

OLTL---The Forgiving Life!

Luke 6:27-36

January 29, 2012

#3 of series

(Come out wearing a Department of Corrections prisoner outfit)

How many of you recognize this bright orange outfit I am wearing?
How many of you have ever worn one of these orange outfits?

This orange suit is issued to a prisoner when he/she enters the county correctional facility. The person who wears this orange outfit has committed a crime that has caused them to have to be put behind bars.

The crime could be from a simple trespassing violation to murder...from identity theft to domestic abuse...from open container to sale or use of drugs...from sleeping on a bench to rape. All of these and more violations will cause a person who is arrested to have to wear one of these orange suits.

I have talked with some folks recently who had to wear one of these outfits. They told me that the imprisoned life is no fun. It is rough and they don't want to go back there. I have sat in court for some folks and watch them enter in wrist and ankle shackles. It is not the view a pastor enjoys seeing of one of his friends.

Someone who wears one of these orange suits carries with them a burden or a stigma from a past offense. I have yet to meet someone who wanted to wear the orange suit of the imprisoned life once they have been set free. Imagine the looks I would get if I went walking around town, the mall, or the community with this orange outfit on?

Most of us have never had to wear a County Corrections Prisoner's orange outfit. But you know what? I have worn a prisoner's outfit that is imprisoning to me. It is a prisoner's suit that I am not proud of. I have been shackled and found it hard to move around in life.

But fortunately, I was able, in time to find the key to unshackle my life and set me free.

I know that almost everyone of us here, if in fact, I would say all of us have at some point in our life worn this same prisoner's outfit. You have been shackled and discovered how difficult it can be to walk around in life while wearing this outfit. I would also venture to say that some of you are still wearing it today. You are still carrying a burden of a past offense you committed or was committed against you.

The prison outfit I am referring to is the prison of unforgiveness. If you and I were required by law to wear the bright orange outfit of unforgiveness how many of us would be wearing that orange outfit this morning here in church?

It may be someone called you a name and you can't forgive them. A couple of weeks ago, during the food pantry outreach, we had an older man not want to move along in the chairs and some young man next to him asked him why he was acting like an #(&#(&\$(&. A lady sitting next to them alerted me to the fact that this older man was going to beat the crap out of this "young skater punk" when they got outside.

I went over and got both points of view. The older man tried quoting the bible to me about, "an eye for an eye." I told him it was just a name man. He replied, "Yeah! And I will take care of it in the parking lot." I told him if he did he was done with the food pantry. He didn't care. I knew there was no convincing him so we put a plan into effect. I had big Mike ready to come out with me to the parking lot. I had another young helper ready to run to the police station. I had the older man go ahead as well as his ride and get his groceries and leave. I had another volunteer walk out into the parking lot to make sure the older man did drive off. I told the young man that he should have apologized and move on. He agreed but never did.

Being called a name put the orange imprisoned suit of unforgiveness on that man and really on the young man. Some of you may be wearing it because of what a family members said or did to you...some of you have been shackled for years because of it.

Some of you may be wearing the orange prisoner suit of unforgiveness because of your landlord, boss, backstabbing friend or some other situation in life.

Unforgiveness imprisons you in the past. As long as you are unwilling to forgive the offender and the offense, you keep it alive...the pain is there...you are picking open a sore, keeping it from healing.

The bitterness in your heart is like a cancer cell that will keep metastasizing in other areas of your life. It will shackle you to entertain thoughts of revenge, paybacks all done in anger. It will shackle you from living a life of freedom. It is devastating. It will cause a life to wither and waste away.

Many of us today, if we were honest, would be wearing this orange prisoner's suit of unforgiveness.

The unforgiving life is an imprisoning life.

There is a key that can open the barred doors of prison and set us free.

Forgiveness is the key to freedom!

Forgiveness is freeing.

The forgiving life is a freeing life!

The OLTL we are called to live is a Forgiving Life!

Jesus is real clear on this one.

If you want to get rid of the prisoner's orange suit stigma of unforgiveness you must forgive others.

In our scripture reading He makes it clear WHO we are to forgive...HOW we are to forgive...and WHY we are to forgive.

Do you remember WHO Jesus said we are to forgive?

Our enemies!

Some of us would rather spend the rest of our life rotting in jail than to forgive that sorry person for what they did to you. Unforgiveness will eat away at you more than it does that person you are wearing that orange suit on behalf of.

Forgiving is for-giving!

Forgiving love is for-giving love to our enemy.

“Love your enemy!” is what Jesus calls us to do if we want to take off the orange prisoner suit of bitterness and revenge.

Forgiving our enemy, much less any one, is not natural for us. We like to keep score of the wrongs done to us and try to get even. We try to justify our acts of anger or revenge by saying we were giving them what they deserved.

Let me ask you this question: “How many of you would like for Jesus to give you what you deserve in life?”

There is no way we can forgive our enemies without the love of Jesus in us. Jesus, while breathing his last breath, with his accusers looking at him prayed to God the Father, “forgive them.” He forgave His enemies.

We can only forgive when we realize that we have not been given what we deserve in life. We are sinners. Jesus forgives us. We forgive only when we realize we have been forgiven for all our mistakes. (Ephesians 4:32)

It is the love of Jesus in our hearts that enables us to forgive those who have hurt us in life. Jesus called us to ***pray for our enemies***. You know what I have discovered whenever I have worn this orange prisoner outfit of unforgiveness? When I start praying for my enemy it becomes harder and harder for me not to care for them and have compassion for them. This is not a prayer of revenge but of justice and mercy.

Who are you still wearing the orange suit of unforgiveness for in your life? Who is that enemy you need to love and pray for?

Oh yeah...do you remember that line you prayed in the Lord's Prayer?

“Forgive us as we forgive others...”

Some of you may be saying, “But I just can't forgive that person for what they did to me or my family.”

Right after that part of his sermon on the mount Jesus added this additional clause in regards to forgiving others:

“If you forgive those who sin against you, your heavenly Father will forgive you. But if you refuse to forgive others, your Father will not forgive your sins.” Matthew 6:14,15 NLT

Pretty simple: you forgive your enemies God forgives you. If you don't forgive your enemies you wear the orange suit the rest of your life, even when you stand before God on that final judgment day!

HOW are we to forgive others?

There is a simple rule Jesus gives us on this: Forgive others, as you would want them to forgive you. What you want from others you give to them. A lady came to the church this week wanting prayer. Someone in her apartment complex had cussed her out and she turned around and cussed him out.

We try to offer respect around here. We discover that most folks will give you what you give them. There are some who are so shackled in life they don't. However, most folks will give to you what you give to them. If you want respect give respect. If you want to be cussed at, cuss back at someone. If you are critical expect criticism to come back to you.

The Message bible paraphrase tells us we are not to forgive others like a “stingy pawnbroker.” When you go to pawn something does the pawnbroker give you full value for the item? NO way! They are wanting to give you below the true value and then try to sell it at a higher price so there is a something in it for them. They have a business to run with a desire for personal profit.

How do we forgive? We offer the full value of forgiving love without expecting anything in return. Many of you have probably offered this kind of forgiveness and the person you were forgiving didn't accept it. Here is the good news...the orange suit is off of you. We are in the “business of forgiveness” with no desire for personal profit.

The Winter X games are going on now. The contestants are given points based on the style and degree of difficulty. The winners are the ones who go out on the edge...the extreme and land their stunts.

The extreme forgiveness game doesn't render gold, silver and bronze medals depending on style and degree of difficulty. We forgive and move on in our orange suit – free life! Forgiving is the key to freedom in Christ. When we forgive we win!

WHY do we forgive?

It is who we are. Jesus said that in forgiving others we discover our true identity!

How many of you have been a victim of **identity theft**? I personally have not but I have had a couple of friends who have had their identity stolen. Their bank accounts and credit card and IRS identities were stolen. Fortunately, the banks and even the IRS were forgiving of the debts someone else piled up with the stolen identity.

When we don't forgive we are committing the crime of identity theft. We are not being who we are created to be. Our God-created identity is to be generous and gracious in our forgiving others.

We are never more like God than when we forgive. Through out the bible we see God as one who seeks to forgive those who come to Him. His character is to be forgiving.

Natural selfishness is not our identity.

God's forgiving love in and through us is our God-created identity. Bitterness, revenge, anger, malice, unforgiveness try to steal our identity in Christ. Forgive others as God forgives you...unconditionally.

There are consequences for wrong actions we have to accept. However, there is the freedom from sin when we seek our identity in Christ's forgiving love.

The OLTL of the forgiving life is offered to every single one of us. There is a way to get rid of this bright orange prisoner suit of unforgiveness...God's forgiving love.

(Take off orange suit and reveal “forgiven” t-shirt.)
There is the simple word of “forgiven” on the front. On the back is a circle of chain links broken by the cross of Christ. Those whom Christ sets free through forgiveness are free indeed!

Make a clean break...forgive one another as quickly and thoroughly as God in Christ forgives you.” Ephesians 4:32 MSG

The forgiving life is a freeing life.
Are you wearing an orange prisoner’s suit of unforgiveness?
You can be set free by forgiving others.
Don’t let another week go by wearing an orange prisoner’s suit of unforgiveness. Let your God-created identity of forgiveness set you free from the shackles of life that are imprisoning you.
The OLTL is the forgiving life!
Live the life of freedom...live the forgiving life!