

Forgiveness

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Date: 13 May 2018

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[0 : 0 0] Amen. I'm pleased to have a seat. And if you have a Bible, then please turn with me to Matthew chapter 6. And let's pause for just a second and let's pray and let's still our hearts and ask that God would be so gracious and teach us many wonderful things about him this morning. So let us pray as we come to Matthew chapter 6.

Father in heaven, as we come before you today, we recognize that we do so in the name of your son, Jesus Christ. And it's our prayer through him that we ask as we return to your words now that your spirit would take these truths and would apply them and plant them deep inside our hearts, that we would leave here changed, that we would leave here with a bigger sense, a grander sense of who you are.

Father, we realize that our only hope is your grace. And so, Father, we fall at your feet this morning and worship you for who you are, asking that you be with us now in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, here we are then at the penultimate sermon of this little series that we've been in over the last little while, thinking about the Lord's Prayer, this pattern prayer that Jesus taught his disciples to pray so that their hearts would be aligned to the pattern of his kingdom.

And so in preparation for this morning, the figure that's been in my head all week is this figure on the screen. Now, I really Googled so many times to make sure I had the amount of zeros correct in this, so I hope that is correct. If not, you blame Google.

So the figure that's been in my head this week is 1.534 trillion. I wonder if anyone's got any idea as to why that might be in my mind.

[2 : 0 0] Well, it's the figure that according to research done by the money charity, the figure that represents the cumulative debt of every single person in the UK.

So last year, if you took every single penny that every single person owed and you added it up, apparently according to the money charity, you'd get to 1.524 trillion pounds.

That's a lot of money. A lot of money. Remember working in the corporate sector for a few years, you learn very quickly that our economy is based on borrowing, it's based on debt.

Every single one of us here is familiar with what it means to owe money. Let me break that down for you, what that means. It means the average family in the UK owes just over £56,000.

The average individual in the UK owes just over £30,000. So whether that's mortgages, whether that's student loans, whether that's borrowing money from banks, whether that's even just borrowing a tenner from your friend, that's what that figure is on the screen.

[3 : 1 1] And this morning, Jesus is going to get us to think about debt. He is, in particular, going to prompt us to consider the biggest debt that you and I owe.

And he's not just going to ask us to consider the biggest debt that you and I owe. Actually, he's going to ask us to deal with our debts. Here's the big idea for this morning. To deal with our debts.

And of course, Jesus hasn't slipped into financial consultant mode. What he's talking about is the reality of sin. And all its messiness, sin that's working havoc in our lives and in the world in which we live.

Our sin against this holy God who made us rebelling against him. Our sin, and we're going to be thinking about other people's sin against us.

Now, immediately you'll sense with those opening reflections, you'll sense that we are at the sharp end of this prayer. We are on sensitive turf with these words.

[4 : 20] What I mean by that is that these are the words that probably in this prayer most touch our nerves and emotions as Jesus goes in loving pursuit, all-out pursuit of our hearts and our minds.

Jesus wants all of us this morning. And I'm sure as we travel through these verses together that God, through his Spirit, as his Spirit does his work amongst us and in us, for many of us we are going to be convicted.

And for many of us this might hurt. And for some of us this might even bring back really painful memories, whether it's recent or whether it's distant, of forgiveness.

But here's the promise why we should hang on. Because if we listen, and if we take what Jesus is saying to heart, then there is immense freedom, and there is immense joy to be found in his words.

Because remember, as we think about this whole area of forgiveness, remember who is speaking here. This is Jesus. He is not like the demon headmaster. If you were like me, you used to watch that show when you were young.

[5 : 32] He's not like the demon headmaster that once he's found out what his pupils are doing, he sends them to detention and watches them as he makes them write outlines. Maybe that was my experience of detention.

He is not like that. He is a loving saviour. He is the king of his people. And he's the great lover of souls. And he is the great physician.

And when he dons the gown, and when he places his chair, when he goes to do surgery on our hearts, we have to understand and know that his knife is the one that brings life.

Jesus is going to operate on our hearts this morning. And with all that as backdrop to get us thinking, here's the words that Jesus tells his disciples to pray.

And forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors. That's from the NIV. Now immediately you'll see that when it comes to facing up to forgiveness, this is what Jesus is prompting his disciples to do, face up to forgiveness.

[6 : 37] You'll see that Jesus wants his disciples to think along two axes. There's the Godward axis, the first bit of that sentence. And then there's the manward axis.

So all I want to do this morning is just to get us to think about those two axes as it plays out in our lives. So what I want to suggest is that there are five ways that praying this prayer for the disciple should impact them.

Now, if you know me well enough, you'll know that I love to alliterate. And these are all going to begin with C. Now, if you have, I should have mentioned this at the start, if you have one of these notices, you'll notice that there's space for sermon notes on the back.

So please encourage me, write something down that I can see. We're taking this away. But this is how this is going to plan and play out in our lives. Five ways that this is going to impact us. Ready for this?

Give me something. Yeah, ready for this. Great. Here is the Godward axis and the manward axis. Here is the first way that this should impact us. Firstly, it should confront us.

[7 : 36] Friends, let me ask you, as you say, sit here this afternoon.

When was the last time you stilled yourself and stopped yourself, found yourself on your knees, thinking about the gravity of your sin? Because here is Jesus lovingly, do you see what he's doing?

He's stopping his disciples in their tracks and he's forcing them to face up for their need of forgiveness. And what he's doing is he's seeking to create in his disciples, if you like, a pair of spiritual antennae that are receptive to the spiritual battle that they are in when it comes to sin.

And I wonder if some of us here this morning, have we got too friendly and too comfortable with our sin? I remember being at school when Steve Irwin came on the scene, broke onto the scene.

Every boy in class wanted to be Steve Irwin. If you remember him, Steve Irwin, the Australian zookeeper, he had the show known as the Crocodile Hunter. What is he doing?

[9 : 15] He's doing crazy things with crocodiles. He's feeding crocodiles. He's poking crocodiles. He's seeking crocodiles out on their terrain. And he's trying to swim with crocodiles. He's trying to wrestle with crocodiles.

And I'm watching this thinking, does he know these are crocodiles? I mean, honestly, did he skip that class in biology? Did he not watch Crocodile Dundee? Maybe even TikTok and Peter Pan could have got Steve Irwin to that conclusion that these are not animals that you mess with.

What does he do when he gets bored of crocodiles? He turns his attention to stingrays. He goes swimming with stingrays. And what happens? One of them stings him in the heart and he dies, 2006.

Remember the shock in the media at the time, this tragic death. And it was a tragic death, but the shock in the media at the time, how could this have happened? And we're sitting there thinking, what else did you expect? Friends, when it comes to sin, let me ask you seriously, there are some of us swimming with stingrays.

Do we understand what we're doing? They may be little stingrays. They may be big stingrays, but a stingray is still a stingray. And that sting will hurt. Do you see how these words that Jesus is telling his disciples to pray is forcing them to be constantly examining their hearts and to be daily on their knees before their heavenly father, saying, Father, I know that I have wandered to the water and I know you have told me that it's not safe to go there.

[10 : 41] Would you forgive me? And would you help me to get out of the water? These words should confront us, friends, as to the seriousness of our sin.

And secondly, they should comfort us. Because when we ask for forgiveness, we have to understand and know that God has resoundingly and finally given the answer to that question in Christ.

That if our trust is in him as our savior, if we know him as the one who has taken our sin upon himself on the cross, and as we know him as the one who credits us with his perfect God-honoring life because our lives are hidden in him, then we know that not only are we forgiven of our past sins, of our present sins, of our future sins because of his grace, but more than that, we are deemed righteous in God's sight and God amazingly adopts us as his sons and daughters, all because we are in Jesus Christ.

That is the gospel. And it is incredible that you and I have added nothing to our salvation, but God, moved out of his sheer love, has sent his son in our place to die for our sin.

And so we sing, when Satan tempts me to despair and he tells me of the guilt within, that upward I look to the cross and see him there who made an end to all my sin because the sinless Savior died.

[12 : 16] My sinful soul is counted free because God the just is satisfied to look on him and pardon me. That is the gospel.

Do you not love singing about it? Isn't there something wonderful about singing gospel truths that gets them right down into our soul? Friends, this is the gospel.

Some of us here today and you feel like Satan has got you in a headlock because of your guilt. What we need to understand is that Satan would have us look anywhere else, Facebook, Google, anywhere else, rather than at the cross.

Because the cross is the power of God unto salvation. The cross is where we find identity and purpose and forgiveness and newness of life. Do you need to recall that glorious gospel truth this morning?

Scottish preacher called Robert Murray McShane from way back in the day used to tell his congregation that when they were feeling the burden of sin, when they were feeling like they were taking a few hits from Satan, for every one look at their sin, they had to take ten looks at Jesus on the cross.

[13 : 32] Remember, when I was young, my mom always taught me when I was having a tantrum to go away and count to ten. Do you remember parents used to do that? Well, it's what he was saying there. When you feel that weight, take a step back and count to ten.

Just look at the cross again and again and again and again and again and again and again and again and again because Jesus paid it all and all to him I owe.

Sin had left a crimson stain but he washed it white as snow. Friends, we need to live in that truth because if you are a Christian here this morning, then the truth is that sin is not the thing that identifies you.

Jesus is the one who defines you. In Jesus, we have a Savior who ever holds us. In Jesus, we have a Savior who ever stands for us. In Jesus, gloriously, we have a Savior who ever pleads for us at the right hand of the Father.

And there is now, therefore, no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. This is not Romans 8, verse 1, not just for a tapestry on the wall.

[14 : 44] It's not just a truth to emblazon on the side of an Ikea coffee cup. It is a truth to tattoo on every single chamber of our hearts. In Christ we stand.

In Jesus, our lives could not be in better hands. Now, you might be asking the question I was asking myself this week. If Jesus has forever paid for my sins, then why bother praying for forgiveness?

That's a good question. Surely the answer is that Jesus drives his disciples to this place so that they can daily know for themselves the joy of forgiveness and daily know and experience his transforming grace and power in their lives.

Perhaps you're here this morning and you wouldn't call Jesus your king or your saviour. Friends, it's delighted that you're here to think about these things.

It's Jesus Christ, the gospel is held out to you this morning. Let me ask you, what are you going to do with your guilt and your wrongs? Here is a saviour who offers to take your burdens upon himself and find rest and peace with God.

[15 : 59] Know that in Jesus Christ forgiveness and peace are on offer through him. What a saviour we have. These words should comfort us.

Thirdly, they should change us. As we experience God's grace, as we think about the size of our sin debt that he paid, as we consider the lengths that he went to to make our redemption possible, you and I cannot remain the same.

As we consider the magnitude of what it means to be God's people as those who have been chosen and redeemed by God, that he has set apart to live as what? A city on a hill.

Salt and light in the world. Light to the nations. A kingdom of fruit. You can go on and on and on. It's interesting, do you know what the most common New Testament word is that describes God's people?

Saints. Saints. The world would see and look into us and see the greatness of our God. You see, this prayer is from the heart of a child of God that beats for holiness.

[17:06] That says, Lord, I know my sinful heart. Would you forgive me for going my way? And would you help me by your spirit who you have sent because you love me so much to live in me?

Would you help me to go your way? That your spirit, as he works in me, would help me say no to my kingdom and building my kingdom? And would it say yes to building your kingdom?

That the values of that kingdom would become mine. And the fruit of the spirit would be evident for all to see in my life.

love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

I tell you what, that's the kind of tree that I want to be. I want people to be seeing that truth in my own life. Beating for holiness. Let me ask you, particularly when it comes to your character.

[18:07] Friends, how often are you asking God that by his grace he would help you change? To become more like Jesus? Kevin DeYoung in his great little book that I really encourage you to read, he's got some spare time over the summer, it's called The Hole in Our Holiness.

He writes this, the best looking Christian, great way to start a quote, isn't it? The best looking Christian is the one who is growing by the spirit into the likeness of Jesus. Such a simple and yet such a profound truth.

His prayer should confront us, this prayer should comfort us, this prayer should change us, and so as we move from thinking about the Godward axis of this prayer, let's now turn to consider the manward axis of this prayer.

As we also have forgiven our debtors. that is hard. And Jesus asks his disciples to examine their own hearts, having received this forgiveness from God, knowing the forgiveness in their lives, to consider their relationships with other people.

And he draws a direct link, do you see it, between the forgiveness that we receive from God and the forgiveness that we extend to other people. Because forgiveness is right at the heart of Jesus' kingdom.

[19:34] Therefore, forgiveness is to be right at the center of the hearts of his kingdom people. And so as we think about the natural implications that flow from Jesus' words there, we have to conclude that this is very hard.

As we think about the challenge that that brings to our lives, it should definitely fall into the I wish you just hadn't said that category. Wouldn't it?

I think it's the fourth thing that as we pray this prayer, Jesus' words do to us, they massively challenge us to face up to forgiveness. Now if you've got your Bibles there, Matthew 6, let's do a little bit digging in Matthew's Gospel, you'll see Jesus underscore the point at verse 15 and 14 of chapter 6.

And you can do this in your own time afterwards, he further explains and illustrates that point in chapter 18 as he tells the parable of the unforgiving servant. Now let me just quickly walk us through that parable because it's so important.

Peter asked Jesus, Lord, how often, and this is a cracking question, how often do I need to forgive my brother who sins against me? His question is essentially, Jesus, when can I legitimately stop with his whole forgiveness game?

[21 : 00] When Jerry Maguire showed me the money, Peter's saying, show me the number. When can I stop showing forgiveness to my brother? Now given that the rabbis of the day are saying three, you have to commend Peter here.

What does he have a shot at? Seven. What does Jesus say? Blows him out of the water. He says 77 or 70 times 7.

We'll go for 77. Talk about upping the ante from Jesus. Now there's Old Testament significance to that number, the background of which we just don't have time to go into today, except to say that Jesus is saying that if the world is so often about revenge, then the hearts of the people of my kingdom are to be so radically and contrastingly different to that.

Jesus tells the story of a servant who owes a very large debt. The way he tells it there, the way he explains it, is for us to recognize that this is not just an astronomically big debt, actually this is a debt that he has got zilch chance of repaying.

He's got no chance of repaying this debt. And so when it comes to repaying that debt to his master, it is little surprise that he is in no position to pay it.

[22 : 17] And his master does the expected thing. He tries to recoup his losses. He demands that his servant and his wife and children be sold into slavery.

And so when the servant comes to terms with that terrifying possibility, the servant does what any one of us would do if the stakes were that high. Looks in his coat pocket, looks at the cards that he's got left to play, and he realizes that the only one that's there is the mercy card.

Master, would you have mercy on me? He falls at the feet of his master, pleads for more time, because he sees that's the only card he's got to play. And the key verse in chapter 18, the one that says, and the master had what?

Pity on him. The master showed him mercy. And get your head around this. See, he doesn't just give him one more time. He doesn't just say you've got X amount of time to pay me back.

Actually, what he does, he goes way further than that. He writes off the debt. Can you imagine the sense of jubilation? Can you imagine the inner sense of freedom that the servant experiences as he hears those words?

[23 : 29] Well, as the servant leaves the presence of the master, lo and behold, on the way out, what does he see? He meets the guy who owes him a lot of money. Now, it's nothing compared to the debt that he's been let off from the master.

But it's still a debt. He doesn't show mercy to the guy who owes him debt. When he realizes that this isn't going to be repaid, he throws him in prison. And when the master finds out, he is absolutely livid.

And then come the crushing and challenging words of Jesus, the sting in the tail to the parable. This is how my heavenly father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from the heart.

And I fitted some new light bulbs in our house last month. Got the ladder out, went up the ladder, changed the bulbs, took the old ones off, put the new ones on, flicked on the switch, and I was just about blinded by the new bulbs, the power in them.

I could feel myself getting a tan at the same time. These were light bulbs. But what happened is I went to Amazon, went to my computer to write, because I'm British, I really strongly worded complaint to put it on Amazon.

[24 : 41] What happened is I got to Amazon and looked at what I'd actually bought. And what I'd bought were these new LED powerful and energy efficient bulbs. So I went back to the ladder, up I went, and I looked out at what these LED bulbs were showing me about the room.

And I looked in the corner, all I could see was the dirt that I haven't hoovered up. Now I take pride in my cleanliness. I looked at the corner, couldn't get away from the dirt. I looked up, all I could see was the cobwebs. I looked at the surfaces, all I could see was the dust.

Because the light from these new light bulbs, we had got so used to living with light bulbs at this level. When it got kicked up, the light had exposed all the stuff in this room that I needed to deal with.

And I realized it wasn't half as clean as I thought it was. This is what Jesus' words here are doing. This is the light shining into every corner of our lives.

What is lurking in there, says Jesus? What do you see when the light goes into the corners? What do you know that you need to deal with? Let me ask this, particularly as we think about other people, maybe even in this room this morning.

[25 : 56] When you look in your hearts, when the light is shining in those corners, what do you see? Is there stuff in there that you and I need to deal with? When it comes to being right with our brothers and sisters, when it comes to being right with those outside, are there any deep-seated thoughts?

Is there any bitterness that's brewing? Is there any harboring hurts that are in there, maybe against other people? To see how God, by his goodness, because he wants us to make us more like Jesus, is putting, maybe even painfully, his finger on particular people in our lives this morning, is through his word.

people that we need to think about being right with. Because I think this is the fifth and final thing that these words do to us, they compel us. To move from facing up to forgiveness, to fighting for forgiveness.

And many of us, I know that even the very mention of those words seem absolutely terrifying. Some of us will have been hurt and betrayed and scarred in ways I do not even want to stand up here and pretend that I know about.

But maybe this morning Jesus would invite you to take his hand and to walk with him on this long and sometimes windy road towards forgiveness.

[27 : 24] Because not only does he know what it is like to be the sin against party in ways that we will never understand. But he promises to be a friend, one who sticks and walks closer than a brother to all his children.

And in the father's wisdom he has provided us with a church family like Paul was mentioning earlier, full of individuals transformed by grace who have committed themselves to helping one another walk this road.

some of you might remember the high profile case that was in the news a few years ago of Christian policeman, I think his name was Stephen Oak.

He was killed while trying to arrest an Al-Qaeda terrorist in 2003 down in Manchester and he left, tragically he left a wife and three kids behind. And a while later the whole family appeared on the, if you remember this, the Kilroy BBC chat show that used to be on.

And they explained that while the pain for them was so real and it was so raw and it was so excruciating, that not only was their church supporting them and walking with them through this time, but Jesus was so near and was helping them to walk the long journey of forgiveness that they needed to show to this man.

[28 : 50] It was amazing, they opened it up for comments just afterwards from other guests who'd gone through similar things who were not Christians and the contrast between what the family were saying and what the other people on the show were saying.

Forgiveness for them wasn't just, it wasn't even on the table as an option. Friend, do you see how God is so glorified when grace triumphs in our hearts? Do you see how Satan rages and how the world stands in shock when a disciple of Jesus says that bitterness and hurt will not reign in this heart, but Jesus will?

God is so, it's just something you know that you need to be right with this morning for the glory of God. This prayer should challenge us and this prayer should compel us.

And as we bring it to a close this morning, do you see how Jesus Christ is not only the solution to our Godward debt? Do you see how he is actually the perfect model of what it looks like to forgive our debtors?

It's to him we look this morning. Wonderfully, do you see what God is doing here? This whole restoration process, this whole transformation process.

[30 : 03] What he's doing in our lives, what was the state of Adam and Eve, their relationship with God and one another before the fall, before sin entered the human equation? Adam and Eve, peace with God.

Peace inside. Adam and Eve, peace with one another in creation. See how God, as he works this transformation process in our lives, he is making us into the whole reason that he made us in the first place.

To know that forgiveness, to know that harmony, to know that wholeness. And so it's to Jesus Christ that we look this morning as the way that God is doing that. And one day it will be fully realized in the new creation because Jesus Christ is the one who says, I am making all things new.

And so it is to Jesus Christ that we look this morning. As we close, do you know more than six million Britons, and I take you back to that number at the start, more than six million Britons don't ever believe they will ever be debt free in their lifetime.

Friends, when it comes to our debt of sin, and when it comes to the debts that people owe us, do you see how the gospel offers us a wonderful alternative? Just before I pray, why don't we just have a moment, just a minute of silence.

[31 : 19] And if there's been anything that's been on your heart this morning, in any of those two acts, then maybe now is the time to bring your prayer before the Lord. Maybe even if you don't know Jesus Christ as your King and your Saviour, maybe even this morning is the time where you first say, Jesus, Lord, I need you.

And then I will pray as we close. O to grace, how great a debtor, daily I'm constrained to be.

Let thy goodness, like a fetter, bind my wandering heart to thee. Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it. Prone to leave the God that I love.

Here's my heart. O take and seal it and seal it for thy courts above. So, Father, thank you so much for your great grace that saw you send your Son for us, for our sin.

And I pray that as your Spirit continues to work in our hearts off the back of this morning, that you would continue to be transforming us more into the likeness of Jesus Christ.

[32 : 41] And so it's to him we look this morning, and it's in his name that we pray these things. In Jesus' name, amen.