

Doing the Unthinkable

Reading: John 8:1-11

- Last Class we talked about forgiving when it's hard
- We agreed that forgiving those who have severely hurt us is difficult
- We talked about some of the kinds of offenses that we find hard to forgive
- But, we were reminded that Jesus forgave those who killed him
- I believe that Jesus forgave them even though they knew clearly what they were doing
- That is the example we are given in Christ, and that is the Forgiveness we are called to

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- Now I'd like to try to define Forgiveness a little bit
- Often I find that things are easier to define what they are **NOT** than what they are
- In a moment we'll talk about what Forgiveness **IS**, but this week we'll start with what it is **NOT**
- I've got this **HUGE** list of **10** things that Forgiveness is **NOT**

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1) Forgiveness is **NOT Approving of what the person did**

- In my opinion, this is one of things that holds us back the most as Ecclesiastes

- How many times have you heard, *"What kind of example are we giving to the Young People?"*
- We often feel that we cannot forgive the person because it will look like we are somehow approving of what they did, and that wouldn't reflect well upon us as a community or as believers
- Somehow we tend to think that forgiving the person will look like we are condoning them
- But, is that really the way that Christ looked at Forgiveness?

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- John 8:10-11
 - 10) Jesus stood up and said to her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?"
 - 11) She said, "No one, Lord." And Jesus said, **"Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more."**
- Clearly, this woman had sinned...
- Jesus was a good example to us that God forgives people without approving of their sin

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2) Forgiveness is **NOT Excusing what the person did**

- We shouldn't try to cover for people who sin
- When you excuse someone you are attempting to lessen the blame attached to their offense by defending or justifying them
- That isn't your job
- You are simply Forgiving them
- That doesn't lessen the impact of what they have done

- Every person is worth understanding
- But, that doesn't mean that you have to excuse what they did

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3) Forgiveness is **NOT Justifying what the person did**

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- Isaiah 5:20

20) **Woe to those who call evil good and good evil**, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!

- God never calls what is Good Evil, and He will never call what is Evil Good
- To Justify means to "make something right or just"
- There is no way that Evil can be Justified
- I always enjoyed Moses' example - He didn't try to Justify the Israelite's actions, he simply appealed to God to save the Israelite's because it wouldn't look good for God to bring them out in the desert to kill them
- While we are required to forgive, we aren't required to try to make it look right

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4) Forgiveness is **NOT Pardoning what the person did**

- A Pardon is a legal transaction that releases an offender from the consequences of their action
- You are not responsible for what they have done
- In Psychology this is called Enabling
- Enabling is when you remove the natural consequences of the person's behavior

- That is not our role
- Our job is to forgive the person, we aren't there to cover for them
- Likewise, you are not responsible to try to fix the consequences of what they have Done, or try to protect them from the consequences of their actions
- That, also, is up to God

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5) Forgiveness is **NOT Reconciling with the person**

- Although they are connected, Forgiveness and Reconciliation are not always the same
- Reconciliation requires the participation of TWO people, Forgiveness does not
- Forgiveness is always demanded of a believer
- Reconciliation is always possible for a believer
- I know that these two ideas are closely connected in the Scriptures, but I think it's important to keep them separate in your mind
- I think that a good example is the Sister whose husband beats her
- Is she required to forgive him for his sinful actions?
- Yes, 70 times
- But, is she required to continue to restore the relationship and go back to him 70 times?
- The answer has to be "No!"
- Biblical Reconciliation always implies repentance and turning away from evil
- Forgiveness does not require repentance

- You are commanded to forgive, even if the other person doesn't even think that they have done anything wrong
- But, in order to Reconcile, they are going to have to admit they're wrong
- Forgiveness comes first
- Reconciliation only happens if there is repentance
- And! To make it even more complex! The truly repentant person does not demand Reconciliation
- Demanding Reconciliation is not repentance, it is manipulation
- Repentance seeks to take ownership of the sin
- Reconciliation seeks to restore that which has been damaged
- Sometimes the person doesn't want to Reconcile
- Lots of times they are just not spiritually mature enough to make that choice
- We should be committed to Reconciliation if the person is willing

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- 2nd Corinthians 5:18-19
 - 18) All this is from God, who through **Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation;**
 - 19) that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and **entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.**
- We have been given a ministry of Reconciliation
- Reconciliation should be one of our goals in life
- God has entrusted us with this message of Reconciliation

- But, for a man to be reconciled, they still have to come to Christ
- Reconciliation is a restoration of friendship after a quarrel
- Sometimes you may not want to continue a relationship with a person that you forgive
- Forgiving them is essential, but Reconciliation is not

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6) Forgiveness is **NOT Denying what the person did**

- Denial, Repression and Suppression are almost always unconscious
- Some people live in Denial
- They refuse to come to terms with the reality of a bad situation
- Repressing the truth like this almost always has negative consequences for our psychological well-being
- Most often this happens involuntarily because the pain is so hard to face that their psyche simply doesn't want to
- Many victims of child abuse repress their memories and often can't recall it until much later in life
- The problem is that repression cannot remove the wound
- Forgiveness can only come when you are able to admit, "*This person did this to me*"

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7) Forgiveness is **NOT Blindness to what the person did**

- "*Turning a Blind Eye*" to sin is slightly different than Denying it
- Denial and Repression are unconscious reactions that your mind has to traumatic events

- Blindness is a conscious choice to pretend that a sin did not take place
- When you "*Turn a Blind Eye*" to sin you are pretending that it did not happen

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- 1st Corinthians 13:4-5
 - 4) Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant
 - 5) or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or **resentful**;

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- The NIV uses the term, "keeps no record of wrongs" instead of the word "resentful" that the ESV uses
- This is a beautiful way to look at Forgiveness, and a thought that we will come back to again in our classes
- But, keeping no record of wrongs doesn't mean being blind to it
- You have to first actually see the sin and acknowledge that it is there
- **THEN** you consciously decide to not keep a record of it
- That is not the same as being blind to what happened entirely

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8) Forgiveness is **NOT Forgetting what the person did**

- We all know what we mean when we say, "*Forgive and Forget*"
- When people say that they mean that if you truly forgive the person, then you would wipe the memory of the sin from your mind, like God wipes our slates clean
- Often, though, Forgetting is not realistic
- Love doesn't erase your memory

- Events will occur in the future that will remind you of what happened to you in the past, and you will be forced to confront the offense once again
- Grace is demonstrated when you are fully aware of what occurred, and yet you still **CHOOSE** to forgive
- God doesn't Forget our sins, He chooses to overlook them
- It doesn't roll off the tongue, but it's better to say, ***"Forgive and Choose to Overlook"***

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9) Forgiveness is NOT Refusing to take what the person did seriously

- Sometimes people respond to situations by saying, *"It's no big deal"*, when in reality it really was a big deal
- They belittle the offense by saying, "No problem!"
- Sometimes you can actually see someone doing this with tears in their eyes!
- They've been hurt so badly that they are actually crying, and yet they refuse to seriously consider the impact of what has happened
- Some people think that in order to Forgive they have to pass it off as inconsequential
- In their mind, it's easier for them to Forgive if they consider it a small offense
- The greater victory is to face the seriousness of the sin, and still consciously choose to forgive it

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10) Forgiveness is NOT Pretending that we are not hurt

- Sometimes this is a just a reaction – An attempt to not look weak
- I was crossing the road once and was hit by a car moving slowly

- I jumped up, waved, and said, "I'm fine" and proceeded on my way
- I wasn't fine
- I was black and blue and quite sore for several days, but my immediate reaction was to show that I'm strong and can take it
- How silly I must have looked, running across the street, bouncing off the front of a Chevrolet, and then cheerfully waving to the Driver, and yelling, "I'm fine, I'm fine" as I limped away...
- It doesn't make any sense at all to think that we should go around pretending that we are not hurt when we have gone through harsh circumstances
- It's ridiculous to think that we should keep a stiff upper lip when cheated on by a spouse
- It's silly to keep smiling and laughing when a close friend has undermined your reputation and hurt you severely
- Even if you have totally forgiven someone, there is no need to expect that you will not feel hurt
- Sin is grievous and its consequences cause us to grieve
- That is reasonable and right...
- There is no need to play up your pain, but there is also no need to pretend that you are not hurt
- There! I can't fit any more on that slide...
- Now, let's look at **What Forgiveness IS**

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1) Forgiveness is **being aware of what someone has done **AND still forgiving them****

- This is the backbone and the hallmark of Forgiveness

- Forgiveness is not being oblivious to what someone did, or covering it up, excusing it, or refusing to acknowledge what happened
- There is no spiritual victory in thinking that you are forgiving someone when you are actually only avoiding facing up to their wrong behavior
- Forgiveness is achieved only when you acknowledge what was done without any denial or covering up - and still refuse to make the offender pay for what they've done
- Forgiveness is approaching the situation with your eyes wide open, acknowledging that what they have done is hideous and reprehensible in God's eyes, and in the eyes of most moral people in the world... And **STILL** forgiving them for it!
- Forgiveness is painful - it hurts to think that the person is getting away with what they did and nobody else besides you will ever find out about it
- When we do cross over into this realm of Forgiveness we begin to feel a little bit like Christ and begin to understand what "Christ-like" really means

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2) Forgiveness is choosing to keep no record of wrongs

- Remember 1st Corinthians 13:5 - Love keeps no record of wrongs?
- Why do we keep track of the times we are offended?
- To use them!
- In a moment of anger, a Husband says to his Wife - *"I'll remember you said that!"*
- When a wife gets really mad at her Husband, she gets **Hysterical**
- When she gets even madder, she gets **Historical**
- She starts bringing up every little thing that he's done for the past 20 years
- Sure, she "Forgave" those things years ago, but she didn't forget them...

- She remembered every wrong thing that he's ever done
- The main difference between *Philio* and *Agape* is that *Agape* is a choice
- Forgiveness is also a choice
- Forgiveness is not a feeling - at least not at first - it is an act of the will
- Forgiveness is the choice we make to tear up the record of wrongs we have been keeping
- When we begin to develop a lifestyle of Forgiveness then we learn to erase the wrong rather than file it away for later use
- Of course, the goal is to do this so often that you begin to change your personality, and actually begin to experience Forgiveness as a feeling

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3) Forgiveness is refusing to punish

- Refusing to punish those who deserve it is the essence of Forgiveness
- It's hard to live with the thought that someone who hurt us deeply would get away with what they have done
- But, the fear that they won't get punished is the opposite of love

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- 1st John 4:18

18) There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For **fear has to do with punishment**, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love.

- If we harbor the desire to see our enemies punished, then we don't have perfect love
- John says, "*fear has to do with punishment*"
- Do we *fear* that God won't step in and give our enemies what they deserve?

- I think that one of the reasons that the Old Testament is full of so many stories of God utterly destroying the wicked?
- He wants us to know that vengeance is one of the things that He does best!
- God wants us to firmly believe that He will take care of it
- So, next time, before you speak, ask yourself: *"How much of what I am about to say is just an attempt to punish this person and make them feel bad?"*

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4) Forgiveness is **not telling what they did**

- We've made it clear that there are some cases where you have to tell - either legally or morally - to stop others from being hurt
- Let's also not confuse this with ONGOING issues, that the person won't confront – Matthew 18 commands us to bring someone else into the problem
- And there might be a real psychological need to talk to someone about something that has happened to you when you have been hurt, and this can be therapeutic if it is done with the right heart
- If this is necessary, then choosing the right person very carefully is important
- But, if you truly Forgive the person you will not GOSSIP about them
- Talking about how you have been hurt WITH THE GOAL of hurting that person's reputation or credibility is just another form of punishing them
- If you share your pain with someone - first examine your motives in doing so
- Make sure you are not trying to make the offender look bad by doing so
- One of my favorite quotes from Shakespeare is about damaging someone's good name and ruining their reputation:

"Who steals my purse steals trash, 'tis nothing; 'twas mine, 'tis his, and has been slave to thousands.

But he who filches from me my good name, robs me of that which does not enrich him, but makes me poor indeed."

- When we go around telling others what someone has done, even though we claim to have forgiven them, then we are hurting them, when it really doesn't help us

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5) Forgiveness is being merciful

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- Matthew 5:7

7) Blessed are the **merciful**, for they shall receive mercy.

- We know two things about God:

a) He is merciful

b) He is just

- Because God is merciful, he does not want to punish us
- Because God is just, he must punish us
- So, how can both of these things be satisfied simultaneously?
- The solution is Jesus!
- Because Jesus died for our sins, God can still be true to Himself and still be merciful
- We are told to be God-like, and being merciful is a good way to start

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- Luke 6:36

36) Be **merciful**, even as your Father is merciful.

- Grace is getting what we **DON'T** deserve
- Mercy is **NOT** getting what we do deserve
- We're looking for both in our lives
- When we deal with those who have hurt us, what better way to start than to not give them what they "deserve" for what they've done

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6) Forgiveness is gracious

- The word translated *Gentleness* in the New Testament is a Greek word that means "forbearance" or "tolerance"
- Timothy says that the Lord's Servant must "correct his opponents with Gentleness"
- The idea behind the word is, *"Do not make a rigorous stand against your enemy even when you are clearly in the right"*
- Be Gentle with them
- This implies an exceedingly rare act of grace
- Graciousness is withholding certain facts you know are true, so as to leave your enemy's reputation unscathed
- Graciousness is shown by what you DON'T say, even if what you could say would be true

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7) Forgiveness is on the inside

- Forgiveness can be a show
- Forgiveness can be only on the outside

- But, if we don't truly forgive on the inside, it will come out on the outside
- You can't hide Fake
- Eventually, your hypocrisy cries out louder than your lies

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- Matthew 12:34

34) You brood of vipers! How can you speak good, when you are evil?
For **out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.**

- If we have not truly forgiven someone, it will come out sooner or later
- It may be easier to forgive when we know that the person who offended us is truly sorry for what they did, but if you must have that knowledge before you forgive, you may never have the victory over your bitterness
- If you think that you are not required to forgive unless your offender has first repented, then you are missing out on a lot of Forgiveness
- Most people you must forgive probably don't think that they did anything wrong
- 90% of the people that you need to forgive will never even know that what they did hurt you or that you have forgiven them
- But, God knows, and that is ultimately why we forgive

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8) Forgiveness is the **absence of bitterness**

- When someone has hurt you, you will naturally feel bitter towards them
- Bitterness will manifest itself in many ways: losing your temper, high blood pressure, irritability, sleeplessness, depression, isolation
- Getting rid of bitterness is important in the matter of reconciliation

- If you have no bitterness in your heart towards the person, then you won't feel any guilt or shame if you don't completely rebuild the relationship
- Bitterness will only go away when you truly wish the person who offended you well in all they seek or do

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9) Forgiveness is forgiving God

- Oddly enough, if we are bitter over something that has happened to us, it sometimes comes back to us holding God responsible for it
- Our bitterness is often traceable to a resentment of God
- We know that God works in our lives, and deep in our hearts we often believe that God allowed bad things to happen in our lives
- No one really knows why God allows evil and suffering to continue in the world
- But, one thing we know, is that He does it in order to help shape and groom us as Christians
- God causes things to work together for good
- God doesn't want to hurt us just for fun
- He causes the evil things that happen to us to change us and mold our characters
- A big part of this process is realizing that God does no wrong, and you being upset with God is not right
- You have to let that go, and "forgive God"
- Don't let what happened to you dampen your relationship with God, or weaken your faith
- Now I want to take a moment to circle back around to a phrase we mentioned earlier...

FORGIVE AND FORGET

- Remember the verse we talked about?

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- 1st Corinthians 13:5 NIV

5) ... (Love) **keeps no record of wrongs.**

- The only reason we keep record of wrongs is so that we can use them later
- We might acknowledge academically that it is God's job to avenge, but emotionally we feel that it's our job to help Him out a bit by punishing the person who hurt us
- Agape is not a feeling, it is an act of will
- Keeping a record of wrongs is also an act of will - A choice NOT to Love - It is the most natural, easy choice for us to make, but it is the wrong choice

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- James 3:5-6

5) So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great things. **How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire!**

6) And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell.

- The ironic thing is that instead of "getting something off our chest", and making everything better, our words can cause an uncontrollable fire to start and destroy everything
- Fires grow!
- If I was to pour water all over one of these chairs, it would be wet, but it wouldn't spread to the other chairs

- If I pour fire all over a chair, by the time the Fire Department comes this entire building will be gone
- SO... If we keep a record of wrongs, we will most likely end up making things a LOT WORSE for OURSELVES, instead of better
- This simple fact also applies to "*imaginary conversations*" - Those internal dialogues with yourself in which you can't get "what they did" off your mind, and you fantasize about what you should have said, and what you'll say the next time the opportunity comes up
- You can have the same victory in your own heart - If you find yourself have a conversation like that, then remind yourself to keep your thoughts positive and wholesome
- Here's the tricky part... Not keeping a record of wrongs also means that you can't keep a record of the things that you have done **RIGHT!**
- We are trying to learn to live by God's grace
- It is just as dishonoring to God's grace to keep a record of you rights, as it is to keep a record of other's wrongs
- All you are doing is saying that you are right in order to make someone else look bad
- You may have a short list of wrongs that others have done, but you probably have an even longer list of all the times that you have been right
- What's the difference?
- Love not only tears up the record of wrongs but also the list of rights
- If you are going to truly forgive people you need to destroy any records you might use to vindicate yourself
- If you don't have a huge list of rights in your head, then you won't be able to use it later to say the dreaded words:
 - "*I knew it all along*"

- *"Do you see now what I meant?"*

- *"You should have listened to me in the first place"*

- And, the big one... ***"I told you so!"***

- Spiritual Maturity means to forget what they did that was wrong, and to forget what you did that was right
- It is very rare that we actually deserve the vindication that we think we deserve...
- If vindication truly is deserved, then it will come... Because God is Just
- At the end of our Study we are going to talk about Forgiving Yourself
- I think that forgiving yourself is one of the hardest parts of this process
- But, it's one of the more crucial parts
- Forgiving yourself means to experience the love that keeps no record of wrongs
- This kind of love is a choice, and to get to the place where we choose to forgive ourselves is no easy task
- It's impossible to forget what you have done, so you often end up in a position where you say, *"I know that God has forgiven me, but I can never forgive myself"*
- Like we talked about forgiving others, forgiving ourselves is also a life long commitment
- Forgiving yourself really is the key
- Forgiving yourself will set you free in ways that you may have never before experienced... But, that's a later class...