

The Forgiven Forgive

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Colossians 3. It will be just two verses today. Beginning in verse 12. "Put on then (Paul says) as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience; 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."

Let's pray. Father, You know. Lord, You know our need this hour. Father, I believe in the Holy Spirit, and I pray You'd meet with Your people this hour and bless Your Word to us all. I pray You'd use it to help Your people. Father, that we would genuinely be helped. That You would speak to us. Lord, perhaps there's even one here who this very subject matter is what stands between You and them, and I pray You might bring that wall down today, Lord, if it would please You. We ask You to meet with us and bless us by Your Spirit. We ask it for Jesus' sake and in His name, Amen.

Well, the last time we were in Colossians, we were looking at verse 12 here where Paul transitions from this putting to death, or putting off of those things associated with the old man or the old self. And we discussed how Paul presents these five virtues, as he calls them garments or clothing that the Christian is called to put on. And we discovered that these really are none other than the virtues of the Lord Jesus Himself that flow to us and through us by way of the Holy Spirit as we set our minds and our eyes upon the Lord Jesus Christ. And so Paul continues to build upon these virtues here, moving from what are primarily attitudes to actions. Really, that's what we have here in v. 12. Heart attitudes. Heart attitudes that really are essential prerequisites if you will to these actions or participles that follow in v. 13, bearing and forgiving. Bearing with one another and forgiving one another. In our text, the ESV says "forgiving each other." Bearing with another and forgiving each other. That requires a heart of humility. That requires a heart of compassion. It requires a heart of patience.

There's a progression in Paul's teaching really at the beginning of the chapter, but particularly from v. 12-13. Paul takes us from the individual adorning or putting on of Christ's virtues, to the public application of them. More particularly, the application of them within the church body. These "one another" statements we find strewn throughout the New Testament are unique. They're unique to the church. We would do well to do our own little word study of all these New Testament phrases, these "one another" phrases. I think Tim, at one point, you made a list of those, didn't you? There was quite a few of them. There are like 50-something of them. There's a lot of them. I didn't look them all up. But very significant. Very significant in church life. If you thought church life and your relationship with your brothers and sisters, it's kind of take it or leave it; doesn't really matter. I mean, they're nice people and all. I like it. I enjoy spending time with them. But my involvement or interaction with them is really not all that important.

Well, you'd be sadly mistaken. We'll discuss that more in a minute. But these are two huge imperatives here in v. 13. These are not secondary items. These are foundational to Christian living. They're foundational to church relationships. That's really what Paul's

addressing here. Although it certainly has broader applications. These are not optional. They're commands. We as the people of God are commanded by God to bear and to forgive.

Let's look at this first one briefly. What exactly does it mean to bear with one another? The ESV folks chose to go with the word "bearing," which has multiple definitions depending on how it's used. While the King James guys went with the term "forbearing." That's the English language for you, right? Where bearing and forbearing can mean the same thing. And they do. The Greek word here is "anecho." It's a word that literally means to hold up. To hold oneself erect and firm against something. It's also a word that conveys this idea of enduring or tolerating. That is a load bearing wall. That means it's a wall that holds up under the weight that's placed upon it. And it does so in an enduring fashion. It doesn't give way. At least, we hope it doesn't. That's what the Greek word means here. Relating to one another, it means to enduringly hold up what another places upon you. Simply put, tolerating them. Maybe you might be doing that this morning with me. In a more negative tone, to put up with them. In fact, a handful of translations including the NASB, actually use that phrase, "put up with," in Matthew 17:17, Mark 9:19, Luke 9:41. When Jesus says, "How long shall I put up with you?" The ESV renders it, "O faithless and twisted generation, how long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you?" There it is. That's our term. Bear with you. Or put up with you. Having clothed ourselves with the virtues of Jesus Christ in v. 12, Paul says now see to it that you bear with one another. Put up with one another. Put up with each other's faults and shortcomings. Put up with each other's differences. Put up with each other's dislikes. Put up with each other's annoying habits. Put up with people who are slow to learn. Put up with people that are just obstinate. Put up with people that are just plain difficult to deal with. Put up with them Paul says. How long, Jesus says, am I to bear with you? What was the answer? His whole life, right?

You think about being the holy Son of God on earth. We're talking about pure perfection personified in the midst of just woefully imperfect people. He calls them faithless and twisted. Think about it. This was every day of His life. Every day of His life He was surrounded by this constant reminder. Everywhere He turned, faithless and twisted. Twisted and faithless. Jesus lived daily bearing with the likes of such. Nobody had to bear more than Jesus. No wonder He ran off to the mountainside to pray. Get away from it all. Get this. The answer to His own question, "how long shall I bear with you?" The answer for Him is the same for you and I. Till we die. That's how long. Jesus states in a question what Paul, by the Holy Spirit, puts in a commandment: Bear with one another. Brethren, it's part of God's purposed design in your life, to put difficult people in it. That doesn't happen by chance. It doesn't happen by accident. It happens by divine design. It's God's methodology of fashioning you more and more like His Son. See, that's the problem we have in life, right? We're not enough like Jesus. But God, you see, has set us in motion. He has set us on this life-long mission of becoming more and more and more like Him. And that is wonderful, isn't it? I trust you can look back and see from today going back in your life, you can see those realities. Though it feels like we've got a long way to go. It's wonderful, but the process can be, and I'd say, often is a painful one. The command of bearing with one another necessitates that such types of people are placed in our life that will require us to bear or put up with, right? The same with forgiveness which we're about to talk about here in a minute.

But that reality of having such people in our lives, that's one of the major reasons why "lone ranger" Christianity is an unbiblical concept. I don't need the church. I've got a mission from God. He's called me to preach or He's called me to do this. I don't need to commit myself to the church. That's not biblical. Isolation is not God's will for His people. God created us for relationships. He created us for relationship with Him and relationship with one another. And the great tragedy of the fall was that relationship with Him was completely severed. And in our broken, fallen condition, we've replaced that relationship with everything under the sun, primarily to self-consumption and self-worship. Jesus came to fix that. In fact, the chief end of the gospel is to restore that relationship. To bring estranged, separated sinners to Himself; into relationship with God Almighty Himself.

Martin Luther said it was John 3:16 which I won't argue with. That's a great verse. But I think one of the greatest one-verse summaries of the gospel is 1 Peter 3:18. "For Christ suffered once for sins..." Hallelujah! "...The righteous for the unrighteous." For what purpose? For what end? "...That He might bring us to God." That's it, brethren. What a glorious reality that is. You think about eternity. You think about glory. What do we know? Not a whole lot. We know this though, God Himself will be there, and His children will be there, right? That's what matters. Not a whole lot we know more than that. But that's the glorious reality we do know. That's where God's going to be. This thing is all about relationships. Eternal relationships. Those eternal relationships, however, they don't start when we physically die in this life. They don't start when we pass into the next realm. They start the moment we die with Christ and are given the gift of eternal life through faith in Him. God in His gospel gives us eternal life and thereby brings us into eternal relationships with one another that start right here in the here and now. And that's significant. That's very important to grasp. Church relations are not secondary - not in God's Word. Listen to this - Romans 12:5, "So we, though many, are one body in Christ and individually members one of another." That's pretty intimate. There are several places in the New Testament that speak this way. Christ laid down His life for the church. God created marriage for that primary reason, did He not? To display His love; to display this inseparable union. Make no mistake about it, homosexuality, transgender, same-sex marriage, casual sex, the porn industry, divorce rates through the roof, at the base of it all, at the bottom of it all lies one grand satanic design to mar this beautiful, wonderful picture of Jesus Christ and His bride; of Jesus being made one with those undeserving people, those undeserving individuals, yet the most privileged in the entire universe. It's wonderful.

Yes, most certainly, salvation is personal. It's at an individual level. But it doesn't stay there, you see. It doesn't stay there. When God saves a sinner, He deals a death blow to that old self. And I emphasize self. He transfers them out of that kingdom of darkness. He places them in the kingdom of His dear Son. In that kingdom, they're pursuing His will. It's a new realm. Everything's new. New life, new clothes, new community. God intends for His people to function together in this new community He calls the church. And texts like this one before us right here, just these few sentences, are reasons to be convinced of the importance of church membership. All of these one another statements in the New Testament, they point to a clear, identifiable body of believers committed and united in fashion to the service, worship, and commission of the Lord Jesus Christ. One of the surest proofs of regenerate church membership is found in the ability of the members within it not to preach, not to evangelize, not even to pray. Now, those

things are absolutely essential and very important. But the devil has his cohorts doing that all over the place. The reality of redemption is most clearly expressed in the demonstration of God's grace being worked out relationally with His people in the church. It is.

And so when difficult people are placed in your pathway, it's not for the purpose of teaching you how to repel; how to keep your distance; how to avoid them; how to run from them. It's for the purpose of letting God's grace - these virtues of Jesus Christ here - shine like the blazing sun in the midst of a dark - in Jesus' words - twisted and faithless generation. So the next time you're finding it hard to bear with someone, be it your brother or sister, just remember the kind forbearance that God has shown you. Do you remember how patient He was with you? How long-suffering? Oh, how He tolerated all your ugliness? All your annoying, backward ways? Not only did He bear with you in all your overtly evil ways prior to your salvation, His forbearance has continued throughout all your stumblings and failures that you have incurred despite all the innumerable blessings that He's poured over your head. God's people have every reason to bear with one another in whatever fashion He calls us to do so. And bearing with one another, while it most certainly is a virtue of Jesus Christ, it's not exactly the most flourishing demonstration of those virtues. Douglas Moo points out in v. 12, he suggests that "bearing with one another does not even require the greatest display of Christian kindness and patience. But it is a necessary first step in establishing community."

And it's a step that's followed by this next progression. Paul adds, "And if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other." Some translations stick with the common "one another" phraseology here. They mean the exact same thing. I prefer using the "one another," as the King James does.

But let me just stop here. I'm going to grab this pen. I just want to get three or four. I want you to tell me. I want to hear somebody tell me what does it mean to forgive? I want to write three or four definitions down. Anyone. What does it mean to forgive? Even if it's one word. Yes, brother? To let go. Okay. We've got let go. Anyone else? Reconcile. We've got that. Two more. Or one more. Release a debt. That's a good one. Release a debt/cancel. Okay. We're all on the same page. It's pretty much what we all were thinking even though we didn't say it. That's what we understand the term to mean, right? To pardon, to cancel, to excuse, to let go, reconcile. Forgiving here in our text - the word translated forgiving - is the Greek work *charizomenoi*, which I'm probably not pronouncing correctly. *Charizomenoi*. And it might surprise you - it did me, it took up a good part of my day - the meaning of this Greek word is this: to gratify. To bestow in kindness. Grant as a free favor. That comes directly out of my Mounce Greek Dictionary. Thayer's Lexicon: "to do something pleasant or agreeable to one. To do favor to; (again), gratify, universally to show oneself gracious, kind, and benevolent."

Now, I didn't realize before I got into this text that there's actually three Greek words that get translated "forgive, forgiving, forgiven, forgiveness." And the primary one is the word *aphiemi*. That's our word forgive in about 80% of the times in Scripture you see it. And that's the word that primarily means to send away, but it conveys the same idea that was just aired, right? Let go, reconcile, pardon, cancel, clear. It's forgive as we know the term forgive. But that's not our word here in the text. It's the word *charizomenoi*. And it's a word that shows up 23 times in the New Testament, half of which are translated forgive, depending on the translation. Most of the other times, it's give or grant. And that's what this word primarily conveys. To give or bestow

kindness. To grant free favor. To do something pleasant, gracious, kind to another. As one Greek scholar stated, "while it's not the common word for remission and forgiveness, it is one of richer content, emphasizing the gracious nature of the pardon."

Jesus uses this term in sharing the story of forgiveness with Simon the Pharisee as he's sitting in his house, reclining at table, you remember that? Where He talks about the money lender who had two debtors. One who had a massive debt, and one who had a small debt. And he forgave them both, and He asked him who's going to love most, and of course, the one who was forgiven most. And using that word, Jesus was underscoring the gracious nature or kind bestowal that the money lender had towards these debtors. (unintelligible) It wasn't just a legal act of removing debt. It was heartless. But a very gracious, kind act of removing the obligation for those men to pay him back. And the response, of course, was the one who owed the most, loved the most. And he was using that illustration because a prostitute was wiping her hair on his feet. And the Pharisees in their self-righteousness were having some problems with that.

But Paul uses this word in Romans 8:32. Well known verse. "He who did not spare His own Son, but gave Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him graciously give us all things?" There's our word: give. The word "give" is charizomenoi. Charizomenoi. In other words, how will God not also with Christ, graciously charizomenoi us all things? And while the word there in that context of that verse is not communicating forgiveness, it is communicating the magnitude of the giving. The magnitude of the kindness and gracious favor God is extending in this open-ended promise.

Another instance is Paul's letter to the Galatians. In Galatians 3:18, Paul says, "For if the inheritance comes by the law, it no longer comes by promise, but God gave it to Abraham by a promise." The word gave - that's our word. Gave what? The inheritance. Again, the word's being used to convey an unbelievable bestowal of favor and gifting. Something that is just freely and wonderfully given.

And I share those verses to help us get a better taste of the breadth and depth of this term here: forgiving. And it is translated "forgiven" even in this letter. If you look over to chapter 2:13, Paul says, "And you who were dead in your trespasses, in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our trespasses." Paul here elects to use the word: charizomenoi, instead of aphiemi - the word standardly used for forgiveness, and I think he does so to underscore the incredible kindness of God in such an act as forgiving all our trespasses.

Okay, so now we have a clearer scope of this word "forgiving," used in the text before us. Let's look again at what Paul has to say here. "And if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other." Paul rightly assumes there's going to be problems in the church. You gather a few hundred people together on a regular basis, and they're still dwelling in their mortal flesh, you're probably going to have a problem or two pop up, right? There's a pretty good chance that someone's going to have a complaint as Paul calls it against another. Legitimate or not, complaints or going to happen. If and when they do, Paul doesn't say, just seek to avoid that person as much as you can. No, he says forgive each other. Have a charizomenoi mindset with one another. Be gracious. Bestow kindness. Forgive that thing and move on. Not separate. Move on together. Don't begrudgingly or mechanically say the words, "I forgive you," and yet your heart is still holding on to that thing. That's not biblical forgiveness. That's biblical

bitterness. The biblical term here is telling us to return that complaint or offense with something pleasant. Freely give it. Don't withhold it. Graciously grant the pardon. Release that thing. Let it go. Meet it with kindness. Yeah, but if you only knew brother... I don't. But the Lord knows. And He says let that thing go. In fact, not only let it go, but do it in such a fashion that it communicates a gracious and a kind spirit. Yeah, but this isn't the first time they've done this to me. "Seventy times seven," Jesus tells Peter. When he asked Him, Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother?

Okay, well, maybe that's for little sins. What about when they're big sins? And they're multiple times? Paul has the answer for that right here in our text. "As the Lord has forgiven you..." "As the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive." Wow. That's a stunning statement. You know, in a verse like this, we're apt to focus on the conclusion of the matter. Okay. You also must forgive. I need to be a forgiving person. I get it. Not so fast. Look at the beginning of the statement. It's really most remarkable. Notice the "as so" construction here. As the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. As - in the same manner; to the extent that God has forgiven your sins against Him, so you need to likewise forgive other sins against you. That's what's being said here. This short phrase here: "As the Lord has forgiven you..." That phrase represents the basis and foundation for all Christian forgiveness. Christians forgive because they're a forgiven people. Forgiven people forgive. In fact, that's what I titled my message. Forgiven people forgive. You want an acid test as to who's real; who's not. Let a man or woman be wronged. Before long, you'll find out the extent to which they've been forgiven. People who get all hung up over little insignificant matters of life and can't seem to let such things go have a very, very small view of God, and a very, very small view of themselves before a holy God; their sin before a holy God. Now, I'm not saying - I'm not even suggesting forgiveness is an easy thing. And I'm not saying it's an automatic thing. But by Scriptural authority, I can assure you that forgiven people do forgive.

We perform what we call the adhesion tape test at work. We build ground support equipment for military aircraft. And unfortunately, they fall under the same specifications the aircraft does. And some of the stuff we do, especially the paint and finishes, so we have all these hoops we have to jump through and all these certain tests we've got to run. And so, basically, what it is is you get a test panel, you mix up your paint. There's all kinds of variables that can throw this thing off. The whole point of the test is to determine if there's true, genuine adhesion of the paint to the component. You've got to have that. You can't have that flaking off. It's got to be quality. It's got to meet a certain quality. So what they do is you spray this panel, let it dry, apply this military grade masking tape basically, and you take a razor blade and you start scoring that masking tape, and you let it sit for a while. You come back and you pull that tape up. You pull that tape up. And if there's any paint on that tape, it's not proper adhesion. That piece needs to go back and get blasted. You start all over. You pull that tape up and it's clean, you have perfect adhesion. A good, quality approved part. It can move on.

I was thinking about that in relation to the Christian life, particularly this - forgiveness. It seemed like a good analogy of whether we have genuine adherence to Christ. When the Lord presses on you the tape test of forgiveness, and allows you to be scored and cut deeply by another person, are we adhered to Christ? When the tape's pulled back, what's the story? When the tape's pulled back, the testing's over, are we holding fast to Christ? Are we holding fast to

Him? And proving so by letting all those offenses go as Christ let ours go? Or are we fixated back here on the tape? Are we hanging on to the cuts? Are we not properly bonded to Christ? Christian, mark this down and be fully persuaded of this in your mind. Because there's not any situation - I mean any - not any situation that could ever occur, not one act of providence that could ever befall you, no matter how bad, no matter how horrific, that does not demand your forgiveness.

We had a woman - I've told this story before. We had a woman going to Fatty's on a regular basis, and we were helping her. She lived over in our neighborhood. And you know, you spend time with somebody and you get to know them. We start digging a little bit, and we finally got to the issue that was keeping her from Christ. It was a horrific story, horrific background. As a child, she was molested and horribly, horribly abused by her step-dad. She told me with much sorrow and tears. "I cannot do it. I cannot forgive him." And I told her, you have to, or you'll never know the forgiveness of God. And I realize, I've been around enough, in a room this size, some of you have gone through similar things. So, I'm not belittling it. And I understand that is incredibly wicked and evil. I'm sure it's an absolute nightmare for anyone to have to go through. But let me tell you, it's not even close, dear brother or sister, it's not even close to the wickedness and evil that you have willfully expressed against a pure and holy God. It's not. You see, "I can't forgive him." That flows from a heart that's never seen its own filth and wickedness before a holy God. Because if it had, such a person, they would see themselves no different than that man. They would quickly conclude they're just as evil. They're the same lump. The same guilt. The same need. You see, when the scales of self-deception fall off and you see yourself in such a light, when you become aware that such a thing as that can be forgiven, such wickedness and sin can be forgiven, such rebellion, such self-absorption, one who is so guilty of really the greatest treason in the universe; if they can be forgiven, that's a game changer. That changes everything. Mark it down. The failure to forgive is a failure to see the enormity of our own sin and the enormity of God's incredible mercy toward us.

Christian, if you're struggling here, here's why. You've got to get your eyes off you. You've got to get your eyes off that person. You've got to get them on Jesus Christ. And as you do that, you will see in Him reason upon reason upon reason to shed any and all offenses toward you. Like my dad used to say, like water off a duck's back, offenses will just roll. The cross has the power to do such things. This is huge. Forgiveness is a really, really big issue. So big, Jesus touches on it several times in His ministry, especially in His Sermon on the Mount.

Let's turn there. We'll scan through the Sermon on the Mount. Just look at the places where Jesus at least makes reference to the concept of forgiveness. Matthew 5:7 "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy." Here we find Jesus certainly implying forgiveness, right? If we are extending mercy to others, we're showing kindness and compassion to an offender, right? Merciful. That kind of rings with our word *charizomenoi*, right? Verse 23, "So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go, be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you're going with him to court, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you be put in prison. Truly, I say to you, you will never get out until you've paid the last penny." This is the same language Jesus uses in another parable we might look at here in a minute. Is that time

right? But the simple teaching here in v. 23, if you have an issue with a brother or sister, if there's an offense, you need to get that thing dealt with. And right now. That's an A1 number one priority. Leave your gift at the altar, He says. Forget about worship. Forget about God even hearing your prayers. As long as this thing's present, that's an obstruction to God. Go clear up the matter, He says, now. Forgive. Reconcile. Then, you're good to go. But this thing of offense has to be taken care of. V. 39, "But I say unto you, do not resist the one who is evil, but if anyone slaps you on the right cheek turn to him the other also, and if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well." Wow. Those are challenging verses. Now that is the spirit of charizomenoi, is it not? That's somebody who's seen something of themselves in the blazing light of God's glory. Mere flesh and blood can't do those things right there.

Matthew 6:9, "Pray then like this..." Jesus gives instruction on how to pray. Down to v. 12, "Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors." You see how Jesus ties forgiveness to prayer here? Praying with an unforgiving spirit, you might as well be praying to that wall. This thing is so important. After Jesus finishes His instruction on prayer, He continues on with the subject. V. 14, "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." Whoa. Now Jesus has a number of stunning, blow-you-away statements in this sermon, but this has got to be one of the most shocking ones of all. If those folks were sitting there eating bread and fish and He was preaching, I'd venture to say several men stopped chewing. Or some might even start choking. This world is full, and I mean full of people like the woman I just mentioned that used to go to Fatty's whose father she could not forgive. People are full of bitterness and anger and resentment. And they're people that feel fully justified in it. These words spoken by our Lord here, they seem utterly absurd to them. "What is that? Surely He doesn't mean that. I mean, I love God - nobody's telling me any different. Me and God, we got a thing going. I was sick back in '98 on my deathbed in the hospital, God brought me out of it. He saved me from it. I know I'm on good terms with Him. I've always believed. I believe John 3:16, you know. I believe God. And it says whosoever believes shall not perish, but have eternal life. Once saved, always saved."

I would say this verse does not at all conflict with John 3:16 in any way, shape, or form. And I would say, once saved, yes, you are always saved. Hallelujah! The problem is not with the Scripture. The problem is with the assumption. An assumption that my belief, my believing, my "faith" trumps all other realities and truth of Scripture. And the reality is, as Jesus so clearly expresses here, if you do not forgive others, you will not know the forgiveness of God. That's serious. If you're sitting here this morning and you're holding on to something you can't forgive, you need to hear this. Hear it again: Jesus says you will never know the forgiveness of God, if you don't let that thing go. Is it worth it? Is it worth your never-dying soul? And the reason why a person who can never come to the place of forgiveness in their heart - the reason why they can't be forgiven, it's not because God forgave them at one time and now they've come to this place where now they can't forgive this person, so He takes away their salvation. No, that's not it at all. The reason why they'll never know the forgiveness of God is because they've never truly seen the forgiveness of God themselves. And that's because they've never, as I said, never really seen themselves in light of who they really are before a holy God. They've simply laid hold of a feel-good gospel which is no gospel at all, and ironically, it has them feeling quite miserable and

discontent and full of hate. Again, forgiven people forgive. Those who understand something of the magnitude of their offense towards God, they learn to forgive.

Matthew 7, "Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce, you will be judged; with the measure you use, it will be measured to you." This kind of echoes back to the verse we just read, right? If you can't forgive that brother for speaking ill of you, you will drown in the absolute fury of God poured out on you for profaning His name with all manner of blasphemies and perverted speech. Verse 12, "So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them." Again, this is the spirit of *charizomenoi*. An others-mindedness. An others-mindedness to do them good. And to shower them with kindness. Verse 24, "Everyone who hears these words of Mine..." Jesus closes the message. "Everyone then who hears these words of Mine and does them will be like unto the wise man who built his house on the rock." And the ones who don't do these words of Jesus, well, you know, they just won't get as many rewards when they get into heaven. That's not what Jesus teaches. No, He likens those people who do not do His words - He likens them to houses that are built on a shoreline in the aftermath of a massive hurricane. We've all seen those pictures, right? Complete devastation. Complete destruction.

That's how serious forgiveness is. So serious Jesus draws attention to it again in Matthew 18. I was going to have us turn there, but I'm not for the sake of time. But read that account, where the man owes the king a great sum of money. In his hypocrisy, he goes to strangle and throw those who owe him far less money. In the same statement He used in that other verse we looked at. You won't get out until you've paid the last penny. And the implication there is that some amount, 100 thousand talents - you try to compare the currencies on google and you get all kinds of conflicting results, but it is a massive sum of money. Well into the billions. The idea Jesus is trying to get across is you'll never pay it. You're never getting out. You go in with the unforgiveness, you get in that prison, you get locked up with an unforgiving heart, you're never getting out. So while you're not in, let it go. That's the message. Jesus ends it by saying, "So also My heavenly Father will do to every one of you who does not forgive your brother from your heart." Wow. From the heart. He's looking at the heart. It kind of makes complaining, a complaining brother or sister rather insignificant, doesn't it? It makes that seemingly large offense not so large at all. It kind of makes Jesus' debt that He paid for me, that He delivered me from rather glorious.

It ought to provoke our minds to start counting all of the hundreds of thousands of talents that have been tossed into the sea of God's forgetfulness. Sent away as it were as far as the east is from the west. (I'm sorry, that's the east and that's the west, isn't it? So far, the Scripture says, has He removed our sins from us. That truth ought to melt our hearts into this *charizomenoi* - that Greek term - that kindness and graciousness and it should pour out into the lives of God's people in relationships with others.

There's so much more that could be said about the subject of forgiveness. I just can't get it all in in one message. But I do want to wrap up here by just appealing to anybody, anybody in here who might be struggling with this letting go of offenses. Perhaps you are holding a grudge against someone. And you know if you are. I encourage you to take a fresh look at the cross. And the wonderful person who was nailed there to it. For crimes far, far worse than those you're holding on to. I stand before you today as one who wrestled and struggled with forgiveness at a

very deep level. And by God's grace alone, through some of these realities I'm sharing with you today, the Lord was pleased to help me through it. And I'm convinced this is one of those working out your salvation with fear and trembling. Forgiveness has to happen. It has to be a reality. It has to be worked out within you or else. Oh, how everything in our flesh cries out for vengeance and self-pity. We want people to know we were wronged! We want payback for that which made us suffer. Listen to these words: "Consider Him who endured from sinners such hostility against Himself. When He was reviled, He didn't revile in return. When He suffered, He did not threaten, but continued entrusting Himself to Him who judges justly." That's how Jesus handled the injuries of others. He didn't throw a pity party. He didn't hold a grudge. He didn't broadcast it to others. He knew His Father knew and trusted Him. And that was enough. See, when we're wronged by others, it answers the question: just how precious and sufficient is the Lord to me? Is it enough that God knows I was wronged? Or do I need to let others know about it? That's a real test, isn't it? Dying to our own woundedness. Praise be to God the cross dispels it all.

I'm going to end by quoting Isaiah 53 here. Just listen to this: This is what the Lord Jesus subjected Himself to for the sole purpose of forgiving sin. "He was despised and we esteemed Him not. Surely, He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows, yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God and afflicted. He was pierced for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities. Upon Him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with His wounds, we are healed. All we, like sheep, have gone astray. We've turned every one to his own way. And the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and He was afflicted. He opened not His mouth, like a lamb is led to the slaughter, like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth." That reality afresh within our minds helps us die to our own woundedness. That reality when it's registered within helps kill an unforgiving heart. Thank you.

Father, we ask You to bless Your Word to us. We thank You for being such a forgiving God. Oh, that those that know it not might know it today. We pray in Jesus' name, Amen.