

Christian Forgiveness

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Date: 26 July 2015

Preacher: Rev. Thomas Hinson

[0 : 00] Let me give you a few events and you see if you can guess what they have in common. These are all from 2014. Event number one, March 7th.

Newsweek wrote an article and in that article they claimed to have discovered the inventor of Bitcoin. Event number two, May 15th. A company called Free People put out an ad featuring a ballet dancer.

Turns out later that the person portraying a ballet dancer in the ad wasn't actually a ballet dancer. Event three, August 28th.

It was announced that Hello Kitty is not in fact a cat. I have no doubt that you remember with great detail each of these events.

And they have each made an indelible mark on your psyche. If you don't remember these events, they all happened in 2014. The thing that they have in common is this.

[1 : 02] Each one of these events, when it happened or when the announcement was made or when the ad came out, catalyzed an enormous outpouring of rage and condemnation and anger in the Twittersphere.

Internet outrage. Outrage. Outrage. And I found all of these from an article published on Slate about the year 2014, which they dubbed the year of outrage.

And they actually, if you haven't seen this, it's pretty entertaining. I spent way, way too much time looking at this this week. But they have a calendar, an interactive calendar, with every single day of 2014. And they were able to find something on every day that created a massive outpouring of vitriol and hatred and condemnation and disgust on the Internet.

It was the year of outrage. Outrage. And what this tells us, and there were a lot of articles about this, is that more and more and more we live in an outrage culture. We live in an outrage culture. It's as though we used to get our drama from soap operas, and then we moved to reality TV shows, and now we just have reality. And, but we have access to so much reality at any given moment, it provides an endless font of entertainment, an endless fodder for outrage over reaction.

[2 : 26] And it's interesting to see how this permeates every aspect of culture. Some of it is legitimate. A lot of it is not. But outrage is sort of the emotion du jour of our time.

And, you know, it's even in some ways permeated Advent a little bit. You know, it's very easy if you're a part of this community to, you know, that you might experience that there are tensions, like the tension between people who have been here a while, the kind of old timers and then the newcomers, right?

There's tensions that exist between people who live in Northwest and people who live in Northeast, you know? There's tension that exists between people who have kids and people who don't have kids, and kind of mutual resentments that, kind of rumblings, you know?

There's tension between people who are single and people who are married. There's all different kinds of sort of tensions that can bubble up, and you feel that sense of the outrage culture kind of seeping in through the cracks of the windows and the doors.

And I think that there's a reason why outrage is so popular. It's pretty common sense. It's because it feels good. It feels good.

[3 : 38] You know, righteous indignation feels good. You feel powerful. You feel right. You feel vindicated. It feels really good to know that there's a line in the sand, and thank God you're on the right side of it.

You know, not so much the other people. It feels good. It feels powerful. But the thing is, when Jesus is teaching about the kingdom of God, he says the kingdom of God doesn't have an outrage culture.

It has a forgiveness culture. It has a forgiveness culture. And unlike outrage, forgiveness doesn't initially feel good. It actually feels the opposite.

It feels bad. It hurts. It's hard. It makes you feel weak. It makes you feel a lack of fairness, an injustice.

These are the feelings that are associated with true forgiveness. Even the rabbis in Jesus' day, even the rabbis, believed that forgiveness should have limitations.

[4 : 42] They taught that you should forgive around three times max. You know, one offense, you should forgive. Two offenses, well, that's possible. You should forgive. Three offenses, well, we want to be generous people.

But after that, you're probably being taken advantage of, and so you should withhold forgiveness. Three times max. Seven times. So when Peter comes to Jesus in this section of Matthew that we've just read, and Peter says, well, how many times should we forgive?

Seven? Well, Peter is doing the math, and he's thinking, well, the rabbis, the rabbis say a maximum of three, but Jesus is always blowing our minds. And so Jesus is probably going to say something more than three.

So to be on the safe side, I'm going to say this ridiculous number. Seven? Seven? And then if you look at Jesus' response, it's either translated 77 or 70 times 7.

But either way, the point is clear. Jesus is saying, in the kingdom of God, forgiveness is unconditional and unlimited. He's saying, in the kingdom of God, the culture is this, that you forgive.

[5 : 46] Ad infinitum. You forgive, and you forgive, and you forgive, and you forgive. At the heart of the kingdom of God, which is the kingdom that Jesus has brought into this world, there is unconditional, unlimited forgiveness.

And here's the thing we're going to look at tonight. Unless we understand that and what it means, we can't really understand Jesus. And unless that kind of forgiveness is a reality in our lives, we really, in no meaningful sense, can be a part of the kingdom of God.

Harsh words. But that's what it says. So we're going to look at Matthew chapter 18, verses 15 to 17, and then 21 to 35, under three headers. Why is forgiveness necessary?

Why is it necessary? What does forgiveness require? And then how is forgiveness like this even possible? Let's pray. Father, even with a bit of humor, Lord, we don't want to overshadow the severity of this issue.

I know that many of us in this room have or even are now struggling with deep hurt and pain.

[7 : 02] Lord, we may be looking at situations and we cannot even imagine forgiving, much less going a day without thinking about the hurt that we've experienced, Lord.

I know this reality in my own heart, as you well know, God. And we ask collectively that what we cannot do on our own, you would do in us through your word tonight.

And we ask this in your son's name. Amen. So first of all, the question we want to ask is this. Why is forgiveness so necessary? Why is it crucial? And there's really two reasons we can see in this passage.

The first section of the passage, you realize there's kind of two sections here. There's teaching that Jesus gives on how the community should operate when it comes to sin and conflict.

And then there's a parable. And the hinge is this question that Peter asks. But in the opening of our passage, Jesus is teaching about the community and how the community should handle and respond to sin in its midst.

[8 : 07] And you see in verses 15 to 17, Jesus is actually describing a specific process for handling sin and conflict. And you can see that sometimes it involves the whole community.

You should go and talk to the person one-on-one about the issue. Talk to them. Figure out what's actually going on. Is sin involved? If there is and they don't recognize it, they don't own it, then you should go and bring a couple of witnesses.

And then if the person still refuses to acknowledge the sin, then you should bring it to the community. And then if the community is still unable to persuade this person that the sin is a reality, then they need to be treated as a tax collector or a Gentile.

And if that sounds harsh to you, remember that Jesus loves tax collectors and Gentiles. In other words, this person should be treated as though they have erected a barrier between themselves and God, which is effectively what it is.

So that's what it's saying. And we read this, we look at this, and some people read this and say, well, why do we need a process? In fact, why is my life or what I choose to do anybody else's business?

[9 : 14] You know, I can't imagine being in a community where people would actually come and butt into the way I'm living my life. I'm not hurting anybody. And all of a sudden, I've got people coming to me and talking to me about what I should or shouldn't be doing.

What a horrible judgmental community. That's because we tend to think of these things purely in individualistic ways. We think that they are things that only affect us.

But the Bible would say that's really, really naive. It actually makes clear in a number of places that the choices we make, and especially our sin and especially conflict we may have with other people, that that invariably has an impact on the people around us.

Not only the people that we know and care about, but maybe even people we don't know we're impacting. You know, there's a place, Hebrews 12, warns about the root of bitterness.

And it talks about how if the root of bitterness takes hold and is allowed to grow, it can set in and defile an entire community. So when you think about unresolved conflict or unaddressed sin or resentment or bitterness, think of them like toxic waste.

[10 : 27] Right? And what do we do with toxic waste? We have a very specific process for disposing of it so that we don't impact the ecosystem. These are very much the same thing.

If we don't have a process to dispose of things like bitterness and resentment, they will have a toxic effect on the entire ecosystem. And so the Bible says take this very seriously.

You have to handle this with great care because the whole community is in danger. So that's the first reason forgiveness is necessary. The second is this. Forgiveness is evidence of your relationship with God.

It's evidence of the quality or the kind of relationship that you have with God. In the parable, the king has this servant brought to him who owes him this extraordinary debt.

We'll get more into that later. And the king is going to sell him and his family all to pay back the debt. And the servant begs for forgiveness and the king grants it. Huge, huge act of forgiveness.

[11 : 26] And then the servant goes out and instead of that act of forgiveness changing the servant and making the servant himself more forgiving in his own life, we see that the servant goes out.

He encounters somebody who owes him a small sum of money and he's hardened and he's almost cruel. Right? He actually chokes the man.

So there's bitterness and anger and, you know, you can almost imagine that he's been stewing on this debt maybe for years.

You know, and then he finally sees the servant and he's like, and all that anger comes out and he grabs him and he throttles him and he has him thrown in prison. Right? And so then the king hears about this and the king brings the servant back and says, I showed you great mercy, but you didn't show mercy and therefore what does he do?

He has him taken and given to the jailers. But that's a nice translation. The word actually means tormentors. He gives him over to the tormentors.

[12 : 28] And just so that we can't wiggle out of it, Jesus then makes sure that we, he, it's almost as though he's spelling it out like you would for a child. He says, this is a metaphor.

And what I'm actually saying is this. My heavenly father will do the same thing to you if you do not forgive your brother from your heart. And so you read this and, and, and the point it's making is this. People who refuse to give, to forgive are headed for eternal torment. And you read this and, you know, it's amazing what the commentators try to do to kind of nuance this.

You know, and it's, and it's amazingly tempting to want to kind of say, well, what, this is really a metaphor for the relationship between Israel and the larger Roman Empire. And, you know, just kind of, but that's not what's going on.

Jesus is clearly making a statement here. Now, what he's not saying is this. He's not saying that forgiving others is a way that we earn God's forgiveness. You could read it that way. That's not, that's not true because it doesn't line up with any of what the rest of scripture says.

[13 : 31] One of the best ways to know that your interpretation is, is along the right lines is if it, in any way, if it, does it, does it reinforce what the rest of scripture says? Or does it challenge or contradict what the rest of scripture says?

And we know that that wouldn't be correct. As we say every week, for Christians, our relationship with God is not based on what we do for God, but what God has done for us, right? Through Jesus Christ.

But what this is saying is this. It's, it's, it's kind of a spiritual principle. And here's the principle of the parable. The degree to which we believe that we have been forgiven by God and that we needed that forgiveness is the degree to which we will forgive others.

The degree to which we believe that we have truly been forgiven by God is the degree to which we will forgive others. It's a barometer. So if you're a Christian and you say, I believe that I, that, that God has forgiven me and Jesus forgiven my sin, that he's reconciled me to himself and that makes me a Christian.

And yet there is no evidence of a willingness to forgive in your life at all. That you hold on to, you know, anger and bitterness and resentment and you refuse to forgive and you, you, you only want to see justice done and you want to, you want payback.

[14:44] Then what this would say is you need to question your relationship with God. What that's really about is do you really believe, was there ever a point when you actually believed you needed the forgiveness?

Or are you just saying the words? So our willingness to forgive others is evidence of the genuineness of our relationship with God based on his forgiveness of us. So forgiveness is necessary because it's, it one, it's necessary for the health of the community.

And two, it's necessary because it's evidence of the actual quality of our relationship with God. Is it genuine or not? So that's why it's necessary. That leads us to the second question is, as we talk about forgiveness, what is it?

What does forgiveness require? And this parable shows us that there are actually four parts to genuine forgiveness. And there are four necessary parts. One of the nice things about this parable is the king shows us exactly what forgiveness looks like.

In verses 24 to 27, you see the king do four things. First, the king recognizes the wrong. Then the king takes pity. And then he cancels the debt.

[15:49] And then he lets the man go. So I want to look at each of those four things. The first thing that we see here, the first kind of where forgiveness begins, is this. And this is something that we mostly can skip over.

It's so easy to not do this. And yet I don't believe that true forgiveness is possible unless we do this.

The first thing the king does is he identifies the wrong. And in the parable, the wrong is what?

What's the wrong that's been done? The servant owes the king 10,000 talents. It's a huge sum of money. And the king is very clear on how much is owed him.

The king isn't kind of cloudy on the debt. The king knows exactly, probably down to the penny, exactly what the debt is. Because it's a huge sum of money. This is the kind of sum of money that might put the king's kingdom in jeopardy.

It's that much money. The king's very clear on how much is owed. And this thing, this need to be clear on the debt is essential for true forgiveness.

[16:50] In other words, you must be able to honestly and accurately name the hurt or the wrong or the debt that has been created in your life. Because we all have default tendencies.

I mean, think about the last time you were hurt. Think about the last time that somebody wronged you or let you down. We all have default tendencies, right? Some of us tend to be minimizers. Somebody does something that's hurtful and your immediate gut reaction is to say, oh, don't worry about it.

No big deal. I totally understand. I know you were just tired that day. I know you were just upset. It's no big deal. Really? I really don't care. It's no big deal. No big deal. That's minimizing, right? Even if it really hurt you, you find the words tumbling out of your mouth, you know?

Maybe somebody stood you up and you sat there waiting for, you know, three hours and they never came. And they come back and say, oh, man, I'm sorry. Oh, it's no big deal. No big deal, right?

Other people, so those are minimizers.

We, others of us, have the opposite tendency. We're kind of maximizers. You know, you can kind of find a reason to be offended in almost every situation. You tend to read situations in ways that are hurtful to you.

[17:56] You tend to assume the worst about other people's motives. If something happens and it's ambiguous as to exactly what was going on, you will tend to interpret it in a way that is most

hurtful to you. You can tend to blow things out of proportion.

You can tend toward the dramatic, right? So we all have our tendencies in ways that this becomes distorted. And so forgiveness, true forgiveness begins when we have an accurate assessment and we can name the hurt that's done.

Without minimizing it, without blowing it out of proportion, naming it for what it is, right? You've got to name the debt. Recognize it. The second step is this.

Once you've named it, once you're aware of the hurt and are able to name it and identify it as best you can, take pity. Take pity.

The word here is actually pretty fascinating. The Greek word literally means that your heart goes out to somebody. It actually refers to your bowels, but in the Greek world that referred to your, that was kind of like talking about your heart.

[18:58] The seed of your love, the seed of your emotions. That being stirred or moved or even going out to somebody. Empathy. So what we're talking about is what? Empathy. That's what we're talking about.

Empathy. Knowing, being able to identify with somebody. Being able to know what it's like to be them. Being able to imagine what they must feel like in their situation. So when somebody hurts or wrongs you, the temptation is to do a couple of things.

You know, first the temptation is to over-focus on your own victimhood. Right? You kind of stew on it. You stew on how bad you were wronged.

Which can lead to self-pity and it can lead to bitterness. Right? And you stew on how wrong it was and how egregious it was and you can't believe that they did that to you. And you just kind of like meditate on that.

That's the first temptation is to kind of exaggerate your victimhood. The other temptation that comes along with that is to dehumanize the perpetrator. You see them less and less and less in your mind as you think about it and relive the events again and again and again.

[20:03] They cease to become a three-dimensional flesh and blood human being. And more and more and more they become a one-dimensional cardboard cutout of a person. Defined pretty much exclusively by the wrong.

They become not just a person who's morally, you know, ambiguous and good and bad and a mix. But somebody who's evil. In other words, when somebody hurts us, I think the temptation is to widen the gap between us and them.

You know? We imagine ourselves ten foot high in a pulpit. And we imagine them kind of groveling down on the ground. You know? And we look at them from our place of self-righteous victimhood. Miroslav Volf, who's written a lot about this, says this. He says, Forgiveness flounders because I exclude the enemy from the community of humans, even as I exclude myself from the community of sinners.

That's a brilliant quote. Forgiveness flounders because I exclude the enemy from the community of humans, even as I exclude myself from the community of sinners.

[21:10] Jesus is saying forgiveness requires us to close that gap. It requires us to send our hearts out to the person, to have compassion for, to identify with the person who has wronged us.

And to do it to the point where we can see that even though, even though we have been wronged, and even though in this particular situation I was sinned against, I'm also a sinner. And we do it to the point where we realize that even though this perpetrator may have brought great evil against us, he or she is still a human being.

I'm still a sinner. They're still a human being. And in fact, as much as I hate to admit it, we have much more in common than I would like to admit. We have to close the gap by sending our heart out to be with them.

Now, this does not mean, this does not mean that we deny the evil that has been done against us, right? It doesn't, again, we don't minimize that. If you've been seriously hurt or you've been seriously abused, and I know some of you, your stories, and I know that you have.

I know some of you have had experiences like that, and I don't know about it. Maybe nobody knows about it. But if you've been seriously hurt or abused or wronged in your life, those actions are evil.

[22:29] They're wicked. And so being able to, as we said before, name and pronounce them as being evil is a part of what forgiveness requires. So I'm not saying that, but what I am saying is you have to strive and do the hard work of sending your heart out past the evil, down, down, down, into

that person until you find their humanness.

Until you're able to recognize that on some deep level, you are the same. That you're the same. That there is a commonality between you that you can identify with them.

So you have pity. You have empathy. You cultivate empathy. This can take years to cultivate even a shred of empathy for somebody who has wronged you. That's the second thing.

The third thing, once you've named the wrong, once you've identified it, and once you have begun to be able to cultivate some degree of empathy, then you cancel the debt. You cancel the debt.

Once you've been able to get to this point, you have to recognize that whenever there is a wrong done, there's a debt that has to be paid. Whenever there's a wrong done, there's a debt that has to be paid. So if I borrow your car and I take it out and I wreck it, there's a debt that has to be paid.

[23 : 43] And either I'm going to pay it and get the car repaired, or you're going to pay it and get the car repaired. But somebody has to pay. And you say, well, what if nobody has the car repaired?

Well, still the damage has been done and the value of the car has been decreased because of that damage.

And if I don't pay you, then you have to just incur that debt yourself. It's a loss that you have to bear. And this is what forgiveness means. Forgiveness means that you pay the debt on behalf of the perpetrator as a gift to them.

That you take the debt that is owed you and you transform it into a gift. That's really what forgiveness is. It's transforming a debt into a gift.

Transforming something that is owed you into something that you give. And this is the same with emotional hurt, which is far more common. Someone says or does something hurtful to you, they're still the same choice.

Either you make them pay or you pay it on their behalf. It's very tempting and easy to want to make that person pay.

[24 : 54] And how do we do that? Well, all kinds of ways. We're all very creative at this. You can maybe say directly hurtful things or use sarcasm. Or you can emotionally withdraw and cut that person off.

Maybe you can treat them like dirt. Or maybe you slander them to other people. Now, you're not going to actually go out and directly say, listen, I'm getting ready to slander somebody.

Get ready. What you'll do is you'll go to your small group and you'll say, guys, I need to process something with you. I need to process this relationship with you. Can I just process this with you?

Because I want to be authentic and I want to be transparent. So let me just process this with you.

And I just want to get your feedback. And then you'll rip that person to shreds. And what you want to do is you want to, when we do that, if we're really honest, what are we trying to do?

We're trying to get the people that are listening to hate that person as much as we do. And the minute you get somebody to say, I can't believe they did that to you. Man, what a jerk.

[25 : 54] I can't believe that. That's crazy. You feel better. It vindicates you. Because you're like, I got somebody else on my side now. And so we can go around in the name of authenticity and transparency and processing and emotional honesty and all that stuff.

Just recruiting people. Right? Recruiting fellow haters. Building a club around a person we don't like. And all the while, you're making that person pay.

You're right? Or you can just fantasize and take pleasure at their misfortune. Or you can maybe just sit around, drinking your wine, fantasizing about all the hurtful things that you're going to say the next time you see them.

That zinger that you can't wait to just nail them to the floor. But in all these different ways, we can choose to make that person pay. The other option is much harder.

And that is that we pay. In other words, every time a wave, and have you ever noticed the times that I've been really hurt in my life, and there's actually even been a relationship over the last few years that has been really difficult, one that's required a lot of forgiveness.

[27 : 00] And that hurt doesn't come all at once. It comes in waves. So it hurts almost unbearably, and then it'll subside. And it hurts again, and it's like waves crashing on the beach.

And when you choose to pay an emotional debt, when you choose to forgive somebody what they owe you, it means that every time a wave breaks on the shore of your heart, you choose to absorb it.

You absorb it. You take it into yourself. You incur the debt. It means that when people who are not involved and shouldn't be involved try to ask you questions and get you to talk about it, you don't. You refuse. It means when your heart or your mind is tempted to fantasize about the nasty things you might say to them or the, you know, if you are tempted to kind of glory and misfortune that they may be experiencing in their life, you simply flip the switch and you decide not to.

It means that when you do and if you do process these kinds of things with friends, you do it in a way that honors the perpetrator. It doesn't feel good to do this, okay?

[28 : 12] It doesn't feel good. It feels much better to make the other person pay. But there's a problem with doing that. Frederick Buechner says it well. He says, of the seven deadly sins, anger is possibly the most fun.

Listen to this. He says, to lick your wounds, to smack your lips over grievances long past, to roll over your tongue the prospect of bitter confrontations still to come, to savor to the last toothsome morsel both the pain you were given and the pain you were giving back.

In many ways, it is a feast fit for a king. The chief drawback is that what you were wolfing down is yourself. The skeleton at the feast is you.

In other words, it may feel good, but we are devouring ourselves if we hold on to things like bitterness and resentment.

Making the perpetrator pay feels good, but it will destroy us eventually. It will consume us.

Forgiveness is an extremely hard road, but that is the road that paradoxically will ultimately set you free.

[29 : 18] So, the reality is forgiveness requires that we commit to forgiveness long before we feel it.

Okay? So, if you're thinking about a situation in your life right now and you're wondering how am I going to possibly do this and you can't imagine feeling that way, well, the answer is forgiveness is a choice you make sometimes years and years and years before you ever feel it.

You choose it. You commit to it. Emotional forgiveness, the emotional reality forgiveness is like a distant land. And sometimes all you can do is buy a ticket and get on the train.

And you buy the ticket and you get on the train and you start the journey. And your choice to forgive is buying the ticket. But the reality of forgiveness is a long ways off. And it may be a long train ride for you.

But all you can do right now is get on the train and wait and trust that eventually the tracks will lead you there. I want to also say that this is not the same as reconciliation.

[30 : 29] Because reconciliation is a two-way rebuilding of a relationship that requires both people. But forgiveness is something that you can do in your own heart. There's a time and a place, I think, to confront someone in their sin.

We see that in verses 15 through 17. You know, anytime there's somebody that's sinned against you, you should confront them. We're told, we're commanded to do that. But there are times when that's simply not possible.

There are times when you're not in a place to do that. And that's why, as we see in this chapter, it's good to sometimes rely on the community to help. There's also times when you can't simply because the person is no longer in your life or they've passed away.

Canceling the debt is something that you can do, that you must do if you want to forgive, and that you can do in your own heart. But it's not easy. And then the last thing we do, so you assess or you name the hurt, the wrong.

You cultivate empathy. You have pity. Identify with the perpetrator. Once you've done that, you cancel the debt. You pay it on their behalf. And then lastly, you have to let it go.

[31 : 39] The king lets the man walk out. You have to let it go. What does that mean? It means that you relinquish your right to ever hold this over that person again. You can't bring it up.

You can't bring it back. You can't ever leverage it. You have to let it go. You don't forget. Forgive and forget is not in the Bible. That's pop psychology lunacy to tell somebody who's been traumatized or abused that they should forget.

That's a big problem in trauma, actually, is the forgetting and the remembering. It doesn't mean forgive and forget, but it means that as you forgive and as you will probably remember, you choose what you do with those memories.

and you choose not to use them as leverage over that person. You choose to let them go, let them walk free. And you say, well, I hear this and this is just not fair.

You're right. It's not fair. Do you know what the definition of grace and mercy is? Mercy is not giving to somebody what they deserve. Grace is giving to somebody what they don't deserve.

[32 : 48] They're not fair. Grace and mercy are not fair. But forgiveness is necessary for Christians.

It's not an option. And it's hard. It means identifying the wrong, having pity and empathy for a wrongdoer, canceling the debt and then letting them walk free. And then Jesus says, this is something that we are called to do over and over and over again.

So that leads us to the last question. How on earth is this possible? The real power of this parable is the difference between the two debts.

I told you we'd come back to this. The debt owed by the fellow servant is what? It's 100 denarii, right? Now, a denarii or denarius was about one day's wages.

So I calculated this based on DC minimum wage. And the debt owed by one servant to the other is about \$8,000. What's interesting about that is it's not a small sum.

[33 : 54] And by itself, if somebody owes you \$8,000, that's a significant sum. You know, that's worth suing over. That's worth going to the authorities about, right? \$8,000 is a lot of money.

It's not nothing. Sometimes when people talk about this parable, they say it's a paltry sum. I think it's important to recognize that by itself, this is actually a lot of money. But it's nothing compared to the debt that the servant owes the king.

The servant owes the king 10,000 talents. Now, we could try to calculate that up, but you would miss the point because a talent was the highest unit of currency that they had.

And 10,000 was the highest Greek numeral there was. So, it's not about the calculation. This is about extremes. This is like saying that the servant owed the king trillions of dollars.

Makes the Greek debt look pretty small by comparison, right? Trillions of dollars. Trillions of dollars. Everything changes when you compare the amount of the debt owed to the servant and the amount of the debt owed to the king.

[35 : 07] \$8,000 seems huge until you hold it up against the greater debt. See, this is the key, I think, the real possible, the reason that Christian forgiveness is actually possible is forgiveness like this becomes possible when we turn our attention away from our debt, the debt owed us, and focus on the debt that we owe God and what God did for us through Jesus because the gospel is this.

Here's the gospel. It starts this way. God assesses the debt. What is the debt? Our sin against God is bigger than the sum of all sin ever committed against us. Do you believe that?

Our debt that we owe God is bigger than the sum of all of the sin and all of the debt that will ever be owed us. God sends us to us. God sends us to us. God sends us to us. God sends us to us. And yet, God sends his heart out to us.

He sends his heart out to us. His heart has a name. It's Jesus. He sends his heart to be with us, to be one of us. And through the death of Jesus, God pays the debt off on our behalf, an infinite debt, cancels our debt, and sets us free to become his children, which is what we were made to be.

So here's the point. Christian forgiveness, distinctly speaking, is only possible at the foot of the cross. It's only possible at the foot of the cross. And this is why, by the way, we have regular rhythms in our life together of gathering and confessing our sin and hearing forgiveness and singing and preaching and praying about God's forgiveness because it's all meant to keep our eyes on the cross rather than on everything that's owed us.

[36 : 52] It's the only way it's possible. So if you're here and you're not a Christian, I personally don't believe that the kind of forgiveness we're talking about here is possible for you.

I'm not saying that forgiveness is not possible. But this kind of culture of forgiveness, unlimited, unconditional forgiveness, I don't believe that's possible apart from the cross.

You simply lack the resources necessary. In order to forgive like this, we have to experience this forgiveness in our own lives. So that brings us back to our initial opening.

The kingdom of God is radically countercultural because it's not a culture of outrage, it's a culture of forgiveness. It's a culture of mercy and grace. And listen, in our culture, things like anger and righteous indignation, they look like powerful weapons.

And they make a difference. And it can be so tempting as Christians to pick those weapons up when people are coming after, when we feel that people are coming after us or attacking us or saying hateful things or persecuting us.

[38 : 07] It can be so easy to pick those weapons up, believing that these are the powerful weapons that will give us a chance. But what we have to realize is those weapons of anger and shame have no place in the kingdom of God.

The only weapons we have are grace and mercy. That's it. And yet the good news is this, that grace and mercy are far more powerful. Far more powerful.
Let's pray. Let's pray.