

Who is forgiveness for?

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[0 : 00] They went, each to his own house, but Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. Early in the morning he came again to the temple. All the people came to him, and he sat down and taught them.

The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery, and placing her in the midst, they said to him, Teacher, this woman has been caught in the act of adultery. Now, in the law, Moses commanded us to stone such women. So what do you say? This they said to test him, that they might have some charge to bring against him.

Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. And as they continued to ask him, he stood up and said to them, Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her. And once more he bent down and wrote on the ground. But when they heard it, they went away, one by one, beginning with the older ones.

[1 : 10] And Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. Jesus stood up and said to her, Women, where are they?

Has no one condemned you? She said, No one, Lord. And Jesus said, Neither do I condemn you. Go, and from now on, sin no more.

Thank you so much for that reading of scripture. Let me just pray. Father, thank you so much for your word. Thank you that your word is living and is active.

Thank you for the living word, Jesus Christ. And I pray that his glory would be revealed and would be shined brightly in our hearts. So we just commit this time to you now, Father.

In Jesus' name, amen. So I remember giving this talk before and someone came up to me afterwards and said, Tobias, why should God forgive you for all the people that you've hurt?

[2 : 17] Here you are in London speaking about God's forgiveness. While those you harmed, they still have to bear the emotional and physical scars of what you've done to them.

They were confounded. They couldn't understand how God could allow me to stand before people and talk about forgiveness.

And honestly, when they asked me that question, I said, okay, wow, that's a really valid question because it prompts me to wonder, well, then who truly does deserve forgiveness?

Yes, I've hurt a lot of people in my life. But a lot of people have also hurt me. And as the old adage goes, hurting people hurt people.

Wounded people wound people. And that's no justification for anything that I've done. But that's the reality of living in a fallen and broken world.

[3 : 24] The victim could often become the villain. So who deserves forgiveness? And to be fair, I didn't think that God could ever forgive me.

And that's why I went years resisting God. Bitter, angry at God. Because of the things that he's allowed me to see and to go through.

The people that he took out of my life. And the things that I've done. It's like, how could God ever love or forgive someone like me?

And that kept me carrying for years a lot of guilt and shame from my past. Because I never thought that there was a God who would be gracious enough to offer me forgiveness.

But however, everything took a drastic turn for me in 1997. I found myself broiled in a violent altercation in prison.

[4 : 36] Which triggered a full-scale lockdown. And facing the prospects of an additional year added to my sentence. Coupled with a year in solitary confinement and a loss of privileges.

It found guilty. I awaited the decision from internal affairs. And it was during that time that a prison chaplain came and he handed me a Bible to read.

And as I was mentioning earlier, the first book I turned to was the book of John. And God had me from the very first words.

In the beginning was the Word. And the Word was with God. And the Word was God. And in him was life.

And that life was the light of all mankind. And that's when the questions started firing off for me. What was this life?

[5 : 37] Was it better than the life that I was living? And what was this light? Could it dispel all the darkness within me? And as I awaited word from internal affairs, I found myself just engrossed in this book.

And in tears, crying. Reading through its pages. Because I found myself encountering people with similar stories to mine.

People who were destitute. People who were devoid of hope. Yet their lives were transformed upon encountering this man named Jesus.

Could Jesus do the same for me? But it was when I got to John chapter 8 that my eyes were opened. And I began to see more than just a religious figure in this man named Jesus.

Now at the time, I was not aware of the textual criticism surrounding John chapter 8. Of whether or not this story was included in the original manuscripts.

[6 : 46] But God used it to open my eyes. To see more than just a good person in Jesus Christ. God used this chapter to open my eyes.

To see Jesus for who he truly was. He was the savior of the world. The one who had the power to heal. And the one who had the power to forgive.

To forgive me of all the things that I've done. Now imagine the scene, right? You have a woman who was caught early in the morning in the act of adultery.

If you're a man during this time and you were caught cheating on your wife. The punishment was not as severe as if you were a woman. You see a man, a woman cheating on her husband was a sin that was punishable by death.

So here we have this unidentified woman. And she was forcibly taken from her home into the temple courts. Where there's Jesus.

[7 : 54] A man who claims to be the son of God. And even suggesting that all the law and the prophets were written about him.

Here he was there in the temple early in the morning. Preaching the word. So the religious leaders, they used this as an opportunity to test Jesus.

To test his orthodoxy. To see if he truly was who he said he was. So they drag this woman and they throw her in front of Jesus.

And they say, teacher, we got one for you. This woman was just caught in the act of adultery. In the law of Moses.

The law you say testify about you. The law says that this woman should be stoned to death. What do you say? Jesus kneels down on the ground and he begins to write something in the dirt.

[8 : 58] And we're not quite sure what Jesus is writing. But the religious leaders and the righteous men of Israel. And the crowd began to grow impatient with Jesus.

We need an answer. Jesus, this woman, I don't know if you heard me. But she's just been caught in the act of adultery. Should we stone her?

Do you agree that the word of God and that the law says that this woman should die for her sins? That's when Jesus, he stood up.

And he said to the crowd, let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw your stones at her.

And he knelt down again, tracing the lines in the dirt. And we read that as the crowds heard this, they began to walk away. One by one.

[10 : 04] Because it seemed as if their conscience prevented them from condemning her. Realizing their own guilt as sinners.

Perhaps their transgressions went unnoticed or seemed less severe compared to hers. However, in the eyes of God, sin holds equal weight.

Regardless of the magnitude and before a holy and just God. It warrants punishment.

And while her sins were evident, sins of pride, sins of greed, covetousness, may have been less conspicuous but equally damning.

You see, I can relate with this woman because my sins were obvious. It was out there for all the world to see.

[11 : 07] I got caught doing something that was clearly immoral. Not just before the eyes of men, but before the eyes of God. And just like this woman, I hurt people.

She hurt her husband. Probably ruined her family. But here is this woman clearly guilty. And she is standing in the presence of God.

The same person that John starts his gospel by saying, In the beginning was the Word. And the Word was with God. And the Word was God.

She is in the presence of God. And he speaks these words over her.

Woman, where are your accusers? Do no one condemn you? Then neither do I. Now go leave your life of sin.

[12 : 11] Translation, woman, you are forgiven. And it was as though those words were directly from God to me.

It was as if God was saying, Tobias, you are forgiven. And it was in that instant I felt life enter into my soul. Despite being incarcerated, I experienced a profound sense of freedom.

See, Jesus changed my heart that day. Just like he did this woman. Because I believed. I believed that he was the light that has come into this world.

So that all who believe in him will not perish. They will not be condemned because of their sins. But they will have eternal life.

But God sent not his son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him so that all who believe in him might have life in his name.

[13 : 23] And if you are here today and you do not know Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, then my question to you is, do you believe that?

Do you believe that in Jesus Christ you can have life in the forgiveness of sins? Let me end by talking about this crowd.

You see, the crowd knew in that moment when Jesus asked them the question, that they all stood guilty before God. But notice what the crowd also did.

They were able to drop their stones, but they end up turning away from the only one who had the power to forgive them of their sins.

They turned away from the only one who could forgive them for all the people that they've hurt, all the lies that they've told, all the lustful thoughts that they've had.

[14 : 32] Maybe you've dropped your stones of judgment, of me or from other people, but let me ask you, do you recognize that you are a sinner and that you need God's peace and his forgiveness?

See, sin is essentially saying to God, you don't dictate to me what's best in my life. I can be moral without you. I can do good without you.

Sin is saying I'm going to live life by my own terms and by my own rules. If you recognize that that's you, then you are a sinner in need of God's forgiveness.

And if you recognize that, then my encouragement to you today would be don't be like the crowd that walks away.

Be like this woman who recognizes her need for Christ. See, the gospel of Jesus Christ says that we are all sinners deserving of hell and condemnation.

[15 : 48] But the gospel of Jesus Christ also says that this same Jesus, he loves us so much that he took our sin and he bore our condemnation on the cross that we might have forgiveness and that we might be made right with God.

You see, friends, none of us deserve forgiveness. But because of God's great love for us, he offers it freely to those who believe in his name.

Jesus could have condemned her. He could have banished her from his presence. But what an incredible act of grace that God showed towards this undeserving sinner.

And my prayer is that we would all see our need for God's grace and his forgiveness.

Let me pray. Father God, we thank you so much for Jesus. We thank you that he has the power to forgive.

[17 : 02] We thank you for the cross. We thank you for the resurrection. And what that means for lost sinners. And I just pray that God, you would help us to recognize our need for you and to know that we deserve your judgment and your wrath.

But in your grace, God, you offer your grace and forgiveness to those who believe on your name.
In Jesus' name, Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.
Amen. Amen.