

Walking in Forgiveness

Two sides of one sheet of paper: what others did to us, and what we did

SPEAKER	Matt Ryniker
DATE	Sunday, April 11, 2021
PASSAGES	Matthew 18:21-35; Luke 6:37-45; Colossians 3:13; Luke 17:3-4; Ephesians 4:31-32; James 3:5-6; Romans 12:1; Romans 12:9; Proverbs 6:16-19; Hebrews 12:15
MESSAGE	Begins at 1:11:22 in the service

THE BIG IDEA

We like receiving grace far more than giving it. But the one who forgave us ten thousand talents asks us to forgive the denarii – and to do it the way he forgave us: at personal cost, generously, without demanding a perfect apology. What others owe us and what we owe God are written on the same sheet of paper; we cannot throw away one side and keep the other.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ◆ A tense year gave many of us extra permission to vent, and words of judgment and condemnation can defile us and plant bitterness in our hearts.
- ◆ Our words are not the root problem. “Out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.”
- ◆ Hating evil is right – God hates things too. The trouble is hatred that festers, turns on a person, and excuses itself as their fault.
- ◆ Forgiveness is not indifference. You cannot forgive where nothing wrong happened, and the goal of the Christian life is not to become a Care Bear.
- ◆ Forgive as the Lord forgave you: freely, at great cost, hospitably, and generous even with our half-finished repentance – not passive-aggressively, demanding groveling.
- ◆ Rebuke is allowed; we are not pushovers. But when they repent, forgive – even seven times in a day.

- ◆ Forgiving others is a form of worship, offered in gratitude for the mercy we received, and it keeps a root of bitterness from springing up and defiling many.

► 1:11:22

Matt opened with thanks to Lindsay and Kenny for an Easter of kolaches, donuts and coffee “with like forty-five different kinds of creamers” – hospitality as “a good spiritual offering” – and invited everyone to take home a lily. Then the topic: walking in forgiveness. It might feel dark at points, he warned, but it was an opportunity “to turn pits of despair into monuments to triumph.”

A raw year, and what our words do

► 1:14:14

The election, protests downtown, mask debates – on top of the ordinary friction of living with roommates and family. In a year like that, “we can just sort of let ourselves go... give ourselves extra permission to vent and air our grievances.” It is not just stress, Matt said, but “the way that we’ve allowed ourselves to defile ourselves with our own words.” We can pronounce judgments, condemnations, even curses without realising it.

► 1:14:57

James says the tongue is small but steers the whole body like a ship’s rudder, and is “a fire, a world of unrighteousness... setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell” (James 3:5–6). It is natural to be upset; but upset for a long time, we fester, and roots of bitterness grow deeper.

The log, the blind guide, and the heart

► 1:16:15

“Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned; forgive, and you will be forgiven; give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you.”

LUKE 6:37–38 ↗

► 1:16:55

Then the parable of the blind leading the blind into a pit, the disciple who becomes like his teacher, and the speck and the log: “isn’t that a kind of blindness?” “It’s going to sound combative,” Matt said. “I’m not accusing anyone in here, I’m just reading. It says, ‘You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye.’”

► 1:18:34

And the root: “The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good... for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks” (Luke 6:39–45). The words come from the overflow of a heart left to fester “like a pit... you don’t even say words anymore, it just comes like a low grumbling frequency.”

A sheet of paper

► 1:19:44

Before turning the corner, Matt handed out an exercise. The pews had been stocked with paper and pens (his son Jack had helped, five days early, “so it’s a hygienic pen and paper situation”).

► 1:20:48

On one side: write down the ways people have sinned against you. “Really go to town on this thing” – the indignity, the shame, the irritation of thoughtless behavior over the last year or two. Pick a top ten if you need to. The back side would come later. The church had done this once before, in 2018, and he thought it worth doing again.

Healthy and unhealthy hatred

► 1:22:58

Some think a healthy Christian never hates anything. “That’s kind of silly. God hates things” – shedding innocent blood, false witness (Proverbs 6:16–19). We are told to abhor what is evil and hold fast to what is good. The problem is hatred that gets out of hand, festers, or fixes on a person – though we know we do not wrestle against flesh and blood – and then excuses itself: “He earned my hatred, and it’s his fault that I’m walking in bitterness.”

► 1:24:41

It is good to confront difficulty. At his gym’s Sunday-afternoon “fight church,” the coach noticed people running away in their bouts, so he put both fighters’ front feet in a tire. Nobody could back off. “It was liberating, because if the thing you’re afraid of is that there’s a person in front of you punching your

face, then what you need to do is actually learn to block and hit back, not run away.” “We’re going to do something combative, but for joy. We’re going to go to a dark place, but for light.”

The unforgiving servant

► 1:25:42

“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?’ Jesus said to him, ‘I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times. Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. When he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents...”

MATTHEW 18:21–24 ↗

► 1:26:50

Ten thousand talents is a fortune; the master releases the servant and forgives the whole debt. The same servant finds a fellow servant who owes him a hundred denarii – “not very much money” – seizes him by the throat, and throws him in prison.

► 1:28:00

““You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?’ And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers, until he should pay all his debt. So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.”

MATTHEW 18:32–35 ↗

The servant got a taste of Luke 6: the measure you use is measured back to you.

The other side of the page

► 1:28:40

Now, on the back of the same sheet: the ways you have sinned against others, against God, against yourself – ideally with the letters criss-crossing, “so you could see that it’s all one situation that we have to deal with as a whole, not separate.”

► 1:29:46

“Wouldn’t we like to deal with them separate?” We like to walk in grace and freedom, but not always to give it. “I like to get forgiven. It’s harder to forgive.” My failings are a sob story; yours just hurt my feelings.

Forgiveness is not indifference

► 1:30:36

Some read “judge not” as “there’s no wrong, everything’s fine, go along to get along.” “That’s not really what Jesus was saying. You can’t be forgiving in an environment where there’s no sin.” If you wear a yellow shirt you know I dislike and I don’t care, “that’s not really forgiving, it’s just indifference.” People really do sin against us – they lied to our face, and it really hurt.

► 1:31:35

“The goal of the Christian life is not to eventually reach your final form of some sort of Care Bear... a Precious Moments doll... as if it’s a virtue to not be upset ever.” The goal is what Paul wrote:

“Bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.”

COLOSSIANS 3:13 ↗

As the Lord forgave you

► 1:32:10

“This is going to make it all the more strenuous to do.” The Lord forgave at great personal cost, generously, freely – and hospitably, like the prodigal’s father out looking for his son.

► 1:32:50

And how was your repentance? “Did you nail that repentance, or did you leave stuff out?” Did you cry enough, make every amend? “One of the cool things about the way God forgives us is that he’s generous with even our repentance.” He could list every sin you forgot and every lazy apology. But when others apologise to us: “You call that an apology? I want you to tell me how sorry you are, and I want to see it in your face.”

► 1:34:10

Imagine the Lord forgiving you passive-aggressively: “Oh, it’s fine... no, don’t mention it... well, it was very annoying... you should know what you forgot.” “That’s not how the Lord is.” So when someone comes saying “I’m so sorry,” think how the Lord forgave you, “because I want to forgive like that.”

► 1:35:14

It is also in your self-interest, because of the measure. Picture yourself gossiping about what someone did, and the Lord saying: “It’s bad when people lie. Remember when you did those things yesterday and I forgave you? Should I not have? Which frequency are we on – are we in the mood to forgive liars, or no?” “Oh no, I meant that guy.”

► 1:36:10

“A lazy way of holiness is just finding out other people’s faults... It takes like no creativity to find faults. None.”

Rebuke, then forgive

► 1:36:42

“If your brother or sister sins against you, rebuke them; and if they repent, forgive them. Even if they sin against you seven times in a day and seven times come back to you saying ‘I repent,’ you must forgive them.”

LUKE 17:3–4 ↗ (NIV)

► 1:37:12

That is the counterweight. Not the fuzzy Christian who says “it’s fine” and turns bitter because you cannot stuff it down forever; “we’re also not supposed to be pushovers.” You can say, “That was wrong. I didn’t like that.” But when they repent, forgive.

► 1:37:42

And who says it? The one who forgave you ten thousand talents. “But it was a lot of denarii. It’s like a whole nickel.” “Remember the million bucks I forgave you?” “I know, but this was my favorite nickel.”

Forgiveness as worship

► 1:38:04

“Present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship” (Romans 12:1). We forgive not to pay the Lord back or earn “glory points,” but as worship – appreciation for the forgiveness we were given “without odd passive-aggressive strings attached.”

► 1:38:38

“Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.”

EPHESIANS 4:31–32 ↗ (NIV)

► 1:39:10

When you come to the Lord aware of your sin, you are hoping for “the soft end of the stick” – comfort, consolation, open arms – “not the bottom end of the boot.” In the same way, “we also don’t want to give the bottom end of the boot. We want to give the embrace... that was wrong, and I accept your repentance.” Otherwise
a root of bitterness springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled.

Let go of both sides

► 1:40:09

Then the point of the game. You cannot split one sheet of paper into its front and back with your bare hands. “Do you want to keep all of it? If you want to hold on to your grudge, that’s fine – but you’re also keeping that other side. Or do you want to let go of both?” You can’t throw away your own sins and then dig the page back out of the trash to keep what they did to you.

► 1:41:05

Matt set up stations while Michael played: a waste basket to throw the paper away, somberly or with a shout of “freedom”; an open invitation to pray a one-sentence prayer of thanksgiving or declaration over the church – “you’re free indeed”; and, because Elodia sensed God wanted to pray for people in the pit, a place to receive prayer from her and Bree.

► 1:41:31

He was careful with the fine print: “We here at Hope Chapel do not teach that by writing your sins on paper and throwing them away, that’s how you’re forgiven.” We are forgiven only by grace through faith, because Jesus died for our sins and took our punishment. This was a prophetic act and a step of discipleship – “we can walk in freedom by doing this, following the Lord.”

► 1:44:26

Or take it home and burn it in a chiminea. Matt promised he would not dig anyone's paper out of the trash, and said he would act weird to spare people embarrassment, the way he used to dance next to the most embarrassed kid when he was a math teacher – “a full Braveheart thing” if you like. “Thank you for the controlled chaos participation, Hope Chapel.”

FOR FURTHER STUDY**SCRIPTURE IN THIS MESSAGE**

- James 3:5–6
- Luke 6:37–38
- Luke 6:39–45
- Proverbs 6:16–19
- Romans 12:9
- Matthew 18:21–24
- Matthew 18:32–35
- Colossians 3:13
- Luke 17:3–4 (NIV)
- Romans 12:1
- Ephesians 4:31–32 (NIV)
- Hebrews 12:15

FOR YOUR HOPE GROUP

1. Matt said a tense year gave us “extra permission to vent.” Where have your words pronounced judgment or condemnation without your noticing?
2. How would you explain the difference between forgiveness and indifference to someone who thinks “judge not” means nothing is wrong?
3. Think about how the Lord received your imperfect repentance. What would it look like to forgive someone else’s imperfect apology the same way?
4. Matt called fault-finding “a lazy way of holiness.” Where are you tempted to it, and what would harder, more creative love look like instead?
5. Looking at both sides of your sheet of paper, what will you let go of this week – and is there a conversation, a rebuke or a forgiveness, that needs to happen?

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Matt Ryniker preached this message at Hope Chapel, where the congregation had done this two-sided paper exercise once before, in 2018. He mentioned his son Jack helping restock the pews, spending Sunday afternoons at a gym's friendly "fight church," and his earlier years as a math teacher, when he would dance beside the most embarrassed student in the room so they would feel less alone.

Watch the full message:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iTWJch2Z0EE&t=4282s>

These notes summarise a message preached at Hope Chapel in Austin, Texas. They are a reader's aid, not a transcript — scripture references link to the full passage so you can read it in context.