

# The Weight of Unforgiveness

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[ 0 : 00 ] Blessings to in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ on this fourth Sunday after Easter yes Christ is risen!

Father, I thank you for this time to focus our hearts completely on you. We pray that you would speak to us through the power of the Holy Spirit through your word.

We do lay the things that are concerning us and on our hearts and minds over to you, acknowledging that you are so much. We ask your blessing in this time.

We thank you for your promise that your word will accomplish all that you have purposed for it. We ask that you would transform us in this time together. We pray it in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen. We will get to our passage in just a moment, but let's start by asking, what does it mean that we are a resurrection people? Jesus himself said, because I live, you too shall live.

[ 1 : 19 ] So what does it make, what difference does it make in our daily lives living in a broken and complicated world that Christ is alive? Well, Paul says in Colossians, since then you have been raised with Christ.

Slide, there we go. Set your hearts on things above where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. That's a powerful theological truth that as the people of God, we have been raised with Christ.

So the power of sin, the hold that death once had over us, has been broken by the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. That's what God has done for us.

What is our response? Well, it's to live for the things that truly matter for all eternity, which brings us to our subject for today, a difficult one, but probably very relatable to all of us.

It's forgiveness.

[ 2 : 47 ] And to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. That's Jesus doing for us on the cross what we could never do for ourselves, and that is to forgive our sins, to cleanse us.

But there's another direction of forgiveness, isn't there? It's that we then forgive others as the Lord has forgiven us. And over and over in Scripture, the two directions are connected.

We pray to the Lord's Prayer. Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount even issues a warning. If we do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

And so we come to our Scripture passage for today. It's in Matthew 18, beginning with verse 21. But I first want to point out how the chapter begins because it sets the tone.

Jesus' disciples come to him with a question. They want to know, who's the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? Well, the disciples have a history of debating and arguing about this question, don't they?

[ 3 : 56 ] How do we get the seats of honor and respect in your kingdom, Lord? Well, Jesus' answer must have deflated their balloons just a little. He calls a child to himself and sets him in the midst of the disciples.

And he says, Well, clearly, the values and the priorities of God's kingdom are different than the world's.

It's never about our greatness. It's about God's greatness. Which takes us to our passage on forgiveness, beginning with verse 21. Of Matthew 18.

Then Peter came and said to him, Lord, how often will my brother sin against me and I forgive him? As many as seven times. Jesus said to him, I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times.

Therefore, the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. When he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents.

[ 5 : 09 ] And since he could not pay, his master ordered him to be sold with his wife and children and all that he had and payment to be made. So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, have patience with me and I will pay you everything.

And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt. But when that same servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii. And seizing him, he began to choke him, saying, pay what you owe. So his fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him, have patience with me and I will pay you.

He refused and went and put him in prison until he should pay the debt. When his fellow servants saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed. They went and reported to their master all that had taken place.

Then his master summoned him and said, you wicked servant, I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant as I had mercy on you?

[ 6 : 14 ] And in anger, his master delivered him to the jailers until he should pay all his debt. Though also my heavenly father will do to every one of you if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.

The word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Well, this parable, it's definitely one of Jesus' most direct and hard hitting.

Parables, of course, were one of Jesus' very favorite ways to communicate, to teach spiritual truth to us about the kingdom of God. By this point in Matthew 18, Jesus had already broached the issue of forgiveness.

But Peter comes with a follow-up question. Lord, how often will my brother sin against me and I forgive him as many as seven times? Well, I love Peter.

Peter, he just says out loud what many of us are thinking but not quite sure how to ask. Peter's assuming here that people are going to sin against him.

[ 7 : 16 ] And he's probably right. We live in a broken and fallen world, messy world. And what he wants to know is what kind of limit should there be when it comes to forgiving that person who offended me, who hurt me?

The rabbinic answer of the day was that three times would be sufficient. Three times. In his question, Peter ups the ante to seven, which represents the number of fullness in Jewish tradition. Surely Jesus would be impressed by Peter's generous spirit. I tell you, not seven times Jesus responds, but 77 times.

Or in some translations, 70 times seven. No matter the translation, Jesus' message is the same. We are to forgive in a way that is complete and limitless.

Just like God's forgiveness of us. As kingdom people, we live out the same measure of abundant grace that we have received from God.

[ 8 : 21 ] And to illustrate the power and the scandal of this kind of gospel forgiveness, Jesus shares this parable. A king is settling accounts with his subjects.

One of these servants owes his master 10,000 bars or talents of gold. For context, a single talent weighed approximately 75 pounds.

And so in today's currency, a talent of gold would have represented about 20 years of full-time wages. Multiply that by 10,000 and you have an insurmountable debt.

Impossible ever to pay back. And the servant drops to his knees before the king. He recognizes the hopelessness of his situation. And all he can do is beg for mercy.

Please have patience with me and I will pay you everything. Is that a realistic promise? His Lord, though, is moved. He is stirred with compassion.

[ 9 : 24 ] He takes pity on his servant and does not just defer the debt or give him more time to pay. He cancels it completely. 10,000 talents of gold dropped to a zero balance.

His servant is suddenly completely free. Imagine yourselves in his shoes for just a moment. What would be an appropriate response to such a gift of amazing grace?

Humility? Overwhelming thankfulness? Tears of joy? His life has been completely transformed in an instant. The debt is gone. But, of course, we know what happens next.

That very servant goes out. And I can almost see his smile turning sour. Because over there, across the courtyard, he recognizes a fellow servant who owes him 100 denarii.

100 silver coins. That's not an insignificant amount. That's something. It's about three months wages. But it's a tiny fraction of what the first servant had owed.

[10:30] But he seizes him, begins to choke him, and says, pay back what you owe me. Well, his fellow servant drops to his knees and pleads, have patience with me and I will repay you.

Does that sound familiar? Almost exactly the same posture and words as the first servant with the king. But he is unmoved and throws his fellow servant into prison until every last coin is repaid.

Well, does this story make your blood boil just a little bit? We feel the injustice here, and it's troubling. How could this servant's heart be so cruel and cold after all he had been forgiven?

The recipient of overwhelming grace, undeserved grace, and yet it failed to penetrate his heart or transform his life? One bit.

We know the coda. Mother servants witnessed this entire thing, and they are deeply grieved. They report back to the king, and his response, he calls the original servant back into his presence and hands him over to the creditors until his impossible debt is paid in full.

[11:49] And then, as he often does, Jesus turns the spotlight onto us. This is how my heavenly father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart.

And those three words are the key, aren't they? What is God most concerned about? Well, it's our hearts. From there flow the springs of life.

God's sanctifying purpose for his servants, that's all of us, is that we become more like Jesus. We take on his compassion, his forgiveness.

This is a powerful and unsettling parable because we're probably going to recognize ourselves somewhere in this story.

I think all of us could agree how much we need God's grace and forgiveness in our lives. Let's face it. We all are that first servant who owes an impossible debt.

[12:48] According to scripture, every one of us has sinned and falls short of the glory of God. We can't pay back what we owe. And the wages of sin, it's death.

And how important that we can admit the bad news of our sin and its consequences so that we can fully grasp and appreciate the amazing good news of the gospel.

That while we were sinners, unworthy, unlovable, Christ died for us. And that forgiveness is the free gift of God through the shed blood of Jesus on the cross.

You have been saved by grace. And remember what comes next, not by works, so that no one can boast. Did you notice that disconcerting detail?

When the first servant pleads for patience, he actually promises to pay his master back. 10,000 talents of gold. Is that realistic?

[13:55] Or is that the stubborn, foolish pride of the old nature welling up inside? I can do this. I can pay it back myself. I can be good enough.

And suddenly the focus is on us and our flesh and our misguided attempts to be strong enough. And we've cut ourselves off from the transforming grace of God. Remember Jesus' words at the beginning of the chapter, Unless you humble yourselves like children, totally dependent, you will never enter the kingdom of God.

Which brings us to the other direction of forgiveness, the horizontal. And the command that just as God lavishly, freely forgives us with his grace, Our gratitude should be so overwhelming that we freely offer that same grace to others.

As the Lord has forgiven you, so you must also forgive. And again, we can relate to that first servant, can't we? Just as it's hard for us sometimes to receive grace.

Why? Because our pride gets in the way. It can be just as hard to extend grace to others. To forgive those who have wronged us.

[15:13] I wonder for a moment, why is forgiveness so difficult? Is it that we don't want to relive the hurt that's been done to us? We don't want to give up the right to get even?

Maybe we're afraid that if we forgive, we're just going to get hurt again. So we put up a wall, we put up defenses. Or that we're letting the other person off the hook. Or we're excusing their sin.

It's not surprising that forgiveness is a key spiritual battleground for us as believers. Because it's at the heart of the gospel. And one look at the cross reminds us of the high price of forgiveness.

Forgiving that other person who hurt us can feel like death. But in God's economy, forgiveness is actually the key. It's the doorway to peace and healing and freedom.

Because we're inviting God into the situation, into the mess, and letting him take over. It's really surrendering to his lordship.

[16:15] I serve as a chaplain at an assisted living facility, Pine Haven. Dan knows about Pine Haven. And recently asked some of our residents, what is forgiveness?

These are 80 and 90 year olds. They've experienced some life. Their most common response. Forgiveness means letting go.

There's some wisdom to that. Our fallen human nature, when you think about it, wants to hold on instead. Hold on to the grudge. Hold on to unforgiveness.

To keep reliving the offense that's been done to us. To demonize the other person. To think all the things we should have said or done in that moment. It's our fallen flesh trying to assert its will.

And over time, left unchecked, the poison of resentment just settles into our souls. And it eats away at us. I have sat with people who have lived in unforgiveness for years.

[17:21] Just can't let it go. Whatever that offense was. And as you can imagine, it just manifests itself in all kinds of ways in their lives. None of them good.

In Colossians 3, the same passage where Paul tells us we have been raised with Christ. We're instructed to rid ourselves. The Greek word has almost a violent casting off of anger, rage, malice, and slander.

Get rid of those things. They belong to the old nature. Not doing us any good. Instead, Paul says, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience.

Bear with each other and forgive one another. Those are the fruits, those are the attitudes of the new nature, of the resurrected nature.

It's clothing ourselves with Christ and his righteousness. And be encouraged if you're tempted to dismay and say, I can't do all those things. What God calls us to, he is faithful to equip us to do it with his grace, with his strength.

[18:32] Some of you know the story of Corrie Ten Boom. During World War II, she and her sister protected and sheltered Jews from the Nazis in Holland.

Eventually, she and her sister were captured and they were thrown into a Nazi death camp in Germany. Where they were tortured, they were mistreated, and they nearly starved to death.

Both her father and her sister died during the war. Her sister just five days before the Allies liberated Germany. Well, after she was freed, Corrie Ten Boom resumed her life.

But she soon discovered she wasn't really free. She had been liberated from prison. But anger and bitterness still held her captive. Finally, she went to the Lord in prayer, seeking the heart of God. And she realized that the only way she could let go of those things was by forgiving her captors. But tests come in life, don't they?

[19:35] One Sunday, she was visiting a church to share with the congregation the power of forgiveness. And she writes, Jesus washed my sins away.

He thrust his hand out towards her. But she couldn't move. She had forgiven this man. But now that she was standing face to face with him, it all seemed impossible.

She writes, Vengeful thoughts boiled through me and I saw the sin of them and yet I could do nothing about it. I could not even feel the slightest spark of love or charity.

And so in that moment, I breathed a silent prayer. Jesus, I cannot forgive him. Please give me your forgiveness. And with that prayer, she slowly lifted her hand and shook the hand of her persecutor.

And in that moment, she writes, I discovered that when our Lord tells us to love our enemies, he gives us the love we need to do it. It's the gospel exchange that God calls us to as his people.

[21:06] We come in faith to the cross. And we surrender. We let go of the bitterness, the rage, the desire to get even. We surrender those burdens at the foot of the cross.

And in exchange, God gives us his healing grace and perfect peace. What an exchange. What a savior.

And we discover that forgiveness isn't primarily about the other person or even the offense that's been committed against us. It's about surrendering it all to God and allowing him to bring peace into our lives.

So how do we live out this calling as resurrection people? To love. To forgive. As Jesus loves and forgave us.

Well, we need his help, don't we? It needs to start with the vertical relationship. Because if we are finding ourselves unwilling or unable to love or forgive others, it may be because we've cut

ourselves off from the healing grace of God.

[ 22 : 13 ] We cannot give what we have not received ourselves. Let me ask a personal question of you. How is your relationship with God even today?

Because if you are not at peace with the living God, you will not be at peace with those around you. If your life is burdened with unresolved sin or anger or bitterness or resentment, it's just a poison inside of you, that's going to clog up the channels of God's grace towards you.

But please also hear the promise of scripture. God will not despise a humble and contrite heart. The Holy Spirit brings conviction to our hearts, our need for a savior, because he doesn't want us to live with the burden of sin one more day.

I think of Peter's words in Acts 3. Repent, therefore, and turn to God so that your sins may be wiped away and times of refreshing may come from the Lord.

And getting real about our own sin and confessing it, God's grace begins to flow and to soften our hearts towards others. We realize the ground is level at the foot of the cross.

[ 23 : 30 ] And I have seen it, how true forgiveness from the heart creates a ripple effect through relationships, through families, through churches, through whole communities.

It declares to a watching world that, yes, Christ is alive. God is in our midst. He's still transforming lives and making things new.

So who do you need to forgive? What offense do you need to lay down at the foot of the cross? It starts by recognizing our own need for a savior, thanking him for his amazing undeserved grace in our lives, and then with open hands extending that same grace to others.

Let's pray. Lord God, your word is comforting because it reminds us of your great love and grace and forgiveness towards us.

It's also convicting and challenging. As your word says, just as we've received forgiveness and grace from you, so we are to extend that to others. And our human flesh rebels, our pride rebels.

[ 24 : 42 ] Sometimes our mind throws up objections. And yet your call is clear to forgive, to give the situation over to you. How we need your help, how we need your grace to do that.

Thank you, Lord, that we have been raised to new life with Jesus Christ. Even living in this messy, complicated world, you have given us resurrection, life, and power. You have given us grace to extend to others.

And Lord, as we are so richly blessed by you, help us to be a blessing to others. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.