

# Jesus Explains Forgiveness

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[ 0 : 00 ] Will you turn with me now, please, to the passage in Matthew that we read together a short time ago, Matthew 18, beginning at verse 21. Let's just read again at verse 21.

Then Peter came up and said to Jesus, 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 times seven.

As we continue looking at Peter's life in the Gospels particularly, we come to this incident. We don't know what lay behind Peter's question, but you get a sense of something like frustration on his part. It may well be that somebody had been annoying him, that he had indeed someone to forgive many times, and that he was troubled about that fact, and what would Jesus make of it?

Was there to be a limit to the forgiveness that he should show to his brother, whoever it was? Or perhaps it was really just a question in theory that he would know the answer to if such a situation ever did arise, that he had to forgive his brother a number of times.

[ 1 : 27 ] So he did what was best with it, whatever lay behind his question. He did what was best with that. He brought it to Jesus. He set it out in the presence of Jesus as a question that he wanted the Lord to answer for him.

But when you bring something into the presence of Jesus, you don't very often, or sometimes at least, you don't get the answer that you expect or would like yourself.

And in this instance, Peter, having thought that if he said, well, seven times, which was generally accepted, it seems as a perfectly acceptable number of times to forgive someone else if you needed to forgive them, Peter came and he went right as far as to say, well, seven times, surely that's enough, Lord?

No, says Jesus, I'm not going to say to you seven times, but 70 times seven. In other words, Jesus was saying to him, you don't put a limit, you don't put a number on forgiveness.

God hasn't done that with you. God hasn't done that with us. And therefore, when we consider what it means to forgive others when we need to forgive, the pattern for our forgiveness, as Jesus is showing, is God himself and his forgiveness.

[ 2 : 50 ] So the ample limit that Peter actually gave in setting out the question is not at all satisfactory to the Lord. It doesn't satisfy him at all that he went as far as to say seven times.

Peter is going to be given an explanation to some extent of forgiveness. And forgiveness is such a hugely important central feature of a Christian life.

It lies at the very heart of what it means to be a Christian, that you've had your sins forgiven by God. It lies at the very heart of what it means to be a Christian in practice, that we forgive others, where that forgiveness is required of us.

You see, we don't set the terms for forgiveness. God does that. And it's God's terms that guide us, that govern forgiveness, whenever we need to show it and exercise it, just as much as the forgiveness that we've received.

So tonight, let's look at two things from the passage. First of all, forgiveness mends what has been broken. Forgiveness mends what has been broken.

[ 4 : 16 ] And secondly, we'll see that forgiveness is mindful of what God has forgiven. Forgiveness mends what has been broken. And forgiveness is mindful of what God has forgiven.

Forgiveness mends what has been broken. Let me just direct your minds back for a moment to chapter 9. We'll do this a number of times this evening, just skimming over a number of passages that are relevant to this.

If you follow them with me, please. It's chapter 9 and verses 1 to 8, where you find Jesus coming to meet with this paralytic who was brought to him lying on a bed.

And when those who were carrying him into the presence of Jesus arrived in the presence of Jesus, Jesus turned and said to the paralytic, Take heart, my son, your sins are forgiven.

Now that's an unexpected thing as you read that. You wouldn't expect him immediately to focus on the man's sins. You might have expected that Jesus would focus on his physical paralysis.

[ 5 : 23 ] Why did Jesus say to him, Take heart, my son, your sins are forgiven. Then he went on to show that in the miracle of healing this man, Jesus was giving a demonstration of his authority to forgive sins.

So that you may know that the Son of Man, that's himself, has authority on earth to forgive sins. He then said to the paralytic, Rise, pick up your bed and go home. And you can see there's a very close connection in the way Jesus is teaching us from that passage between this man's physical paralysis and the sin that Jesus mentions and then pronounces forgiven.

Why is that? It's not that God is using this man's unfortunate paralysis as an illustration of something.

It's rather that he's bringing together for us the fact that sin is something that leaves us broken, not just in physical terms, but morally and spiritually and even in relationships.

That's why forgiveness has to be seen as something that mends what is broken. A broken life is the result of sin, our sin against God.

[ 6 : 47 ] That broken relationship between ourselves and God requires to be mended. How is that broken relationship mended? What lies at the heart of God actually fixing that break, that breach between ourselves and himself that the Bible so clearly shows is a result of our sin stemming from Adam?

Well, one of the prominent things in God mending that break is forgiving our sin. It's our sin that comes between ourselves and God.

And until that sin is forgiven, that relationship remains broken. So if our sins are not forgiven this evening, if we have not come to God with our own confession of sin, with our expression of sorrow that we have sinned against God, and when we do that, it's not that we come because we're afraid of the consequences if we don't.

One of the primary things in our repentance, in our confession of sin, is that we're sorry that we have brought such an offense to God himself. That our sin is an offense to God.

That it's an assault upon his name, upon his honor, upon his glory, upon his rights. You know, we can try and fix our relationship with God in all sorts of different ways.

[ 8 : 13 ] And if you go to a book in the Bible that's very irregularly read, perhaps, or certainly not preached from, it's the book of Ecclesiastes. And what is the book of Ecclesiastes saying?

Well, the writer of Ecclesiastes, who we take to be Solomon, was looking at things under the sun, to go no further than the limits of this world. And he says it doesn't matter what people have, or what people do, or however much effort they put into it, vanity of vanities, says the creature.

All is vanity. It's like a bubble that you burst, and then there's nothing left. If you consider it simply under the sun, simply in this world, simply in terms of what you yourself can do, what you and I can actually achieve, it comes really to nothing at the end of the day.

You've got to go above the sun. You've got to go to where God is. You've got to go to the God who has provided for us such abundant pardon and forgiveness to mend this broken relationship that our life begins with.

And that's really what the grace of God in the gospel is directed to, or directs us towards. When he calls us to confess our sin, when he calls us to repentance, what's he calling us to do?

[ 9 : 37 ] What is that telling you about God? It's telling you, among other things, that God is set in his heart on mending this relationship that's gone bad, that's broken.

That the grace of God, the favor of God, the power of God, the love of God, the steadfast love of God, the mercy of God, the pardon of God. It's all about fixing this broken relationship.

It's all about his invitation, as you find in the prophecy of Isaiah, chapter 1 and verse 18. And you really can't take that verse without reading all the verses that lead up to it.

This is Isaiah's opening. The introduction, if you like, to his great prophecy, the book of Isaiah, the prophet. All of these verses in the first chapter are building up God's account, God's verdict over the people's sin.

And verse after verse, is piling on what the previous verses had. And by the end of verse 17, by the time you've reached that, you're saying, Lord, surely there isn't any more that you want to add to

this.

[10:46] This is such an enormous burden. Look at what you're saying about these people, that they're just like a body full of putrefying sores. There's no soundness in it. Their sin is like that in your presence.

You're almost at the point where you say, Lord, please don't tell me any more. I can't take any more. And then what do you read? You read God saying, Let us reason together.

Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow. Though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.

However deep-dyed, God is saying, our sin is as it is. When we come to confess it, we meet with a God of pardons.

We meet with a God who's saying, you know, my forgiveness extracts every tinge of sin's color from your life, from your account.

[11:49] And it doesn't remain on your account anymore. Our sins not being forgiven is such a serious issue.

How is it between yourself and God tonight? Have you come to God with your own sin? And have you come to know the pardon of God and Jesus Christ who are trusting in Him?

Otherwise, that relationship with God remains broken. But then this is going further. Not only our sin not being forgiven, does it mean our relationship remains broken between ourselves and God, but our not forgiving others when we need to forgive them also leaves things broken.

Let me take you back again in Matthew to chapter 5 this time. Chapter 5 and at verse 23. Verse 23. I love the sound of those rustling leaves.

It means you're actually attentive to the gospel, attentive to the Bible, eager to find out what is this about. Chapter 5, verse 23.

[13:10] So he says, If you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother and then come and offer your gift.

And he's saying there, if we have an offering as would be in those days, coming into the temple with an offering to God and coming to the altar and then remembering that your brother has something against you.

It doesn't say that the brother was the cause of the offense. It may be that the person coming with the gift was the cause of the offense. Jesus leaves it open. That's just that he says, We know, you know your brother has something against you.

Whatever cause has caused it. First of all, leave your gift there. First go and be reconciled to your brother. Don't come to God with your gift, he's saying.

Till you've mended the relationship first that's gone bad between yourself and your brother. And you see, the crux of that is our taking the initiative ourselves.

[14:16] Even if we're adamant, well, the other person is at fault. The broken relationship has been caused not by me, but by the person who has wronged me.

Jesus does not say, well, that's fine then. You're not responsible in any way to try and mend it.

What he's saying is, whoever is responsible, whoever really has caused it, I have to say to myself, if there is anything between myself and my brother or sister, then I have to attend to that and mend it the way God attended to my relationship with him and mended it in the forgiveness of my sins.

First go and be reconciled. First go and seek forgiveness or have your forgiveness given to him or to her. That's the counter, you see, in the Bible consistently to what you find so commonly now human experience and which we've got a counter with the teachings of Jesus and the practices of a Christian life.

That's the way to counter revenge, holding grudges, getting even. That's the way of the world.

That's the way of those who don't live by the standard of Christ.

And it must never be that way in those who are his disciples, those who are named as his church in the world. And you have to do it and I have to do it without delay.

[15:55] There's no suggestion that we should say, well, I know my relationship with so and so is not what it should be, it's broken down, something's come between us, but I'll just leave it for the moment, it might sort itself out.

It doesn't say that at all. First go and be reconciled to your brother. If you happen to break your leg, not that we, of course, want to hear anybody coming with broken legs, but if you break your leg,

you're not going to say, well, my leg is broken and it really hurts me, but it's okay, I'll just wait till next week before I go to accident and emergency or wherever.

No, you attend to it straight away. You need that break to be mended. You need that physical break to be put together again to heal. And so morally and spiritually, forgiveness is about healing.

It's about mending. It's about mending what has been broken in relationships. It's about taking the initiative ourselves.

You see, people think that if the Bible was just the teachings of Jesus, the Christian life would be a lot easier. If we just cut out all that this Apostle Paul said and the Apostle Peter said and the Old Testament said, how much easier it would be to live by the standard of Jesus' teaching in the Gospels.

[17:16] Would it really? Anybody who is of that view has never really properly read the Sermon on the Mount or Christ's comments throughout these Gospels.

Because the most challenging and demanding of principles and practices are not from Paul.

Difficult, though some of them are, and demanding.

They're from the mouth of the Lord. And that's why he said to Peter, I'm not going to say to you, seven times, but seventy times seven.

Do I have something tonight against a brother or sister? Does a brother or sister have something against me? Have I a relationship somewhere that is broken down?

If so, who is responsible for mending it? I am. You are. We all are.

[18:18] It's the Christian thing to do. It's the Christ-like thing to do. It's the God-like thing to do. Did God say, I'm going to wait until they come to me before I take the first step towards them?

No. He demonstrated his love and demonstrates his love in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

Why did Christ die for us? Why did Jesus come into the world? Why did the Father send him into the world to mend broken relationships with himself? To fix what sin had broken?

And our Christian life is based and patterned upon the way God has acted toward us. forgiveness. And that's the second point we'll need to look at briefly.

Forgiveness is mindful of what God has forgiven. And that's where this parable comes in from verse 23 down to the end of the chapter. Forgiveness and being forgiven are very, very closely connected throughout the Bible.

[19:27] When you go to, for example, Mark chapter 11 and verse 25, you find Jesus again speaking, of course, saying the following, Mark chapter 11 and verse 25.

Very similar to what we're looking at with Peter this evening. He's saying, therefore I tell you, 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.

Now that doesn't mean that God's forgiveness is depending on our forgiving of other people. But there is a very close connection. What is it that demonstrates that we've been forgiven by God?

It's that we are ready to forgive when we are required to forgive our fellow human beings. Or go to Colossians. Paul writing to the Colossians that wonderful chapter, chapter 3, but also a very demanding chapter about the Christian life and the standard that God has set for the Christian life in chapter 3 of his letter to the Colossians.

He says there how we are to put away all of these things, anger and wrath and malice and slander and obscene talk. Don't lie one to another seeing you've put off the old self with its practices.

[20:47] And then he says, verse 12, put on then as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, put on compassion, put on kindness, put on humility, put on meekness, put on patience, bearing with one another, and if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.

You see the standard? It's as the Lord has forgiven us, so we are to forgive one another. And coming back to the parable in Matthew 18, it's really important that we get something of an understanding of the amounts that Jesus is talking about.

In your Bible nowadays you've probably got something to do with that in your margins or at the foot of the page when he says that this king who began to settle accounts, one servant was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents.

And then that servant went out, found somebody who owed him, or went and found someone who owed him a hundred denarii.

What is the relation, what's the comparison Jesus is making? Well, if you think about a hundred denarii, okay, one talent, remember he was owing his king ten thousand talents, one talent equals six thousand denarii.

[ 22 : 15 ] denarii. One talent, six thousand denarii. And this man owed ten thousand talents, which is something like sixty million denarii.

And yet when he met this other person who owed him a hundred denarii, he caught him by the throat and refused to accept his pleading, to give him patience, and cast him into prison. the huge debt that had been forgiven himself, that he had been forgiven, that had been cancelled out by this king, who was his employer.

That massive debt that he could never have paid off in the whole of his lifetime, it was cancelled. and yet this comparatively tiny debt that this fellow servant owed him, he wasn't prepared to wipe out and to cancel.

You see, he was unmindful of what he had been forgiven, of the debt that had been cancelled against his own name. He refused the pleas of his fellow servant, and he had forgotten that his king had been moved by pity, when his own pleas begged for pardon, and for cancelling his debt.

[ 23 : 48 ] And you know, there's something of a picture there for us too, about our lives, and the comparison between, and the contrast between, the enormity of our debt to God, which we could never possibly have met or paid, and took the blood of Jesus Christ on the cross as death to pay it for us on our behalf.

We could never have paid that. It was paid for us. That's the glory of the gospel message tonight. You don't have to pay your own debt to God.

It's been paid for you. All you've got to accept is the person who paid it for you. How ridiculous it is when you know of that huge debt that none of us could have paid, how ridiculous it is to refuse to forgive someone else when we have something to forgive.

It really doesn't stand up, does it? And Jesus deliberately puts them side by side. The huge debt between us and God that God forgives and comparatively tiny debts, tiny things compared to that that we are asked to forgive when we have to forgive others.

They may of course be big things. That doesn't mean any of that is easy. forgiveness is very easy on paper or in theory.

[ 25 : 22 ] Not so easy when you've got something to forgive. Then it becomes a challenge, especially when you see it as significant, large, a big thing.

when the offense is great. But when you put it beside our debt to God that he has canceled, it doesn't really seem that big then, does it?

And that's why we've got to take account of what's been forgiven as this explanatory parable sets out. And if we are reluctant, if I'm reluctant tonight to forgive someone when I need to forgive them, if someone comes to me and says, I'm really, really sorry that things are like this between, please forgive me if I've done anything wrong.

If I say to that person, no, I'm not prepared to do that, you've got to make recompense, I'm really forgetting. My reluctance has forgotten the enormity of the debt that God forgave me.

And I'm putting the debt that whoever else I need to forgive has against me as if it were an equivalent or greater than the debt that I had that God cancelled.

[ 26 : 44 ] That's the explanatory parable. Now let's come back finally in forgiveness, being mindful of what God has forgiven. There's the explanatory parable, there's the comparison made, and there's Jesus showing how we must reckon with what has been forgiven us.

But the second point there is the extent of forgiveness. I'll go back to the beginning again. Lord, how often will my brother sin against me and I forgive him? As many as seven times? No, he says seventy times seven.

If you go back to a similar, or forward rather, to a similar reference in Luke's gospel, it's in Luke chapter 17, and verses three to four, where Jesus says to the disciples, pay attention to yourselves. If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him. And if he sins against you seven times in the day, and turns to you seven times saying, I repent, you must forgive him.

And there's no accident that the next passage, the apostles said to the Lord, Lord, increase our faith. Lord, increase our faith.

[ 28 : 04 ] This is a difficult requirement. Forgiveness. And it's limitless. It's limitless nature as Jesus describes it here to Peter.

What he's saying effectively is, there are no limits, Peter. It doesn't matter how often you have to forgive. It's your prerogative and your privilege to do it.

Otherwise, you are unlike the God who forgave you. And you see also, it's to be from the heart, as the last few words of the chapter in the final verse says, so my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart, forgiveness.

It has to be sincere, genuine forgiveness. If we just forgive in an outward sort of external forgiveness or pronouncement of forgiveness, and yet in our heart we're still harboring a grudge, we're hypocrites.

That's sheer hypocrisy. What is said outwardly has to have a corresponding inward genuineness, forgiveness from your heart.

[ 29 : 19 ] Just as God and Jesus from his heart forgave our sins. In other words, forgiveness means that you genuinely love the person that you are forgiving for whatever you're forgiving them for.

You are genuinely loving the person that you're forgiving. Again, there's a text in chapter 9 that is significant in that regard where Jesus is speaking about our being made whole, our being mended, our being made whole.

It's here, this woman who came and touched the hem of his garment. She said, if I but touch it, I shall be made well. It is in this translation, but it's actually better. I shall be made whole.

And it's not without significance that in Colossians, we read in Colossians 3, and now at verse 13, the one following on from the verse we quoted, it says, not only must you forgive as God has forgiven you, but put on love.

Put on love, which binds everything together in harmony, or in the av, which is the bond of perfectness.

[ 30 : 40 ] See, when forgiveness is indeed genuine or out of genuine love for the person, what that means is this, you are caring more for the person than for what that person has done.

The person becomes more significant than the action, words, or whatever you need to forgive. And when we love the person, we are then more like God in the forgiveness we receive from Him.

Because when God has come to forgive our sins, that's precisely what He's doing. He's showing His love for us as persons, over and above the action of our sin against Him.

And what He's really saying is, I really am set on mending this relationship on forgiving your sins. Because I love you as a person.

And therefore I'm prepared to forgive you your sins. Let me leave you with this thought. We are never more unlike God than when we are unforgiving and we are never more like God than when we forgive one another.

[ 32 : 10 ] Peter had forgiveness explained to him by Jesus. Tonight, from this passage, for a short time, Jesus has unfolded to us in the gospel the importance, something of the meaning of the nature of forgiveness.

forgiveness, and how it is in forgiveness, that we are really like the God who forgave us. Let's pray. Lord, our God, we confess in your presence that we fail in regard to forgiveness of one another and of others as we do in so many other things.

Grant that we may be like the apostles who sought that you would increase their faith, that you would give us the capacity wherewithal by which we may, Lord, instantly forgive when required to forgive.

Help us never to leave any matter to rankle or go bad further than they are when our relationships break down. Help us, we pray, to attend to what is broken so that we may attend to it instantly and seek its mending.

We thank you for your forgiveness. For as we read in your Psalms, if you were Lord to mark our sin against us, who could stand? But there is forgiveness with you.

[ 33 : 43 ] We pray that our lives may more and more be patterned upon the way that you have dealt with us and that in forgiving one another, the world may also see that we are indeed your people.

Hear us, we pray, for Jesus' sake. Amen. Let's now go back to Psalm 103 to finish off our evening service. That's Psalm 103, page 369 and that verse 8.

Sing verses 8 to 12 and tune this free church. The Lord our God is merciful and he is gracious, long suffering and slow to wrath and mercy plenteous.

He will not chide continually nor keep his anger still with us. He dealt not as we sinned nor did we quite our ill. And so on down to verse 12 to God's praise.

Let's stand to sing. Ele hashtag man of God Seattle was big hymn to transcript, about bringing more of God and he is gracious.

[ 34 : 56 ] He is righteous. He is gracious, condos, to hurried andactore to wrath In mercy plentious He will not shine continually Nor keep His anger still With us He death, no does we sing Nor give grief white our hills For us the heaven is high

The earth's are not the path So great to look That you in fear His tender mercy's heart As far as He's distant From the west so far That He From us we do With His love All our reigning With He After the benediction I'll go to the main door Now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ The love of God the Father And the communion of the Holy Spirit Be with you now and always Amen Amen