

To God Alone Be The Glory

Let's say you go to the bank for a loan, a sizeable loan, four times as much as you earn in a year. A month later you make your first payment. Second month, second payment. Third month, third payment. During the fourth month, you are called into the bank for a meeting. You think to yourself: "Oh, no! What's wrong with my loan? I know I made the last three payments on time." You gather proofs of payment to make sure. When the meeting begins, you don't even give the bank representative time to speak: "What's problem with my loan?" you ask. "I know I've made the payments on time." "Oh, there's no problem," says the rep. "The bank has forgiven your debt." Of course, you're elated. But you're not used to hearing the term "forgive" outside of church circles. "Oh, that's right!" you think to yourself. "I had forgotten that 'forgive' is a banking term. Now that I've had this big loan forgiven, I have a better sense of what it's like not to be punished for my sins. I wonder if Jesus had this in mind when he taught us to pray, 'And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us?'"

My friends, I submit to you that this is exactly what our Lord had in mind when he taught us to forgive as he forgives. In real life loans aren't forgiven very often: it would put banks out of business. So it's special when a debt is forgiven. Keep this in mind. Joseph is about to help us learn to FORGIVE AS GOD FORGIVES.

Let's review the story of Joseph. His father Jacob had 12 sons. Joseph was daddy's favorite. His brothers couldn't stand to have him around. So they got rid of him, sold him into slavery. Joseph was taken to Egypt where the Lord blessed him again and again so that, after many years, Joseph became prime minister of Egypt. The King of Egypt wanted Joseph to store up food during the seven years of plenteous harvest which God had promised. A seven-year famine was coming to Egypt that would affect the whole middle east, including Joseph's brothers up in the land of Canaan.

When Joseph's brothers came to Egypt to buy food, they had to appear before Joseph. His brothers didn't recognize him because Joseph was dressed like an Egyptian and spoke through an interpreter. Here was his chance for revenge. But Joseph had already forgiven his brothers. *On the other hand he was in a position to test them and see if they had changed. When he was certain they had repented of what they had done to him, he revealed himself to them. "I am your brother whom you sold into slavery." But instead of revenge, Joseph demonstrated his forgiveness by moving his father, his brothers, and their families to Egypt so that he could take care of them during the rest of the famine. In fact he showed them love for the next 17 years.

But eventually their father Jacob died. Joseph's brothers were worried that he would take revenge. ¹⁶*So they sent word to Joseph, saying, "Your father left these instructions before he died: ¹⁷'This is what you are to say to Joseph: I ask you to forgive your brothers the sins and the*

wrongs they committed in treating you so badly.’ Now[, dear brother,] please forgive the sins of the servants of the God of your father.”

Imagine that you’re Joseph. What are you feeling? I know I’d be a little upset if someone thought I wanted to get even for something I had verbally forgiven. We don’t know exactly what Joseph thought, but *When their message came to him, Joseph wept.* Can you see why? If his father Jacob really **had** told the brothers to send this message, then that meant his own father didn’t think Joseph had forgiven them. And if their father Jacob had **not** told the brothers to send this message, then the brothers were so scared of Joseph that they made up a story. They lied about their father, because they didn’t think Joseph had forgiven them. Either way it’s a sad state of affairs. All this time they thought Joseph was holding a grudge, just waiting for their father to die. For 17 years they were burdened by guilt. It breaks my heart when family communication is so poor that people don’t know where they stand with each other.

¹⁸*His brothers then came and threw themselves down before him. “We are your slaves,” they said. “You can do anything you want to us. All we want is our lives. We know we made you be a slave for a long time [probably 12 years]. We’re full of remorse.”*

Joseph was soooo not like what they expected. ¹⁹*Joseph said to them, “Don’t be afraid. Am I in the place of God?”* That’s like saying, “Revenge is something that

belongs to God alone. How could I presume to act like God and take revenge on you? ²⁰*You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.”* God can use anyone’s vilest, most hateful actions to accomplish more good than the bad that was planned. That’s one of the coolest things about God, don’t you agree? You see this same grace in the death of God’s own Son, Jesus: through the hatred of Jesus’ countrymen, God brought about rescue from sin for everyone on earth. *Back to our story: since God had forgiven Joseph’s brothers, Joseph forgave them. ²¹*“So then, don’t be afraid,” he said. “I will provide for you and your children.” And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them.*

God wants us to forgive others. I know you know this, but if you’re normal you need to be reminded. Think of someone who has hurt you. Okay, some of you can think of more than one person. You’re forming a list in your mind: a former close friend, a boss, your spouse, a parent, someone at work, your brother or sister or cousin, someone at church, your current pastor, a former pastor. Maybe this person lied to you, chewed you out when you didn’t have it coming, insinuated there’s something wrong with you, taught you wrong about God’s Word, led you down a wrong path, made you feel like you were worthless, put you down, betrayed you in some way, was cold and unfriendly. God wants you to forgive that person.

In fact we need to forgive others. It will hurt us if we don’t forgive. Did you hear what Jesus taught in today’s Gospel? You

could lose eternal life just by not forgiving someone. Failing to forgive will hold you back in your personal spiritual growth. Our failure to forgive could easily keep our church from progressing. Even secular counselors have figured out the importance of forgiving in order for you to make it through the healing process when you've been wronged in some way.

When Leonardo da Vinci was painting the "Last Supper," he had an intense, bitter argument with a fellow painter. Leonardo was so enraged that he decided to paint the face of his enemy into the face of Judas. That way the hated painter's face would be preserved for ages in the face of the betraying disciple. When Leonardo finished Judas, everyone easily recognized the face of the painter with whom Leonardo quarreled. Da Vinci continued to work on the painting. But as much as he tried, he could not paint the face of Christ. Something was holding him back. Leonardo decided his hatred toward his fellow painter was the problem. So he worked through his hatred by repainting Judas' face, replacing the image of his fellow painter with another face. Only then was he able to paint Jesus' face and complete the masterpiece. It's difficult to honor God when you're failing to forgive.

But how? How can we forgive? If you're having a problem forgiving someone, you may have lost perspective. For an attitude adjustment, try walking in God's shoes. Stroll down memory lane in your life with God's law in hand. It won't be long before you realize that you have done so many things wrong that you have an unpayable

debt before God. What do you and I deserve? (Yes, you know, but really think about it for a second. It can help us to feel the fires of hell licking at our feet.)

Now come with me to the first international bank of Calvary, where Jesus was crucified. Watch as Jesus' blood flows, causing our unpayable debt to be forgiven, paid in full. Watch the Father scoop up all the piles of sin that Jesus' death has just cancelled. Watch him. There he goes, out over the ocean. He's tying a big block of concrete to it. Ooh! Did you hear the sploosh when he dropped it in the ocean? "When God buries our sins in the deepest sea, He posts a sign for himself which reads: No Fishing!"

If you're still having trouble forgiving someone, write down everything you're upset about. I'll bet your list has fewer than a dozen items on it. If you can think of more than two dozen unforgiven items, you have a serious prob... You might be from Lake City. Doesn't matter. No matter how many sins you have not yet forgiven, compare the size of your list with how many sins God has forgiven you by letting his own Son pay your debt. The list you made looks pretty small now, doesn't it?

Forgive. What a beautiful word! You could explain what you mean by "I forgive you" with: "I choose not to punish you—not with my fist, not with my tongue, not even in my head where I make wishes." Corrie Ten Boom shares this true story in her book, "The Hiding Place." Corrie and her sister had been thrown into a German concentration camp during WWII. It was a church service in Munich that I saw him,

the former S.S. man who had stood guard at the shower room door in the processing center at Ravensbruck. He was the first of our actual jailers that I had seen since that time. And suddenly it was all there—the roomful of mocking men, the heaps of clothing, Betsie’s pain-blانched face. He came up to me as the church was emptying, beaming and bowing. “How grateful I am for your message, Fraulein,” he said. “To think that, as you say, He has washed my sins away!” His hand was thrust out to shake mine. And I, who had preached so often...the need to forgive, kept my hand at my side. Even as the angry, vengeful thoughts boiled through me, I saw the sin of them. Jesus Christ had died for this man; was I going to ask for more? Lord Jesus, I prayed, forgive me and help me to forgive him. I tried to smile, I struggled to raise my hand. I could not. I felt nothing, not the slightest spark of warmth or charity. And so again I breathed a silent prayer. Jesus, I cannot forgive him. Give me Your forgiveness. As I took his hand the most incredible thing happened. From my shoulder along my arm and through my hand a current seemed to pass from me to him, while into my heart sprang a love for this stranger that almost overwhelmed me. And so I discovered that it is not on our forgiveness any more than on our goodness that the world’s healing hinges, but on [God’s forgiveness]. When He tells us to love our enemies, He gives, along with the command, the love itself.

You never know what good will come out of your forgiving others. A seminary student in a big city was tested about forgiveness. Although he preferred to work his way through seminary in some kind of church activity, the only job he could find was driving a bus in a rough part of town. One day a gang of tough teens got on board and refused to pay the fare. After a few days of this, the seminarian spotted a policeman on the corner, stopped the bus and reported them. The officer made them pay, but then he got off. When the bus rounded a corner, the gang robbed the seminarian and beat him severely. He pressed charges and the gang was rounded up. They were found guilty. But as soon as the jail sentences were given, the young Christian, knowing their spiritual need and pitying them, asked the judge if he could serve their sentences for them. The gang members and the judge were dumbfounded. “It’s because I forgive you,” he explained. His request was denied, but he visited the young men in jail and through his witness, several of them were brought to faith in Christ.

Are you still harboring ill feelings because of some hurt? If so, it’s time to forgive. God wants us to. We need to. Our new selves want to. You haven’t been sold into slavery, so you’re not even being asked to forgive as much as Joseph. For Jesus’ sake God has forgiven us more than what he asks us to forgive. **FORGIVE AS GOD FORGIVES.**