

# Forgiven and Forgiving

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[ 0 : 00 ]     Some of you may know the name Corrie Ten Boom. Some of you may not know the name Corrie Ten Boom. But let me tell you a story about a lady called Corrie Ten Boom.

She was a Dutch woman living in the Netherlands during the time of the Second World War and the lead-up to it. She was a watchmaker. That was her father's trade as well.

And she and her sister Betsy sheltered Jews who were fleeing the persecution of the Nazis.

They protected Jewish people in their home from the Holocaust. An extraordinarily brave thing to do in which, of course, she and her sister Betsy were risking their lives.

Corrie and Betsy were captured. And they were taken to a place called Ravensbrück Concentration Camp, which was an all-women concentration camp in Germany.

[ 1 : 12 ]     And as we can't, of course, fully grasp or imagine, Corrie and Betsy underwent terrible cruelty in Ravensbrück.

Corrie and Betsy died there. Corrie, however, survived. And she went on to become a very well-known Christian speaker and writer, writing about her experiences that I've very quickly related to you in a book called *The Hiding Place*.

And she wrote a number of other books as well. And on one occasion, Corrie was speaking in Germany, at a gathering in Germany in a church, and her topic was forgiveness.

She knew how important forgiveness was. She knew that firsthand because by this time she'd opened a center to help those who had suffered horribly during the war to rehabilitate.

And she could see that those who had been able to forgive those who had sinned against them could move on in their lives and grow and heal.

[ 2 : 29 ]     And those who had not been able to forgive were invalids all their lives. It consumed them. It broke them. And they were walking invalids for the rest of their lives.

So she knew the importance of forgiveness. But she was about to discover it in a far more personal sense at the end of this talk that she was giving.

Because at the end of the talk, imagine it was in here. Everyone files out the door at the back there or at the front. Everyone's leaving after she's given this talk.

But one man is coming up the middle, walking towards her. And initially she just sees him in what he's wearing then and there.

The brown overcoat that she sees as his balding head. An average looking man. But then as he comes closer, she recognizes him and he's not wearing that brown overcoat anymore.

[ 3 : 30 ]     He's wearing the uniform of the SS. Because she recognizes this man as having been a guard at Ravensbrück concentration camp.

And one of the people that perpetrated such terrible crimes against her and all of the fellow inmates. Now, for a moment, just think what she's feeling.

Try to imagine what she's feeling. The man approaches her and says, Fraulein Ten Boom, it's amazing what you were just speaking about there.

Forgiveness. About how in Christ all our sins are forgiven, no matter what it is that we've done. They're dropped, as it were, like a stone into the bottom of the ocean to be remembered no more.

It's so wonderful. Now, I know you were at Ravensbrück. I was a guard at Ravensbrück.

[ 4 : 39 ] I know because I'm a Christian that my sins have been forgiven by God. But sister, I need to hear it from your lips. Will you forgive me?

And he held out his hand to her. And we'll pick up the story towards the end of our message this morning.

Why did Jesus speak this parable? Why did he so forcefully there in the Lord's Prayer circle back and make a point about that petition that we ask for forgiveness, but we also state there that we have forgiven all those, all those who sin against us?

Why does Jesus give us this striking parable? It's to shock us out of being unforgiving people.

It's to shock us out of thinking we can pick and choose who we forgive. It's to shock us into remembering this essential, non-negotiable truth about being Christians, that forgiven people are forgiving people.

[ 6 : 03 ] Full stop. Those who have been forgiven all their sins through Jesus Christ are therefore forgiving people.

And he uses, if you like, an absurd tale to create that sense of shock in us because it's so mad, isn't it, what this unmerciful servant does.

He comes out of the king's presence having had a completely unpayable debt cancelled. And no sooner has that happened than he has physically got a hold of someone and is choking them, demanding payback from them for something they owe him.

Jesus is saying, how absurd is that? Isn't that ludicrous? Can you imagine someone being like that?

So that we too will say, yes, it is crazy. But then look in our hearts and say, who am I behaving like that towards?

[ 7 : 18 ] Am I like the unmerciful servant towards someone who has sinned against me? And we are being invited into a place where we can finally forgive.

You may have said yourself in relation to your being sinned against, or you may have heard others say, I can't forgive that person.

Yes, I can't forgive that person. Let me suggest to you that that's not a viable option for a Christian. There is, won't forgive that person, or I don't know how to forgive that person.

And that can be quite understandable. But Jesus in this parable is going to challenge us if we're simply saying, I won't, and hiding behind, I can't, in order just not to do it because we don't want to.

But, if, what is perhaps more likely, we just don't know how to get there in terms of forgiving someone. Jesus gives us the root map for that as well in this parable.

[ 8 : 44 ] But what is forgiveness? Very important to define a word, isn't it? If we're going to talk about it for a substantial part of this morning's service.

What is forgiveness? Well, here's a definition that is not my own, but comes from some writing on forgiveness done through a lot of biblical reflection and thought from a writer called Aaron Sironi.

Forgiveness is a decision and a promise. So, forgiveness here is a decision and a promise to release a person by cancelling the real debt the person has with you.

Notice that doesn't say anything about feelings. It is a decision and a promise. It is something you do to release a person from the real debt by cancelling the real debt.

So, it's not to diminish the sin that was done. It's not to say, that was nothing. It's not to belittle something that was seriously done to you. It's to acknowledge the extent of it and to cancel it.

[ 10 : 03 ] You decide and promise not to hold a grudge. You decide and promise not to plan revenge or retribution. You decide and promise not to demand or exact payment.

You decide and promise not to harbor ill will, to follow the biblical command to put away all malice. That is what forgiveness is.

And the word really means release. Who do you need to forgive today? or are you seeking forgiveness today?

Or are you aware of a situation where you know forgiveness needs to happen and it hasn't happened and so people are just in limbo until this act of grace takes place.

I'm sure this message is of relevance to everyone in this room in some way or other. So often the hardest words to say are I forgive you.

[ 11 : 18 ] And sometimes the words that we are longing to hear from someone else are I forgive you. Let's dive into this parable together.

Now it's set up by Peter isn't it? It's in response Jesus gives this parable in response to something Peter asks in verse 21.

And we can we can really put ourselves in Peter's shoes here because Peter wants to know just exactly how often you actually have to forgive someone before you can just get them out of your life.

That's so often the way we think. He's probably hoping for a low number. How many times? But he knows Jesus to some extent now and he knows Jesus is gracious and kind and merciful so let's go for seven.

That sounds generous. Seven times? Maybe he'll get a pat on the back for saying that from Jesus. What does Jesus say in response? Seven? No chance.

[ 12 : 33 ] Not seven times but 77 times or 70 times seven it's hard to translate. That is unremitting relentless forgiveness.

Just being a forgiveness machine. that's the picture he wants to create of just overflowing forgiveness.

That's what he wants from his disciples and the number's not an accident either because there's an echo there from Genesis and a man called Lamech who's a descendant of Cain.

He's a child of hell and he wants to be avenged sevenfold. 70 times sevenfold and Jesus says no forgive that amount.

Forgive that amount if you're a disciple of mine. And we might think at this point that just that sounds lovely but that's unattainable to me.

[ 13 : 43 ] You're giving me no hope here. You're just giving me a lofty ideal which sounds wonderful. I wish I could dispense forgiveness in this free unrelenting way but that's not where I'm at this morning.

And so Jesus doesn't leave us there. He shows us how we can be in this forgiving position by beginning his parable.

The kingdom of heaven is like so it's a parable of the kingdom. He's showing us kingdom values here in this parable. The kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants and he begins the settlement and who does he call in?

First of all as he began the settlement a man who owed him 10,000 bags of gold was brought to him. This is 10,000 talents literally and a talent was a phenomenal sum.

It was equivalent to about 20 years wages. One talent, right? I don't know if any of you are mathematicians this is outside of my area of ability.

[ 15 : 01 ] 20 years wages for a day labourer. one talent. How many does he owe? 10,000. Now, who knows how he's managed to rack up this kind of debt, but we're not supposed to push a parable in every direction.

It's there as an illustration of a debt that is what? A debt that is clearly unpayable. It's astronomical. It's an unpayable debt.

that's what this servant is burdened with as he goes into the presence of a king who now determines to settle accounts.

He's not able to pay, is he? Who could? Who could pay? This man's a servant. He doesn't have anything like this kind of money. And so in verse 25 we read, 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.

They're to be sold into slavery to repay this debt. And I'm sure even that wouldn't go particularly far in paying it off. That, friends, is a picture of our burden without Christ.

[ 16 : 24 ] It's a picture of our unpayable debt. Through sin, which we have been doing from the beginning, we have incurred this unpayable debt to God.

And it's pictured in terms of this astronomical financial debt here in this parable. It goes on in verse 26. At this the servant fell on his knees before him good start, but not a good end.

Be patient with me, he begged, and I will pay everything back. Here's the first alarm bell. How on earth is he going to pay this back?

Just a few more days, 24 hours, I'll get you what you need. This is the first alarm bell about this servant. servant, he has not appreciated the extent of the debt, has he?

Because he's still entertaining this insane delusion that he can somehow work it off. But friends, is that not what we are often like, particularly before we've come to the cross?

[ 17 : 43 ] But we're under the impression, yes, that our sin is a barrier between ourselves and God. we tend to think, what I'll do is, I'll turn over a new leaf, and tomorrow I'll do nothing bad and everything good, watch my mouth, go to church, try my best, and somehow that will outweigh this burden of sin which separates me from God.

To try and save ourselves by works. the king knows better. This man can't pay it off.

And what motivates the king to do what he's about to do in verse 27? Pity. Pity.

Now, I'm really impressed with your apology. That deserves debt cancellation. just sheer pity, mercy.

He's asked for a repayment plan, which is an extremely daft thing to ask for when you owe 20,000 bags of gold and your job is a servant.

[ 18 : 58 ] But what the king gives him is something immeasurably more wonderful than a repayment plan.

The king gives him debt cancellation. There and then, on the spot, he wipes the slate clean completely.

A debt that is going to end him in the worst place imaginable has just been cancelled. sold. And he let him go.

That is a picture of our redemption through Christ Jesus. Because the king bears the cost, doesn't he? Ten thousand talents is no small sum, even to a king.

He's going to have to absorb that cost in order to forgive the servant of it. there's a real price to be paid, but that will happen on the king's side, not on the servant's side.

[ 20 : 11 ] And if you are a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ this morning, what the king does for the servant here is a picture of what the Lord God has done for you through Jesus.

You had an unpayable debt, and it was not going to go well for you as long as that debt was still reckoned to you.

But what God has done in Jesus is cancelled it completely. Our sins were higher than our heads.

We can't fully appreciate either the number or the odiousness of all our sin, but we have some idea, surely.

And it is all taken away by Jesus who paid the price for them. His blood is worth more than 10,000 bags of gold.

[ 21 : 16 ] His blood is priceless. His blood cancels debt. His death for us gives us life and freedom.

Do we sometimes lapse into forgetting the extent to which we've been forgiven in Jesus? And might that have something to do with how we struggle to forgive?

Have we failed to grasp or appreciate the astronomical nature of our debt and the joy of having it graciously cancelled by God?

Have we become miserly in our forgiveness because we somehow think we've not been forgiven much? We have been forgiven an astonishing amount.

have you been forgiven this morning? Are you a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ?

[ 22 : 23 ] Or is that astronomical debt still a burden on your shoulders? Go to the cross. Go to the cross of Jesus Christ where his blood was shed for sinners like you and me and where you will find not the burden of some debt repayment scheme but where you will find full and free debt cancellation simply by putting your trust in him.

Will you do that if you haven't already done that? Put your trust in Christ today. He says he won't turn away anyone who comes to him and he invites you to come to him because he is the saviour of sinners.

Then we get this man's next act. Having had his debt cancelled, he saunters out of the king's presence and immediately finds one of his fellow servants who owes him a hundred silver coins.

Now that's not small change. A hundred silver coins is about a hundred days wages and that shows you the real debt that occurs when we sin against someone.

It's not small and it doesn't do well to minimize something that isn't small. We ought to acknowledge it for what it is. this man owes the other a hundred silver coins.

[ 24 : 09 ] That's not nothing on its own. However, in comparison to ten thousand bags of gold, what is it?

What is it really? Is he going to get hung up on this having just come out of the king's presence? surely like he's walking on air, this burden having been relieved.

No, he physically gets a hold of this person and demands his money back with menaces. Pay me back what you owe me, he demanded.

And we are supposed to be appalled that anyone would act in this way. he grabbed him and began to choke him.

His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him be patient with me and I will pay it back. Same thing he said. But he refuses. He doesn't have pity.

[ 25 : 15 ] Instead he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. When the other servants saw what had happened they were outraged and went and told their master everything that had happened.

When fellow servants, that is fellow believers, see a person who is supposed to be a believer and see that their characteristic is that they're an unforgiving person, this just doesn't add up to them.

It causes them to stumble. They're scandalized and outraged because how can someone who's been forgiven so much be unforgiving? How can that be one of the things they're known for?

How can that be part of the way they are? The servants here are outraged and go and tell the king because it's so obscene what this servant has done to his fellow servant, having just had all his debt cancelled.

told. That's what it's like for us when we don't forgive. And the way in which we can forgive is to remember how much we've been forgiven.

[ 26 : 41 ] Now, here's an objection, reconciliation, and that is, what if the person has not acknowledged their sin?

What if they have not repented? What if they have not apologized, not asked for forgiveness? Well, here's the thing. Reconciliation is very unlikely to happen until that person acknowledges the wrong.

in fact, if that person sinned you against you in a way that is harmful or dangerous to you, you can't be around that person, of course, until it's safe once again to do so, if it ever is.

Reconciliation can't happen, and you can't ever act in a way that enables their sin or affirms their sin, but you can still promise and decide to cancel the real debt, to refuse to demand payback from them.

You can still forgive. You can, as it were, sweep your side of the street, and in many cases where people have fallen out, it's often the case that people have sinned against one another.

[ 28 : 00 ] We are often not entirely the victim in such a case. There may be, and that requires discernment. But often we can see where we have gone wrong as well, acknowledge our wrong, ask for forgiveness, and that may well then prompt the other to do the same.

Paul says in Romans, as far as it depends on you, live in peace with everyone. So don't excuse yourself from the responsibility to forgive if you need to forgive.

What happens to this wretched man? Well, the master calls the servant in. You wicked servant, I cancelled all that debt of yours because you begged me to.

Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you? And then what comes next in verse 34 is really a picture of damnation. It's a sign that this man was never really touched by grace at all.

And so therefore, just as Jesus promised after the conclusion to the Lord's Prayer, that unless you forgive, my Father will not forgive you, there we get a picture of that again and again a statement to close this passage.

[ 29 : 31 ] This is how my Heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart. So no kind of caveated, qualified, I'll just say it but not mean it type forgiveness.

From your heart. Who do you need to forgive today? We were talking about Corrie Ten Boom.

The man had his hand outstretched, didn't he? Sister, do you forgive me? Now, what's going through her mind at this point are the horrors of Ravensbrook, memories of her beloved sister Betsy dying there, of the humiliation and degradation that took place in Ravensbrook and of which this man was a perpetrator.

her? But what we've just been talking about was also ringing in her mind. Forgiveness is non-negotiable.

Forgiveness happens in light of how much we have been forgiven. Now, she did not wait to feel anything. You sometimes hear this expression, maybe you can find it in your heart to forgive that person.

[ 31 : 08 ] I'm not going to find it in my heart to forgive anyone. I'm going to find it in Christ Jesus. I'm going to find it at the cross. We can't be forgiving apart from the grace of God in Christ Jesus.

That's where I'm going to find it to forgive someone. She looked to him and out of sheer obedience she took out her hand from her pocket and reached it out towards him.

Out of sheer obedience to forgive. She made that promise and decision to cancel the real debt that this person had towards her.

But as their hands touched and as her hand grasped his hand it was as if she could feel the love of God, the grace of God, the mercy of God flowing down her arm and into those clasped hands of SS guard and victim of the Holocaust and she said brother I forgive you.

it's not one and done. It so often doesn't happen in that one off special kind of way.

[ 32 : 43 ] We need to work at it. It's often a process. forgiveness. But surely what we've learned together this morning tells us that simply ignoring the need to forgive, the command to forgive is not an option for Christians.

It may require pastoral help and counsel but surely it's a journey worth being on. The journey as a forgiven person to be a forgiving person.

Amen. Let's pray together now. Heavenly Father we thank you for your word. And we pray Lord you'd seal the truth of your word upon our hearts today.

That Lord these words would not fall to the ground but rather they would be used of you to make us more like your beloved son Jesus.

the one who paid our unpayable debt. And Lord help us to appreciate how much we've been forgiven so that those real debts that people have towards us we can make that promise and decision to cancel them.

[ 34 : 08 ] To give up harboring ill will and indeed Lord where it's appropriate where it's wise to seek reconciliation and healing.

Lord it would be wonderful as if we were to hear in coming days of broken friendships being repaired in response to your word this morning of healing to take place in relationships in families in between friends and indeed even within this congregation Lord your grace is powerful we ought to show that we are forgiving you give us a way to do that by showing Lord just how much we owed and just how astonishingly generous and gracious you are to forgive that debt we remember that at the cross that debt was paid in full so that there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ

Jesus our Lord and we do pray again Father that if any have not yet placed their trust in Jesus as Saviour and as Lord that they would turn from their sin that they would Lord appeal to you on the basis of your mercy not hoping to somehow repay you but simply would receive and rest upon Jesus the one who has paid for all our sins and by whose resurrection promises us a new and eternal life in him may they do that now Lord and may it be to your honour and glory and praise Lord make us gracious people kind hearted merciful loving people whose witness is to a gracious loving and kind saviour and father Lord we need your spirit for this pour out your spirit into our hearts

Lord and may he pour out the love of God into our hearts change us make us like the one who even though he knew no sin became sin for us so that in him we might become the righteousness of God we ask these things in Jesus holy name amen to hate turn on expose to and who are they fall ou a sus you or orasking and curse you or the you or and Er can do you or he or can ah or you or or you