

Speaker 1:

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Pastor Mark:

Well, if you've got a Bible go to Genesis Chapter 50, first book of the Old Testament, last chapter, we're spending 10 weeks looking at the life of Joseph. This is our final and concluding week. Let me preface my sermon by sharing with you my heart. I'm your pastor and I love you, and I want to help. I want to be helpful. I find great joy in opening God's word and helping God's people, that's literally my favorite thing. It's just to open God's word and help God's people and that's why I love you, and I love my job so much. And we're going to talk today about forgiveness, and when I get into this issue of forgiveness it's going to be for some of you a very tender place, for others of you a very, very tender place.

Pastor Mark:

And I want you to know that my goal ultimately is to unburden you, to see you healed up and hopeful so that you can move forward with God's intended destiny for your life. And I'm not going to stick very closely to notes today, I'm just going to talk a lot from the heart and from memory. And this will be a long sermon, not that the other sermons were short, but this will be noteworthy. And I will also say that much of what I have learned is as a result of talking with my family. We went through a very difficult time some years ago and sat down as a family, and my hope and prayer and goal at that time was to open God's word and to help my family make sure that we learn about forgiveness.

Pastor Mark:

So that we could be forgiven and I could be forgiven, so that we could forgive others, that they could forgive others so that we could walk in the freedom and the life and the joy and the peace that the holy spirit provides for those who are walking in forgiveness. And that led me to a full year long study biblically of this topic of forgiveness. I literally have a stack of almost as tall as me that I've read in recent years on forgiveness. And what I was able to learn, by the grace of God was helpful to my family. And you're my church family, and you need to know that I love you with the same love that I love my own family. That my intent for you is the same as my intent it for my own children.

Pastor Mark:

That I want to be helpful, and so I appreciate the honor of teaching God's word today. And even if I'm not your pastor, maybe just borrow me for an hour and see if I can be helpful, okay? So we're going to pick up the story of Joseph, and here is the story of Joseph to catch you up. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, this line of family. From Jacob comes 12 boys, one girl through four women, lots of drama. Okay. We've looked at their dysfunctional family system. Joseph was favored by his father, which is a sin that is sadly still common in many a family. As a result, his brothers became jealous, envious, covetous of his position. He had a dream that they would bow down to him and that he would be a significant prominent ruler.

Pastor Mark:

And they opposed God's destiny for his life and they were very embittered against him. As a result, they came up with a scheme, they threw him in a pit and they were going to kill him, and then they decided instead to sell him into slavery. So as a 17 year old young man with iron shackles, Psalm says, around his neck and his feet, he is taken as a slave to be sold on the market in Egypt. He is purchased by a man named Potiphar who's a military leader. He serves that man faithfully, Joseph's character is godly. The wife seeks to seduce him, he rejects her, he maintains upward loyalty to God and to his boss. As a result, she falsely accuses him of rape and he is thrown in prison.

Pastor Mark:

He spends his twenties and thirties as a prisoner and as a slave. He's a godly man who is innocent. He chooses not to be bitter, he chooses to forgive, he chooses to live by faith that God has a future and hope for him. Eventually, he is ruling in the prison and eventually he is chosen by the Pharaoh, the most powerful man on the earth to be the second in command. He has this reunion during this time of famine with his brothers, and he's already forgiven them. We've seen this great emotional forgiveness, rebuilding of trust, reconciling of relationship in the storyline of Joseph. Where we pick up the story today is he has literally gone from his parents, to a pit, to Potiphar's house, to a prison, ultimately up to the palace of the Pharaoh.

Pastor Mark:

That's where we find him, and his father has died. We looked last week that he buried his dad. This week, we see the final scene between he and his brothers. And it's a curious one, it starts in Chapter 50:15. We'll use Joseph as a case study for forgiving. When Joseph's brother saw that their father was dead they said, "Maybe that Joseph will hate us and pay us back for all the evil we did to him." What are they thinking? He hasn't really forgiven us. Maybe he was only faking forgiveness because our father was living. Now that our father is deceased, there is nothing to restrain him from seeking vengeance against us. The opposite of forgiveness is vengeance. Forgiveness is I'm not going to make you pay. Vengeance is I will make you pay.

Pastor Mark:

People say this when they say I'm going to put the screws to him, I'm not going to let him off the hook, all that means is you are going to pay. In Romans chapter 12:19, the apostle Paul says quoting God, "'Vengeance is mine,' saith the Lord. Don't seek vengeance. Trust God to judge justly." The opposite of forgiveness is vengeance. Joseph has forgiven them. Many years earlier before he even saw them and came into their presence, he has already fully forgiven them as Jesus articulates from the heart. But their fear is that in his heart it's not forgiveness, it is in fact vengeance. These are people who are forgiven, but they have not received the gift of forgiveness.

Pastor Mark:

They possess it, but they have not opened it and enjoyed it. Some of you are like that. Some of you, Jesus died for your sin, he's forgiven you. Someone else has paid a penalty for your sin, it has cost them something and you're forgiven, but you have not received that gift. You have not opened that gift. You've not enjoyed that gift. That is the condition of Joseph's brothers, God forgives them, Joseph forgives them, they live in fear which is the opposite of love. They live in fear of vengeance because they're suspicious of the love of forgiveness. How will Joseph respond? So they send a message to Joseph, verse 16, this is where they don't feel that they can necessarily even take the risk to be in Joseph's presence.

Pastor Mark:

They've already been together, reconciled for many years, but they're fearful. And so they send a messenger ahead to test the temperature where is Joseph in regards to their sin against him. So they send a message to Joseph saying, "Your father gave this command before he died." So they pull out the dead dad card. Before he died dad said be nice, and don't don't watch Liam Neeson movies and get any ideas. That's what dad said, right? "Say to Joseph, please forgive the transgressions of your brothers and their sin." They're going to use the biblical language. We live in a day that doesn't believe in sin. If you don't believe in sin, you don't believe in a savior because you don't believe you need to be saved from sin.

Pastor Mark:

We make sin as bad as it is so that we see Jesus as great as he is. They didn't just practice an alternative lifestyle, have an alternative morality or a different perspective, they sinned. They violated the will, the word, the way of God. It was sin. When we diminish sin, we diminish our savior, we diminish our salvation. When we are honest about our sin, we can be honest about our savior. When the bad news is as bad as it truly is, the good news is as good as it truly is. And so they're talking here about sin, and when we're talking about forgiving someone we're talking about sin. Not just an annoyance, an inconvenience, an oversight, a mistake or a minor issue, we're talking about a sin.

Pastor Mark:

We're talking about a clear violation not just of your law, but God's law. And they're acknowledging, they are recognizing, they are confessing sin. In our day, we would call this theologically repentance of sin. This is the essence of what it means to be Christian. The Protestant Reformation that we're in the midst of celebrating the 500 anniversary of, it began with a man named Martin Luther nailing something called the Ninety-five Theses up, it was his statement. The first line was this, "All of a Christian's life is one of repentance." What they're doing here is they're repenting of their sin, they're owning their sin, they're confessing their sin, they're acknowledging their sin, but it's two things. It's confessing your sin and receiving forgiveness, that's Christianity.

Pastor Mark:

Our age values tolerance, the Bible values repentance. The culture says nothing in you is wrong and needs to change, the Bible says everything in you is wrong and you need God to change you. He'll take you as you are, but he'll transform who you are, so you need to repent. Without the repentance of sin, we do not have a right relationship with God. So they come and they are practicing repentance, they are saying we have sinned against God and our brother, that is in fact true, because they did evil to you, he's using the language of evil. Our culture has a hard time retaining this word, we need to retain it. We can't use, overuse and abuse it, but we need to retain it.

Pastor Mark:

Some things are just plain old evil. What they did was evil. So, "Say to Joseph, please forgive the transgressions of your brothers and their sin because they did evil to you. Now, please forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of your father." Here's Joseph's emotional response, Joseph's response was Joseph wept when they spoke to him. Why does he weep? Because he has forgiven them. He has given them a gift that God has given him, the forgiveness of sins. They have not opened and enjoyed the gift, had they opened and enjoyed the gift they would be healed. They would be living in love, not in fear. They would be coming to him directly, not sending an intermediary.

Pastor Mark:

Here's how you know that you have truly forgiven someone, when you see them burdened by things that you no longer hold against them, it grieves you because you want good for them. You want good for them. Joseph doesn't look at this situation and say, "They caused me a lot of pain, I'm glad they're having a little pain. You reap what you sow. They really made my life miserable, I'm glad that their life is miserable. Now we're even." Because that's what vengeance does. Instead, Joseph says, "No, God forgives you. I forgive you. You haven't received, embraced, understood this gift, as a result you're living in condemnation, you're living in shame, you're living in misery." And he weeps.

Pastor Mark:

This is the heart of God. Some of you need to know this, that God's heart toward you is reflected in the heart of Joseph. God forgives you, he loves you, he wants a relationship with you. You're far away from him because you're afraid of him, and he is weeping because he wants to forgive you and have a relationship with you. And that gift comes through his son, the Lord Jesus, and that's a gift that you need to open and enjoy. The story of Joseph continues. After he weeps, verse 18, "His brothers also came and fell down before him." Do you remember what caused all the problems? Joseph had a dream that his brothers were going to bow down, and the brother said, "There's no way we're going to bow down. Throw him in a pit, sell him as a slave. That's over."

Pastor Mark:

They get reunited, they come before Joseph, lo and behold, they bow down. The very thing that their entire plot was devised to avoid, happens. And nobody makes them do it, they just do it on their own. I wonder if it dawned on them in the moment like, oh my gosh, God won again. Right? You can delay, but you cannot destroy the will of God and that's what is indeed happened here. It has been a lot of years, but God's will is coming to pass, but they are down on their knees and what are they doing? They are begging, they're begging for forgiveness from someone who has already forgiven them. Some of you still do this. There are things that you have done in your past, you've sinned against God, you've confessed, repented and God has forgiven you and you're still begging God please forgive me for what...

Pastor Mark:

And God's like, "I already did. That's over, get up, let's have the relationship. I love you. You're forgiven. You're forgiven." "There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ." Romans 8:1. "Satan is the accuser of the children of God. He accuses them day and night." Revelation 12:10. Satan keeps pounding you, but God's already forgiven you. Satan keeps condemning you, but God has already forgiven you. These guys are living sadly in a very tragic emotional state where there is love, joy, peace for them, but they don't have it in their soul because they have not really embraced full forgiveness that has been given to them freely. Do you know anybody like this?

Pastor Mark:

They're scared, they're socially isolated, they're aloof, they're withdrawn, they're distrusting, mistrusting, they're a little suspicious, they're a little anxious, they're relationally cautious. It's because they don't understand forgiveness. This next verse is very insightful. But Joseph said to them, "Do not fear." Do you know that's the number one command in the Bible? About 150 times it says fear not in some form or fashion, you know why? Because we're always afraid of somebody, we're always afraid of something. "Do not fear," and he asked this question, "For am I in the place of God?" Let's unpack this. Practically, politically speaking is Joseph in the place of God? Yes or no? Yes.

Pastor Mark:

See, Egypt is a counterfeit kingdom. God is a king. God has a kingdom. It says in God's kingdom, Jesus sits where? At the right hand of the father. He's the second in command. Egypt is a counterfeit kingdom, it's been ruling for 1300 years, it's the longest lasting empire in the history of the world, it's the most powerful preeminent prestigious nation on the earth in that day. Who is the king of the kingdom? Pharaoh. He is worshiped as a God. Who sits at his right hand in the Jesus seat? Joseph. Joseph is literally sitting in the Jesus seat, the number two, the right hand man of the king over the kingdom. If Joseph would've said, "They have sinned against God, now God will punish them." The Egyptians would've agreed.

Pastor Mark:

He can kill them. These are not citizens, they are sojourners. They have no legal rights, they're not Egyptians, his family is a bunch of Hebrews. He can throw them into the jail cell that he spent the better part of his twenties and thirties. He could come up with all kinds of false accusations and charges against them as he suffered in the name of vengeance. He could murder them. He could do even worse, he could murder their children and just watch them live in misery. Like God, he can do anything he wants. Like God, he does what his God does, forgives. Forgives. And when Joseph is asking this question, "Am I in the place of God?" The Egyptians perhaps would've said, "Yes you are." And Joseph said, "No, I'm not."

Pastor Mark:

What Joseph is saying is history has a courtroom, everyone has a day in court. A judge will evaluate their life and determine their eternal destiny, forgiven or unforgiven, and Joseph is saying, "I will not sit at that bench. I will not hammer that gavel. I will not render that verdict." Question, are you willing to do the same? Some of us convene a court; family, friends, coworkers, neighbors, jumping online. I'm going to convene a court. I am the judge. I will now render a verdict. Some of you have already done that, and your punishment toward them is vengeance. Joseph says, "I will not sit in that seat. I will not hammer that gavel. I will not render that verdict. I will let God be God and I'll be me."

Pastor Mark:

Jesus says it this way, "The father is entrusted to him all judgment." You need to know who sits on that seat of judgment, it's Jesus. And here's why he's best, because he knows all. You and I don't. Let's say that you have been wrongly, falsely accused or misunderstood. Don't you get it frustrated when other people rush to a verdict and their verdict isn't even based on the factual evidence? We do that to others as well. This is why Proverb says, "Everyone seems right until the other side of the matter is heard." Any of you have children experience this? One kid walks in, "Here's what happened." You talk to the other kid and they're like, "That's not exactly what happened." We only hear one side of the story. Furthermore, we do not know all that God knows and so we allow God to judge and we leave it in God's hands.

Pastor Mark:

That's what forgiveness is, literally handing the case to a higher court. It's not that the case does not get tried, it's saying I will not try this case in my court. I will hand this case to the Lord Jesus. He will try it in his court, and whatever verdict judge Jesus renders, I will support. This next verse is crucial, critical, insightful. It is considered by many to be the key to the understanding of Joseph's interpretation of all of the details and data in his life. Here's what I want to tell you. It's not just what happens to you, it's how

you interpret it that determines your destiny. Two people can go through the exact same experience and have two different definitions of what happened and why. One can be life giving, the other can be death inducing. Here's how Joseph looks at his whole life.

Pastor Mark:

And at this point he is heading toward the end, he's an elderly man. "As for you," I'm sure when they heard that they're like, "Oh boy, what now?" "As for you," okay, this is personal. "You meant what?"

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Evil.

Pastor Mark:

"Evil." Be honest. He doesn't say nothing happened, it wasn't a big deal, nobody's perfect, time heals all wounds because you know what? Time doesn't heal all wounds, only time with God heals wounds. Well, he doesn't say nothing happened, nothing hurt me, it didn't matter, it all worked itself out, that's in the past. He's very honest, he says, "You meant evil. You intended evil, let's call it what it is, against me." This was very personal. Sometimes people will attack you personally and they say, "Don't take it personal." I take it personal because it's personal. But God, there it is. See the brothers, their understanding of the story of what has happened between them and Joseph has not yet factored in God.

Pastor Mark:

We've done evil, he probably is angry, dad has died, we're in danger, vengeance is coming. What's going to happen to us? That's their interpretation of all of the events. Joseph's interpretation is God had a plan. God had a plan and I see God's plan. Faith is trusting that God has a plan until you see the plan of God. Joseph lived by faith through it all in prison, falsely accused, separated from father and family, never lost his faith. He lived by faith. He didn't know what the plan of God was, now he knows what the plan of God is. Oftentimes it takes a long time to find the plan of God, but eventually God's plan prevails.

Pastor Mark:

He says this, "But God meant it for good." Does he say God meant evil? Does he say that? He says you meant evil, but God meant... You need to get this clear. Lot of people, bad things happen and they're like, "God, why do you do evil?" God does not do evil. God is good, not evil. God is light and in him there is no darkness at all. People, Satan and demons do evil. God is so good, he'll use evil for good. There's some bad theologies that say that everything that happens is God's will. There are things called sin that are not God's will because they're not in accordance with God's character, and they're not in obedient to God's word. You meant evil for me.

Pastor Mark:

God had a bigger, better plan. He used it for good. This is the hope of the Christian life. That God doesn't waste anything, that he uses everything for his glory and our good. Some of the translations will say, "What you intended for evil, God used for good and the saving of many lives." What God is doing is oftentimes so much better than what we're seeing, and so much bigger than what we could even be perceiving. There's a verse in the New Testament Romans 8:28, "God works out all things for the good of those who love him and are called according to his purpose." Genesis 50:20 is the Old Testament version of that, "What you intended for evil, God used for good and the saving of many lives."

Pastor Mark:

This is about God's sovereignty, and God's providence, and God's goodness to bring good out of evil. The brothers threw Joseph in a hole, left him for dead, but he came forth and ruled and reigned to be a savior. And from him comes Jesus who is betrayed, thrown in a hole, and comes earth to ruin reign and be a savior. The family resemblance is quite remarkable. To bring about that, many people should be kept alive as they are today. People were saved. You did evil, God did good, people were saved, glory to God, good for the people. This was God's purpose and plan that prevailed. So do not fear, do not be afraid. I didn't come to harm you. I'm not opposed to you. I'm not seeking vengeance against you. My power will be used to bless you, not burden you. You know that you have actually forgiven someone when you bless them.

Pastor Mark:

That's why Jesus tells us to pray for those who persecute us, and to do good to those who do evil. To be a blessing to those who seek to burden us. Why? Because whether or not we bless them is the test of whether or not we've forgiven them. If they have intended evil, how do you know that you have forgiven them? You bless them. You bless them, and he blesses them. He says, "Do not fear. I will provide for you and your little ones." I'm going to take care of you and your kids, I'm going to bless your whole family. And parents know exactly what this feels like. If somebody really wants to bless you by blessing your children, you feel particularly blessed. It's one thing to bless me, you bless my kids you double bless me. He blesses everybody. Thus, he comforted them.

Pastor Mark:

You know that you've forgiven somebody when you're so healed up, healthy, move forward, glad for your new life that you see them stuck in the pain of the past and you've forgiven them and God has forgiven them and they will not receive and enjoy that gift. That you want to go back and comfort them, speak kindly to them and encourage them to enjoy that gift of forgiveness and to move forward with the life that God intends for them. Thus, he comforted them and he spoke how? Kindly. How do you know you've forgiven somebody? How do you talk to them? How do talk you about them? We tend to give nicknames to the people we love and hate the most. Some of you have a negative nickname. You refuse to even see that person as a human being anymore, they're now a caricature.

Pastor Mark:

There's a lot of chuckling, I wasn't expecting that much chuckling. He doesn't give them a nickname, he refers to them with dignity, value and worth as God's image bears. He doesn't threaten them, he assures them. He doesn't burden them, he blesses them. He doesn't take from them, he gives to them. I need you to see that this is how Jesus treats us. That we're like the brothers, Jesus is like Joseph. When we come before him, if we have not received forgiveness or fully embraced, understood, and enjoyed it, his heart weeps, but he is patient loving, gracious, and kind to help us to understand his affection, devotion so that we can have relation.

Pastor Mark:

So I want to spend a bit of time, and by that I mean a lot of time, talking just from the heart, free flow and about forgiveness. First thing I want to talk about is just understanding forgiveness. What is it? In my 20 plus years as a senior pastor, the counseling issue that I have dealt with most is forgiveness. That's the issue that comes up all the time. And sometimes people have depression issues, a relational conflict, a strained family, or some sort of despair or anxiety. And there may be a myriad reasons for

that, but oftentimes at least participating in the problem is unforgiveness. Now some of you wouldn't say you're bitter or unforgiving, you'd just say I'm hurt. I'm disappointed. I'm wounded. I've been damaged.

Pastor Mark:

Some of you would say I'm bitter. Some of you would say I'm unforgiving. Let's just say that those all talking about the same condition. Some of us just think that one word is better than the other because this word makes us feel like a victim, whereas this word makes it seem like we've responded to sin with a sinful attitude. Forgiveness is a private matter, oftentimes between you and God. Sometimes the other person doesn't even need to know because you know what? You don't want to invite them back into your life. They were a dangerous person, they have moved on and you need to forgive them, but you need not invite them back into a relationship in your life. Sometimes the other person doesn't agree. Have you ever seen that?

Pastor Mark:

You think somebody did something really bad and they're like, "I don't agree." And if you go to them and say, "I forgive you." They say, "You don't need to because I didn't do anything." That doesn't help, just let it go. Okay? Just let it go. Maybe one day they'll come around and say, "You know what? God convicted me. I now agree with you." Give them a hug and tell them yay, but it may be a while. Sometimes they thought you forgave them because you said you forgave them, but the truth is you've nursed some sort of grudge or hurt in your heart and you don't need to tell them. How do you know that you need to tell someone that you've forgiven them? Whether or not it gives or lifts a burden. If you're telling someone you forgive them so you can dump the burden on them, "You're evil, nasty, vile and wrong, but good news, I forgive you."

Pastor Mark:

Then they are a nail and you are a hammer, okay? That's not relieving a burden. Joseph tells his brothers that he forgives them because they are burdened. They're not living under the weightlessness of forgiveness, they're living under the weightiness of unforgiveness. And what he tells them is you're forgiven. He tells them that to lift the burden. The only time we really need to tell somebody that we've forgiven them is if they're living in all that condemnation, that shame, that guilt, that hurt, that pain, and we love them and we want to get that burden off of them. We don't tell someone we've forgiven them to give a burden to them. Oftentimes it's between you and God. It's between you and God. Forgiveness is both a one time event and an ongoing process. There's an occasion in the gospels where they come to Jesus and there's a big theological debate.

Pastor Mark:

It's trending on Twitter, a lot of blogs, comments are open, social media debate, factions, conferences, books being written, pastor so and so versus pastor so and so. I know this doesn't happen anymore, but it used to and so they have this big debate about forgiveness. And the question was how often, how many times do you need to forgive someone? And the most liberal, generous, loving people said seven, because that's a number of perfection. So seven times I forgive you, eight I'm stabbing you in the liver. Forgiveness is done, okay? Don't make me count to eight, all right? So they come to Jesus and Peter asks, "How many times do we got to forgive somebody Jesus? What team are you on? What side do you take?" Jesus says, "You need to forgive them 70 X 7." Some of you are like, "I'm not good at math." What he meant was a lot.

Pastor Mark:

A lot. A lot. How many of you be like, "I'd lose count?" That's the point, you stop counting. Why do you do that? Well, forgiveness happens in a moment, but sometimes it's also a process. Because sometimes if you notice this, the person did it and then they do it again. Married to that person? They are too. Okay? Just something to pray about. I'm just here to help. Sometimes you get part of the information and you forgive them and then you proceed forward and then you get more information. You're like, "Oh, I'm hurt all over again. I didn't know all that." Or sometimes you feel like you've forgiven them, but the pain of a circumstance brings it back up. You're like, "Oh, I'm feeling it again. I thought I was over this." 70 X 7. One commentator says, "What Jesus means by that is that forgiveness is limitless."

Pastor Mark:

Forgiveness is canceling someone's debt so they do not have to repay you. The currency of business is money. The currency of relationship is forgiveness, that's the currency of relationship. So when we have a financial debt, forgiveness is the forgiving of the debt so that we don't have to pay. In relationship, forgiveness is the forgiving of the sin so that they don't need to us back or repay us. Jesus teaches us this in Matthew 6, they come to him and they say, "Lord, teach us to pray." Jesus says, "Our father who art in heaven," he goes on to say, "Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. Go over to, I believe it's Luke Chapter 11, the same prayer is articulated with one caveat. Jesus is quoted as saying there, forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us." Jesus says that debt and sin are synonymous.

Pastor Mark:

The reason that Joseph could be forgiving is because he was giving. Forgiving is just another form of giving, that's why we want you to learn to be giving people. If you are giving, you'll be forgiving. Joseph has been generous with his wealth, he's been generous with his forgiveness. He's been generous. He is one who understands giving and forgiving. What happens is for those of us who are Christians, our sin accrues a debt to God, a debt. All of your sin, past, present, and future, all of your sin. Omission, you didn't do the right thing. Commission, you did the wrong thing. All of your thoughts, all of your words, all of your deeds, all of your motives, God sees and knows all. All of that is a debt to God. Jesus comes to pay that debt. We call that forgiveness.

Pastor Mark:

That he offers his death for our sin because the Bible says that the wage for sin, the price for sin, the payment for sin, some translations will call it the ransom for sin, is death. Jesus dies to pay the price that we should pay that we could be forgiven. When we forgive someone, what we're saying is I'm not going make you pay. We can do this emotionally, I'm not going to punish you, withdraw from you, hurt you, speak ill of you. We do this financially, I'm willing to just forego the debt. We do this in a myriad of ways where we cancel the debt, and we are the one who pays and we know that God is ultimately the one who pays ultimately. It is the canceling of someone's debt so they do not have to repay you. I don't know why I feel like saying this, I just feel compelled to share an illustration.

Pastor Mark:

I was talking to a guy many years ago, he committed adultery on his wife. I asked him, I said, "Why did you commit adultery on his wife?" He said, "She owed me." I said, "She owed you?" "Yeah. When we got married I thought it would be like this, our intimate life and it wasn't like that. So I feel like she owes me." That's the opposite of Christianity. You owe me, therefore I'm going to make you pay. Forgiveness is you owe me, therefore I'm not going to make you pay because that's how God does relationship.

That's how God does relationship. Forgiving is canceling someone's debt so that they do not have to repay you. Healing up. Have you ever seen somebody who's unforgiving and bitter? Are they healed up, healthy, joyful? "How are you doing?" "Great. So excited for my future."

Pastor Mark:

No. No. I'm bitter, I'm hurt, I'm angry, I'm stuck, I'm unhealthy, my relationships are being soiled, and God seems very far away. So you can heal up, move on and leave the matter in God's hands. It's literally like, "God, this is toxic. You can have it." Jesus is like, "I can handle it. That's what I do." Forgiveness is the opposite of denial. Joseph doesn't say nothing happened, what you intended for evil. Bitterness, I can't get over this, I can't forgive this, you're going to pay for this. Vengeance, make you pay, nursing a grudge. Some of you have been nursing a hurt, a grudge, a disappointment for a very long time. Do you know that bitterness is like cancer? You either cut it out or it grows until it kills the host.

Pastor Mark:

Cancer in the body is seen as bitterness in the soul, it infects everything, it affects everyone, and it only brings forth sickness and death. And continuing to see yourself as a wounded and hurt victim with no future hurt because of past pain. Was Joseph a victim? Yes. Did he allow that to determine his identity and set the course for his destiny? No. He forgave, healed up, lived in relationship with God and moved forward. You can't do both simultaneously, live in the past and press forward in the future. I think it's in Philippians 3:13 the apostle Paul says, "This one thing I do," that means it's very important. "This one thing I do forget what lies behind, I press forward with the call of God in my life." Paul had a lot to be forgiven of, he murdered a church leader.

Pastor Mark:

Paul had been harassed, opposed, imprisoned, beaten, shipwreck, homeless, left for dead, an angry mob followed him from town to town. He had a lot of people to forgive. He had a lot of things to be forgiven of, and a lot of people to be forgiving of. And what he says is, "I forget what lies behind and I move forward." You have to decide, am I going to have the trajectory of my life be backward or forward? Will it be to my pain or to God's presence? Will it be to the worst day of my life, or will it be to the future days of my life? And the enemy whispers in your ear and says, "Don't forgive them. You'll let them get away with everything." And I would tell you when you forgive, you don't let them get away with anything, you let yourself get away from everything.

Pastor Mark:

It's not about them, it's about you and God and then you let God deal with them. Forgiveness is not trust. Some people ask, "Well, what is forgiveness? What is not?" Forgiveness is not trust. Forgiveness is free, trust is earned. Do you get that? Somebody commits adultery, says, "Well, you forgive me, you got to trust me now." No, no, no, no. No, you have emptied out your account, right? You have emptied out your account. And I forgive you, but now you need to make some deposit so that I can trust you. Some years ago somebody came up to me at church when our kids were little, and I think they meant well, you never know. They said, "Hey, we'd love to babysit your kids." I said, "No, that's not going to happen."

Pastor Mark:

They said, "Why? You don't trust us?" I said, "And what am I supposed to say?" What I said is the truth. I said, "No, I don't trust you." And they said, "I'm offended." I said, "Because I don't know you." I don't

trust people I don't know, right? If somebody came up to me at Walmart and said, "Can I watch your kids?" I'd say no, because I don't know you. Just because we're in a different building, we still have the same relationship, I don't know you. That's right, I don't know you. I love you, love everybody. Forgive you, forgive everybody. Trust you, don't trust everybody. Forgiveness is free, love is free, trust is earned in the context of relationship over time.

Pastor Mark:

Just because you forgive somebody doesn't mean you trust them. It's not reconciliation. Well, we need to pick up where we left off, not necessarily. See, Joseph tested his brothers over the course of a few years. He'd already forgiven them, he tested them to see if he could trust them. Once he realized he could trust them, then he reconciled with them. I always say this, forgiveness takes one person, repentance takes another person, reconciliation takes both persons. Takes one to forgive, one to repent and two to reconcile. That's why in the new Testament Paul says, "Insofar as it's possible with you, seek to live at peace with all men." What he's saying is do your part. If you're guilty, apologize. If you're offended, forgive. Reconciliation may occur, may not occur.

Pastor Mark:

At an occasion it ended up in a lot of conflict and drama some years ago, there were two couples that were best friends, they'd go on double dates, do everything together. Come to find that the one wife really loved the other husband, okay? And this became an emotional affair that was heading toward a fullblown physical adultery. So I sat down with this couple and the foolish husband of the wayward wife said, "Well, how do we reconcile our relationship?" I said, "Double dates are over. Going on vacation together is over. Your wife loves her husband. You need to part ways, you need to forgive each other, heal up and move on, but you can't trust one another. Your best friend's been running around with your wife. This is not someone you need to be in close relationship with if you want to preserve your family. Makes sense?"

Pastor Mark:

And sometimes people who are manipulative use and abuse the Bible. "If you forgive me, you need to take me back, pick up where we left off, reconcile." Wait a minute, reconciliation, trust, forgiveness, those are three different things. I can forgive you, maybe we can build trust, maybe we'll reconcile, but those are three big steps. It's not one big step. I forgive you, therefore we're reconciled, sometimes that's the case, but it doesn't have to be that way. Forgiveness is not covering a crime. If somebody comes to you and says, "Okay, I'm stealing from my boss," or "I'm abusing a child. Don't tell anybody." What's the answer? I can't agree to that. I side with the victim. I side with the victim.

Pastor Mark:

I can forgive you and call the police, I can forgive you and testify in court because I need to be truthful. I need to be forgiving and truthful. And it's not God's forgiveness, you can forgive somebody and Jesus can send them to hell. Did you know that? Just because you have forgiven them doesn't mean that God has ultimately forgiven them. You're leaving them in God's hands. This is what forgiveness is and is not. Seven kinds of unforgiving people, I'm not nearly as far along as I anticipated. All right, next one, seven kinds of unforgiving people. I get paid by the hour, this is going to be a while, okay? Now, here's the honest truth. The honest truth is I believe that my job is to lead and feed God's people.

Pastor Mark:

And if you're going to get in your car and you got kids and you perform the miracle of getting them dressed on a Sunday, add it to the list of Jesus' miracles, we did it. And you make your way here, I want to provide some protein in the diet so that you're well fed, okay? So that's my way of saying hang in there, okay? And thank you for hanging in there, okay? Seven kinds. How do you know if you're bitter or unforgiving or hurt or nursing? How do you know? You're like, "I think I'm doing good. Well, let's see. Okay. There's the archeologist. The archeologist is the person who's always digging up the past, right? Every time you get in an argument, this person, they're like, "Well, let's go back and dig up some of the stuff, okay?" And they're looking for rocks to throw at you, that's what they're looking for.

Pastor Mark:

And some of you keep excavating the same plot, you're like, "Section B quadrant four, you're just like your mother." Okay? So you're an archeologist, always digging up the past. You're not making plans for your future, you are visiting the pain of your past. Are you the archeologist? The stalker, okay. This is less funny, but equally helpful. The stalker is the person who is so hurt that that person who hurt them becomes the center of their life. They don't fix their eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of their faith. They fix their eyes on the offender, the cause of their problems and pain. You become almost obsessed with someone. Where are they going? What are they doing?

Pastor Mark:

You start trying to keep an eye on them through family, friends, friend network. Social media is a really dangerous thing for a hurt person, a wounded person, a bitter person, because now like God, you get to peer into someone's life. Where are they going? What are they doing? What are they wearing? What are they eating? What are they drinking? Who are they with? What are they liking? You can become obsessed with someone in a way that is tremendously unhealthy. There's someone that I have great affection for that has gone through great pain. Every time I talk to them, they give me the update on their offender. "You know what they posted this week?" "No I don't." "Well, here's what they said. Here's what they did. They had a photo, they got a new car. They went out to dinner. Here's what they're doing."

Pastor Mark:

You need to spend more time with Jesus than them. You need to pay more attention to that relationship that will heal you than that relationship that broke you, okay? Some of you need to stop being on social media, some of you need to stop following certain people, some of you need to stop seeking out certain information. You need to let it go. You need to let God be God so that you can be you. The tragic tale teller. Have you ever met a good salesperson? They've got a pitch and it's remarkable. I met a guy recently at the vitamin store. My son was getting his haircut and I saw a vitamin store. I thought I'm old, I probably need vitamins, so I went into the vitamin store.

Pastor Mark:

I go into the vitamin store, this guy meets me at the door. This guy looks like he eats vitamins. I mean, whatever you're taking, I'll take double because I'm going to take twice the work to get to that, okay? So this guy starts his here's our shake, try it. And here's this and this is organic and gluten free. And this will make you fly, and this will make you invisible. You're like, "These are amazing pills. I can be all the superheroes. I can have my own Marvel movie. That's amazing." Next thing I know, I got a whole bunch of vitamins and I'm walking out thinking this guy's really good. So I gave him the knuckles, I said, "You're

really good at your pitch." He said, "Yeah, I've been doing this a long time." I said, "Bro, you got this down to a... I mean, you've really nailed this."

Pastor Mark:

Some people sell you on their life and they want you to buy into their pain and be part of their evil. They tell you the terrible tale. Let me tell you what happened. What they're saying is feel sympathy for me, form an unholy alliance with me, oppose my enemy. They're like salespeople. What they are is they're demonic evangelists, they're trying to convert you to Satan's cause. Sometimes the tragic tale teller, they have learned how to just really tell the story, that's amazing. Wow. I mean, by the end you're sold, you're like, "Whatever you're selling, I'm buying. Wherever you're going, I'm following. Wherever you're shooting, I'm shooting." The tragic tale teller. Here's what happens with the tragic tale teller, they tend to embellish the tale over time.

Pastor Mark:

You ever seen that? You ever seen somebody who's got a story and every year it gets a little bigger? You got a grandpa? You heard him tell his war stories? When he first told you he said, "I wet my pants at bootcamp and I never made it to war." By the end, he is like, "I killed Hitler." You're like, "Wow. That's amazing." That story, it grew over time. It really got embellished. We don't know who killed grandpa Hitler. "Yes we do." Okay. All right. What happens to the tragic tale teller? The tale gets bigger over time. And also what happens is the tragic tale teller doesn't have all the details, so they fill in the narrative with their speculation. Okay. Do you know why they did that? All of a sudden you start impugning motives of the heart and start filling in the gaps. And the truth is God knows, they know, you don't know.

Pastor Mark:

But the tragic tale teller is all about converting people to their cause. As a result, what they're seeking to do is to multiply those who would oppose their offender. In our day, we call this the open letter on the internet. We use social media, we'll gossip. The tragic tale teller. What the tragic tale teller is trying to do is to amass a swarm. Charles Haddon Spurgeon, he was an old Baptist preacher. He basically said a bee sting can't hurt you, but a swarm is the problem. I'm paraphrasing. What social media allows is here comes a bee, okay, they tell the tragic tale. Here comes the swarm. Anybody experience this? Join me. That's the tragic tale teller. Even if the tragic tale is true, it's a tragic tale. It's not a transformation tale. That's the trouble.

Pastor Mark:

When Joseph tells his story, he doesn't tell a tragic tale, he tells a transformation tale. What he doesn't say is I was abused, thrown in prison, falsely accused of rape, didn't see my father. I have to look like an Egyptian, I had to learn Egyptian. My kids have a demonic pagan priest as their grandfather. This isn't the wife that I picked. Tragic tale. He has a transformation tale. This was God's purpose, my life is awesome, I'm in God's will. It's not what I wanted, it's what he wanted. And his will was good. He has a transformation tale. The tragic tale never has hope because it never has God and it never has a future. It's all about the past and the pain and the problem with no hope for the future.

Pastor Mark:

The record of wrong keeper. These are the people who violate first Corinthians 13, which says love does not keep a record of wrong. You can keep a record of right, you should. Let's say you're married, keep a

record of all the awesome things about your spouse. And when they do something that drives you crazy, read that other list first. You can make a record of wrong, here are all the things that they did. Don't post it on the internet, don't share it with anyone else. And God, I forgive them of this, this, this, this, this. We call that a processing letter, set it on fire and be done with it. You can make a record of wrong, but you can't keep a record of wrong. Those who keep a record of wrong, every time you do something, they add it to the list. They're amassing the debt. They're like the accountant who says, "Oh, I'm going to add this to your debt."

Pastor Mark:

Some years ago, there was a couple, they were coming up on their 50th wedding anniversary and they wanted to meet and I thought this would be joyful, and it was not. "What's going on?" "I really don't want to celebrate our 50th wedding anniversary." "Why?" "Well, on our honeymoon..." We're going to start there? You're so old I'm amazed you still remember that. That's amazing. I'm doing the math in my head. Literally, I'm like, "Was that before Nixon?" And then it was and then week one and week two and week three and year one, and they keep going. A little while in, you're just like, "Is this going to take another 50 years? Because I got stuff to do." Record of wrong.

Pastor Mark:

"Oh this reminds me of March 14th, 1973 when you you..." Wow. Wow. If you're that kind of person, everything you say may be true, but it's not healthy and it's not helpful. The negative anniversary funeral planner. There's not a section of cards for these people at the Hallmark store. The negative anniversary funeral planner, something bad happened, I'm going to turn it into an unholy day. This is the day that my dad walked out. This is the day that my mom died. This is the day that my boyfriend cheated on me. This is the day that my wife left me. This is the day that my boss fired me. This is the day that my friend betrayed me. Sometimes you just do this in your mind. Some people actually put this on their calendar. Somebody I know, they actually keep these dates recurring on their annual calendar.

Pastor Mark:

As that negative anniversary comes, they start to go into a depression. They're a mess through that negative anniversary and they let everybody know their tragic, terrible tale. And then afterward they have a season of mourning. And let me say this, how many of you are older, fifties, sixties, seventies, eighties, nineties? If you take all the pain in your life and start making negative anniversaries, pretty soon your whole year is filled up. People do this. Some of you need to go literally just take things off your calendar. And if it's in the calendar of your mind, you need to clear that cache as well. The emotional leaker. The emotional leaker's the person like, "I'm fine. I'm over it. I'm better." "How's Johnny?" "Oh, no." You're like, "That was quick. Wow. We just went there, zero to 60. You're not doing great. How are you feeling about Tony after the breakup?"

Pastor Mark:

"I'm fine with that son of..." Whoa, we're going the wrong direction, I don't think you're fine. Some of you, you feel like you're fine until somebody brings it up or something reminds you and then out it comes and you're like, "Sorry, didn't mean to. That just came out. That's awkward, right?" Yeah. It's really awkward. Yeah, it's really awkward. Amy Carmichael, I've told you before, she was on missionary. She says whatever is in the bottle is what comes out when it's bumped. The emotional leaker, they've got a lot of hurt and pain and everything's okay until somebody bumps them and it's like, well, there it is again. God needs to come in and he needs to empty that out.

Pastor Mark:

The wounded digital warrior. The wounded digital warrior is the person who says I'm a victim, I now represent all victims and I'm in my pajamas at home amassing an army to march across the earth. And we will slay all foes and we will defend all people who are victims like us. I know this doesn't exist, but I'm saying it's a hypothetical possibility in the future so I'm forewarning you of the wounded digital warrior. The wounded digital warrior is the one who sees themselves as the righteous victim who has the right to victimize others. They're hurt people who hurt people. They're tormented people who tormented people. They're victimized people who victimized people. They're not healthy, they're not well. They haven't experienced or shared the gift of forgiveness.

Pastor Mark:

And in our day you can amass a lot of people and you can gather and convene a large court and you can render verdicts about people publicly and to do so is shamefully. Any of you, don't raise your hand, bitter, unforgiving, hurt. Seven reasons to forgive, I'll try to run through these fairly quickly. Forgiving glorifies God. When you introduce yourself to someone, you say, "Here's who I am." You tell them who you are. Exodus 34, God introduces himself to the people of Israel, says, "The Lord, the Lord, slow to anger, abounding in compassion, mercy, love, forgiveness." What God says is this, "Hi my name's Yahweh. I like to forgive people." That verse is the verse of the Bible that's quoted other places more often than any other verse of the Bible. That's the most popular verse in the whole Bible. "Hi, my name's God. I like to forgive people."

Pastor Mark:

1st Corinthians 10:31 says we're to glorify God. That means we mirror, we image, we reflect God. God forgives, we glorify God when we forgive. Forgive. Say I want to glorify God, then for forgive some people. People say why do you forgive? Because my God forgives. My God forgives me, so I forgive you. And then if you find that interesting, let me tell you about him because what you really need is ultimate forgiveness. That's why in Ephesians 4:32, the apostle Paul says, "We need to forgive others as we have been forgiven." That means forgiven people should be forgiving people. That's why we forgive, because it glorifies God.

Pastor Mark:

Our world is all about vengeance and anger and bitterness and sickness and vitriol and depravity and horror. And God's about forgiveness and life and joy and peace and the holy spirit. Forgiveness blesses you. There's a man named Luskin, he runs the Forgiveness Project at Stanford. He says he's conducted the largest clinical evaluation of forgiveness. I don't think he's a believer, he doesn't even seem to understand God's forgiveness through Jesus Christ, which is amazing. But just people who try to forgive in the best of their understanding, he says that medically, we can show tremendous improvements to their mental, emotional, physical wellbeing. The burden goes off and the hope comes in. Stress goes down, self-medicating goes down. Heart attacks go down, stomach problems go down. Life gets better physically for those who learn to forgive.

Pastor Mark:

Forgiveness blesses others. Hebrews 12:15 says that we need to pay attention in the church that a root of bitterness does not rise up and through it many become defiled. What happens is roots live underground, you don't see them until they spring forth. And then from it comes a plant or a tree, and then off of that comes fruit. And next thing you know, it multiplies and you've got an entire orchard.

Some of you have the root of bitterness in your heart and it's going to defile your children. You're bitter against your spouse and your kids are going to be implicated. You're bitter against your coworker and the rest of your company is going to be implicated. You're bitter against your friend and other friends in your life and your family are going to be implicated.

Pastor Mark:

By forgiving, you take the shovel to the root of bitterness. You dig it up so that it doesn't grow up and then include and involve other people and make them sick. What you don't want to do is take your bitterness and give it to others so that they can be infected, you want to give it to God so that you can be healed. Forgiveness defeats the demonic. I've shared with this before, but I'll do so summarily and briefly. I took a whole year to study forgiveness and unforgiveness and bitterness in the Bible and I found oftentimes in the same orbit, it speaks of Satan and demons. I didn't read this in any book, I just prayed and I felt like the holy spirit shared this with me, that Satan demons don't forgive because they're not forgiven. Satan and demons are never forgiven of anything. In fact, Jesus didn't die for Satan, Jesus didn't die for demons. He only died for men and women.

Pastor Mark:

There is no possibility of forgiveness of sin through Jesus Christ for Satan and demons. As a result, Satan and demons are never forgiven, they're never forgiving. If you say, "I'm a believer, but I won't forgive them." What you're saying is I invite Satan into my life. Some of you say, "No, no, no, I don't want Satan. I just don't want to forgive them." They go together. Unforgiveness and Satan, they're a package deal. That's why some of you are tormented, haunted. You keep reliving the same horrible event, you keep returning to the same painful past. Revelation 12:10 says that Satan is the accuser of the children of God, that he accuses them day and night. Some of you can't sleep. Some of you can't rest. Some of you, it feels like you're tormented because you're tormented. Because you're tormented. Because you're tormented and you don't have to be.

Pastor Mark:

Matthew 18, Jesus tells a story of a guy who owes another guy, let's say a million bucks. He can't pay it. There's a debt. He wants the debt somehow cared for, forgiven. He goes to the guy he owes a million bucks, he says, "I owe you a million bucks. I can't pay. Let's work out a repayment plan. Don't enslave my wife and kids, please." The man who is the lender says, "I'm just going to forgive the whole debt. The million dollars is gone." That man goes home, tells his family, "Good news kids. Son, you don't need to be a gladiator. Daughter, you don't need to be a prostitute. Wife, you don't need to be a concubine. He forgave the debt." Another guy comes to him, owes him, let's say a thousand bucks, says, "I can't pay. Can we work out a repayment payment plan?" He says, "I will forgive you none of your debt. You will repay it all to me. There is no forgiveness of your debt."

Pastor Mark:

That's the picture between us and God. God forgives us a million bucks and we won't forgive somebody a thousand bucks? It says that that person is handed over to the jailer to be tormented day and night. The jailer most believe is Satan. There is a horrific strand of what is called biblical counseling and it's shameful that it would use that language for this doctrine that says you can't forgive anybody until they repent. What they're saying is until they say they're sorry, and agree with you, which oftentimes does not happen, or if they die, you can never forgive them. Then you are stuck in this prison cell of

bitterness, hurt, unforgiveness, woundedness, and they have the key. No they don't, you do. Forgive them and walk away.

Pastor Mark:

Forgiveness is the key that gets bitter believers out of demonic torment. Your offender does not hold the key, you hold the key. You forgive them and you walk away. Satan and demons have to stay in that prison, but you get to walk away. You don't have to live there with them. This is in why Ephesians 4 he says, "Be kind, tender hearted, compassionate to one another, forgiving one another as God in Christ, forgave you." And previously, I think it's in chapter 4:30, he says, "Do not grieve the holy spirit." The holy spirit forgives. The holy spirit brings the power to forgive. Some of you would say that's... That's a point I'll hit at the end. Let me just by way of preparation, tell you about Ephesians 4, do not grieve the holy spirit.

Pastor Mark:

As you're in your jail cell of demonic torment, and you're haunted and you're broken and you're frustrated and you're hurt, the holy spirit is standing outside the cell and he is weeping. He's saying, "I want you out of there." And you're in the cell saying, "I can't forgive them." And he would say, "That's why I'm here, because you need a miracle. You need the power of God because the power to forgive is not in you. I will enter you and power you to forgive them. You walk out of that cell and walk with me and I'll get you healthy because I have a future and a hope for you. I really want that for you. I've been praying that for you all week." I believe the holy spirit is in our midst and he wants you to know that and experience that. You need to walk with a spirit, not with Satan. You need to live in freedom, not torment. You need to move forward, not be stuck in the past.

Pastor Mark:

Forgiving is grace to your offender. Joseph gives grace, he's already forgiven them. He blesses them with his words, he blesses them with his wealth. It is grace to them. You say, "Well, they don't deserve it." Well, we don't deserve it. God gives us grace, we give them grace. It's a witness to others. When Christians fight with Christians in front of non-Christians, the only person that wins is Satan. "Hey, you want to join our team?" "What's your team about?" "Our team's about forgiveness." "Doesn't look like it. You guys attack each other publicly. It's ugly." "No, we're the forgiveness team." "No, you're not. No, you're not." Joseph forgives his brothers. He, until they arrive is the only believer in all of Egypt. The only thing that the Egyptians know about Joseph's God is what they see in Joseph's life. Some of you are like that at work.

Pastor Mark:

Their opinion of Christ is what they see in the Christian, that's all they know. By forgiving them, Joseph has a witness. So let me just tell you this, your test is your testimony. Your test is your testimony. There's an occasion in Acts 7, the whole chapter up to chapter 8:1, there's an early church leader named Stephen. He preaches about Jesus, a man named Saul of Tarsus comes and leads an angry mob of men to murder him. As Stephen is being stoned and murdered, he echoes his Lord Jesus, he says, "Into your hands I commit my spirit." Which is what Jesus says on the cross. And he also says, "Father, forgive them." He's praying for the forgiveness of those who are murdering him. And it says that in this occasion of Stephen's forgiving, that he saw heaven open. Who did he see? Jesus. What was Jesus doing? Standing.

Pastor Mark:

Jesus is usually seated at the right hand of the father. He sees Stephen being murdered, forgiving his enemies and praying for them, and Jesus gets out of his seat. "Nice job, son. Forgive them. Forgive them." You ever seen in a football game, team is marching toward the end zone, time is running out. If they get the ball over the line, it's a victory. That's Jesus. "Hey, look everybody. Angels, departed saints, look, he's doing it. He's forgiving. Look. He's going to forgive them, he's forgiving. He did it, he forgave them." Jesus jumps out of his seat and he celebrates. For the Christian, forgiveness is the end zone. We all get out of our seat and cheer for that. Jesus gets out of his seat and cheers for that. It says in chapter 8:1, "And overseeing the murder of Stephen was Saul." Who's that? Paul. Did Jesus answer Steven's prayer? Oh yeah.

Pastor Mark:

It's not long, Jesus comes down. You know you're in trouble when Jesus comes down. Knocks him off the horse, blinds him, says, "I'm the God who does forgiveness. I'm going to forgive you and I'm going to make you a messenger of forgiveness." Saul goes on to proclaim the forgiveness of sins until he is murdered for preaching the same thing that Stephen did, because that's the power of the gospel of forgiveness. And what happened was Stephen is forgiving while Saul is watching. Never forget, others are watching. Lastly, it opens you to the flow of the holy spirit to forgive. There's a occasion in John 7, this woman that's had a lot of bad relationships, she's very broken, wounded, hurt, sinful. Jesus comes and he basically tells her and I'm paraphrasing, "Your soul is like pond water. There's no flow, it's stagnant, it stinks, it's death."

Pastor Mark:

What he says is you need streams of living water. You've come to a well to draw water, you need streams of living water to flow through you, to bring health and healing and hope, to bring life, to take all of that filth and that pain and that hurt and wash it downstream. And he's talking about the ministry of the holy spirit. I was going to read it. It's too long, you can read it on your own. The end of the story for Joseph is this. He dies a good death because of two things, he received forgiveness of sin and he shared forgiveness of sin. If you want to have a good future, have your sin forgiven, forgive others of their sin. That's how you live a good life and you die a good death. A descendant of Joseph came into human history, his name was Jesus Christ.

Pastor Mark:

He behaved like Joseph, only perfectly. We behaved like the brothers continually. We opposed him, we were jealous of him, we hated him we wanted to destroy him and rid ourselves of him. Jesus, falsely accused, beaten by an angry mob, flogged and scourged so that the flesh is ripped from his back. He is crucified between two thieves. While he is weeping and he is bleeding and he is suffering and he is sweating and he is dying, he is also speaking. Theologians will call this the final seven words of Jesus. You know what the first word is? Father, forgive them. In response to that, a soldier took a sponge and shoved it in his mouth. As I've told you before, this is probably part of the military issue for field soldiers. As their toilet paper, they would give a soldier a sponge, out in the field, they would sop it in wine vinegar to use it as a disinfect and put it on the end of the stick and then they would scrub themselves as toilet paper.

Pastor Mark:

They took that. Jesus said, "I forgive you." And they shoved that in his mouth. With that taste in his mouth, Jesus keeps forgiving people. He looks at the thief next to him and says, "Today you'll be with me in paradise. I forgive you." And then Jesus dies to pay our debt to God, the debt of death and all of your sins are forgiven. Here's what I need you to know, Jesus' heart for you is the same as Joseph's heart for his brothers. They had a hard time receiving the gift forgiveness. If you have never given Jesus your sin, you need to give him your sin and you need to receive his forgiveness. Three days later, Jesus conquered Satan, sin, death, hell in the wrath of God. Like Joseph, he is now risen up to be the second in command of a glorious kingdom, a kingdom of forgiveness.

Pastor Mark:

The best way for you and I to prepare for the meeting of our king and the entrance to his kingdom is to receive his forgiveness, to open that great gift, and to share it with someone else who has sinned against us. The holy spirit will help you do that, the holy spirit will help you experience that. We are God's people, we meet in God's presence. It's an honor to be your pastor, I love you. We're going to take communion in just a minute, we'll remember the broken body and shed blood of Jesus. I'll invite the band forward. This is to remember we're forgiven people who can be forgiving people. Holy spirit, I pray for your presence and your power among the people right now.

Pastor Mark:

Lord God, we're here to do church, we're not here to have a meeting, we're not here to have a concert. We're here to meet with God. We're here to meet with God. We're here to meet with a God who forgives our sin. We're here to meet with a God who pays our debt. We're here to meet with a God who pursues us for relationship. All of this is shown imperfectly, but quite amazingly in the life of Joseph, but it is perfectly revealed in his descendant, the Lord Jesus. Lord Jesus, we right now want to confess to you that we are sinners, that we are guilty of evil, that we need forgiveness of sin. Holy spirit, please, right now, let these dear people experience that. Let that not just be words that they hear as Joseph's brothers did, but a transformation they experience as Joseph did.

Pastor Mark:

Holy spirit, please flow through these people. Take away all the hurt, all the bitterness, all the pain, all the anger, all the condemnation, all the shame, all the remorse, all the regret. Please set captives free out of their prison of torment. Please allow them to share this gift with others who have sinned against them. Please bring to mind right now, someone or something that they need to forgive. And God as we come to sing, we confess that we are your people, we want to be in your presence. We want this to be a place of the kingdom of forgiveness, and we want these to be forgiven, healed, free, hopeful, joyful, liberated children of God. God, as we come to worship now, we remember Jesus, we celebrate Jesus, we thank Jesus. And we ask for the grace to treat others as Jesus has treated us. Amen.