

# Forgiveness

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Preacher: Simon Rehberg

[ 0 : 00 ] On the night of September the 6th, 2018, a 26-year-old accountant called Botham Jean was murdered in Dallas, Texas, by an off-duty Dallas police department patrol officer called Amber Geiger, who entered Jean's apartment and fatally shot him.

She had entered Jean's apartment believing it was her own and believed Jean to be a burglar. I don't know, maybe you've seen this in the news.

It was a horrible incident that caused a lot of political controversy in the States. Why am I telling you this? Well, most people were absolutely and understandably enraged that this had happened.

But there was one person who surprised everyone at court when the sentence was decided. And that was the brother of the victim called Brand.

And when it was his time to speak, he said this. And he turns to Amber Geiger, the police officer, and he says, If you are truly sorry, and I can speak for myself, I forgive you.

[ 1 : 24 ] I know if you go to God and ask him, he will forgive you. And I don't think anyone could say it, but I love you just like anyone else. And I'm not going to say, I hope you rot and die just like my brother did, but I personally want the best for you.

And I wasn't going to say this in front of anybody, not even my family, but I don't even want you to go to jail. I want the best for you. And that's exactly what Botham would want for you.

And the best would be for you to give your life to Christ. Again, I love you as a person, and I don't wish anything bad on you. I don't know if this is possible.

And he turns to the judge, and he says, Can I give her a hug, please? Please? And if you Google this, if you go on YouTube, you can find the clip.

It's a very emotional scene that has taken place there. The Bible is absolutely packed with stories about forgiveness.

[ 2 : 25 ] Because forgiveness is a central theme to Christianity. And because of forgiveness, Christianity is a unique religion. No other religion emphasizes forgiveness and commends forgiveness as much as Christianity.

There's no other religion, no other God that would give everything, who would go as far as giving even his own son so he could forgive his people.

Because the whole story of the Bible is a story of forgiveness. You know, in the beginning, God made everything. He made the world. He created us.

We lived in harmony with him. Things were good. But we rebelled against God, even though we had everything. We deserved to be separated from God for time and eternity. And then God came up with an incredible plan to redeem his people and to bring them back to him by giving his son Jesus to die for them.

That's the story of Christianity. And forgiveness is there all throughout. And if you think about it, it doesn't make sense. There's no logic to it.

[ 3 : 38 ] There's no reason why God should forgive his people. The only reason that I could come up with is radical love. Radical love from God that he extends towards us.

And the idea that I want to talk about tonight is that the forgiveness that we have received from God is a forgiveness that we need to pass on in our own lives.

And that's why we have to talk about forgiveness tonight. It's important to talk about it. Because really everyone needs forgiveness at some point in their life. And everyone will have to forgive someone at some point in their lives.

And in this passage that we just read in the Gospel of Matthew, we can find a lot of helpful stuff. So my sermon tonight will be answering two questions.

First of all, what is forgiveness? Second of all, how can we forgive and why should we? I should not lean too much on that lecture. So first of all, what is forgiveness?

[ 4 : 47 ] There is a helpful definition which I didn't come up with, but some other smart person did. And that definition is quite lengthy, but you're all smart people here in Bonacorte, so that's all right. And that says that forgiveness is a voluntary and costly act of love where the wronged person absorbs the debt created by the offender instead of making the offender pay.

Forgiveness is not about denying justice or minimizing justice, but about relinquishing vengeance and trusting justice to God and seeking restoration when possible.

That's a long definition. Don't worry. We will break it down a little bit. So first of all, forgiveness means naming what has happened truthfully without minimizing it.

Forgiveness doesn't ignore or deny the offense. It acknowledges it. And we see that in this text where the king wants to settle his account with the servants who owe him money.

10,000 talents is what one particular servant owes him. And if you didn't know that, one talent in the biblical currency is about a yearly income.

[ 6 : 10 ] So I went on Google and I asked, what's an average yearly income in the UK? And it said 40,000 pounds. Now, I've never seen any of that money, but apparently that's true.

So if you think about it, 10,000 talents, we calculate, quick maths, 400 million pounds in our modern day currency. That's a huge amount of money.

That's what the king says, you owe me to the servant. And forgiveness is doing, the first step of forgiveness is doing exactly that.

Being quite clear about what it is that is owed. It's not about just saying, forget about it. It's not about just saying, it doesn't matter. Now, forgiveness doesn't ignore what has happened.

Forgiveness doesn't deny or minimize. Forgiveness says, yes, you have insulted me. Yes, you have stolen from me. Yes, you have hurt me. You have betrayed me.

[ 7 : 11 ] So the first step is to make it plain and clear what it is that you even need to forgive. Which leads us to our second point. Forgiveness means refusing to take revenge.

And by that I mean refusing to take revenge both outwardly and inwardly. You see, forgiveness in its nature, and this is quite obvious, means not taking revenge.

Revenge actually is the opposite of forgiveness. Some people are confused about what forgiveness actually means. And they say the opposite of forgiveness is justice. If I forgive someone, justice is not done.

But actually, the opposite of forgiveness means revenge. And that's where a lot of people really begin to struggle with it.

Because if we are wronged, we demand justice. An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. If someone has offended me, they must pay.

[ 8 : 14 ] The king in the story says, you owe me 10,000 talents. And surprisingly, after the servant begs him for more time to pay, the king decides not to do anything about it.

To let it slide. And then we read that this same servant goes and finds a fellow servant. Who also owes him some money.

A hundred denarii, we read. And again, I've translated that in modern day currency. A hundred denarii would be about 10,000 pounds. Still very significant. 10,000 pounds is a lot of money. But it's not even close to the debt that this servant owed to the king. Which was 400 million, if you remember. And the reaction that this man has is interesting.

He doesn't just ask this other servant for his money. No, he goes to him and he grabs him by the throat and he says, pay it back to me now. Now, this is maybe stating the obvious, but forgiveness means not doing that.

[ 9 : 21 ] Forgiveness means not going to the person and choking them. And forcing them to pay back what they owe me. And again, I'm stating the obvious, but sometimes we can deceive ourselves.

And we say, I'm a good Christian. I'm not taking revenge. And perhaps outwardly we're not doing that. Outwardly we're not going to another person choking them. But inwardly, actually what is happening is that I'm starting to resent the other person for what they have done to me.

Outwardly, it's easy not to take revenge on someone. Outwardly, we're actually really good at taking revenge at a person. Inwardly, I do picture myself choking them.

Ignoring them. Mocking them in my mind. Having pretend arguments with them. Where I really tell them what I think about them. Beginning to resent them, being bitter against them. And believe it or not, but that is a form of revenge. And it's a sign that, like the servant in this story, perhaps you haven't understood God's grace after all.

[10:31] We'll say a bit more about that later. Thirdly, what is forgiveness? Forgiveness means that you have a willingness to bear the cost of the injury.

Forgiveness is a willingness to bear the cost. When someone has sinned against another person, there is always a cost.

There is always a debt that is created that one person owes to another person. I was at Joe's and Susie's last night. And let's just pretend that I would have given Joe my phone.

Let's just pretend my phone was completely new. And I say, look, Joe, here's my new iPhone. And he takes it and because he's so clumsy, he lets it fall. He drops it. And suddenly it's broken.

Now there is a debt. Now I've got two choices. What can I say? I can say, you've got to pay that phone for me. You've got to pay me some money. Or I say, don't worry, Joe.

[11:31] It's fine. It happens. Forgiveness says, I pay for it. I absorb the debt. I won't make you pay for it.

You see, the king in the story tells the servant that he cancels his debt. Who is paying? Well, the king is paying. The king is absorbing these 10,000 talents.

He is lacking that money from that point onwards. He is suffering the cost. And, of course, this obvious picture is that this other servant who owes him 100 denarii, you know, he should just say, it's fine.

I was just forgiven 10,000 talents. I don't care about your 100 denarii anymore. And that means that if we absorb the debt, the money, if we absorb the offense that has been done to us, it means that we suffer from it.

Forgiveness means suffering. And that's just a really brutal reality sometimes. But we will say a little bit more about that later. Just the fourth thing, the last thing I want to say about what forgiveness is, is that forgiveness has an end goal.

[12:46] It's not only that you absorb the cost, that you swallow it, that you take the pain. No, but it's also the hope for reconciliation. Forgiveness doesn't stop at just saying, it's fine, I'll pay for it.

But it goes further. Forgiveness is not something we just do for fun. Forgiveness has an end goal. And that is, as difficult as it sounds, reconciliation. Forgiveness, in other words, is the hope for reconciliation.

And that's extremely difficult because if you ever had to forgive someone anything, you know how difficult it actually can be. But yet, that is what forgiveness is all about.

Ideally, it ends in reconciliation. We have to be honest. We have to be real. Sometimes that's not possible. Perhaps the other person is dead already. Perhaps there was trauma that was caused that was just too big.

We can't face the other person. Or the other person is unrepentant and doesn't see any fault in themselves. You can still forgive them, but then you can't reconcile with them if they don't see the wrong they have committed.

[14:01] In those cases, we still are supposed to look and try to forgive the person, but reconciliation might not be possible. Nonetheless, it should be the end goal of it all.

And it was certainly the goal of the king in the story. The debt is canceled. We are okay again. The only reason it didn't happen is because the servant himself didn't appreciate the forgiveness and went and put the other guy in jail.

Now, I said earlier, you people here in Bonacourt, you are smart people. The parable is quite obvious, isn't it? God is the king who forgives you all the debt that you have accumulated.

All the small and big sins that you have committed against him, which have accumulated to such a large sum that we could never pay it back to God.

So he forgives you the debt. How does he do it? Well, he gives his son to absorb the debt, to suffer, to pay.

[15:06] And if we are really honest in our hearts, we say we believe that, we say we are saved because of that, and yet we do really still get angry.

And I mean disproportionately angry so often because we are wronged by someone else. Of course, it's wrong of other people to wrong us, but compared to all the things we have done against

God, it doesn't measure up.

And that's why we struggle to forgive. Again, we are short-sighted, we are emotional beings, and if somebody does something to us, our pride is hurt. So let's come to the second part.

How can we forgive, and why should we forgive? Why should we forgive? Let's do a German lesson here. There's a German word which is called Nachtragen.

And that word describes the act of carrying something after another person. Basically, if somebody drops something, for example, you pick it up and you carry it with you, trying to bring it back to that person.

[16:18] Or if somebody gives you something that you don't want to have, you still carry it, and the person runs away, and you try to get back to them.

But in any case, if someone wrongs you, and you don't forgive them, then you are the one who is Nachtragend. You are the one who is carrying something around with yourself.

You are the one who has a bag on your shoulder, extra weight that you can't let go of, because you are carrying that offense around with you. Being Nachtragend means not being able to let go.

Now, it works the other way around as well. If you are the offending party, you have wronged someone, and you are sorry for it, you are carrying around shame and guilt.

And nobody can take that away from you unless they forgive you. It is really interesting that in our world, a lot of people want to get rid of the idea that shame and guilt exists, that we can just do whatever we want without any consequences.

[17:24] And yet the Bible is of a different opinion. Shame and guilt do exist, and forgiveness is one way to get rid of it. The philosophy of the 20th century certainly expected the Christian religion to be irrelevant in our day.

But it doesn't quite work like that, because in our practical life, in our experience, we still feel guilt and shame. And even if you are saying you don't believe in God tonight, you are still feeling that. Now, why would you feel that if indeed you can just do whatever you want? Why would you feel shame and guilt if there was no moral order in this world? It is hard to answer that, isn't it?

You see, forgiveness is the only way we can relieve others of their shame and guilt. Forgiveness is the only way I can experience freedom of the things that have happened to me.

That is why we need forgiveness, and that is why we need to forgive. There was a famous case, as I said in the beginning of my sermon, where this police officer shot an Afro-American in his home.

[18:33] And it is just unbelievable that the brother of the victim came to court and he said, I forgive you. If you watch the clip on YouTube, you will see that the woman, she is at the end of it all.

She falls around him and she cries her heart out. And you can see how much it means to her and that she can let go finally, or at least begin to let go. So how can we forgive?

Why is it so hard to forgive, maybe? Because, again, if we are the ones who forgive, we are the ones who are bearing the cost. We are the ones absorbing the cost of the consequences.

And that involves suffering, as I said earlier. Even imagining forgiving other people makes us uncomfortable. It's like, Jesus, so you're saying you just want me to let this go.

Just like that, right? But where is the justice here? Well, the justice is right here in the text. You see, you are the servant in the story who has been forgiven his debt by the king.

[19:44] So, therefore, you have to forgive the much smaller debt to your fellow people. That's where the justice is. You don't forgive because you were always perfect, and now you are absorbing a big debt.

That would be unfair. The justice is that God has forgiven you a much greater debt. And now he is asking you to absorb what is, in comparison, quite a small debt.

You still don't believe me? Have you not offended the holy and living God? Have you not transgressed his law hundreds, thousands of times? Has he not forgiven you your sins?

If he hasn't, consider asking him. But if he has forgiven me, this big pile of debt, all these offenses, then how can I not forgive the person that has wronged me?

Well, you might think, I've only spoken a little lie, or made a bit of fun of my co-worker, or just took something that didn't really belong to me. It wasn't a big deal. It wasn't that deep, right?

[20:49] Well, every time you did that, the Bible is very clear that you showed rebellion against your God. Every time you did that, you were one in the crowd shouting, crucify.

Crucify. Every time you did that, you were one of the people who spat Jesus in the face, who mocked him, and who put a crown of thorns on him, and drove these nails deeper into his flesh.

That's you, and that's me. And yet, as Jesus hung upon the cross, covered in blood and sweat, enduring the worst pain known to mankind, beaten, suffocating, he looked at you, saying, forgive them, for they know not what they do.

How can you look at Jesus, the innocent one, and hate your brother? How can you look at what he forgave you, and go to your brother, and choke him, and throw him in a jail in your mind?

C.S. Lewis writes, to be a Christian means to forgive the inexcusable, because God has forgiven the inexcusable in you. That's what this passage is saying.

[ 22 : 03 ] I want to close with a story that really moved me, about a man called Irino da Pazzo. Irino da Pazzo was a man who lived during the Nazi regime in Europe, and he was fluent in multiple languages.

So, he was used by the Nazis to translate documents and letters. And in 1943, because he was a Christian and he warned Jews of their deportation, he was imprisoned.

But because he was a father of four, his sentence was lowered from a death sentence to imprisonment in a concentration camp.

Now, in the winter of 1943, he had been there for nine months already. He was weighing about 90 pounds. He was covered with wounds over his body.

They had broken his arm and had given him no medical help. And Christmas Eve, 1943, the commander of the concentration camp asked him to come to his office.

[ 23 : 14 ] As I said, Christmas Eve, the whole table in the commander's office was laid with food, delicious food. And Irino standing there, barefoot, shirtless, watching the commander eat for about an hour.

Irino in that moment was fighting the temptations to hate this man, clinging in his heart to the gospel truths that he knew. But just as he caught himself, this happened.

And this is what he now writes himself in a book later on. The commander said, your wife is a good cook. I didn't understand what he meant.

Then he told me, your wife has been sending you parcels of small cakes for seven months. I've eaten them with great pleasure. Again, I had to fight the temptation to hate him and accuse God. I knew that my wife and children had very little to eat. They had now saved flour, fat, and sugar from their already meager rations to send me something. And this man here had eaten my children's food.

[ 24 : 20 ] Again, the devil whispered to me, hate him, Tapazzo, hate him. And again, I prayed and God prevented the hatred from taking possession of me. Then I asked the commander to hand me one of the biscuits.

I didn't want to eat it. I just wanted to look at it and think of my children. But my tormentor didn't grant my request. Instead, he cursed me. I said to him, you're a poor man, commander, but I am rich because I believe in God and I've been redeemed by the precious blood of Jesus Christ.

He got very angry and sent me back to camp. This happened on Christmas Eve, 1943. Now, Irino Tapazzo survived the war. And he couldn't forget what had happened on Christmas, 1943.

So he decided 10 years later to find the commander. And he was successful. He writes this, The commander no longer recognized me. Then I told him, I'm number 17531.

Do you remember Christmas 1943? Now he remembered all the horrors. Him and his wife were suddenly terrified. Trembling, he asked, have you come to take revenge?

[ 25 : 35 ] Yes, I replied and opened a parcel I had brought with me. A large cake appeared. I asked his wife to make coffee.

Then we drank coffee and ate cake together. The man looked at me completely confused. He could not understand why I was acting like this. Finally, he started to cry and asked me to forgive him.

I then said that I had forgiven him for the sake of Jesus' love. We loved because he loved us first. A year later, the former camp commander confessed his terrible guilt to Jesus Christ.

And his wife also gave her life to Jesus. Both were able to experience liberating forgiveness from all their sins. What an amazing story.

That's what forgiveness is. We forgive the inexcusable because God has forgiven the inexcusable in us. Let us pray. Lord, we are so thankful for the testimony of this man.

[ 26 : 45 ] And we are so thankful that in the Bible we see, well, the testimony of your son Jesus. That he forgave even though he was innocent.

That because he absorbed all the debt in all the world, we can now forgive even if we are wronged.  
Lord, we are so weak, so feeble.  
And we need your help. So we ask that you would give us your Holy Spirit. You would strengthen us. That you would lead us and help us in the situations where we need to forgive.  
Forgive us all our sins. In Jesus' name we ask. Amen.