



Message Transcript

The Hallmark of Christianity

Jeff Schwarzentraub

Pastor Jeff:

Our father in heaven, we give you all the glory, honor and praise for who you are. And Lord, we are so thrilled to gather in your presence to hear your word proclaimed. Because Lord, we as a people believe that every time your word is faithfully and accurately proclaimed that you are speaking. So our prayer this morning is speak Lord, for we are ready to hear you. And so now for all those who have gathered who desire to hear the Lord Jesus Christ speak directly to you, who will believe what he tells you and who will by faith put into practice what he shows you, will you agree with me very loudly this morning by saying the word Amen. Amen. The death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ are central to everything that we as believers believe. During Easter week, we spend specific time being intentional about focusing on what happened during the passion week and what happened on Good Friday and what happened on Sunday morning when Jesus rose from the dead.

But the reality is, as believers in Christ, that's central to what we believe every single day, every single hour, every single minute that the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ is the greatest news. That's what will take us into all eternity. And on this Palm Sunday, what we remember is, is that was the day of what we call Jesus's triumphal entry. When Jesus Christ fulfilled prophecy by coming into Jerusalem on the back of a colt and he fulfilled the prophecy of Zechariah 9:9, and he rode in and as he was riding in, you remember what the people were screaming, "Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord." Children were giving him praise. The religious leaders didn't know what to do. The religious leaders were telling

everybody, "Just be quiet. Tell them to stop. Do you realize they're worshipping you?"

And Jesus said, "Even if they are quiet, the rocks will cry out, blessed be the king." And Jesus Christ came in knowing he was fully God. And yet these very people that with their lips were offering and praise within one week would be using those same lips to say, "We have no king but Caesar. Crucify him, Crucify him." Just to get excited, just to get emotional, just to give lip service to the king is not nearly enough that when Jesus Christ came in, one of the first things he did during Passion Week was he cleared the temple. He did it at the beginning of his ministry. He did it right when he came in here at the end of his ministry during the last week of his life. And he did that because the people there were extorting people. They had turned what was to be called his father's house, which say it with me, his house was to be a house of prayer and he turned it into a den of robbers. He turned it into a den of thieves.

It became a marketplace for individuals rather than a place for people to seek his father. And he was so upset. He was Overturning the money changers and overturning tables and grabbing a quart of three whips and driving people out of there. But as further revelation goes, we realize that during that week, if we could sum up everything that took place, it culminates with the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. And that through Christ dying on the cross and shedding his blood and being laid in a grave and through his power of being resurrected, that we can experience life in his name. That all the forgiveness for all of our sins is extended through the person of Jesus Christ.

Forgiveness is the hallmark of Christianity, it's what we want to experience from Christ. Because if we're dead in our transgressions and sin and if the wrath of God is on us, the only hope for that is found in Jesus Christ. For the revelation of the New Testament tells us that, the temple is no longer in the temple, but we are his temple. And that what God's desire to do is to cleanse us, to clean us out, to help us understand fully what Jesus Christ came for. And while all of us as believers in Christ would clamor for his forgiveness, would thank God for his forgiveness, sometimes we don't understand the fullness of what his forgiveness is all about. And today I want to do a special message on this Palm Sunday. So as we get ready to ready our hearts for this week with Good Friday, with Easter, with praying for God to do his work, that we truly understand the forgiveness of Christ and what that means for our lives.

So I wanted to take you to a familiar story found in Matthew chapter 18. Matthew chapter 18, starting in verse 21. Now, this was before the triumphal entry. This is before Jesus went into Jerusalem. When the disciples are learning that he's going to lay down his life and they're trying to figure out, well, who's the greatest in the kingdom? Can I be one of the greatest? And Jesus was telling him about stumbling blocks of sin and how not to cause children to sin. He was talking about prayer and having a disciplined life. And Peter comes to Jesus and I don't know that he fully understood the significance of what he was asking Jesus until after Jesus Christ had rose from the dead and he had experienced forgiveness of Christ in a whole new way. But Peter comes to Jesus and ask two questions, and Jesus answers his questions with a parable.

I'd like to read it to you. And then we're going to talk about five truths about forgiveness this morning. Matthew chapter 18, verse 21, it says, "Then Peter came and said to him, 'Lord, how often shall my brother's sins against me be forgiven? Up to seven times?' Jesus said to him, 'I do not say up to seven times, but up to 70 times seven. For this reason, the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. When he had begun to settle them, one who owed him 10,000 talents was brought to him. But since he did not have the means to repay, his Lord commanded him to be sold along with his wife and children and all that he had and repayment to be made. So the slave fell to the ground and prostrated himself before him saying, 'have patience with me and I will repay you everything.'

And the Lord of that slave felt compassion and released him and forgave him the debt. But that slave went out and found one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii, and he seized him and began to choke him saying, 'Pay back what you owe me.' So his fellow slave fell to the ground and began to plead with him saying, 'Have patience with me and I'll repay you.' But he was unwilling and went and threw them in prison until he should pay back what he was owed.

So when his fellow slave saw what had happened, they were deeply grieved and came and reported to their Lord all that had happened. Then summoning him, his Lord said to him, 'You wicked slave. I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave in the same way I had mercy on you?' And his Lord moved with anger, handed him over to the torturers until he should repay all that was owed him. My heavenly Father will also do the same to

you if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart."

And here in that parable, we really learned five truths about the forgiveness of God and how God expects forgiveness to be done. And I'll tell you this, forgiveness is the hallmark of Christianity. And we know this because some of Jesus's last words on the cross were what? "Father forgive them for they do not know what they're doing." Forgiveness is the reason that we are Christians. It's the mercy of God through the forgiveness of his son that allows us to know who Christ is. And here's five truths about forgiveness, because if you've been forgiven, you'll want to know that all these truths are applicable to you and need to be extended as well. So notice this first one. Peter comes and asked Jesus two different questions.

He came and said to him, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him?" In other words, "If my brother continues to sin against me, where's the limit of my forgiveness?" He says, "Up to seven times." He's asking this question because he wants to know the limit of his forgiveness. When is the sin too great? When is the sin too often? When is the sin too frequent so that I can say, "Okay, I'm done." He's asking the question because... He's asking the question that many of us ask. Let me just ask this question. Anybody in here, just by show of hands, anybody here been hurt or wronged by someone in your life? Okay, just show of hands, okay. If you're participating, you're raising your hands. All of us have. And so he's asking the question, how do I stay in good relationship with you? But what's the limit to that? Is it up to seven times?

Now Peter says seven maybe for a couple of reasons. Number one, seven's the number of completion or perfection. "So I'll do it perfectly, I'll do it up to seven times." Maybe it was because there were seven days in a week and I'll do it every single day for a week. Maybe it was because the Pharisees of the day said, you should forgive someone up to three times and Peter's like, "I'll go over double what they're doing. I'll go over double what the most religious people are doing." But here's the first truth about forgiveness that you need to understand. Forgiveness is limitless. Forgiveness is limitless. Notice Jesus's answer. Jesus said to him, "I do not say up to seven times, but up to 70 times seven." Now, I do not believe Jesus was asking Peter to do a math problem and say, "Peter, it's not seven, it's 490 times. But then the 491st time cut them off."

I don't believe that's the intention because if we understand forgiveness, we understand that when we forgive, we're choosing never to bring it up again. So if you've forgiven somebody, you don't have a track record of that. God says in Jeremiah 31, "He chooses to remember our sins no more." Now we know God doesn't forget because God's omniscient, he knows all things, but he chooses not to bring it up. So when you forgive somebody, if you truly forgive them, it's not that you're saying, "I forgive you, but I'm holding onto this one in my back pocket in case you screw up again." It's, "I'm forgiving you and we're done bringing it up." When God forgives us, he takes our sin as far as the east is from the west, he drops it into the deepest sea. He doesn't bring it up anymore. And so, he was telling Peter this, "Not just seven times." He was saying, "There's no limit to the amount of times that you forgive."

There's no limit to the type of sin, someone were to forgive you. And there's no limit to the kind of person that sinned against you, even if it's the same person with the same sin over and over again. When you forgive them and they sin against you again, guess what? It's an opportunity for you to be lavish with your forgiveness. That's what it means. And we don't like that teaching. We like the limitless grace of our Father through his son Jesus Christ when it comes to forgiving our sins. We like knowing that no matter how we've sinned and no matter how grievous or how many times we've sinned the same sin over, we can come to Christ and be fully cleansed from all of our unrighteousness. We love that don't we? Don't we love knowing that there's no sin, that's too great. There's no sin. That's too frequent.

There's no sin. That's too grievous where God would say, "I can't get you that one. I've forgiven too much." No, he is lavish and we love that. Here's what we don't like, that He expects us to be the same way in our forgiveness towards one another. See, sometimes we ask the wrong question. We're asking what the limit is to, "Okay, where can I draw the line here?" Here's a better question to ask. When do you want Jesus Christ to stop forgiving you? See, that's the question. If your answer is never, which it should be, then that's his answer for you when it comes to forgiving other people. And it needs to be limitless because you're going to have opportunities all the time. I promise you. I mean some of you're going to have opportunities today to put this into practice. Some of you're going to have opportunities this week if you're looking for opportunities, you're like, "Lord, I would love to have the opportunity to forgive somebody that wrongs me. Please give me the chance," you'll get it. Promise you.

Because forgiveness means it's not mitigating what was wrong. It's not excusing what was wrong. It's admitting that, "What you did was wrong and it was painful and it was hurtful and it was wounding and it was significant and I don't like it, but I must forgive you." Why? Because as I've said from this pulpit, I'll share it a couple of different ways. Holding on to unforgiveness is like drinking poison and hoping the other person dies.

Forgiveness is release, it's letting go. If you have unforgiveness in your heart, you're actually tied to that person. You can't continue to mature in Christ if you have unforgiveness in your heart, it's an impossibility. I mean, even when you pray the Lord's prayer, do you know what you're praying? "Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us." Here's what I'm praying, "Lord, I want you to forgive me in the same way you watch me forgive other people. That's what I'm asking for." Because as a believer, let me tell you something, unforgiveness is not an option. You cannot be born again and have unforgiveness fester in your heart. It's an impossibility. You can't call yourself a believer when you believe that the only reason you're a believer is because Jesus Christ's mercy and grace to you was limitless and then withhold forgiveness from somebody else.

That's an impossibility. It's incongruent. And if you say, "Well, I can." Then you need to check your heart to see if you're really born again. Because people who are really born again, they may get to a place where there's some bitterness and there's some hurt and there's frustration. And I don't know if I feel like it or what. But I must, I have to because I know I'm going to stand before the Lord Jesus Christ in all of his

glory, who is willing to forgive all my sins, and I don't want to stand there holding onto one little iota of unforgiveness from another human being. It's limitless. It's limitless. It's as quiet in here as it was in the first service. Did you know that? Because we're talking about releasing that which has hurt us. And we like to hold onto it. It reminds me of tug of war. Have you ever seen people doing tug of war? I got to see it this week. I was in a beach in The Bahamas, they were doing tug of war. I was just watching. But it's amazing how people compete for things that mean nothing.

And when they're competing for nothing, nobody's going to win a trophy, nobody's going to do anything, they're competing. But what's beautiful to see is when somebody realizes this doesn't mean anything and I don't need to hurt my hands and I don't need to keep tugging on this, I don't need to keep doing this. And they huddle up and they decide, you know what? On the count of three, let's just let go. And they get down and they're doing all their thing and they count down 3, 2, 1, and the team that goes like this, "Let's go of the rope." And you can see the faces of the other team like going back, this team's declared the winner, but they don't feel like they won. This team is the loser, but they're free and they're enjoying things. That's what forgiveness looks like. When you put somebody back into the hands of God, you are no longer tethered or tied to them and you can be free to continue to grow in Christ. Amen. It's limitless.

When people hurt you, it's an opportunity to forgive. When people wound you, it's an opportunity to forgive. You say you want to be like Jesus. One of the ways to grow

spiritually mature is to forgive others, but they don't deserve it. That's why you forgive them. Nobody deserves it. You didn't deserve to be forgiven. It wasn't that Jesus came to the earth and said, "I'm looking for those who deserve forgiveness." He came in spite of us. He laid down his life in spite of us. He died even if we were never going to respond to him in faith. He died anyway to extend full forgiveness so that if you would repent and come, he would never turn you away.

And in the same way, Jesus says, "Hey Peter, let your forgiveness be limitless, Peter, because my forgiveness to you is limitless and you're going to learn in about a week just how limitless my forgiveness is. When you deny me three times when I need you the most, I'm going to restore you. I'm going to show you what forgiveness looks like. And once I do, I want you to extend that forgiveness to others."

He who has been forgiven much loves much. Amen. Forgiveness is limitless. Number two, forgiveness is costly. It's costly. Notice what the parable goes on to say, as Jesus starts telling them, he goes, "I say to you up to seven times." He said, "For this reason, the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with the slaves. When he had begun to settle them, one who owed him 10,000 talents was brought to him." Now 10,000 talents, we don't know exactly how much a talent would be worth in our economy today, but a talent itself was a large amount of money.

10,000 talents, what the Bible's trying to exclaim is, this is an insurmountable debt. This is probably the equivalent of billions of dollars this slave owes his master. Whatever he owes him, he doesn't have, and if you don't have it, you can't pay it. So

he's brought to him. But since he did not have the means to repay, his Lord commanded him to be sold along with his wife and children and all that he had and repayment to be made. "You can't pay me? You're being sold, your wife's being sold, your kids are being sold. Everything you own is being sold and you're going to work for the rest of your life until you pay me. And by the way, you'll never be able to pay me." So the slave fell to the ground and prostrated himself before him saying, "Have patience with me and I will repay you everything."

Can he repay him everything? He's never going to repay them in 50 lifetimes. He doesn't have a chance of repaying them. But he's begging him. He's like, "Please, please, please don't sell me and my wife and my kids. Don't take all my possessions. I promise I'll pay you back." That's what he's saying. So what does this kind Lord do? "And the Lord of that slave felt compassion." That means he was moved. That means he felt pity for him. That means he saw that he could make a difference in what he do. "He released him." There's that word released. "And forgave him the debt. All right, it's over. You're free. You don't owe me anything." Now, how would you feel if you were released of an insurmountable debt? I mean, you can't pay it. And now all of a sudden it's like you go from being sold to, "Don't worry about it. We're good."

Now, this is costly because what does it do? It costs the Lord everything. It costs the Lord what he was owed. Forgiveness always costs somebody something. That's why when people say, "Well, God is just a God of love, that's why I'm going to heaven." No, no, no, no, no. That's not why anybody goes to heaven. Forgiveness is costly. It costs Jesus Christ, his very life on a cross. God the Father poured out wrath

upon the son. That's what happened. It cost Jesus Christ his life. Nobody gets into heaven without the costly payment of salvation. That's why there is no other name given under heaven by which men must be saved. That's why Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth and the life, and no one comes to the Father except through me." It's only through the payment of Jesus Christ's sacrifice that anybody can be saved.

He's the only way. He's the only way. And it costs him his life. Well, it's going to cost me if I forgive somebody. Of course it does. It's going to cost you time, it's going to cost you money, it's going to cost you energy, it's going to cost you emotion. It's going to cost you whatever it costs, but it's worth it so that you're not tethered to them anymore. Forgiveness is always costly. That's why it's so hard to exercise and so difficult to do. That's why our flesh is like, "I'm not forgiving them. They don't deserve it." Nobody deserves it. You don't deserve it. Forgiveness is, "I'm forgiving you in spite of the fact that you don't deserve it because I want to be free." And how many people are there that want to receive the grace of God and then not extend it because it's too costly?

It always costs the person who is giving it. It's limitless, it's costly. Number three is this, this hallmark of Christianity. This forgiveness is also to be transferable. Transferable. Now, you would think that this slave, after he was forgiven, that much debt would feel like, "Oh my goodness, I am so free. Now I can extend it to others," but that's not how he acts, knows verse 28. "But that slave went out and found one of his fellow slaves who owed him 100 denarii. A denarii was a day's wage, he owed him

about three months salary. So he goes out and finds this guy, and you would think from reading in the text that he would find this guy and be like, "I got to tell you something. I just got the most insurmountable debt relieved. You don't owe me anything either. Because I want to tell you how good my Lord is to do it to me, so I'm going to do the same thing to you because it felt so good to me. I want you to experience the grace that I experienced."

You would think that's what he was going to say. But that's not what he says. He goes out and he finds this guy that owed him 100 denarii, basically three months of wages and what does he do? And he seized him and began to choke him. He's getting physically violent with him saying, "Pay back what you owe me." Are you kidding me right now? This guy was just forgiven an insurmountable debt. This guy has a debt that he could probably pay back, and instead of just saying, "Don't worry about it, don't worry about it, I forgive it, I release you." He goes back, seizes him, grabs him, physically chokes him, starts yelling at him saying, "Pay me back." Now, notice how this guy responds.

So the slave verse 29. "So his fellow slave fell to the ground and began to plead with him saying, 'have patience with me and I'll repay you.'" Have you heard those words before? He quotes the exact thing that, that slave, a slave quoted to his Lord, have patience with me and I'll pay you back. This guy could have actually paid him back. He could have actually done it. He could have worked it off. This guy, even if he would've wanted to get the money back, said, "Okay, I'll be patient with you. Let's make a deal over the next year, you pay me off just a little bit every single month. Let's

get this thing taken care of." But no, no, no, no, no. That's not what he does. This guy pleads for mercy in the same way the first slave had pleaded for mercy.

But here's what happens. Verse 30, "But he was unwilling and went and threw them in prison until he should pay back what was owed." He said, "I've been forgiven everything, but listen, you're going to be in prison until you give me mine." It's as if he doesn't even realize what's taken place. See, forgiveness is to be transferable. When God offers us forgiveness and when we receive the forgiveness of God, God forgives us, not just so that we'll go to heaven. God forgives us so that we can be conduits of his mercy and grace to all the people that wrong us. So that when people wrong us and when people, "Don't deserve to be forgiven," they see men and women, boys and girls that would say, "Because Christ has forgiven me so much, I forgive you, I release you from this." It's quiet. I'm telling you was this quiet first service too.

Because we love the limitless, costly grace of the Lord Jesus Christ that was completely transferred to us. But we don't want to transfer it to anybody else. We want it to stop with us. We want to know what the limits are. And you should have known better. You should have done better. And that's why there's so many Christians in our world today that claim the name of Jesus that still live in such bondage because they haven't learned to extend the forgiveness of God to somebody that wronged them. Amen. Who is it in your life?

If you can't think of anybody, that's okay. But if you're a born again believer, and there is somebody, I guarantee the Holy Spirit's been telling you about that person, you see their mind, you see their face, you see their heart, you see them all over and

there's a thing inside your flesh is like, oh no, not them. And Jesus is like, "Oh yeah, of course to them." It needs to be paid forward. And here's the beauty of this teaching. Especially for those of you who are like, "I want to get back to Nehemiah four, that was way better."

You're going to have opportunities this very week to put this very thing into practice. If you're married, you'll have a chance today. If you have parents, you will likely have a chance today. If you have children, you will likely have a chance today. If you work in a work environment, you will have a chance tomorrow. If you go to school, you will have a chance tomorrow. And here's what I would tell you. Young people listen to me. Because there are people my age and older that would tell you, "Yeah, you know what? My teacher back when I was in eighth grade did that, that, that, that, that. My coach when I was in high school did that, that, that, that, that. My mom was blah, blah, blah. My dad was." All those things may be true, but you are the one who's dying. You are the one that needs to be set free. Forgiveness is not for them, forgiveness is for you.

It's growing in what Christ wants you to grow in. And when you begin to learn that, you don't need to stay tethered to that, it frees you. One of the great reformers, Lewis B. Smedes said this, "Forgiveness is to set a prisoner free and to find the prisoner was you." That's what forgiveness is. I mean, when you forgive people, you're actually being released. I told you the story when I played football at the University of Illinois in college, I really felt like I got dealt a bad hand my last year. I felt like I was

put down and should have been the starter and all those different things. And I was angry for a long period of time. And I remember I was at a Promise Keepers with my college coach some months later after the season was over. And I was still harboring bitterness. By the way, can I just tell you if you're here today and say, "I don't think I have any unforgiveness." If you have hurt, resentment, bitterness, anger, it's all unforgiveness, that's all it's.

And I was at this conference Promise Keepers and it was in Indianapolis and we were second row from the top behind the speaker. And the speaker was teaching on forgiveness. And here's what he said. He goes, I want you to turn to the person next to you and tell them who you have unforgiveness in your heart towards. And college football coach turned to me and he said, "Jeff, do you have unforgiveness towards anybody?" And I boldly said, "I don't know. I can't think of anybody right now." And I remember I drove home from that conference and my heart was just raising. I'm mad, I'm still frustrated, I'm angry. I was done wrong, all that stuff. And God just put on my heart, you need to forgive him. And I remember taking a two-hour drive from where I lived at the time back down to his office within a month, and I drove in.

I said, "Hey, I just need to talk to you for about five minutes. You know I was really upset with the way you handled things and I've been harboring all this angst towards you. I was wrong. And I'm just asking, would you forgive me for doing that? You're the coach. You had the right to do whatever you wanted." And I'll tell you, when I walked out of that office, I was a different person. I was a different person. Friends, you need to realize God gives you the opportunities he gives you for you to grow

spiritually. Some of you have been praying, "I just want to grow spiritually." And then God gives you somebody in your life that hurts you. You're like, "That's not what I prayed for." That's exactly what you prayed for. All right?

I mean, think about this, in marriage husbands love your wife as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her. It's not just talking about he was willing to die for the church, which he did. But what did Jesus do for the church? The church that yelled crucifying, the church that bad-mouthed him. The church that was rude to him. The church said over and over rebelled. The church said, never did what he asked. The church said, what do you do? He continues to forgive. So in a marriage, what do you have a chance to do as a husband?

Forgive your wife all the time. Because I find, when a lot of people want to go to counseling, and I know this was true of Kim and I early on when we wanted to go to counseling. We didn't want to go to counseling for people to speak into our own lives. I wanted to get a listening ear for what people needed to fix in my wife. And she wanted a listening ear for what people needed to fix in me. And that's why we went to counseling. But do you realize if you understand forgiveness, it means even if your spouse sins the same way over and over again and doesn't even see it and doesn't even understand it, guess what you get to do? Hey, I just forgive him. It's as if I'm not holding it against you. And I'm just going to trust that the Lord will build that.

And it really doesn't matter because I'm just thrilled the Lord's going to use this in my life to grow me. And I'm not going to be tethered to that stuff, because I want to be free in Christ to just forgive you, ongoing. You get two married couples, that two

married couple. Two people in a marriage. You get a married couple that practice ongoing forgiveness, there's healing there, there's freedom there. And by the way, can we just talk about love for a second while we're on the topic? Love is not an emotion. It's a decision. If you get married for emotion, you're going to be disappointed in about a week. Love is a choice to love somebody, even when and in spite of what they do. That's what love is. That's how Jesus loves us, amen. So when we're talking about transferrable love, we're talking about, okay, because of what Christ has done to me, this is what I'm giving to you.

And it does not mean that I have to go to them. I felt prompted to go talk to my coach, because he knew I was mad at him and we had had a relationship. We'd talked about it, but it doesn't mean that every time you forgive somebody, you need to go dump on them. I wasn't going to dump on him. I was going to tell them I was wrong. Because sometimes people are like, I heard this message, "Pastor Jeff, I'm coming to you. I've hated you for about five years, but I love you now. I'm really sorry." That doesn't help the person. Don't go dump on, just forgive them. Go before the Lord and say, "Lord, I turn them over to you and I'm not going to hold onto him anymore. They're in your hands." And if the Lord would prompt you to go, you're only going to say why you were wrong, not what they did. Does that make sense? So this is not dumping on other people day. This is going before the Lord and getting your heart right before Jesus day, amen.

And it needs to be transferrable. If you truly love God, that's how it's going to go.

It also needs to be this. Number four, not only limitless, costly and transferrable, it needs to be undeniable. It needs to be undeniable. If you sit there and say, "Well, I think I've forgiven him, I don't know if I have," then you haven't. Forgiveness is undeniable. It's obvious, it's irrefutable, it's conclusive, it's unmistakable. It's verifiable. When you forgive someone you know, forgave them and notice what happens. So people are watching this. Do you know people watch how you live? You say you believe in the forgiveness of Jesus Christ. They're watching to see if you extend it. They're watching to see if you extend it. So notice this in verse 31. So when his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were deeply grieved. It means they were saddened.

Like we saw this guy get forgiven everything and we watched the way he berated our friend, they were grieved and they came and reported it to their Lord all that had happened. Notice this unforgiveness is recorded. I'm going to take it to my grave. You do not want to take it to your grave because the first person you're going to see is the Lord Jesus Christ in all of his glory, who is willing to forgive everything. And you don't want to be holding on to any unforgiveness when you meet him, I promise you. I love you enough as your pastor to say, just let it go now. I won't even sing the frozen song. Just let it go, okay? All right.

So they reported all that happened. "Then summoning him." So now he's going to go get that first slave that he had let go. "Summoning him, his Lord said to him, you wicked slave. I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. You pleaded, I forgave you. Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave in the same way

I had mercy on you? Did you not see what I did for you? Did you not see what? How come you can't extend what I did to you?" And oh, by the way, your cosmic debt is far greater than any single human being has ever wounded you.

"Should you not also have mercy on your fellow slave in the same way I had mercy on you and his Lord moved with anger." It's not always angry, "Handed him over to the torturers until he should repay all that was owed him." Remember this slave, put his friend in prison until he could repay everything. Well, there's an out to that because that friend could repay. Can this guy repay? This guy couldn't repay in an eternity. Unforgiveness is where people go to live in hell. Unforgiveness is for those that can't forgive. Only Christians have the ability to forgive truly from the heart. Only Christians can do that. If you die with a bunch of unforgiveness. "I hate them, I can't stand, they wounded me." You don't want to die that way, then you don't understand what Jesus has done for you. He's forgiven everything in your life.

So there's no human being and there's no sin that's happened against you that's too great that you can't forgive. So can we just talk about some of these things? I'm going to go from preaching to meddling here. I hope you're okay with that. Church hurt. What's church hurt? If you have church hurt, it means you presently have unforgiveness towards a person that was in a church that you were in that you need to forgive right now. That's all it means. Were you truly hurt by a person in church? I was. Guys, I've been in the church my whole life. I've pastored this church for 13 and a half years. If I wanted to keep records or keep a suitcase full of "IOUs," I would have them. I don't have any. There's nobody that's hurt me, I can't forgive. When people hurt you as a

Christian, guess what you get to do?

You get to forgive them, release them to the Lord and then you pray blessing over their life until you're not bothered when you hear their name or see them. That's what it means. So that you don't have anybody in your life that you're, I got to angst towards. I don't want to see them. You don't have that privilege. Forgive them. Just forgive them. That's what Christ did. Just forgive them. I've had hard things happen in my life. I was a youth pastor in a church one time where we had a thriving student ministry, about 300 kids and a 500 member church. And we had 40 adults working with us and doing all this. And when I went and moved on, I'd raised up two different guys. One to take middle school, wanted to take high school and everybody was willing to continue doing the work.

But when I left, the senior pastor that was there didn't like the way that I was doing things. And so he came in and decided I'll just hire my own guy and I don't care what you guys do. And about 30 of the volunteers quit. And when they did, then he started blaming me and saying, "Well that's just because you guys were for Jeff and weren't for Jesus," and all this kind of nonsense. They didn't give me my last paycheck. They hired a guy, turned out to be homosexual who had an encounter with one of the high school boys and ended up in prison. I was mad. I was really mad and I was angry and I was all the, but I didn't realize what was going on is God was giving me an opportunity to forgive. And I had to sit down with a couple of people and kind of work some of that stuff through because all the pain.

But I got there and I'm good and I don't have any angst towards any individual or any church or I just don't. Because I don't want to stand before Jesus with angst in my heart or hurt in my heart or bitterness or resentment. I don't have it. Because I want to be free. And you can be free too. You can be free too. Amen. And God wants you to be. And no matter how grievous the sin is, God's willing to forgive it. And if you say, "I am hurting in my church, I was hurt in my marriage. I was hurting my friendships, I was hurt at work." You're correct. Nobody's going to challenge that. But if you're holding onto it, you're playing a victim card and you're saying, "Yeah, and I want everybody else to know and I want to hold onto this and I want to get this root of bitterness." And just not the way Jesus Christ works.

I mean, think about Jesus. He tells us in the Sermon on the Mount, if you're offering your gift at the altar and while you're offering your gift there, you realize your brother has something against you, what does he say to do? He doesn't say don't give the gift. He doesn't say stop worshiping. What does he say? "First, go be reconciled to your brother, then come offer for the gift." Why? Because how you treat other people and how you extend the mercy and forgiveness of God is an act of worship. So you can't be in a church and have angst towards other people in the church. You can't be in the church and have angst towards people in the church down the street that you don't go to their church because you don't like them. Let me just meddle some more. Some of you don't want to take cards and give them to certain people because you don't want them to come to BRAVE and get saved.

Or you definitely, if they do, you just don't want them sitting by you in your

church. And that is not the heart of God. The heart of God is no matter who, no matter where you can come and God is willing to forgive it all. I told the story of Corrie 10, boom in the first service and afterwards I went into my office and I printed this so I could actually read it and be more exact. But you remember Corrie 10, boom. She was in Ravensbrook concentration camp because her and her family hid Jews during the Holocaust and were sent there, her and her sister Betsy were sent there. And after the Holocaust, she was out preaching or teaching, giving testimony on the grace of God. And she was finishing up a testimony and she quoted one of her favorite scriptures. She said, "When we confess our sins, God cast them into the deepest ocean gone forever."

And here's where the story picks up. She says, "The solemn faces stared back at me, not quite daring to believe. There were never questions after a talk in Germany in 1947, people stood up in silence and in silence collected their wraps and in silence left the room and that's when I saw him. Working his way forward against the others. One moment I saw the overcoat and the brown hat, the next, the blue uniform and a visor cap with its skull and crossbones. It came back to me with a huge rush, the huge room with its harsh overhead light, the pathetic pile of dresses and shoes in the center of the floor.

The shame of walking naked past this man. I could see my sister's frail form ahead of me, ribs sharp beneath the parchment skin. Betsy, how thin you were. Betsy and I had been arrested for concealing Jews in our home during the Nazi occupation of

Holland. This man had been a guard at Ravensbrook concentration camp where we were sent. Now he was in front of me, hand thrust out. A fine message Freulein, how good it is to know that as you say, 'All of our sins are at the bottom of the sea.' And I who had spoken so glibly of forgiveness fumbled in my pocketbook rather than take his hand. He would not remember me, of course, how could he remember one prisoner among the thousands of women, but I remembered him and the leather crop swinging from his belt. It was the first time since my release I'd been face to face with one of my captors and my blood seemed to freeze.

'You mentioned Ravensbrook in your talk, he was saying I was a guard there.' No, he didn't remember me. But since that time he went on, I've become a Christian. I know God has forgiven me for the cruel things I did there. But I'd like to hear it from your lips as well. Freulein again, the hand came out, 'Will you forgive me?' And I stood there. I whose sins had every day to be forgiven and could not. Betsy had died in that place. Could he erase her slow, terrible death simply for the asking. It could not have been many seconds that he stood there handheld out. But to me it seemed like ours as I wrestled with the most difficult thing I ever had to do. For I had to do it, I knew that. The message that God forgives as a prior condition, that we forgive those who have injured us.

'If you do not forgive them in their trespasses, Jesus said, neither will your father in heaven forgive your trespasses.' I knew it not only as a commandment of God, but as a daily experience. Since the end of the war, I had come home in Holland and set up a home for victims of Nazi brutality. Those who were able to forgive their former

enemies were also able to return to the outside world and rebuild their lives no matter what the physical scars. But those who nursed their bitterness remained invalids. It was as simple and as horrible as that. And I stood there with the coldness, clutching my heart. But forgiveness is not an emotion, I knew that too. Forgiveness is an act of the will and the will can function regardless of the temperature of the heart. 'Jesus, help me.' I prayed silently. I can lift my hand, I can do that much. You supply the feeling.

And so woodenly, mechanically, I thrust my hand into the one stretched out to me. And as I did an incredible thing took place. The current started in my shoulder, raced down, my arms sprang up into our joint hands, and then this healing warmth seemed to flood my whole being, bringing tears to my eyes. 'I forgive you brother,' I cried with all my heart. For a long moment we grasped each other's hands, the former guard and the former prisoner. I had never known God's love so intensely as I did then." Listen to what she says. "And having learned thus to forgive in the hardest situations, I never again had difficulty in forgiving. Oh, I wish I could say that. I wish I could say that merciful and charitable thoughts just naturally flowed from me from then on but they didn't. If there's one thing I've learned in 80 years of age, it's that I can't store up good feelings and behavior but only drawing them fresh from God each day."

Don't you love that story? That's what God calls all of us to do. There's no sin too great. The hallmark of Christianity is forgiveness. The growth in Christ is forgiveness. In the same way Jesus forgave you, forgive others. That's what he's saying. There's no other way. There's no other way. And this is what he's talking about here. When

he's talking about the fact that forgiveness is undeniable. It was undeniable that Corrie
10, boom forgave her accuser. He may never have known what was going on. She did,
God did and she was freed up in a new way from that moment on. I mean, just think
about the gospel of Jesus Christ during holy week. He washed Judas Iscariot's feet.
The one he knew had sold him out for 30 pieces of silver. The one he knew was going
to kiss him on the cheek and sentence him to death, the one he knew that was going to
cause his execution.

And he got down, took a towel out from around his waist and he washed the dirt
off Judas Iscariot's feet the same way he did for anybody else, knowing that
forgiveness was welcome for Judas Iscariot, even though he never took it. It's
undeniable who Jesus Christ is and how he forgave. Therefore, we end with the final
one. Forgiveness is not just limitless, costly, transferrable, undeniable, but it's also
foundational. Notice what he says. He says, "My heavenly father will also do the
same." Do the same as what? He said "You're going to go there and you're going to
stay there until you pay the last part of your fine." Let me tell you what he's saying
there. There is no such thing as purgatory. There's no purgatory. If you could work off
your sins, then Jesus Christ died for nothing. You don't get to work off your sins in this
life or the next. The only thing you can do is receive the grace of Jesus.

That's it. "But this is what my heavenly Father will do, the same to you if each of
you does not forgive his brother for your heart." 1John four says, "We love God
because he first loved us." If someone says, "I love God and hates his brother, he's a
liar. For the one who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God

whom he has not seen. And this is the commandment we have from him, that the one who loves God should love his brother also." You cannot love God and hate somebody else. You cannot love God and not forgive somebody else. That is an incongruity, it's an impossibility. If you're a Christian, you forgive. And as you forgive, you experience the mercy and grace of God because you set it up for them to be able to be put into the hands of God for him to do what he wants to do.

Sometimes forgiveness can lead to restoration like it does through Jesus Christ and the cross where he offers forgiveness, but we must come through repentance and faith. It's not automatic. Just because Christ died for the world doesn't mean everybody's saved. You have to go through the motions of getting right with him then too. Just because you've been hurt by somebody or you've been abused by somebody doesn't mean you enter back in that relationship. It means you forgive that relationship in such a way that if that person ever got right and could admit they're wrong and could do that stuff, that reconciliation would then be possible. But it may not happen in this life. This is a broken world. We can't guarantee what other people are going to do. All we can do is take care of us. And when the Holy Spirit puts on our heart, you have unforgiveness, you have hurt, you have bitterness, you have resentment, you have all then here's what we get the privilege of doing, forgive them.

Right before the Father, we go right to the cross of Jesus and we say, "Because you've forgiven me so much, because you've forgiven me all my debt, because you continually cleanse me every day. There is nothing I could hold against any other

human being. I forgive them too." That's the foundational bedrock of Christianity. And that's why we got to be careful that we don't let a root of bitterness grow. Hebrews 12:15 says, "See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God, that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble." And by it many are defiled. That's why I say of all the sins in the church, one of those challenging ones is unforgiveness. Because we don't see it, because we try to suppress it. Because we try to push it down, we try to pretend it's not there. But until it's undeniable that you've forgiven someone, until it's, I'm praying blessing over them, I'm asking God to encourage them, I'm asking God's best for them.

Until their name can be spoken or I can be in their presence and I'm not bothered anymore because I've given them to Jesus and that's fine, then we still have some work to do in our heart. And I just want to tell you, I love you so much as your pastor. I want you to experience the full meaning of Easter, the full meaning of Easter. It's not just that Christ died for you so you could experience all of his forgiveness, which is true. It's Christ died for you, so you could experience all of his forgiveness and extend that to others. Amen.

Because there's a world out there that hears about Jesus, that hears about what he's willing to do, but doesn't often get to see a full demonstration of what that looks like. And it's not about you going out and remembering five words that forgiveness is and taking notes on it and getting it all figured out. It's a matter of has the Holy Spirit put someone on your heart? Has the Holy Spirit put someone on your mind that you need to forgive? I'm saying you start with God in that equation. Not call them on the

phone, not tell them I forgive, no. Start with the Lord and say, "Lord, because of all you've been willing to do for me on the cross because you've been willing to forgive all my sins, Lord, how could I possibly hold this against somebody else? This has been crippling me. This has been hurting me. I no longer want to be crippled by this. I want to release these people into your hands. I want to release this person into your hands. They're yours. I want to pray blessing over them. Lord, heal my heart."

And releasing somebody then allows the Lord to come in and bring freedom. Some of you have stopped growing in the Lord because of unforgiveness. Some of you have physical ailments because of unforgiveness. Some of you have emotional challenges because of unforgiveness. Unforgiveness starts to unlock freedom. And remember, it's not an emotion. It doesn't mean in the moment, "Oh, I feel great now." It doesn't mean that. It means I'm willing now because of what Christ did for me, I don't want to harbor any unforgiveness towards anybody else. Because I know when I meet Jesus, I want to say, "Hey, I was just trying to extend everything you gave to me. And if you could forgive me, I am aware of me. I know of all sinners of whom I'm the worst, because I'm most familiar with my life. And Lord, you did a work in me. So how could I hold this against anybody else? It's me."

So the way I want to end our service today is as we stand and as we pray. Is we'll have some of our pastors, some of our elders up front. If you want to pray with somebody, you can come up and pray by yourself. But this is what the amazing grace of God is about, is to set you free from your bondage of unforgiveness in your heart. If Christ has set you free, you're free indeed. You don't need to be bound to your past

anymore. I believe your best days are ahead. Amen. Amen. Would you stand with me?

Father in heaven, we give you all the glory, honor and praise and we come before you now in the name of Jesus. And if you're here today and you've never welcomed the forgiveness of God into your life and you think you're just going to heaven and have a relationship with God because you're a good person and you recognize today your sin, then I want you to know that Jesus Christ came while you were still a sinner and died for you. And if you're willing right now to turn from your sin and turn your heart to Christ, and you can pray like this, "Jesus, I know I'm dead without you, but right now I want to turn from my sin and I want to trust you as my personal Lord and Savior, come in and be my Lord and change me." And Lord, for all of us here who are believers, as you've shown us in the Holy Spirit, who we are in you, show us if there's anybody we need to extend grace and mercy to at this time.

And if it is Lord right here, right now in this place, immediately we bring them before you and we say, Lord, they're yours. I'm no longer holding onto it. They're yours with an open hand free me Lord so I can continue to grow in the grace of Jesus. Father, we love you and we bless you and we praise you Lord. This is amazing grace. Not just that we've been redeemed and set free, but we get the opportunity to extend it to many other people as well until we see you face to face and hear the words, "Well done, good and faithful servant." Lord, do a work in our life. We celebrate you this week. We're reminded of your grace this week. We love you and it's in Jesus Christ's name we pray. Amen and amen. Can we give God praise for who he is?

