

Forgiven by God

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[0 : 00] Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, three persons, one God, we come into your presence. We have been in your presence all morning, but we come into your presence very consciously to be with your children and your people, to be with seekers and skeptics, to be in your presence, Father. We come to receive from you this morning, to receive grace from you. Father, we acknowledge that we are always in deep need of receiving grace from you. And so, Father, we ask that the Holy Spirit would do a wonderful work deep in our lives, that we might be in your presence, that we might receive from you this morning, and that we might respond to you as we receive in a worthy manner. And, Father, that might be repentance, that might be praise, that might be new hope, it might be healing, it might be strength, it might just be, well, Father, you know that there's many different ways that we have needs, that your grace is sufficient, and we ask that you would help us to receive it with gratitude, and respond in a worthy manner.

And we ask this in the name of Jesus, your Son and our Savior. Amen. Please be seated. It can sometimes be a surprise to people who come to the 10 o'clock service that they see, oh, there's an 8 o'clock service, and they decide to come to the 8 o'clock service, and discover that the 8 o'clock service is radically, radically different.

There's no screen, no words on it. You get these little booklets. And, in fact, we use the 1662 Book of Common Prayer in a booklet form, but it's the 1662 Book of Common Prayer.

[1 : 35] It has thee, thou, dost, wast, hast, all that old-fashioned language. I wear robes as well, and the service has no music, and the sermon is about half the length.

That's the goal. A little bit less than half the length of the 10 o'clock service. In fact, sometimes at the 8 o'clock service, I say, I'm going to talk about this. I don't have time now. I'm going to talk about this at 8 if you're curious to see how I handle it.

You know, watch the 10 o'clock, the sermon from the 10 o'clock service. I mention that because what sometimes happens, and in fact happened to me today, is I always teach people that I'm, when I'm trying to teach them how to preach the Bible or teach the Bible, that you should begin with something interesting to get people's attention.

And I had a really, really good grabby thing for this sermon. And I did it at the 8 o'clock service, and I realized after the service that it was the complete wrong opening for the sermon.

So you're not getting it. Instead, you get me telling you that I had a good one, but this wasn't it. But hopefully I've got your attention. If you want to turn in your Bibles, we're going to look at one of the most famous stories of Jesus.

[2 : 37] There are four ancient biographies of Jesus. Now they're known as Gospels. And three of the four ancient biographies have different versions of this same story.

So the early Christians, the early disciples of Jesus, thought that this was a very important story.

They all wanted to make sure that it got told. And so turn with me in your Bibles to Mark 2, verses 1 to 17.

It's the first story that's the one which is in three of the Gospels. We're going to look at two stories.

And here's how it goes. By the way, one of the most common things that we hear in our culture today is that you need to learn how to forgive yourself.

It's a very, very common thing. And you would just get a very sympathetic nod. And it really is very interesting. It wouldn't matter if you were at a Bridgehead, a Starbucks, or a Tim Hortons. It wouldn't matter if you went to the best cigar lounge in the region, the best Scotch lounge in the region, where the bar, which is the cheapest, nastiest, grungiest, most down-and-out, sketchy bar, if you said, I'm trying to learn how to forgive myself, people would just nod.

It sort of turns. It doesn't matter whether you vote NDP, conservative, or liberal. It doesn't matter if you, like, make America great hats, or you want to vote for Joe Biden or Kamala Harris or AOC. It's one of those things that just most people nod their heads at.

[4 : 00] And this story talks about this very directly, by the way, the wisdom or the possibility of this. So anyway, here's how the story goes. Verse 1. And when Jesus returned to Capernaum, after some days, it was reported that he was at home.

I just sort of want to pause there for a second. And some of you might remember last week's scripture text, which came just before this, is that it ends with Jesus healing a leper. And after Jesus heals the leper, he says to the leper, go to the priest, have him certify you as clean, do the appropriate sacrifices, and don't tell anybody I did this.

And it's not clear in the text whether he actually goes to the priest, but what it is clear is he does the opposite of what Jesus tells him, and he goes and tells everybody. And this just builds Jesus' fame so that it's hard for him to go anywhere.

But some people, and at some point in time in one of the sermons, I'm going to talk a little bit about why it is that Jesus would tell people not to tell him. Like Mark records him saying this quite frequently.

[5 : 04] But one of the things we can see here that helps us to understand that is this. I don't know how many of you lived in small communities, but Jesus must have come in at night when it was dark, and he's actually been in this small community in a person's house for a couple of days before people figure out he's there.

It tells you something about the character of Jesus that he didn't say, I'm here! Come in with trumpets, you know, drums, banging, let everybody know he's here, draw a big crowd.

Like that's not, he comes in, he's actually just spending some time in the house, and it takes a couple of days before people realize that Jesus is there. And once they realize he's there, then the crowds start to come.

They want to hear him, and I guess they also want to see him do a miracle. And let's just be honest, we'd love to see a miracle. We're no different from them. It would be on the news, somebody performing miracles like this.

So a crowd gathers. But it sure is sort of a sense, the humility and the self-effacement of Jesus, that he doesn't intentionally go out to try to draw crowds and attract attention to himself.

[6 : 13] Verse 2, And many were gathered together so that there was no more room, not even at the door. And Jesus was preaching the word to them. And they came, this is going to describe who they are, it's four guys.

Four guys come, bringing to Jesus a man who's paralyzed. Verse 4, And when they could not get near to Jesus because of the crowd, that's sort of very interesting, they say, listen, I got the good spot, I'm not giving up my spot to let you get in there.

It sucks that your friend's paralyzed. I mean, that's really the attitude of the crowd. It just sucks for them, I'm not giving up my spot. So verse 4, They could not get near to Jesus because of the crowd, so they, in the houses in those days, the roof was always flat, and in a sense it was like a deck.

And so whether it was a ladder or stairs on the outside, there was usually a way, always a way, to get up onto the roof. So they removed the roof above Jesus, and when they had made an opening, they let down the bed on which the paralyzed man lay.

Now, just before we see anything further, you know, one of the interesting things about this story, if you think about it for a second, if let's say we were, we were in Jesus' time, or it was just happening right now, and Mark said, listen here, I've written about this story, what do you think?

[7 : 34] And all of us would do this. They'd say, you know, come on, Mark, give it some extra colorful details, like, like, surely the people were sort of swearing, you know, at the commotion going upstairs, they were saying, you know, you guys, you know, keep it quiet, we're trying to listen to Jesus, you know, people are, they're wrecking the roof, and probably there would have been people wanting to go out, and all this, all this detail that we would love to know about, what was going on in the room when they're making a big hole in the roof, and none of it's there.

That's what I mean by, you see, it's very interesting, and it shows our distraction, like, the inherent type of distraction that we have when it comes to things of God, that we would be far more interested in lots of ways with all this other stuff, you know, the, you know, the mess, who's going to

clean it up, all of that type of stuff, than what, but Mark sort of ignores that, he doesn't play to our habit to get distracted, because he's driving towards making a particular type of point about Jesus, and by the way, it must have been Jesus who stopped people from going upstairs and up onto the roof to stop those guys from wrecking the roof.

It must have been Jesus, but we don't say that. Maybe it wasn't. Verse five. So the guy, they lay down, they make a hole, they drop the guy down, and the guy's now standing in front of Jesus. Probably a lot of people are in a very, very, very bad mood, because they're covered with straw, covered with dirt. The homeowners are probably really furious, but when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, son, your sins are forgiven.

Now, we want to pause here for a second. Here's one of the problems we have. If you're a person, maybe from a, you know, a Muslim background or a Buddhist background, and you're hearing this story for the first time, or if you're just, you haven't had any real Christian background, you're hearing this story for the first time, I want to tell you about a problem that Christians have when they're very familiar with the story.

[9 : 38] One of the things I try to tell people when I'm trying to give them encouragement about how to preach and teach the Bible when it comes to a narrative like this, is never assume that a response is obvious. Like, don't assume, well, of course that's what Jesus would say.

No, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, just a thought experiment. What would Stalin say? Kill those guys. Like, what would, what, no, no, I'm going to say a few things today for our Muslim friends who might be watching.

I'm going to say a few things today about Christianity and Islam and just sort of give me some mercy about this. I don't mean any disrespect, but I want to throw out some, there's some puzzles and riddles in this text in terms of the contrast between Christianity and other faiths.

But if you think about it for a second, what would Muhammad say? Muhammad would probably say, well, it's Allah's will. It is the will of Allah. That's what he would say.

He wouldn't say, son, your sins are the will of Allah. What would Buddha say? Buddha was obviously, from the records of him, he was obviously a man who did have great compassion and that part of his way is the way of compassion.

[10 : 52] But he also emerges out of a Hindu worldview that he might very well have just said, well, may I, you know, I can help you with some water and he might say to his disciples it's important to show compassion.

But at the end of the day, it's as a result of the sins in this life and the sins in previous lives that have now brought this state, karma has brought this state upon this particular person.

And really, what you can do is use this as a time to illustrate to the man and to others the importance of following the way so that you will no longer be caught up in the cycle of death and rebirth and having all these karmic penalties come to you to begin to try to break that cycle by having enlightenment and, you know, achieving nirvana.

That's probably what something along the line that Buddha would say. What would a politician say? What would a therapist say? You see, part of the thing which we don't quite get when we see this story is the, Jesus is going to relate to this man in a profoundly compassionate way.

And whether our culture wants to acknowledge it or not, it's as if in around the years, depending on how you count it, 27 to 30 or 30 to 33, that's the time that Jesus' teaching ministry went on and culminating with his death upon the cross and his resurrection which launches this Christian movement Jesus is like a bomb that blows up modern thought.

[12 : 28] And much of now, 2,000 years downstream, we just assume, we just assume that the proper response is to show some type of compassion towards him.

But that's not an obvious response. Once again, what would Stalin say? It's not an obvious response. In a sense, our whole response to this is formed by stories like this, the compassion of Jesus.

But he says this very, very odd thing. Son, your sins are forgiven. men. We, last Sunday at the 8 o'clock service, we had a street person come to be part of our service.

And, in fact, Shane happened to be there and I said to Shane when I came in, could you just keep an eye on him because I wasn't sure. You see, as soon as I came in, he told me that he was the second coming of Jesus.

That's the first thing he told to me. He's the second coming of Jesus. And, and so I just said and he was wandering around. He signed his name three times in the book. Actually, one of the times he

signed his name was Zeus as well, actually.

[13:48] But, you know what I mean? Like, he was very, very, very, like, clearly mentally ill and having a psychotic episode. And, and so I just asked Shane if he could keep an eye on him in case he was very disruptive.

Now, as it turned out, he wasn't disruptive. He sat there. He did a few little odd things, but he sat there. I mean, he told me a second time when I gave him communion that he was the second coming of Jesus and some other things.

And, and I just listened to him for a few seconds and I said, I'm really sorry you have to sit down. And he did. So it was all fine. But the fact of the matter is that that fellow was clearly mentally ill. He either thought he was Zeus or he thought he was the son of God.

So, that's the offensive and shocking thing about this text which we have to get into it. You see, once again, partly what happens is when we read the text we say, well, that's just religious language, just religious language, just religious language.

No, no, no, no, no. Just think about it in real life. This is a story. Remember the very, one of the early sermons on this, I said that one of the things which is very unique about Mark's gospel compared to the secular literature or the pagan literature of the day.

[14:51] I shouldn't say secular. There would have been no idea of secular in those days. But in the pagan literature of those days is that he uses fact-type language all the way through. He emphasizes the fact-ness of what he's talking about.

And just as, I didn't ask, but I know that all of the other people at the 8 o'clock service, they all would have instantly recognized that this man was mentally ill. And he talked to several of them.

They all knew he was mentally ill and all of us were reacting appropriately to him as a mentally ill man. Trying to act with compassion to him. Gentleness. We didn't tell him to leave. We didn't do anything like that. We tried to act with him. You all know he's mentally ill.

Only mentally ill men say something like, son, your sins are forgiven. Right? That's a mentally ill thing to say.

So now you're having to go, whoa, okay. Even most, you know, maybe Richard Dawkins or some very, very, very hardcore atheist would be prepared to say, yes, George, Jesus was mentally ill.

[15:59] I'm so glad a Christian finally, I'm not saying he's mentally ill. I'm just saying, you think about it, that's a mentally ill type of thing to say. That's how we would all respond to it. Now, in his time, they, his hearers don't respond to it as mental illness, although they might have if you heard all of the things they wanted to say.

In fact, if you read the Gospels, you'll find out that there are in effect, and I can't remember if it comes up in Mark, there is a time when basically all of Jesus' family is concerned that he's mentally ill or that he's consumed with demons or something.

They know, they come to think he's not right. You see, one of the other reasons to believe that Jesus actually did die on the cross and rise from the dead is that the historical evidence shows that his family thought he was mentally ill or something was wrong, that at his death, only his mom was there, none of his brothers or sisters, and yet we know that after the resurrection of Jesus, that at least his brothers and sisters also came to believe that he was now God, the Son of God.

It's actually part of the historical record to believe that something like this actually happened. But look how the story continues in verse 6. Now some of the scribes were sitting there questioning in their hearts, why does this man speak like that?

Notice what they say, why does this man speak like that? He is blaspheming. Who can forgive sins but God alone? I mean, that's, by the way, what we could say to the mentally ill fellow who was here with us two Sundays a week ago.

[17:38] You know, only God can forgive sins, dude. Like, you can't. You're a man. Um, verse 8, and immediately Jesus, perceiving in his spirit that they thus questioned within themselves, said to them, why do you question these things in your hearts?

Which is easier to say to the paralytic, your sons are forgiven? Or to say, rise, take up your bed and walk? Now just sort of pause here. On one hand, it's equally easy to say both.

And I'm sure if I'd given that fellow, sorry that Ross is sitting there, it's not Ross, it's the, there was another person, in fact, you were at church last Sunday, in fact, actually, you saw that fellow, I think. He might have even talked to you. But he was sitting right there in that seat, the very front seat, as close as he could to be to me when I had the, when I was doing the communion, right? I mean, I'm

sure if I'd let him speak, he would say, son, your sins are forgiven and stuff like that, right? So, you know, on one level, it's easy to say stuff like that. It's a sign of mental illness. And even if it's not a sign of mental illness, even if it's some type of a poser, some type of person who's figured out that he's got some very, very gullible people and he can make very, very extravagant claims, and, but he knows that he can't really do it.

[18 : 56] He's just talking. That talk is cheap, but healing a man who's paralyzed, well, that's an indicator of something.

So, verse 10, but that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins, Jesus says to the paralyzed man, verse 11, I say to you, rise, pick up your bed and go home. And the man rose and immediately picked up his bed and went out before them all so that they were all amazed and glorified God, saying, we never saw anything like this.

We never saw anything like this. So, you see, here's the thing which is going on in the text. Just like the mentally ill man from last Sunday didn't say to me, I'm going to tell you about the Son of God. He didn't tell me, I'm going to tell you about Zeus. Jesus just says, your sins are forgiven. He's not like me during the absolution where I pronounce what God has done.

Jesus doesn't pronounce what God has done. Jesus just says it. And it's the same thing with the healing. Jesus doesn't pray for healing. He just says, he just says, just like God would.

[20 : 08] In a sense, what we would do when we pray is we would pray to God and say, God, could you heal this man? And when we pray, what we're hoping is that God, in a sense, up in heaven, hears our prayer and says, okay, man, stand up and walk.

And what you see here with Jesus is what you hope God would do when you pray to God. Jesus is doing something that only God can do. And so, what you see here is it's an indicator of the fact that Jesus, when he says your sins are forgiven, that that is, he can actually do that.

Now, there's a couple of things here about this. Like, I think if you said to most Canadians, you know, you can come to Jesus and your sins are forgiven.

And I think most Canadians would say, I need Jesus to forgive my sins like a fish needs a bicycle. Like, okay, that's what you're selling, this is how much interest I have in it.

In fact, actually, probably if you got into it, you'd say, you know what, what I'm really trying to learn is how to forgive myself. Like, if Jesus could give me some advice about how to forgive myself, well, that would be an interesting story.

[21 : 25] Because that's what I'm really trying to learn. I'm trying to learn how to forgive myself. And, in fact, I think for most Canadians they'd say, you know, don't you think it's a lot more important to learn how to forgive yourself than, I don't know, be forgiven by God, by Jesus?

Well, here's a couple of things just to consider about it. Before I was the rector of Church of the Messiah, I was in a rural church, non-rush hour traffic, be about a two-hour drive to where I lived, two hours and a bit drive.

It was on the, I lived on the way to Algonquin Park. So you'd go down the Trans-Canada Highway, Cobden, you'd turn left, and you'd, you know, another 20 minutes or so on the road on the way to Algonquin Park.

You come to Eganville and I just lived one block over from the one set of lights in town. And I looked after Eganville, I looked after Killaloo, and I looked after two other little spots that nobody's ever heard of.

They used to be sort of communities, but now they're just a sign on the road, Tremor and Clontarf. And, but in that big geographic area that I looked at, and if I was to go from Arnold Theobig's house at one end to Delmer's house at another end and I kept to the speed limit, it would have taken me about 70, 75 minutes to drive from one into the other.

[22 : 39] So I covered a lot of land but not many people. A lot of deer, a lot of cattle, not many people. But within that area there was a First Nations reserve, and that First Nations reserve had been originally evangelized by Roman Catholics.

There was an actual Roman Catholic church on the reserve, and so I didn't have much to do with people who lived there, but I did have something to do with several of them. And one of the people that I had to deal with was part of our church.

He got in some trouble with the law, which is neither here nor there. I actually thought he was innocent, but that's neither here nor there. And so he asked me if I would support him.

He had to go to appear before the judge for the first go-around. And so he asked me if I would sit with him in the crowd waiting for his name to be come up, and I'd buy him a coffee, and then afterwards we'd talk, and I'd pray and all that.

And I said, sure. It was a very interesting experience to sit there. So first of all, I said to him, you know, the thing that you did, I almost said his name, we'll just call him Bob. He said, the thing you did, Bob, you could go to the tribal, there was a tribal justice system set up to deal with this.

[23 : 42] Why didn't you go to that? Now, by the way, I'm not, just time out, I'm not making any political comment. I never followed him. I have no idea whether he was telling me the truth. But what he said was this.

He said, no, no, no. He said, guys like me on the reserve, we never go to the tribal justice system. I said, you never go there? He said, no, no, no.

He said it's controlled by a couple of powerful families. And the way it works is they give themselves a pass, but for people like me, they're going to be very hard on me. And I get a better deal with the white judge.

And I said, really? So I never followed up on that. I have no idea if it's true. But that's what he said. He said, yeah, yeah, it's powerful families that control that. My family is a very low-status family. They don't like my family. I would get hard. I'd be treated very hard. I'm going to get a better deal with the judge. I said, well, that's interesting. And then as I sat there, the second thing that was really interesting is that as each of the lawyers stood up to help the different client, he gave me a prairie about the effectiveness of the lawyers.

[24 : 44] He'd say, that lawyer never returns his phone calls. That lawyer has a serious alcohol problem. That lawyer is lazy. That lawyer is lazy. Is this that lawyer? Is this? He knew who all the lawyers were.

At least that's he claimed to. I have no idea whether he was accurate about any of it. But he'd said, don't worry. I, you know, me and my family, we know about all the lawyers in the region. We have the best lawyer.

I have the best lawyer that you can get. Now, I'm saying all of this because, you see, what would you say if he not only knew about the lawyers, but if it was a situation where there were quite a few different judges and he was able to sit there and tell you, well, that judge shows favoritism to the cronies.

That judge is racist and that judge takes bribes and that judge has a serious alcohol problem.

And, you know, that judge isn't very competent, doesn't like me. And if you heard that, you wouldn't want to go before that judge, would you?

[25 : 55] You'd be very careful. You sure wouldn't. You'd want to try to figure out the good judge, not the judge that has all those other major character flaws. Right? That's what we'd all want to do. But, here's the problem.

You say you want to learn to forgive yourself. Do you show favoritism? Do you show any prejudice? Are you easily bought off?

Do you get distracted? Do you only care about justice? Yes. If you didn't answer yes to all of those things, then why do you think you can forgive yourself?

Like, if you wouldn't trust another judge to do that, why would you trust yourself to forgive yourself? Like, don't you think it's always tainted?

And just think for a second. Like, one of the things that I had to do, I would still do it if somebody comes to me and they want to be remarried after divorce. Let's say a 30-year-old man comes and he wants to be remarried after divorce.

[27 : 07] And I'd talk to him about a little bit of things. But let's say I discovered that that 30-year-old man had a wife and he had four kids. And the wife was a stay-at-home mom and this man wants to marry another, like a 23-year-old woman.

And I'd have to ask this man this question. That's why I've asked this question to guys. How do you think you're going to be able to fulfill your financial responsibilities to your four kids and your first wife and marry this young woman who you're obviously going to want to have kids with?

Do I like asking that question? I am very Canadian. Those of you who know me, I hate conflict. I am sleepless for nights before it. But I've had to look guys in the eye and say, how are you going to fulfill those obligations?

This is separate from whether there was a valid reason biblically for his marriage to break up and being remarried. The fact of the matter is if you sire those kids, you've got a responsibility to those kids.

You've got a responsibility for your kids. So here's the point of the story. The wife with the four kids, she hears that her husband, who now wants to marry another young woman, and maybe he's been the one responsible for the breakup of the marriage he's had in the fair.

[28 : 34] What would she say if she heard him say, I've learned to forgive myself? That wife would say, she'd go explosive, she'd go ballistic, what do you mean you forgave yourself?

Like, she'd say, what a jerk. She'd probably say something stronger. Well, why is it that we as Canadians want to learn how to forgive ourselves, but we can't sort of get our minds around these types of particular problems?

You see, one of the things which is always talked about at the end of every presidential cycle, it was talked about with Trump, it was talked about with Obama, it was talked about before that, it will be talked about with Biden, is that every U.S. president, the last week or so before they step away from office, they give a whole pile of presidential pardons.

Get out of jail for free cards, you're completely and utterly pardoned. And those of you who follow such things, sometimes they're good. There's been a miscarriage of justice somewhere along the line and just because of the angularity of the law, it can't actually be rectified, but there's been, you know, evidence and all and so sometimes you go, that's a real, that's a good use of it, that there's been an injustice corrected.

You know, and sometimes it's just, you know, for whatever reason there's been some press reports about this person or that, but always he lets off his cronies, right? Always.

[30 : 03] I'm not making a political comment. Trump did it, Biden did it, the president after Biden will do it. It's a human thing. They let off their cronies and there's always a whole stuff in the paper about the fact that he just let off his cronies and if you happen to be pro-Trump, you think, yeah, yeah, you know, they shouldn't have been punished, blah, blah, blah, way to go Trump.

But you know, and they're going to do the same thing with Biden. You know, the people who were mad at Trump, they're going to say, way to go Biden, you know? And all the people who voted for Trump said, how come you guys didn't like it when Trump did it, but now he, like, that's just human nature.

That's just cronyism. And in a sense, when you want to learn to forgive yourself, it's cronyism to yourself. Now here, you have to be very careful.

You see, one of the things which is going on in Jesus' words here is there's a profound mystery. There's a riddle which he's posing. And the riddle is this.

Why is it that when Jesus says this to the young man, he's not just guilty of cronyism? Like, why is Jesus not like Trump?

[31 : 20] Why is Jesus not like Biden and Obama? Why is it not just cronyism? See, the fact of the matter is, is that true forgiveness has to honor justice.

And that's why for true forgiveness there always has to be a cost that's paid. Very, very obvious when it comes to things like money. Somebody, I lend somebody \$10,000 expecting to get it back and then something happens they can't get it back.

If I forgive the debt, let's say they only were able to pay me back \$1,000, I forgive the debt, I'm writing off the \$9,000. Well, who pays that \$9,000? The \$9,000 is still gone.

Like, I can't call up Trudeau and say, Trudeau, I've just forgiven somebody \$9,000, could you send me a check to cover it? Like, if I forgive somebody the \$9,000, I pay that cost.

If you forgive me a debt, a financial debt, you absorb that cost. And that gives us a window in all forgiveness. That if somebody has wronged you in another type of way and you, you might have a profound desire to publicize to everybody how bad they are.

[32 : 34] Or you might want to have them, you might want to do some other type of thing so that they really suffer in some type of way, that there's some satisfaction that you can get to see that there's some suffering or some other types of, you know, or other legal or other consequences that happen to them so that there's some type, you have at least the beginning of some type of a sense of balance.

And if you forgive them, then you have to pay the cost of that within yourself. You have to pay the cost of the fact that they will not have that type of punishment that you think they deserve, that you

just have to, in a sense, you have to, in a sense, swallow that in some type of way. There's always a cost to forgiveness. By the way, for our Muslim friends, this is one of the profound weaknesses in Islam. Just give me some grace.

It's a profound weakness in Islam. Because in Islam, Allah just, he never pays a cost to forgive. It's hard not to see that what goes on with Allah is any different than cronyism.

Where he lets some go free and others have to suffer his punishment. You see, the mystery which here, which happens, is that Jesus is setting up a riddle.

[34 : 04] When he says, son, your sins are forgiven, he's also pointing us to the fact that justice is going to be met in that young man for whatever that young man is responsible for.

That this is one of the things preparing us for the cross. That when we see Jesus dying upon the cross, what we see is that Jesus takes the place of that young man in a sense what that Jesus is saying.

And it's only if he's God that he can stand for every single human being. It's only if he's both God and man that he can stand for every single human being. And so for whatever things that that young man has done which is wrong, whatever demands of justice that that should be, if you took the accumulation of all of those types of things, and you would say if you knew all of those things that that young man had done and became an old man and everything that you would think there has to be some consequence.

There has to be some consequence. There has to justice demand some consequence. That when Jesus dies on the cross that's what John means when he says behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

That Jesus in a sense is saying I will take your place young man and all of the demands of justice I will take your place they can come on me.

[35 : 19] No I don't. I know you don't deserve it. No I know I don't have to do it. It's not a matter of you deserving it. It's not a matter of you have a right for this. It's not a matter that I have to.

It's not a matter that I'm weak. I am strong. I am the one who can heal paralyzed people. I am the one who can heal the leper. I am the one who can still the storm. I am the one who can walk on water.

I am the one who can feed five thousand men. I am strong. I am doing this of my own free will. I see your profound need and broken. I see your profound need and brokenness and I know you can never fulfill the demands of true justice if your life was seen with perfect moral clarity and God sees your life with perfect moral clarity and you can never deal with that without being unmade.

need. So I will take your place. And that when you see Jesus dying on the cross what you are seeing is the cost of forgiveness being borne by God himself for undeserving people like you and me.

And it's powerfully illustrated by the symbol that as Jesus dies the veil which separates the holy of holies from the world is torn from top to bottom to show that the cost of true forgiveness has been paid.

[36 : 51] Now the next story is very important to bring this home to us in a powerful way because you see we all say that and believe that and like that for a moment but there's something about the way our brains are wired just that our brains are wired that we almost instantly sabotage the radicalness of what this is that Jesus is doing for us with his life and death and resurrection and we see it if we look at the next story.

And what we see in the next story is why what human beings need what you and I need is not to learn how to forgive ourselves I do not have to learn to forgive myself I have to learn I have to ask God to make what Jesus has done for me on the cross to be more real for me because I slip into a different way of thinking too quickly.

Look at what happens in verse 13 and Jesus went out again beside the sea and all the crowd was coming to him and he was teaching them and as he passed by he saw Levi the son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax booth and Jesus said to him follow me and Levi rises and follows him now just those of you who aren't familiar with stories like this in the context if you watch a second world war movie set let's say in occupied Holland and you see Dutch people if you're watching a second world war movie now set in Holland during the occupation by the Nazis usually what is going to be involved is some heroic and there were very many heroic Dutch people who resisted the Nazis tried to protect the Jews did what they could to undermine the Nazi regime but there were also Dutch men and women who supported the regime who helped the regime right it was Corrie Ten Boom

and her family and her mom her sister and her dad died in a concentration camp for hiding Jews but they they were found out because neighbors reported them so when you watch a second world war movie and you see a Dutch man or a Dutch woman working for the Nazis that's what a tax collector is okay they're they're not they're not only they're not only going to be constantly guilty of graft and injustice and a whole pile of other things but they work directly for the imperial forces oppressing the Jews over the Jews so that's what a tax collector so Jesus sees a guy like that a guy like a Dutch person helping the Nazis and he says follow me and the guy follows him you go on one level you go wow like wow but now you're going to be concerned with the very next story look what happens next verse 15 and as Jesus as he reclined a table it's actually very interesting the Greek it's not sure whether it's Jesus' house or Levi's house you can't actually tell in the Greek whether it's Jesus' house that he's renting or staying in or whether it's Levi's house but so I'll just say and as he reclined a table in his house many tax collectors and sinners were reclining with Jesus and his disciples for they were many who followed him look at that for there were many of these sinners and tax collectors who followed Jesus and the scribes of the Pharisees who aren't following Jesus the scribes are like the experts in the law when they saw that he was eating with sinners and tax collectors they said to his disciples why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners now here's the thing about us one of the reasons that we would side we would say whoa that's terrible what they're doing well the reason one of the reasons we say that's terrible that he's doing that is because we've been formed by Jesus and also partially because we like the idea of going against the moral majority but here's the thing and I'm making no political comments you can pick your thing Jesus is having a party with everybody wearing make America great hats with big pictures of Trump behind them or all the trans activists are together and Jesus is in there having a party with them now pick your politics for those of you of one group you'd say how could Jesus be with a whole pile of make America great people like what's he doing with sinners and for the rest of us we're going what's he doing with all the trans activists having a party with them

[41 : 23] Jesus says this in verse 17 and when Jesus heard it he said to them those who are well have no need of a doctor but those who are sick I came not to call the righteous but sinners now here's the thing about this see the normal way the normal way that we're wired at a very very deep level is to understand spiritual and religious life like this we'd say okay it's really good you guys with make America great hats I'm just going to keep staying with one thing I'm not making any political comment okay I just make it simple so we'd say okay oh that's really good that you guys all wearing your make America great hats you've all decided to follow Jesus okay now here's the first thing you've all got to take your hats off you've got to get rid of the Trump posters you've got to burn them you've got to promise you'll never use them again okay and if you do that and now you've got to do a few other types of things you've got to do this and you can do that well if you do that okay now you're sort of welcome into polite society and now we could see how if you actually said a few prayers because now you're working you're going to be you're going to be kinder to this group you're going to be kinder to that group you're going to make a donation to the

Black Lives Matter movement you're going to support AOC in politics and you start to do that type of thing well you can be accepted in church and you can say a few prayers and if you do that and you do that you do that well eventually you can be connected to God that's the basic way we're wired but that then goes against this profound mystery that's just happened before this that the only way somebody's sins can be forgiven is if God pays the price for your sins that God absorbs that cost into himself and the fact of the matter is that the religious development that's presented in the gospel is a complete opposite it's not that first you get rid of the Make America Great hats and give some money to AOC and then you can sort of say a few prayers and then you're made right with God it's a complete opposite you begin by being made right with God while you're wearing your Make America Great hats and hating AOC when you're completely and utterly unworthy God forgives you in the person of Jesus it begins with forgiveness and union with God and works backwards from our naturalistic religious point of view that as the gospel grips you you say gosh Jesus is the one who's reconciled me to God I need to pray I need to figure out how to pray and I need to figure out how to read the word and I'm not really worthy to be with other Christians I'm going to hang around with Christians and now as you've got to look at you know maybe the way I'm handling politics isn't right you know maybe walking around wearing a MAGA hat to church is just not very charitable maybe I should take that off begins with grace and moves the other way it's not a matter of making yourself worthy until you find a union with God that never is going to work never

going to work only makes you anxious only makes you self righteous only makes you proud only makes you arrogant only makes you unhappy only makes you self satisfied until your life crumbles completely useless you and I need grace we need this profound act of Jesus dying on the cross for us and as that grips us we say you know what my view of people of different colors that's wrong my view of women that's wrong my holding on to money that's wrong my ungenerous heart that's wrong my thinking the worst of

C's group that's wrong works from the gospel out to our behavior not being worthy until Jesus finally dies for you please stand you know that Christian life for those that I point here there's a camera here by the way that's why I sometimes look I'm not picking on the Maureen family or Claire on the computer there's the camera there I want to acknowledge the congregation that's there but also to you you know that the Christian life just begins when you sort of have an internal desire that you need to actually be with Jesus and accept what he offers you might not be able to put that into words that's fine you don't have to put yourself into words all you have to do is just say if you've never become a Christian say Jesus what you did for that paralyzed man could you do that for me and what you illustrated with those bad people could that be the story of my life that's all you have to say you don't have to know all the theology just have to say that that's that's where

I need to belong and for those of us who are Christians one of the you so much that Jesus loves us that Jesus loved us that he died on the cross thank you so much that you see every human being with perfect moral clarity because you are the author of morality the center of the moral universe you see each human being with complete utter piercing clarity you know those excuses so that we did something that wasn't really wrong that there were good excuses you you know those things that had no excuse that we just did something wrong we give you thanks and praise that despite your moral not despite that father when you were full with moral clarity you loved us and

[47 : 34] Jesus came to die upon the cross for us to take that punishment that making rightness that had to be done that we couldn't do for ourselves that he did it for us in his life in his death upon the cross we thank you father for the many evidences for his resurrection and not only in history but also in our lives and we thank you for what he did for us on the cross father we thank you that he is our savior we ask father that what he did for us on the cross that that might be the ground upon which we stand it might be that which covers us it might be the lens by which we see the world around us the lens by which we see ourselves the lens by which we see money and relationships in our culture and politics and jobs and careers and sex and everything else that it might be father the way that we understand the world and the way that we live that that might be that which forms us father that it might be Jesus and his death upon the cross we ask that your Holy Spirit would do that work in our lives more and more we thank you that we can gather to recommit to reconnect to renew father the covenant knowing not that we have to give our lives to

Jesus again that when he took us he took us but that we can recommit that we can reconnect we can renew that covenant and say Lord help me to live for you this week we ask all these things in the name of Jesus your son and our savior amen