

A Big Deal

John 21:15-17

Matt and Karen met in college. He was in a fraternity, but met her, a dorm student, while they were working together on a committee for the Dance Marathon. He graduated a year before she did, but he took a job close to campus so they could still see each other regularly. After she graduated, they got married in her hometown. It was a beautiful wedding—all their friends from college were there. They moved to Minnesota and lived in a tiny apartment. He started a new job, while she worked for a while at a local Wal-Mart. They didn't make much money, but being together seemed to make them happy.

Then Matt got an offer with a company that was growing quite rapidly. They offered him a much bigger salary and a better chance to advance. But the job also required that he had to travel a lot. It gave Karen a chance to go into grad school. But they saw so much less of each other. When she finished in less than two years getting a master's degree, she got a good job herself. There was much less pressure for Matt to be making so much, but the company was still growing. He passed up a chance to be home more often to get on the fast track for promotion. He justified it by buying things for Karen—a nice house, a new car, and even a big winter vacation in the Caribbean. But they still saw so little of each other. His business trips took so much of his time. The trips involved late hours, drinking, and social events. The temptations became too much for Matt. First, he spent a night with a woman he met on one "outing." Then he got into a relationship with another employee.

Karen could tell something was wrong, but Matt never admitted to anything. He just went on as if nothing was wrong. Besides, he was able to pay for many nice things—clothes, a renovated kitchen, and another new car. And wasn't Karen happy with her job?

Then one day Karen mistakenly gets a phone call. It is from "that other woman." Karen has suspected this, but now the worst seems true. She confronts Matt about it. He is evasive and dismisses it as no big deal. Besides he has a big trip ahead to negotiate a big contract for the company. There is talk going around that he will be the next new vice-president of the company. As he leaves, Karen bows her head to her hands and weeps.

Matt is in Dallas putting on the final touches to the deal. He gets the phone call. There has been an accident. Karen is in the hospital. She is in intensive care. She is on life support. Matt rushes to get back home.

There always seem to be delays with air travel, but this is taking forever for Matt. He keeps getting texts from Karen's sister saying that she is hanging in there, but it looks bleak.

When Matt finally gets to the hospital he is overwhelmed. All monitors and tubes going in and out of Karen! One side of her is black from the bruises. She is in a coma. He has no chance to

say to her how sorry he is, how he had been unfaithful, how he had put so many other things in the way of their marriage.

Then the doctor comes and tells him in a very somber tone that even if Karen survives, it looks as though she may just live on machines—a vegetable. Matt will never be able to tell her how sorry he is. How could he mess things up so much?

He spends sleepless days by her bedside. Then he finally goes home and crashes, but only after drowning himself in liquor. Then he wakes to a phone call. It is his brother-in-law. Karen is conscious! She is responding! It is a miracle!

At first a surge of joy fills Matt. She's alive! But, then, the joy is replaced by a wave of guilt. How can he face her? He betrayed her!

No one was more upset that Jesus had died than Peter. Not only had he hoped that Jesus was the Messiah, not only had he run away like the other disciples, he had denied Jesus three times. The last time he called down curses from heaven if he ever knew Jesus. But then he saw Jesus across the courtyard as Jesus was on his way to another trial. Peter knew that Jesus knew. The guilt hit him. How was he ever going to tell Jesus that he was sorry?

But Jesus rose. Peter was overjoyed, but he was also guilty. He had heard from the women who had gone to the tomb that the angel specifically said that Jesus wanted Peter to know He was alive. But was Peter forgiven?

Jesus meets Peter and five other disciples by the Sea of Galilee. He asks Peter, “Do you love Me?” Peter answers, “Of course I do.” Then Jesus says, “Feed My sheep.” Again, Jesus asks Peter, “Do you love Me?” Again, Peter answers, “Yes, Lord, You know I love You.” Again, Jesus says, “Feed My sheep.” A third time Jesus asks, “Do you love Me?” Peter answers, “Yes, Lord, You know I love You.” Jesus says a third time, “Feed My sheep.” Peter is frustrated by Jesus’ repeated questions. He feels the guilt. Why should Jesus ever accept him back?

What about Karen and Matt? Will she take him back? Is she right in doing so? He might feel sorry now, but how easy it is to go back to one's old ways. It is not that easy of a matter.

Nor was it for Jesus and Peter. Forgiveness can seem so easy in our culture. We forgive so easily because we want to be forgiven when we step over the line. We forgive politicians, celebrities, athletes, and others for their indiscretions. We say, “They are only human.” But we want to keep the standards low so we don't have to worry about getting ourselves in trouble. Forgiveness, then, is no big deal.

But Jesus did not look over the “indiscretions.” He didn't have to worry about protecting Himself from any accusations—He is sinless! But He notices those sins. He died because of them. He forgave Peter, not because it was so easy, but because He is that merciful. For Jesus forgiveness is a big deal—the biggest!

Matt can't lower the standards. He can't say, "I was only human." He can't make Karen feel that she is too hard if she doesn't forgive him. He was unfaithful. She has every right to say no.

So did Jesus with us. Peter wasn't the only one who denied Jesus. Think of what we have done—lying to avoid getting into trouble, lusting after something which is not ours, blowing our tops over the people closest to us, insisting on our own way. Look at what we fail to do—taking care of the world God gave us, helping the people who need us, staying in shape instead of spending our time in front of a screen. In all these ways we've been unfaithful. And our unfaithfulness hurts like adultery against a spouse. It's betrayal. It is denial just as surely as Peter did! Only when we see it that way, as Peter did, do we see what it means for Jesus to say to us, "Do you love Me?" and accept our, "Yes, Lord, You know I love You."

Peter continued to sin. St. Paul tells us in Galatians how Peter denied the Gospel by not eating with Gentile Christians when Jewish Christians from Jerusalem went to visit where Peter and Paul were in Antioch. There is no way that Peter- and certainly not we—could love Jesus perfectly. We still sin. We still deny Him.

Karen takes Matt back, but Matt still has to face the consequences of his unfaithfulness. He can't expect her to trust him. He can't act as if it is no big deal.

We still face the consequences in this life of our unfaithfulness. We deal with broken relationships. We get sick; we get frustrated. We will die. But Jesus still accepts us as He did Peter.

And what did Jesus tell Peter to do? "Feed My sheep." Jesus not only forgives; He gives to us what He cares for most—people. Jesus forgives so we can care for the people He puts in our lives. Now that is a big deal!

Meagan is having a hard time having her mom accept her as someone near high school. Her mom always seems to be putting limits on what she can wear, who she will be with, and when she can go out. She is tired of arguing with her mom, so just tries to avoid her as much as possible. Every now and then she will try to get around her by going to her dad, who seems to be a lot more flexible about things.

She begins to do things without her mother noticing, like putting on makeup in the bathroom at school and getting it off on the way home on the bus. She tries to text her friends only when her mother is not around. That seems to work for a while.

Then she is approached by an older high school guy who is attracted to her. She knows her mom wouldn't approve of him, so she tries to cover that up. But the more she tries to hide, the more she is tempted to spend time with him and make it harder to cover up.

Things come to a head when her mom finds out. She says she is putting her foot down this time. And what makes it worse is that her dad backs her mom up on this one. They fight over the

issue until Meagan shouts out, “I hate you!” and slams the door behind her as she goes into her room. Her mother decides to let her cool down. Then finds out that she has fallen asleep. Her mom has to leave early the next day for work, so doesn’t want to wake Meagan up on her way out.

Meagan has spent a lot of time sulking in her room. She gets up glad that her mom has already gone, as she schemes about how she can defy her.

But as she sits during classes, she starts thinking about how her mother has been there for her—listening, helping with homework, inviting her to do things together like bake cookies.

Then a woman comes into her classroom and whispers to her teacher. The teacher instructs Meagan to go with the person to the school office. Meagan wonders incredulously, “What have I done wrong?” The woman has her sit down and gently tell her there has been an accident. It has involved her mom. This woman will take her to the hospital where her dad is.

Meagan gets to the hospital and enters into a waiting room where her dad is. He gives her a great big hug and begins to explain what it will be like to go into the room in the ICU and see her mom.

But nothing can prepare her for the sight. Her mom’s face is mostly covered by a mask, tubes going every which direction to and from her. Machines beeping with lights and gauges like something out of science fiction. And her mom, the one who has always been there for her, lies helpless.

Meagan runs out of the room, crying. Her dad comes to console her, but she is overwhelmed by the thought, “Why did I say, “I hate you’?” Now I will never be able to tell her how sorry I am.

Megan stays in tears as the moments drag on. The nurses first, and then doctors talk to her dad. She can’t hear what they are saying, but it is very serious. Meagan knows it is not good news. Her dad just encourages to pray with him. But for Meagan there seems no hope.

Then a nurse comes out! Her dad is called into the room. He then comes out with a smile on his face and calls Megan to join him. He says, “Mom wants to talk to you!” Though Meagan feels a wave of joy, she also hesitates. Why would her mom want to see her after hearing, “I hate you!”?

Megan hurts as she goes into the ICU room because of the thoughts she had about her mom. How can her mom forgive her?