

Lesson 3: How Does He Save?

Key Concept: How does Jesus save? Answer: Forgiveness

Bible Study: Mark 8-12

Bible Study

Coaching Pt: Make it known that you welcome any questions at any point.

Review from Last Week and Introduction

Last week, we talked about how Jesus says that every single one of us has a problem. We either have a religious problem or an irreligious problem. If you have a religious problem, you keep all the rules to impress God so that you have leverage over Him and don't really need Him. The problem with this is that you end up like the religious leaders that Jesus is so hard on in Mark who don't know that they're sick and need a doctor. They miss out on the healing (i.e. forgiveness) that He as the great physician comes to bring because they don't think they need it. With a religious approach to life, you wound God's heart by functioning as your own god, telling Him you don't need Him because you're good enough.

On the other hand, you have the irreligious crowd who break all the rules and are determined to live by their own set of rules. "I don't need Jesus or God, if they even exist, because I set the parameters of my own life," says an irreligious person. But this is a wound to God's heart, as well, because you're directly challenging His authority. It as if God is a parent whose prodigal child is screaming, "Go to hell, Dad. I renounce you as my Father. You no longer exist in my world. I don't need you nor do I want you in my life." In sum, irreligious people are going to do what they want to do when they want to do it. Just as that hurts a parent's heart, it hurts God's heart.

So the question is, "What do we do about the wound that we have all created in God's heart through our religious and irreligious rebellion?" The answer to this question is bound up in the concept of forgiveness. In our time together today, we're going to begin by thinking about how forgiveness works in human relationships. Then, we'll build on that by thinking about how forgiveness works in our relationship with God. The rationale for beginning with forgiveness in human relationships is because, for starters, human relationships are easier to get our mind around, but, additionally, because forgiveness in our relationship with God mirrors forgiveness in our relationship with others. Or putting it another way, forgiveness works.

1. Forgiveness in our Relationships with Humans (horizontal)

Often, you will hear people in their spiritual journeys say, "I admit that I am not perfect. Nobody is. But why can't God just forgive me?" The reason He can't is

because forgiveness doesn't work that way, even in human relationships. Think about the last time someone ***really hurt you***. I am talking about a deep, intentional wound. You had, at that moment, **2 options: vengeance or forgiveness.**

The first option is for you to seek **vengeance** in some way. You make their life **miserable**. You slander them. You talk about them behind their backs, to their face, on Facebook, whatever opportunity you get. You make it very clear to them, "I am going to ruin you just like you ruined me." But, there is a problem with this option. You feel momentarily better, but you become **hardened and bitter** in the process. There is no forgiveness and reconciliation, but rather just more harm done. There is a reason why we say to our children, "**2 wrongs** don't make a right." The reason is that the evil they did against you, you're now returning to them, which means the evil has worked its way inside of you and is now coming from your poisoned heart. You're no longer simply a victim but you have now committed the same crime.

The Interpreter (Netflix: 39:00–42:20): There is a film that captures this dynamic of forgiveness vs. vengeance really well called The Interpreter. Nicole Kidman plays the lead. Her family was killed by an evil dictator in Africa named Edmond Zuwani. As a result, she went through phases of being a militant radical who opposed the regime, and then, finally, she reverted to diplomacy through the U.N., largely as an interpreter. In a twist of fate, Edmond Zuwani is scheduled to speak at the UN and in the process receives a death threat on his life. Kidman becomes a suspect. Sean Penn, as a detective, finds out her family history and becomes suspicious that Kidman might be responsible. He begins to ask her about her feelings towards this man. "When I think about him, I feel disappointment." He responds, "that is a lover's word. How about rage." Kidman responds, "Everyone who loses someone wants revenge on God if they can't find someone else. In Africa, in Motobo, the Ku believe that the only way to end grief is to save a life. If someone is murdered, a year of mourning ends with a ritual that we call the drowning mantra. As an all night party beside a river, at dawn, the killer is put in a boat, and bound, so that he can't swim. He is then pushed overboard, and the family of the dead has to make a choice; they can let him drown or swim out to save him. The Ku believe that if the family lets the killer drown, they'll have justice, but spend the rest of their lives in mourning. But, if they save him, and admit that life isn't always just, that very act can take away their sorrow. Vengeance is a lazy form of grief."

See the family who has been wronged has a choice—they can seek **vengeance** and let this guy drown, and if your system of justice is balanced by an **eye for an eye**, or in this case, a death for a death, then justice is achieved. But, Kidman says, the Africans know that you may have "**justice, but spend the rest of your lives in mourning**" because you have now just committed another wrong; the evil they perpetrated comes inside of you. But, she says, there is another option. The family who has been wronged has the option of swimming out and saving the very person who murdered their family member. She doesn't use the word, but this is forgiveness.

See, here is the point that the film makes so well: *forgiveness doesn't just happen by saying, "I forgive you." Forgiveness means telling someone, "I'm not going to make you pay for what you've done because I will pay the debt myself." To really do this means that you will have to suffer.* In the movie, it means the wronged party swims out and saves the life of the one who took their family member's life. Can you imagine how emotionally difficult this would be? It would involve incredible emotional suffering. The decision to pay the emotional and psychological (and often financial) debt of your wrongdoer is incredibly difficult and emotionally expensive, but in doing so, forgiveness is born, and, as Kidman says, you won't spend the rest of your life in mourning, full of bitterness and rage.

Coaching Point: Make this interactive by asking them if this makes sense. Why or why not?

Forgiveness takes time: Suffering is the way forgiveness happens. Simply saying, "I forgive you," won't cut it because forgiveness doesn't happen without the wronged party being willing to suffer on the other party's behalf, and because of this reality, forgiveness normally takes time.

For example, in my marriage with Bradford, we have a commitment that we will always forgive one another. This does not mean, however, that forgiveness happens or is offered instantaneously. When wronged, our common phrase is, "I will forgive you, but *not yet*." Right now I am hurt and angry and not ready to pay the debt you just created."

Bradford, unfortunately, has had plenty of opportunities to practice delayed forgiveness. One time came recently in the midst of pursuing another adoption. We drove to Los Angeles, took Ford's birthmother out to lunch, and had a great (and emotional) lunch with her. Then, we spent 8 hours with an organization going through training for another adoption. At 9pm, I was exhausted and emotionally drained, but Bradford was still churning out a letter to Ford's birthmother. So I callously said, "Baby, wrap it up. Sometimes you get a little wordy." I tried to catch the words before they went into her ears, but they slipped through. Damage done. She looked at me and said, "I'm going to forgive you, but *not yet*."

Forgiveness is a process: This leads to one other key component of forgiveness. It is a process that happens every time we remember the offense or the wrongdoer. Real forgiveness means, "I'll suffer this debt myself. I won't bring this up again and *continue to hold it over your head*." And that is where forgiveness is so challenging because we don't have delete buttons in our brains. Every time we remember the wrong that was done to us, we have to pay the debt of forgiveness. And, if we continue to bring it up and hold it against the wrongdoer, then we haven't forgiven them. We're determined to make them pay. Instead, ongoing real forgiveness means eliminating the phrase, "See, I told you so. Here you go again. Just like you did when...."

Coaching Point: Make this interactive by asking them if they have seen this play out in their relationships. Ask them to give an example.

Forgiveness dynamics: And, in general, just so you know, the less the offense, the less the suffering required to grant forgiveness. A little white lie that doesn't do much damage won't require you to suffer much in the process of forgiveness. But when you're really wronged and deeply wounded, forgiveness requires a great deal of emotional suffering. All that is within you will want to rip them up by email or make a Facebook post slandering them or call them and give them a good old-fashioned tongue-lashing. But, forgiveness happens when you make the choice to suffer rather than make them suffer.

Economic Terms: Maybe it will help some of you to think about this in economic terms. If you have a mortgage on a home, then you owe a debt to the bank. If you can't pay the debt, somebody has to pay it, either you, the bank, or the federal government, but the debt doesn't just go away. Someone must absorb it. Someone must suffer the loss. When you are not able to pay your mortgage, the bank can't just say, "I forgive you." They have to suffer financially on your behalf to forgive that debt.

2. Forgiveness in our Relationship with God (Vertical)

As we are about to see, the same relational dynamics that apply in our human relationships apply in our relationship with God. According to the Bible, we all have wounded God's heart deeply by our sin. We saw this the first week when we looked at how we have all built our lives around something other than God. We also saw this last week when we looked at how we create wounds in God's heart through our religious and irreligious lifestyles. And, when we pool all of our sin together collectively as the human race, is it any wonder that God's suffering would be as great as it is? When you consider all the wrongs that we collectively as human beings have committed against Him, you realize just how much He must suffer for us? Murder, treason, character defamation, stealing, self-righteousness, pride, anger—you name it, we have done it to God. And remember, the greater the offense, the greater the suffering required to forgive.

This is why Jesus had to die. Herein lies the answer to an SDSU student who once said to me, "I know I'm not perfect, but why can't God just say, 'I forgive you.' I just don't see why the cross is necessary." The cross is necessary because God made a willful choice to forgive us, knowing that His suffering would be far greater than any suffering imaginable. On the cross, you have the ultimate suffering for the ultimate forgiveness. Tim Keller said it well, "The currency of forgiveness is blood, sweat, tears, and thorns." See God couldn't just say, "I forgive you," anymore than any of us can—forgiveness from Him meant that He would have to suffer.

In fact, Jesus explains why He had to suffer on the cross in Mark 8:31-34.³¹ "And He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days, rise again." Notice Jesus says that He (the Son of Man) MUST suffer and be killed. Not maybe, not might—He must suffer and be killed. Why? Because there was no

other way for mankind to experience forgiveness. A man, as our representative, had to pay our debt, but only the God-man, Jesus Christ, could do so because His perfect life is the only thing that would create the spiritual currency (i.e. righteousness) to pay the debt.

Jesus reemphasizes the necessity of the cross as He continues this conversation with Peter. ³² *And He said this plainly. And Peter took hHm aside and began to rebuke Him.* ³³ *But turning and seeing his disciples, He rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man."* Get behind me, Satan? That isn't exactly the kindest thing to say to one of your key leaders. Peter was Jesus' right hand man. And yet Jesus rips him here. Why? Because Peter is trying to talk Him out of the very thing that will bring forgiveness to mankind. Peter is playing right into the hands of the enemy by discouraging Jesus from making the payment for our sin with His life.

In case we miss this, Mark circles back to this concept in Mark 10:45 and explains WHY He must suffer. **Read Mark 10:45.** ⁴⁵ *For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."* A ransom. That's what Jesus says He came to do, "to give His life as a ransom for many."

What is a ransom? It is an exchange. Typically a person is held hostage, and when the ransom, or payment, is made, then the hostage is released. That is what happens to us. We're held hostage by Satan. We're under his influence and control until Jesus ransoms us.

Therefore, the cross is so central to the story because it is the ransoming of mankind. Without the cross, there is no ransom and no forgiveness. This is why the biographies of Jesus are so unlike any other biographies - 1/3 of the gospels (the biographies of Jesus) focus on His death and the cross. Contrast that with the biography of Winston Churchill that was over 1300 pages, but only three pages were about Churchill's death. Not only that, but Christians never stop talking about the cross. In fact, the cross is THE symbol of Christianity. Why? Because this is how forgiveness happens!

Certainly no other religion celebrates the death of its founder. Not Islam. Not Buddhism. Not Hinduism. Those are all religions built on a religious system of works. Totally different from the way Jesus says God deals with the wound that we have dealt Him. Forgiveness doesn't come by us being good, but it is by God forgiving us by suffering. At the heart, there is no other way. Forgiveness is bound up in suffering. And the good news of the gospel is that God was willing to suffer for us, offering us His life as a ransom.

Discussion Questions

1. What 2 options do you have when someone hurts you?
2. Using financial terms, how would you define forgiveness?
3. Describe an example in your life where you said, "I forgive you, but not yet."
4. Respond to the statement, "I know I'm not perfect, but why can't God just say, 'I forgive you.' I just don't see why the cross is necessary."
5. Read Mark 8:31-34. Why is Jesus so harsh with Peter?
6. Read Mark 10:45. How does this text enlighten you about the necessity of Christ's death?

For next week, read Mark chapters 13-15.

FORGIVENESS: Mark 8-12

PREPARATION: (1) Pray/fast, (2) Optional: Watch film “The Interpreter”

PREVIOUS WEEK: They read Mark chapters 8-12; focused on, “How Would Jesus Save?”

Review from Last Week and Introduction

- A. RECAP: Religious problem or an irreligious problem.
- B. “What to do about the wound that we have all created in God’s heart?”
- C. Forgiveness in relationships with humans (horizontal) & God (vertical)

Forgiveness in Relationships with Humans (horizontal)

- A. “Why can’t God just forgive me?”
 - 1. Forgiveness doesn’t work that way,
 - a. 2 options: vengeance or forgiveness.
 - i. Vengeance makes you feel better, but you become hardened and bitter. The evil gets inside you.
 - 2. The Interpreter (Netflix: 39:00–42:20): The Ku believe that if the family lets the killer drown, they’ll have justice but spend the rest of the lives in mourning. But if they save him, and admit that life isn’t always just, that very act can take away their sorrow. Vengeance is a lazy form of grief.”
 - 3. **Coaching Pt: Make this interactive by asking them if this makes sense. Why or why not?**
- B. Forgiveness means telling someone, “I’m not going to make you pay for what you’ve done.” To really do this means that you will have to suffer.
- C. Forgiveness takes time
 - 1. Marriage illustration, “I’ll forgive you, but not yet.”
 - 2. **Coaching Point: Make this interactive by asking them if they have seen this play out in their relationships. Ask them to give an example.**
- D. Forgiveness is a process
 - 1. Occurs every time you remember the offense
- E. Forgiveness dynamics: The less the offense, the less the suffering required to yield forgiveness
- F. Economic ex: A mortgage on a home

Forgiveness in Relationship with God (vertical)

G. We all have wounded God’s heart deeply by our sin. Can’t just say, “I forgive you.” Had to suffer.”

H. Tim Keller, “The currency of forgiveness is Blood, sweat, tears, and thorns.”

I. Mark 8:31-34

- 1. Jesus taught his followers that he **MUST** suffer, be rejected, and die. It was something he had to do. But why?
- 2. We get the answer in Mark. Read **Mark 10:45**
 - a. Ransom
- 3. Comparison with Churchill’s biography
 - a. 3 pages of 1300 on death vs. 1/3

4. Cross=symbol of Christianity
5. Difference between Christianity and other major religions