

## Opening

- Romans 5:6-10// *When we were utterly helpless, Christ came at just the right time and died for us sinners. 7 Now, most people would not be willing to die for an upright person, though someone might perhaps be willing to die for a person who is especially good. 8 But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners. 9 And since we have been made right in God's sight by the blood of Christ, he will certainly save us from God's condemnation. 10 For since our friendship with God was restored by the death of his Son while we were still his enemies, we will certainly be saved through the life of his Son.*

## Intro

- Participatory moment... What's your favorite movie? Why?
  - Notice, no one named functionality as the reason their favorite movie is their favorite... Black Panther is one of my favorite movies, but I would never say the reason I love it is because of the *function* it plays in the MCU, or because the plot works good enough... I love it because of the characters, the acting, the soundtrack, the Wakanda aesthetic, its cultural significance...
  - Honest Trailers (if trailers were made with nothing but a brutally honest and snarky description of the movie):
    - Black Panther
    - Mary Poppins
- Too often, when we tell The Story of the gospel this is our approach. **The gospel is supposed to be a Christian's favorite story... It's the Good News! And yet, we tell a story (albeit an honest story) that falls short of its beauty.**
- "Plumbing Theology," Makoto Fujimura
  - "In hearing many sermons across many denominations, I have found that we tend to depict the gospel as a message of "God fixes things"—which is what I mean by plumbing theology... Plumbing theology answers what God did to 'fix' the problem of the Fall (through the salvific work on the cross), but it does not address why we need the plumbing fixed to begin with."
  - In other words... So often, we boil down the power and beauty of the gospel to the problems it solves: 1) freeing us from the emotions of guilt and shame, and 2) from fear about where we'll go when we die.... Don't get me wrong, these are absolutely true statements about the effects of the cross. We are freed from shame! (Hallelujah!) and we are spared the consequence of hell (Praise God!) *But there's even more to the story!*
- "Forgiveness"
  - In the Greek the word forgiveness comes from a family of words that literally means to: let go, release, send away, unbind, loose, abandon, and even divorce.
  - **The word by itself focuses on the negative (what's lost or left) and puts a heavy emphasis on what is being left behind.**
    - When you "forgive" someone you are letting go the offense or releases them from the consequences of their wrong.
- The Exodus story
  - We can think of the Old Testament story of the Exodus as a dramatic picture for what happens when we are forgiven of our sins... **Like the Israelites who were freed from slavery and left Egypt and their chains behind them, as a result of Jesus' death on**

**the cross we have been freed from the consequence of our sinfulness, leaving behind the power of sin's enslavement!**

- But there's more to the story...
- Often we boil down the story of the Exodus to the Israelites crossing the Red Sea, fleeing Pharaoh... But the majority of the book of Exodus contains stories about what happens after that moment... **We tend to focus on what God freed the Israelites from but not on what he freed them for.**
- Ex. 19:4-6// 'You have seen what I did to the Egyptians. You know how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. 5 Now if you will obey me and keep my covenant, you will be my own special treasure from among all the peoples on earth; for all the earth belongs to me. 6 And you will be my kingdom of priests, my holy nation.' This is the message you must give to the people of Israel."

### **Relationship... "Brought you to myself" (Ex. 19:4)**

- This is the purpose statement of the Exodus! And yet, we only talk about the premise... We do the same thing with forgiveness...
- If our focus on forgiveness is just about saving people from their sin or the eternal consequences of hell, then we've completely lost the plot. The true reward of heaven is not merely escaping the consequence of hell... It's not even the reward of mansions and streets of gold... It's about the eternal *relationship* we have with God.
- **Christ did not die for your sin but your friendship...**
  - He may have died *because* of our sin, but his focus was not on our sin but on our reconciliation with God. (Heb. 12:2... "For the joy set before him.")
  - Romans 5:10// *Our friendship with God was restored by the death of his Son...*
- **Sin and guilt may be the premise of salvation, but forgiveness and friendship is the purpose.**
- When I was a kid I was afraid of heaven... Too often we appeal to the survival instincts of people when we tell the story of salvation, forgetting the even more enduring instinct for relationship.
- What's awesome about the forgiveness of cross is that it's not just a preview. This friendship you will have with God in heaven starts today. It starts now! You don't have to wait for eternity.

### **Renaming... "While we were sinners" (v. 8)... "While we were enemies"... (v.10)**

- If the main purpose of forgiveness is that it reconciles us with God... it doesn't stop there. The power of God's forgiveness ripples out into our earthly now, and effects even our relationships with the people in our lives.
- Tim Keller goes so far as to say, that if you are unwilling to forgive others, then you are not forgiven yourself... "an unforgiving heart is an unforgiven heart."
- And it's not just Keller, the apostle Paul says it too: "Make allowance for each other's faults, and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you *must* forgive others." (Col. 3:13)

- And not just Paul, but Jesus!... “If you forgive those who sin against you, your heavenly Father will forgive you. But if you refuse to forgive others, your Father will not forgive your sins.” (Matt. 6:14-15)
- **As Christians, forgiveness is not something that is meant for us to receive, it's also something we're meant (even required) to give!**
- Why is that?
  - Central to Jesus' ministry on earth was his mission of renaming... (Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*)
    - When Jesus entered the scene, he entered a very specific moment in history. In the Jewish world, the lines between Jewish factions had hardened around theological and political differences (sound familiar). These lines were so rigid that faithful, God-following Jews were telling other God-following Jews, “You do not belong in the kingdom of God...” Pharisees vs. Saducees vs. Essenes vs. Zealots... And beyond these internal divisions within the faith there was that indelible division between Jew and Gentile. The Roman world was no different. Non-Jews were also dividing themselves up into categories... slave/ free, male/ female...
    - But Jesus came to rename and redraw the boundaries... What was unclean, he called clean... People who were outcasts, he made insiders... He healed a bleeding woman and a blind man, he touched men with leprosy... He made disciples out of women, Samaritans, tax collectors, etc.
- Romans 5:8// But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us *while we were still sinners*.
  - Jesus crosses the social/ religious boundary between holy and sinful, clean and unclean, friend and enemy and says... even while you are a sinner... weak... unclean... enslaved... I'm going to treat you like a friend. And he does it in the most dramatic way possible, by dying on their behalf!
  - (v. 7) “Rarely will anyone die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person someone might die.”
    - John 15:13// *There is no greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friends.*
  - Jesus death on the cross is so powerful, not only because dying for another person is the most extreme expression of love someone can give, but because Jesus died not only for his friends, but for his enemies.
- By dying on the cross for his enemies, Jesus teaches us that forgiveness is for all... which means:
  - 1) everyone needs forgiveness (we're all sinners)
  - 2) no one is excluded from forgiveness (salvation is for all)
    - Our nation and world is in such a horrific state today because we do not believe, and therefore, are not living up to this standard of forgiveness... Instead, we think we are too good to need forgiveness and that our enemies are too bad to deserve it.
- “Forgiveness flounders because I exclude the enemy from the community of humans even as I exclude myself from the community of sinners.” - Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion & Embrace*
  - *exclude from community of humans...* we see our enemies as less than human... we demonize and dehumanize them!
  - *exclude ourselves from the community of sinners...* we may sin from time to time, but I'm not a sinner... we paint ourselves as angels and saints.
- Christ's forgiveness transcends this way we usually think... Not only does it help us see others in a new light, but also ourselves... I am forgiven not because I am special, but

because no one is excluded from forgiveness. I'm only here because Jesus is letting everybody in!

- Just like God didn't cherry-pick who he was letting in, you can't cherry-pick who you forgive! Remember... "a forgiven heart is a forgiving heart."
- What I'm not saying... That we should intentionally place ourselves in dangerous and toxic relationships where repentance does not exist and is not expected. **There is a difference between forgiveness and reconciliation.**
  - By dying on the cross while we were still sinners, Jesus initiated forgiveness... We must do the same (Volf calls this the **will to embrace**).
  - But just because you have the will to embrace does not mean you actually will embrace, or that you should. **Your willingness to forgive cannot lead to full reconciliation unless its met with repentance on the other side.**
    - The three most powerful words in marriage are not "I love you," they are "I was wrong." It's hard to say those words... But essential if you want to move forward after an argument or disagreement.

(Renaming... so that those who were out are now in, and those who were already in can no longer see themselves as superior than others)

### **Remaking... "And you will be my kingdom of priests, my holy nation." (Ex. 19:6)**

- This experience of forgiveness is not just an individual thing... He doesn't just want us to be reconciled in relationship with him... or reconciled in relationship with individuals in our lives... **He wants us to take part in the reconciliation of the world.**

### **"And you will be my kingdom of priests, my holy nation." (Ex. 19:6)**

- Think about that... The Israelites were not only freed from slavery, but given the honorable position of priest!
  - Notice, they did not go from slave to kings & queens (there's a kingdom, but God is still the king)... they did not go from oppressed to oppressor... They became a kingdom of priests.
- As Protestants we like to talk about the privilege and proximity of priesthood, but not the responsibility.
  - "Priesthood of believers"- In our Western, Protestant tradition we've taken this priest language and made it all about us... Now that I have been freed from my sin I can have direct access to God (which is true!) But in celebrating that truth we have left out the most essential purpose of the priest... to serve as a liaison for others.
  - As priests, we have a responsibility... What was the main role of a priest in ancient Israel?... To serve as moderator between God and humanity.
    - There is only one high priest, and it's not us... it's Jesus. But we are still to be ambassadors...
    - "For God was in Christ, reconciling the **world** to himself, no longer counting people's sins against them. And he gave us this wonderful message of reconciliation." (2 Corinthians 5:19)
    - "You will do more than restore the people of Israel to me. I will make you a light to the Gentiles, and you will bring my salvation to the **ends of the earth.**" (Isaiah 49: 6)

- “You are the light **of the world**—like a city on a hilltop that cannot be hidden.” (Matt. 15:14)
- I’m not sure that when the people of the world look at Christians today... the very people who recognize this special gift of forgiveness granted to us by grace through faith in Jesus... I’m not sure they see a light.
- The art of Kintsugi, Makoto Fujimura
  - Kintsugi - the ancient Japanese art form of repairing broken tea ware by filling the cracks with gold (kin = “gold,” tsugi = “reconnect”). Through this process, the tea ware isn’t just repaired but remade into a more valuable piece of art by an incredibly skilled artisan.
  - Kintsugi is not just repairing, its’ remaking.
- **Fujimura uses kintsugi as a metaphor to explain the gospel in the fullness of its functionality and its beauty.**
  - The gospel *does* repair, but it also creates something new.
- In a short documentary film that Fujimura created on the art of kintsugi, he interviewed a master kintsugi artist, who explained that his business began to boom after the large earthquake that rocked the country in 2011. He said people who were without homes and even people whose bodies had been broken by the earthquake, were coming in droves to repair their tea ware... they were coming in to redeem what they could.
  - This might sound strange to us, because we live in a throw-away culture. If something breaks, we don’t get it fixed, we just buy a new one. But the philosophy of kintsugi counteracts that mentality and teaches that everything is redeemable.
- Our throwaway mentality affects more than just our relationship with objects, but with people as well... cancel culture. For the past several years, our society has been experiencing a social earthquake of unrest... and far too many of us are content with just throwing people away.
  - Maybe this is the reason why the story of the gospel has become so unattractive to people today. They look at a group of people who say that they’ve experienced this amazing forgiveness of God and yet the same people are unwilling to extend that forgiveness to others who disagree with them.
- But what would it look like if we actually did cooperate with God In the work of reconciling the world to himself? The Bible actually does promise that this is what will happen in the end... It describes a “new heaven and new earth” (Rev. 21)
  - “New” = kainos... Does not mean something that replaces an old thing. It’s doesn’t mean something completely original (that word exists... it’s neos). Instead, kainos means “new in quality,” “fresh in development,” “an innovation.”
  - It’s kintsugi! It’s not replacing the old, but remaking the old into something new.
- Rev. 7:9// every nation, every tribe, every people, every language
  - Our differences will not be forgotten in heaven. Which means that some of the very things that irritated us about one another here on this side of eternity will exist on the other side... But on that side, those things which once caused division will then be filled with grace. **You can imagine those streets of gold not as evidence of luxury but evidence of the healing work of kintsugi, reconciling all people together.**

- That's a beautiful image. But we are not there yet... And in the meantime, we have the hard work of forgiving to do... when the people we have to forgive are still sinners.... I don't want to glaze over the fact that forgiveness requires suffering. Kintsugi when it's all done makes a beautiful work of art but the work of putting all the little pieces back together again is tedious and time-consuming.
- So how can it be done?
- I wanna leave you tonight with just three practical things that we can do as a kingdom of priests, as a priesthood of believers. And all three practical things may not feel so practical because they all involve prayer. But **prayer might be the most practical place To start for some thing as impossible and impractical as Christ-like forgiveness.**

## Closing

- Prayers of confession
  - an unforgiving heart is an unforgiven heart... sometimes we aren't able to forgive others because we don't remember what it's like to be forgiven, ourselves.
  - "Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you *must* forgive others." (Col. 3:13)
    - to the degree you remember what Christ has done for you is the degree you will forgive others.
- Prayers of intercession
  - Ex. 28:29// "In this way, Aaron will carry the names of the tribes of Israel on the sacred chestpiece over his heart when he goes into the Holy Place. This will be a continual reminder that he represents the people when he comes before the Lord."
- Prayers of imprecation
  - "Hidden in the dark chambers of our hearts and nourished by the system of darkness, hate grows and seeks to infest everything with its hellish will to exclusion. In the light of the justice and love of God, however, hate recedes and the seed is planted for the miracle of forgiveness." - Miroslav Volf