

Limitless Forgiveness

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[0:00] Morning, everybody. Lovely to see you all. Now, this guy here is called Joseph Tillman.

! And he is behind bars for the next 19 years for killing an innocent husband.! The husband of a wife named Regina Johnson.

Married for 50 years, long time. Then her life ruined. At the sentence, and Regina was allowed a few final words.

But you know what she did? She got up from her chair. She walked over to Joseph. And she looked him in the eye and said, I forgive you.

How on earth does that happen? How on earth does that happen? How do people do this?

[1:08] Listen, in the wake of Me Too and cancel culture, our culture has almost given up on forgiveness, hasn't it? As Christians, it's one of those things, though, that is so expected of us to forgive.

It's just what we should do. Yet it is so hard to do. Do you find that? It is so hard to actually forgive. You might be one of those people who have been really hurt by somebody. And you're trying to forgive. And it is not easy, is it? You know, I recognise what we're talking about today might be quite hard.

Now our minds normally go to actually the sort of the big things like this. These big acts of forgiveness. Do you know what? We all have some ways that we all have to forgive in small ways. Partially, kind of, you know, in places like this. Actually, I've got AI to do this to this. It's so good.

[2:19] They're all looking at that one person. I love it. We've got to forgive small ways and big ways and small ways. Like in church, right here. When you rub people up the wrong way.

They rub you up the wrong way. When you're not appreciated for serving. It could be lots of things. It doesn't matter what it is. We're still asking that question of, how do we forgive?

How do we do it? And today we're thinking about forgiveness mostly in church context. Now we're sort of halfway through a series about living life with the Lord Jesus.

And we've seen it's a hard path. It's a suffering path. Suffering now. Glory later. Self-denial like Jesus. Going to the cross. Taking up our cross.

A path where you can stumble on that path. And where you can cause others to stumble as well. But part of that suffering and denying ourselves. And maybe where we might stumble is.

[3:22] Well in the time when we have to forgive. When we're in close quarters in church. Look at verse 21. Matthew 18. Verse 21.

This is Jesus' disciple Peter. And this is what he asks. Lord how many times should I forgive my brother or sister. Who sins against me.

Up to. I don't know. Seven times. Your brother and sister. This is church right. By the way. The custom of forgiveness was about three times.

And then you don't forgive. So Peter I think. He's trying to be really holy here. He's like. Oh I'm going to bump it up to seven. Look how holy I am Jesus. But Jesus answered verse 21.

Jesus answered verse 22. I tell you. Not seven times. But 77 times. Don't you get it Peter?

[4:19] The exact number is not the point. Seven times by ten. Then always go one more. Jesus says.

Show limitless. Forgiveness. Again. We are asking right now.

How are we to do that? How can we do that? When they've done that to me. Well this parable is partly showing us how.

The power to forgive. You can forgive. You can forgive limitlessly. When you know. God's limitless. Forgiveness. For.

You. That's the engine. For forgiveness. Look at verse 23. Therefore the kingdom of heaven is like a king who went to settle accounts with his servants.

[5 : 20] And he began this. And as he began the settlement. A man who owed him 10,000 bags of gold was brought to him. Now imagine a letter comes through your door. It's stamped on it. Important.

Confidential. And reading. You've got to open this one. It's not just one you can just chuck away. And you open it. And you unfold the thirds. And you read it. And what does it say. A little bit of AI here. You owe the tax man.

One gazillion pounds. That's a bit of a silly number. That doesn't really exist. But I think that's the force of what Jesus is saying here. 10,000 was kind of like saying a gazillion pounds.

That was the biggest number they kind of used in everyday speech back then. Now one gold bag. Get this. One gold bag. Is 20 years wages.

10,000 gold bags. Infinite. Impossible. Immeasurable. Verse 25. Since he was not able to pay the master order that he and his wife and his children and all that he had to be sold to repay the debts.

[6 : 32] At this the servant fell on his knees before him. Be patient with me. He begged. I'll pay back everything. Look if you owed HMRC that much money right.

You would do this. Wouldn't you? You'd probably travel up to London. You'd go to head office.

You'd knock on the door of 10 Downing Street. Whatever it is. Please have mercy on me.

But see the limitless mercy of the king. Verse 27. The servant's master took pity on him.

Canceled the debt. Literally forgave the debt. And let him go. Go. Isn't this so obvious what this means? God is the king.

The servant is us with an astronomically large sin debt to pay. And the power to forgive limitlessly comes from knowing God's limitless forgiveness of us.

[7 : 44] Look at that verse again. The servant's master, number one, took pity. Two, cancelled the debt.

Three, let him go. Let him go. We might despise the person who has wronged us. Who we need to forgive. Maybe for good reason.

It might have been something that's really awful that happens. Look at God. He takes pity. He takes pity on us.

Do you know what that word is? It's the word for compassion. Used throughout the Gospels. It literally means. Do you know what it means? It means to pour your heart out to someone. It's the number one word that's used of Jesus to describe who he is and what he feels.

He looked at the crowds with compassion. With love. His heart went out to the crowds. And today his heart goes out to all of us.

[8 : 53] And that is amazing because we're sinners. We do things wrong. And do you know what he does? Number two, he forgave the debt.

When people wrong you, again, there is a debt there. That is a good way to talk about it. It's real. It's not an illusion. They owe you payback. But however big that debt is, the debt we owe God is 10,000 times more.

Listen, he's incredibly kind, God is. He is so kind to us. Every heartbeat, every good gift that he gives, every breath that we have, it comes from him.

We don't deserve it. We don't deserve it. Do we honour him? Do we thank him? No, we actually throw it back in his face. Look, if you had to write down every time that you thought something that was against God's good ways, or a way that you acted wrongly, or you felt something that was wrong, you wrote those things down.

I don't think there will be enough paper left in Farnham to write those things. There will be so many. But the worst thing is, it's actually who it's against. Sinning against your infinite creator, well, it incurs an infinite debt.

[10 : 12] Do you see? And he turns the screen around at the checkout, and he shows you a picture of what you owe, a sea of 10,000 bags of gold that you just can't count.

We can't pay. And there's punishment. The Bible says that is hell forever. Forever. But in his mercy, God does not make us pay.

His son willingly pays the debt. And debts don't just vanish. Somebody is bearing the cost whenever that debt is there. And for us, Jesus does.

He bears it. He takes that cost. He absorbs it. But knowing the infinite wrong, what does he say? What does he do? Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do. On the cross, knowing what we've done. On the cross, the eternal God takes our punishment for us. [11:25] If you trust him. And in verse 27, he lets us go. No grudges, no earning his forgiveness. Free to go. A limitless debt forgiven by a limitlessly forgiving God.

When we know that, well, Tim Keller said this. I've been really helped by this fantastic book this week in my prep. By Tim Keller on forgiveness. He says, when we're melted by the beauty of the king, well, then we can forgive.

When we're melted by the beauty of the king, we can forgive. Look, it's not easy. Forgiveness is not easy. It feels, it almost feels good, actually, to hold a debt over someone, doesn't it?

It feels like they deserve it. And look, forgiveness is not the same as reconciliation. We need to be clear on that. Sometimes, space might be needed.

Forgiveness is a process quite often. And when we forgive, we're entrusting justice to God. But nonetheless, with Jesus, we can actually forgive.

[12:45] And he gives us away. The power to forgive outwards first comes downwards. Because we've known and experienced just how much our loving God has forgiven us.

And that's really the key. Now, once I was helping on a holiday Bible club in another church a few years back, and I was there teaching, and I went through the Christian message on a few sessions. One of the sessions was on sin. We had a whole session on sin. And afterwards, a lady came up to me and said, Thank you very much, James, but why do we have to talk about sin all the time? It's quite negative, isn't it?

It's quite negative, isn't it? It's quite negative to talk about sin. What will this parable say? We can't forgive because the debt someone owes us feels so big, doesn't it?

That's why we can't forgive sometimes. But God's forgiveness puts that in context. I love this quote so much. It says, However much you're a victim, and we really, really can be, before God, you're an offender to him 10,000 times more.

[14:04] And when we've been forgiven limitlessly, when we see the size of that debt, when we see our sin, and we preach sin to ourselves and grace, well then we're knowing God's limitless forgiveness for us.

For us. Now this really should stop here. The parable should finish.

He's obviously going to forgive people, isn't he? After this? Of course he is. What happens next should make you flabbergasted. Have a look at verse 28.

Verse 28. We need to beware an unforgiving heart. When that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him 100 silver coins.

Now that's not nothing, by the way. That's three months' wages. Yeah? And when people wrong us, it is not nothing. But look at what he does. He grabbed him and began to choke him.

[15:12] Up against the wall, pay back what you owe. His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, Be patient with me and I will pay it back.

Now, have you noticed something here? That that is the same script. That is exactly what he said a second ago. Surely he remembers that he just said that. He's only just walked out of head office.

He's basically meeting him in the doorway. He said, pay back what you owe. And he does this.

Verse 30. But he refused.

Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. We should be outraged by that. That is so obviously wrong. We intuitively know that. It's just crazy.

How can he do that? Verse 32. Then the master called the servant in. You wicked servant. He said, I cancelled all that debt of yours because you begged me to.

[16:20] Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had mercy on you? On you. If he'd really known mercy, he would have given mercy.

I think with God this is almost blasphemy. Believing it's foolish to forgive a hundred silver coins.

It's saying God was really foolish to forgive your infinite debts. Verse 34. Verse 34. In his anger, his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured until he should pay back all he owes.

And then look at how Jesus lands this. This is how my heavenly father will treat each of you. Unless you forgive your brother and sister from your heart.

Where'd that come from? Kind of expecting to almost distance himself. But it's a warning, isn't it?

[17:36] It is a warning. Again, this is not saying we earn God's forgiveness by forgiving others. It is saying people who don't show forgiveness show they weren't really forgiven.

I think we just get it from the way the story's set up. It's obvious that's what you should do. You've been truly forgiven. Obviously. Look at verse 26. This is quite a funny detail I noticed actually. So he says, I'm going to pay you back everything, he says. Now when I saw that, I was really puzzled. Why in the next bit when he says everything exactly the same. He doesn't say everything. In the first one, he says he's going to pay back everything.

Words really matter. Actually, you kind of have to think then. Really, you think that you can pay back infinity. Like, do you get this? Do you actually get this?

Do you actually get this? Like, even the second servant doesn't say everything. And he's actually got a payable debt. Three months, it'll be done. Verse 32, he's wicked. He's wicked.

[18:45] In Matthew, the lawless and the wicked never knew God in the first place. A person like this has never truly experienced forgiveness. Look, most of us aren't this servant.

Okay? Most of us aren't this servant. We are forgiven. But it's still a warning to be nothing like him, isn't it? Beware an unforgiving heart.

So, it's good to think. Maybe it's for a big thing.

And that is never easy. But remember this context. It's in the context of church, your brother and sister. So, maybe it's not a small thing.

You know, it's 100 silver coins. Three months' wages. But it's maybe just more of an everyday thing. Now, listen to this.

[19:52] Church is somewhere where we come with so many expectations, isn't it? How things should be done. Now, from the preaching to how the coffee's made. From how we should do the music to how we should run prayer meetings.

Now, expectations of how we should be treated as people. And maybe rightly, these are good expectations. Now, how much we should be appreciated for serving on the ministry. Now, how kind Christians in general here should be to you and I.

Now, let me ask you. Have those expectations always been met? I don't think they always have. Do you know why? Because we're sinners. Okay?

I'm a sinner. I've rubbed people up the wrong way. Right? And it's possible to get really annoyed. And offended.

And embittered, isn't it? And what happens to that? Well, it snowballs. It festers. It grows. And believe me, I've seen that happen.

[21:03] And that can drive us away from church. It can drive us away from the Lord Jesus, actually. We don't want to be anything like that unmerciful servant. We can't even forgive 100 silver coins.

We can't forgive 100 silver coins. So, will we forgive? Or, I think these are opposites.

Will we make people pay? And I think that can be really subtle. And I was thinking this week, and I felt it really in my own heart, actually.

You know, a few months ago, it wasn't here. It was in a kind of Christian environment. And I got into a conversation with someone. And I'll be honest, the way they were talking to me, it just wasn't very nice.

You know, they were a Christian. I just felt like, no, you shouldn't be talking to me like this. I feel, this is horrible. You're hurting me. And, you know, to his credit, he came back almost straight away. And he had just apologised.

[22:07] He said, I'm really sorry for how I talked to you. That was not on. I'm really sorry. And do you know what I said? I said, oh, thanks, mate. All forgiven. All forgiven. I felt quite good about myself.

Looking back, though, I don't know if I'd forgiven him. Really? This gets to the heart of what true forgiveness is. There was a debt owed. To forgive would have been for me to absorb that debt so that I pay it.

That's how I pay it. I take it on me. But I know that I hadn't really forgiven because I was still subtly kind of making him pay. You know, I snubbed him a little bit.

Just kind of avoiding him. Wasn't really kind of laughing at his jokes. I told my friends about the situation, but didn't really put him in the best light.

That wasn't forgiveness. I've repented of that this week. I've forgiven him. Look, it is very possible to overanalyse.

[23 : 20] It's impossible to overanalyse. And we can never forgive perfectly. We're not Jesus. But maybe it is good to think, like I was, are you still making someone pay?

Forcing someone to come up to your level when you forgive them? The silent treatment. Keeping that evil caricature of them in your head.

Gossiping about them. And in this context, is it someone at church? It's good to ask that question, isn't it?

And maybe they've not appreciated your serving. Or not looked out for you when you really needed them. Or not really ran a ministry how you think they should.

Or they just annoyed you. Or they just rubbed you up the wrong way. They just said something insensitive. It can be so normal and mundane, these things, can't it? Sometimes. But listen, the Lord is full of grace to us this morning.

[24 : 26] He has forgiven us. And he is wonderful. But we can be empowered by his spirit to forgive, knowing God's limitless forgiveness for us.

To forgive and not make people pay. Why is it so hard? Well, the nicer, kind of more natural option, I think, is to put them in prison.

And not forgive because it feels better for us. It's kind of nice to hold something over somebody. It's that sense of control and revenge.

It feels nice. That's why we do it. But only for a time. Only for a time. Because you know what?

It always imprisons you more. Living your life avoiding someone. Angry at someone. Who's actually the one controlling?

[25 : 33] Who's actually the one in prison? It's you. It's you. The world is the way it is.

Wars and bitterness and revenge. Because we enslave ourselves to the debt. To get payback.

Imprison ourselves. But Jesus comes with the most wonderfully freeing news for all of us.

And to the whole world. That we can be truly forgiven. And therefore we can forgive others. So that we can be free.

How good is that? How good is that? Even when they don't repent. Even when we don't really feel it. It's based on God's mercy isn't it?

Not our feelings. Not their repentance. The burden of bitterness can be gone. Anger can be gone. When we know God's limitless forgiveness for us.

[26 : 40] At the cross. And then we can do this. Look at verse 27 again. This becomes a model. The servant's master took pity on him.

Canceled the debt. And let him go. Have compassion. Have pity. You're a sinner just like them too. That's where it's a little bit different to God isn't it? Cancel the debt.

Absorb it like Jesus. You pay it. Let them go. Let them go free. And do you know what happens? You can be free.

You can be free. Let's pray. Father forgive them for they know not what they do.

Thank you so much that the Lord Jesus said those words. Thank you for his really kind and amazing character to want to forgive.

[27 : 46] Thank you so much. Thank you so much. Heavenly Father that through your son that you forgave a limitless debt that we owed. It's cleared. So we pray that we really would respond rightly.

That we wouldn't be anything like that servant in that parable Lord. Help us. Through the gospel through the Lord Jesus. To forgive. We pray that in Jesus name.

Take care. Take care. Take care. Take care. Take care. Take care.

Take care. Take care. Take care. Take care. Take care. Take care. Take care. Take care. Take care. Take care.

Take care. Take care. Take care. Take care. Take care. Take care. Take care. Take care. Take care. Take care.

[28 : 44] Take care. Take care.