

Forgiven and Forgiving

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[0 : 0 0] The following message is given by Walt Alexander, lead pastor of Trinity Grace Church in Athens, Tennessee.! For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at TrinityGraceAthens.com.

! Ephesians chapter 4 verse 31, Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you along with all malice.

Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another as God in Christ forgave you.

This is the word of the Lord. I don't know Jennifer Thompson. She grew up in North Carolina.

I grew up just south of the line in South Carolina. She was a high school homecoming queen. I was, how do you say it, not really into high school. She was a bit older than me, though we both cut our teeth on some of the same 80s glam rock.

[1 : 1 7] I don't know her, but my heart still goes out to her. One night in 1984, a man broke into her apartment, held a knife to her throat and raped her.

It could have been the end of life as she knew it, but Jennifer was a strong young lady determined to fight and overcome. She wanted her attacker to pay even through the ordeal.

She studied his face for anything that distinguished him. As she said, after the fact, when and if I survived the attack, I was going to make sure that he was put in prison and he would rot there.

Several days later, she identified the man in a lineup. And based on her testimony, Ronald Cotton was sentenced to life in prison. She couldn't wait to move on from what had happened to her and the weight of guilt and the baggage of all these things.

And that horrible night, you can only imagine what she was wrestling with. Unbelievably, two years later, after being sentenced to life in prison, Ronald Cotton was given another trial.

[2 : 2 7] Determined to ensure that justice took place, Jennifer took the stand again. She testified that Cotton was her attacker. There was another suspect, but Jennifer testified that she had never seen that man in her entire life.

Cotton went back to prison. Eleven years went by in total. Jennifer got married, had three kids, had triplets. She was well past the nightmare of that life in so many ways, but then she was asked to help with the prosecution again.

She was asked to provide a blood sample for DNA. She complied. And then the unthinkable happened. One afternoon, a police detective and district attorney knocked on Jennifer's door to inform her that Ronald Cotton was not her attacker.

The DNA testing had proved that the other suspect, the man whom she said she had never seen in her life, was the man who raped her.

Jennifer was devastated. She had sent the wrong man to prison. She had stolen 11 years of his life. She asked the district attorney, how do I give someone back 11 years, sir?

[3 : 50] Now, in addition to the nightmare of what had happened to her, Jennifer was wracked by her own guilt for what she had done to him, testifying against the wrong man.

How does Jennifer find forgiveness? How can she be forgiven? How can she forgive?

Our culture provides many answers, but many of them are not helpful. If we're victims, we must not forgive. Our culture says forgiving perpetrators only encourages their perpetrating.

So don't forgive. If you're a certain race, many say forgiveness is out of the question. Racism is a systemic problem that needs to overhaul every aspect of our society.

Those out of power should never ask for forgiveness for someone in power, or even accept it from them. Interestingly, in our culture that talks so much about justice and wrong, and power and reparations and so on, our culture disdains forgiveness.

[4 : 58] It doesn't merely not accept it, it is repulsed by it. We don't want to forgive. We don't know how to forgive.

It's wrecking us. The pain and turmoil of unforgiveness is severe. Sure, it can be fun at first to withdraw and to avoid, but it gets really cold really quick.

Devolves into bitterness and anger, resentfulness and disdain. It's the number one destroyer of relationships. All too often, as we age, our relational world shrinks, not because of busyness, but because of the canceling of unforgiveness, and it wrecks our bodies.

There's so many health challenges that are brought about by unforgiveness, high blood pressure, ulcers, increased anxiety, hypertension, so many of these things, and the local church is not immune.

When forgiveness is not practiced, the local church becomes less of a place where we welcome one another in the Lord, and more of a place where we navigate the minefields of broken relationships with fake smiles and half-hearted handshakes.

[6 : 11] Yet there's nothing more fundamental to the gospel than the forgiveness of sins. The shorthand for the gospel in so many ways in the New Testament, or the immediate benefit that's celebrated in the New Testament, is the forgiveness of sins.

Yet we saw that in Ephesians 1-7. In Him we have redemption. The forgiveness of our trespasses. Forgiveness of our sins.

And so it could not be more serious. Our problem with unforgiveness could not be more serious because it reveals a deficiency in our understanding of the gospel.

It's a gospel five alarm fire. And it must not be. The Lord is calling us to be a people that are practicing forgiveness. Practicing forgiveness.

It's not a one fell swoop extension. It's a practice that you're committed to. And where we're going is forgive one another freely, repeatedly, and eagerly because God has completely forgiven you in Christ.

[7 : 18] Forgive one another freely, repeatedly, and eagerly because God has completely forgiven you in Christ. The first point we break this out with is to forgive is to refuse retaliation for wrongs done against you.

To forgive is to refuse retaliation for wrongs done against us. As we've gone through chapter 4, there's a pattern to these commands.

Now we saw all throughout this letter, it's just filled with not commands. Filled with the truths of what God has done in Christ. Now we come with these commands. And there's often a pattern. There's a prohibition.

A negative command. Followed by a positive exhortation and then some sort of gospel motivation. And that's what we see firstly in verse 31.

We see a negative prohibition. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger, clamor, and slander be put away along with all malice. The negative prohibition is clear.

[8 : 19] We must not retaliate in any way for wrongs done against us. It's total. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander and malice.

All of it. The all applies to every single term there. To forgive is to refuse all retaliation. The prohibited retaliation is captured in this downward spiral of unforgiveness.

How do these words relate? Well, they relate in this downward spiral. Unforgiveness begins in the heart. It shapes our actions and is exposed in our speech. It must all be put away.

It begins with bitterness, he says. Let all bitterness be put away. Like a bite into a sour lime, the wrongs done against us leave us smarting.

It's an old word we don't use, but they leave us sour and bitter. It may be the result of being betrayed at the deepest level possible. Or just being carefully left out of a gathering that we thought was with our friends.

[9 : 27] It may not even be a wrong that's truly a wrong, but just our perception of a wrong. But whatever it is, it leaves us in a smarting, souring, bitter position of heart.

It begins in the heart. An offense of some kind leads to bitterness and often resentment and disdain.

This cluster of internal opposition and anger. But bitterness rarely stays in the heart. He continues, let all bitterness and wrath and anger be put away.

There's little difference between these words. In fact, one of the words we've already seen when he said, Be angry and do not sin. Do not let the sun go down on your anger. In verse 26, so anger is sometimes right.

Be angry. But anger is often wrong. It's when bitterness and resentment, anger and wrath come up. When bitterness and resentment lead us to reject attempts to work it out reasonably.

[10 : 31] And instead, vent what's going on within. Whether loud or quiet, wrath and anger are the venting of a bitter spirit.

Proverbs 29, 11 says it so vividly. A fool gives full vent to his spirit, but a wise man quietly holds back. It is never wise, never permissible to vent your spirit.

The ends never justify the means. The wrong never justifies the venting. Do you see? So all wrath and anger must be put away.

The venting of anger often includes our words. And that's where Paul goes next. It includes clamor and slander. These two terms focus on angry, unforgiving words. Clamor is just a word for shouting or screaming.

It's the verbal jabs of conflict. The shouting back and forth. The shots across the bow. The verbal shots that come from conflict.

[11 : 42] The clamoring. But slander is something different. So clamors, these verbal jabs. Slander though is when our words are used to tear down.

You know, it's important to realize that slander is not necessarily a false report. Nor is it merely a negative report. Slander is, the best understanding, is an against report.

It's sharing something to tear down. So gossip, the way they relate, gossip is talking about someone to someone who's not a part of the problem or the solution for the ungodly joy of it.

That's what gossip is. Well, slander is talking about someone to someone who's not a part of the problem or the solution for the purpose of tearing down. You should never go to that restaurant.

Did you hear what that driver does on the interstate? I don't know. That's not a very good example. But you get the idea. It just rolls off our tongue. This negative against report.

[12 : 46] And it must be put away. It must be put away. Along with all malice. Malice is kind of speaking to an attitude.

A spirit. A mean-spirited, vengeful attitude that animates all of those terms. And so, the mounting force of these words for anger and unforgiveness is meant to be alarming.

These six terms brought together or gathered together by this repeated conjunction are meant to be alarming. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away.

Along with all malice. It's meant to alarm us. It's meant to alarm us to the variety of ways unforgiveness is let loose in the local church.

Many commentators talk about the similarity between this verse and stoic teaching. Stoic teaching talks about calmly enduring wrong or offenses in an unfeeling or unemotional state.

[14 : 04] That's why we say, I'm more stoical. I'm less emotional. I'm less emotional. But Paul is not teaching stoicism.

Paul is teaching how to live worthy of the gospel. He says, let it be taken away. Our translations read, let it be put away.

And of course, anger and bitterness and wrath and clamor and slander should be put away. But he's alerting us to something else. It's not merely that we're meant to put away these things.

He's alerting us to reality that the gospel is meant to take away these things from us. The gospel is bringing about this new life where we don't merely put this thing off.

But the gospel is trying to take it off. So unforgiveness focuses on all the things that have been taken from us. But the gospel is here to take unforgiveness from us. So what do we do?

[15 : 10] Several years ago, ESPN released a 10-hour documentary on Michael Jordan and the 1998 Chicago Bulls called The Last Dance.

It was their quest to win a third three-peat. Or second three-peat.

Thank you, son. But in their third title in a row, obviously. The documentary was incredible. Michael Jordan was famous for not conducting private interviews.

Very secretive. It didn't fit so well into our culture. It's called The Last Dance because the manager pledged to tear the team apart, to break it apart at the end of the season.

And so they dubbed that season, or Phil Jackson dubbed that season, The Last Dance. In 1988, the Bulls were given one last dance.

[16 : 06] One last chance. They went on to win the title. Phil Jordan famously made the game-winning shot over Byron Russell and his sixth finals MVP.

Still ahead of LeBron. After the season was over, head coach Phil Jackson called a final team meeting. He said, this is it.

This was the last dance. This is the last meeting of the 1998 Chicago Bulls. He informed the guys ahead of time that he said, I want you to write down what this team means to you and bring it to the meeting.

It was an emotional meeting. Everyone shared. Steve Kerr would go on to become a Hall of Fame coach. Dennis Rodman. Scotty Pippen. Michael wrote a poem.

Everyone was shocked as he shared what the team meant to him in a way that no one had ever seen. After everyone shared at the last meeting of the 1998 Chicago Bulls, they had a little piece of paper with what they wrote in their hands.

[17 : 19] And Phil Jackson gave them a coffee can and said, put your piece of paper in the coffee can. Then he turned out the light. He lit the paper on fire.

They all stood there watching the paper burn. Phil Jackson said, there's no way you can go forward if you keep living in the past.

The Apostle Paul is trying to do something very similar right here. You cannot go forward living in the past. You cannot go forward with unforgiveness for something in the past.

And so what is it that you need to throw into the coffee can this morning? Were you abused? Were you physically or sexually mistreated?

Were you abandoned? You may have literally been left on your own at an age that was far too young. Or you may have been neglected to the point of near utter abandonment.

[18 : 30] Have you been cheated or betrayed? Have you been lied to? And misled?

Have you been slandered? Has your business, your family, your reputation been damaged by the malicious speech of others? Because the gospel comes to take it away.

All those things are legitimate wrongs. But the gospel comes to take them away. I think the Lord, the Spirit of the Lord wants you to throw that into the coffee can and burn it up this morning.

The gospel comes to take it away because you're no longer your own. You were bought with a price. You belong to God. I mean, I think the point of this message is not merely, the gospel does not just say it's unbecoming of you to be unforgiving.

It's not becoming of you to be unforgiving. Obviously, it is unbecoming to be unforgiving. That's not merely what he's saying. The gospel is saying it's not yours anymore. You're not your own.

[19 : 30] Your life is not your own. The wrongs done against you are not your own. You give up your right to retaliation.

Romans 12, 18 says, Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God. For it is written, vengeance is mine. I will repay, says the Lord. That's a quote from Deuteronomy.

Tell them when you go into the promised land, or you go into this land and they begin to attack you, vengeance is mine. You are my people. It's my vengeance that rules your life, not your own.

And so, this command, this put away command, is calling us to look the cost of forgiveness in the eyes. Some people say, why can't God just forgive?

You know, that's one of the common questions about our God revealed in the Bible. Why can't He just forgive? Why can't He just wipe the slate clean like we do with college debt?

[20 : 31] Just clean it out. Start over. But anyone who says that is someone who has not had to forgive someone. Anyone who knows true forgiveness knows it exacts a cost.

And so, forgiveness begins when the person sinned against chooses to refuse retaliation, to pay the cost.

Forgiveness, therefore, always feels worse than bitterness at first. So, to forgive is to refuse retaliation.

Point two, to forgive is to do good despite wrongs done against us. It's to do good despite wrongs done against us. After the negative prohibition, Paul continues with this positive exhortation.

Now that we are in Christ, how do we respond to one another, to those who sin against us? Verse 32, first part of the verse, be kind to one another. Tenderhearted.

[21 : 42] There's one of your one another's. Be kind to one another. Tenderhearted. Forgiving each other. These are surprising results or responses to wrong. All of these responses look wrong in the face.

They play it straight. They deliberately act unfairly. Anger, bitterness, and unforgiveness are all about fairness. Fairness is about setting the record straight.

Restoring justice. Well, forgiveness is deliberately unfair. Forgiveness, therefore, is not forgetting some wrong or excusing some wrong.

Sweeping it under the rug. Forgiveness, therefore, also is not ignoring some wrong. Forgiveness is something else. If I do something wrong, I deserve something wrong to be done to me.

If I punch a wall, I deserve it to make a dent, make a hole. If I sin against you, betray your trust. I deserve your frustration and anger. But in forgiveness, you choose to do something else.

[22 : 46] And it begins with kindness. He says, be kind to one another. Be kind. Put it on. It's who you are in Christ. Put it on. You know, sometimes we say, I'm so mad at that person, I'm going to kill him with kindness.

I'm going to do nice things until they get ticked off, you know? That's not what we're talking about here. The Apostle Paul is not commending that, though. It's sometimes work. It's called manipulation, though.

That's not what's going on. This is the same word that's used in Scripture when it says, the Lord is good. But taste and see that the Lord is good.

It's saying the Lord is not merely doing good things, but has a good heart towards His people. And so kindness means we refuse retaliation. Instead, focus our hearts and minds on the good of other people.

On what is eternally good. And obviously, we need the Lord to do a work for that to happen. One of my favorite movies to illustrate this is The Fugitive.

[23 : 51] Harrison Ford plays Dr. Richard Kimball. And Harrison Ford was the boss for a number of years. And my kids just don't understand. It all didn't boil down to Star Wars either.

He's accused of killing his wife. He's wrongly convicted and sent to prison. Through a string of circumstances, he escapes and sets out to prove that he didn't do it.

And so for much of the movie, he's a fugitive on the run. He's hunted by a ruthless police officer, another boss, Samuel Gerard, played by Tommy Lee Jones.

While running, he keeps trying to find out who killed his wife, what happened. And leaves clues for the police to discover as they're chasing him down.

So he's leaving these clues everywhere he is. But he's being chased by Gerard, this bloodhound police officer, trying to find him and find where he's hiding.

[24 : 50] Near the end of the movie, there's a moment where Gerard shouts across the room where Kimball is hiding. He knows he's there. He sees him running around. He says, I believe you. I know you didn't kill your wife.

In a moment, we see a rush of relief come off Kimball's face. He's no longer afraid to be taken in by this man. Because he knows the man is a good man.

He knows the man is after the truth. He's not a crooked cop, but a good one. And that's what this verse is trying to commend to us. We give our goodness. Goodness is an incredible thing to give to another person.

To be all for their good. To reject all the manipulation. Reject all the spin. All the angling. And instead say, I am for your good. Making it clear.

That's what he's saying. Be kind to one another. Have a good-natured, kind heart towards them. Be tender-hearted. Literally, this means to have healthy intestines or bowels.

[25 : 55] Now, I don't think the main point is about our health. We don't need to go home and drink our apple cider vinegar today. It's an ancient way of referring to what comes up immediately.

What is instinctive to us? We talk about this. What is your gut-level response to this or that? Ours must be compassion.

This word is used repeatedly of Jesus Christ. It's trying to illustrate something very important. When he saw the helpless harassed crowds, he had compassion. It's used 15 times, I think.

When he withdrew to pray and be alone with the Lord, but the crowds chased him down. You remember that? He went away and they ran along the land and they got there before he did. And he was trying to get away from them. He had compassion.

When he was out with them, ministering them for two days and nothing to eat, or all day and nothing to eat, he had compassion. When he saw a widow weeping for his son, he had compassion. What is it saying?

[27 : 00] What's it saying? Is it just saying he knew it was a good thing to do to be compassionate? No, it's not saying that. It's saying from the depth of who he was, compassion flowed out. It was his gut level response.

Our imperfections, infirmities, and iniquities do not bring forth the Lord's frustration, but his compassion. And so too in the community, that's what we need. Our infirmities, our iniquities, they need to bring forth compassion.

Our imperfections. Paul is using this word intentionally to call us to walk in Jesus Christ, in new life.

We tell new members, here's only a matter of time before we disappoint you. Why? Because we want compassion to animate our life together. The best construction on one another's conduct to animate our life.

A readiness to help in times of imperfections, infirmities, and iniquities. Perhaps most difficult, but most important of all, it includes forgiveness.

[28 : 13] Forgiving each other. There's two words used for forgiveness in the New Testament. Most often, there's a word, it just means to send away, to release, to let free.

That's what's used in the Lord's Prayer. When he says, forgive us our debts, we forgive those, forgive our debtors. Another word is what's used here, to give freely and graciously.

Forgiveness is to be the repeated practice of the New Testament church.

We forgive again and again and again and again. We forgive as many as 70 times 7. It's meant to be gracious. The accent on this word for forgiveness, forgiving each other, is meant to be gracious.

It's literally the grace word. Karizomai is to show kindness, to do good to the undeserving and the ill-deserving. It's firstly a choice not to do certain things, not to hurt, not to cut down, not to indulge in ill will in our minds and hearts.

[29 : 32] But it's not just those things. It's a choice to release others and treat them graciously as if they didn't do it. It's stunning.

But it's incredible. Let me make a few caveats. Real forgiveness does not fall for cheap substitutes. Real forgiveness does not just forget the wrong or excuse it or ignore it.

It doesn't just glance over the wrong. Real forgiveness looks the wrong in the eye. Real forgiveness also does not magically erase all consequences. Sometimes trust needs to be restored.

Sometimes charges need to be filed. Sometimes actions need to be taken. Sometimes we cannot just forgive and forget. That's not the command.

Real forgiveness also does not stop at forgiveness but works out in other constructive ways. So forgiveness, you know, sometimes I think, we think about forgiveness often as this posture of heart. I forgive though I still treat you like a dirt bag.

[30 : 38] Like that's not forgiveness. Forgiveness is always clustered with other constructive actions. So you cannot do the dirt bag forgiveness.

It must be something different. It doesn't square biblically. You may need to be wise around someone or you may need to be careful. But if you do not want anything to do with them, you have not forgiven them.

And maybe the Spirit is wanting to illumine a person, a relationship. You have not forgiven. Real forgiveness looks wrong in the eye and chooses to do good to the undeserving and ill-deserving anyway.

Anyway, so to forgive, thirdly, is to remember God forgave our wrongs done against Him. To forgive is to remember God forgave our wrongs done against Him.

After the negative prohibition, the following positive exhortation, Paul proclaims the gospel motivation. This really is the power of forgiveness.

[31 : 38] Forgiveness. You'll never be able to forgive others until you've experienced the forgiveness of God. In our culture, there's no one we're taught more to forgive than ourselves.

It's a cottage industry of books and conferences and so on. Don't be so hard on yourself. Don't be so unkind to yourself. Obviously, there's something there.

But the reason it is the main person you need to forgive is because we've exalted ourselves to the main standard. So we need to learn to forgive ourselves because we are our highest authority.

No one has the right to tell us what to do or what we've done. No one can tell us what's true for us or untrue for us. And so it's no surprise that we must learn to forgive ourselves.

But none of it works. We're walking around guilty. Because there's no freedom from guilt in forgiving yourselves. Who has the power to forgive sin?

[32 : 46] Not you. There's no power to forgive in focusing on forgiving ourselves. And so the power to forgive comes from turning to God. The power to forgive comes from turning from others horizontally to God vertically.

There's a wonderful change in orientation when we land at the end of this verse. It's changing our minds away from this horizontal plane to suddenly this vertical plane to our relationship with the Holy God.

The power to forgive comes from God. The power to forgive comes not from turning from wrongs others have done, but turning to see the wrongs we have done against God. He says, God in Christ forgave you.

Freely, repeatedly. Freely. And so, how does it all work? I can't improve upon the answer of Jesus Christ. One of His disciples came to ask Him, How many times do I forgive my brother?

He said, or they said 70 times? And He said 70 times 7. Not so they would start counting up and stop when they reach that number. 490.

[33 : 59] He told them a parable. The parable is about a king who wanted to settle his estate. The king was quite wealthy.

He had many servants. And many times a king who was wealthy like that became essentially a bank for the area. And so he had many servants and he had many people indebted to him.

But he wanted to collect. You know, he wanted to resolve his estate. He had one servant who owed 10,000 talents. A denarii is one day's worth of pay.

And a talent is about 6,000 denarii. So this servant owes 60 million denarii. Which would require 164 years to repay.

The equivalent, one author says, of 7.5 billion today. How did he get into so much debt? We don't know.

[35 : 01] We just know he cannot repay it. The master orders him to pay his debt. Or he orders him to be sold with his wife and children and possessions to pay off the debt.

And the servant begs him, have patience on me. I will repay you everything. The master releases him from the debt and forgives him of the debt.

Now this is the peril. This is what our Lord is teaching him. The same servant walks away. Comes upon a servant who has a debt with him.

Something like 100 denarii. About \$17,000. So no small sum. Just not nearly as great as his debt.

When that first servant finds that his servant owes him 100 denarii, he chokes him and says, pray what you owe. No. The second servant begs for mercy and says the same thing.

[36 : 06] Have patience with me. I will repay you. And the king heard about it and summoned the servant. Said essentially, what in the world, man? What are you doing?

I forgave all your debt. Should you not have had mercy on your fellow servant as I have had mercy on you? Then he threw the man into prison until he should pay it all.

Now, what's the point of the parable? Who are you in the story? You're the one with the 10,000 debt.

10,000 talent debt. You're the one who owes 7.5 billion. God is the king. That's what Jesus is making very clear. God's the king. You are the servant. You've gone your own way.

You've done your own things. You've not loved the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. The sins of others against you are serious. But your sins against God are far more serious.

[37 : 04] That's what would have suddenly alerted the disciples to the reality of what is going on in forgiveness. And so, the Lord is wanting to alert us to the reality of our sins against God.

We could go to many places to define the wickedness of sin. But there's no place where we see the utter evil and ugliness of sin more than at the cross. Jesus was offered up as a sacrifice by God for us.

It is true. It is wonderful. In eternity past, God determined to set forth Jesus Christ as a sacrifice for our many sins. Hallelujah.

Praise the name. But in offering Him up as a sacrifice for us, Jesus was killed by us. Jesus was covered with our sins.

And the wrath that was stored up for our many sins was poured out fully on Him. You want to know what is the evil of your sin? Well, look at the cross.

[38 : 05] That's what the Lord is saying. That's what the Scriptures say. John Stott says so well. Were you there when they crucified, my Lord? The old Negro spiritual ask.

And we must answer, yes, we were there. Not as spectators only, but as participants, guilty participants, plotting, scheming, betraying, bargaining, and handing Him over to be crucified.

We may try to wash our hands of responsibility like Pilate, but our attempt will be as futile as His. For there is blood on our hands.

Before we can begin to see the cross as something done for us, leading us to faith and worship, we have to see it as something done by us, leading us to repentance.

Do you see? Do you see Jesus Christ is not just an offering for our sins. He was the one we killed. As we sing, it was my sin that held Him there until it was accomplished.

[39 : 12] His dying breath has brought me life. I know that it is finished. So we're meant to see the utter wickedness of our sin, and we're meant to celebrate that it is completely finished.

Jesus said from the cross to all humanity that trusted in Him, Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.

not just a sacrifice for us, but a sacrifice by us, and it is done.

It's finished. What you realize when you realize true forgiveness is that you are the one in the prison.

You are the one guilty. You are the one deserving. You are the one upon Him. The wrath of God is being stored up.

[40 : 35] And then suddenly you're set free. You're set free. Forgiveness exalts a man so far above his troubles that any trouble done to me, he's like, what?

Dwell on that? Disdain that? Get resentful about that? No way! Not in light of how I've been forgiven. And so the gospel of Jesus Christ wants to set you free this morning, to set you free, to receive true forgiveness of sin and true liberation from this endless cycle of unforgiveness and anger to lift you above these things.

If you are, and I am the 10,000 talent debtor, then all of our wrongs and all the wrongs done against us are but a 100 denarii.

The reality is, your sins against God are far more serious than anyone's sins against you, and so you must forgive.

The parable ended with Matthew 18, 35. The Lord turned it, as He often did in these parables, to stick the barb into the hearer.

[41 : 51] He said, so also, when He talked about throwing the servant into prison, He said, so also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you if you do not forgive your brother from the heart.

Now, Jesus is not saying, you must forgive, or I will not forgive you, as if suddenly forgiveness becomes this work that makes us acceptable to God.

But He is saying, if you cannot forgive your brother, you are not a Christian. If there's a long list of people you cannot forgive, you are not a Christian.

The greater warning is not for the one who sins worse, but the one who refuses to forgive. So can we still forgive?

For over two years after Jennifer Thompson learned that Ronald Cotton was not her attacker, she felt ashamed.

[43 : 04] Over and over, she wondered, how could I have made such a terrible mistake? What about the man whose life I ruined? What about the damage I caused to his family? She wondered, does he hate me as much as I hate myself?

So, then one day she stopped crying. She knew exactly what she must do. A few weeks later, she drove 50 miles to a church in the town where she was raped.

She prayed for the strength to face this moment. She prayed for the strength to face Ronald Cotton. She said, I'm sorry. If I had spent every day for the rest of my life telling you how sorry I am, it couldn't come close to what I feel.

Ronald Cotton was calm and quiet. Finally, he spoke and he said, I'm not mad at you. Never been mad at you. I just wanted you to live a good life.

For two hours, they sat and talked in this church while their families paced outside. They talked about pitfalls of memory and the power of faith, the miracle of DNA.

[44 : 15] They talked about Bobby Poole, the man who was convicted. As dust fell on the small church, they made their way out. In the parking lot, their families were weeping.

And Jennifer Thompson and Ronald Cotton embraced. That's the power of the gospel. That's what the local church is meant to be.

Our culture can't answer this question. It has no resources to bring to the table. But the gospel is thoroughly sufficient to teach us how to forgive and show us the way of peace.

Let's forgive one another freely, repeatedly, and eagerly because God has completely forgiven you in Christ. Let us pray. Father in heaven, we cast ourselves onto you. We don't want to play fast and loose.

We thank you for the privilege of sitting under your word. God, anything unhelpful, we pray that it be forgotten. Anything that resonates with the word of God would be remembered, applied, that we would be doers of the word and not hearers only.

[45 : 29] God, help us in the agony of a world east of Eden so often marred by our own failures and disappointments as well as the sins done against us.

Help us to walk in the power of the gospel, we pray. In Jesus' name, amen.