

Forgive Us Our Debts

Matthew 6:9-13

Pastor John Miller

Now I want you to follow with me in your Bible. I'm going to read verses 9 to 13. And if you want to read along with me, feel free to do that. Again, verse 9, Jesus said, "After this manner, therefore, pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be Thy Name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread..."—And here's today's passage, verse 12—"...Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory for ever. Amen."

We have come today to the fifth petition in what is commonly called the Lord's Prayer. There are a total of six prayers or petitions in this Lord's Prayer. Now we come to number five. And I want you to notice it with me. Go back to verse 12. Jesus said when we pray, we pray, "And forgive us our debts, as we..."—what?—"...forgive our debtors."

Now the sequence of petition number four and petition number five is suggestive. In petition number four, "Give us this day our daily bread." Petition number five, "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors." So simply stated, you have "give us" and then "forgive us." Next week it's going to be "Lead us not into temptation." So we go from the focus is on God—His Name, His kingdom—to God's provision—His bread, His forgiveness, and His protection. Jesus is giving to us the pattern and the priority of prayer.

But an interesting relationship between bread and forgiveness. Someone said, "As bread is the first need of the body, forgiveness is the first need of the soul." Our body needs to be sustained by bread; our soul needs to be forgiven by God. Alexander McClaren said, "God made us to need bread. We made ourselves to need pardon." I love that. God made us to need bread, but it's because of our own sin and our own disobedience that we need to be forgiven, and we need to be pardoned from sin. And I believe it indicates that just as God provides our bread, He will certainly pardon our sins. Amen? If my Father, Who is in heaven, loves me and wants to provide my bread and take care of my physical and material needs, don't you think that God stands ready and willing to forgive your sins? I do. Forgiveness is perhaps one of the most important subjects of the Bible, that we be right with God and that we be right with others.

So this petition, truly prayed, will bring healing to our fractured relationships with God and with others. Now I said this first service. I'll say it second. I want to encourage you, especially if you're married this morning. I won't ask you to raise your hands. Hopefully you know who you are who are married. If not, come after service, and we'll pray for you. "I think I'm married. I don't know if I'm married." We'll lay hands on you. But I know that this will heal hearts today in a marriage. You ask anybody that has a marriage that has lasted a long time, and they tell you one thing. "We have to learn to forgive one another." We're going to offend each other, we're going to hurt each other. We need to learn to forgive one another. Amen? [Someone sneezed.] And so this passage is all about forgiveness. And even when your wife sneezes on you, you

have to forgive her. God bless you. Sorry, I couldn't resist that.

So, there are three points I want to make. I want you to write them down. Number one is the problem. Write down the words "the problem." And here's the—the question here is that I need to believe and realize or be conscious that I have sinned. So the problem is I need to believe I have sinned. More important than my need for bread is my universal need for forgiveness. Now there's some subpoints I want you to write down. And listen carefully. Number one, we all need forgiveness. We all need forgiveness. The Bible tells us in Romans 3:23, "For all have sinned and..."—what?—"...fallen short of the glory of God. There's no one righteous, no not..."—what?—"...one." So we've all sinned, we've all fallen short of God's standards. No one is righteous, no not one. What does that mean? It means that we all need forgiveness. Forgiveness is a universal need. There is no one that doesn't need to be forgiven.

Now I want you to notice the phrase or the term that He uses for sins there. It's the word "debts." "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors." Now in Luke's Gospel, chapter 11, verse 4, Jesus gives us the Lord's Prayer. And He says, "Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who have sinned against us." So the "debts" here is a metaphor, the Jewish metaphor for sin. That's what it is referring to. Now how often do people pray this prayer without realizing or sensing that I am a sinner before God? So the implication in this petition is this: If I pray, "Forgive us our debts..."—and again, no personal pronouns. It's "us" not "me," although it's totally legitimate to ask God to forgive you individually. So we come as a family, "God, forgive us of our debts," without being conscious that I am a debtor. Right? What sense does it make to pray, "Forgive my sins," if I don't think I've sinned or I don't think I'm a sinner? You know, one of the problems in the church today is we don't take sin seriously. One of the problems in the church today is we don't even talk about sin, think about sin. We're aware of it but no one wants to admit it or confess it. That's a problem. All of us have sinned, all of us have fallen short. We're all debtors to God.

Now this metaphor of sin being a debt indicates that we owe something to God. The word "debt" and "duty" come from the same root word, by the way. If I have a duty or a debt, it means I owe God my obedience. I owe Him my love. I owe Him my allegiance. And if I haven't given to God His due, then I am in debt to God. You've heard the phrase that, "I owed a debt I couldn't pay, and He paid a debt that He did not owe." So sin is likened unto a debt. We're all bankrupt. That's why Jesus said in the Beatitudes, "Blessed are the poor in spirit." We're all spiritually paupers. We're poor. It means destitute poor. Dirt poor. We have nothing to commend ourselves to God. So this prayer is uttered from a heart that is conscience and believing that I have sin that needs to be pardoned or needs to be forgiven. So I must pray with a consciousness of sin.

Are you willing to admit your need for food? Why not would you admit your need for forgiveness? Isn't it funny that whenever you say, "Hey, are you hungry?" "Yaah!" I don't know what's wrong with me lately. Food has been such a blessing lately. Thursday night my wife's down here with the women, and the women sing, and she had some leftover chili and she had turkey pot pie and chicken, and I just ate all of it one night. It's like, "What else in this

refrigerator can I eat?" you know. And it's just like, "Whoa. It must be the weather. Food tastes so good right now" you know. And when someone says, "Hey, you want to eat?" "Oh, yaah, great. I'm ready to eat." "Hey, are you a sinner?" "Naw; I'm not a sinner." Isn't it funny how we will readily admit "I'm hungry," but we don't want to admit "I'm a sinner"?

This petition, this prayer is saying to God, "I am a sinner." You go, "That's a morbid thought. That's a negative thought. You ought to be able to be a little nicer and a little more positive." You can't appreciate the positive that God forgives our debts until you appreciate and understand the need, the negative, that we are sinners in need of a savior. Amen? "God, help us to be sensitive to sin. God, help us not to whitewash sin, but to know that it needs to be washed white by the blood of Jesus Christ." We need to come to Him and admit my need. "I need forgiveness." We all need forgiveness.

But what exactly is sin? Second question: What is sin? Sin is the transgression of God's law. Now there are many different words or phrases or metaphors used to describe sin, but one word that is used quite commonly in the New Testament is the word "transgression." And here's what the word means. It means to willingly, deliberately, knowingly, intentionally step over the line. The word literally means to cross the line. We use the term "out of bounds." "That dude, man, that's out of bounds. You're out of bounds." It means that you've stepped over the line. You've transgressed. It indicates that I do it willingly. I rebel. I intentionally step over the line. I transgress God's law.

Now where better than the Ten Commandments can we see God's line or His line in the stone—not in the sand, but the line He's drawn for what is right and what is wrong. Commandment number one, "...no other gods before Me." "Thou shalt have no other gods before Me." How many of us are guilty of loving other things before God? It could be a person, it could be a passion, it can be a possession, but we love other things. So we break the First Commandment. How about Commandment number two, "...no graven image"? This basically could also be that we think less of God than He has revealed Himself in His Word. Any image in our mind that we paint of God that is less than the God of the Bible is idolatry. And then Commandment number three, "...God's Name in vain." This isn't just swear words or cuss words or using the Name "Jesus" in a vulgar way. This can also mean that I take the name of Christian and that I live inconsistently with what a Christian should be. I'm taking the name of God and I'm living my life in vain. Or Commandment number four, "...the Sabbath day." That I dedicate a day every week to God. You're to be commended that you are in church today. And I hope you're here because you want to be here. You're here because you want to give your best to God. You want to be in a sanctuary with God's people and worship God and pray and give to God and hear His Word. This is so important. We're losing a priority of the church today that church is important. And I know that sometimes people will say, "Aw, I can stay home and watch it on the Internet." There's no substitute for fellowship with God's people. We need to be together in God's house. But we take a day, and we worship God where He has the priority of our lives. And then Commandment number five, "Honor your father and your mother." How many times have we violated that Commandment? And then the next five Commandments that deal with our relationship with others. "Thou shalt not murder," Commandment number six.

"Thou shalt not commit adultery," Commandment number seven. "Thou shalt not steal," Commandment number eight. "Thou shalt not lie," Commandment number nine, and "Thou shalt not covet," Commandment number ten. Those are God's rules for life. Those are God's Commandments.

So we transgress when we lie or we steal or we commit adultery or we murder—by the way, the Bible says, "Thou shalt not kill," but is referring to murder there. It's talking about homicide. So He's telling us that even, Jesus said, in our hearts.

Now sin has a couple categories. It has the categories of attitude as well as action. Now this is something that a lot of people don't realize. Did you know that you can sin in your attitude? Did you know that pride is sin? That hatred is sin? Jesus said that if you hate someone, you've already committed murder. Do you know that lustful desires are sinful before a holy God? He says if you look after someone lustfully, you've committed adultery already in your heart. And covetousness is a matter of the heart. You can't really see that as an outward action, but if you covet what belongs to someone else, then you've already committed sin.

Now sin not only means a transgression, sin also means a missing of the mark. Write that down. Missing the mark. It's the Greek word "harmatia," which means that we try. Unlike transgression, we deliberately step over the line, but missing the mark, is falling short. So we are trying to obey God, we are trying to do what's right. "The things I want to do..." Paul says, Romans 7, "...I don't do. The things I don't want to do, I do." You ever have that? You get up in the morning, "I'm not going to overeat. I'm not going to overeat," and then you overeat. Which is funny, because I just talked about me overeating. Pray for me. "I'm not going to lose my anger, I'm not going to think about that sinful thought," and then you do it. "Aw, wretched man that I am." Or you're like, "I'm gonna do that. I'm gonna read my Bible," and you don't. "I'm gonna pray," and you don't. "I'm gonna witness to somebody," and you don't.

You know, there are sins of commission as well as sins of omission. A sin of commission is one that we commit, we actually do. A sin of omission is one that we omit, we don't do. To know to do right and to not do it is what? Sin. And we don't often think in those terms. To love somebody, to forgive somebody, to help somebody, to be honest with somebody—if I know to do right and I don't do it—by doing nothing, I have actually sinned. So sin is a serious matter.

The Bible says, "The soul that sins shall surely die." The Bible says, "The wages of sin is death." And only God can forgive sins. Amen? When they let down the man, who was lame, on his mat through the roof, and Jesus said to the lame man, "Your sins are forgiven," the religious community freaked out around Him. They went, "You can't forgive sins. Only God can forgive sins." And then Jesus said, "To show you that I have the authority and the power to forgive sins..."—because they related sickness and sin together—He said to the man with the mat, "...stand up, roll up your bed, and walk out of here." The man jumped up, grabbed his mat, took his bed, and walked out. Jesus Christ is God, and Jesus Christ has the authority to forgive your sins. Amen? And only, and only does God have the ability to forgive sins. So we must confess our sins to God.

And it's based on the cross of Jesus Christ. You know why God can forgive you of your sins? Because His Son paid the penalty on the cross. When you see the cross, you are reminded that God plays by His own rules. God plays by His own rules. "The soul that sins shall surely die." So He gave Himself, in the Person of His son, on the cross, to pay for man, the creature's sin. He couldn't just dismiss our sin; it's a serious thing. And "The soul that sins shall surely die." But in Christ, we are forgiven. But we must by faith appropriate what Jesus did for us on that cross. So my question to you is, "Are you ready to admit that you have sinned?" And secondly, "Are you ready to pray 'God, forgive me'?"

Think about what that would do in your marriage. "God, I've sinned. I didn't treat my wife properly" or "my husband properly. God I've sinned, and please forgive me." And then we're going to get into the second half of this petition, "as I forgive others." There's two parts to this forgiveness. God forgives me, and I must forgive others. And they both work together; they cannot be separated. Now we saw the problem: I need to admit I'm a sinner.

Second main point I want to make is the provision. I need forgiveness of my sins. So the problem is I am a sinner. The provision is, God provides for forgiveness. I want you to notice in verse 12—go back to the text. The prayer is, verse 12, "Forgive us." "Forgive us." Forgiveness comes in three categories. Now, again, these are important. I want you to listen carefully. The first category of forgiveness is "final forgiveness." Final forgiveness. This is the initial salvation of the sinner when we repent of our sins, and we believe in Jesus Christ and we're born again. Past, present and future. Let me give you a verse. Ephesians 2:8-9. And many of you know it. "For by grace you have been saved." "By grace you have been saved, through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is..."—what?—"...a gift of God. Not of works lest any man should..."—what?—"...boast." Notice what Paul says there. He says, "By grace you have been saved."

You know, if you're a Christian, you have been saved, you're being saved, and you will be saved. Past, present and future. But all of that is what we call "total forgiveness." I've been justified, I'm being sanctified, and one day I will be glorified. Now I happen to believe—I emphasize "I happen to believe," because not every Christian will agree with this, but I am convinced of it being Biblical and Scriptural—that once you have been forgiven of your sins, and you're a child of God, you are on your way to heaven. You can't "unregenerate" yourself. You can't unsave yourself. You can steer off the path, you can backslide, you can question whether or not you've been regenerated, but if you're a Christian, and you've been taken out of Adam and you've been placed in Jesus Christ, I believe that once we're in Christ, we're always in Christ. And Romans 8 says, "There is no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus." You didn't put yourself in Christ, you can't take yourself out of Christ. This is what we call "justification." It's the act of God whereby He declares the believing sinner righteous, based on the finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross. That's final forgiveness. And final forgiveness is something to celebrate. Amen? My sins have been forgiven. I'm a child of God, my name's been written down in the Book of Life, and I'm on my way to heaven.

But here's the second kind of forgiveness. It's called "fellowship forgiveness." Fellowship forgiveness. And I believe that's what Jesus is referring to in verse 12 when He says, "Forgive

us our debts.” He’s not talking about salvation forgiveness or final. He’s talking about a believer, who needs to be forgiven, to restore fellowship with God. Let me give you the classic test. 1 John 1:9. Again, you know it. “If we confess our sin, God is...”—what?—“... faithful and just to...”—do what?—“...forgive us our sins and...”—to do what?—“...cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” Good stuff; right? Someone called 1 John 1:9 the Christian’s “bar of soap.” I like that. I mean, I’m always washing myself with 1 John 1:9, because every day I say something stupid, I stumble or I fall. And “Lord, I’m sorry. Please forgive me.” The Bible says, “If we confess our sins, He’s faithful and just to forgive us, to cleanse us.” And “If we walk in the light, as He is in the light, then we have fellowship with Him,” and the Blood of Christ is constantly, continually cleansing us from sin. Now some people get confused. “I thought you were saved. I thought you were already a Christian.” “Yes. But sin hinders my fellowship with God.” And I don’t want anything between my soul and the Savior, so that His blessed Face I can see.

It’s impossible to be right with God and wrong with people. And it’s really impossible to be right with people and wrong with God. You want a life that is in harmony with God and others? You have to confess your sin. You have to become a child of God. And then when you know you’ve sinned—attitude or action—you have to ask God, “Please forgive me. Wash me in Your bar of soap.”

Now my favorite illustration of this is John 13. I’ve preached an entire sermon on this. And I know I’ve shared it before with you, but let me explain it. In John 13, it’s where Jesus, in the upper room, washed the disciples’ feet. You remember the story? And when they got into the room, there was no servant there, so Jesus gets up from supper, He takes off His robe, He takes the towel, which was the badge of a slave or servant, by the water and the basin, and He ties the towel around His waist. And He gets on His knees, and He starts to do what? Wash the disciples’ feet. What a picture of the Son of God with a towel around His waist, on His knees, washing the dusty, dirty feet of His disciples! And then He comes to Peter. Peter says, “Lord, You’ll not wash my feet!” Peter thought this was beneath Him. “Lord, I just can’t let you wash my feet.” And he’s probably looking at the other guys thinking, “How could you let Him do that?” “You’ll never was my feet!” Now listen very carefully what Jesus said. Jesus said to Peter, “If I do not wash your feet, you have no part with Me.” What did He mean by that? He meant, “If I don’t wash your feet, there’s no participation, there’s no partnership, no fellowship, no communication.” You might put the word “fellowship” in there. “No fellowship with Me.” “I need to wash your feet.” Now anyone that’s had a bath knows in the Middle East at that time—and you walk on the dirty roads—you just need your feet washed. So Jesus said that. He goes, “Look Peter. You’ve already had a bath.” Now listen very carefully what Jesus said. You can read it yourself, if you don’t believe Jesus said this. John 13. Jesus said, “If you’ve had a bath, all you need now is your feet washed.” This is very significant. At that time the bathhouses were outside. They didn’t have indoor plumbing. They had to go outside to bathe. They put on sandals. And from the bathhouse or the pool, the pond, wherever you’d bathe, back to the house, open sandals, dirt. What happens? Your feet get dusty; right? So they would wash just their feet.

That is a perfect picture of the Christian life. When you are born again—the Bible actually says in the book of Titus—it says you experience the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Spirit. God gives you a bath, so to speak. You are completely clean. That is final forgiveness. But as you walk through life—you go to your job during the week, you go home, you go into neighborhoods, you go shopping—as you walk through life, what happens? Your feet get dirty. And you need to confess your sin so that—not that you can be born again, again—I know people who think they need to get born again every week. And I'm like, "You don't need to get born again, again. You're in the family. God's not going to kick you out. God regenerated you. He's not going to unregenerate you. God put you in Christ. He's not going to take you out of Christ and put you back in Adam." "There's no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus." But you do have stinky feet, and you need your feet washed. Some of you right now—[sniffing] I can smell them. Please confess your sin before you leave. Let Jesus wash your feet. No one needs to leave church today with dirty feet. Because we know if we confess our sin, He will cleanse us from all unrighteousness, and we can live in fellowship and in harmony with Him.

Alan Redpass said, "This is the family prayer we are considering. And it does not deal with the sins of unbelievers, it does not deal with our standing before God, which can never be affected. It concerns the sins of the children of God." So my question, before we leave this point, is "Christian, do you need your feet washed?" Do you need your feet washed? Did you lose your temper? Did you think a bad thought? Did you say an unkind word? Did you steal something? Maybe you committed adultery. I had a man come up to me after first service just sobbing, because God spoke to him about sin in his life. And he confessed his sin, and he was forgiven and free. Maybe God is speaking to you right now. Maybe God brought you here to hear this sermon, because your feet are just filthy dirty, and you can't hear God's voice anymore, you don't sense His presence anymore, you don't have His peace anymore. You've lost the joy of the Lord in your life. And if you want that fellowship restored, then you need to confess your sin, and He is "faithful and just to forgive you and to cleanse you from all unrighteousness." So we have to be forgiven to have fellowship with God.

Now the third point I want to make—write this down. We go from the problem, which is sin, we go to the solution, or the provision, which is forgiveness, and thirdly, we see the prerequisite. The prerequisite. This is, I need to forgive others who have sinned against me. Look at verse 12. Jesus says when we pray, we say, "Forgive us our debts..."—and then what does it say?—"...as we..."—what?—"...as we forgive others." Oh, I'd like to erase that. I'm just being honest with you. You're looking at me like, "Huh. I can't believe you said that." Think about it. There are some people that I do not want to forgive. I want to beat 'em up. I want to lay hands on them in the Name of Jesus. I don't want to forgive them. They're mean, they're rude, they're obnoxious, they bug me, and I don't wanna forgive them. But when I read this petition, there ain't no way around this. If I'm going to say to the Lord, "Forgive my debts," I'm going to have to say, "as I forgive others." You cannot separate this petition; it's one petition. And if I expect God to forgive me, then I have to be forgiving to others. That's the prerequisite. I can't ask God to forgive me and then turn around and not expect to forgive others. "God, forgive me, but I ain't going to forgive him! I deserve forgiveness; that person doesn't!" How can we ask God to

forgive us, when we're unwilling to forgive others?

And here is the third category of forgiveness. You wondered. I only gave you two; right? I gave you final and fellowship forgiveness. And I saved it for this last point. This is the third category of forgiveness. I call it "family forgiveness." Family forgiveness. In the body of Christ, in the fellowship of believers, we sin against each other, and we need to forgive in the family of God. Remember, He's our Father in heaven, and He is to forgive us our debts, as we forgive others, our debtors. So we are asking for family forgiveness. So the second half of this petition gives us the condition for forgiveness.

Now I want you to note it's importance is so great that Jesus expanded on this point in verses 14 and 15. Look at it with me in Matthew 6:14-15. No other petition does Jesus give a commentary on but this one, because He knows how important it is. He says—verse 14—"If you forgive men their trespasses..."—there's that "trespass," sin—"...your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But..."—verse 15—"...if you forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." See, it's all one package. You can't have one without the other. This is why St. Augustine called this the "terrible petition." This is why when I read that I think, "Oh, can I skip over this? Do I have to forgive that? Could this please not be in the Bible? Can I find it in the manuscript that doesn't belong there, please Lord?" Not so. Jesus said when we pray and ask God to forgive us, we have to be forgiving others as God forgives us.

And the more I know I'm a sinner, the problem, the more I experience the provision, forgiveness, the more I am ready to meet this prerequisite. "God, I'm going to forgive those that have sinned against me. How can I have anger, hatred or unforgiveness when You have forgiven me so very much?" So we can't ask God to deal with us in a way that we deal differently with others. Alexander McClaren, again, once said that "A deep sense of my own sin and unworthiness of having no ground or right to stand on will surely lead me to be lenient and understanding and forgiving of others." How true that is. The greater my awareness of my unworthiness and my sinfulness, and the greater my experience of God's pardon, the easier the enabling comes for me to be able to forgive others that have sinned against me.

Now I want to make clear. Jesus is not—this is a fine line, but it's a distinction you need to understand. Jesus is not telling us, though I refer to it as a "prerequisite," it is, but it isn't. Jesus isn't teaching here that he waits for us to forgive other people before He forgive us. What this passage is actually saying is that they are combined together. This is how it works. If I want to be forgiven, I need to repent of my sin, and I need to forsake my sin, and ask God to forgive me. So if I am unforgiving toward someone else, guess what? I repent of that. I ask God to forgive me. My unforgiveness, my bitterness, my hatred, my hostility—in my repentance to God, includes my forgiveness to others. You understand what I'm saying? It's all wrapped up in one package.

Now here's an example. "By grace you have been saved, through faith, not that of yourself. It is the gift of God. Not of works, lest any man should boast." We are saved by grace. We're not saved by faith. We're saved by grace. We're saved by grace through faith. Now in order to be

saved, there must be faith, though that isn't what saves you. Now, some of you are going, "I don't have a clue what you're trying to say." I told you, this is a very fine line, but it will help you understand this concept that God—that you're not meriting, that you're not deserving forgiveness from God by forgiving others. But in the package, when I repent and ask God to forgive me, it would include that I no longer have hatred or animosity or unforgiveness toward others. You can't come to God and say, "God forgive me of just three of my sins. There are six of them, but I want to hang on to the other three. Just forgive me of these three." It's not a smorgasbord. When you come to God, you repent of all your sin, and God forgives you of all your sin. But if you are unwilling to forgive somebody that has offended you, then you are not really repenting. You're not really sorry for your sin, and you're not going to experience forgiveness. That's basically what Jesus is saying in this petition. It's a family forgiveness. How can we expect God to forgive us, if we're unwilling to forgive others?

When we forgive others, we are like God. Some would even say we are most like God when we forgive others, because God is in the business of forgiving us. Ephesians 4:32 says that we should be "kind," we should be "tenderhearted," we should be "forgiving one another, even as God, for Christ's sake, has forgiven us." Be kind one to another. Be tenderhearted one to another. Forgive one another. This is why I said at the beginning of this message, this is so important for married folks. This is one of the great passages for your marriage. "Be kind, be tenderhearted, be forgiving, even as God, for Christ's sake, has forgiven you." So we need to forgive and be like God.

Someone said, "We come to the cross to be forgiven; we stay at the cross to be forgiving." You know, if you're going to burn bridges—we use that phrase, "I'm just going to burn this bridge. I don't want to see your face anymore. I'll forgive, but I won't forget." You know, when you forgive somebody, you know what you do? You treat them like it never happened. And your heart and your attitude? Like it never happened. I know there are consequences to sin. And sometimes we cannot reverse those consequences. But when we truly forgive somebody, we don't burn the bridge. I don't want to go through life burning bridges behind me, because if some day that same bridge—I'm going to have to pass over it myself. I'm going to have to pass over that same bridge.

Now, in conclusion, Jesus gave a story about forgiveness in Matthew 18. We won't turn there, but I'm just going to relate the story. Matthew 18. I think it starts about verse 22—excuse me, verse 22-35. It's called the Parable of the Unmerciful Servant. And it started because Peter came to Jesus, and he said, "How many times should someone sin against me and I forgive them?" And what did Peter say? "Seven times," like he was really awesome. "Man, I'm really on a role here. Seven times! What do you think, Jesus, pretty good, huh? Seven times!" And Jesus said—probably shook His head—said, "Peter, not seven times but seventy times seven." And Peter went, "Ai yai yai yai yai! I don't think so." Now Jesus isn't telling us we count. "Okay. 149; I got the count. Okay, you're out! You just went one too many. Whoop! Praise God, I'm free at last! I'm outta here!" That's not what He's saying. He's saying that we have an attitude of forgiveness that forgives over and over and over and over and over. You can't stay married, if you don't learn to forgive. It's absolutely essential. And how can you not forgive, when God has

forgiven you? And how can you expect God to forgive you when you won't forgive someone else?

So Jesus told the story. I almost forgot the story. He said there was a great landowner and a big king, and he brought his servants in and to take account of their payments. And one man came in who owed—and this is a paraphrase of the story—he owed the king 10 million dollars. Today's currency, at least 10 million dollars. Can you imagine having a 10 million dollar debt? And he told the king, "Be patient with me. I'll pay you. Please, just be patient with me." And the king was compassionate and kind and said, "Guess what. This is your lucky day. I'm going to cancel your debt." "Wow!" Ten million bucks just cancelled! Can you imagine? Maybe your mortgage—your home mortgage. Someone just said, "Hey, I'm going to pay your mortgage. Your home's going to be clear." And "Wow! Praise God!" You'd kiss them; wouldn't you? "Thank you!" So this guy goes skipping out of the presence of the king. He'd just been forgiven of 10 million dollars. And as he gets out in the street, he sees a guy across the street who owes him 17 bucks. "There's that guy [grimacing]! I'm so mad at that guy! He owes me 17 dollars. Man, I'm just—I'm going to give—..." And he runs across the street, grabs him and chokes him and says, "Where's my 17 bucks?!" And the guy says to him what he just said to the king. He said, "Oh, be patient with me. I promise that I'll pay you." The very same words came out of his mouth. He should have said, "Well, I've heard that before." He said, "No! I'm going to throw you in prison! Debtors prison! And you'll stay there until you pay me my 17 bucks!" Well, there were some other servants who saw what went down, and they ran back to the king and said, "Do you know what? You know that dude that you just forgave 10 million dollars? He just threw in prison a guy who only owed him 17 bucks!" As I said, this is a paraphrase. And the king says, "Go get that guy!" And they bring the guy back in. And he says, "Is it true that I just forgave you this great debt, and then you went out and you wouldn't forgive a fellow servant?" He was trembling. "Yes, it's true." And then the king took him and threw him into a prison, and it says he handed him over to the tormentors.

Did you know if you're going to have an enemy, pick a good one, because they're really expensive. You can't afford it. It will lock you in a prison, and it will destroy you. It will destroy you. You're not going to hurt the other person. You're only going to hurt yourself when you're unwilling to forgive. And Jesus said, "That man, that wicked servant will not come out until he pays the uttermost farthing" or denarius.

Are you in a prison right now? Do you have bitterness and hatred and unforgiveness that you're unwilling to give up? If you say, "Forgive me my sins," in order for that to happen, you have to have a willingness and an ability and you have to say, "as..."—not "because." He didn't say "because." But He said, "as we forgive others." Rolled into forgiveness of my sin is forgiveness of others' sin.

Have you experienced final forgiveness? Have you asked Jesus to forgive you of your sins? Have you been saved or born again? Are you a child of God? Have you asked Jesus to forgive you and wash your feet today? I'm sure out of a crowd this size in the sanctuary, there are many of us today that need to say, "Lord, please forgive me." God is speaking to you about an

area in your life right now where your feet are dirty, and you need to confess your sins.

Or maybe you need to practice family forgiveness. Maybe you need to forgive somebody in the church or somebody in your family or someone in your marriage or someone in a relationship that you've had bitterness or hatred or animosity toward. God wants you to forgive others as He forgives you. Let's pray.