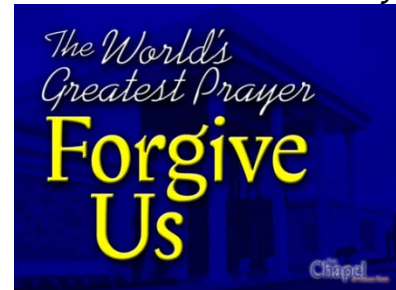


## Sermon

# Forgive Us

Dan Neary

Last Sunday, Dr. Vertefeuille reminded us that *The Lord's Prayer* pops up in all sorts of places when he recounted the stories of the passengers on flight 1549 praying *The Lord's Prayer* aloud as they prepared for a water landing.



This week I'm sure many of us noticed the prominence of *The Lord's Prayer* in Tuesday's historic celebration.

Many have wondered who would succeed Billy Graham as the "Nation's Pastor" or the "Pastor to Presidents."

It appears that Rick Warren, Pastor of Saddleback Church and author of *The Purpose Driven Life* may be ascending to that post. I hope you joined me in being proud of Rick Warren and the solid Christian prayer that he used to lead the world in praying for the United States and our new president: Barak Obama. It was a significant moment in an inauguration with unusually high participation... both in the millions on the ground, and the rest of us watching around the world.



I have a clip from the end of the prayer for us to listen to this morning... just the last minute of the 4:44 prayer.

Jesus: this is the best part of the prayer.

Let's join in praying the Lord's Prayer.



Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name.

<sup>10</sup> Thy kingdom come.

Thy will be done in earth, as *it is* in heaven.

<sup>11</sup> Give us this day our daily bread. <sup>12</sup> And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.

<sup>13</sup> And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil:

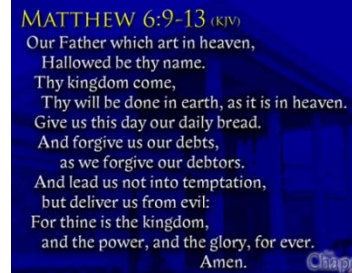
For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen. <sup>1</sup>

I think you will agree with me that this prayer, *The Lord's Prayer*, was fitting way to lead us all during this momentous occasion.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Holy Bible: King James Version*, electronic ed. of the 1769 edition of the 1611 Authorized Version. (Bellingham WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1995). Mt 6:9-13.

I heard one news commentator, who was in attendance, remark about the awesome power of that moment. Standing in this crowd that could literally be seen from outer space (Did you see the satellite pictures? The people looked like a cloud of small insects on an attack of the Capitol, swarming up the Mall)... in the midst of an unprecedented crowd, this reporter joined Rick Warren, as well as hundreds of thousands of others praying this prayer that Jesus taught to His followers. Somewhere around a million people prayed together, "Our Father."



MATTHEW 6:9-13 (KJV)  
Our Father which art in heaven,  
Hallowed be thy name.  
Thy kingdom come,  
Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread.  
And forgive us our debts,  
as we forgive our debtors.  
And lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil:  
For thine is the kingdom,  
and the power, and the glory, for ever.  
Amen.

I'm sure it was an awesome experience... but, of course, it wasn't all that new, not necessarily a unique occurrence. The followers of Jesus have been praying this prayer, in small groups and large, in every language, for now thousands of years. A million people praying on the Mall of our Nation's Capitol is awesome... but only illustrates the way that this prayer has led multiple millions of Christians to God for ages, all around our globe.

Forgive us our debts, or transgressions, or sins.  
Forgive us!

We've broken this prayer into seven parts for the purpose of our sermon series; today we come to this passage that reads:

<sup>12</sup>And forgive us our debts,  
as we also have forgiven our debtors.<sup>2</sup>



The World's  
Greatest Prayer  
Forgive  
Us

This is unique among the various parts of the prayer for at least a couple of reasons.

First it is the only place in the prayer that bears with it a specific **obligation** on our part.

Throughout the rest of the prayer, the focus is entirely on God:

- You are our Father God
- You are Holy
- We want what Jesus teaches about a Kingdom *not of this world*
- We want Your will to be done, right here and now
- You provide bread, and everything we need
- You have the power to keep us from temptation
- You have the power to deliver us from evil



MATTHEW 6:9-13  
Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name,  
your kingdom come,  
your will be done,  
on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread.  
And forgive us our debts,  
as we also have forgiven our debtors.  
And lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from the evil one.

<sup>2</sup> *The Holy Bible: Today's New International Version*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005). Mt 6:12.

You God! It is all about You!

But here we have a unique exception; when it comes to being forgiven, we are to be forgivers.

More specifically, it appears that we are to come to God in prayer, with this work done ahead of time (“have forgiven”). As we come to God for forgiveness, we are expected to have been forgivers already.

Furthermore, this part of the prayer is distinguished by being the part of the prayer that Jesus **expounded** on in the Matthew passage.

Look at the words of Jesus that immediately follow *The Prayer*:

<sup>14</sup>For if you forgive others when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. <sup>15</sup>But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.<sup>3</sup>

MATTHEW 6:14,15

For if you forgive others  
when they sin against you,  
your heavenly Father  
will also forgive you.  
But if you do not  
forgive others their sins,  
your Father will not  
forgive your sins.

Remember, especially in the context of this instance of *The Prayer* in Matthew, Jesus is **teaching**. This is wrapped in the context of the *Sermon on the Mount* in which Jesus is teaching about what it means to be His followers, citizens of His Kingdom.

He says

your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

<sup>9</sup>“This, then, is how you should pray:<sup>4</sup>

Once laying out *The Prayer* before His followers, it was as if He said, “**did you get that?** Did you understand that *really important* part in the middle?”

Forgiveness.

Three points:

- Forgiven
- Forgivers
- Seek Forgiveness



<sup>3</sup> *The Holy Bible: Today's New International Version*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005). Mt 6:13-15.

<sup>4</sup> *The Holy Bible: Today's New International Version*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005). Mt 6:8-9.

First, understand that this (forgiveness) **is the** transaction. We are forgiven!

There is nothing that we need from God that surpasses the need for forgiveness. We come to Him and find all sorts of things:

- Beauty
- Peace
- Strength
- Provision
- Health
- Wholeness

But none of that compares with forgiveness.

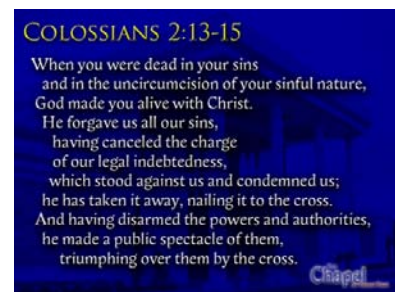
Let's look to the passage from Colossians 2 that David read earlier to help us understand this forgiveness.

First we see our **lives without Christ** being described as no life at all; without forgiveness we are "dead" in our sins.

Do we need to be convinced of this? Do we need to be convinced that we are in need of forgiveness? Even though popular culture tries, as it might, to convince us that everything and anything is all right, that all manner of behavior is permissible, that there really aren't any universal standards of right or wrong... **we know better**. And the more we understand a perfect and holy God, the more we are confronted with the standard of a majestically perfect and awesome God... the more we understand how we simply cannot live up... we know that our shortcomings mount up as a **debt** before a holy God.

We don't need to be convinced... but we may need to be reminded. Around here, we are at least reminded every Sunday morning, early in our worship service together, when we come to God in **repentance**. We come together, standing as those who still strive to be more aligned with God's holiness, but falling short. Pastors and parishioners, young and old, rich and poor... we all come with the same cry: God we have more to learn, more to be, more to give. **We need your forgiveness**. We are grateful for the life Christ gives, and we mourn the death that we still cling to with our frail, misguided hands.

We come for forgiveness like this with this great promise: we ask as we always **receive** forgiveness. The **death** of sin is overwhelmed by the **life** of Christ. We are forgiven by God's awesome power through Christ.



He forgave us all our sins, <sup>14</sup>having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross. <sup>5</sup>

Our sin, our willful disobedience, our laziness, our lack of kindness, the good we leave undone... all of it mounts up like an impossible debt before a holy God... but thanks be to God, it is canceled, all of it, through Christ our Redeemer.

Our debt was paid through Christ "nailing it to the cross."

Think of it. Not a senseless death... not a needless sacrifice... not a crime perpetrated by misguided religious leaders through a corrupt government... no, the Cross was God's plan to rightfully purchase our forgiveness, our life, our *eternal* life. He **forgave** us, He **forgives** us, all our sins!

So when we pray "forgive us our sins" we know that the request is met by the awesome power of God. Forgiveness is ours, paid for and ready for us to receive, because of what Christ has done for each of us and all of us.

We are forgiven!

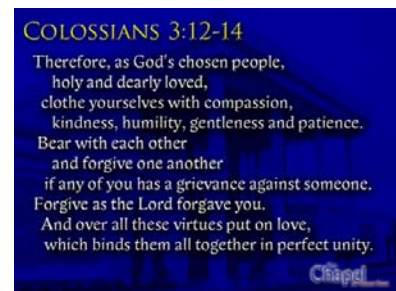
Of this we can be certain.

**And** we are to be **forgivers**.



Let's continue to look to Colossians, now picking up with the passage that David read earlier for chapter 3.

When we have this new life, as believers in Jesus, living this new life purchased for us by Christ's miraculous work, nailing our sin to the Cross... we can live Godly lives through His power. Being made holy through Christ, dearly loved as God's children, we are invited to be like him:



clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> *The Holy Bible: Today's New International Version*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005). Col 2:13-14.

<sup>6</sup> *The Holy Bible: Today's New International Version*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005). Col 3:12.

This is one way that we know that we are His. We, God's children, are invited to take on characteristics of God's character.

- Compassion – feeling the needs of others over our own needs
- Humility – remembering that we are merely sinners saved by God's grace
- Gentleness – choosing to take on weakness for the sake of the weak (someone actually said to me this week, "although not the gentlest shepherd, you're a good shepherd")
- Patience – remembering that we are all among God's works in progress

God calls us to

<sup>13</sup>Bear with each other and forgive one another<sup>7</sup>

Furthermore, the writer goes on to make in plain and clear:

Forgive as the Lord forgave you.

This is a clear calling to be like Christ. Forgiving others, even if it calls for sacrifice.

The words of Jesus are hard.

<sup>14</sup>For if you forgive others when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. <sup>15</sup>But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.<sup>8</sup>

Plainly stated, **unforgiveness is sin...** a grievous sin.

Those who are followers of Jesus, those who seek to worship God with our redeemed lives, are called to put aside unforgiveness, to not tolerate it in our lives. We are to be, like Jesus, forgivers.



This can bring to mind an important, maybe even thorny, theological question: Can God forgive unforgiveness? Is unforgiveness an *unpardonable* sin? The whole context of the Bible teaches us that, yes, God can forgive our unforgiveness... but like every other sin, God calls us to leave it behind. Look at the context here. Jesus is calling his followers to the highest standard, even using hyperbole in some cases:

- Cut off the hand that causes you to sin
- Pluck out the eye that causes you to sin
- Murder is bad, but anger is as bad
- Adultery is sin, but so is looking with lust

A life that worships God best is a life marked by striving toward God's highest standards... and the forgiven being forgivers.

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<sup>7</sup> *The Holy Bible: Today's New International Version*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005). Col 3:13.

<sup>8</sup> *The Holy Bible: Today's New International Version*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005). Mt 6:13-15.

The strength to be that kind of forgiver comes from God. **It is hard** to forgive, especially when we still carry pain, when we bear scars, when there is no way to ever entirely forget whatever wrong is done against us.

But forgive we must. This is the high calling that Jesus gives us... the highest calling that Jesus demonstrated to us.

When pursuing forgiveness, doing the hard work of being forgivers, we can receive strength in knowing that **God does not waste our pain**. Remember the episode that David read about from the Old Testament passage in Genesis.

Joseph's brothers were right; they deserved punishment for the way they behaved, and Joseph was in a position to deliver the punishment they deserved. But instead, Joseph chose **compassion**. He chose **humility**, noting that he was not in the place of God. He chose **gentleness** and **patience**. And in his wisdom, he realized that God made something very good out of the mess that Joseph's brothers intended for evil. So he forgave.

I'll pause and ask, "so what?" before getting to the third point.

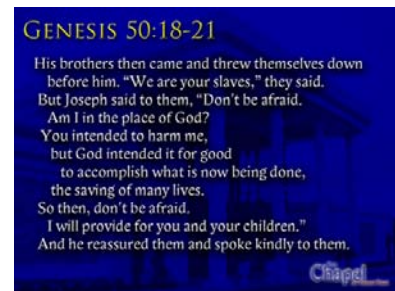
Although not specified in this passage, I think there is an important **logical conclusion** that we can take with us as our "so what?" today.

We can know that we stand forgiven before God; God has forgiven us. And we know that we are called to be forgivers; when it is in our power to be forgivers, we are commanded to do so.

1. We are forgiven (by the full power and authority of God), and
2. We are to be forgivers in order to have right relationship with God.

Being a forgiver puts us in a ready position to be forgiven by God.

So... the act of **seeking** forgiveness must have a powerful redemptive force. If we know that we need to be forgiven by another, seeking that forgiveness has redemptive power. That unforgiveness stands, not only as a barrier between the offender and the offended, but as a barrier to a whole and holy relationship between that offended person and God.



I suppose that it goes without saying that we should, of course, seek forgiveness when we have hurt another. When we have caused harm or done some damage, seeking forgiveness is the right expression of love and worship... but let's take that a step farther. We should seek forgiveness even if we don't think *we* need it... because *they* may need it.

Seeking forgiveness, regardless of our judgment of our need for forgiveness, is powerful ministry.

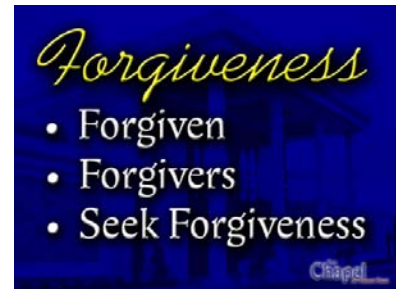
Our legal standard for justice is "innocent until proven guilty." No punishment is just, no debt or penalty is acquired, until we are proven guilty.

But could it be that our spiritual standard of justice different? I know that I tend to operate "innocent until proven guilty" when it comes to seeking forgiveness. I'm glad to seek forgiveness when I need forgiveness... but very slow to seek forgiveness when I am not convinced that there is any offense. I'll seek forgiveness when I need it, but don't naturally seek forgiveness for the sake of the offended.

This is the highest standard to which we are called. This is how we bear with one another. This is an important part of how peace rules in our lives and hearts.

Let's commit ourselves to these three today.

1. Receiving God's forgiveness; knowing that God has forgiven us, meeting our debt by nailing it to the cross.
2. Loosening our grip on our pain, and the offense we've acquired, and being forgivers.
3. Not allowing others to hold any grudge, even if it is not deserved, in order for the barriers between one another, and any barrier that separates from God, can be torn down.



Let's pray together

