

So thanks for being here today to honor the Lord.

It matters.

And I've been praying for you.

A lot of people are praying for you Sunday by Sunday.

So thank you for being here.

Hey, we'll put that first slide up the picture.

I read this story about this.

You know what this is?

a coal fire, steam fire that's coming up out of the ground in Centralia, Pennsylvania.

You know how long it's been burning?

For over 60 years, 60 years, it's been burning.

And it comes from more than 300 feet underground.

It was probably started originally by a surface trash fire, and it's been burning for decades.

And geologists tell us it will eventually burn itself out in 250 years.

And the thing is, this town, Centralia, used to have thousands of people in it, and I read they're down to seven, seven people.

And you could drive along old Route 61.

It was shut down in 1993 because of the steam and the fire coming up from it.

What an amazing thing.

You might think this is an isolated case, but

the geologists will tell us that there's more than 220 of these type of fires going on in the United States.

What an amazing thing.

And so how do we explain that and how do we relate?

And here's why I'm telling this little bit of trivia is because I think that there's people in churches all

over America

and they have a fire burning down deep in their souls, and they don't know how to get rid of it.

And it might be a fire of anger.

It might be a fire of bitterness, a fire of unforgiveness.

And so that's a story of so many people.

I'll give you case studies.

A co-worker cannot forgive.

Someone who stole credit for a project that he did.

A boss who unjustly let you go.

A classmate who posted something terrible on social media about you.

A friend who gossiped about you behind your back.

A brother that you feel mistreats your elderly parents.

A husband who cheated on you.

An uncle who sexually abused you.

a pastor or church member who disrespected you.

Let me give you another case study.

Natalie, age 22, grew up in a home where she never felt safe.

Her father was an alcoholic.

And when he was sober, he was a nice guy.

Basically just ignored the family.

But when he was intoxicated, he became angry and he abused the family.

even getting physical with the children.

So when Natalie was 16 years old, she made the mistake of standing up to her father one night when he came in from a bender and he was drunk.

She stood up to him and she'll never forget the blow that she took on her face.

And now she's out on her own, but she's made a vow.

Not only will she never forget, I mean, who could forget that,
but she's made a vow that she will never, ever forgive her father.

You know, the number one cause of depression is some form of anger.

Anger.

Anger due to hurt.

And the truth is that hurt people hurt people.

You've heard that before.

So can the gospel provide any help to so many who struggle with unforgiveness,
with hurts, habits, hang-ups, resentments.

So we're going to read a passage today, a very famous passage.

You've read it before.

It's the parable of the unforgiving servant.

You remember that one?

If you have your copy of Scripture, turn to Matthew 18, or turn yours on and look at it, verses 21
through 35.

And I'm going to read it for us.

I'll make a few comments as we go along.

This is the parable of the unforgiving servant.

Verse 21.

Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins
against me?

Up to seven times.

And Jesus answered, I tell you not seven times, but seventy-seven times.

So as an aside, rabbinic literature taught that if I'm quoting,

If a man sins once, twice, or three times, forgive him.

If he sins a fourth time, do not forgive him.

This is from the Mishnah, and that's an exact quote.

So Peter thought he was being very generous in offering to forgive someone seven times in this answer, this question he was putting upon Jesus.

And so Jesus, in response, gives us stories, many times He did, the parable of the unforgiving servant.

So verse 23 continues this.

Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants.

Now, the amount that we'll read about suggests that this servant wasn't a slave servant.

The vast amount suggests that he was a governor of the land or region.

Maybe he collected taxes for the king, but squandered it all.

Verse 24, look at that.

As he began the settlement,

A man who owed him 10,000 talents was brought to him.

Literally, it's countless, right?

Millions of dollars.

And as someone has figured this up in today's economy, 2 1/2 billion dollars.

So Jesus, in this story, he's suggesting an outrageous amount to make this point.

Verse 25, 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.

The servant fell on his knees before him.

Be patient with me, he begged, and I will pay back everything.

But the servant's master took pity on him, canceled the debt, and let him go.

What an amazing thing.

What grace, what generosity.

Verse 28, But when the servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants, remember this, who owed him a hundred denarii.

Okay, some of you have studied this before.

a denarius, a single unit, how much was that worth?

About one day's pay, right?

So you can figure out what that would be.

And so this amount was 100 days pay, a trifle amount versus the millions that this wicked servant owed his master.

And he grabbed him and he began to choke him.

Pay back what you owe me, he demanded.

Verse 29.

His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, be patient with me, and I will, pay you back.

But he refused.

Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt.

Just so you know, a Hebrew slave had to work for six years.

for restitution, for something he owed.

Verse 31, when the other servants saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed and went and told, and the verb therefore told means to describe in great detail, right, the whole story, their master everything that had happened.

Then the master called the servant in, you wicked servant.

I canceled 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?

Verse 34, In anger, his master turned him over to the jailers to be tortured until he should pay back all that he owed.

Well, this wicked servant could not possibly pay back all that he owed.

So there's a hint here of eternal punishment.

making the point that lack of forgiveness has consequences, and I would say has eternal consequences.

And then the final verse, verse 35, this is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart.

Now, some of you have heard this story throughout your lifetime.

Yeah, I get it.

I need to forgive.

But do you see what's at stake here?

Do you see the consequences?

And so I've just got a few points for you.

The first, and they're all obvious.

The first one is the sin forgiver, that's Jesus, takes forgiveness very seriously.

Or he wouldn't have told this parable, this story.

He takes it very seriously.

Verse 22, look at that.

You see, God's forgiveness is unending.

Now, depends on what translation you're reading, what interpretation.

In saying this, Jesus might have said 77 times.

He might have meant 70 times 70.

Scholars aren't exactly sure which interpretation, but whatever it is, it's a lot of times.

Right?

It's more than the three that the rabbis allowed.

And God expects the same for His followers.

In Matthew

chapter 6, Jesus said, if you forgive man, or men, when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.

But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

Wow, take that verse literally.

Anybody want to be forgiven?

I do.

Anybody want to be held not accountable and given grace?

And anybody want to hear the words, well done, good and faithful servant, not, you wicked servant.

I mean, there's some consequences here.

Jesus takes this very seriously.

Second quick point, you should take forgiveness very seriously, and so should I.

See, the unforgiving servant made a grave mistake.

Though he had been graciously, amazingly forgiven of a huge debt, he didn't pass that on to another human being.

Notice the consequences.

It was the wrath of the Master.

It is punishment.

The Master could not just overlook this because our heavenly Master is perfect.

And so, again, verse 35, this is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart.

Why?

Because only people who have been forgiven and who forgive others will enter heaven.

The need for forgiveness is an attribute of all of us because we all have a sin nature we're born with.

That's why continual forgiveness is needed and continual forgiveness must be granted.

That's the whole 70 times 7 or 70 times 70 thing.

I wonder if everyone here in this room has thrown yourself on the Master and His grace and forgiveness.

Because listen, I don't need eternal forgiveness of my sins for just one that I committed, or seven, or 70 times 7.

I sin every day of my life, maybe a sin of omission, something I failed to do, maybe sins of commission, thought, word, deed, action, attitude.

I'm A sinner.

Can you imagine if you just sin three times a day?

By the way, this is a great evangelism explosion illustration, right?

Imagine if you just committed 3 sins a day in thought, word, deed, something you didn't do.

You didn't love somebody the way God wanted you to, or you did thought, word, whatever.

Three sins A day.

You'd be almost a saint, wouldn't you?

Three sins a day times 365 days a year.

Thousands.

And then 10 years after that, 10,000.

Can you imagine standing before a judge committing 20,000 crimes?

What would he do?

He'd lock you up and throw away the key.

And yet we think it's not a big deal.

And that's the good news of the gospel, right?

That Steve Holdway can be forgiven of all his sins, past, present, and future, because of the blood of Jesus.

He did the work for me.

And my job is to, in gratitude and humility, receive that free gift by placing all my trust and hope in Jesus for forgiveness and for entrance into heaven.

And heaven's a place for perfect people.

Have you made that same commitment of your faith?

If not, today is the day of salvation.

Well, you might say, I just can't forgive this person.

Well, I hate to break it to you, but Jesus says you can't be forgiven then.

He who cannot forgive others breaks the bridge over which he himself must pass.

George Herbert wrote that.

So before we talk about forgiveness and what it is, let's talk about what forgiveness is not.

And this will be review for a lot of you.

I get it, but they're good reminders.

Forgiveness is not, first of all, forgetting.

How could you forget when somebody has offended you in a grievous way or they've hurt you or they've stolen from you?

You're not designed to forget that.

You can't forget.

Forgiveness is not forgetting.

In fact, to forgive, you must remember because you've got to keep on forgiving.

Forgiveness is not something you do once because those emotions will come up again.

When you see the person or hear about it, they'll come up again.

You've got to keep on forgiving.

So forgiveness is not forgetting.

Forgiveness is not feelings.

Who feels like forgiving?

It's an act of the will.

Forgiveness is not fellowship.

In other words, reconciliation with the offender.

It's being best friends.

Now, sometimes you need to keep boundaries, right, from certain people.

It's also not fooling yourself.

You know what I mean by that?

Denying that you're really hurt.

It's no big deal.

No, it was a huge deal.

So it's not fooling yourself.

It's not fairness.

If you're looking for fairness on planet earth, you're not going to get it.

Life is not fair.

And in God's economy and His providence, He's not going to make everything fair just because He loves you.

Was it fair that Jesus had to die for your sins and mine?

That's why I rest in vengeance is mine, declares the Lord.

I will repay.

So listen to this.

is really good.

Lewis Meads wrote this in the book, *The Art of Forgiveness*.

He said, let me make sure, let's make sure that we clear up a few misunderstandings about forgiveness.

Before we can build, we have to blast.

We have to blast away the erroneous thoughts on what forgiveness is not.

See, when you forgive a person, that doesn't mean that you are immediately healed.

When you forgive a person, this does not mean that you're going to be buddy-buddy.

When we forgive a person, this does not mean that we surrender the right to restitution or justice when appropriate or possible.

When we forgive a person, this does not mean that we trust them, yet trust has to be earned.

When we forgive a person, we're not avoiding pain, we are opening the door to healing.

When we forgive, we take the journey at the pace we're able to handle.

The deeper the hurt, the longer the journey.

So those are some things that forgiveness is not...

What is biblical forgiveness, though?

Let's just look at this.

Well, number one, and simply might not like this, is just obeying.

True confessions.

I don't like to obey all the time, do you?

There's some hard things in this book.

I'm called to deny myself, take up my cross, and follow Jesus every single day.

I don't always want to do that, do you?

I don't want to obey everything in there.

Same with forgiveness.

Forgiveness is an act of obedience.

We read the scriptures, did we not?

Jesus commands, Jesus demands that you forgive.

So it's obeying.

It's also remembering.

that Christ died to forgive you.

can extend a lot more grace to people who really bug you.

Anybody bug you?

People that offend you.

People who sin against you when you realize, oh yeah, I've greatly sinned against my Savior who did this for me, and He has forgiven me and accepts me.

So it's remembering.

It's also releasing.

It's releasing your resentment

toward the offender and your rights to get even, and even releasing your right to hear the words, I'm sorry.

Wouldn't life be great if anyone that ever offended you came and apologized?

Can I break it to you, church?

That ain't going to happen.

I don't care what you've walked through in life, you're not going to get an apology for everything that offended you.

On our cruise last week, we went with some good friends, my sister and brother-in-law, and some good friends.

And I remember at the table, Dave mentioned this, that he had decided, he said this, I've decided in my life that I'm just not going to be offended anymore.

I'm not going to take up an offense anymore.

It's an act of the will.

It's realizing you're going to be offended all the time.

Have we offended you yet today at church?

Let me just ask.

Oh, I didn't like that song, right?

Am I offending you now in the sermon?

I don't...

He should be wearing a suit and tie, right?

How else can we, oh, it's too warm in here.

It's too cold in here, right?

Have we offended you?

Something's going to offend you.

And you can either hold on to that offense or you can decide, you know what?

Love, agape love, 1 Corinthians 13, doesn't take offense.

And so forgiveness is obeying.

It's remembering.

It's releasing.

I love this.

Stormier Martian says this.

Forgiveness doesn't make the other person right.

It just makes you free.

I would choose freedom.

Again, another quote.

True forgivers do not pretend they don't suffer.

They do not pretend the wrong does not matter much.

But the first stage of forgiveness is just release.

And you will know that forgiveness has begun when you recall those who hurt you, and you can actually, after time, wish them well.

Wish them the best.

I remember doing counseling as a pastor, and it would be a breakthrough when an ex would actually tell me, you know what?

I even pray for my ex-husband.

I pray for my ex-wife.

That's when you know healing is taking part.

But it's important not just for those who go through the pain and tragedy of divorce, but married couples.

A survey was...

made of 200 married adults in regards to forgiveness.

Okay, you married couples, listen up.

The researchers were wondering how one's ability to forgive would affect marital satisfaction and the length of marriage.

And they found a huge correlation between marriage satisfaction and forgiveness.

In fact, it appears that as much as one-third of marital satisfaction is not based on looks or how romantic your spouse is or all of that.

It's based on the ability to forgive and to ask forgiveness.

One-third of marriage satisfaction.

As forgiveness ability went up with these couples, individuals reported fewer symptoms of depression, anxiety, and fatigue because they had learned how to forgive.

So what is forgiveness?

It's obeying, it's remembering that Christ forgave you.

It's releasing the person to God.

It's also finally deciding.

deciding, okay, God has given me a pretty good example, a model of what forgiveness is by sending His Son.

So I'm going to decide to be like God.

Anybody remember who Clara Barton was?

She founded what?

The American Red Cross.

Have you ever heard this story about her?

She was reminded one day of some vicious thing that somebody did to her.
years before.

It was something bad.

And she acted, though, like she had never heard of the incident.

And one of her friends asked her one time, Don't you remember it?

You know what her reply was?

No.

I distinctly remember forgetting it.

You can never forget things that happened to you, but you can keep on remembering to forgive and forget.

So what is the application today?

There's application for all of this, right?

Number one, who is it that you just cannot forgive?

Family member, friend, co-worker, boss, pastor, church member?

I mean, who is it?

And what does that say about your obedience level or Christ-likeness?

Second application, do you recognize that bitterness

is a cancer.

I mean, it's a cancer that makes us sick spiritually, emotionally, and psychologists, psychiatrists, doctors will tell us, physically sick.

Third, understanding that forgiveness is not the same as feeling good about someone, trusting

them, liking them, reconciling if they are unrepentant or unwilling,

or making them a part of your life even?

Why does it make sense to carry the weight of unforgiveness?

In the final analysis, forgiveness is an act of faith.

In forgiving someone, really, I am trusting that God is better, much better at justice than I am

And by forgiving, I release my right to get back, to get even.

I'm going to leave that up to God.

I'm going to leave all the issues of fairness, let God work those out, not me.

And I'm going to leave in God's hands the scales that have to balance justice and mercy.

I'm going to leave in God's omnipresent nature,

He's present everywhere.

He's all-powerful.

I'm going to leave it to his omniscient nature that he knows everything, that he knows the background of that person who hurt me.

He knows their story, where they've walked, the things, the bad things that have happened to them.

He knows the whole story, what happened to them when they were a little child, a three-year-old, a seven-year-old, a 13-year-old, a 20-year-old.

He knows all of that better than I can ever know.

He's all-knowing.

I'm going to leave it up to a God who understands why things happen and why people act out the way they do.

I think I'm going to leave it up to God.

You see, if a sinless Savior can find it in His heart to forgive sinners, how it must grieve Jesus when sinners refuse to forgive fellow sinners.

What if, though, a person refuses to apologize or repent?

Let's go back to scripture, Luke 17, 3-4.

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 a day and turns to you seven times, saying, I repent, you must forgive him.

See, there is a condition for full restitution and restoration, yes?

There's an if clause in here.

If he repents.

There's a condition for fellowship and full restoration of the relationship.

But you can't control that.

You can't make that happen.

And a lot of times that's not going to happen.

Some glorious times it does.

And what a beautiful thing that is to pray for and work for, but it's not always going to happen.

See,

You might not have a relationship with someone that you forgive, but you can release them to God.

You can grant forgiveness.

Colossians 3, 13, bear, listen to this, bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another.

Forgive as the Lord forgave you.

I read the story one time of an NFL lineman and he

During his career, he was huge, as all those offensive linemen are, right?

But after his pro career, he decided to lose weight.

He lost 130 pounds.

And one day he was at the gym with a friend, and he's walking on the treadmill.

You know what the friend did?

He went and he got 130 pounds of plates, right?

So 45.

45, that's 90.

Got some others, made it 130 pounds.

And he went and gave it to this guy and he's working on a treadmill.

And he dumps these plates, these weights on this former NFL lineman.

And he was struggling to keep up with the treadmill, right?

And he said, my friend, that's how much weight you lost.

And that's what it was doing to your knees, right?

And your hips and your joints, carrying all that.

And I say that to say this, some of you are carrying some stuff you should not carry.

I'm not talking about you losing weight.

I'm talking about you losing the weight of bitterness or resentment or jealousy.

losing that weight of that fire that's still smoldering in your soul down deep, and you can push it off.

You don't even think about it most days, but sometimes it comes up and it's a reminder you've never dealt with it.

Ephesians 4 says that we actually give the devil a foothold by not forgiving.

C.S.

Lewis says, to be a Christian means to forgive the inexcusable

because God has forgiven the inexcusable in you.

I guess what I'm saying is John 8.36, if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.

See, there's help with anger.

There's help with resentment, with bitterness.

There's help with unforgiveness.

Let me share one more story with you.

And it's actually from Iran, right?

Lot's going on there today, and I hope you're praying for the Middle East.

Hey, don't forget to pray for this situation between Russia and Ukraine.

And I know this has been going on for years now.

Don't forget to pray.

Don't forget to pray for Israel.

Don't forget to pray that God and His sovereignty will overrule the rulers.

Right?

Her son's killer stood on the chair on the gallows.

I've got it.

This is the actual photo.

His hands shackled, the noose around his neck, hundreds crowded around the jailhouse, and this is in northern Iran.

And they gathered to see if the mother, Samara, would exercise her right to kick the chair out from under him to let him hang.

He's standing on a chair.

And this is all reported and photographed by the Associated Press.

Her only thought had been his execution since her 17-year-old son was killed seven years ago in a street brawl when the assailant's knife sliced through his neck.

She writes, as a mom, my world collapsed that day that I heard about my son's death.

If I pardoned this man and saved him from death, how would I be able to live anymore?

The thought of him going free just ate her up.

I told my husband, if he were spared death, I would die.

So families of murder victims in Iran and some other Muslim countries are often faced and given the final word of whether the person should be imprisoned or killed.

It's an eye for an eye type of thing.

Well, the young man, as the noose went around his neck, cried out, forgive me.

She moved in close, face to face with him, and said, did you have mercy on us?

Did you show mercy to my son?

You've taken happiness away from us.

Why should I have mercy toward you?

She stared at him angrily.

She slapped him across his face.

And then she and her husband did the unthinkable.

They reached up and loosened the noose around his neck.

And with that...

move, he no longer had to face the death penalty.

The crowd gasped.

Some cheered, some applauded.

Others were just shocked.

The young man's sentence was changed to 12 years in prison, half of which he had already served.

But the mom says this, I feel that

When I did this, all the blood that had accumulated in my heart over the years suddenly burst and just poured out.

All at once I became peaceful.

I do not think about revenge anymore.

Now, if this Muslim mom who doesn't have the Holy Spirit of Jesus living inside her could do something like that, how much more the followers of Christ.

would listen to Him and obey Him when He says, you want to be forgiven, then you must forgive.

And so this morning, I don't know what's going on in your life, but I do know that this is a huge, huge common thing for so many people, so many born-again believers, let alone non-believers.

And so this morning, I just want to give you some help.

two ways.

One, when we leave here and go out for the fellowship slash members business meeting, I have half-page sheets with what forgiveness is and what it's not.

And take one if you want it.

They're on both tables out there.

And it's by a book by June Hunt, a great little book.

And you can Google that or find it on Amazon or whatever.

That's thing one.

But thing two, I want to lead you

in a prayer to forgive your offender.

And I'm just going to read this, and I would ask you to pray along with me just silently from your heart.

If there is something, someone, maybe it's yourself you need to forgive.

You're beating yourself up.

You've done it for a year, 10 years, 30 years.

You can't forgive yourself for something you said or did, some crazy thing you acted out.

Think of yourself here.

Some of you might be angry with God because you don't understand why He allowed something that He allowed.

Maybe it's toward Him.