

# Formed by Forgiveness

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Date: 23 October 2022

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[ 0 : 0 0 ]     Hi, my name is George Sinclair. I'm the lead pastor of Church of the Messiah.

It is wonderful that you would like to check out some of the sermons done by Church of the Messiah, either by myself or some of the others. Listen, just a couple of things. First of all, would you pray for us that we will open God's Word well to His glory and for the good of people like yourself? The second thing is, if you aren't connected to a church and if you are a Christian, I would really like to encourage you to find a good local church where they believe the Bible, they preach the gospel, and if you have some trouble finding that, send us an email. We will do what we can to help connect you with a good local church wherever you are. And if you are a non-Christian checking us out, we're really, really, really glad you're doing that. Don't hesitate to send us questions. It helps me actually to know, as I'm preaching, how to deal with the types of things that you're really struggling with. So God bless.

Just remaining standing, I invite you just to bow your heads in prayer. Father, we are in your presence. We might not feel your presence, but Father, we have gathered together in the name of Jesus to be in your presence in the power of the Holy Spirit. And we ask, Father, that the Holy Spirit would fall with gentle but mighty power upon each one of us, so that Jesus might minister grace to us, and that we might respond to that gift of grace that is freely given yet again today, that we might respond to that in a worthy manner, Father, that is good for us and brings glory to you. So Father, pour out the Holy Spirit gently but deeply upon us, and we ask this in the name of Jesus, your Son, and the only Savior. Amen. Please be seated.

So some of you know that, I mean, I don't just go to coffee shops. I also read books, and I like reading mysteries or thrillers or something like that, and it's a very common feature in books like this to have a type of tragic anti-hero, somebody who's going to end up being the hero of the book, but is deeply wounded. And often, the wound is that they have done something terrible in their life that has caused tragedy, and they've never been able to come to terms with it.

And the constant sort of ongoing theme within the book from other characters is that they need to learn to forgive themselves. It's a very, very common thing. In fact, actually, it's one of those things that doesn't matter if you vote for Trump or Biden, it doesn't matter if you vote for McKinney or Sutcliffe or Shirely, that that would probably be a very common type of North American advice is that we need to learn to forgive ourselves. The text that we're going to look at today speaks directly to this particular piece of advice and actually points us in a way that is vastly better, that accomplishes what we desire, because I actually think forgiving yourself doesn't actually ever work, but this points us in the direction of something that does work. And so for those of us who are troubled in our conscience with things that we have done or failed to do in the past that has caused harm, this is very important and very good news for us. So I invite you to turn in your Bibles to Mark chapter 11, and we're going to begin at the first verse, Mark chapter 11, verse 1, and if you're using this version, it's on page 68.

[ 3 : 56 ] And some of you are familiar with this, some of you might not be, but we're going through this ancient biography of Jesus written by one who was an eyewitness of some of the things, but it's based on eyewitness testimony written when eyewitnesses were still alive. And one of the ways that we, one of the things in the story is that Jesus has predicted since chapter 8 that he's going to go to Jerusalem, and he's going to go to Jerusalem, he's going to die. And one of the things which is, when you're telling a story like this, it's not that you necessarily have the same number of words for every part of a person's life. A third of the gospel of Mark is taken up with this last week of Jesus's life. And so now he's been saying he's going to Jerusalem, now he arrives, and this is how he arrives. It goes like this, verse 1 of chapter 11.

Now when, sorry, yeah, never mind. Now when they drew near to Jerusalem, to Bethpage and Bethany, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his disciples and said to them, go into the village in front of you, and immediately as you enter it, you will find a colt tied on which no one has ever sat. Untie it and bring it. If anyone says to you, why are you doing this? Say, the Lord has need of it, and we'll send it back here immediately. And they, that is the two disciples, went away and found a colt tied at a door outside in the street, and they untied it. And some of those standing there said to them, what are you doing untying the colt? And they told them what Jesus had said, and they let them go. Now just sort of pause here for a second. This is a very, very odd story in lots of ways. In fact, actually, often what happens in Bible studies and in commentaries, in fact, is there's a bit of a discussion about how this came to be. Had Jesus secretly arranged it in advance? Like what was just going on? And I think one of the things that we are to take it from this, just as it's an important aside, is, well, here's the thing. I can tell you of a couple of times that I've had answered prayer that is just miraculous. There's no naturalistic account for it.

A couple of years ago, I was with a couple of doctors, and one of the doctors who was a Christian said, you know, anybody who's been a doctor for a very long time, or any length of time at all, they will tell you, if you're very honest, it comes to that point in the night, you know, they're all having the red wine or the white wine or whatever, and it comes to that point in the night, they'll all say that there have been medical cases they've dealt with that don't make any sense.

Now, because they're non-Christians, they wouldn't say that it was because of a miracle or answered prayer. They would just say, I know of a case where it just, you know, the x-ray showed this, the x-ray showed this, the x-ray showed this, and then the next day showed that there was nothing.

And so, and maybe some of us here, if we had a conversation, we could talk about something that really did, like, really miracle is the only way to explain it, but most of our prayers are answered in a way that there can be a naturalistic explanation. That, you know, it just happened this, and just happened like this, and just happened like this, and in some ways, I think what is really neat about this is that it shows that, like, that you could have a miraculous, I mean, Jesus wanted it, and it happened that way, but maybe there was some other naturalistic explanation of it, but that's just part of the life of faith for us as Christians. I mean, the heart of the text is going to be talking about what it means to have faith, and part of it for us is in faith is we pray to Jesus who knows all things, and sometimes when he says yes, it won't be clear whether it was, in a sense, just a coincidence that nature would have produced, or some other thing happened, or whether it's a miracle, but we don't have to care about that. Here we see Jesus sovereignly handling events so that he would enter as he sovereignly desires to enter in. That's what happens here in verse 7. If you look at it, verse 7, and they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it, and Jesus sat on it, and many spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut from the fields, and those who went before and those who followed were shouting, Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David! Hosanna in the highest!

[ 8 : 46 ] Blessed. Now just sort of pause. You know, this week I was thinking about it. If this was organized by Hollywood, this is how the gospel would end. Isn't this how a Hollywood movie ends? With a big crowd cheering, and all that's missing is Jesus kissing a pretty woman, and if Jesus was to kiss a pretty woman after this big crowd, that would be a Hollywood ending. The producers and the directors would say, that's a wrap. Let's get it out, and we're going to make lots of money with this particular story.

But in this case, it's not the end of the story. It's in fact getting to the very point of the story. And one of the things, those of you who are very familiar with the Bible, you'll know that all four of the ancient eyewitness biographies of Jesus include this incident. All four of them.

And some of you will remember bits and pieces of the stories which are a bit different. I think what Mark is doing in his telling is very significant and very important, but not...

I really love those songs that we were singing, and it's made me hoarse. I had to stop singing the last verse. Because I was singing it too much. Can you... Where's Deborah? Can you sing too much? I don't know. I guess you can, if it hurts your voice.

But what's happening is this. Jesus didn't die on the cross in a cathedral between two candles. Jesus did not die on the cross and rise from the dead in the way that often, like in Mormonism, nobody sees the angels except Joseph Smith, and nobody sees the gold tablets.

[ 10 : 31 ] And it's not that Jesus' death and resurrection happened in some secret type of way that only one person saw or nobody saw. There were three times in the year when the city of Jerusalem increased threefold, fivefold, sixfold, because people came from all over.

And this is one of those times. It's the Passover is about to be celebrated. And so the population of Jerusalem is swollen immensely. And Jesus just made it that everybody knew he was there.

Everybody knows he's there. That's what he's done. He's orchestrated it. So it's not... If you go back and read some of the other ancient biographies, there's sometimes that Jesus just sort of slips into the temple.

He maybe has just a couple of interactions and he slips out or slips into Jerusalem and then leaves. But this time, everybody knows he's there. And when everybody would have been talking about this entrance, some of them probably will have stains of donkey poop on their clothes that they have to get rid of.

It's going to be talked about all week. And when he dies, everybody knows it. You see, this is the exact opposite of a secret type of mystery religion.

[ 11 : 53 ] The Christian faith is a public faith. It's a public revelation that can be tested. And Jesus is just guaranteed that everybody knows he's there.

And when he dies, everybody will know that he dies by crucifixion. And in verse 11, remember I said that in some ways that earlier part of the story talks about Jesus, in a sense, being sovereign, that he sovereignly wants...

It's actually really interesting. One of the things which is sort of cool about this text is that it shows both... The stories that we're looking at today, it throws together both the godness of Jesus and the sovereignty of Jesus and the humanity of Jesus in a very powerful way.

Jesus is so poor he doesn't own a donkey. He has to borrow a donkey. And a little bit later, we're going to see that Jesus is hungry.

Yet, the same one who is poor and can't even afford a donkey, he sovereignly organizes a donkey for him to come in.

[ 13 : 13 ] And in verse 11, it doesn't look as much in English, like it's there, but it's more powerful in the original language. And verse 11, And Jesus entered Jerusalem and went into the temple.

And when he had looked around at everything, as was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve. Now, in the original language, this phrase, looked around, he's not looking around like a tourist.

Looking around. Looking around. Looking around. Looking around. Looking around. Looking around. Looking around. The churches, which had now become museums. He's not looking around as if one of you finally gets an opportunity to buy a house and you go sort of looking around to see if you want to buy the house.

The word looking around implies that he's the owner who's come to what he owns after being gone for a while to do an inspection.

That's what's being implied in the original language. The owner of the temple has come. And he's looking around to see if it's as he intended. Now, one of the things which is so brilliant about the Gospel of Mark, and it's one of the reasons, even from a human point of view, people still read it, is the way that Mark often will tell things without using, like, clearly explaining it, but allowing the story to unfold, to communicate at the level of a story.

[ 14 : 43 ] And stories communicated at a deep level for us as human beings. And so, Jesus is going to be saying something about how he is doing a new thing.

In a sense that everything that the Old Testament had been promising is about to be fulfilled. And that God is about to do a new thing in terms of how he relates to human beings.

And that he communicates by these very clever little stories. And then this odd aside about prayer that talks about forgiveness. Look what happens in verse 12.

On the following day, when they came from Bethany, he was hungry. Remember I said to you one of the things about, you know, in our day and age, we have a hard time believing that Jesus was God.

But for the first several centuries, Christians and others had a hard time believing that he was human. And so, texts like this were very important in the forming of the early creeds and doctrinal definitions to remind people that Jesus is fully human and fully God, but one person.

[ 15 : 50 ] And he's hungry. In verse 13, And seen in the distance a fig tree and leaf, he went to see if he could find anything on it. Note it doesn't say necessarily food, just find anything on it.

And when he came to it, he found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs. And Jesus said to it, May no one ever eat fruit from you again.

And his disciples heard it. Now, this has been a, this part and the part that's going to come in a few verses has troubled lots of Christians off and on throughout the years.

And lots of people from outside who look in at the text. And it's a very puzzling text. Like, it seems as if, in fact, actually, in some ways, this text touches at one of the deep fears that even we Christians have.

But it especially touches on a deep fear that those outside the Christian faith, when they look at it, they have. And that deep fear is that, you know, good grief, God is just unreasonable.

[ 16 : 58 ] He's just unfair and unreasonable. And this story perfectly illustrates his unfairness and his unreasonableness. that here it is.

It isn't even the season for figs. And he still goes ahead and curses it. Like, how unfair is that? And for many people outside the faith, one of the barriers to them coming in is they have this sense that the God that they'll meet is an unfair God who makes impossible demands and then blames you for not being able to meet it.

Now, the fear is real. But the text actually doesn't illustrate it. And part of it is, has to do with translation issues. That little bit for it was not the season for figs in the original language can go in different places in the sentence.

So here's what's really going on. It wasn't the season for figs. And yet, and for a fig tree, when it's not the season for figs, the tree has no leaves.

So it would be the same for us in the spring when all the trees are bare and there's still snow on the ground and it's not spring yet because it's February or whatever and all of a sudden you see a tree, a maple tree, with green leaves.

[ 18 : 18 ] Or a better example, an apple tree with green leaves. And you go, oh, wow, there's an apple tree with green leaves. Like, it draws your attention.

And so he goes to see if there's anything on it. And I only know this because obviously I don't know anything about fig trees. I've depended upon commentaries for this. And what happens is at the very same time in a healthy fig tree, as soon as the figs are being produced, the figs are also being produced.

The leaves and the figs grow at the exact same time. So, we're going to see more about this in a moment. What Jesus is doing here is one commentator called it a portent, an old-fashioned word.

One of those little things, a harbinger. Sorry, that's another old-fashioned word that some of you won't know what it means. It's something, it's sending a bit of a signal about something that's going to happen. And the signal about what's going to happen is that out of all the nations on the earth, how odd of God to choose the Jews.

And he chose them. If you go back, those of you who remember the stories of Abraham, he chose Abraham and then his descendants to be a blessing for the nations, to be the means by which his glory is made known to the world.

[ 19 : 44 ] And out of all the nations, they're the only one. Out of all the trees in February, there's only that one tree that has leaves. And unlike an apple tree, where you can have the leaves without the beginning of the apple and the fig tree, you have to have both at the same time.

And he goes. And it has the appearance of life, the appearance of what it should have, but it has absolutely no fruit. It's barren. Now, it's beyond the scope of this sermon because one of the things which those outside the Christian faith have as a great dislike about the Christian faith is the idea of God's judgment.

It's a very peculiar fear because, gosh, if there's one thing about our age we live in an un... We live in a hyperjudgmental age.

You say the wrong word in a tweet and the internet explodes. You say... There's one fellow that I watch on YouTube called John Campbell.

It's a very interesting source of sort of just main actual data on COVID and other types of issues. He's had a couple of warnings and it's just a little aside that he made that brought the censors down on him and now it's almost painful to watch him because he's worried about saying one wrong word that will cancel him.

[ 21 : 19 ] And it's a very puzzling thing that we live in an age where people feel completely and utterly free to judge others and condemn them to cancellation and destruction, but don't like a God that might judge them.

In fact, it's actually usually a feature of being judgmental. Ourselves. That we don't like the idea of someone else, especially God, judging us.

And except as we'll see, Jesus giving this parable of God's judgment on the Jewish people.

This is not a text about God replacing the Jewish people. It is a text about the fact that the temple and the priesthood will come to an end.

And in fact, it does come to an end. In the year 70, it's come to an end. It's never been returned. God's not finished with the Jewish people. But the temple and that phase has come to an end.

[ 22 : 24 ] But I'm getting a little bit ahead. You'd expect maybe to see, just look, remember I said how Mark sort of tells things by using the story to unfold it?

Look what happens in verse 15. It's page 70 if you're using this. And they came to Jerusalem so that he says this to the fig tree and then they walk away.

The fig tree is just there, has all the leaves and everything. And they came to Jerusalem and he entered the temple and began to drive out those who sold and those who bought in the temple. And he overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons.

And he would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple. And he was teaching them and saying to them, Is it not written, My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations?

But you have made it a den of robbers. And the chief priests and the scribes heard it and were seeking a way to destroy him for they feared him because all the crowd was astonished at his teaching.

[ 23 : 25 ] And when evening came, they went into the city, out of the city. Now, this is not an anti-capitalist text. It's not that Jesus has something against markets. It's not that he has something against selling pigeons.

It's not like that at all. If you ever have a chance to go to Jerusalem, it's very interesting. One of the things I really recommend you do is you go into a church like Christ Church in the old city of Jerusalem.

And it's a very, very interesting place. Not only is it the very first Protestant, in fact, evangelical church that was ever set in the Holy Land in Jerusalem.

But it has sort of like a bit of a, like a lot of places there. There's a wall around it and everything. There's a variety of buildings. It's a bit of a complex. And you're going through the old city of Jerusalem, which is filled with tourists and pilgrims.

And it's noisy. And it's, if you like crowds and you like excitement, it's like a very, it's just really amazing. The old buildings, the stores, the smell of the food, which is delicious.

[ 24 : 33 ] And you pass through this gate into a courtyard. And then you pass through some other place and then you finally get into the church. And if you go into the church, the church building is like what you would expect it to be.

It's very still and quiet. It's very simple. Very simple with a lot of Jewish symbolism in it, obviously, because it's a Christian, but using Old Testament symbolism.

And it's very quiet and still. And you can just tell when you're in there that this is a place that people have prayed in. You know, many of you have gone into old places. You can have this powerful sense.

This is a place where people have come to pray for more than a century. The difference between there and a two-minute walk out is the difference between, as the English used to say, chalk and cheese.

It's a huge difference. And so here we have a temple compound. And it'd be no problem if those places were all out, people selling all that stuff were outside.

[ 25 : 39 ] But in fact, not only were they not outside, but right inside. So there is no sense of prayer there with the bartering and the haggling and the complaints and the yelling and the screaming and the baying of animals.

It's as if the busy street, it's as if... Actually, one other thing, if you really want to... An even bigger contrast, if you go to Jerusalem, to go to Christchurch, but before that, go to the Old Market, which is just...

You crowd it. Everybody's pushing you. It's noisy. It's really just... It's quite an experience. It's overwhelming if you're not... If you're from somewhere like Ottawa, and it's overwhelming to be in this crowded outdoor market.

But that outdoor market, right in the temple, how is that a place of prayer? And it's taking over the place of the courtyard of the Gentiles, the courtyard which is specifically for pagans to come to pray to the God of Israel, which is what God had wanted in Genesis 12, and all the way through what our Jewish friends called the Tanakh and we call the Old Testament, is that God wanted the nations to come to Him.

You know, read Psalm 67. What... Steve, in a couple of weeks, is going to preach and challenge us to have a sense of the worldwide nature of the church and the missionary expansion. And Psalm 67, you know, why is it that we should pray that the gospel goes to the ends of the earth?

[ 27 : 04 ] Because God wants more people to praise Him. He wants more people to praise Him. That's Psalm 67. And they're stopping it.

And He drives them all out. My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations. It's not what I wanted. You've just made it a place where there's crooked and non-crooked business people.

And there's no prayer at all. Now the miracle of destruction. I have a couple of different people who when they see me working on my sermon now, they ask me what I'm going to preach on on Sunday.

And I said to one of them, I said, oh, I have the most popular topic in Canada. I'm going to talk about the destruction. I'm going to talk about the judgment of God. And I said, you know, that's just one of those topics.

If I was to advertise that, it would just bring in the crowds because everybody wants to hear about it. And he laughed. He's not a Christian. He laughed. Look what happened. Verse 20. As they passed by in the morning, they saw the fig tree withered away to its roots.

[ 28 : 13 ] And Peter remembered and said to him, Rabbi, look, the fig tree that you cursed has withered. Now just sort of pause here. There's a very funny thing which is happening. But the first thing is this.

This has caused lots of people trouble. Now, it shouldn't cause trouble. If we're going to see in a moment, it is in fact an enacted, it's the only miracle of destruction in the Gospels.

Not the only miracle of destruction in the New Testament, but it's the only one in the Gospel. And on one hand, it's a solemn warning that every single human being will one day appear before the judgment seat of God.

We don't get a pass because we're cute or because we're Canadian or because we're a victim. And the other thing about it in terms of the death of fig tree, it's just one of those weird things.

It's like, okay, really? You have a problem with that? Like you've never once had a cut flower in your house? You do realize that cutting the flower kills the flower? Or like, like, you know, we don't think about stuff like that.

[ 29 : 26 ] You know, those little fall decorations, like trees had to die for that to happen, right? You do realize that. Like it's a false problem. It's being overly sensitive about what doesn't matter.

But now you would expect that Jesus is going to say more about it. But Jesus goes in a very different direction, but it's an important direction for us to understand because he's going to go in the direction of what does it mean to have fruit?

And how do we have fruit? You see, Jesus is going to call us not to have a Facebook life or an Instagram life or a TikTok life, but a real life.

Not all about appearances, not about the fact that shortly after this picture was taken, you and your girlfriend had an unbelievably terrible fight where you said horrible things to each other and you didn't speak to each other for a month.

But the world doesn't see that. They just see that cool place you went to eat and the cool food you have, right? That's the Instagram, Facebook life. All appearances. Jesus says, there's nothing wrong with appearances.

[ 30 : 42 ] You know, George, you should wash your face before you come and try to comb your hair before you come to church. There's nothing wrong with appearances. But if all you have is appearances, that's like, in a sense, even in our culture, we understand that we don't, like, if you were to say that any Canadian, you're shallow, they would be deeply wounded.

It wouldn't matter whether who they vote for, they would be deeply wounded. We all, whether or not we're shallow, we actually don't want to be shallow. We want to have some depth. And Jesus says, we've seen the fig tree and all it has is leaves but no fruit.

And now, I'm going to talk to you very briefly and it's a whole other series of sermons that could be done and I'll just try to pick up the highlights. Is what, how do you, how do you be real?

What's reality? The very first thing he says is verse 22. and Jesus answered them and he gives a command, have faith in the triune God.

Have faith in the triune God. That's where it begins. Now, faith is one of those words that we have trouble with.

[ 31 : 56 ] I have to take a moment to try to help you, help us all to understand it. For many of us, faith is an emotion. We feel like we have faith.

but emotion is empty. Emotion is just appearances. And, and for others of us, faith is like a power.

I, I talked to several people who watched power, positive thinking stuff and, and, and having better control of your life and, and, and it's talked, faith will often be talked about in those types of things and believing it as a type of power, something that allows you to accomplish things.

But that's not what the Bible here is talking about in terms of faith. Faith is not, it's an odd type of power. You see, when you talk about faith as like a power to accomplish things, they're talking about faith as if it's like a muscle.

And, you know, you want to get really strong, so you take up the three classic deadlifting exercises, exercises, squats, deadlifts, and, and bench press. And, and you, you eat the right way to get your muscles bigger and you get a coach and you, you, you work on all three of these different things and, and your muscles get bigger and bigger and bigger and you can lift more and more and more things.

[ 33 : 18 ] And, and for many people in our culture, we either think of faith as something like muscles or something like an emotion, but it's neither. In fact, if I could come up to the simplest analogy for what faith is, it's like listening.

It's like listening. It's receptive. I could, I could go to a dinner party and I could be all ready to listen, but that doesn't make the other person speak.



And all of us have had the experience of talking to people who don't listen. So there is something there. There's something that comes from us, but at the end of the day, the heart of it is reset, receiving and connecting.

And so what he's saying is, you need to have this receiving of God, this connecting of God, this opening to God, the triune God, not just any God.

And one of the things which is so significant about these whole series of stories is, you see, the fact of the matter is, as you think about listening, there's lots of problems with listening, because one of the things you can do is you can listen to people who lie.

[ 34 : 38 ] You can listen to people who are untrustworthy. You can listen to things which are just illusions, which are delusions. You know, you can listen to all of these things and you can receive them and take them in.

And Jesus, part of the whole point of Jesus' life and coming within after all these centuries of prophecies in his life and his death and his resurrection, that there have been rumors of God, there have been idols of God, there have been false gods, and Jesus reveals the true God because we need to listen and receive the truth.

And what did Mark just do with chapter 11 with the triumphal entry is that everybody and their dog now knows that Jesus came into the community. And when Jesus dies on the cross, everybody knows that he dies on the cross.

And when his disciples say the grave is empty and we have seen him, everybody in Jerusalem can go and look at the tomb and look for the body and the body is never found.

Receive, listen, connect to that which is true, the true and living God, the triune God. And from that flows other things. What flows? What flows?

[ 35 : 56 ] What type of fruit is going to come from being connected to the triune God, to opening yourself to the triune God and receiving the triune God?

Well, the first thing is going to be prayer. Look at what he says in verses 23 and following. Truly, if those of you who are familiar with the old King James Version, that would be translated is verily.

And it means amen. Like this is a solemn, true statement. I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, be taken up and thrown into the sea and does not doubt in his heart but believes that what he says will come to pass, it will be done for him.

Therefore, I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it and it will be yours. Now, as I said, you could do a whole book trying to unpack that just very, very briefly.

I'm already sort of come up to the end of my time but I need to just say a couple of things here about this. A couple of things. First of all, is that when you've put your faith and trust and as you're putting your faith and trust in the triune God, one of the things he'll tell you to do is to pray big.

[ 37 : 03 ] You know what? We should be praying for the end of certain systemic evils in Canada and the devil will tell you, you can't pray against that.

Good grief, George. The Supreme Court says it's a right. Apple likes it. Microsoft likes it. Amazon likes it. Hollywood likes it.

The universities all like it. Pray anyway. Pray for a day. Pray for a week. Pray for a month. Pray for decades. And in heaven, we'll find out that one of the reasons some of those great evils have passed like the evil of slavery was that because insignificant people like you and me have prayed for decades.

The second thing about this prayer thing is remember what I said about that whole thing in the beginning about you could explain the donkey in naturalistic ways.

I think one of the things that God is going to do for us in heaven is play nights where we'll have other movie nights. I think I shared about movie nights for George's dumb things he prayed for and then, you know, after there's been a season in heaven, there'll be things which George sort of felt grumpy with me about.

[ 38 : 24 ] This is how God will happen. Things that George was grumpy with me about for not answering. And they'll show me praying for something and then me sort of being upset that God doesn't answer it because I had to, you know, five years later or ten years later or twenty years later it happened.

And I'd completely forgotten that I prayed about it. I was grumpy in the moment I just forgot about it. And it could be that it's a miraculous thing, pray big, but it could be that, you know, so to speak, there's a bomb that knocks that part of the mountain off into the sea.

And George doesn't remember that George was praying for that. Or it could be, and this is another part of prayer, is that God says, yes, I want that mountain taken down and thrown into the sea because I want, you know, this church or this ministry to the poor there.

So, George, I'm going to answer your prayers. George, roll up your sleeves. Get to work. Get to work. We're going to answer that prayer. Get to work.

Get the shovels. Raise the funds. Get the architect's plans. Let's get it done. But the main thing is that it comes out of our prayer.

[ 39 : 30 ] And then this final thing, just really final, look at this next particular, and the other thing about doubt, sorry, you just think about the analogy of listening for a second. One of the things I do when I go out with my wife is I try to sit with my back to the television because it's hard to listen to your wife and watch the television at the same time.

If this was a different type of church, there'd be, I'd say, do I have an amen? And all the women would say amen and the men would look sheepish because it's hard to listen to two things at the same time.

And doubt just means being in two minds. And the same thing about believe in your heart, it means commit to it. It means if I'm going to listen to you, I commit to listening to you. And I'm not listening to three things.

I'm not listening to the radio and watching the TV and listening to it at the same time. It doesn't work. You're not open to it if that's happening. And just finally, the final thing about forgiveness. Look at verse 25.

And whenever you stand praying, forgive. If you have anything against anyone, so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses.

[ 40 : 44 ] Now, there's a couple of people here who are very good with grammar. And one of the problems we have with understanding this text is that we read it as a conditional, sorry, grammar geek moment.

In the original language, it's not a conditional but the subjunctive. And it makes all the difference in the world for the text. You see, what this text is saying is that, you know what, faith is being open to God, receptive to God, attentive to God, allowing of God to come in and coming into God, it's that type of receptivity.

And when we do that, it changes us. Like when we do that with another person, it changes us. Both of us change. In the case of God, it's not that God changes but that we change.

You see, this is pointing to the fact that what's going to happen on the cross, the reason we can have faith in God is that what we see when Jesus dies on the cross is that God has taken the means so by you and I can be forgiven by God.

Because of Christ's death on the cross, when I have faith in that, when I receive it, when I allow it to enter into my life, when I enter into it, one of the things about Jesus' death on the cross is we are seeing that God has forgiven you of everything in Christ.

[ 42 : 25 ] You see, the fact of the matter is that you and I don't need, if you are here or if you're watching and you're troubled by not being able to forgive yourself, what is happening is that God is knocking on the door of your heart and saying to you, you need to accept my son.

You are longing to know Jesus without recognizing him. Because we can't forgive ourselves, we can't pay our debt to ourselves, but we have a longing to be forgiven, to be forgiven by God.

And when we put our faith and trust in him, we are entering entering into his forgiving us of everything that we have ever done that is wronged.

And when we open ourselves to the triune God, he shapes us to be ones who forgive. And all I can say to this, I've really gone over my time.

if you think of someone who's wronged you and you want to hurt them or you want to, you feel embarrassed, you feel ashamed, you have to fight the temptation and want others to know how bad they really are, then that shows that you have not forgiven them.

[ 43 : 54 ] And sometimes when we pray that we can forgive another person, God does a miracle and it goes away right away.

And for others of us, it's a journey of forgiveness that we need to pray day in and day out that we can forgive that other person until we come to that point where we are free of the hurt, that we are absolutely, genuinely free, no longer the desire for vengeance or to hurt the other person or reveal the other person, no longer feeling fight or flight or tower or cower, that we are free.

And one of the things our world needs in a world of hyper-judgment, one of the profound fruit that the Christian community can begin to show in our day and age is the truth and the power of forgiveness.

I invite you to stand. Bow our heads in prayer. Father, we confess that most of the time we don't even think we have to forgive people.

And, Father, we think that there's nothing in our lives that need forgiveness, not recognizing those resentments that we still carry, those desires to wound that we still carry, those times that we get red in the face with embarrassment or shame, those things that make us still so angry, Father, and we are, Father, constantly inundated by experiences that show our desperate need to forgive and do not recognize that we ask, Lord, that your Holy Spirit would do a gentle but healing work within us, that your Holy Spirit would, Father, help us to trust Jesus in his death on the cross more and more and more.

[ 45 : 52 ] There would be more real to our heart and that that becoming real to our heart, that it would form us to recognize our profound ongoing need to forgive and that you would help us to pray that we can forgive and make us people who pray, pray, and pray into that profound need for us to forgive others and that we might know that wonderful fruit that you bring into our lives, that that time comes when we can forgive and then we can say free at last, free at last, praise God Almighty, thank God Almighty, I am free at last.

We thank you, Father, that you have forgiven us in Jesus and may that form us in terms of how we think and how we pray and how we live. And we ask all these things in the name of Jesus, your Son and our Savior.

Amen. Amen.