

Stories that Change Everything | Contents Under Pressure

Aaron Brockett | Luke 18:21-25

Hi, how's everybody doing today? Good to see you. I want to welcome all of our guests and first time visitors at all of our campuses right now. Let's put our hands together and welcome all of our other campuses. Good to have you.

And as you've been hearing us talk about the last several weeks, Sunday night services are coming up in two short weeks. So I want to encourage you if you're a Saturday night person at the Northwest campus or if you attend one of the services at North or Downtown that is running out of seats, would you please make the jump to Sunday nights—go to a service, serve at a service. We're going to have food and fun—outdoors, indoors. We're going to have kind of a party atmosphere in August as we soak up these last few weeks of summer. So you're not going to want to miss Sunday night services.

I also want to throw in a real quick plug here for the series that we're going to jump into in the month of August. It's a four-part series and I want to encourage you—if Traders Point is home for you, regardless of what campus you're a part of—I want to encourage you to make it a priority for you to be here every single weekend of that series because I believe that it's a series that God might use as a pivotal one in the life of our church.

I don't say that lightly. There have been a handful of sermon series that I can kind of think about in the last decade that I have been here that, when I look back on them, God really used them to shape us as a church. God really used them to grow me. They actually are at least part of the result of the church that we've become.

As I've been studying and praying about this next series, I think that this next series has the potential for God to use it in a really big way. We're calling it *Growth Track*. So if you have ever wondered or if you have ever had anybody ask you, "Hey, how do you get connected and how do you personally grow in a big church? because in a big church it's easy to get lost in the crowd. Does anybody even know if I am here?"

Some of you like that, by the way. And some of you are like, "Well, that's the reason why I come because I don't want anybody to bother me, alright?" Or maybe you're here because you've been hurt before in the past. And I get that. So you're welcome to just take all of the time you need to heal and to check things out. But the expectation is that eventually we would get connected. We would eventually begin to grow. And the answer to the question: Do we want you to get connected and do we want you to grow is absolutely yes.

So if you've heard us say over and over again that we want to remove unnecessary barriers that keep people from Jesus, don't interpret that as that is all that we care about. That's the

beginning of the growth track. We want to talk about the track of growth that God wants us all to be on. So I hope that you will be here next month for that.

But we've got a little bit of work to do to finish up this summer message series that we've been in. So if this is your first time, if you've been at the lake all summer—welcome back. We've been in this summer message series called *Stories That Change Everything*. And the big idea behind this is that good content or really compelling information that we learn may change our minds but that is no guarantee that it will change the way that we live. And Jesus knew this.

Just read about how Jesus interacted with people in the gospels. Anytime he could perceive that somebody's heart was hard or maybe they just weren't ready to receive what it was that he had to say or teach—instead of escalating the conversation and getting combative, Jesus would sort of redirect. He would back up and he would ask questions and he would tell stories, because story is the language of the heart.

Just because we know something doesn't mean that we will actually apply it or that our lives will change. It's got to get into our heart in some way and so Jesus would tell a story to kind of enter into the side door or the back door of our hearts. He was brilliant at it.

So these stories that Jesus tells that are found in the gospels are called parables and we've just been working our way through them over the summer months. And the one that we want to look at today is found in Matthew, chapter 18, verses 21-35. So if you have a Bible or maybe you have a Bible app that you can go ahead and open up, I want to encourage you to meet me in Matthew 18. If you don't have an app or a Bible with you, you can actually download one on your phone—the youversion Bible app is a great one. I would recommend that one. Or I'll put the passage up on the monitor beside me.

The parable that Jesus is going to teach today is about forgiveness. Now, I don't know about you but I love the subject of forgiveness just as long as I'm the one being forgiven. But I'm not such a big fan of it if I'm the one who has to give it to you if you don't deserve it, if you don't say that you're sorry, if you don't kind of grovel a little bit first. Like, I don't really want to give you or anyone who's hurt me forgiveness. It is the un-natural thing to do. Is anybody with me? Are you going to kind of leave me alone up here? Alright? I forgive you.

Yeah, it's difficult. It's tough, right? And all of us can probably think of somebody in our life right now that maybe we need to forgive but we just don't really want to. Maybe you have really good reasons—it's justified why you wouldn't.

I was reading this past week about a married couple who lived in Argentina in the late 1800s. Don't judge me. It was a slow week. That will hit you in a few minutes if you wake up. So Mr. and Mrs. Del Corral lived in Argentina in the late 1800s. He was an attorney and at the end of his life he had amassed a small fortune. He owned about 330,000 acres of land in Argentina, worth about one million dollars.

Now a million dollars is a lot of money today but it was worth a whole lot more back in the late 1800s. His wife ended up spending a lot of that money and throwing them into a whole bunch of debt, which he didn't appreciate.

So he ended up filing a discharge of responsibility for the debt and placed all of the debt solely in her name to where she had to pay it back herself—wonderful guy. And it didn't do well for the marriage. She got upset with him. It caused this big argument. They separated and it was really, really nasty and vicious.

Anyway he died in 1883 and he's buried in a crypt in a fancy cemetery and he had this sculptor create a bust of his image to put on top of the crypt. Well, his wife's crypt is right next to his. She lived another 15 years, but she hated him so much and she was so angry with him for what he had done to her concerning the whole debt thing she had the same sculptor create an image of her bust to put on her crypt so when she died that is what would get placed on top of it. But she did not want to be facing him. So she had the sculptor turn her back toward her husband's grave.

This is an image of it. This is him. This is her. Lovely couple—something tells me that no amount of marriage counseling was going to fix their issues. And it's kind of creepy when you look at it because it's fixed, right? There is no chance for forgiveness or reconciliation in that relationship.

Now as we come to our passage, Peter was a guy who followed after Jesus. And he was not a married man¹ but I think he had someone in mind when he comes to Jesus one day with this really important question.

Look at me in verse 21. It says, "Then Peter came to him and asked, 'Lord, how often should I forgive **someone** who sins against me?'" And then before Jesus can even answer Peter's question, Peter answered his own question. Don't you love talking to people like that? He says, "'Seven times?' 'No, not seven times,' Jesus replied, 'but seventy times seven!'" I pulled out my calculator and added that up—it's 490 times.

Now something tells me that Peter has a face in mind of somebody that he is talking about when he comes to Jesus with this question. You don't ask this question if you're not thinking about somebody, right? You don't ask this question if you don't have a situation in mind.

Now, we don't know who it was for Peter. My guess is that it was somebody in the group. My guess was that it was somebody who was standing right there. Maybe it was John. John was another one of the disciples who followed after Jesus and if you read John's gospel, John always talks about himself in the third person—so annoying. It's like: I am John, the disciple Jesus loved, right? I imagine that got under Peter's skin.

¹ Edited to add: Peter was married, and Jesus healed his mother-in-law (see Matthew 8:14-15, Mark 1:20-21, Luke 4:38-41).

If you read John's gospel he talks about how he and Peter were the first guys to discover the empty tomb and I think he mentions three times that he outran Peter to the tomb. They were so competitive. And I wonder if Peter is upset with John about something.

Maybe it was James. James was always vying for the seat of greatest honor next to Jesus. He's got somebody in mind. And he says: How many times should I forgive? Seven? And that number was not random.

See the Pharisees taught that you were to forgive somebody three times. That was the appropriate number of times you should forgive. If they offended a fourth time then you could just let them have it. So here's what Peter was saying. Peter was actually taking the number that he knew he should use to forgive somebody, doubling it and adding one to show Jesus how spiritual he was.

And Jesus, what he hits him with was totally something that Peter wouldn't have been expecting. Jesus says: No, forgive them seventy times seven. Forgive them 490 times in the same 24 hour period.

And I think the look on Peter's face told Jesus that he wasn't going to get anywhere with him by continuing to talk about this. So Jesus says: Let me tell you a story. This is what prompted the parable of the unforgiving servant. Let's look at it together.

Jesus says, "Therefore, the Kingdom of Heaven can be **compared** to a king who decided to bring his accounts up to date with servants who had borrowed money from him. In the process, one of his debtors was brought in who owed him millions of dollars."

Now that translation doesn't quite fully capture it there. The currency that they would have used then was talents. Jesus mentions a number that is so astronomically high there was no way that the servant could pay it back in a thousand lifetimes. In other words, if Jesus were telling the story today, he would say: The servant owed bazillion dollars. He's trying to make a point that there is no possibility that he could ever pay it back.

"He couldn't pay, so his master ordered that he be sold—along with his wife, his children, and everything he owned—to pay the debt. But the man fell down before his master and begged him, 'Please, **be patient** with me, and I will pay it all.' Then his master was filled with pity for him, and he released him and," he, here's the word, "**forgave** his debt. But when the man left the king, he went to a fellow servant who owed him a few thousand dollars. He grabbed him by the throat and demanded instant payment.

"His fellow servant fell down before him and begged for a little more time." Saying the exact same thing, by the way, "'Be patient with me, and I will pay it,' he pleaded. But his creditor wouldn't wait. He had the man arrested and put in prison until the debt could be paid in full," which means that he will never pay it because how do you earn money in prison?

“When some of the other servants saw this, they were very upset. They went to the king and told him everything that had happened. Then the king called in the man he had forgiven and said, ‘You evil servant! I forgave you that tremendous debt because you pleaded with me. **Shouldn’t you have mercy on your fellow servant, just as I had mercy on you?’** Then the angry king sent the man to prison to be tortured until he had paid his entire debt. That’s what my heavenly Father will do to you if you **refuse to forgive** your brothers and sisters from your heart.”

So aren’t you glad you came to church today? Some of you are thinking, “We really should have gone to Kings Island today, that was the plan.” Can I just go ahead and mention the elephant in the room? That what Jesus says there in the end is shocking.

And maybe, if you’re anything like me, you wish you could stop Jesus and say, “Whoa, whoa, whoa Jesus, stop right there. What exactly did you mean by that again?” Like, “I need to clean my ears out, Jesus, because it seems as if you said that my salvation is dependent upon me forgiving other people. And I’ve been told my whole life that I am saved by grace through faith. And now you seem to suggest that God’s not going to forgive me unless I forgive other people who actually don’t deserve it, by the way.”

And if you are feeling any of that tension, can I just go ahead and say that’s totally justifiable. I do to. So what is it that Jesus is saying and what is it that he is not saying. I want us to back up just a little bit; sit down on the inside if we need to. Before we pick this apart or dismiss what Jesus says, let’s walk through this together and see what is it that Jesus meant and what is it that he did not mean so that we can arrive accurately at the point of the story.

So I think, first of all, we need to start here: Being hurt by others in this life is inevitable. Would you agree with that? Anybody in here been hurt before? Anybody at any of our other campuses—have you been wounded by somebody? Offended by somebody? Cheated on, lied to, abused, betrayed—we all have.

And Jesus is acknowledging—it’s subtle but it’s there in the story—that you and I are not getting through this life without some wounds and some offenses. And the sooner that we come to just recognize that and be honest about that instead of denying that or just sort of operating as if we are impenetrable, that nobody can get through to us, we need to own the fact that those wounds and offenses are very, very real and we don’t want to dismiss them too quickly—either in our lives or in the lives of those we love.

It kind of reminds me of that conversation that the great boxer Muhammad Ali had with an airline stewardess. Any of you remember hearing this? Muhammad Ali boards an airplane one time and he doesn’t buckle up. And the stewardess very politely asked him to buckle his seat belt. And he looked at her and he said, “Supermen don’t need no seat belt.” And she looked right back at him and she said, “Supermen don’t need no airplane, buckle up,” alright? Can we just all admit that we’re not Superman?

Can we all just admit that those wounds and offenses don't bounce off of us? So maybe you had a mother you could never please. Maybe you had a father who said really mean things to you thinking he was motivating you but it actually had the opposite effect.

Some of you have grown children right now and they rejected everything that you taught them and they think that your old-fashioned values are nonsense and it's caused this rift that actually hurts you really, really deeply but you don't know how to express it.

Some of us have co-workers and neighbors or maybe a best friend who we used to do everything with, but something happened in the relationship—we can't even quite fully put our finger on it and we grew distant, and distant, and more distant and there is a wound that is there.

And as we end our lives, the older that we get if we don't deal with those wounds in a healthy way, then we end up bottling them up and the contents of those emotional wounds get under extreme pressure over time. So what do we do with them? What do we do with those emotions that are under pressure?

Jesus comes along and he says that we need to forgive. And it would be very easy to say, "Well, I don't like that very much." Maybe the reason why is because maybe some very well-meaning people put it to you this way. Maybe you sat down with a friend over coffee and you told him about the offenses and the wounds from other people and he very lovingly looked back at you, he meant well by it but it didn't help, he said, "Well, you just kind of need to get over it. You just need to forgive them," and it didn't help. Actually it made it worse.

Maybe some of you have heard sermons on forgiveness where the preacher just kind of stood up and said, "You just need to forgive because..." and that just wasn't good enough for you.

Can I just say this? This is not what Jesus is saying. Jesus is not saying that you just need to get over it. He's not saying that it's not that big of a deal. He's not saying that you just need to grow thicker skin. That is not what he is saying. Pay attention to the story. Jesus acknowledges that forgiveness always has a cost associated with it.

The servant in the story owed the king more than he could ever repay. They were at an impasse. So the king could throw the servant in prison forever and the king was never going to have the debt repaid, or the king could forgive this servant. But what ends up happening when he does that is that the king absorbs the expense of the debt.

Forgiveness always has a cost associated with it. This is the reason why Jesus went to a cross. Have you ever wondered that? Ever had somebody ask you that question, "Why did Jesus have to go to the cross? Why couldn't God just say: I forgive you?" In the same way you can't, because there is a debt there, there's an expense, there's something that has to be reconciled.

And God says: You can't pay back that debt so I'll send my Son to pay that debt for you. Forgiveness always has a cost associated with it. And when we are hurt or offended or wounded by someone, the natural, human response is what? Can we say it out loud? It's okay to talk in church. What's the natural human response when you've been hurt? I'm going to hurt you back, right? The natural response is revenge. That's why it feels so good. That's why it feels so right.

And, in fact, even if I'm not going to act on it... Sometimes whenever people come to me and I'm like, "Man, I'm just really upset about this other person." They're like, "Well, Aaron, just get over it. You just need to forgive," right? And I'm just like, "Would you please just let me have my daydream about their brakes going out for just a minute, alright? Can you just live with me in that moment? Can you just let me imagine my cleaning out the toilet bowl with their toothbrush for a minute? Could you just go there with me on that?" That's the natural, human response.

What is the un-natural response? Can I say this? What is the super-natural response? because that's actually a way to put it better. It's to forgive. It's a super-natural response because it's going to require more power than you can give. It's going to require more of a decision than you can make on your own.

I want you to remember this. Maybe pull out your phone, take a picture of this screen, take this application with you. Think about this. Talk about this in your group: There may be a cost, in fact I would probably change that now after preaching it three times, there **will** be a cost to granting someone else forgiveness, but there is a much larger cost to withholding it.

It's got to go somewhere. And so, yes, there will be a cost if you grant forgiveness to somebody who doesn't deserve it, they don't think they need it, they don't even ask for it. But don't fool yourself into thinking that there isn't a cost if you withhold it. In fact, the cost is actually greater. And guess who pays? You do either way. But the second way is much healthier. And actually research is just beginning to back this up.

This is from the Stanford Forgiveness Project. They say, "Though the act of forgiveness may not come naturally to us, research has shown that learning to forgive," and I find that that's interesting that they say that because it's an un-natural thing to do, you have to learn to do it. I've got four kids. None of them came into this world knowing, naturally, how to forgive. What they naturally knew how to do was to hit their brother or sister over the head with a toy. That's what they naturally knew how to do, right?

So when we learn to forgive, "...it lessens the amount of hurt, anger, stress, and depression people experience. People who learn to forgive," there it is again, "also become more hopeful, optimistic, and compassionate. Forgiveness also has physical health benefits. People who learn to forgive report significantly fewer symptoms of stress such as backache, muscle tension, dizziness, headaches, and upset stomachs. In addition, people report improvement in appetite, sleep patterns, energy, and general well-being."

The Mao Clinic says something very similar. They say, "Forgiveness can lead to healthier relationships, greater spiritual and psychological well-being, less anxiety, less stress, less hostility, lower blood pressure, fewer symptoms of depression and even a lower risk of alcohol and substance abuse."

Jesus said this 2,000 years ago. He said: Listen. You need to forgive. Not because they deserve it, it really actually has nothing to do with the other person. It has everything to do with your emotional and spiritual health and well-being.

So, practically speaking, where's our first step in this? What do we do with this? See, here's my fear in preaching a sermon on forgiveness. And I've been in this situation before. I feel a little bit like I'm lecturing my kids on them needing to eat their vegetables. I just feel a little bit that way with you right now. I've felt the tension in all of the services. You're kind of sitting there going, "Nope, I don't want to forgive." Right?

If I were to sit down with you one on one and say, "Hey, is forgiveness a good thing? Should you forgive somebody?" I think that every single one of us would say, "Yes, it's not easy but we know we should forgive though. We know that that's the healthy thing to do." Are you going to forgive? "No." We don't want to. So what's the practical first step? How do we forgive?

Well let me just have you kind of consider a couple of things. First of all I think we should consider this: Forgiveness is not amnesia. Forgiveness doesn't just mean that you forget about the offense or the wound. And I'm afraid that maybe some of us have had well-meaning Christians or a well-meaning person in our life come up to us and we're talking about how we've been hurt and he says something like this, have you ever had anybody say this to you? "Well you just need to forgive and forget. Just forgive it and forget it." And you don't want to, right?

Have any of you ever heard somebody say this? "Well, God forgives and forgets." And that sounds really nice. Here's the problem with the statement forgive and forget. You ready? It's not in the Bible. Some of us thought that it was. About the closest that we have to it in the Scriptures is Isaiah 43. Isaiah 43 says this, "God blocked out our transgressions and he remembers them no more." But that is not the same thing as he forgets.

God did not just like slip one day, hit his head and all of a sudden he forgot your college years, alright? God doesn't like all of a sudden suffer from old age and say: I just can't recall all of the ways that you've offended me before. That would mean that I don't have as much confidence in a God who forgets. No, what God does is something much better. He remembers. He just chooses to not hold it over us anymore. He absorbed the debt, absorbed the expense, himself.

There's another passage of Scripture that says that God separates our sins as far as east is from the west, but that does not mean that he forgets it. He just doesn't hold it over you and me anymore. Is anybody with me in that? It's really quiet in here. That's amazing! So, when Jesus

says that you should forgive as I have forgiven you, that doesn't mean that you sweep it under the rug, act like nothing happened, Pollyanna—it's all A-okay with me. It's no big deal. That would be an unhealthy way of dealing with it.

No, you actually say to this other person, "I'm very aware of what you have done to hurt me. I just choose to not hold it against you. I choose to no longer harbor my bitterness or marinate in the bitterness of this anymore because I'm just realizing that that's just hurting me. See, forgiveness is a decision that we make long before it is a feeling that we feel. If you're waiting for the feeling to come before you forgive—then you'll be waiting forever.

Here's the other thing that I want you to consider: Forgiveness does not mean you don't establish healthy boundaries with the person who hurt you. I think this is where, for many of us, we don't exactly know how to create healthy boundaries with people. See, forgiveness is not the same thing as I trust you. So when you say, "I forgive you," that doesn't mean that you are saying, "I trust you." And if you are the one being forgiven, you should not take that for granted. You should not hear the other person say that they trust you.

Here's what happens, I'm afraid. In marriages and in friendships and maybe with family members or co-workers or whomever—there's an offense, there's a rift in the relationship, there's a rupture somewhere and you say, "You know what? I know I need to forgive. We just had an impasse. I'm just going to have to swallow the expense of this and I'm just going to need to forgive for the sake of reconciliation and joy and kindness and all of that. So I forgive you." And the other person goes, "Sweet. When can I move back in?"

And you're like, "Whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, right?"

Or, "Hey, that's awesome, man. Let's go rent a tandem bike and ride it through the park. We're best friends. BFFs, right?"

And you're like, "Wait a second. We just went from neutral to 100 miles an hour. I don't trust you yet."

I think that what happens is that we don't know how to communicate that or establish healthy boundaries, but we do know how to give the cold shoulder so we just do that, "I do know how to be passive-aggressive. That's my spiritual gift and I can make you feel really, really bad about it for a while." So what happens is that we create this barrier because we don't know how to create healthy boundaries.

Forgiveness does not mean: I trust you. What forgiveness means is: I will let go of the hurt. Forgiveness means: I'm going give up my desire to get even with you. Forgiveness means: In speaking to others about you, I am not going to spin it, share it, or spread it in a way that makes you look bad to them. I'm just not going to do that.

Here's what forgiveness is. Can I say it this way? Forgiveness is: I'm going to stay sweet. The opposite of sweet is bitter. And so your heart—we've already established that getting offended and wounded by others is inevitable in this life and right now, whether you realize it or not...

I'm fully convinced that some of you walked in here today at all of our campuses and maybe you didn't even know you needed to forgive somebody because maybe you've become so good at just being numb to your feelings and just stuffing it so you've bottled it up and bottled it up and bottled it up and the contents are under a great amount of pressure and that's what is actually connected to your anxiety issues right now, it's what's connected to your lack of sleep right now, it's what's connected to some of your anger issues right now.

So whether you realize it or not, you are growing sweeter and sweeter as you grow older or you are growing more and more bitter. Have you ever noticed that with the people you know who are in their life in their twilight years? They are either the biggest sweet hearts ever or they are not. And I think that something happens in mid-life somewhere. You just go to either bitterness or sweetness.

I was talking to a friend of mine who is in his late fifties this summer. We were talking about this subject over breakfast and he goes, "No, actually Aaron, I think that you get to a certain place in life, you get to a certain age, where you just become more of what you already are."

And you, right now, are either growing in sweetness or you are growing in bitterness and the difference is your ability to forgive. The difference is the ability to extend to others what God has given to you.

I think maybe one of the clearest examples of someone staying sweet when he had every right to get bitter is Joseph from the Old Testament, Genesis, chapter 45. Maybe some of you know his story. I love the story of Joseph.

Joseph is the youngest of all of his brothers² and he's his dad's favorite. And his dad gets him this really expensive, fancy coat and Joseph starts having all of these fancy dreams about how God is going to use him in a big way and how his brothers are going to actually serve him. And he, very foolishly, shares that with his brothers and they start to resent him.

So one day they are out away from their father and they beat their little brother up and they throw Joseph into a well. And at that particular point they realize that they had just crossed the line. So if they get him up out of the well and they take him home, you know that he's going to tell on them, which is going to get them in big, big trouble.

So instead of just kind of owning it, they make matters worse and they see some Egyptians walking by and one of them suggests: Hey, why don't we just go ahead and sell him into slavery.

² Edited to add: Joseph was the most favored of the 12, and Benjamin was the youngest.

Let's not kill him, let's just sell him into slavery in Egypt. And they go home and tell their father that he was eaten by a wild animal—it's horrible. It's a horrible story.

And Joseph goes off to Egypt and it's not like he's there for a weekend and then his brothers have a change of heart and they go get him. No, his brothers leave him there knowing where he is. You can just imagine Joseph, especially in those initial weeks and months, sitting there waiting and waiting and waiting for his brothers to finally get some conviction in their life and come and rescue him but they never do.

So he's there, he's in Egypt, and he's all by himself for decades. I thought about that and I thought, "Man, that is a lot of time for him to grow in bitterness." And he could have. And he could have had every right to.

It kind of reminds me of those super hero movies like *The Avengers* or whatever is your favorite one and always the enemy or the evil one in those movies—I like it when they go back in time and show how that person became evil. You know what I'm talking about?

Usually what happens is they are like a nerd or something and they crossed paths with Ironman or they crossed paths with Mr. Incredible and they don't pay attention to their ideas and so they get offended and upset and hurt and they just get bitter, and bitter, and bitter, and bitter, and more bitter and all of a sudden they become like the super heroes nemesis.

That could have been Joseph. But it's not. In fact, years later, Joseph—because he stayed sweet and because he was obedient to God—God promoted him. God used him in the midst of his circumstances and he began working for this guy named Pharaoh and there was this famine that went across the land and guess who comes to town looking for help? Yeah, his brothers—and it's been so long that when they see him, they don't even recognize him.

I love the description in Genesis 45, verses 1 through 5 of them being reunited. It says, "So he was alone with his brothers when he told them who he was. Then he broke down and wept," because he'd been bottling up all of his emotions, all of his hurts for all of these years, the contents of his emotions were under pressure inside and when he sees them he just bursts. He begins to weep, "He wept so loudly the Egyptians could hear him, and word of it quickly carried to Pharaoh's palace.

"I am Joseph!" he said to his brothers. "Is my father still alive?" But his brothers were speechless! They were stunned to realize that Joseph was standing there in front of them." I bet they were. I bet they pooped their pants. I bet they were standing there like: Oh my goodness, the skeletons are out of the closet. What in the world?

Notice what Joseph says next. He says, "Please, come closer," He could have said: Get out of my sight. He could have said: You came here wanting help from me? No way. He could have said something much worse that I can't say on this stage.

“And he said again, ‘I am Joseph, your brother, whom you sold into slavery,’” he’s not sweeping it under the rug. He didn’t say: Oh, no big deal. It’s okay. Okay. It’s all fine. You had a bad day. I get it.

No he says, “...you sold me into slavery in Egypt. But don’t be upset, and don’t be angry with yourselves for selling me to this place.” Now here it is. Get it. **“It was God who sent me here ahead of you to preserve your lives.”**

That’s amazing. Do you hear what he is saying? Joseph stayed sweet for all of those years and he says: Listen. I trust that God is bigger than the way that you have hurt me. I trust that God can actually fight my battles for me. I trust that God can work through my forgiveness more than my revenge. That’s what he is saying. Joseph stayed sweet all the way through.

Jesus, our King, stayed sweet all the way to the cross. Think about this for a minute. Jesus, all he came to do was to heal people and love people and show them the way to life and they crucified him. They said all kinds of untrue things about him and they tried him, illegally by the way, and they beat him up and they mocked him and they drove nails into his wrists and into his feet. And in those moments on the cross his pain was more than physical; it was also emotional and spiritual because he cries out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” That’s emotional pain.

And Jesus could have gotten bitter in that moment, don’t you think? I would have. But Jesus stayed sweet. So sweet that he talks to God the Father about the people who nailed him there. And what does he say to God about them? “Father, forgive them.”

I wouldn’t have said that. I would have talked to God about the people who nailed me there but I would have said, “Father, smite them. Father, throw the hammer down on them and make them wish they were never born, God.” Which is reason one-hundred-and-one why I would make a really crummy savior, alright?

What would prompt Jesus to say forgive them? He stayed sweet. Jesus was so sweet that in his moments of greatest pain and misery, he looks at this guilty thief hanging on a cross next to him and if I recall, the guy did not acknowledge his sin, did not ask for forgiveness but Jesus gave it to him anyway—so easily I might add. All the dude said was: Hey, would you remember me when you come into paradise today? And Jesus looked at him with compassion and he said: I’ll do you one a whole lot better. Today you will be with me.

Can I just say that that kind of sweetness and grace is unreal and that’s the heart of our Father? And there are some today at any of our campuses, they need to hear that right now because some of you, you accepted the invitation of a friend or a family member or a co-worker quite honestly because you were tired of them inviting you and you just wanted to get them off of your back, alright? And that’s okay.

Or you thought, “If I come to church, the roof will cave in. If I come to church... You don’t know what I’ve done. God will never forgive me.” Can I say that as easily and quickly and as sweetly as Jesus forgave that thief on a cross, he’s willing to forgive you and he’s willing to love you and he’s willing to accept you.

So we go back to the beginning of our passage and I think that Peter had someone on his mind who he needed to forgive when he asked Jesus this question. I think the situation was fresh. Peter’s kind of an angry guy. Just read about his life through the gospels. He’s always cutting people’s ears off, or he’s cussing people out. I like him.

I think Peter—I think Peter was listening to a little too much DMX in his headphones, right? You all don’t make me lose my mind up in here...

Jesus, how many times do I need to forgive this brother over here because I’m about to lose my mind. Seven times? And Jesus says: No. Seventy times seven, 490 times to be exact in the same 24 hour period. You’ve got to start over every single day. What’s Jesus saying? That there’s a number associated with it, meaning that you should forgive 490 times and on the 491st time you’re like, “I’m going to drop kick you.” Is that what Jesus is saying?

No, that’s not what Jesus is saying. Here’s what Jesus is saying: Forgiveness isn’t about keeping score but losing count!

Is anybody with me in that? Forgiveness isn’t about keeping score. It’s about losing count! You will be offended. You enter into a relationship and get honest and real and you love somebody—you’re going to get hurt. The only alternative to that is to just live your life by yourself. So you’re going to have to forgive if you’re going to keep relationships alive.

Some of us, what we do in our relationships is we keep lists—mental, emotional lists—and anytime that person hurt us or offended us, instead of believing the best about their motives, that’s just one strike against them. And Jesus is saying: Listen. You’ve got to get rid of the lists. You’ve got to clear off the ledgers.

Every time you have a conversation or interaction with somebody and somebody looks and you kind of weird, you can’t walk away going, “I don’t understand why they gave me that look. I don’t think I like them very much”

You can just, every time you come away, or you follow somebody on Instagram and you’ve got serious FOMO, fear of missing out, and you’re like, “Whoa, I can’t believe that they didn’t invite me to that. There’s a little mark. I’m going to get them back. They’re not coming to my party.”

You’ve got to get rid of this whole thing like, “You went over there for Christmas last year. When are you going to come over for Christmas this year...?” We just nitpick at all of our relationships and Jesus says we have got to stop keeping count. We’ve got to just let it go.

So I'm going to ask our worship team to come out but we're not finished yet. There are a few more things that I think that God wants to do and to say to us. I just want to lead us to this moment of: Okay, maybe you've heard all of this—and this is a difficult message, I get it. This is painful. This emotional for some of us because we have a face in mind, we have a name in mind, maybe we have multiple.

Here's the thing that I realized this week in preaching this message is that I didn't think that I needed to forgive anybody and what God has revealed to me is that I do. There are people who have hurt me and offended me and wounded me and don't even know it and who I need to forgive, not for their sake but for mine.

See, when Jesus says that if you don't forgive then your heavenly Father won't forgive you—listen to me—that is not a threat. That's a warning. It's a warning that your heart is getting bitter and more bitter and more bitter and harder and harder. And do you know that the Bible says that the only unforgiveable sin in the Scriptures is blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. What that practically means is that you become so bitter and so hard that you can't hear God's voice anymore. Sometimes God can't forgive you because you don't even think you need it anymore. You've become so out of tune with the voice of God. So some of us today, we need to forgive.

Now what do you do with a message like this, right? Do you just go, "Well, great message. We'll go to lunch. I ain't going to do anything with it, but way to go, alright?"

I think for some of us we think that forgiveness kind of works like this bottle of Heinz catsup. The squeezable kind of forgiveness. What you hear me say is, "Well you need to go up to that person in church who offended you and you need to reach out and text them or call them, "Hey, man, can we get together today?" And you're going to sit down and you're going to go, "You know, you really offended me but you know," and you squirt it out like catsup—it's not open, by the way, so you guys are good.

And it's all going to go gushing out and they're going to go, "Oh, my goodness I'm so sorry. I didn't realize that I hurt you that way." Or, "Thank you so much. I feel really horrible. And, hey, let's be best friends again." It just gushes out.

And that would be awesome if it worked that way. And I'm not even saying that it can't. There might be some instances, some relationships in your life where you just have the squeezable kind of forgiveness and it's not all that difficult and it's great because it gets resolved really, really quickly.

But something tells me that actually forgiveness works more like the old glass bottle of catsup. Any of you remember these? Yeah. Growing up, man, this was the way that I got catsup on my burger and fries. And it required you to break a sweat. Right? If you could get the cap open, here's what happens—it's a glass bottle. The contents are under immense pressure so you turn it upside down—that catsup ain't coming out. That catsup just sits there so you'd just be like shaking it; you're banging it on the table.

I'd always take a knife and I'd start stabbing it like a Slasher movie. Then all of a sudden the catsup would come flowing out, ruin the burger and it's all over the fries and you're like, "Oh, man." The 80s were great. Some of you are really missing out, alright?

So many times I think we go, "Okay, I'll forgive. I'll sit down. I'll reach out." And you open up the cap and nothing happens. They look back at you and they are like, "I don't know what you are talking about. I didn't really think that I needed it." Or they don't want to own what they have done. Or you say that you forgive but you don't feel the emotions come and it just feels stuck. So what happens is you put the cap on and you go, "I'm not doing that again," and you just get a little harder and harder.

Here's what I think forgiveness is. Here's what I think Jesus is asking us to do, because there is a supernatural element to this that we don't need to underestimate. All he is saying is: Get open. That's all he's saying. Would you just get open to what only I can do in your life?

See, the makers of the Heinz 57 glass catsup bottle realized that they had a problem on their hands because fine restaurants would not carry their product because they couldn't have people stabbing bottles of catsup in fine restaurants. So what they did, if you've ever heard any of this, they designed the bottle in such a way that you take off the cap, you tip it upside down, you place your finger on the sticker with the 57 on it and all that you've got to do is just gently and consistently tap on it. And after just a few moments of that it releases the contents that are under pressure.

See, I believe that's what forgiveness is because you just get open, you turn it upside down, and you're in prayer and with a desire to stay sweet you just begin to tap, "Holy Spirit come. Do what only you can do. Hey, listen. I don't feel like doing this but I'm going to do it for the sake of the relationship, for the sake of my joy, for the sake of my sweetness, for the sake of reconciliation, for the sake of my spiritual well-being, for the sake of my emotional health I'm just going to keep tapping, I'm going to keep tapping."

And it may come slow. It might come quickly. It might come today—maybe tomorrow. But you just say, "God, I'm going to trust that you are bigger than the way that I've been hurt. God, I'm going to trust that you can work in ways that are bigger than my revenge. I'm going to trust, God, that you're asking me to more in this life through forgiveness than when I just try to seek to get even."

Here's the thing. I believe that God wants to use our church in a significant way to reach our city and the world. I'm not doing this with my life just to go to church every weekend or to just preach a message every weekend. I'm doing this with my life because I want to be a part of a movement of God, I really do. I want God to move in this world and I don't want us to stay asleep at the wheel, I don't want us to through the motions. I really believe that Jesus is the hope of the world and he's chosen us to actually take that message to others. I really believe it.

Here's the thing that I think will hold us back. We will not be nearly as effective in our mission if we are still holding a grudge with one another. For some of you it's the person sitting next to you. For some of you it's somebody in this room. You can see him. For some of you maybe it's somebody on staff. For some of you it's somebody you go to work with. Whoever it is, a family member, and you're like there's this junk bottled up inside of you. And God says: I need my people to be soft enough and sweet enough for me to work.

I think that there are a lot of churches out there that are really good churches and they really love Jesus and they really know all of the things that they should do but God isn't doing anything through them because their hearts are hard because they won't forgive. That's a nice little golf clap.

So here's what I want to ask you to do right now. I want to ask you to stand to your feet at all of our campuses and I want you to just simply make this your prayer:

God, I'm willing to get open. I don't know what's going to happen but I'm willing to get open to talking to them again. God, I'm willing to get open to reconciliation again. And, God, I'm willing to hang out with them again. God, I'm willing to have a meal with them again. God, I'm willing to get open and then I'm just going to tap away by being obedient and choosing to stay sweet every single day and by praying that your Spirit will come, trusting that you will release the contents that are under pressure.

Father, we come to you right now and I just pray that you would help us to get to this place in our lives where we would just get open to you doing what only you can. God, we've been wounded, we've been hurt, we've been offended by people in our lives and more is coming. And right now, today, may we draw a line in the sand and say, "Today is the day that I will no longer continue to grow in bitterness, I'm going to stay sweet. I'm going to stay sweet and let you do what only you can. So, God, I pray that your spirit would be in this room, that you would do a super-natural work in our hearts and in our relationships for your glory. In Jesus' name and the church says: Amen.

Come on. Join me. Let's pray. Let's worship. Let's invite him in. Get open.