

FORGIVING CHALLENGE

ABSOLUTION

We are continuing to look at how Jesus forgave Peter. Last week we looked at how Peter came running to Jesus, and how in confession, God cares less about *how* you come, and what you say, but simply *that* you come. And before you even come to Him, you need to see He's already come for you.

Today I want to define for you what forgiveness is. The definition of forgiveness has two parts:

Forgive

- 1) to cancel a debt**
- 2) to stop feeling angry or resentful toward (someone) for an offense, flaw, or mistake**

To receive the total forgiveness of God, the debt must be cancelled, and the feelings of anger and resentment must be gone.

The first part, canceling a debt, is an action. The second part has to do with an attitude. You cannot experience the total freedom that comes from forgiveness without both the action and attitude taking place.

On December 18, 1865, slavery in the United States was abolished by the Thirteenth Amendment. How many slaves were there on December 19th? In reality, there should have been none.

But many still lived like slaves because they never learned the truth. Others knew and even believed they were free, but they didn't know any other kind of life, so they lived as they always had.

To officially, legally free the slaves in our country it took first, President Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation. Next, it took over 600,000 soldiers killed and countless maimed in the Civil War. Third, it took 22 of the 36 States to vote to adopt the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution. That's a lot!, and you'd think the battle would be done. Legally it was. There was no law that held anyone in slavery in the United States.

The plantation owners said, "We're ruined! We've lost our all our slaves." But soon they realized that as long as they kept the

people *living* as slaves, and *thinking* that their life hasn't changed, then their freedom would have no practical effect. The newly freed people had been born as slaves and had been slaves their whole life. And so, white people in the south continued a whole society of treating black people cruelly so that they would *think* like slaves and *act* like slaves. They had heard that they had been given freedom, but their lives changed very little. It took another 100 years before the oppressive system of segregation was finally dismantled.

Remember, we said that forgiveness has two parts:

- 1) to cancel a debt**
- 2) to stop feeling angry or resentful for someone's offense, flaw, or mistake**

To receive the total forgiveness of God, the debt must be cancelled and the feelings of anger and resentment must be gone.

The first part, canceling a debt, has to do with an action. The second aspect has to do with an attitude. You cannot experience the total freedom that comes from forgiveness without both the action and attitude taking place.

In the freeing of the slaves in the United States, it was hard to legally free the slaves. It took a Proclamation, a War, getting the Thirteenth Amendment through both houses of Congress, and then, 2/3 of the States voting "yes" to adopt it. That's the action part. For the former slave families to actually feel free, and live free took another 100 years, and longer.

The second part of forgiveness is much more challenging than the first. The first, very literally, can be settled with an action. But the second part is more a process than an action. And this is where we get hung up.

It is hard for us to forgive. When a co-worker or a family member says or does something – not intentionally, not spitefully – but accidentally and it hurts us, we find it hard to forgive. Yet we live in a world where we deal with a lot more hurtful things than unintentional words and actions. Our lives get touched by murder, rape, terrorism, divorce, infidelity, neglect, abuse, racism, pornography, pride, and greed. So, if we struggle with forgiveness

in some of the trivial things we go through, then how much more will we struggle when significant issues come our way?

Today and next week we will see how these two parts of forgiveness work together.

Today we are looking at absolution, and that is the action, the canceling of the debt. Next week we look at Restoration, and that is where we see that our God not only has paid the price for us but no longer harbors any anger or resentment towards us.

You remember Peter was the disciple who boldly proclaimed to Jesus, "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God!" Jesus changed his name from Simon to Peter, which means "Rock," or "Big Bolder." Jesus said that on this rock-solid faith He would build His Church, and Peter was appointed the leader of this movement that would take the news of Jesus to the world.

Peter also promised that he would never, ever deny Jesus. But later that same night, Jesus was arrested and on trial. Peter was standing out in the courtyard warming himself from the night chill, standing near a charcoal fire, when a servant girl asked Pete, "Aren't you one of Jesus' followers?" Peter denied *ever* knowing Jesus. He did it three times – the third time he cursed to make his denying ever knowing Jesus sound more emphatic. Then Jesus happened to walk within sight. Jesus looked right at Peter. Peter in shame realized what he had done. He went out and wept bitterly.

Within a day, Jesus was crucified, dead, and in the tomb. It appeared that Peter would never have the chance to talk to Jesus and reconcile. It seemed like Pete would have to live with his guilt and shame every day of his life. But then Jesus rose again. And Peter was there when Jesus appeared in the Upper Room to all the disciples twice. But the two never had a chance to talk one-on-one, and for Peter to be forgiven.

Then Jesus showed up where the disciples had been fishing all night. Jesus cooked them breakfast. They came and sat down to eat with Jesus around a charcoal fire. Peter was the first to get to Jesus. He must have seen and smelled the charcoal fire and been

transported in his mind and his emotions back to the night he stood near a charcoal fire where he died ever knowing Jesus.

Peter was thinking and feeling *“Oh wow, did I ever blow it! I’m not worthy...I disqualified myself...Jesus is reminding me of why things are different now...I can’t follow him anymore...I screwed up. He’s bringing me back to the charcoal.”*

But we know that is not the character and nature of our God to hold onto grudges. He’s not bringing Peter back to the coals to make him relive his worst moment, but instead, to relieve him of his worst moment. Let me repeat...don’t miss this: **God doesn’t want us to *relive* our worst moments, He wants to *relieve* us from them.**

Jesus had prepared a meal. In ancient times, to eat and prepare a meal for someone who has done you wrong is a gesture of forgiveness. Jesus’ actions were saying loud and clear, *“Peter, I’ve made a fire. I’ve cooked you a meal. I’m willing to reconcile. I’m not holding anything against you. Come have some breakfast.”*

They ate and Peter is now in front of Jesus, feeling guilty, and filled with shame. Then Jesus spoke to him:

¹⁵ When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?”

“Yes, Lord,” he said, “you know that I love you.”

Jesus said, “Feed my lambs.”

¹⁶ Again Jesus said, “Simon son of John, do you love me?”

He answered, “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.”

Jesus said, “Take care of my sheep.”

¹⁷ The third time he said to him, “Simon son of John, do you love me?”

Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, “Do you love me?” He said, “Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.”

Jesus said, “Feed my sheep.

Around the charcoal fire, on the night of Jesus’s betrayal, how many times did Peter deny Jesus? Three.

Around the charcoal fire, on the shore that morning while eating breakfast with Jesus, how many times does Jesus ask Peter if he loves Him? Three.

The Bible talks about how Jesus has reconciled us back to God. And we toss the word reconciliation out quite a bit in this world. The thing about reconciliation is that it's a very careful, thorough process that can sometimes be very difficult. It requires looking at the details, very specifically. In the finance world, if you've ever had to reconcile your books before, you know how long, arduous, and methodical this process is. But, this process is important so that you don't bring a misbalance with you into the future.

Ernest Hemingway wrote a book entitled *Capital of the World*. In it he told a story of a father and his son named Paco who had been estranged for some reason. Paco is a common name in Spain -- a nickname for Francisco. Paco ran away from home when he and his father argued over something foolish that he said or did.

Paco found himself wandering the streets of Madrid, Spain hoping to enter into a profession that would most likely get him killed – bullfighting. Those who train under a mentor have a good chance of surviving this profession, but Paco's memory of his mistakes and guilt over what happened blindly drove him to this one-way street to suicide.

Paco's death was the last thing his father wanted. So, the father tried something desperate which he hoped would work. There was little to no chance that he would be able to find Paco by wandering the streets of Madrid, so instead he put an announcement in the local newspaper *El Liberal*.

The advertisement read, **“Paco, meet me at the Hotel Montana at noon on Wednesday. All is forgiven! Love, Papa.”**

Wednesday arrived, and when Paco's father got to the Hotel at the time of the meeting, he wasn't prepared for what he was about to see. There, standing in front of the hotel were 800 young men all named Paco, waiting for their fathers – waiting for the forgiveness they thought they would receive that day.

God knew that your greatest need was forgiveness. That's why He sent His Son. That forgiveness is available through Christ.

Maybe today you feel like Peter, carrying guilt and shame over something you did. All sin is ultimately sin against God, your father. Maybe today you're saying to yourself, "*That's me! I'm that Paco. And I have walked away from my Heavenly Father.*" Then know that God will never turn you away. He promises you that a broken and contrite heart, He will never turn away. (Psalm 51:17)

This week of absolution, as we begin it today, hear God's declaration of forgiveness over you. Hear Jesus' forgiveness in the deepest, darkest, most shame-filled places of your story.

Peter had denied Jesus three times. And in this moment, what is Jesus doing? He is entering into His worst moment, all three denials, and fully reconciling Peter.

Why? Because in order for us to fully heal, our wounds need to have any infection, any bacteria cleaned, so that our wounds can turn to scars. Part of our healing process is to deal with our past wounds.

When it comes to forgiveness, God doesn't want you to hang onto your sin, stuff away your sin, or suppress your sin. He doesn't want or need you to try to overcome your sin by yourself. But He will ask you to go backward to examine your sin before He will invite you to move forward with His grace.

If we don't go back and confess all of the ways in which we've failed Him, we will not be as effective for Him as we can be in the future. When we don't allow God to fully absolve us from all of our past mistakes, we drag our mistakes and failures along with us. It's no wonder that in our pursuit to move forward, we aren't living effectively. We're carrying all of this baggage around with us.

Had this exchange with Jesus not happened, what's the alternative? Every time a rooster crowed, Peter would be filled with shame. Guilt. Doubt. Hopelessness. But instead, in order to relieve Peter, Jesus goes through the painful process, asks the hard questions, in order to bring absolution in Peter's life.

To absolve is to release from guilt, obligation, or punishment. It is a declaration of the forgiveness of sins.

The process of healing will not be without pain for you, but the most painful part of the healing process has already taken place in the crucifixion of Jesus.

From up on the cross, Jesus shouted, “Tetelestai.” It means “It is finished.” I would think the devil had a nice laugh hearing Jesus say that. The Evil One finished off the Messiah, the Savior God sent. He was on the cross and dead. It sure looked like the devil won, and we were doomed forever.

But notice, Jesus didn’t say, “***I am finished.***” He said, “***It is finished.***” The “it” that Jesus finished was the payment of all the sins of all people of all time. During the time in which Jesus lived the word “Tetelestai” was also written on business documents or receipts to indicate “Paid in Full.” Jesus’ death on the cross was the full reconciliation needed. He balanced the books. He wiped away the sins of our past so we can move forward boldly in the future! The debt you and I and all people owe to God to pay for our sins, Jesus paid in full!

The reason why this is such Good News for us today is that, like Peter, we too, have fallen short. You might even have a charcoal story of your own that continues to haunt you. The sin that continues to go with you that you just can’t shake. The time you failed and then you completely abandoned your faith, or maybe just ever so slowly started walking away from God’s call on your life.

What really changed Peter’s life is when he encountered the forgiveness of Jesus firsthand. It’s one thing to hear about it or to know about God’s forgiveness for the whole world, like a fact. It’s another thing altogether to truly receive it yourself.

Why did Jesus come again to Peter? Not just to tell him he was forgiven, but to show him he is fully forgiven. And for you, too, Jesus not only tells you the truth that He died to forgive you and all people, but He comes to you personally. He knows your life intimately. He knows everything about you, even better than you know yourself. Jesus has seen you at your best, and He knows

about your worst moments. So, admit to Him your charcoal moment. Don't hide it. Don't lie that it isn't wrong. Bring it to Jesus in honest, open confession. For Peter to ultimately be set free he experienced Jesus forgiving him first-hand. And you can listen to me tell you about Jesus. But know that He is here. He knows all about you. And He loves you still. Be forgiven. Know His love for you personally in your heart.

Listen to these words from Colossians 2, in the Message version:

When you were stuck in your old sin-dead life, you were incapable of responding to God. God brought you alive—right along with Christ! Think of it! All sins forgiven, the slate wiped clean, that old arrest warrant canceled and nailed to Christ's cross. He stripped all the spiritual tyrants in the universe of their sham authority at the cross and marched them naked through the streets.

Because of the blood of Jesus that He shed for you at the cross, I have Good News for you. You have been forgiven. The debt has been paid for. The slate has been wiped clean. If the God of the Universe has removed this penalty upon you, will you remove it from yourself as well? Will you stop making yourself pay for the sins you've done? Will you stop walking with guilt and shame? Will you receive the total and absolute pardon, release, and the free gift of forgiveness from our God?

You have been forgiven in the name of the Father, by the blood of the Son, and through the power of the Holy Spirit.

AMEN.