



THE FORGIVING FATHER

Kevin Presley

Greetings and welcome. It's wonderful to be with you today. One of the most powerful parables ever spoken by Jesus, the great Storyteller, was about a man with two sons, one of whom was rebellious and foolish. He left home and left behind a heartbroken father to go live for himself and fulfill all his sinful dreams and desires. He soon learned, though, that the way of the transgressor is hard and realized what a terrible thing he had done. He decided to go home and beg his father's forgiveness, and this once proud and haughty son returned in great remorse and humility, doubtlessly wondering how his father would receive him. Jesus said in Luke 15:20, "And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him." If you please, the Lord Jesus was painting a picture of heaven's own doorstep, and not only the attitudes of men below but the disposition of the Father above.

What is your image of God? What is He like and how does He look at you and the rest of the world? Perhaps you think that God looks at man and trembles with rage and is just waiting to unleash His unbridled wrath upon every person who has ever sinned. Or maybe you think of God as the ultimate grandfather who sits obliviously up in heaven doting over us and smiling at everything we do; a pushover, who won't bring Himself to punish man for His sins. Well, both concepts are wrong. For sure, God is indignant about sin and cannot allow it to pass unpunished, but He is also gracious and long-suffering, and His great desire is to be reconciled with His sinful and fallen creation. His disposition toward even the vilest sinner is one of love and concern. His heart aches when we sin. His wrath is kindled within Him like a parent becomes angry with a rebellious child, but that anger is tempered by an undying love for the sinner and a desire for that sinner to repent and be saved.

The apostle Peter said, "For the Lord is not slack concerning His promise as some men count slackness..." (meaning He will one day judge the world and will judge man's outstanding transgressions) "...but He is

longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.” (2 Peter 3:9) God does not forgive us in our rebellion. He demands repentance, but He is ever so anxious to forgive us! This should be our model in forgiving others, too! Repentance is necessary, but we should be ready and willing to fully forgive those who do repent.

The forgiving Father longs for us as prodigal sons and daughters to come home and be reconciled to Him. No matter what you have done and how far into sin you have sank, God’s arms are open and His great desire is to see you come walking down the homeward trail and the Bible teaches us in the beautiful parable of the wayward Son that when He sees you coming His way, He will run to meet you and will wrap you in His arms and forgive you freely. The world needs to hear that message. Maybe you need to hear that message today. You feel guilty and unlovable...but there’s a God in heaven who loves you more than any parent loved a child, and He wants to forgive you if you’ll meet Him on His terms.

Speaking of the rebellious generation of Moses who were delivered from Egypt, the prophet said, “But they and our fathers dealt proudly, and hardened their necks, and hearkened not to thy commandments, And refused to obey, neither were mindful of thy wonders that thou didst among them; but hardened their necks, and in their rebellion appointed a captain to return to their bondage: but thou art a God ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and forsookest them not,” Nehemiah 9:16-17. Isaiah 55:6-7 says, “Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.” The marginal reading there says He will “multiply to pardon.” Of course, our earlier reading in Micah 7:19 says “God delighteth in mercy...” And that He can cast our sins into the deepest sea. He wants to show mercy to us. The beautiful 103rd Psalm says in verses 8-14, “The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy. He will not always chide: neither will he keep his anger forever. He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him. As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us. Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him. For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust.” The Psalmist doesn’t say that God unconditionally and automatically forgives our sins. He does say that He understands our weakness and our fragility. He remembers that we are mortals and not divine, and that allows Him to be patient and to provide us ample opportunity to repent of our sins and be forgiven. The problem is not in God’s willingness and ability to forgive, it is our stubborn refusal to repent.

I mentioned the parable of the prodigal son. That parable could just as easily be called the “Parable of the Forgiving Father” because it’s as much about the Father as it is about His rebellious son. Here is a young man who had done everything to hurt, disappoint, and anger his father. His father loved him, yet that arrogant little brat didn’t want to live by daddy’s rules, and so he haughtily demanded his portion of the father’s estate and went and wasted every penny of it on sin and profligacy. We have reason to assume that he spent his father’s hard-earned money on wine and harlots. However, it wasn’t long until he learned what every sinner eventually learns, that the good times don’t last forever. The far country with its sinful crowd left this young man high and dry. He was hungry, destitute, dejected, and unloved in that strange land that he thought so enticing and inviting. So, with a heavy heart, his head bowed low in shame and disgrace, he warily starts down the familiar road to home. I’m sure he wondered what his father would say and if his father would ever want to see his face again. He probably recited the apology he was going to make a thousand times as he trudged along the road toward home.

He finally made it back to the country he knew so well. The familiar sights of home and of his childhood were scattered all along the way as he got close to the old home place. There must have been a long trail leading up to the house. I don't know, but I like to think of that home as having a front porch across the front of it. Perhaps his old daddy was sitting there with a sad look, just watching the roadway and looking out over the distant horizon. I imagine he had spent time there every day since his boy left home...watching, hoping, and praying. Suddenly, he sees something way off in the distance, a familiar form coming over the hill. His heart skipped a beat as he watched it come closer, and in a moment, he knew his prayer had been answered, and it just had to be his long-lost son. Regardless of where he had been or what he had done...the bible says, "while he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him." He smothered his humble confession in a loving embrace and welcomed his son back home again. Friends, do you realize that's one of the most powerful pictures we have of God in all the scriptures. God is ready to forgive your sins, but you've got to repent and turn toward home.

One of the most amazing things about God's mercy and forgiveness is how far it reaches. He can forgive what most think is unforgivable! God is willing to forgive EVERY sin, the very darkest of sins. Sometimes people get to thinking that their sin is just too horrible for God to ever forgive. Sometimes, we're willing to forgive someone if what they have done doesn't seem too serious, but if it's scandalous and if we've been hurt by it, it's hard for us to forgive them. It's difficult for us to wrap our minds around the love and the capacity of forgiveness in the heart of God. Listen, though, to Isaiah 1:18. He says, "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." The word "scarlet" means double-dyed or twice dipped. It is the picture of a garment that has been dipped into the vile vat of pollution time and time again, yet God says it can be made as white as snow. That's the power of God's grace, my friends! Paul's prayer in Ephesians 3:17-19 was that we might know not only the height, length, and breadth of God's love, but the depth of it as well. His love reaches the lowest gutter of sin and picks the vilest sinner up out of his ruined condition.

You know, the Bible tells us about some people who were rescued from the dark depths of depravity. Why, the very people who constituted the first converts to Christianity were a blood-thirsty mob who called for the murder of God's Son. Yet, God loved them enough to forgive them when they truly repented and obeyed the truth, beginning on the Day of Pentecost when they were at last convinced by the preaching of the miraculously confirmed gospel of Christ's kingdom. And then, consider the people who made up the church at Corinth. These weren't your good neighbors down the street. These were moral "low lifes". Their sins were as bad as sin can get. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 6:9-1; "Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God." That's a dark picture! But listen now. He said "...And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God." Here were the lowest of the low, and yet Paul said they had been redeemed and washed in the blood of Christ. My friend, if God could forgive people like that, I can assure you that you have never done anything that God can't forgive you for if you'll turn loose of it and seek God's pardon on the terms of the gospel. And even when Christians err from the path of right, God is willing to forgive if they can repent. 1 John 1:9 says, "If we (speaking to those already Christians) confess our sins (acknowledge them and agree with God about our guilt), he is faithful and just to forgive us of our sins and to cleanse us from ALL unrighteousness."

But what does it MEAN to be forgiven? Perhaps one of the best ways to understand it is to look at what God does with our sins when He forgives them. In Acts 3:19, the scripture says that our sins can be “blotted out.” That means that He removes the notation of the offense from His record. The fact that God keeps such a record should concern every one of us. Did you realize that God makes a note of every sin and every offense that you commit? He knows about it and He’s writing it down and one day, if you refuse to confess it to Him and seek His forgiveness, He’s going to read the list off one by one and you’ll be forced to answer for everything you’ve done, and I’ll be forced to answer for everything I’ve done. But how wonderful to know that just as easily as God can write a sin down, he can just as readily erase it from His book, and He wants to do that! The Bible tells us in Hebrews 8:12 that God remembers our sin no more forever when He forgives it. He restores the offender to his former position of love and grace. The Bible says that God covers our sins; Psalm 32:1. He removes them from us as far as the east is from the west; Psalm 103:12. He obliterates them from His memory forever; Jeremiah 31:34. He hides His face from them according to Psalm 51:9. Also, the Bible says he does not impute sins that have been forgiven, according to Romans 4:7-8. The word “impute” is a mathematical or bookkeeping term. Sin incurs a debt to God, and God is keeping a ledger of our debts. However, when He forgives us of our sin, He no longer has a record of it on His ledger. And the Bible also assures us that when God forgives, He will never mention those sins again; Ezekiel 18:22. You know, we often fall very short of that. It’s always a temptation to hold someone’s past over their head. Perhaps if they sin again, we go back and dredge up the deeds of the past, but not so with God. Every time He forgives, we’re given a clean slate on which to write.

We can also discover the meaning of forgiveness by looking at its synonyms. For example, the forgiveness of sins is also called the “remission of sins” in passages like Matthew 26:28 and Acts 2:38. That’s a good word because remission means to remit payment for, and after all, sin renders us in debt to God. In other words, when God forgives our sins, He marks the debt “paid in full!” The Bible calls forgiveness a “cleansing” because sin renders us unclean in the sight of God, according to Psalm 19:12 and Psalm 51:7. 1 John 1:7 says, “But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.” It’s also called justification because sin renders us guilty. Romans 3:24 says, “Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.” The Greek word for “justified” means to “set right, “to regard or show one as innocent or just. Now, if the facts of the case were all that were shown and we had no advocate in Christ and no sacrifice of His blood, we would immediately be declared guilty in the courtroom of heaven. But because of the advocacy of and the reconciliatory work of Jesus Christ upon the cross, the person who is washed in His blood is declared innocent of all charges, even though he committed the crime or the offense. The word “pardon” is also used to describe forgiveness in Psalm 25:11. That’s the case because sin automatically renders us worthy of punishment. A criminal is irrevocably convicted in a court of law, and all that is left for him to hope for is a pardon from the governor. Salvation is our pardon from the consequences of our crime. Forgiveness is the same thing as healing because sin leaves our souls diseased and dying. Forgiveness means freedom because sin binds us and leaves us enslaved. And finally, to be forgiven means to be reconciled because sin renders us estranged from God. Isaiah 59:1 says, “...your iniquities have separated between you and your God and your sins have hid His face from you that He will not hear.” God’s holiness demands that He separate Himself from the sinner. It puts man at odds with God. But when Jesus died on the cross of Calvary, He, as it were, reached up and took the pure and holy hand of God and reached down and took the wretched, defiled hand of man and clasped them together on His bloody chest and said, “It is finished.” He repaired the broken relationship between God and all who would turn to Him in repentance and obedience.

I want to conclude our study today by talking about how God forgives us. What's the remedy for sin? Zechariah 13:1 says, "In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness." That blessed fountain was nothing less than the blood of God's own Son shed on the cross of Calvary. Friends, that's the only thing that can atone for your sin. He took your place so you wouldn't have to be cast into hell because of the things you've done. In love and pity, he took your punishment so you could go free and live eternally. So, how do I allow Him to be my vicarious sacrifice? How do I place my faith in Him to save, and thus call upon His name to save? How do I wash in His blood to be clean? The answer is found in Acts 22:16. When Saul came to believe that Jesus was the Christ and turned from his sins in repentance, he was told to "Arise and be baptized, washing away thy sins, calling upon the name of the Lord." Have you done that? If not, you need to.

©2025 BibleWay Media. All rights reserved.

BibleWay Media grants permission to copy this material for personal use. Permission is also granted to distribute this transcript as long as it is reproduced in its entirety, used solely for its original purpose of spreading the gospel, and attribution is given to the author and Let the Bible Speak.