

# The power of forgiveness

*Preached on July 16, 2023 | Pastor: Pierre Telep*

We are living in a world which is marked by brokenness and pain and beyond the shiny façade which most people would display, there are often hidden struggles, difficulties untold, worries people do not dare to express. Louis Armstrong, whom I'm sure we all know through his song "What a Wonderful World," sang another song which is maybe a bit less known. The song says "nobody knows the trouble I've seen," and he ends the song saying "nobody but Jesus." Most of us are like that.

There is what people can see, but there is also what nobody but Jesus sees. And people can carry brokenness and pain for years. But it does not have to be like that. The topic the Lord has put in my heart to share with you today is a path to freedom, it's a path to healing, it's a path to a new life. Please let's take our Bible and read from the book of Matthew chapter 18: 21-22. Then Peter came to Him and said, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven. I wonder how this issue of forgiveness came that Peter would bring it to Jesus exactly in those terms, asking how many times one would forgive their brother who has sinned against them. The reality is that in a family, including in God's family, it would happen sometimes that a brother or a sister would do or say something that hurts you. ! Is there anybody here who has never been offended by anyone? Please raise your hand if you have never been offended by anyone.

For those following from London, I cannot see, but I take it as granted that we have all been offended by someone one day or another. There is a fact, people might not always do it intentionally, they can be unintentionally, but in this life, people harm other people. So Peter is coming to Jesus, recognizing that even when my brother would sin against me, being a follower of Christ means forgiving, but how many times, how long am I allowed to go through the same process of forgiving my brother? The suggestion Peter would give to Jesus, about 7 times, is full of insights. Those that are engineers in the room, you know that it is difficult for any process to repeat itself 7 times. If anyone wants to convince themselves, try to fold a paper 7 times without breaking it. So forgiving is part of Christian life. But unless you have been hurt, you cannot forgive. Unless someone does you wrong, you don't have the opportunity to practice forgiveness.

The problem with many of us is that we carry the pain of having been hurt for years. We deliberately choose to carry the wounds that have been inflicted on us throughout life. Why? Here Jesus is raising the bar and telling Peter a high amount of time one needs to forgive. In a sense, Jesus is actually saying, "you don't have to ever carry this weight with you, you need to always move on as a free person." It's not about the number of times you forgive, it's about your ability to enter life as a free person. Anybody who has not forgiven is a slave because this grumbling, this anger we carry through life, is keeping us tied to the same things over and over. I want to say something here this morning which I have received from the Lord: "forgiveness is faith in action." Apostle John said show me your faith with your words, I will show you mine with my actions. The area of forgiveness is one of those areas where true faith can be tested, and only actions can testify to the depth of faith.

Today the Lord has sent me here to tell you, for you to fully embrace the future which He has for you, you need to empty your hands from the things of the past. Please stop counting the number of times people have done you wrong. Stop making the list of bad people, worst people, and people you think deserve the death penalty. All these things are burdens you don't need to be carrying with you on the journey to that wonderful place where God wants to bring you. So when we forgive, it's a service we do to ourselves, it's about taking the path of healing. But Jesus is not asking us something He has not experienced Himself. We know that we can forgive because He has forgiven us first. You can never give something you never received. We have received Jesus's forgiveness, so as Christians, we are the best people on earth to pass forgiveness further. Quite frankly, if those that have received forgiveness are not passing it, then whom should we expect on earth to pass it? Are you not the salt of the earth?

While some are struggling to forgive others, some are struggling to forgive themselves. How much longer do you want to stay in this prison? So the Lord is giving us the key out today: let it go. Let them go. Why? Because we are not much better. Because without the Lord, we would have done the same, maybe even worse. Because they might have been weak, not necessarily wicked. Before we finish, I'd like to highlight just 5 of the characteristics of God's forgiveness as we see in the Bible so we can take example from what we have truly received. There are many more, but just giving 5.

1. God's forgiveness is accessible: The Bible tells us in the Book of Matthew 7:8 that "Everyone who asks receives". God does not hold anyone guilty who asks for forgiveness. There is only one way a person can become clean in the eyes of God, that is through forgiveness. If God's were to hide His mercy from us, nobody would survive. So God has made forgiveness accessible, why shouldn't you?
2. God's forgiveness takes the first step: "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." (Romans 5:8) Jesus did not wait for us to become good people before He would die for us. God did not wait for us to ask before He would send His son to save the world. There is a religious approach where one would say, why should I forgive someone who is not even willing to be forgiven? As Christians, we are called to take the first step with our forgiveness.
3. God's forgiveness infinitely renews itself: "The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness." (Lamentations 3:22-23) God's mercies are new every morning. As we stood up this morning we received new mercies. Tomorrow we will receive again new mercies. That is why Jesus gave a number very high for forgiving the same person.
4. God's forgiveness is complete: "I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions, for my own sake, and remembers your sins no more." (Isaiah 43:25) When God forgives you, he remembers your transgressions no more. For some of us who find it difficult to forgive ourselves, why would you remember something which God himself is not remembering no more? Are you more Holy than God to judge yourself harshly where He said I will remember your transgressions no more? The Bible also says in the book of Romans chapter 8:1 "There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." If God's word says no condemnation, I'm sure we can take Him at his word. No condemnation indeed. So leave here today a free person, as Jesus asked once a woman "where are those who were accusing you?" and it happened they had all left. That is what Jesus does, all those that are accusing you will go. But go and do the same for others. Set people free from those accusing them. That is the work Jesus came to do on earth. To set people free from bondages. When you forgive, you set yourself free from bondages. When you forgive, you do Jesus' work.
5. God's forgiveness is transformative: "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!" (2 Corinthians 5:17) Sometimes, the best way to see that someone has come to Christ is through the transformation in their lives. Because when Jesus touches someone, I can testify that the old will really go, and the new will come.

As we will be singing “All to Jesus I surrender,” I would like to invite you to come to Jesus, to receive the transformative forgiveness, the complete forgiveness, that forgiveness which took the first step because Jesus wanted to reach out to us. Let’s come to the cross today, to be clean, so we have the power to forgive ourselves. Amen.

