

# When Conflict Comes to Church

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[ 0 : 00 ] The scripture reading today comes from the book of Matthew, chapter 18. Please follow along on the bulletin, on the screen, or on your own Bible. Starting in verse 15, we read, If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone.

If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.

Truly, I said to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

Again, I said to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.

[ 1 : 27 ] Then Peter came up and said to him, Lord, how often will my brothers sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?

Jesus said to him, I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times. Therefore, the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. When he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. And since he could not pay, his master ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made.

So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything. And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him, and forgave him the debt.

But when that same servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii. And seizing him, he began to choke him, saying, Pay what you owe.

[ 2 : 50 ] So his fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him, Have patience with me, and I will pay you. He refused, and went and put him in prison until he should pay the debt.

When his fellow servants saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed. And they went and reported to their master all that had taken place.

Then his master summoned him and said to him, You wicked servant, I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me.

And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant as I have mercy on you? And in anger, his master delivered him to the jailers until he should pay all his debt.

So, also, my heavenly Father will do to every one of you if you do not forgive your brother from your heart. This is the word of God.

[ 3 : 58 ] Great. Thank you, Anastasia. Well, let's come before our Father in prayer as we look at this passage together. Lord Jesus Christ, Heavenly Father, Holy Spirit, we come before you this morning.

We open up our, not only our hands, but our hearts. We want to hear from you. We want you to speak to us, God. Won't you minister to us? Won't you heal us?

Won't you encourage us? Won't you call us to yourself? God, you know where each one of us are at this morning. You know our joys and our delights, our pains and our fears. Father, won't your word come and speak to us?

Lord, open up our hearts as we open up your word, we pray. In your wonderful name. Amen. If you have recently returned to Hong Kong from being away for the whole summer or the whole of 2022, welcome back.

EJ and others, great to have you. But you might be forgiven in not recognizing half of the church. And the reason is because over the last six months or so, there's been so much change at Watermark.

[ 5 : 14 ] We've had to say goodbye to a whole bunch of people. Chris and Jen, Chris and Fiona, Echo, Ryan and Catherine this week went to Singapore. We're going to be saying goodbye to some more people in the next couple of months.

But we've also had a whole lot of new people coming, which has been wonderful. And that's been really exciting, getting to know some new people in the church. It's been really great. And so there's been lots of change.

One of the new people that I hope does, I hope, let me put it this way. One of the guests that I hope never comes to Watermark, but may, but I hope we're going to do everything we can to shut him out, is a guest called Mr. Conflict.

Mr. Conflict. What do you do when conflict comes to the church? Well, for a number of us here, you became a Christian at Watermark, and Watermark is maybe the only church that you know.

And my hope is that it's been a good experience. Hopefully you've been welcomed with uncommon grace and humility. But we also know that that's not always the reality in church.

[ 6 : 20 ] Sometimes at Watermark, but maybe at another church as well, many of us have experienced pain and difficulty and conflict in the church. In Matthew 16, that we looked at a few weeks ago, Jesus says, I will build my church.

And in chapter 18, which we looked at last week and this morning, Jesus is explaining his church, how it's going to operate and how his church is going to work. And one of the things that we see is that the church is made up of people who are both saints, but also sinners, but also sufferers, all at the same time.

So the church, Christians are made up of saints and sinners and sufferers. The word saint doesn't mean someone who is morally perfect and got it all together. The word saint means someone who is set apart to be part of Christ's kingdom, belongs to Jesus.

And that's what the church is made up of. But the church is also made up of sinners. We heard this last week where Niels explained to us, all of us are needy sinners. We are fallen.

We are broken. We don't have it all together. Oh, but the church is also made up of sufferers because we live in a broken world and we feel the effect and the scars of other people's sin and brokenness in our lives.

[ 7 : 36 ] And so the church is made up of sinners and saints and sufferers and not just as a collection, but each one of us carry that ourselves. And so what that means is the church does not consist of those that are perfect people, but those that are forgiven people.

Does that make sense? And so in a church family like Watermark, hopefully as wonderful as it is, it's not perfect. At best, we're made to be a foretaste of heaven, a picture of glory in some ways, this uncommon unity that Claire spoke about.

But we're not perfect. We're still going to make mistakes. And sometimes that means this conflict is going to arise. And so in this passage, Jesus is going to tell us two things.

He's going to say, on the one hand, don't be surprised when there's relational sin or conflict in the church because the church is not perfect. It's made up of imperfect people.

And so don't be surprised when that happens as if, oh my goodness, I can't believe this. But on the other hand, Jesus says, don't be okay with it. Don't tolerate it. Don't say, oh well, you know, hey, that's the way it is.

[ 8 : 46 ] I guess we all just sinners, so okay. So don't be surprised, but don't be okay with it. And the reason is because conflict and sin is such a terrible thing.

It causes such breakdown of relationship. It causes such hurt and pain. Sin always breaks relationship. One with God, vertically, but also horizontally with each other.

And so that's why in our passage last week, if you'll remember, Neil's preached in verse six, Jesus says, if somebody causes one of these little ones, remember who the little ones? They're not the children. They're all of us.

If somebody causes one of these little ones to sin, it would be better for a millstone to be tied around his neck and thrown into the sea. That's how serious Jesus is with sin. He says, if your right hand causes you to sin, hey, maybe you should cut it off.

If your left foot causes you to sin, maybe cut it off. It's better to end into life maimed than to have two limbs and go to hell. Jesus says, sin is serious and it's terrible.

[ 9 : 48 ] And yet he says, don't be overly surprised when it happens because the church is not made up of perfect people. It's made up of forgiven people. Well, in our passage today, Matthew 18, the question is this.

So how should we handle relational conflict in the church? There's two stories in our passage and they both start off with almost the identical sentence. If you've got your Bible, look at verse 15 with me.

Jesus says, if your brother sins against you. And then verse 21, Peter starts off the next section saying this, Lord, how many times should I allow my brother to sin against me and I forgive him? Two sentences that start off the two different sections almost identically. And so the question is this, how do we handle sin in the church? Relational conflict.

When Jesus is talking about a brother here, he's not talking about your biological brother, he's talking about another believer, right? A brother or sister in Christ. Friends, how do we handle it when somebody lets you down?

[ 10 : 51 ] When somebody treats you in a way that you feel dishonored or embarrassed by them or shamed by them? Maybe you feel like somebody has spoken about you behind your back. Or maybe somebody says something and then you find out actually there's a whole other story, the reality is different and you feel like they've been dishonest with you.

How do we handle these kind of difficulties? Somebody promises you something and then lets you down and makes a lame excuse. How do we handle relational difficulty in the church? Well, before we get to Jesus, let's think about this.

Let me suggest a couple of ways we could handle it. One way is you could say, I'll trust you the first time, but thereafter you let me down, that's it, right? Do you know the saying, if you hurt me once, shame on you.

You hurt me twice, shame on me. I don't know if you know that saying, right? It means I'll trust you the first time, but if you hurt me and I trust you again, that's my fault for trusting you. So maybe you feel like, I'll trust you the first time, but you've got one shot at it, don't let me down.

After that, I'm going to withdraw and just retreat. Maybe you could feel like, hey, I've been hurt down by people in the past, maybe my parents or a colleague or a friend, maybe the pastor at my previous church.

[ 12 : 04 ] Actually, so I'm going to build up my wall around me and I'm going to just keep my distance from people and not really let anyone in. I don't know if you know the song by Paul Simon back in the 80s, I Am a Rock.

He says, I have no need for friendship. Friendship causes pain. If I never loved, I never would have cried. So I built up the walls. I am a rock. I am an island.

For a rock feels no pain and an island never cries. Maybe that's how you feel, right? I've been hurt in the past. I'm going to build up my walls. I'm not going to let anybody in. Maybe there's another way to handle difficulty and that is to take the advice of social media.

What does social media tell us these days? If any relationship causes you stress or anxiety, it's a toxic relationship, you cut them off, right? That's the thinking of our world, right?

Toxic relationships are bad for you. That person's dead to me. I don't have time for toxic relationships. Someone causes you stress and anxiety, you just cut them off. How should we as a church handle relational difficulty when conflict comes to church?

[ 13 : 16 ] Well, Jesus is going to give us two bits of wisdom in this passage that go right against the grain of popular culture. And so let's see what Jesus says in our passage. The first thing Jesus says is this.

Don't hide from relational conflict. Talk about it. Don't ignore it. Sweep it under the rug. Pretend it doesn't exist. No, go talk about it. Address it.

Look at verse 15 with me in your Bible. Neil spoke about this last week, but let's look at it again briefly. Verse 15, Jesus says, If your brother sins against you, then put on a friendly face at church and pretend nothing has happened in order to maintain the peace.

No, no, he doesn't say that. He says, No, if your brother sins against you, go and talk to him about it. Tell him his fault, his offense, between him and you alone.

Now, the way that Matthew writes this, it sounds pretty black and white, right? Somebody does something, you just go to them and say, Hey, Buster, you messed up. Let's sort it out.

[14:18] Well, in reality, life's not often that black and white, right? It's not always that clear. And so maybe a better way of talking about it is if somebody, if you feel like somebody's hurt you or offended you or done something against you, a good way to handle it is to go and say, Hey, I feel like this has happened.

Am I understanding the situation right? Or, my impression is that you said this, but then this happened and that feels like there's a disconnect. Can we talk about this? So rather than just going and saying, You sucker, this is what you did, there's a way to approach it that requires humility and wisdom and grace.

But Jesus' point here is don't just sweep it under the rug, pretend nothing's happened, actually go and talk to your brother or your sister about it. See, I feel like this might have happened.

Can we talk about this? And so our job is not to be the chief prosecuting officer in the church to go around telling everybody their fault. No, no, that's just going to make people defensive.

If we do it with humility, people will have humility to hear it and receive it. But Jesus' point is this, when something comes up, when someone has wronged you, go and talk to them about it.

[15:29] Now, why should we do this? Is it because we want to put people in their place? Is it a bit too much pride in the church and so we've just got to humble people a little bit, bring them down a notch or two?

Or maybe the reason is because actually my reputation has been tattered and I want to restore my reputation in the community. No, no, actually look at what Jesus says here, verse 15, because if he listens to you, you've gained your brother or your sister.

Jesus' point here, his motivation, is love. It's to restore the relationship, to restore trust, to rebuild the relationship that's been hurt. The goal here is to love someone.

It's a form of love to honor them enough to go and talk to them and say, hey, I know this is difficult, but I feel like this has happened. Can we talk about this? It's the same thing Jesus says in the section before, right?

He says, if someone's got a hundred sheep and one wanders off, it's easy to think, ah, it's just one, I've still got 99. Actually, go and leave those 99 where they are and you go after the one.

[16:34] Friends, it's easy to think, I've got 99 other friends in church, it's okay if I lose one or two. No, no, no. No, leave those 99, they'll still be there. You go after the one, say, hey, can we talk about this?

Now, the reality is that sometimes it doesn't always go as well as that, right? You go and you talk to someone and you say, hey, can we talk about this? And they push back and they don't want to talk about it or they get defensive and they say, no, it's not the case or they maybe twist it on you and say, actually, it's your fault.

If you hadn't done this, I wouldn't have done this. And what does Jesus say? Do we just say, okay, well, I tried. I guess I'll just avoid that person. No, look what he says. He says, go and take somebody with you.

Maybe take a friend or a CG leader or an elder and say, hey, I really want to talk through this. I really want to restore the relationship. Can we talk through what happened here? And eventually, that person still doesn't want to talk about it or maybe the members need to get involved and say, hey, when we've joined this church, we agreed this is how we're going to handle things and this isn't how we handle it.

Let's really talk about it. But Jesus' point is here. When there's relational difficulty, you feel like someone's hurt you or let you down, don't ignore it. Don't pretend it.

[17:49] Go and talk to them. And the reason is this. Because relational conflict is like food that's going moldy at the back of the fridge. Right?

Do you know what that is like? You open the fridge and there's some noodles from like three weeks ago and there's some stuff growing on it or you untapped the milk and you can smell it and it smells terrible.

Oh, it's so easy just to close the fridge and leave it to someone else. Especially if you live in like a commune or a digs with other students, right? Say, I'm just going to leave it. It'll be someone else's problem. But it doesn't go away, does it?

It's just going to get worse. Or even more serious, imagine you go to the doctor and you say, I'm just not feeling well. And he does a scan and he finds a growth or a lump and he feels like, I really want to go on holiday next week.

This is not very convenient. I'm just going to pretend it's not there. That's not going to help things. It's not going to disappear on its own. It doesn't just vanish. No, no, no. You deal with it.

[18:51] You move towards it. Hey, can I tell you where I see this the most often in my life? With my marriage to Claire, right? Sometimes I know you'd never believe it, but just hypothetically, right?

Something happens between us and there's some misunderstanding and I feel like, and then I tell myself, I don't want to avoid, I don't want to deal with this. I'm just going to avoid it.

And I tell myself, it's not a big deal. It's just, if I ignore it, it's going to go away. And what happens after two or three days, I'm thinking about it and I start to think, I said this and then she said this and then I said we're going to do this and then she went and did this and I'm replaying it over in my mind and I'm telling myself, it's not a big deal, it's just going to go away.

But what's happening, it's still there and then two days later, something small happens and what do you think comes out of my mouth? A whole volcano of frustration and emotion, right?

And in that moment, I wish, oh my goodness, I wish just two days ago, I'd said, hey love, I feel like, I feel like there's something between us or hey love, I feel misunderstood, can we talk about this?

[19:59] I wish I had done it and I regret, I didn't. Friends, let's not let that happen in the church. Let's not stew on things or bury things or leave them unaddressed.

Don't come to church with a fake smile, pretending everything's wonderful and in our heart, actually we are seething. No, let's talk about it. Let's address it. Let's restore the conflict.

Let's humbly, graciously, love one another enough to talk about it. Now, in the second passage, second story, Jesus gives us another bit of wisdom and this is even harder and Jesus' wisdom is this.

Firstly, we said, don't hide from it, talk about it. Secondly, Jesus says, don't hold on to it but release it. Look at verse 21 with me.

Peter says, Lord, how often will my brother or sister sin against me and I forgive them? Now, that's a great question, right? That's a great question.

[21:00] How many times should somebody come to you and say, listen, I've messed up, please forgive me and you say, it's okay, it's behind us. Now, the rabbis in Jesus' day based on some scripture in the Old Testament thought three was a good number, right?

Amos 1 and 2. So they said, three times you forgive your brother, the fourth time, that's it. They're not listening. Well, Peter's a very generous guy and so he says, seven times, Lord.

And look at what Jesus says. I tell you not seven times but 77 times or the Greek could be 70 times seven times, right? Jesus' point here is not that you keep on forgiving somebody until you get to number 491, right?

and then finally entitled to take revenge. 490 strikes and then you're out. No, Jesus' point here is don't keep score. Don't even count. If somebody comes to you and says, hey, I messed up, I'm really sorry, just forgive them.

Let it go. Jesus' point here is if someone lets you down and messes up and they really come and ask for forgiveness, don't say, well, this is the fourth time, this is the seventh time.

[22:10] If they really are sorry, let it be to you like this is the very first time that it's happening. Now, Jesus here is not talking about brushing aside serious cases of abuse, right?

If somebody comes and abuses you physically, emotionally, sexually, Jesus is not saying, ah, whatever, just forgive them, you know, you're a Christian, just let it go.

No, no, friends, when there's cases of that, you may need to walk with a professional, a counselor, there's deep, deep pain involved, right? And so Jesus is not just brushing it off saying, ah, whatever.

But Jesus is also not saying that forgiving somebody is the same as excusing somebody. And that's an important difference, right? Excusing somebody is saying there's some reason, there's some extenuating circumstances why they're not really responsible for what happened.

So, for instance, right, you've got a meeting with somebody and they don't arrive for your meeting. They just don't show up. And they phone you and they say, I'm so sorry, it's my fault entirely, please forgive me.

[ 23 : 21 ] Okay, they're asking for forgiveness, right? But if somebody phones you and says, I'm so sorry, please forgive me, just before I left the office last night, my boss gave me this huge presentation.

And so I worked until like 2 a.m. And just when I was going to bed, my dog got sick and started vomiting all over the couch. And I, it was an emergency, so I had to take my dog to the vet and you'll never believe what happened.

I got to the vet and there was somebody else with their pet lion and their lion was attacking my dog and I didn't get to sleep until like 8 o'clock this morning. I'm so sorry. What are they saying? They're not asking for forgiveness, they're asking to be excused, right? They're saying, it's not really my fault. Here are all the reasons why I'm not responsible. But when somebody's asking to be excused, what they're really saying is the offense that I've caused is not that big or it didn't really hurt you or it's not really my fault.

But that's not what Jesus is talking about here. Excusing somebody is saying the offense wasn't their fault. Forgiving them is releasing them even though it was their fault. Jesus says we need to forgive somebody who sins against us.

[ 24 : 31 ] He's not asking us just to excuse them. He's not asking us to say, well, I guess it wasn't really that bad. Just, you know, move on. He's saying no, it was bad. It was painful. What they did was wrong.

But can you find in your heart to release them anyway? When Jesus talks about forgiveness here, he's talking about what Tim Keller says, refusing to nurse the grudge in our heart or replay the wrongdoing over in our mind, right?

in our hearts and our minds. C.S. Lewis says, to forgive somebody is to make every effort to kill every taste of resentment or bitterness in my heart, every desire to pay back, humiliate, or to see the person suffer.

It's to release the moral debt that that person owes me for their wrongdoing. Now, of course, that doesn't mean that there's no consequences to their wrongdoing. Somebody really lets you down again and again and again.

It may take a while to rebuild the trust. It doesn't mean that you just necessarily trust them straight away, but you can release them from the moral debt that they owe you. Somebody talks about you behind your back or lies to you again and again, there's consequences to that.

[ 25 : 44 ] Somebody does something really egregious, they may go to jail and have to face the consequences. So forgiving them doesn't mean not facing consequences, but it means releasing them of the bitterness in our own hearts the resentment and the moral debt that they owe us.

Jesus is calling us to kill every taste of resentment in our hearts and to release the person from our hearts. Now, on the one hand, as we spoke about earlier, popular culture says, hey, if somebody hurts you, you cut them off, right?

They're causing you stress and anxiety, just find other friends. On the other hand, there's another approach that popular culture has and it says this, to forgive somebody is the best thing that you can do because that's actually the way that you are going to be free from the pain that they're causing you.

In other words, culture tells us if you hold on to resentment and bitterness, it's like drinking a poison that's only going to cause your own heart pain and it's better to release them so that you can be free.

And that is definitely true. I don't know if you know the famous phrase, right? Holding on to bitterness is like drinking poison and waiting for someone else to die. And that's definitely true. If you refuse to forgive somebody, you are inextricably tied to that person, even if you don't want to be.

[ 27 : 07 ] Even if that person moves to the other side of the world or even if they pass away and die, you are still bound to them if you can't forgive them. And so that is true, but that's not Jesus' motivation.

Jesus gives another motivation in this passage. Jesus gives us a reason to practice radical, undeserved forgiveness and grace, not because of what it will do to us, but because of what He has already done for us.

Jesus compels us to forgive those that have hurt us, not because of what you can do for yourself, but because of what He has done for you. And so Jesus tells this parable that Anastasia read to us.

He says there's this guy who owes 10,000 talents. Now in the first century, a talent was the highest currency available.

It was the highest unit of currency. And 10,000 was the highest Greek numeral. So Jesus here is saying an obscene amount of money, right?

[ 28 : 12 ] Robert Gundry, one of the commentators, says a gazillion dollars. Okay, so that's how much this guy earns. So here's a guy, he owes a gazillion dollars, more than you can even fathom.

And one day, his loan is recalled. And he's doomed, right? There's nothing he can do about it. He can't pay it back. He can't trade his way out of his debt.

He can't sell himself into slavery and pay off his debt. There's nothing he can do. He's dead. He's doomed. And so the man falls on his knees and he says, Lord, have mercy with me.

Have patience with me. I will repay you everything I owe. Which is a lie. He can't repay it. He's never going to repay it back. And amazingly, this king, this master, for some reason, decides to give him grace and mercy.

And he doesn't just give him more time to get his affairs in order or to restructure his loan. He says, do you know what? Take your debt that you owe me and write it off.

[ 29 : 16 ] He takes the contract note and he tears it up. He completely just writes off this guy's debt. He says, you owe me nothing. Insane, right? Amazing. Now, a gazillion dollars doesn't really make sense to us.

So picture yourself in this situation. Imagine you've got a credit card and you're not really careful and you spend wildly on it and you do a whole lot of crazy things and you make some really bad decisions and you feel like you're wealthy and you get into tons of debt.

And before you know it, your credit card statement says you're half a million dollars in debt, \$500,000 in debt. Maybe even more, maybe a million dollars, okay? A million dollars you owe.

But in addition to that, you actually bought an apartment a few years ago when times were good and you mortgaged it up to the hilt and now you own \$20 million on your apartment and you just lost your job and now you owe over \$20 million, you've got no job, no income, you're in deep trouble, right?

And so one day your bank manager phones you and says, hey, we need to talk about your loan, the money that you owe us and you don't know what to say. And so you say, listen, I'm really busy, I'll call you later and you don't call back and he phones and you avoid his phone calls and eventually he comes around to your house, right?

[ 30 : 34 ] And you say, listen, I'm in deep trouble, right? I don't know how I'm going to pay you, \$20 million. I don't know but I'll make a plan. Anyway, the next day you get a phone call and your bank manager says, I'm feeling generous today, I'm going to write off that million dollars that you owe us.

You go online to your credit card and you see the total says zero. Unbelievable. Oh my goodness. I mean, isn't that a good thing?

Well, you phone your manager and you say, that's incredible and he says, oh by the way, your mortgage is gone as well. It's zero. He's cancelled your debt.

I mean, \$20 million. I would feel pretty happy, pretty free. The chain on your, the burden on your shoulders is gone, right? Well, that's what's happened to this guy and more.

And so, he walks down the street and he's dancing and he's singing and he sees this guy who owes him \$5,000 and he says, Phoebe, you owe me \$5,000 and he goes up to her and he says, when are you going to pay me?

[ 31 : 48 ] Sorry, Phoebe, picked on you. He sees his friend Bob, right? He says, Bob, when are you going to pay me? \$5,000. You owe me, you said you're going to pay me and his friend comes and says, hey, my wife's in hospital.

I've just had to pay. I'm getting paid tomorrow. I'll pay you this week. And what does he do? He says, you lying scoundrel. And he takes his Bob and he throws him on the floor and he starts punching him and kicking him and drags him off to the police station.

Well, look at what Jesus says. Jesus says, the master, in his anger, the master who forgave his debt, will deliver such a man to the torturers until all his debt is paid.

Why? Because here's a man that's received radical, radical mercy and that radical mercy he's received is disconnected from the rest of his life and he does not know how to extend even a fraction of that mercy to others.

Friends, you see what Jesus is saying here? Jesus is saying that if you're a follower of Jesus, we were like the servant. We were in the deepest debt possible.

[ 33 : 04 ] And like the servant, we couldn't even come close to paying off our debt. And so like the servant, the only thing that we could do was to get on our knees before our father and say, Lord, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy. Friends, Jesus says that if you're a Christian this morning, you're not a Christian because of anything you did to repay your debt. No human being could pay back the debt that they owed.

No human being could merit or earn God's grace. The only way that you become a Christian is to cling onto that old rugged cross and say, God, have mercy.

The only chance we have is to plead for the undeserved mercy of Jesus. Miroslav Wolf says this, forgiveness flounders when we not only exclude those that have hurt us from the community of humanity, but we exclude ourselves from the community of sinners.

That's a profound thought. Forgiveness fails when we look at others and we say, there's something less than human about you. There's something different about you. But we also look at ourselves and we say, there's something different about me.

[ 34 : 11 ] All those suckers out there are sinners but there's something different about me. And so C.S. Lewis famously said, to be a Christian means to forgive the inexcusable because in Christ God forgave the inexcusable in me.

Friends, you know that that's true for me, your pastor. I am infinitely worse than you can imagine. Some of you know a lot of bad stuff about me.

You don't even know the beginning of it. Jesus Christ forgave the inexcusable crap in my life and therefore Jesus says, Kevin, can you extend a little bit of mercy to those that have let you down?

In Romans 2, verse 4, there's this incredible verse. It's kind of like a bedrock verse for our church. He says this, don't you know that the kindness of God is meant to lead us to repentance?

That's a foundational verse for our church. Friends, Christians are those who live lives of confession and repentance daily. Why? Not because of God's severity.

[ 35 : 23 ] It's not God's harshness that leads me to repentance. It's not God's severity that causes me to fall on my knees. It's His kindness. It's His compassion.

It's His tenderheartedness. When I see how God has treated a rebel like me, it causes me to get on my knees and say, oh God, I'm so grateful. Come and change me.

But do you see what Jesus is saying in this story? The kindness of God not only leads us to repentance, it also leads us to forgiveness. To forgive somebody is to give them what they do not deserve.

To give undeserved mercy in response to the undeserved harm that they've caused us. And that means that forgiveness is always extremely costly. It costs you your right to be angry.

It costs you your right to vindication. It costs you your right to a reputation in the community. It costs you your right to feel like a victim.

[ 36 : 27 ] To forgive somebody is always extremely costly. And yet, for those who are in Christ who have experienced the kindness of Jesus, it's no cost at all. And the reason is because Jesus has not only forgiven our debt, He's given us Himself.

Friends, if Jesus has given you a new name and a new identity and a name that's welcome into His family and a purpose and a hope and a future and a new track record, if Jesus has given you Himself, what are you and I looking to that person that is so hard to forgive to give us that Jesus Himself has not really given us?

And so in Ephesians 4, the Apostle Paul says, he writes to these young Christians and he says, put away all bitterness. Put away anger. Put away the malice. Be kind to one another.

Tenderhearted. Forgive one another just as God in Christ has forgiven you. Friends, when we are unaware or we forget our profound, daily, ongoing need for forgiveness, we lose not only the pattern but also the power to forgive those that hurt us.

Jesus' forgiveness of us is not only the pattern, it's not only the law, it's also the power, the motivation to forgive those that have hurt us. In Jesus Christ and His grace, we know that we have all that we need, undeservedly so.

[ 37 : 58 ] And so we can release those that have undeservedly hurt us or taken from us. And so friends, if you're a Christian this morning and you feel the deep pain of being wronged or being hurt,

can I ask you, can I urge you to come to Jesus?

I can't heal that pain. I can't repay back what has been taken from you. But Jesus Christ can. And He'll give you more than what's been taken from you. Friends, can I urge you to come to Him this morning?

Come in your pain, come in your tears, come in your agony, and ask Christ to wash you with His grace. Friends, in the church we have both sinners and saints and sufferers.

Not only across the church family but within each one of us. And that means that we shouldn't be surprised or shocked when things don't go perfectly well in the church. And yet at the same time because we're meant to be a taste of heaven, we shouldn't be okay with it.

We should mourn it and grieve it. And so how do we handle it when someone wrongs us? How do we handle conflict in church? Well, we graciously and humbly move towards that person.

[ 39 : 06 ] And we say, I want to restore the relationship. Can we talk about it? But we don't just go towards them to do that. We also go towards them with unfathomable grace because of the grace that we've received in Christ Jesus.

Friends, I'd love to pray for us this morning but Natalie, do you want to come and lead us in song? We're going to pray in a few minutes time but before we do that I want to just take a, give us a minute or two just to reflect and just to sit quietly and just to think.

And maybe as we do that maybe I can actually just pray and ask God the Holy Spirit to speak to us. friends, what has God been saying to you this morning?

If you're a human being the chances are somebody's hurt you or let you down. If you've lived for more than five years in this world, more than five minutes, somebody's caused some offense, somebody's treated you unfairly.

Friends, I really am convinced that God wants to heal some of us this morning. He wants us to set us free. He wants us to demonstrate the undeserved kindness that maybe those people don't deserve but He wants us to be free and to receive His grace so that we can extend grace.

[ 40 : 42 ] And so God, the Holy Spirit, I ask you God, won't you come and speak to us? Won't you come and heal us? Won't you come and minister to us?

I pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[ 42 : 28 ] Thank you.

In Psalm 139, the psalmist writes, Search me, O God. Know my heart. Try me and know my thoughts.

See if there's any grievous way in me. Lead me in the way of the everlasting life. Father, we make that our prayer today.

God, come and lead us in the way of everlasting life. Come and set us free, God. Amen. Jesus, we confess that we need you this morning.

We need you because we need your grace. But we also need you, God, to give us the ability to give grace to others. Amen. Amen.

[ 44 : 07 ] In Luke chapter 4, Jesus starts his ministry, and he quotes from Isaiah 61. He says, The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to proclaim good news.

He sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives, to set free those that are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. Father, Jesus, won't you come and set us free?

Won't you come and minister to our hearts? Father, we confess it's so hard to sometimes let go of pain in the past.

It's so hard, God, to forgive those that have hurt us or wronged us. Jesus, we pray that as the gospel gets into our heart and as we reflect on the amazing and good news of the gospel, that you also change us and help us and heal us and help us to be gracious to those around you.

Jesus, come and have your way, we pray. Amen.