

Forgiveness

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[0:00] Forgiveness is so important in the gospel and it is so important in the effect that the gospel has on the sort of relationships that we have together.

! Let me just give you a couple of examples. So you remember, I've said this before, about the person in Northern Ireland who had suffered terribly in the troubles and said, as I recall it, I am a Christian, therefore I can't forgive them.

And I think that can't be right, can it? If we're Christians, we have an orientation towards forgiveness, no matter what awful things people have done for us.

So I offer that as one starting thought and let me offer you another starting thought. We've dipped into a BBC programme called Split. It's about divorces. It is a horrible theme because people sin against each other, but there's no viable method for forgiveness.

And that is just an awful situation, isn't it? If there is no forgiveness, there is no means of forgiveness, there is no logic of forgiveness, then relationships are in this horrible, stuck, hopeless situation.

[1:46] And I believe that the gospel is different to that. And that's what I'd like us to think about this evening. We're going to come to the Lord's table and remember that the Lord has forgiven us.

And if we've really got the heart of that, that should alter the way we think about relationships with other people. It says in the Lord's Prayer, doesn't it, forgive our sins as we forgive those who trespass against us.

And if there isn't a heart of forgiveness within us, it calls into question whether we've really received forgiveness from the Lord Jesus. That's the thought of thought I'd like us to develop through the course of this evening.

Let's start off by reading Psalm 103, which among the many things, the many marvellous things that it says, does speak about the forgiveness of our sins.

Psalm 103 says this. Praise the Lord.

[2:51] Psalm 103. Sorry, I'm getting a bit quick. Psalm 103.

Praise the Lord, my soul, all my inmost being. Praise his holy name. Praise the Lord, my soul, and forget not all his benefits, who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion, who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagles.

The Lord works righteousness and justice for all the oppressed. He made known his ways to Moses, his deeds to the people of Israel.

The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast 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.

[4:29] As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us. I'm going to stop there. That's the bit I wanted to draw to our attention.

The psalmist, he's in the Old Testament, isn't he? He can't see the cross of Christ, but he still can say this is the way God works. He does not keep on accusing us.

I remember what you did. I remember what you said. He does not always accuse us. He does not treat us as our sins deserve. As far as the east is from the west, that direction, that direction, that's how far he's removed our transgressions from us.

And I think the Philippian jailer got the hang of that this morning. And that's why he, as he believed, he was filled with joy. That is just such tremendous good news, isn't it?

As far as the east is from the west, that's how far he's removed our transgressions from us. So can we sing a version of Psalm 103?

[5:40] You need a hymn book if you haven't actually got one. Can we do it in Psalm 103b? Praise my soul, the King of heaven, to his feet your tribute bring.

And this is the one that says, ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven. Who like me his praise should sing. Yeah, we can sing this coming. Let's pray.

Lord, we thank you that you are the God of grace. We thank you that Christianity is a religion of grace. We thank you that we have come to know you as the God of grace.

And please grant that, even though we might be tired this evening, we pray that our thoughts and hearts might be captivated to the great focal point of grace at the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And pray that as we commune together and we eat bread and drink wine, that our hearts would be again moved to faith and gratitude.

[6:49] And as it were, we're feeding on Jesus Christ, who will feed even people like us with the riches of the benefits of his cross.

Do grant this, we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Let's look at Colossians 3. Colossians. Colossians. 1-1-8-4.

Colossians 3. So this, so Colossians, and by the time we've got to chapter 3, we have been, it's been emphasized to us that the gospel, the new covenant is in Christ.

We are rooted in Christ, we are rooted in Christ, we are rooted in Christ, built up in Christ.

Everything is to do with him. And all the Jewish stuff which pointed us to Christ is now behind us.

[8:04] It is something that, the purpose of which was to point us to Christ. And our orientation is towards him. And it's not going back to the old signs and symbols.

So he says in chapter 2, verse 16, Do not let anyone judge you on what you eat or drink or rely on a religious festival, a new moon celebration or a Sabbath day.

These things are a shadow of the things that were to come. The substance, the reality is found in Christ. So we're heading and pointing ourselves towards the Lord Jesus Christ.

And in chapter 3, he says, Since then you have been raised with Christ. Set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.

Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.

[9:04] When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. It's profoundly Christ-centered, isn't it?

You're raised with Christ. Set your hearts and your minds on Christ. The things to do with him. And one day when he appears, we too will be like him.

We will appear with him in glory. Which is something to get our heads around, isn't it? It's not what we're ordinary thinking about when we watch the news. But this is what we are actually to think about.

And when we come to verse 12, Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience.

What a lovely set of adjectives. Are they adjectives? No, they're nouns. What a lovely set of nouns they are. These are the things that characterize how Christ has dealt with us.

[10:20] And they now are to clothe us. That's to be our business, if you like, to be like that. Clothed with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience.

Bear with each other. And forgive one another. If any of you has a grievance against someone, forgive as the Lord forgave you.

That's the bit that stuck in my mind. We're to forgive one another as the Lord forgave us. And how did he forgive us? Totally.

Completely. Our sins are washed away. As far as the east is from the west. That's how far he removes our transgressions from us. He doesn't dig it all back up again.

He said, yeah, but I remember when you said, that's all gone. All forgotten. Buried in the deepest sea. Yes, that's good enough for me.

[11:27] I shall live eternally. Praise God. My sins are gone. It's a chorus, isn't it? And he says in verse 14, over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

So there's a completeness about this mindset and this sort of heart attitude. Because I think that's where it comes from. It's not patterns of rule keeping.

It is a heart attitude which spills over or expresses itself in the things that we say, the way we think about people, the way we react to people, the way we respond to people.

There is a logic to it. And it says, if Christ forgave me so much, who am I to withhold forgiveness for other people?

Just going back to that theme of the BBC TV series, it's about marital unfaithfulness, about marriage promises broken and marital unfaithfulness.

[12:30] It's a horrible situation to be in. You can feel the bleakness of the characters who find themselves so tangled up and things like that.

I heard of a testimony of a Christian woman whose husband had been unfaithful and she forgave him. That was a costly thing to do. And the question was, how could you forgive him?

And the answer was, I realise how much Christ has forgiven me. And I think that's a really deep dynamic, isn't it, in our relationships.

We have been obnoxious to the Lord Jesus Christ in our lives and he forgives us. Who are we to withhold forgiveness from other people?

I'm not saying that we should be naive or irresponsible or thoughtless. But nevertheless, there is something quite deep here, isn't there, about the way the Lord deals with us and about the way we deal with one another.

[13:36] I'll read the sentence again. Bear with each other, forgive one another. If any of you has a grievance against someone, forgive as the Lord forgave you.

And that's what we're coming to think about around the table, isn't it? About how the Lord has forgiven us. Shall we sing something? Shall we sing 804? Shall we bring our focus specifically to the cross?

So Romans chapter 3, verse 21. In this part of Romans, he is building up his reasoning to Jewish people who might be tempted to think because they know what God's law is, that's fine.

They are right with God. And he says, no, all the law does is show you how wrong you are with God. And then Gentile people who didn't have the law and the gospel is for them too.

And he says, both Jew and Gentile need this gospel. And if we think about the Old Testament, we thought about Psalm 103 and how the writer there could say, as far as the East is from the West, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.

[15:16] But how could he say that? What intervention in time and space could make it possible for somebody to say that? And that's why in 321, Paul says, now, now, now the cross, now Christ has died on the cross.

Now we can see where this all comes from. But now, apart from the law, the righteousness of God has been made known.

To which the law and the prophets testify. They point us to this. But the righteousness itself, this gift of forgiveness, if you like, this gift of being right with God, is given through the faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.

It's just the same. There's no difference between Jew and Gentile, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. And Jew and Gentile alike, all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Jesus Christ.

They are justified freely. It's sort of the idea of gratuitously. There's no particular reason why he should do that. A friend of my dad's was walking along the beach in North Wales.

[16:40] And a guy came up to him and knocked him in the face and knocked out one of his teeth. And my dad said, well, what did you do to deserve that? And he said, nothing. I was just, he just did it for no reason at all.

I don't know why he knocked me in the face. I was just bizarre. There was no reason for it. And here, that same thought is, there's no reason why God should forgive us freely. It is a free, unprovoked gift. And it comes through Jesus Christ. If you want to look at the reason, he's the reason. Because not of what we have done, but what he has done through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.

God put him forward as a sacrifice of atonement through the shedding of his blood to be received by faith. That's the sort of nitty gritty thing, isn't it?

That the cross is a sacrificial act. It is a blood shedding act, like the blood sacrifices in the Old Testament.

[17:46] And we are to look at what Christ did and to say, yeah, that's enough for me. I trust in what he did. I receive that by faith.

He did this to demonstrate his righteousness because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished. Because Christ was going to die for these sinners.

He did it to demonstrate his righteousness in the present time so that he can be just. God is completely fair. Those sins were punished, but not in us, in Christ.

And he's the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus. So there's a little reminder of the significance of the cross. And the way he says, now.

Now we see this. Now it's set forth for us. And in a sense, this is set forth again as we come around the table.

[18:52] We have bread, which signifies Christ's body broken for us. We have wine, which signifies Christ's blood shed for us. And that which we receive by faith, we signify by actually eating and drinking ourselves.

Makes sense? Yes. Yeah. So I'd say that concludes our communion service.

But perhaps before we go home, we could commit the new week to the Lord in prayer. And just any particular, I think seeing as we're expressing our togetherness as a family, we could perhaps think of some issues for us as a church family.

Thinking of people who are unwell. Think of Martin. I haven't seen him for quite a while before Christmas. I'm a bit out of the loop, but I mean...

He went to Jesus' world. That's right. Yes, yes. Yeah. Do you know how he is apart from that? His back was bad, and he was getting better.

[20:15] Right. So he's quite good for that. Okay. Yeah. Some guy issues, otherwise.