

Communion

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Preacher: Mark Rayfield

[0:00] Yes, forgiveness. It's difficult, isn't it, to forgive. I was thinking of cycling down here. It's not easy to think of our enemies. On Wednesday, we were very helped, weren't we?

It was a very sobering evening, listening to Johnny speaking about the persecuted church in Nigeria, Eritrea and China. And it was hard hearing the enormous persecution that some believers suffer as I speak in those countries.

And yet, some of them were able to forgive their enemies. Can you imagine someone killing your spouse or your child and the anger you must feel?

And yet, some were able to forgive, I think he said. It's not easy, is it? And many live in unforgiveness around us.

Perhaps you know relationships where there is unforgiveness. Sadly, we see it in marriages, don't we? Sometimes. Where husband and wife have not forgiven each other.

[1:22] And that can be very tormenting, can't it, when we live with unforgiveness. And it can make us bitter. And it's not a good thing to harbor that in our lives.

So, I've been reading a book called Unbroken. Last century, I don't know if you've heard this story. Louis Zamperini, here on the screen, was an Italian-American who grew up in California.

He was a wild, recalcitrant boy. Not a nice boy in a lot of ways. Difficult for mummy and daddy. But he became a really good long-distance runner.

A miler, they called him. Who ran in the Munich Olympics in the 1930s. I think it was 34, was it? Or 38? Was it 36?

36. Okay. And at that time, men were getting close to the four-minute mile. And had it not been for World War II, he might have won many medals.

[2:38] And perhaps he would have got the four-minute mile before Roger Bannister. Who knows? However, when the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor, America went to war.

And in the 1940s, he trained with the Air Corps and fought for his country against the Japanese as a bombardier.

I think that's how you say it. On bomber planes. And this was the plane he was on. I can't remember if it was a B-25 or a B-17. You can borrow my book if you want and read it.

It's a great, great book. Countless men lost their lives in the Pacific Ocean. And many not even fighting.

They were just training to go out there. Sadly, there were so many accidents because the bombers went very good planes. Many accidents. Thousands of men died.

[3:37] But Louis was one of the lucky ones who survived. Turn back. Not only did he survive around 40 days floating on a raft out at sea in the Pacific Ocean, surrounded by sharks.

But he survived the horrors of Japanese prisoner of war camps. And you can read this story in Unbroken. I have the book right here.

If you want to read it, you can. It's a page turner. And in one camp, there was a vicious and capricious guard nicknamed the bird.

And he would beat Louis regularly. He would go after him. Sadly. He thought that he was going to die, to be honest, in the camps.

But by God's grace, he didn't. And eventually, when the Japanese surrendered, he was mercifully set free. And he returned home to the U.S. like many POWs.

[4:52] But Louis was beset with nightmares of his time in the camps, especially of the bird's abuses. Back in California, he took to alcohol to stop this.

And he was in a pitiless state with his marriage breaking up and in financial straits. And in his heart, he wanted to get revenge on the bird.

He wanted to murder him. He wanted to go back to Japan and kill him. However, by the grace of God, he went to a Billy Graham rally in California.

And this passage was read out by Billy Graham. John chapter 8. You see, Louis thought he was one of the good guys.

Not a bad one, like the bird. But like the Pharisees in this passage, he realized that he could not throw a stone.

[6:07] He came to the sudden realization that he was a bad guy. He saw all the anger and that restlessness in his heart.

And it was proof that he was one of the bad guys. He was a sinner in need of a savior.

He was standing in the place of debt. He needed forgiveness. Like this woman who had committed adultery, he needed saving.

And he remembered the time he was on that raft in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, dying. And he cried out to God, If you save me from this disaster, I will serve you.

And he gave his life to Christ at that rally. And he became a new creation. The old self went away. He went home and poured all his liquor down the sink.

[7:12] At that very time, he would start drinking. His relationship with his wife got better. And he started a ministry to children.

A new creation. You see, being forgiven liberated this man. He no longer wanted to kill the bird. His nightmare stopped.

He was a new man. And tonight, brothers and sisters, we see this supreme forgiveness at the cross as we partake in the bread and the wine.

Christ says to us, you are forgiven. I forgive you. This is a wonderful, freeing thing, isn't it, brothers and sisters?

That we are forgiven at the cross. And as like Louis, it grants us to forgive others. Because all our wrongdoings are paid for by the Messiah.

[8:21] A passage from Micah. Chapter 7, verses 18 and 19.

Who is a God like you? Pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression for the remnant of his inheritance.

He does not retain his anger forever because he delights in steadfast love. Probably that's chesed, isn't it? He will again have compassion on us.

He will tread our iniquities underfoot. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea. Isn't that a lovely verse?

You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea. They will be remembered no more. As far as the east is from the west. So have your transgressions been removed.

[9:21] We come to a wonderful saviour tonight, brothers and sisters, that has forgiven us. We stand forgiven at the cross. We can partake of these elements in glory and thanksgiving and praise and wonder at our marvellous saviour.

Forgiving us. Setting us free. So that we might walk in fullness of life. So let's sing and praise our saviour and then afterwards we'll have a time of open thanksgiving and praise before we have communion.

So we're going to sing, come and sing.