

Apostle's Creed: The Forgiveness of Sins

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Preacher: Kent Dixon

[0 : 00] Well, good morning, Braemar Baptist. Thank you. So for anyone who may not know me, my name is Kent Dixon, and it's my privilege to be the lead pastor here. And over the next few weeks, oh, no, sorry, that's my fault.

Over the next few weeks, we'll be exploring the final few concepts in our series on the Apostles' Creed. And we'll see how in many ways, the ones that were left to cover these last few weeks are the ones that are really most personally applicable to us.

But before we continue this morning, I want to take a moment to talk about our next sermon series, which is The Story. The Story. So you've heard me talk about it a bit here and there over the past few weeks, but that video will hopefully give you a little bit more about what this series is about.

It's really a teaser. So we'll be starting our sermon series on the story on Sunday, September 8th. So I encourage you to be here for that. Between the fall and spring of 2020, believe it or not, yes, I'm planning that far ahead, week by week, we'll be exploring our way through scripture from start to finish.

And a friend of mine who is, I would say she's an atheist, I was telling her about this and she said, wow, how will people stay engaged over that long? And I said, that's up to God and it's up to me to be prepared.

[1 : 46] So if you haven't read the story, it's a fantastic book. It takes scripture and tells it in a narrative, not that it isn't already, but I encourage you to come and participate in that series because I think it'll be a great journey together.

And then starting on Tuesday, September 10th, we'll be launching a program called Food for Thought. And it's very similar to Action Night, which many of you would be familiar with.

So the evening will include a shared meal together and then I'll be leading us through an exciting new series called Discipleship Explored. We're trying new software in case you hadn't noticed.

So there we go. We're trying new software in case you haven't let the history of the Law City. We're trying new software in case you haven't played with the ■■■ore.

We're trying do some strengthening. We're you for the same time. Thank you.

[3 : 25] Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. And so I know we're all busy. It can be hard to make time during the week especially, but exploring Philippians together through this series will be a great opportunity for us to deepen our connections with one another, but also to engage God's calling for us as people here at Braemar.

So I hope to see you there. Participant books, they're very cute, they're small, they're handy, will be available at the church office and they are \$6 each, so we'll have them available at the office or at the sessions themselves.

[4 : 55] This morning we're continuing in our series on the Apostles' Creed, but before we continue this morning, I'd like us to take a moment to recite the Creed together. And as I've said before, as you read these words, as we've done this before, I invite you to think of it not simply as stating truths or facts, but as a prayer.

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth. I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary.

He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried. He descended to the dead. On the third day, he rose again.

He ascended into heaven. He is seated at the right hand of the Father and he will come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Holy Catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting.

Amen. As we continue unpacking the Creed together this morning, we come to the phrase, the forgiveness of sins. And before we get to our understanding of this phrase, as people who say we believe in Jesus, who say we follow him, I want to break it down a bit into our basic understanding of the concepts that are reflected here.

[6 : 33] What does it mean to be forgiven? The Oxford Dictionary defines the word forgive or to be forgiven as to stop feeling angry or resentful towards someone for an offense, a flaw or a mistake.

So in light of this definition, what does the concept of forgiveness clearly imply? What has to have happened for forgiveness to even be required?

Audience participation. What is required for a need for forgiveness? Feel hurt. Feel hurt.

Broken trust. Broken relationship. Offense of some kind. And you've also likely heard the expression forgive and forget.

After someone has hurt you and you have forgiven them, how easy is it for you to completely forget the initial words or actions that caused you pain or hurt feelings?

[7 : 48] Is that easy for you? I find that for me, while I'm generally very quick to forgive someone, the cause of that hurt may often linger or even become something that unfortunately stays in my memory.

And that's not to say that I haven't truly forgiven the person. More so that that initial hurt was impactful enough that it has in some way changed me.

And it may also have changed my relationship with that other person. And I believe it's critical for us to seek to be intentional about forgiving someone who has hurt us.

Because only through forgiveness are we free to move forward. Forgiveness has the power to allow us to live in the present.

Not holding on to past. Not holding on to resentment. You likely all know someone who holds anger and bitterness towards someone else for something that was done or said in the past.

[8 : 58] Maybe that person is even you. And I've heard that referred to, and I may have even said it over the weeks, as renting space, letting someone rent space in your head for free.

Because I believe it's a significant drain on us, both physically and emotionally, to hold a grudge against someone. And what does it say about us personally when we hold grudges?

When we look for opportunities to get even with someone who has hurt us? Or when we just refuse to let go? Take a moment.

Here's a homework assignment. Take a moment when you get home this afternoon to consider if there's anyone in your life that you have not forgiven.

Think about how that has made you feel over time. Because, my friends, chances are that resentment and resistance to forgive someone who has hurt you hurts you more than it will ever hurt them.

[10 : 08] And likely, more than that initial offense even hurt. So if you harbor bitterness or resentment towards someone else, have you ever stopped to think, do they even realize?

Do they even know you're angry with them? They probably don't. Forgetting a hurt that someone has caused you may be unrealistic for you right now.

And that's okay. Because it may take time. Or as I said before, it may never be possible. But ask God to help you to let go and be freed from resentment and bitterness.

And that's not just a pastor saying, oh, just let go. Just be kind. Just... No, I know it's hard. I know it's hard. And I've lived it myself. But it's possible.

And God will help you. A quote I recently said, I read, said it well. Forgiveness isn't just a kindness to others.

[11 : 16] It's a kindness to ourselves. Forgiveness isn't just a kindness to others. It's a kindness to ourselves. Because even if reconciliation may never come in that relationship, let go of that burden and give it to God.

I'm here to talk with you, to share your story, and I want to walk with you on that journey towards forgiveness. So if you're struggling with forgiving someone, come and talk to me.

I'll even be happy to listen. Because it's not easy, as I said. As humans, we have come to recognize forgiveness as something transactional, haven't we?

Someone hurt me, took something from me. So they must pay back that offense with at least an apology. Or better yet, for me, some kind of restitution.

Do you feel that way when someone has hurt you? I better at least get an apology. But where does grace come into the equation for us? If at all.

[12 : 28] As people who are accepted and forgiven by God, we must recognize His grace to us. God's forgiveness comes with no cost.

No debt. Nothing to be paid back. Isn't that rare in this world? To not owe someone for something? That, my friends, is the model of forgiveness that we have been given.

But God's forgiveness is also not a free pass. And I've talked about Christians thinking we have free passes before. It's not a free pass.

It's not something that I'm forgiven. I'm forgiven forever. True. But it's a free pass for me to go on sinning. Wrong. That cheapens grace, in my opinion.

The free grace gift of forgiveness that God has given us is an opportunity for us to draw closer in relationship with Him. Because we can be open and honest with God about our need, about our weaknesses.

[13 : 42] Because guess what? He already knows them. He knows that we need Him. So we need to be unafraid to be vulnerable to God.

Just as with a human relationship, we're called to recognize that what we've done has caused hurt or separation in our relationship with God.

But unlike with a human relationship, where forgiveness from someone else may be withheld, even when we apologize. Have you apologized to someone and felt like, yeah, I said the words.

That wasn't really received. You can feel it. That's not what it's like with God. Because through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, we can be confident that God will always forgive us.

Always. It's impossible for us as Christians not to consider what God asks in response. This is not payback.

[14 : 52] This is God asks us in response to our confession of sin and His gift of forgiveness.

How often do we stop there? I'm forgiven. Good. I sinned. I'm forgiven. I confess. I'm good. But Scripture shows us clearly how as forgiven ones, those who are forgiven, we are called to forgive.

With God, forgiveness is a two-way street. The Bible says in Matthew 6, 12, 14, and 15, when Jesus taught His disciples to pray, let's read this together.

And forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors. But, here's the but, for if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.

But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins. catch that?

[16 : 15] So, how often do we say, forgive us our sins? Good. Perfect. Oh, I have to forgive? Oh, that's different. It's important to remember.

Because I think too often we read the words of the Lord's Prayer and we may only hear our part of the equation. Is that fair?

Am I right? We may miss that for God, forgiveness is a two-way street. And our own forgiveness actually rests upon our willingness to forgive others.

Ouch. Yes, God knows what we're going to confess to Him. What we're going to ask Him for forgiveness about.

That's not a surprise to Him. It's not unknown to Him. Before we even tell Him, God knows full well every situation in which we have stubbornly refused to forgive someone else.

[17 : 29] Oh, I'm not going to... Why would I accept an apology? Why would I do that? They hurt my feelings. Do we hold that power over other people? My friends, your forgiveness hinges on forgiving others.

Don't let your stubbornness, your bitterness towards someone else over how they've hurt you or made you angry stand in the way of God's grace for you.

Because God's forgiveness is a critical aspect of your relationship with Him. And we don't have time this morning to get into the idea of God's judgment.

But if you're holding back from forgiving someone because you feel in your heart that they have wronged you some way, if you're seeking justice, ask God to help you let go of that.

Because our God is the God of justice. Justice is God's alone. Let even your perceived righteous anger towards someone, let it go.

[18 : 46] Because justice, again, belongs to God alone. Trust Him that His will will be done.

Another important concept that we recognize in our phrase this morning is the word sin. When I say that word, it's heavy, isn't it?

Because we can take it too lightly, we can take it too heavily, too simply, sin. And over the course of our series, I've talked about this before, that we recognize that many times language, the words that we choose, the words that we use, carry weight.

And often baggage. The word sin is one of those words that causes people, both Christians and non-Christians, to bristle a little bit, doesn't it?

But why is that? I believe that for people who don't recognize or follow God, the word sin, that word, may actually reinforce the idea that Christians are judgmental, that we are self-righteous, that we're repressed or in some way even deluded.

[20 : 19] Sin? Oh, I can do whatever I want. Everything is good. The world seems to see the desire to follow guidelines, whether simply moral ones or certainly biblical ones, as somehow denying ourselves in some way.

Have you recognized that in society? By following guidelines that Jesus gave us or biblical principles, Christians are somehow seen as not living their lives to the full potential.

Right? For Christians, I believe we also can take the idea of sin too far when we beat ourselves up about it.

If we set unrealistic expectations for ourselves or measure ourselves against brothers or sisters, we may somehow arbitrarily deem to be more righteous or holy than we are.

do you see that in yourself? A tendency to self-judge? A tendency to think, I should not have done that. And I've talked to you about that before.

[21 : 31] We're very quick to criticize ourselves or sometimes not quick enough. But is that something that you can relate to this morning? A sense of self-judgment?

A sense of judging others self-righteously? To go to the definition itself, sin can be defined in so many ways.

It's such a heavy word. And in a basic sense, the word sin has become somewhat oversimplified to the point where it's become equated with right or wrong.

If you sin, that was wrong. I talked to a friend of mine before the service started this morning, and I said, how do you define sin? And he said, bad things, and laughed.

And I said, right, that's how we define it, right? I did something bad, I sinned. And in our post-Christian society, the word sin alone has become directly tied to religious people.

[22 : 34] And certainly a worldview that, as I said before, people perceive as judgmental, repressed. When we ask ourselves, what is sin?

I would think the majority of us think of the Ten Commandments first, right? Lying, murder, adultery, honoring our parents.

That one doesn't always hit the radar quite as high as the others. So on. And that's certainly part of it. And I think for most of us, even within our limited definitions, we perceive some of these commandments, some of these sins in the Ten Commandments, to be somehow on a different level than the others.

Our perception of degrees of sin is likely another sermon series. Because we think of them in different levels, don't we?

We think of, okay, murder, really bad, really, really bad. Nah, not honoring your parents, really that big a deal? somehow sexual sin?

[23 : 40] Well, that's way out there. We can't even begin to talk about it. Because somehow it's far, far, far worse. Is it? It's different, but is it worse?

The original sense in the Greek, New Testament Greek, hamartia, is failure, being in error, missing the mark.

And I found this interesting, especially in relation to spear throwing. So I think if you throw a spear at someone, that's sinful. And then the Hebrew word hata originates in archery, and it literally refers to missing the gold, missing the center of the target.

And then sin, according to a Greek concordance, is defined as missing the mark. So we see that concept. And it shouldn't surprise us that the doctrine of sin is essential to Christianity, because it's directly tied to the idea of redemption, the idea of restored relationship with God through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

Christ. And as I prepared this sermon this week, I was seeking to maintain a balance between reminding us of our sin and our need to confess to God so that we can be forgiven, but also to remind us of God's grace and great love for us.

[25 : 24] Do you see those two concepts? concepts are so important. Our sin and our need to confess that for forgiveness, but also we have God's grace.

So there's a lot of, but what about kind of questions that come about. Things this morning that may be resonating with you personally have come from my own heart as well.

What is sin? What does my sin look like? Am I aware of it? Do I confess it? These are important things because I think very often we oversimplify the realities of sin and forgiveness.

Or, as I said before, we may even make them more complex than they need to be. I recognize in myself the reality that if I was not forgiven by God, I would be hopelessly lost.

I see in myself pride and stubbornness, Michelle, be quiet, defiance, and so many other selfish, sinful traits in myself.

[26 : 39] When I stop and immerse myself in the ugliness of my sinful behavior, it makes me somewhat sick. And I often pause to thank God for His goodness to me and for His forgiveness.

And that forgiveness is something that I have never earned or deserved, but I so desperately need every day.

And I hope you can relate. The Bible says in Psalm 133 and 4, let's read it together, if you, Lord, keep a record of sins, Lord, who could stand?

But with you there is forgiveness so that we can, with reverence, serve you. Sin and forgiveness are ultimately relational for us.

We choose what we want for our lives when we sin, whether we do that consciously or not. We choose to act in our own best interests rather than submitting to God's will for our lives.

[27 : 58] Sin and forgiveness are also intimately connected as Christians. Jesus. The Bible says in Romans 3 23, again, let's say this together, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.

God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement through the shedding of his blood to be received by faith. Jesus paid that cost of our sin and only by faith in God can we receive that gift.

My friends, that gift is ours. It's freely given when it is recognized and accepted by us.

The Bible also says in Ephesians 2, 8-10, let's read this together as well. For it is by grace you have been saved through faith and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God, not by works so that no one can boast.

For we are God's handiwork created in Christ Jesus to do good works which God prepared in advance for us to do.

[29 : 30] I recognize that concept of repentance is a huge one. And we could spend a great deal of time on it but we simply can't talk about sin and forgiveness without recognizing it.

Because this is really where the whole concept of it being not merely transactional. transactional would be we sin we receive forgiveness done and done but this is transformational because we sin we receive forgiveness and we are called to what repent of our sin.

in biblical Hebrew the concept of repentance is represented by two verbs shuv which means to return and naham which is fun to say which means to feel sorrow.

Do you see the richness and depth of meaning there? To return and to feel sorrow. And in the New Testament the word is translated the word translated as repentance is the Greek word *metanoia* which is a compound of the words *meta* which means after or with and *noia* which means to think or perceive.

So in essence the translation of repentance in Greek then is to think differently after. the Bible says in Acts 3:19 let's read this together as well repent then and turn to God so that your sins may be wiped out that times of refreshing may come from the Lord and that he may send the Messiah who has been appointed to you even Jesus.

[31 : 43] As Christians we are called to confess our sins then repent of our sins seeking to think and act differently as we receive God's forgiveness that is freely given to us.

And in repenting of our sin God promises to as we read here refresh us and through Jesus restore our relationship with him.

Authors Raymond Kanata and Joshua Ratano provide a really interesting perspective. You can just listen because this is a lot of reading. Our whole culture is built on the notion that we get what we earn and our pop culture teaches us that heaven is the exclusive reward of good people.

So if you say that you know you're going to heaven it's just assumed that you're arrogant that you think you've somehow earned your place in heaven. But that's not what Christianity teaches about heaven or salvation.

The Apostles Creed reminds us of this when it states I believe in the forgiveness of sins. if you're a Christian what is your hope?

[33 : 07] That your good outweighs your bad? That you're better than the woman sitting next to you? No. The Creed reminds us that our true hope our only hope is that Jesus made it possible for our sins to be forgiven.

My friends I stand here this morning as your brother in Christ. As a fellow sinner who has received the same grace as you from our loving Father.

Let's seek that forgiveness that freely given gift of grace and be people that turn from our own desires for ourselves that bring fleeting fulfillment at best to God's desires for us that bring fulfillment unlike any other.

If you're here this morning and you're struggling with being able to forgive as I said earlier if you're struggling with being able to get over hurt feelings us.

It's not about getting over it. We hear that and we say that to people. Get over it. Or you'll get over it one day. It's not about getting over it because you've been changed for better or worse by the actions of other people.

[34 : 41] You're different now than you were before. But if you're struggling with trying to forgive someone, trying to let go of what someone has done that has hurt you, I'd love to talk with you about that or even just listen to what you're going through.

And if you're here this morning and you find yourself struggling with sin in your life or with the idea that God's forgiveness is somehow yours, through Jesus Christ, you can talk with me or one of our elders or someone else about that as well.

Because I want us to be a community of people who seek to forgive as freely as we have been forgiven by God.

Let's pray. Father God, thank you for your forgiveness. You're a great love for us. Thank you that you recognize who we are in spite of our sin and that our sin does not define us.

Father, help us to not define ourselves by our sin, not define ourselves by our failures. What we have done that we perceive has hurt you or hurt others or hurt ourselves.

[36 : 13] And Father, as you have called us to repent, as you've called us to think differently after, help us to remember to repent, to remember to consciously come to you with the things that we have done, because you know them anyway.

and confession and repentance brings healed relationship with you, with others, and with ourselves.

We pray these things in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.