

Forgiveness and Unforgiveness

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[0 : 0 0] in prayer. Father, Jesus has said that the Holy Spirit is our helper, that he is a spirit of truth.

And Father, that Jesus and you have sent the Holy Spirit to us, that we might remember his words, and that we might walk in them. And so, Father, we ask that you would be kind and merciful to us, and whether it's those of us here or those online live or those downstream, that your Holy Spirit would fall upon us so that your words would come home to us very deeply. And we know, Father, that as your word comes to us very deeply, it's a word of grace and a word of freedom.

And so we ask this in the name of Jesus, your Son and our Savior. Amen. Please be seated. So I had another coffee shop incident, but a good one. I went to a different coffee shop on Friday morning because the one I normally go to, there were no seats. And as I come in and I get my coffee, I see that one of the regulars that I talk with a lot, that he's sitting in the same coffee shop, and he's talking with his business partner. And neither of them are Christians, neither of them have any type of Christian background whatsoever. Both very, very great guys. And as I'm walking by, I just said hi, but I didn't want to interrupt them because it looked like they were in a bit of a business meeting. But one of them, the fellow that I talked to most of the time, he said to me, oh, you're sitting down to work on your sermon. What's your sermon going to be about this week?

And I said, I paused, and I'll find out in heaven one of you were praying for me right that instant. And I said, actually, I'm talking about something that neither of you could relate to and nobody can relate to. I'm going to talk about the problem of unforgiveness, at which they burst out laughing.

And that says, yeah, yeah, yeah, that doesn't have anything to do with either of us. And I went and sat and continued to work, and they had their business meeting. So we're going to look at a story that actually opens the door for us to consider forgiveness and unforgiveness, and sort of its power in our lives. And so it'd be a great help if you would turn with me to Nehemiah chapter four.

[2 : 2 9] Nehemiah chapter four. And I confess that this week I've done something which I haven't done for a while. I've sort of envisioned it as we go through this chapter, as if they're scenes or episodes in a Netflix series. And I've entitled each of the scenes as we sort of go through, sort of as a bit of a help. Originally, I was doing it, I was trying to get a handle on how to, what to do with the text.

And I realized this would be a handy way for me to sort of make sure I understand the bits of the story as they go together. And then this week, I just decided we'd go through it together all in the same manner. So it begins with episode scene one, the joy of mocking, the joy of mocking, verses one to three. Now when Sanballat heard that we were building the wall, he was angry and greatly enraged. And he jeered at the Jews. And he said in the presence of his brothers and of the army of Samaria, what are these feeble Jews doing? Will they restore it for themselves? Will they sacrifice?

Will they finish up in a day? Will they revive the stones out of the heaps of rubbish and burned ones at that? Tobiah, the Ammonite, was beside him. And he said, yes, what they are building, if a fox goes up on it, he will break down their stone wall. Now, it's actually really interesting. This is a story still being read 2,400 years after it's been written. So even if you're watching and you don't believe the Bible is the inspired word of God, it is at least significant that there is a text like this still being read 2,400 years later. And for some of you, some of you who might have been in churches where they've done some leadership training. And often the book of Nehemiah is a book that's used in leadership training. There's lots of leadership principles that you can unearth from the book of Nehemiah. I haven't been focusing on that. I've been looking at the book, not just from the lens of leadership, but sort of a, I've just been trying to look at the book, actually make it more relevant for everybody or bring out the story for everybody. But even churches that haven't gone through the book of Nehemiah, this is often a chapter which is read. You might not recognize it right now, but things come up to it later. Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah. I've heard that before. Now, but here's the thing. In many ways, this story 2,400 years ago is the seed for two movie genres that all of us are familiar with, westerns and bully movies. In other words, like for bully movies, mean girls and legally blonde, there's a lot to what happens in those types of movies with what's going on in this story, and westerns. And so you just think about it for a second. What's a very, very common scene in movies like the mean girls or legally blonde or in westerns? There will be a scene where you have the losers, usually the new kid in the movies, the bully movies, it's the new kid in the losers. And what happens is there's a time when the popular people and the powerful people, maybe in a high school or some in-office thing, and all of their people who cheer them on are all around mocking and humiliating the poor loser and the new person. It's a very, very common aspect of movies. And in westerns, those of you who like westerns, I have to confess I like westerns. I shouldn't be embarrassed about it. I love a good western. But what's a very, very common theme in westerns? Well, there's the simple homesteaders, and there's the baron who for mining rights or railway rights or cattle rights or whatever, he wants their land. And he's trying to do things to humiliate them and take over their land. And there's often a scene early on in the movie where the baron, almost always a man, man, and his thugs, his 10, 15, 20, 30 thugs, they're all around. And they have a poor homesteader, and they mock them and belittle them and threaten them. Right? Very, very common movie themes, actually. And that's exactly what's happening here. You have these Jewish people, a small number of them, scattered, laboring away. What we haven't seen, what we've skipped over, is at the end of chapter two, there's the message, Nehemiah says, I've actually come to make sure that we build the wall around

Jerusalem so we can be protected, and so our culture can develop, and so we're not living all the time in fear from, in a sense, by guys like Sambalat and Tobiah. We can start to go on and live our lives, hold our heads high. It's a very, very important thing. We all know how important it is to be able to hold our heads high. And so he said, it's time to build. And the people say, yes, let's build. And then sort of, if you go back and you look at it, what has happened is very shortly after that, they actually start to build. And it's as if you piece it together, if you read the whole, like, the five or six chapters, and you look at it, that Nehemiah has come up with a very, very brilliant strategy. See, this is why it's talked about in leadership things. So first of all, the original wall encompassed the whole city area, which was like a valley, a hill, a valley, a hill, and a valley. And the original walls encompassed all of it. And this valley to this valley is the really big hill. And this valley to this valley is the smaller hill. And what Nehemiah has decided to do is not try to build the wall over at all, but to ignore all over here. And in good military fashion, the original wall actually was at sort of at the bottom of the valley. There's some water sources there and everything which they needed. And what he's just decided is he's just going to build a wall around this bit, around this hill, and he's going to make it at the top, which gives it, of course, for those of you with a military background, a military advantage. It captures the high ground. And so the first thing is he's not going to make all of the wall. He's just going to build a small part of the wall. The second thing is he decides is he's going to mobilize the people just to build the part of the wall which is in front of them. So in a sense, he's saying, okay, the Morides, they're going to build this part of the wall, the, you know, Victor and Alex, and they're going to get their friends, they're going to build this bit. And, you know, and Chris and Dana, this bit, and Ross and Shirley, this bit, and, you know, Andra and Deborah, this bit, and, you know, George and Louise, this bit, and Diane and her friends, this bit. And we're just going to do this, and we're all going to work at it at the same time. And the other thing about it is, it's a little bit like an early example of, you know, how military engineers in a battle situation they don't try to build something that's going to last for 100 years, they just build something that's going to be good enough for the battle. They throw up a temporary bridge, they put sandbags or something. And he said, we're just going to build something which is good enough. Good enough is good enough. And the other thing he decides to do is we're all going to work at it at the same time.

We're not going to do something like saying, let's get all of everybody together, and we're just going to build this section, and we're going to build this section perfectly to the proper height, and then we'll build this section perfectly to the proper height, and then, no, no, no, no, no, no, he said, we're not going to do that. We're going to start all around. We're going to work at the same time. Even if the wall begins by only being this high, we're going to have a perfect circle.

[10:00] And then we're just going to do the best we possibly can. And so they're doing it really quick. Most of them are unskilled, and it's going to probably mean, you know, that, well, actually, I shouldn't say the George and Louise section, because Louise would know how to build something.

So let's say it's just the George section, and it's looking pretty rickety. And, you know, and then there might be the Diane section, and Diane makes sure that it looks really, really good, right? And so it's all a bit of a mishmash all around, and that's how they're doing it, and they're doing it really quick. That's what's just happened before this. And these guys, it's happening so quick that we're going to discover later on the whole wall building process is done in 52 days. That's the other part of this thing. We're going to do this like a blitz rig. Before our enemies start to even realize what's going on, we're going to be well into the process, and before they can really do much, we're going to finish it. It's like a blitz rig.

And that's his strategy, which we find out if we read, you know, chapter two and three and four and five and six, and we piece the little pieces together. So Sanballat and his guys, they've come around, and now it's just like legally blonde or mean girls. It's just like a Western. They're there with their army, and with all these big buffoons chuckling away, they make fun. They say, look at these builders. They're feeble. Their mind is feeble. Their body is feeble. They're just, they're feeble, and they're making fun of them. And one of the things they say, well, they sacrifice. What they're actually saying there is they're mocking. They say, no, what are you guys going to do? You're going to pray the wall up? As if that's going to happen. You're going to pray the wall up? Like, that doesn't work.

Pray all you want. The wall doesn't go up. They're just, they make fun, and they make fun, and they make fun, and they make fun, and they make fun. And so what does Nehemiah do?

He's mad. He's probably a little bit humiliated. And as the story goes on, we're going to see that, in fact, the enemies have some success in having their mocking get in the heads of the Jewish people.

[12 : 15] It's going to become clearer a little bit later. So what does Nehemiah do? Well, let's look at the next scene. And here it is, and it's going to be a bit of a shocking title, but the scene is called Praying for the Ruin and Damnation of Enemies. What? That's in the Bible? Praying for the Ruin and Damnation of the Enemies. Verses 4 and 5. Listen to, he prays. Listen to how he prays.

Hear, O our God. So he's saying to God, God, are you hearing this? I want you to hear it. I want you to make, Lord, I want, I know you hear my prayer. I think you do. I want to make sure you don't just hear my prayer, but you hear what all these guys are saying. And for we are despised. And now he says, turn back their taunt on their own heads and give them up to be plundered in a land where they are captives. In a sense, this prayer is a perfect karma prayer. And the modern form of karma in the West is what goes around comes around. And he's praying, Lord, it's time for what's going around to come around. So, Lord, I want them to be defeated. I want them to be invaded. I want them to be defeated.

I want them to be taken captive. I want them to be taken to a foreign land. And, Lord, I hope that when they go to that foreign land and they start to build something, that then they're plundered. That's what he's praying. And then it gets, it gets, it continues. Verse five, do not cover their guilt.

Now, cover their guilt is, it's a literal translation and it's a very, very good, but basically what it means is forgiveness. That's why if you look at some modern, more modern versions of the Bible, they'll say, don't forgive them. And that's what it means. Do not cover their guilt. Don't forgive them, Lord. Don't forgive them. And let not their sin be blotted out from your sight. In other words, never forget it. Ever. Never forgive them. Always remember what they've done. Never forgive them, God. That's what he's praying. For they have provoked you to anger in the presence of the builders.

Now, some of you might say, well, I didn't know that was in the Bible. George, like, are we supposed to go and do likewise? Like, is this teaching us how to pray?

[15 : 12] Well, we're going to come to it at the end of the story. We're going to return to it because it's something that we need to think about a little bit. So what do you do? How can a story continue after a prayer like that? Well, here's what happens. Nehemiah is praying this, and it might very well be that it's like a regular prayer of his. And we'll get to get a bit of a better sense of why he's even praying like this, because the next scene is building while being encircled by enemies.

Building while being encircled by enemies. Verses 6 to 9. Here's how it goes. So we built the wall. We continue to build the wall. They're yelling. They're insulting us.

They're threatening by their just very posture, the stance of their legs, the thrust of their chest. They're threatening us. But we continue to build the wall. And all the wall was joined together to half of its height for the people who had a mind to work. So this next little bit is happening when they're about halfway through the wall rebuilding process. And just a bit of a heads up, we're going to see that in chapter 5 and chapter 6, there's other things going on in the community while the wall is being built that Nehemiah is also having to deal with. But right now, he's just talking about this one sort of aspect of it. But notice what happens, verse 7.

But when Sanballat and Tobiah and the Arabs and the Ammonites and the Ashtodites heard that the repairing of the walls of Jerusalem was going forward and that the breaches were beginning to be closed, they were very angry. And they all plotted together to come and fight against Jerusalem and to cause confusion in it. And we prayed to her God and set a guard as protection against them day and night.

So what's happened is the story has unveiled enemies a little bit as it goes along. If you go back and you read from chapter 1 to here, you'll see that new enemies keep being unveiled. And it's not obvious to us because we're not aware of the geography, but if you get a Bible atlas or some other help, what you'll discover is that now there's the Jewish people right here. And originally, there were people up here and people over here who were their enemies.

[17 : 31] And then they added people over here who were their enemies. And now they've added people here who are their enemies. So they're completely and utterly circled, encircled. It would be, to use like a war analogy, it would be as if, I'm trying to remember this, and some of you can correct me after the word. There was a battle in the Second World War where the Allies made a big advance. And then there was a counterattack by the Germans. And there was a group of Americans left encircled by the Germans. And they sent paratroopers in. It's very powerfully portrayed in the series Band of Brothers. And you have these people fighting completely surrounded and outgunned by the Nazis all around. And that's the situation which is being portrayed here in the situation. And they're just talking destruction. And you can see, right, this is exactly like what happens in bully movies. It's exactly what happens in Westerns.

In bully movies, there's always a scene where people break out from the encircled crowd and they do something to further humiliate and intimidate the uncool kids and the new kid. And in Westerns, there's always a scene where some of the goons and some of the thugs come and they burn out some homesteaders to cause even greater confusion and desire to sell. It's a very, very common theme.

And that's what's going on here in the book. And it's very interesting that Nehemiah, in verse 9, you look at again, we prayed toward God and set a guard as protection against them day and night. And I just want to mention this. It's part of a biblical pattern that you pray and do, and you do and pray. It's not a matter that you just pray, and if you pray, you don't have to do anything, or that if you just do things, you don't have to pray. No, the biblical model is you pray and you do, and you do and you pray. And that's what you see here in the story. Actually, I missed an earlier point. If you could just put this up, Claire, I sort of skipped back to my first point.

This is relevant for this whole section. You know, the things that they mock them about building the wall, it turns out the mockers are all wrong. God does want the wall built. And this is an important thing for us, because we can allow enemies to get into our head. And sometimes maybe somebody doesn't like us, they're our enemy, because we've done something wrong to them, and that's going to get to forgiveness. But sometimes they just don't like us. They hate us. They want to see us fail and get destroyed. And yet we know that we're doing what God would have us do. The Lord's quiet yes always trumps the world's loud no. The world's quiet yes always trumps the world's loud no.

Anyway, back to our story. So you pray and you do in the biblical way. Is this like now that they've prayed, is God going to start to do something that's going to help them? Well, no, actually, it's going to get even worse before anything happens which is better. The next scene is called When the enemies are in your head. When enemies are in your head. Verses 10 to 12. Look at what happens. And the first is in verse 10. In Judah it was said, the strength of those who bear the burdens is failing. There is too much rubble. By ourselves we will not be able to rebuild the wall.

[21 : 04] And in the original Hebrew, it's written in a rhythmic fashion, so that it's like a little bit like a child's song. You know, sticks and stones may make my bones, but you know, names will never hurt me.

Or some other little type of a, you know, a ditty like that that people say with a bit of a sing-song voice. In Hebrew, this is written in a sing-song manner. And it's as if this is what there's now starting to go on in their head. The enemies are in their head. And so the enemies are in their head.

And they don't want to come out and say, well, we're really afraid of them. So instead, what happens is their confidence is completely and utterly sapped. And now they're thinking to themselves, I'm not strong enough to bear the burden. This isn't going to work. It's going to fail. There's too much rubble. We just can't do it by ourselves. And then in verse 11, you see that the enemies have a sense that the Jewish people, that they're getting in their head. And so this doesn't make them say, okay, okay, let's just cool it. We don't have to be so mean. No, no, no. What happens with people like that when they're getting in your head? They get meaner. They get meaner. That's what happens. They get even more aggressive and mean. And that's what you see in verse 11. What they're saying, that the Jewish builders are thinking, I don't think we're going to be able to do this. I think it's going to be a failure. And now the enemies are saying, they will not know or see till we come among them and kill them and stop the work. Whoa. And the neighbors who haven't been building, but are part of the community. And it's a little bit, we, in a sense, in a big city like this where things are impersonal, we pick up when the culture doesn't like something. But any of you who've lived in small towns, one of the things which was really hard for me when I was a minister in a small town, it took me, because I was from Montreal originally, and then from Ottawa, and I'd never lived in a small town. And I didn't realize that if we made a decision in council, all of the community talked about it. Like, I didn't realize that. I didn't realize that's how small towns worked.

It didn't dawn on me in a million years that people who never came to our church would talk about what we were doing and influence the decisions. Like, but that's what's going on here. And what they're saying in the neighborhood is this, verse 12, the Jews who lived near them came from all directions and said to us 10 times, you must return to us. Like, give up, get out.

Now, this next scene, I'm using the Lord of the Rings analogy from the movie. And the next scene is called an Aragorn moment. Nehemiah has a moment as if he's Aragorn, not with a fancy sword and all of that. But see what happens in scene 5, verses 13 to 14. So this is all going on. The enemies are in their head. So what does Nehemiah do? Verse 13. So in the lowest parts of the space behind the wall, in open places. So in the lowest parts of the space behind the wall, the spots where the walls may be only this high, not this high, where the wall is just never going to be very high for whatever building reasons. And in the open places, I stationed the people by their clans, by their family groupings, with their swords, their spears, and their bows. And I looked around. I looked and I rose and said to the nobles and to the officials and to the rest of the people, here's that moment.

[24 : 53] What I'm thinking of is there's this wonderful scene. If you haven't seen it, I guess it's a bit of a spoiler. But it's in the third movie. And they need to draw the attention of Sauron away from what Frodo's doing. So you remember the same, they all go to attack Mordor. There's just a tiny number of them. And you remember that scene where the gates open and there's thousands and thousands and tens of thousands of people and they completely start to surround Aragorn. And there's this very powerful scene where he's on his horse and he says, there will come a day when we will all die and our hands will be weak, et cetera, et cetera. But this is not that day. He rallies them as all they're being completely and utterly surrounded. And this is Nehemiah's rallying cry. He says, do not be afraid of them. Remember the Lord who is great and awesome and fight for your brothers, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your homes. Now I'm going to pause and I'm going to do something. If it was just you folks, I don't think I'd have to worry about it. But this is online and I might get pushback.

But it's the right thing to say. And I want to say something to the men who are here. This story reveals a biblical pattern. So men, men, you are called to be prepared to fight.

You are called to be ready and willing to defend and to fight. That is your calling as men. Now I'm not saying you should all go out and take martial arts training, buy pistols and learn.

I'm not saying that. We're not in a culture where that has to happen in that type of physical way. And this is made fun of in our culture. And I should probably try to qualify with all sorts of quotas. But I'm not going to do it. This is a very consistent biblical message. Men, you and I are called that when the time comes, we are willing to defend. If the boat's sinking, we put women and children into the life rafts and are willing to die ourselves. If the time of attack comes, we're willing to defend, lay down our lives to defend. And don't let the enemies in our culture who want to deny these truths get in your head. That's who you are as men.

That's who you are. That's who I am. Pray that if that time comes, I would be willing to lay down my life or to stand my ground to protect and defend. So what happens? Do they fight? Well, let's look at the next scene. And if you're just listening to this in a podcast form down the road, there's a question mark at the end of this title for scene six, which is disarming, disarming to work, question mark.

[28 : 01] And it's verse 15. And what you see is this. When our enemies heard that it was known to us and that God had frustrated their plan, we all returned to the wall, each to his work. And what we're going to see is now there's a question. Do they lay down their arms, they put it away and they get back to working? No. Actually, that's what you're going to see in the very, very next section. And you can see, by the way, in all of this, why if you wanted to do some leadership lessons about prayer, if you wanted to do leadership lessons about, you know, re-analyzing the task and coming up with a different plan, if you wanted to see something about how to manage threats and to work and be creative, you can see how you could get lessons out of all of this. And this is one of those parts that if you haven't been familiar with it up to now, you go, oh yeah, yeah, that's where that comes from in the Bible.

What we see is this. The next scene, scene seven, is called the hammer, the sword, and the trumpet. The hammer or the chisel, the sword, and the trumpet. And here's how it goes.

From that day on, half of my servants worked on construction and half held the spears, shields, bows, and coats of mail. They don't disarm. They work at a slower pace, but maintain their defenses.

And the leader stood behind the whole house of Judah, who were building on the wall. Those who carried burdens were loaded in such a way that each labored on the work with one hand and held his weapon with the other. So if they were carrying burdens, they had their sword strapped to their side as they carried the burdens. If they were working on the side with a chisel or a hammer, they'd have their sword right beside them at all times, like immediately present.

Eighteen, and each of the builders had a sword strapped to the side while he built. The man who sounded the trumpet was beside me. And I said to the nobles and to the officials and to the rest of the people, the work is great and widely spread, and we are separated on the wall from one another.

[30 : 09] In the place where you hear the sound of the trumpet rally to us there, our God will fight for us. In other words, if the attack comes from the enemies and we're too spread out to mount a defense, I know we have at least one military guy here. Classic military strategy, we'll all gather in one spot, we'll form a defensive perimeter, and we'll fight. Come where the trumpet sounds. Just run to where the trumpet's blowing, and we'll know. And so we labored at the work, and half of them held the spears from the break of dawn until the stars came out. I also said to the people at that time, and then it goes on a little bit about some other precautions which they took.

So, what about that prayer? What about that prayer? And how does that fit in with the whole story?

You know, sometimes you hear, like I gave an example today of where I had sort of a timely word to my friends, but a lot of times I don't. I mean, one of the things I want to encourage you is to bear witness to Jesus, to your friends, and your places of work. And if they throw something at you, raise an objection, and you just go, but it's not the end of the world. That's how you start to figure out how to answer questions, is by taking that step, and then, you know, later on you'll think about it.

One of the things I wish I had said sometimes to my Jewish friends, because a lot of my Jewish friends, I can tell that they believe that Jewish people have the Old Testament, they call it the Tanakh, and Christians have the New Testament, but Christians don't believe the Tanakh is theirs, is Christians. They just, you know, Christians have the New Testament, Jewish people have the Tanakh, and I wish I, next time I get a chance, I think I'm going to try to say to them, you know, listen, you need to understand that Christians believe that God, in a sense, wrote one book with two chapters, and the chapter has sub-chapters, and that first chapter is what you call the Tanakh. We call it the Old Testament, or maybe another way to put it would be chapter one, and that he also wrote a second chapter, that to finish the book, he wrote a second chapter. There's sub-chapters within it, and that's what we call the New Testament, and just like in any book, you can't just read chapter one and think you understand the whole book if there's still chapter two, and if you read a book and you read chapter two, but you haven't read chapter one, you're never going to really understand the book.

You need to read both books to understand, you need to read both chapters to understand the book, and so when you see this prayer here, you're seeing a very, very good prayer written, so to speak, in chapter one. Now, what you learn from reading chapter two, as well as chapter one, is that at the end of the day, the whole book has only one hero, and that one hero is Jesus. If you go back and you look at chapter one and chapter two, you'll have people like Peter, and you'll have people like Paul in chapter two, and you have people like David, and Abraham, and Moses, and Nehemiah in chapter one, and what you look at, and how the Bible shows that there's only one true hero is that in both chapter one and chapter two, all of the heroes, and they're sort of lesser heroes or sub-heroes, there's all some things about them which is flawed, which they sin in, in all of their cases, without exception. There's only one true hero, the true and greater hero, and all of these lesser heroes, the heroes who sin, who don't, well, they're just not the full hero. They're really pointing the way towards that time when we come to realize and recognize the true and greater hero, which is the Lord Jesus Christ. So how does this work out for Nehemiah? Well, it works out like this.

[34 : 06] Nehemiah prays, Father, never forgive them. Never, ever, ever, ever, ever, ever, ever, ever forgive them.

What does Jesus pray on the cross? Also surrounded by his enemies, but now hung by his enemies on a cross to die. He says, Father, forgive them. Father, forgive them. So a couple of things. So here's the first thing. If you could put up the next point. There's two things that we can learn. One thing here that we can learn right off the bat about Nehemiah's prayer is that we are to pray honestly and to pour out your heart to the Lord. Pray honestly. Pour out your heart to the Lord. See, the fact of the matter is, if I hate people, if I don't forgive them and don't want to forgive them and never want to forgive them, and I'm talking to Almighty God, he already knows that's what I think. Like, he already knows that. So why should I try to pretend that I'm pious? Like, that's only play-acting. Like, if I'm play-acting with my wife, my wife doesn't, she wants me to be me. I mean, she also wants me to keep repenting of the things about me that are bad.

That's a whole other topic of conversation. But she wants me to be me. And so, you know, Nehemiah is mad. He's angry. He's humiliated. And he's praying for justice. He's praying for justice. And his prayers reveal a misunderstanding about forgiveness. And it's a misunderstanding that you have hints of the solution in the Old Testament, but it's not made clear until you come to the New Testament. Yet, you constantly have this riddle posed to you about how God's chosen people, it just can't be a case of favoritism or something like that. There must be something else that doesn't make it just favoritism. If you could put up the next point, that would be very helpful. Forgiveness does not involve injustice, exoneration, forgetting, minimizing, or favoritism. You see, that's how we think of this as forgiveness.

How do we think of forgiveness? Well, we think of forgiveness as we try to look at what's going on, and we try to say, okay, well, it's not really as bad as that. And we try to come up with excuses, maybe. That's what people are telling us, or that's what we think we have to do to forgive. We have to try to come up with some types of excuses to make it look like it's not quite as bad. We try to give extenuating circumstances, where people tell us that forgiveness is just forget that it happened and just move on, where people try to have it about being favoritism. Like I know of one family, where the father, in fact, the man had been sexually abusing nieces and nephews and others, and when it comes out, the whole family, the larger extended family, tells the victims to forget about it and also tries to minimize it. It really wasn't that bad, and also tries to say something about favoritism. Well, this is your uncle. This is this person, and he's suffered enough, and think of the other person. And because of these extenuating circumstances and because of the role, you need to show favor to them. And that's what forgiveness means. You forget it. You minimize it. You give people a pass because of who they are. Excuse me. You exonerate them. And in a sense, what happens with how we normally counsel people to forgive is we want to perpetuate injustice. If you put up the next point, forgiveness deals with inexcusable wrongdoing. Forgiveness deals with inexcusable wrongdoing.

See, that's the problem. When people say they can't forgive, partially they just reject it. They say, you think I should let that person off and forgive them just because they're my uncle or just because they're my grandfather. Like, how dare you say that? Or you try to put away and put away and make it not look as bad. And then you come to that part that's just, you can't make that part of what's happened to you just look minimal. And then you say, how can I forgive them? Because you've come to that which is inexcusable.

[39 : 00] And then you come to a brick wall. And there's nowhere else to go. But you see, you come to Jesus.

And it's only really in Jesus that the strands of the teaching of forgiveness in the Old Testament and the riddles at the heart of grace are made clear. That when Jesus dies on the cross, because he's not just Jesus, the son of Mary and the adopted son of Joseph, he's also God, the son of God.

Well, first of all, I don't have to give excuses to him. He already knows all of the extenuating circumstances for the wrong that I've done. I never have to make excuses to him. Some of my excuses would just make him laugh because it's stupid. But he knows the real excuses. If there really are excuses, he knows them better than I do.

But after you get rid of all of the excuses, there's what's left is what I've done, which is I failed to do what I should or I've done what I shouldn't. And I've just done it. I've done it. And it's inexcusable. And it's wrong. And that's what he forgives.

And we see in forgiveness, at the heart of forgiveness, is that the person who's wronged. Now, this is where it's going to be obviously different when it comes to us.

[40 : 35] Because you see, in a sense, what happens with Jesus done on the cross first, there's two things. You see, justice is done. Justice is done. The punishment that I deserve for my inexcusable wrong that would unmake me falls on him.

He offers to be my substitute. Because the judgment for the inexcusable wrong that I have done would unmake me. And he wants to save me.

So he takes that punishment. And justice is done. It's not minimized. He bears the full brunt of the punishment. But forgiveness goes beyond justice.

Not by undermining justice, but by going beyond it. And what goes on beyond it, and we can see it here with the justice, is that he does all of this to redeem me.

And so, because I can never repay, I can never amend my life, I can never fix it, he bears the cost of it. He swallows the cost of it himself. He swallows the cost.

[41 : 50] See, that is why, if you put up the next point, to be forgiven is life-giving. And what we'll see in a moment is to forgive is also life-giving.

Now, what this means, hopefully I'm going to be clear about this, I pray that I have clarity.

Let's use the example of if somebody was to murder one of my children. It would be completely valid, and this is what we learned from Nehemiah's prayer, it would be completely valid for me to pray that justice is done.

To pray that the prosecutor doesn't just decide because he or she wants to have a bit of an easier life and that the case is going to be tricky, to downgrade clear premeditated murder into some type of involuntary manslaughter.

That it's valid that I pray that the prosecutors and the judges don't back down, they don't lose heart, that true justice is done, and that the person experiences a just punishment for what they've done, knowing that that's never going to be complete or adequate for the pain and the true wrong, the depth of the wrong that they've done.

[43 : 10] But at the same time, it's valid that I pray to forgive them. I pray to forgive them. And if I'm going to pray to forgive them, it means some of that other stuff that I think that should be done to them, like depending on how they've been murdered, that that same type of murdering happened to them, that if there was anything in terms of humiliation, there was any type of torture, any type of all of that, that they experienced that.

I want them to experience that. I want them to experience that. And our civil society will never give that. So there's still things in there that are unsatisfied.

But you see, what happens if you don't forgive? Even after they go to jail and they go on in their life and all of that type of thing, and I'm having to deal or you're having to deal every day with the deep wrong that's been done, and I become bitter and I become angry and I become fixated and I become consumed by it and I can't forget it and I look at people and I get mad.

And if I don't forgive, you see, what happens? I'm getting, you know, the person is going on with their life. They might not even feel guilty. And I get consumed by it.

You know, I've used the analogy before. What happens to me is that it's as if every day I eat lots and lots and lots and lots of ex-lax, hoping that that person gets diarrhea.

[44 : 43] But it doesn't happen. I just get the runs. And my life gets bent out of shape. And there's a mystery to forgiveness where you, in a sense, absorb into yourself.

You're going to realize and accept the truth that you can't do all of these things, that the full punishment that you think they deserve can never happen. And the purpose of forgiveness is to take onto yourself that cost so you can be free.

You see, you've only really forgiven another person when it no longer obsesses you. And where, when you think about it, it doesn't make you want to fight them, or it doesn't make you cower under them because you're still afraid of them.

You come to a point where it has no hold on you. Now, of course, Jesus just models this.

He doesn't have to do it. He's not bent out of shape or anything like that because he's God. But he came so that you and I could be forgiven. That's why he came, that when we put our faith and trust in him, we can be forgiven.

[45 : 54] He took into himself the cost that had to be paid for my wrongdoing so that I could be forgiven. So justice is done. My inexcusable wrong is done.

But that forgiveness is part of grace and mercy. It goes beyond justice to this point where I can have a relationship with God, which is what he ultimately wants.

So in our case, once again, to forgive another person doesn't mean, to say, George, if you forgive this person for murdering your child, it should mean they don't go to jail.

No, no, no, no. They still go to jail. There's no contradiction between desiring justice and forgiving, at least human justice.

There's no consequence, no contradiction by that at all. But if you could put up the final thing, or second final thing, the Lord Jesus Christ wants you to walk the path of forgiveness with him because he wants you to be free.

[46 : 57] He doesn't want your enemies to always be in your head. He doesn't want them to control your life. He wants you to be free.

And you'll only be free when you learn to forgive. And you learn to forgive by embarking on a journey of, well, if you could put up the final point, as the forgiveness of Jesus becomes more real to your heart, he will deepen you, ground you, draw you, and propel you to forgive.

I mean, many people who are outside the Christian faith forgive. It's part of God's common grace. And many Christians have a hard time. But as the fact that he forgave you, he forgave me, becomes more real to my heart.

It deepens me and grounds me and gives me a place to stand. It will draw me in a direction of forgiveness. It will propel me in a direction that I need to forgive.

I need to forgive so that I can be free. And you need to forgive if you want to have reconciliation. You can't have reconciliation without forgiveness. See, that's why the teaching of Jesus is so profound for families.

[48 : 11] It's so profound for churches. It's so profound for marriages. You see, if I can't forgive, I'd have to have a new marriage every year.

My wife would have to marry a different man every year if she can't forgive, if I can't forgive. Because not only do we need to be free of the wrong, but forgiveness is the first step towards reconciliation.

You will hear many people, many of many people, on death row in the States who've come to faith while they're on death row and who've been forgiven by people who don't deny that they still need to pay for what they've done, but also start to know a type of forgiveness and the freedom of having been forgiven.

So there's no contradiction between justice and forgiveness. forgiveness is greater than justice, but not in a way that removes justice.

It's just greater. And God has called you and me to learn to forgive so that we might be free, that we might be free in him.

[49 : 28] I've had people that I've had to pray for over a decade that I could forgive them before I've been able to forgive them. Sometimes if you pray to forgive, it'll happen really quick.

But that's why I say that Jesus wants you to walk the path of forgiveness with him. Because sometimes it's a long obedience in the same direction of praying to forgive.

But it's always worth it. Let's stand. Father, we confess before you that it's easy for us to think that you show favoritism towards us or that you just forget the wrong we've done or that you've just sort of minimized the wrong we've done or don't remember the wrong we've done.

And so, therefore, it's all right for us to be pious in a relationship with you. And then, Father, something happens that we just can't deny is wrong and we don't know how you...

Father, it's as if we've never actually acknowledged that Jesus, that you have forgiven us in the person of your Son when we put our faith and trust in him. And so, Father, we ask that you bring home to this this profound truth that Jesus, Father, he saw the inexcusable wrong that we have done in the past and will do in the future and still he forgave us.

[50 : 57] You forgave us in Jesus. And we ask, Lord, that this truth would become more and more real to our hearts so that we could be so deep and so deepened and so secured and so drawn and so propelled that we might really, Father, more and more understand your forgiveness of us and that we might be shaped to forgive others.

And we thank you, Father, that you want us to do that so that we will be free. And so, Lord, we ask that you help us both to appropriate the forgiveness of Christ and that you would help us, Father, to walk a path of forgiveness, of learning to forgive others.

that you would help us to recognize those parts of our life that are ruled by unforgiveness and are being deformed and twisted and broken by unforgiveness.

And we ask that you help us to name that for what it is, unforgiveness, and help us to pray into it that we might forgive. Thank you, Father, that you want us to be free in Christ.

And we ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.