongs and blasphemy. The Lord Jesus made it clear that if we desire to be forgiven then we must "forgive men their trespasses" (Mt. 6:14). The principle was illustrated in his parable of the unmerciful servant: "So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses" (18:35). He also said: "when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any: that your Father also Which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses. But if ye do not forgive, neither will your Father Which is in heaven forgive your trespasses" (Mk. 11:25,26). So, as he taught his disciples how to pray, included in the model prayer was the request: "forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors . . . forgive us our sins; for we also forgive every one that is indebted to us" (Mt. 6:12; Lk. 11:4).

It is thus incumbent upon us to forgive where we have been wronged, where we have been hurt by the words and behaviour of others. What we cannot do is forgive those who have sinned against God. That is God's prerogative. For a time the ability was bestowed upon Jesus. This became clear as he healed the one sick of the palsy. The scribes who witnessed the event were sat there thinking to themselves, "who can for-

give sins but God only?" (Mk. 2:7). When Jesus became aware of their reasoning to themselves he explained the power that was now his: "the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins" (v. 10).

There is no doubt that throughout his ministry he forgave where forgiveness was possible, but on the cross the matter was taken one stage further as he prayed "for them which despitefully" treated him (Mt. 5:44). As he realised how and why these men's actions ran contrary to his heavenly Father's commandments he asked for his Father's forgiveness on those deserving of such compassion. To the end his thoughts were on others, their needs and their wellbeing.

Paul appreciated the immensity of the debt he had to be forgiven. To the Corinthians he admitted that he had "persecuted the church of God" and was "not meet to be called an apostle" as a result (1 Cor. 15:9). Perhaps this was at the back of his mind when, in writing to the Ephesians, he described himself as "less than the least of all saints" (Eph. 3:8). As he contemplated what he had been forgiven he knew what must be the nature and magnitude of his response. This, surely, was reflected in his advice to others. To the Ephesians he said: "be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you" (4:32). Similarly to the Colossians: "Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies . . . forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye" (3:12,13).

Perhaps our contemplation of the measure of our need for forgiveness, and our meditation on what was required of our Lord and Master that we might be redeemed, may be one of the means of ever keeping this same principle before us: "even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye".

Once again it is a case of letting "this mind be in [us], which was also in Christ Jesus".