

JOKE: The Fourth of July was coming up, and the nursery school teacher took the opportunity to tell her class about patriotism.

"We live in a great country," she said.

"One of the things we should be happy for is that, in this country, we are all free."

One little boy came walking up to her from the back of the room. He stood with his hands on his hips and said, . . .

"I'm not free. I'm four."

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## Week 2 - Unhindered Forgiveness

Today we're going to continue on in our series, Unhindered. If you weren't with us last week, here's a brief recap; The book of Acts tells the story of the birth of Christianity and the very beginnings of the spread of the Gospel. . . And when you're going through the book of Acts there's one specific word that brings it all together, it's the very last word of the book, remember what that word was church? Unhindered.

It's this one word that bridges the gospel accounts to the epistles. This one word gives us context, hope, and clarity for all that God has done and is doing through His Son, Jesus. Last week we started by looking at the lavish love and grace available to us through the unhindered Kingdom. God has held nothing back from

us, and we'll see over the next few weeks just how amazing that truth really is.

In Grand Rapids 2018 a mother stood in front of the man convicted of killing her teenage son and as he looked on she said:

"I have to forgive you, and I forgive you from the bottom of my heart. I pray for you because as a mother, you're a child to me and in my heart, I have no anger or bitterness towards you and as a mom I just want to hug you because I know that there's something that's not connected that made you feel so angry. , ."

Forgiveness it's a powerful force in our lives. It's something that all of us need, and the good news is through Jesus, we all have access to.

But, what is the big deal about forgiveness?

Well, here's some good news Scripture has about it. . .

Isaiah 43:25 (NLT): "I—yes, I alone—will blot out your sins for my own sake and will never think of them again.

Psalms 103:12 (NIV): as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.

Hebrews 8:12 (NLT): And I will forgive their wickedness, and I will never again remember their sins."

1 John 1:9 (TPT): But if we freely admit our sins when his light uncovers them, he will be faithful to forgive us every time. God is just to forgive us our sins because of Christ, and he will continue to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Forgiveness to a follower of Jesus, is rooted in the belief that all people have fallen short of God's mark and because of our sin we are in need of forgiveness from the Savior of the world.

We understand that forgiveness comes from God, who willingly extends His mercy and grace to all who repent and seek His forgiveness. Repentance not a very popular word in our culture.

We live in a culture that no longer clings to the absolute truth of God's word. We have motivational speakers instead of pastor's. Churches that are influenced by the culture rather than the church influencing it. We are called to love God not the world and it's standards. Amen.

But hear this church, we all have sinned and need God's forgiveness and He still calls us to be transformed and become more like Him.

Forgiveness of sin used to come through the sacrificial system as described in the Old Testament. And there were a number of sacrifices described, purpose given, when to be done, how to it.

I'm glad we no longer have to bring our animals to an altar to receive what God has for us.

Because Jesus changed everything, and now, through His single sacrifice on the cross, forgiveness is available to all who confess, ask, repent and believe. It is this single act of love that has opened the door for everyone.

And hear this church, forgiveness is for everyone.

As I mentioned, the “system” of forgiveness used to be through the sacrificial system it centered around the concept of repentance and atonement.

It involved a complex system of sacrifices and rituals that were intended to restore a person's relationship with God and the community after they had sinned or committed a wrong.

Repentance was the first step towards reconciliation, then atonement, which involved making amends for the wrongdoing.

This was done through the offering of sacrifices, which were a way of symbolically transferring the guilt of the individual to the animal being sacrificed. The blood of the animal was seen as a way of cleansing the individual from their sin and restoring their relationship with God.

It was all done through rituals, priests, sacrifices, prayer, fasting, and so much more.

Not to mention, this process was only available for the Israelites or others who were adopted into the faith. So, not only was it

complicated, it was constricted. Only those who were chosen could be forgiven. . .

And that's what makes Jesus, the chosen Messiah, all the more significant. Through His single sacrifice on the cross, forgiveness is available to all who confess, repent and believe. And in case you don't know Scripture calls us chosen, we have been adopted into the family of God because of the sacrifice Jesus gave.

Luke 23:32–34 (NIV): Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with him to be executed. 33 When they came to the place called the Skull, they crucified him there, along with the criminals—one on his right, the other on his left. 34 Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” And they divided up his clothes by casting lots.

Let's skip down to verse 39. . .

Luke 23:39–43 (NIV): One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: “Aren't you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!” 40 But the other criminal rebuked him. “Don't you fear God,” he said, “since you are under the same sentence? 41 We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong.” 42 Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” 43 Jesus answered him, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.”

That story shows us the power of believing in Jesus. It shows us the freedom we have to come, unhindered, to Christ and be forgiven.

Romans 10:9 (TPT): And what is God's "living message"? It is the revelation of faith for salvation, which is the message that we preach. For if you publicly declare with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will experience salvation.

And just like the story I shared about the mother in GR at the beginning of this message we are forgiven to forgive.

Matthew 18:21–27 (NLT): Then Peter came to him and asked, "Lord, how often should I forgive someone who sins against me? Seven times?" 22 "No, not seven times," Jesus replied, "but seventy times seven! 23 "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. 24 In the process, one of his debtors was brought in who owed him millions of dollars. 25 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. 26 "But the man fell down before his master and begged him, 'Please, be patient with me, and I will pay it all.' 27 Then his master was filled with pity for him, and he released him and forgave his debt.

Forgiveness is not just about being forgiven by God, but also about extending forgiveness to others. It's about sharing the amazing news of Jesus with others.

I believe that forgiving others is not only an act of obedience to God but also a way to experience healing and freedom from the burden of anger and resentment. We are called to forgive as we have been

forgiven, and to extend mercy and grace to others just as God has extended it to us.

Steve Harvey talking about forgiveness said: “If you forgive a person but hold onto the anger, the pain, and the hurt and you say you forgave the person . Then you don’t understand what forgiveness really is. Forgiveness is not for the other person it’s for you. What you don’t understand about not experiencing true forgiveness not letting it go, was explained to me this way. When you don’t forgive a person it’s like you drinking the poison and waiting for them to die.”

Share story of work incident with Mark.

It’s not always easy to forgive, but when we stop to consider how much we have been forgiven and how much we are loved by God, it’s makes it easier to extend it to others.

This next verse is a difficult one to hear. . .

Matthew 6:14–15 (TPT): 14 “And when you pray, make sure you forgive the faults of others so that your Father in heaven will also forgive you. 15 But if you withhold forgiveness from others, your Father withholds forgiveness from you.”

Jesus warns us about withholding forgiveness from others.

You could say He warns us about putting up obstacles and hindrances that others must overcome.

We've been given freedom and forgiveness and we must not withhold the same from someone else.

I mentioned that not forgiving is like you drinking the poison and waiting on the other to die

And the truth is unforgiveness often leads to negative emotions like anger, resentment, bitterness, and hatred. And those emotions can consume a person and affect their daily life, It can lead to stress and anxiety.

Unforgiveness can damage relationships, as it creates a barrier between people. (Talk about Jim and I)

Holding onto unforgiveness can prevent individuals from moving on from past hurts and experiences, keeping them stuck in a mindset that is not at all what God desires us to be in.

Unforgiveness can lead to spiritual blockages, that prevents us from experiencing the intimacy that God desires for us to have.

Matthew 5:23–24 (TPT): “So then, if you are presenting a gift before the altar in the temple and suddenly you remember a quarrel you have with a fellow believer, 24 leave your gift there in front of the altar and go at once to apologize with the one who is offended. Then, after you have reconciled, come to the altar and present your gift.

Jesus isn't only concerned with our spiritual well-being but our overall well-being too.



3 John 2 (TPT): Beloved friend, I pray that you are prospering in every way and that you continually enjoy good health, just as your soul is prospering.

We are called to follow in the steps of Jesus, who even forgave His accusers and executioners as He was hanging on the cross.

Remember it. . .

Luke 23:34 (NIV): Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing. . .”

He wanted them to be forgiven, that’s one reason why He was on the cross and He recognized that they didn’t even fully understand what they were doing.

Makes you wonder how many of us fall into a similar category.

We sin and sometimes even hurt others out of ignorance. We move too quickly through our lives and we miss opportunities to slow down and be present with the people around us we care about most. We need a Savior who sees us as we truly are, and in all our brokenness and beauty, loves us all the same.

That’s grace. That’s forgiveness. That’s Jesus.

Forgiveness used to be a complicated thing to figure out. The right sacrifices, on the right days, made in the right way. That’s what you had to do to be made right with God. . .

The writer of Hebrews tells us. . .

Hebrews 10:8–18 (NIV): 8 First he said, “Sacrifices and offerings, burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not desire, nor were you pleased with them”—though they were offered in accordance with the law. 9 Then he said, “Here I am, I have come to do your will.” He sets aside the first to establish the second. 10 And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. 11 Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. 12 But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, 13 and since that time he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool. 14 For by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy. 15 The Holy Spirit also testifies to us about this. First he says: 16 “This is the covenant I will make with them after that time, says the Lord. I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds.” 17 Then he adds: “Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more.” 18 And where these have been forgiven, sacrifice for sin is no longer necessary.

That was the old way, but Jesus is the new way.

In fact, He says. . .

John 14:6 (NIV): Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

In his book *Orthodoxy*, GK Chersteron says, “The essence of the whole Christian position is that we have all sinned and that forgiveness is possible.”

Forgiveness is possible.

That small sentence alone must be amazingly good news for some who are here today. Some who need to be reminded that there isn't any hindrance to forgiveness here. . . Jesus made sure of that on the cross when He took the whole weight of sin upon Himself.

2 Corinthians 5:21 (NIV): God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Just as forgiveness has been generously made available to us, we are to offer it equally generously to those around us.

As I wrap up today who of you may need to receive forgiveness in your life or to who do you need to ask for forgiveness.

Pray that God would open your eyes to any root of bitterness so that it doesn't take root in your heart.

Remove the hindrances and find the peace that God has waiting for you. It's on the other side of forgiveness, and it's available to everyone.

And he who the Son sets free is free indeed.

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