

Forgiveness

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[0 : 00] Even I am he who blots out your transgressions for my own sake and remembers your sin no more. Psalm 103. The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, if we don't know these verses.

Abounding in love, he will not always accuse, nor will he harbour his anger forever. He does not treat us as our sins deserve, or repay us according to our iniquities.

For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him. As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.

1 John. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another. And the blood of Jesus, his son, purifies us from all sin.

As I said, we've covered all this already this morning. And we've been flowing through the beauty of that forgiveness. Forgiveness flows through the very essence of our relationship with our God.

[1 : 17] God sent his son. God sent his son. His son to shed his blood so our sins could be forgiven. Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered.

The heart of our relationship with God is based on who he is and what he has done for us. Without his forgiveness, we have no relationship. We have peace though, through Christ Jesus our Lord.

As a coming to preach to you this morning, you can't escape the fact that we've just come through Easter.

And on Easter, I happened to be in Italy, in Naples, where we sent Aoife Bevel. And we're supporting Aoife to help in a church plant there.

[2 : 18] And I sat in the first meeting of that church plant, which was a great blessing to be there. But because my Italian is very weak and the service was in Italian, I was really picking up every maybe third sentence.

I was able to follow. But because of that, one particular sentence, and I'm not going to try and repeat it in Italian. And the preacher said, We are blessed to know that Jesus said, Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.

That is the message of God to us in forgiveness. He forgives us. Because behind it all, he knows that when it gets right down to it, we, as clever as we may think we are, most of the time don't even understand what we're doing when we're doing it.

And the treasure we have in the gospel is that Jesus went on the cross and said, Father, forgive. And he has shed his blood so that we can have that forgiveness.

And therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. It's worth repeating that over and over and over again to ourselves.

[3 : 44] We have access to that. As we have been reminded this morning, through song and prayer, and how Johnny reminded us even as we looked at those verses from Colossians first thing this morning.

We have access to that forgiveness if we are born again, if we are saved, if we are in Christ Jesus, if the grace of God has gifted us the faith to understand that, to know that we have been rescued and brought from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light, the kingdom of the sun.

So if you're not, hear the voice of God talking to you now. And if you are, lift your hearts and thank Jesus.

Thank Jesus for his shed blood so that you know the truth of this forgiveness. I was glad that we had that emphasis this morning and I wanted to emphasize all those things as we come because from here on, I'm going to be talking about how that forgiveness reflects in our hearts and how we live our life out amongst each other.

Because not only are we forgiven, but we are told that we must forgive. Matthew chapter 6 verse 14 For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.

[5 : 19] But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins. Matthew 18, 35 This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart.

Mark 11, 25 And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive them so that your Father in heaven may forgive you and your sins.

The picture of forgiveness flowing from God to us and from us out to each other and out into the world to me is beautiful.

When I was driving down this morning, I had an opportunity to do something on a Sunday morning I normally don't do. I was flicking through radio stations, seeing what the world is talking about on a Sunday morning because I'm currently blessed to live two minutes away from where I fellowship. So there's no time to listen to anything in the car. It's a nice thing on a Sunday morning. But this morning I heard poets talking about the life of poetry.

[6 : 32] I heard songwriters talking about songwriting. I heard, and I'm not going to get into it now, but I heard a very well-known celebrity talking about their decadent lifestyle.

And I asked the Lord to show me how to love that person as they gloried in their rebellion. And then I flicked on and I heard opera.

And I like opera. Sorry. I'm not a huge buff, but I heard Renata Tabaldi.

And if you're into it, what a beautiful voice. And she was singing Puccini. And as I drove along, that voice and that music lifted my heart and made my soul sing.

And I thought to myself, does my soul still sing like that when I consider how much God has forgiven me?

[7 : 36] Listening to Renata Tabaldi this morning was like having my ears washed with liquid gold. That's how it felt like to me. And I said to myself, do I still consider how my soul has been washed with something more precious than liquid gold?

the blood of Jesus? And do I respond in the right way to Him and to all of you and to all of my brothers and sisters?

Do you still want to respond that way? Do you still look at yourself full in the glory of the grace of God and recognize how far you've come and lift your heart and say, thank you Jesus.

Thank you God. Thank you Lord Holy Spirit for working in my life to make these things known to me. In that moment of recognizing that forgiveness and what we are to do, we see the beauty of the love of God.

And in the quantity that that forgiveness is lavished on us, we should lavish that forgiveness on one another, our brothers and sisters. Luke chapter 6, verse 36.

[8 : 56] Be merciful just as your Father is merciful. Luke 11 and Luke 17. Forgive us our sins for we also forgive everyone who sins against us and lead us not into temptation.

Even if they sin against you seven times in a day and seven times come back to you saying, I repent, you must forgive them. Forgiveness is central to our peace with God but forgiveness is also central to our peace in general.

In the verses that we've just looked at and the thoughts we've been just bringing out, God has made it clear that it is His desire that we be at peace with Him and with all men as much as we are able. To forgive freely as we have been forgiven. to forgive without limits. That's really easy, isn't it? So easy to forgive without limits.

I have no problem with that. Liar. It's really hard for us as people to forgive without limits especially when the same things seem to be happening around us.

[10 : 09] but we have to fight in that struggle to seek to do it in God's way not our own way. In our lives forgiveness it serves the most obvious things to resolve conflicts to remove resentments and forgiveness is an expression of our righteousness through Christ Jesus lived out.

and whether we like it or not and it's been said several times already we are told to forgive. We can have no real hope of resolving conflicts if we have no heart to forgive.

And we cannot set limits on what we are willing to forgive or how many times we are willing to forgive. in as much as God's boundless love has covered our boundless sin we are to forgive our brothers and sisters in Christ endlessly.

Everybody knows this verse I think if you've spent any time in church. Matthew 18 verse 21 Then Peter came to Jesus and asked Lord how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me?

Up to seven times? Yeah good man. And Jesus answered I tell you not seven times but 77 times. [11:36] We know what Jesus was saying there. Don't put a limit on it. And just as we live in our life in general don't limit it to your brothers and sisters.

Our heart is to be of love and forgiveness for those not outside the church as well. How can we hope to want to love them? But I tell you love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. What's an enemy? An enemy is not somebody who's just mildly upsetting you causing you a little discomfort. An enemy is somebody who's totally opposed to everything you are and everything you want and everything you hope for.

How are you going to love an enemy? Unless you have the heart to forgive. Now I don't want anyone to misunderstand either.

I did not and I am not saying that you must ignore the sin that is done to you. I'm not saying that you have to blithely go by and say ignore it.

[12:43] The wrongs that are done may be dealt with if you wish. If you wish the wrongs may be dealt with.

But our pattern has to be the one that we're given. Matthew 18 15 to 17 again I'm sure I'm not sharing anything new with you if you are in the fellowship for any length of time.

If you are in the church of Christ for any length of time you will know that Jesus said if your brother sins against you go and show him his fault just between the two of you.

If he listens to you you have won your brother over. But if he will not listen take one or two others along so that every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.

If he refuses to listen to them tell it to the church and if he refuses to listen even to the church treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector. You do not have to suffer in silence but neither do you have the right to add further sin and injury on top of a previous injury.

[14:04] In all things we are to be biblically minded. We are to be faithful to the desires of Jesus in our lives. He wants us plainly speaking to be peacemakers not troublemakers.

Verse 15 If your brother sins against you go and show him his fault just between the two of you. If he listens to you you have won your brother over.

There is the first part of the model of how we are to deal with these issues if we feel wronged. It dictates our attitude too. It's so easy to feel aggrieved.

It really is so easy to feel aggrieved. How many times have you felt aggrieved and had that feeling of hurt that you've been wronged? And it builds up a head of steam inside you.

And you can get to the point of rather than really wanting restoration and reconciliation you really just wanted the other person put in their place. To show them how wrong they are.

[15:18] Even if you let it stew for too long building up that momentum that you just want to ring from their mouth an apology so that you can say yes I was right.

You were wrong. And if you do that sometimes before you even get to that point you've told this person or you've told another person.

Sometimes we can even be very clever and dress it up saying I'm looking for prayer. I just want to pray about this. And we're avoiding the fact that what we should have done is gone to the person. Building ourselves up getting ready to put the other person in their place. setting them straight. Letting them know what they need to know. And forgetting that what we're supposed to do is pray and then go to the person.

Pray then say to the person. Just between the two of you. And it means just that. Speak to the person. Speak to them.

[16:32] What happens next is a different matter. Only if the person refuses to resolve are we to do anything else. And still what's the purpose of it?

Not to show the other person how wrong they were. The real purpose is reconciliation restoration. And restoration. We have to have the heart to want to say something, to fix something. a gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger. We have to be careful. And even if we have been wronged, it doesn't mean we have to actually seek out the person. We can choose to forgive and let it go.

You don't have to correct everybody, you know. you can choose to analyze the thing and go, that can be left. I can choose to forgive.

[17 : 37] It certainly doesn't mean you seek revenge or retribution. That seems fairly basic. That's God's job anyway. It's mine to avenge, I will repay, says the Lord.

So if you have been grievously hurt, you can still forgive and trust that God will deal with somebody else's sin. We're not told to overcome evil with evil.

We're told to overcome evil with good. It's not an eye for a nine. Jesus said, turn the other cheek.

Be careful in your responses. If somebody forces you to go one mile, dig in your heels and refuse to go the second. That's what it says, isn't it? No, it says, go two.

But we have fallen so often and so easily into the counsel of what the world says, stand your corner, fight your ground, don't be a doormat.

[18 : 42] That's one that I hear all the time, but we're not meant to be doormats. And people use that as going, well, I am going to stand up for myself and I am going to show that person that I'm the one who's right here.

And straight away we're in dangerous territory, we're on dangerous ground. Even Christ corrected, even Christ scolded.

Read what he said to the Pharisees. Look what he did in the temple. But, they were particular groups.

Look how he dealt with his own when he had to correct. He was, for the most part, so gentle with his own.

And he covers us in his forgiving love and he tells us, well, we must do the same or else we're just like the rest of the world. We must act out in love. We know these verses too.

[19 : 44] What is love? Well, love is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no records of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil, but rejoices with the truth.

And when we're looking at these things that we have to deal with in our heart of forgiveness and in our troubles and our challenges, do we really want the truth to come out, or do we just want our version of the truth to be accepted?

It's so easy to get into the mindset of rebuking rather than reconciliation. As brothers and sisters, we have a responsibility to mind each other.

So if somebody's going wrong, yes, we should get alongside somebody and help them to return. But rebuking, that may not be your job.

It's your elder's job, maybe at times. It's definitely God's job. And trust God. Protecting somebody from sin is not the same thing as putting them in their place.

[21 : 03] It's not. Look at David. He's been pursued by King Saul. Look at 1 Samuel 24.

David had the opportunity to take his revenge on Saul. But he didn't. He showed him respect and honour. Revenge is mine, says the Lord.

And here, I think, is the part that I have had to talk to people about on so many occasions. And here's the part that can really tick us off, folks.

There is no limit to the number of times we are meant to forgive. that is hard for us to accept as people. Because we don't like being hurt repeatedly.

It hurts us. It makes us feel rotten and brow beaten and low and sad. It makes us cry.

[22 : 10] I put my hand up. I've cried. I've cried in my fellowship. at some of the things that have been said to me. But that doesn't give me the right to do anything else other than what Christ Jesus has done for me and forgive.

When Peter comes to the Lord, he says, Lord, how many times? And the Lord says, not seven, but seven times seventy. in the measure that we are forgiven, we must forgive.

Now that verse is taken out of a much longer passage in Matthew chapter 18. verse 23.

And he says, therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wants to settle accounts with his servants. And he goes on to tell the parable of the servant who is forgiven much. And what is his response?

He goes out and he seeks retribution, let's use that word, against those who owe him. And the king is furious. And the king says, in the measure, paraphrasing it, that you have been forgiven, you should have forgiven others.

[23 : 30] You can read that later to remind yourself. In the measure that we are forgiven, we need to forgive. We have to guard our hearts against developing a spirit of unforgiveness and

resentment.

It seems obvious to say it, but resentment is the enemy of forgiveness. Resentment leads to unforgiveness. And both of those things are poisonous instruments that the devil uses in our lives. Resentment is poison. Augustine said many, many, many, many, many, many, many, many, centuries ago, resentment is like drinking poison and expecting the other person to die.

That has been used many times by different people. About three years ago, I actually heard Peter Andre say it, believe it or not. But it has its original use in terms of our spirit of forgiveness that flows from God to us and us out.

But resentment is like drinking poison and expecting somebody else to die. Satan loves unforgiveness because it wraps up individuals in anger and hate and strife.

[25 : 00] It destroys fellowships. It splits churches. God loves forgiveness. Forgiveness breaks chains.

We were chained in sin. What broke the chains? Forgiveness. God loves forgiveness.

Forgiveness breaks chains. Unforgiveness binds chains around us. Unforgiveness towards other people, brothers and sisters, those outside our fellowship.

Unforgiveness puts chains of their sin back around us. When we don't forgive, we are taking the sin of somebody else, tying it to ourselves and carrying it on.

And often that person is completely unaware that you've loaded yourself with their sin and are dragging it around. unforgiveness.

[26 : 02] And that's when we're defeated in unforgiveness. Satan has the victory there. Here's an idea. Let's put one over on Satan.

Let's forgive each other quickly and not give him even the slightest foothold in our relationships with one another. And always listen to Jesus and remember that's the truth that sets us free.

Corrie Ten Boom said of forgiveness. Forgiveness is the key that unlocks the door of resentment and the handcuffs of hate.

It is a power that breaks the chains of bitterness and the shackles of selfishness. I talk to people about this a lot in my role.

And I keep getting asked, but what about my apology? But what about them making it right? Well, yeah, that should happen where it is possible.

[27 : 10] But in some cases, that's never going to happen. There are cases where there are hurts and sin, wrong doing, where you're never going to get an apology.

You're going to hang on and hang on and hang on carrying the weight of that other person's wrongdoing around with you. What if the person has died?

You can't ring an apology from a dead person. What if the person lives 12,000 miles away and you have no contact with them? It's my personal experience, folks.

Somebody did something absolutely horrendous to me. Sorry, I was just looking around at the profile.

I want you to know this because I'm not speaking from a point of going, I've not looked at these issues and had to deal with them myself. before I was a Christian, I was a complete and utter basket case.

[28 : 26] When I was a child, I was abused by a woman. It caused me huge problems all through my teenage years into my adulthood.

I went for secular counseling in my 20s. Thankfully, somebody dragged me there because at that point I was in a bad way. The secular counselor helped me to deal with the anger.

So I stopped being angry. But I can tell you now that every morning I woke up and I opened my eyes, the first thing I thought about every day, every day, was what that person had done to me.

And then I became a Christian and I learned about forgiveness. And I learned about what I'd been forgiven. And over time, I realized that I had to forgive people.

And it hit me straight in the face one day that whether I liked it or not, for me to be free of what that person had done, I had to forgive.

[29 : 35] That person was living 12,000 miles away. I couldn't walk up to the door and say, hey, I want a word. There's no point in arguing with me. What you've done is wrong. There's no point in, there's no need for me to lay it out.

There's no excuse for what you did. What you did is wrong. It can't be excused. There's no argument. Irrelevant. What I had to do was get on my knees and pray to God for the strength to

forgive.

I know that some of these things that are in our lives are not easy to forgive. And I prayed and I prayed and I prayed and I prayed. I can even remember one morning I got on my knees and I said, I forgive, name to the person.

I forgive you for what you've done. I forgive you for the damage it's caused. I forgive you. And I stopped, I lifted my head and I went, oh well God, you and I both know that that was a joke. Because I wasn't there yet. But I got there and I stopped waking up every morning with it being the first thing. and it set me free from what they had done.

[30 : 42] Now that's a heavy story but I am just sharing it at this moment. I had no intention of doing that when I stood up here this morning. But as I read the sentence I said I must share this.

I'm not talking to you from a position where I've not had to deal with tough stuff. But as I've looked through too, I've realized that as I saw what I needed to forgive, I also saw what I needed to seek forgiveness for because shock, surprise, none of us are perfect.

You don't need an apology to forgive someone. As long as you don't forgive them, their sin will continue to hurt you. It doesn't matter what it is.

I had somebody who was counseled by a secular counselor to write a long letter to somebody who had hurt them detailing all the hurts and then send it to the person.

It destroyed that relationship forever. The person had done this before they came to me and I asked them to go back to the person and ask for forgiveness for sending that list of things that happened 20 years ago.

[31 : 59] And then I said to the person, now you go and pray to forgive them and try and forget about that list. They're still working through it. We need to break the chain of hurt. Break the chain, the anchor of unforgiveness that is keeping us locked in the past.

As Christ hung on the cross, he cried out, Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing. Most people don't even realize they're doing things to hurt us.

sinless. It's the sad reality of our fallen and broken nature that most of the time we don't even realize we're doing things that hurt one another. But we need to look to heaven to see what we do next.

And although it can be said that Christ and his perfect sinlessness was able to do these things and we're just people, we have the power of God with us.

And we are to be ruled by the Spirit of God. And we know what the fruit of the Spirit is. And the Spirit should dictate how we react in each situation.

[33 : 06] It should rule our every response in every situation. And one thing that should tell us that we have no right to withhold forgiveness from anybody comes from Christ.

Psalm 25 verse 11 tells us, For the sake of your name O Lord, forgive my iniquity though it is great. Forgive my iniquity.

Forgive my sin. Not one of us gets in here clean. Jonathan Edwards said, Christ will forgive any sinner.

Christ will not refuse to save the greatest sinners who in a right manner come to God for mercy.

This is his work. It is the honor of Christ to save the greatest sinners when they come to him, just as it is the honor of a physician to cure the most desperate disease or wounds.

Christ will forgive any sinner. We have no right to withhold forgiveness from anybody, but especially not our brothers and sisters. Colossians chapter 3 verse 13.

[34 : 17] Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. As in all things, Christ is our example.

He is the perfect example to us. He has redeemed us and he is the one we are to model. When they hurled their insults at him, he didn't retaliate.

When he suffered, he made no threats. We have to have the attitude of Christ. And we, in this, as in all things, are more than conquerors, because we can do all things through Christ.

It doesn't mean it's easy to get there. And that's why we need to live in the power of the Spirit of God. And we need to recognize to live like this will take commitment and faithfulness on our part.

we're given all we need for a life of holiness, for a life of godliness, but we'll never fully experience it unless we make the effort to be entirely entwined with Jesus.

[35 : 33] You can't have a casual attitude to Jesus and to the Word of God and really expect to lay hold of the treasures of heaven.

God has expressed his love to us through forgiveness and we know this because while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. It's an expression of his unending, unshakable, unbreakable, never fading, always faithful love to us.

And we know that we have the righteousness of Christ when we live as he intended. inasmuch as God's boundless love covers our boundless sin, we are to forgive our brothers and sisters as we seek to love them as Christ did.

Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did. Whoever loves his brother lives in the light and there is nothing in him to make him stumble. But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks around in the darkness.

He does not know where he is going because the darkness has blinded him. I write to you, dear children, because your sins have been forgiven on account of his name. Luke chapter 6, verse 36.

[36 : 51] Be merciful just as your father is merciful. And never forget, in forgiving others you are set free, free from the chain of others' sin.

and free to love as fully intended. In conclusion, forgive. It sets you free. It confounds Satan. And it pleases the Lord. Amen.