

What You Were Born Again To Do

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[0 : 00] Good morning, everyone. I'd like to thank the gentlemen for leading us today. It was a really, really good time of worship.

And it serves to set the tone for today's topic, today's text. We are going to be in Matthew 6. So if you would open up your Bibles and find Matthew 6, we're going to read the entirety of the text for the sermon series that we've been in.

We've been in the Lord's Prayer for the past several weeks. This is the second to the last week that we will be in this area. So let me read, starting in verse 9 down through verse 15.

Jesus says, Let's pray.

[1 : 39] Father, we thank you that we get to come before you and call you our Father.

We thank you for breath every day. And more than that, we thank you for our second birth in Christ Jesus. Father, help us by your Spirit to understand your Word today.

Draw us closer to you. You tell us in your Word that you call us to draw near to you and that you will draw near to us. Father, please do that today.

Help us to lift high the name of Jesus in the way that we think, in the way that we talk, in the way that we act. We pray that all of this would bring you great glory.

In Jesus' name. Amen. So our challenge today is to be obedient to the Word of God.

[2 : 45] Specifically in verses 12, 14, and 15. That's where our focus will be today. 12, 14, and 15. Because this is where the word forgive appears six times.

Next week, Jeremy will conclude our series on the Lord's Prayer with the final verse of the actual prayer, which is verse 13. So Jesus teaches us to pray these words.

Forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors. Now, I'm certain that all of us have prayed those words. I'm certain of it.

But have you ever meant it? Do you actually feel comfortable saying to God, please forgive me in the same manner that I forgive others?

Does that cause you any discomfort? Because as believers, we love the subject of forgiveness, do we not? We celebrate forgiveness.

[3 : 51] In fact, I would say that forgiveness is the most frequent topic that we sing about every Sunday as a church. It's the main theme.

And today was no exception. You know, here's a sample of some of the words that we just got done singing together. Or in the new one, just caught that.

That's a good one. I believe the final verse says about Jesus, is there a greater vision of grace?

Without forgiveness, we can't even begin to define the word grace or mercy.

We can't define God's character, the purpose of the cross, the gospel itself, being born again, or the gift of eternal life.

Forgiveness is the heart of the gospel. In fact, when Jesus rose from the dead and appeared to his disciples, this is what he said in Luke 24.

[5 : 08] Thus, it is written that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations beginning from Jerusalem.

So Jesus said that the gospel that we preach to the world is the message of God's loving forgiveness. God is love, yes?

And God has made his love known to us through forgiveness. In 1 Corinthians 13, we read what love is all about.

Perhaps you're familiar, love is patient and kind. And it goes on. It says, love is not irritable or resentful.

Well, some translations put it this way, love keeps no record of wrongs. That's love.

[6 : 15] Now we have to ask ourselves, does God love us this way? Love keeps no record of wrongs. Well, in Psalm 103, we hear that as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions or our sins from us.

So yes, that is how God loves us. In today's text, Jesus uses two different words for sin. You might notice in verse 12, sins are called debts.

And in verses 14 and 15, sins are called trespasses. It's interesting. I'd like to unpack that for just a second. Who here has ever broken a window?

Anybody? Two and a half of us. Okay, so two of us. Yep, accidentally broken a window. And that would, like a whoops.

As a child, I was known in my family as the one who broke windows. I remember being directly responsible for at least four broken windows.

[7 : 32] Three that belonged to our family and one that did not. In fact, there was one window pane that I broke on two separate occasions.

Okay, so the act of breaking a window, that could be called a trespass. I did what I should not have done. And the money that I had to pay to replace that window was my debt.

So the offending act was a trespass and the debt is the amount needed to cover the damage.

Starting in verse 12, Jesus begins to draw our attention to our own sin as a debt that we have run up against a holy God.

Now stop and think about your own debt to God. Please don't answer this out loud, but how many sins have you committed?

Just take a second and think. How many sins have you committed? How many times have you failed to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength?

[8 : 45] How many times have you known the good that you ought to have done and you left it undone? Every single one of your sins is very serious.

Your debt is unimaginably large. I want you to turn over to Matthew 18. In Matthew 18, Jesus tells a parable to illustrate debts and forgiveness.

It's the story of a servant who owed the king 10,000 talents. 10,000 talents was this debt a servant owed the king.

Now a talent is the amount of money equal to about 20 years of work. That's one talent is worth about 20 years of work.

So yes, mathematicians in the room, that means that this servant's debt was equal to an annual salary times 200,000 years.

[9 : 59] Adults in the room, you can think about your annual salary and multiply that by 200,000. Now I'll help. I'm going to help you. Okay?

In Ryan's international version of the Bible, this is how the translation would read. The servant owed a kajillion bajillion dollars. That's really the point that Jesus is making here.

It was a debt that he could never repay. And guess what? That is you and that is me. Our many sins place us in debt to the king in ways that we can't even really grasp.

It's an utterly hopeless position. But here's the good news. In the parable, Jesus tells us, verse 27, that out of pity for the servant, the master of that servant released him and forgave the debt.

He forgave the debt that he owed that the king knew he could never repay. And that is a picture of the gospel. Like the servant, we deserve an infinite punishment for our sins that have carried an infinite debt.

[11 : 16] But because of Jesus, our trespasses are forgiven and our debt is fully paid. That's why we sing our sins, they are many, his mercy is more.

Now go back up a few verses in Matthew 18 and see why Jesus told this parable in the first place. Starting in verse 21, then Peter came up and said to him, Lord, how often will my brother sin against me and I forgive him?

As many as seven times? And Jesus said to him, no, I don't say to you seven times, but 77 times or 70 times seven.

Jesus told this parable of the servant and the king because Peter had just asked about his own responsibility to forgive others. That's what brought this parable on.

Peter says, do I have to forgive a brother who sins against me more than once? how about seven times? Does that seem pretty gracious?

[12 : 27] And Jesus in essence says, don't keep count. In fact, he's basically saying this, no disciple of mine will keep a record of wrongs.

That's what he's saying. no disciple of mine will keep a record of wrongs. And then he goes on to tell the story of a servant who owed the king an infinite debt and it was forgiven.

Now put yourself in the mind or the shoes of this servant. His life was just changed. It's like he was born again.

And we would expect this servant with his new lease on life, with his slate wiped clean, to go out and imitate this mercy to his fellow servants.

So let's find out what happens. Verse 28, after he was forgiven the debt. Verse 28, But when that same servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him 100 denarii, which is about three months worth of work.

[13 : 45] Okay? 100 days worth of work. And seizing him, he began to choke him, saying, pay what you owe. So his fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him, have patience with me and I will pay you.

But he refused. And he went and put him in prison until he should pay the debt. And when his fellow servants saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed and they went and reported to their master all that had taken place.

Do you get it? Everyone who is listening to this story, including Peter, got the point. How could a servant who has been forgiven an enormous debt, be so unforgiving over a much smaller debt? Now that's a story. See, if you truly understand what God has done for you, the only response is to forgive others.

How could we not? One side note, did you notice that his fellow servants were greatly distressed? unforgiveness affected more than just the two people who were in that conflict together.

[15 : 10] And that is true for us today as well. With the body of Christ, we suffer when bitterness and resentment replace forgiveness.

worse than that. Worse than that. When you hold on to unforgiveness, catch this, your brothers and sisters will begin to distance themselves from you.

Did you catch that? When you hold on to unforgiveness, your brothers and sisters will begin to distance themselves from you. Now why do I say that? Because when you're unwilling to forgive, those around you have reason to believe, that your unforgiveness will eventually turn toward them. Because we're sinners. We're going to sin. We're not perfect and so the pattern might repeat itself. So in this parable, Jesus lays out how God's children are to be.

And yet he knows our weakness. He knows that this is hard to do. That's why you might notice that back, in Matthew 6, this is the only part of the Lord's prayer that Jesus decides to circle back to and explain.

[16 : 29] As Jesus says, this is how you pray, forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors. You can just picture his disciples becoming very uncomfortable and squirming in their seats saying, that can't mean what I think it means, does it?

And then right on cue because Jesus knows their thoughts, says, for if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

forgive others. Now that last verse should shake you to your core. If I refuse to forgive others, I don't have God's forgiveness.

That is extremely serious. Now don't misunderstand the Lord. Don't misunderstand this. At first glance, it almost sounds like Jesus is saying, once you forgive others, that good deed will cause God to forgive you.

And if we understand things that way, then God's forgiveness would be dependent on our forgiving others first. But Jesus is not explaining forgiveness in a sequential pattern like that.

[17 : 43] We can't put his words here up against the clear gospel message throughout all the scriptures. God's word is clear. We love because he first loved us.

We forgive because first he forgave us. See, in terms of salvation, we do not obtain forgiveness by forgiving others or by any other good work.

In fact, a familiar passage, Ephesians 2, this is what verse 4 and 5 says, So our standing before God is entirely of grace.

None of it is through good works, even the good work of forgiveness. Don't forget that. And yet, our new life in Christ necessarily will result in good works, like forgiveness.

Are you still in Ephesians 2? Now we're going to read verse 8. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

[19 : 08] For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

Do you see the pattern here? God loves us first. His forgiveness through Christ gives us new birth, and as new creations, we will walk in the good works that God has prepared for us.

The one whose sins are forgiven by God will forgive others their sins. It's in his new nature. Now, during my research, I studied a scholarly book that helped me understand this.

It's called Flap Your Wings by P.D. Eastman. How many of you have read any books by P.D. Eastman? Okay. Okay.

So, Flap Your Wings by P.D. Eastman. Our family has read this one many times. Looks like this. It's in our collection here.

[20 : 16] Okay. Now, this is what it's about. I'm not going to read you the whole thing. But it's about a little boy who's walking along, and he sees an egg in a path.

And so he picks it up, and he puts it in the nest above him. And then Mr. and Mrs. Bird come home, and they take care of the egg.

And when it hatches, it does not look like they expected this baby to look. In fact, it looks more like a baby alligator, more so than a baby bird.

Nevertheless, Mr. and Mrs. Bird name him Junior, and feed him everything that they can find. The baby gets bigger and bigger until he crowds out the whole nest.

And then Mr. and Mrs. Bird decide, it is time to teach their baby to fly. And now I will read the last portion of the story for you. So Mrs.

[21 : 16] Bird pushed and pushed. Mr. Bird showed Junior how to fly. Jump into the air like this, he said, then flap your wings. So Junior got ready, he took a big breath and jumped.

Up, up, up into the air he went. Flap your wings, yelled Mrs. Bird. Flap your wings, yelled Mr. Bird. Junior flapped and flapped but it didn't do any good. He didn't have any wings.

Down, down, down went Junior, down into the water, splash. Here's the twist. It was cool and wet in the water.

It was just right for Junior. Junior. You know, said Mrs. Bird, I don't think Junior was a bird at all. Oh, it doesn't matter, Mr.

Bird said, he's happy now and just look at him swim. I hope that causes you to want to read the whole thing. So Junior was an alligator.

[22 : 23] Now, sure, he acted like a bird for a short while. But in the end, alligators will do what alligators will do. His nature wasn't to fly.

His nature was to swim. And only when he began to swim was it just right. And so it is with the redeemed child of God.

Our father forgave us and caused us to be born again of his spirit. And it is in our new nature to forgive as our father forgives. You see, a follower of Jesus who doesn't forgive is denying his nature.

It's like an alligator trying to fly. When we don't forgive others, we are acting like a different creature altogether. Specifically, our old self.

And we aren't quite right. See, Paul tells us in Ephesians 4 to put off your old self which belongs to the former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds and to put on the new self created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

[23 : 42] A bird flies, an alligator swims, and a child of God forgives. It's the best example of the saying, like father, like son.

this is what Jesus means when he says in the sermon on the mount, this is the next slide here, this is what he means when he says, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you so that you may be sons of your father who is in heaven.

See, loving your enemies, we just established this, it doesn't make you a child of God. loving your enemies doesn't make you a child of God. But if you're a child of God, you will forgive, you will love

your enemies.

This is a must. So if someone claims to be a Christian but doesn't forgive, there are two possibilities. Is it possible that this is a child of God who is willfully sinning and needs to repent for the forgiveness of that sin?

for the true follower of Christ, this command in the Lord's prayer will cut to the heart and will cause us to confess our sin, to repent and to be obedient.

[25 : 05] I will forgive. The other possibility is that the one who is not forgiving others has never experienced the forgiveness of God. That's the other possibility.

because the person who refuses to obey Jesus does not see him as Lord. If it isn't in this person's nature to forgive, has that person been born again?

That is a legitimate question we can ask. Does this person have the new nature? Because remember, James tells us that the kind of faith that has no works is what?

Dead. It's a dead faith. God is saved. Remember Ephesians 2. We have been saved by grace through faith and when we have been saved we are created in Christ Jesus for good works that God has prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

This is also why in 1 John 4, John the apostle says this, this is so hard for us to read. If anyone says, I love God and hates his brother, he is a liar.

[26 : 22] For he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. That is hard. So let me ask, are you struggling with forgiveness?

Who haven't you forgiven? It's probably the person that you've been thinking about throughout this message. Jesus is telling you to cancel the record of debt just like it has been for you.

Forgive the smaller debt because you've been forgiven the bigger debt. That's what forgiveness means. But we need to clarify some things because there are some things that forgiveness is not.

Okay, so we can do away with some confusion. forgiving someone does not mean that what the person did was okay. Yes? If someone sins against you, it wasn't okay.

I know I have a terrible habit. I was talking with Jeremy about this. I have a terrible habit of responding to apologies by saying, it's no big deal, that's okay. Every time. But it might be more accurate to say, you are forgiven.

[27 : 40] forgiven. It's done. That debt is gone. Even without saying, it's okay. That's right in line with the example of God, who never said, you sinned, no big deal.

No. You sinned, it is a big deal, and I forgive you. Forgiving someone also does not mean that trust is restored.

forgiveness. Jesus makes it clear that those who believe in him are forgiven. But he also did say, you know, those who are faithful with little will be faithful with much.

You see, trust is earned, but that doesn't mean that forgiveness is earned. Forgiveness also doesn't mean that you're healed from the damage necessarily that was caused or that you aren't experiencing the pain anymore.

Forgiveness doesn't even mean that the person has repented. That's hard. Does that make sense? What if the person who wronged you has no remorse?

[28 : 58] It might not seem possible, it might not feel possible to forgive someone who has intentionally caused you pain, physically or emotionally. but there is hope.

There's hope. When forgiving someone feels out of reach, you can look to your Savior, Jesus.

Here are some examples. When Jesus was being crucified, this is what Jesus said, Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.

Now notice that. He's praying that the Father will forgive them and cause them to repent and believe. Father, forgive them. That's a powerful prayer. And you might be familiar with the story of Stephen in Acts 7 who was preaching the gospel to a very hostile crowd and they turned on him and they began to stone him for his faith.

And this is what verse 60 says. Falling to his knees, he, that's Stephen, cried out with a loud voice, Lord, do not hold this sin against them.

[30 : 17] And when he had said this, he fell asleep, which is another word for, that's when he died. Those were his last words. Lord, don't hold this sin against them. Now you notice he didn't say, like while he's being stoned, he didn't say, I forgive you.

That might not have actually caused a lot of really positive reaction in that moment, but his focus was not necessarily that interaction.

It was, Father, I don't want to hold this sin against them, please don't hold this sin against them. So if the spirit is stirring up in you an opportunity to forgive somebody, don't let the person's lack of repentance stop you.

Maybe you don't start with the words, I forgive you, but instead pray like Jesus did and like Stephen did. Father, forgive them. Forgive them.

By praying in this way, you align yourself with the heart of God. As you pray for your father to forgive your enemies, you will be reminded that God has forgiven you a bigger debt and a bigger sin than what your enemy owes you or has committed against you.

[31 : 35] And this will help you pray, Father, forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors. Forgiveness means that we see no debt. The record of wrongs is erased.

In other words, we're choosing grace rather than bitterness. forgiveness. Because when we were enemies of God, that's how he loved us.

So that's how we love our enemies. Back in 1845, there was a poem that was written titled, Father, forgive them.

And I think it illustrates forgiveness beautifully. This is what the poem reads. Father, forgive them as a flower at fair when crushed beneath some rude and careless tread breathes forth its fragrance on the balmy air, regaling him who hath its beauties shed.

Now that's powerful. You see, the flower is crushed under the heel of the careless. And in response, the flower blesses the offender and all those around with a pleasing fragrance.

[32 : 51] It's a pretty good picture of forgiveness. When we forgive, as we've been forgiven, we are reminded of the gospel itself.

And when we forgive others their trespasses, we demonstrate the gospel to them. We are showing the world what it looks like to keep no record of wrongs.

I want to finish with one other short text. I'll just read it for us.

It's in Colossians 2. It's verse 13 and 14. And you who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, amen, all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands.

This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. I can't think of a text that wraps up this whole picture of forgiveness better than that.

[34 : 10] So let's pray that we can honor Jesus by rejoicing in the forgiveness that we have received and that we can honor him by following his example and by forgiving others.

Let's pray. Let's pray. Father, we need your help to pray in the way that Jesus taught us.

But since Jesus is our Lord, we desire deeply to follow his commands, to follow his words.

Help us to pray sincerely, forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors. Lord, we also ask that you would convict us when we are not quick to forgive because we need to be reminded of the gospel.

And if we have been forgiven, it is in our nature now to forgive in the way that you do. Lord, search our hearts.

[35 : 25] You know that this is hard for us. it's hard for us. But we pray, Father, we pray that your spirit would continue to guide us into all truth and to make us more and more like our Savior, Jesus, who is absolutely forgiving.

loving. We thank you for this truth. Please challenge us and be patient with us as we go forward, desiring to bring you great glory, looking forward to the day that we see you face to face.

In Jesus' name, amen. amen. Thank you.