

Forgiveness

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[0 : 0 0] to Matthew chapter 18. This is the passage Jeremy will be preaching on, I'm sure. Matthew 18, and we're going to read from verse 21. Matthew 18, reading from verse 21 through to the end, verse 35. Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times? Jesus answered, I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times. Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand bags of gold was brought to him. Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt. At this the servant fell on his knees before him. Be patient with me, he begged, and I will pay back everything. The servant's master took pity on him, cancelled the debt, and let him go. But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred silver coins. He grabbed him and began to choke him.

Pay back what you owe me, he demanded. His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, Be patient with me, and I will pay it back. But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. When the other servants saw what had happened, they were outraged and went and told their master everything that had happened. Then the master called the servant in. You wicked servant, he said. I cancelled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you? In anger, his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured until he should pay back all he owed. This is how my heavenly father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart. We'll end our reading there. Well, thank you again for the opportunity to share God's word with you. If you have a Bible, then turn back to that passage in Matthew 18, 23.

As I said a few moments ago, I had the privilege of visiting Rwanda just the year before lockdown. And on the first full day that we were there, we went out into the countryside on a very hot day. We were talking with local people. We were hearing a bit about what was going on within that particular village and region. And we were just about to get back on the bus and some people were taking photos when this man came up to me, a man probably in his 70s. And he said to me, do you see that lady over there? And this was an older lady, again, probably of the same age.

She said, you know, that lady is the most amazing lady I've ever met. I said, why can you tell me the story? He said, I killed that lady's husband and children. If you cast your memory back, you know Rwanda went through a genocide where the two tribes literally killed hundreds of thousands of people. And he said, I came into the village. We lived in the same village all our life. I went into their house one evening and I killed her husband and her children. He was arrested. He went to prison.

[4 : 1 5] And in prison, he came and found Jesus Christ and was forgiven. And through the process, he was then released. And he didn't know what to do because he'd only ever known that one village to live in all his life. But he went back to the village. And on the first Sunday, he went in to church.

And the first person that came up to him was that lady and said, in Jesus Christ, I forgive you. And I love you as a brother.

Forgiveness is something we talk about a lot in church. It's a hallmark of a Christian journey. And the commitment is to become a forgiven person. It's an essential virtue of what it means to believe in Jesus Christ. Forgiveness was one of the big themes that Jesus talked about in his three-year ministry. As he hung on that cross on that first Good Friday, and as he breathed his last words, he said, forgive them. They do not know what they do. In the prayer he taught his disciples, the Lord's Prayer, were told to forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.

Essentially, the prayer asked, God forgive me as I forgive other people. Peter, one of the disciples, inquired of Jesus, how many times should I forgive? As many as seven times?

And perhaps Peter was using that because that was the perfect number within his culture. Jesus replied, 70 times seven.

[6 : 30] Jesus wasn't saying 490 was the magical number, but it was we can keep track of that number. We're pointed to stop keeping track, to constantly forgive so that we might forgive people.

So what is forgiveness? The language of forgiveness comes to a sense of inequity.

Think of the old balancing scales you used to see when you went into the banks before it all got digitized. You know, you put your money on one side and you'd even it up with the weight.

If it's been an offense against a person, that imbalance arrives. The scales are tipped already. And that takes us right back to our need, right back to the book of Genesis.

When Adam and Eve committed the first sins and sin entered into the world and inequity had entered in. The relationship between the creator God and his creation was broken.

[7 : 49] We are broken. We are broken individuals. Because our relationship with Christ, with God the Father is broken.

And the only way back is for us individually to be forgiven by Jesus. That was our opening hymn this morning.

In Christ alone, only Jesus can do that. But with that knowledge of forgiveness comes the ability then to forgive others.

Rather than saying when something happens, I'm going to get even with you. I'm going to retaliate and make you feel pain like you caused me.

You owe me something because you did it. We talk about the scales of justice. Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.

[8 : 57] Forgiveness is about letting it go. Forgiveness is about letting it go.

Focusing on more positive things. For yourself, by stepping out of that cycle, always feeling that you need to strike back to prove your strength.

Which only means it happens again and again. Gandhi said, An eye for an eye, the world will soon go blind. Jesus said, You have heard it said, An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.

But I say to you, repay no one evil for evil. Instead, repay evil with good. Forgiveness is also about going through a process where we get to a place where we can let go of resentment.

Where we can hopefully even see that individual in a new light and truly forgive us.

[10 : 28] Forgiveness doesn't just happen by us. You see, forgiveness doesn't just happen by us wishing it. Forgiveness doesn't just happen by us closing our eyes and say, I'm going to do it, I'm going to do it.

But forgiveness is a gift which ultimately comes from God himself through his Holy Spirit. True forgiveness is a spiritual act.

And forgiveness is actually a gift to you rather than to the person that you are forgiven.

You see, sometimes we withhold forgiveness because we only see it as a gift that we're giving to the one person who we feel least like giving it to.

But the truth is that primary forgiveness is about forgiving yourself. You see, most of the time, if we're thinking about somebody that we've got to forgive or a group that we've got to forgive, they've moved on.

[11 : 40] They've forgotten the incident. They've forgotten what they've done to you. They don't actually care whether you forgive them or not.

But it's how it is affecting you and your relationship with God and your relationship with others.

Forgiveness is a choice. A process where we decide not to allow our thoughts, your spirit, your life to be consumed with resentment and bitterness.

And this is dangerous. Because if you don't, it can turn you in to a bitter, sour individual. Someone who is angry at life, angry at God.

Who you look to take out revenge time and time again. And ultimately, it can turn to depression.

When we hold these resentments in and obsess over what has happened to us, we can stay trapped in a narrative where we are always the victim.

[12 : 54] And you're not made for that. That's not why God created you. God created you to be in relationship with him.

To be in relationship with other people. To have a life not of happiness, but a life of joy. And joy and happiness are two really quite different things.

But it's to have that joy that comes only from God. Forgiveness means you can claim a new narrative where the horrible consequences of what has happened to you no longer define who you are.

Maybe you've heard the old saying, With holding forgiveness is like drinking poison and waiting to affect the other person. But the only one negatively affected is you.

Forgiveness starts because we have been forgiven by God. In church, we talk about the peace of Christ that surpasses all understanding.

[14 : 16] And part of our inner peace derives from being a forgiven person. But let me say what forgiveness is not.

Because one of the obstacles to forgiveness is confusion about the nature of forgiveness. There are a lot of myths that get in the way.

Forgiveness is not acting like it never happened. Just trying to sweep it under the carpet. It's not becoming a doormat.

Opening yourself to let someone keep mistreating you. It's not even reconciliation. Or giving people back trust again.

It's not even about restoring relationship to what it was before it happened. And it's not something the other person has to ask for.

[15 : 26] It's not a lack of accountability or consequences. It doesn't mean that we don't have to reset boundaries. It can mean that relationship might be over.

It might mean that individual has to face judgment and prison. Forgiveness is about how you are going to deal with your hurt and your anger.

I don't know what's happened in your lives. Perhaps a person sitting next to you doesn't know what happened when you were a teenager or in your 20s or your 30s or your 40s or even what happened yesterday.

I don't know the people that have hurt you. And I cannot stand here and say to you just it's easy just forgive that person and move on.

But I can gently suggest that you do not want to get yourself trapped in a life of anger and bitterness.

[16 : 50] You do not want that individual to be the individual that defines who you are or defines your relationship with God or with others.

I'm not even saying you have to reconcile with that individual. But what we do need is we need God's spirit to help us to forgive.

To be able to forgive that individual that group of individuals that family situation whatever it is to seek and to give that forgiveness.

Because that forgiveness has hurt you. It may have hurt you beyond words that you can describe. And there are levels of hurt aren't there? Because when we talk about forgiveness there can often be multiple layers there.

[18 : 01] There are everyday things that happen in human relationships that perhaps are easier to forgive. And can I suggest the more you forgive the easier it is to forgive the big things if we can forgive the little things.

But there are deeper hurts that are long-lasting that can and have internally defined who we are. Often it isn't just a one incident but it can be a pattern of behaviour of broken trust of betrayal by someone else.

And forgiveness is something that happens once we forgive. But it's also a process as well.

It's something that we might have to work through to keep coming back to. I don't know if you remember if you go back probably 40, 50 years ago Scripture Union used to have a book called The Way to Life which used to teach you how you became a Christian and the very back of that there was a picture of a pond and a man about to go fishing and it had no fishing allowed and underneath it was that when we forgive when God forgives us it goes into that big deep river and we don't go fishing for it we don't put it out again we're not remembering it.

I remember Tony Campola telling the story of you know on that last day when we go to heaven is there going to be like a big video screen behind us and all our sins are going to go flashing through that video.

[19 : 48] No. Because it's been forgiven. It's been forgotten. But for us here on earth forgiveness is a process.

Perhaps there are things if we're deeply honest we haven't yet forgiven people for. Or perhaps there's things that you've done that you don't think God can forgive you for. perhaps you live with a guilt an incident that happened and you think well yeah God can forgive a person sitting to the left of me and the right of me God can forgive the world I know I believe John 316 but he can't actually forgive me that thing I did in my life.

For those deep hurts we need God's working in our lives perhaps we need to seek professional help. Forgiveness is one of those journeys that is difficult.

We won't always get it right. You may have already thought you'd forgiven something only for it to slap you in the face again later. Keep forgiving. Keep opening the door to your own freedom from the past.

[21 : 16] rest. And as we come to a conclusion I hope each of us go from this place this morning firstly knowing that you are forgiven.

And over him the vilest offender who truly believes that moment from Jesus a pardon receives. Praise the Lord.

Whatever you've done in your past wherever you've come from know that you are forgiven by God. For those of us who know in our own lives that there are things that we still need to forgive other people for start the process with God's spirit.

God understands. God is there to help us. He's given us people within his fellowship others who can help us through that process.

I know it's not easy. We cannot manufacture it ourselves. It comes from knowing that relationship that loving relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ.

[22 : 34] Christ. And I do pray that each of us know forgiveness and are able to forgive today.

Amen. Let's pray. Father God thank you that you hung on a cross and as you took the sin of the world upon you you still forgave.

and Lord for some of us we feel like the burdens that we carry are like the sins of the earth.

They hold us back. They make us feel bitter. They make us feel angry. They give us no hope or peace. And I pray gently that through the work of your spirit today that we would know your forgiveness.

that you would love us and care for us. And that as we forgive because we have been forgiven you would set us free into a true and living relationship with our Lord Jesus Christ.

[23 : 51] Thank you that all things are possible through you and we pray that you would hear this prayer and all our prayers in Jesus name. Amen.

We're going to conclude our service by a final song of worship. Amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saves a wretch like me.

If you're able, let's stand and sing this great hymn of truth of forgiveness from God. Amen. Amen. Amen. Thank you. Amen. Amen. Amen.