

# FIVE FORKS BRETHREN IN CHRIST CHURCH

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**SERMON:** *It's who I am. It's what I do.*

**SERIES:** *Distinct*

**SCRIPTURES:**

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**DATE:** *2021 - 4 - 11*

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*\*Credit to Mary Poplin; CS Lewis; John Ortberg; Faith Matters Article*

Well good morning, it so great to worship with you. Want to say welcome to all of you here in this room and many gathered on-line, at home, tuning in to the live stream.

Have you ever thought about **who you are** at the very core of your being? If someone was describing you what would they say about you?

You know, I was thinking, that we put forth so much effort to be **Distinct (SERIES TITLE SLIDE)** in certain aspects of our lives.

Takes hours to be an expert gamer, doesn't it? We will lift weights, run, change our diet, rearrange our schedules, spend money on fitness machines to have a distinct body physique. We'll put resources into hair products or skin care products etc. We'll put resources into our cars and athletic equipment and home décor, vacations. We'll go out of our way to get our kids into all kinds of athletic or musical or academic endeavors.

Why? Because we want to excel, stand above the rest in those areas of life. We want to be known for them. **It's who we are. It's what we do.**

It got me thinking, what if we were to put that same kind of efforts and intentionality in living each moment of each day like Jesus? What would say then about who we are?

Last week was such a great Easter celebration. A reminder about the event that lies at the center of our faith. The reason we follow Jesus is because we believe that the tomb was empty...not because someone played the best April fools joke ever, but because this time Jesus got up and walked out. I shared this quote last week, it's great though isn't it? **"If someone can predict their own death and resurrection and then actually pull it off...you should give your life to that person."** That's Jesus.

This event, should cause us to live differently at the very core of our being. It should change who we are.

For the next two weeks I want to talk about two concepts, two familiar words, that flow out of the Easter story, that are at the heart of following this Jesus so much so, that I believe these two concepts are part of what distinguishes us from the rest of the world.

It's who we are. It's what we do.

It doesn't mean you won't see these characteristics in peoples and cultures outside of Christianity, you will. But I think that because both of these words culminate in and flow out of the Easter story, they are central to our lives in a way they are not for people who don't follow Jesus.

This means that they should look a little different in our lives and they should be increasingly more prevalent the longer we walk with Jesus.

Any idea what two concepts we are talking about?

**Forgiveness and Grace.**

So this morning, I want to talk about a little bit about

## **I. Distinct forgiveness.**

David Benner – **The most important single concept in Christianity is that of forgiveness.**

And I'll tell you why...

### **1. We were made by loving relationship for loving relationship.**

God created human beings out of love to be in relationship with Him and relationship with each other. "It is not good for man to be alone." We were created for community and loving relationship.

But, there is something universally true about all people...everybody get your pen out...take note on this...

### **2. We are not perfect.**

On a daily basis we fail to love and live in harmonious relationship with one another.

All you have to do is be around people and you will soon realize this is the case.

In my house, there is failure to get along with each other over all kinds of things. Like who gets to sit where at the dinner table? Who gets to play the iPad first? Who gets to choose what we watch on television? Who gets the bigger cookie? And that's just Jenny and me...not including the kids.

And in our world, there is all kinds of fighting and quarrelling with each other...

Or on a larger scale, just within the last year we have failed to get along on issues related “racism, police brutality, voting rights, where you come down on the political spectrum.”

And far too often, our response to imperfect people is: vengeance. You hurt me I hurt you back. There’s a phrase we use in our world for this...it’s called **getting even**.

And this it is not unique to us, it has been around for centuries. We might call this...

### **A. The way of Lamech.**

Let me explain. There’s a man in the Old Testament, who shows up in Genesis chapter 4. His name is Lamech. You are likely more familiar with Lamech’s father...

#### **Methushael.**

There are only few verses involving Lamech, but they are profound and powerful words.

**<sup>19</sup> Lamech married two women** (now there’s his first problem, when it comes to dealing with fighting and quarreling), **one named Adah and the other Zillah...**

**<sup>23</sup> Lamech said to his wives, “...listen to me; wives of Lamech, hear my words.** (Ready listen...

**I have killed a man for wounding me, a young man for injuring me. <sup>24</sup> If Cain is avenged seven times, then Lamech seventy-seven times.**

In other words, Cain sought vengeance and killed his brother, how much more will I get vengeance. Lamech’s way is vengeance, 77 times upon the one who has hurt him.

You hurt me, I hurt you back. It is often our way of dealing with people who are less than perfect.

Sadly, these are the only verses in Scripture associated with Lamech, this is what he is known for, this is what make Lamech distinct...vengeance...killing a man who has wounded him.

But the way of vengeance has never resolved the problem of human imperfection. Revenge and retaliation does not restore, heal loving relationships. The problem with getting even is that no one ever thinks the score is finally even.

Will the Palestinians ever get even with the Israeli's? Will the Bloods ever get even with the Crips on the streets of Los Angeles? They may go on killing each other until they are all dead...but they will never get even.

Vengeance begets vengeance.

**“The Rule of an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth cannot sustain itself forever; ultimately both parties end up blind and toothless.”** Ghandi

And it actually leads to one of the most poignant statements in all of Scripture, as God views the vengeance and the violence that begins to permeate humanity.

**Genesis 6 - <sup>5</sup> The LORD saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time. <sup>6</sup> The LORD regretted that he had made human beings on the earth, and his heart was deeply troubled.**

And so God has to come up with another solution to human imperfection and sin and hurt. Call it a vaccine to remove this toxic heart of vengeance that permeates our

lives, something that will restore and heal loving relationships. God's vaccine is called "forgiveness".

**"Forgiveness is the name of love practiced among people who love poorly. And the hard truth is all people love poorly."** Henri Nouen

So let's take a look at Jesus alternative answer to human imperfection.

### **B. The way of Jesus.**

Let's turn to Matthew 18...it all starts with a conversation between Peter and Jesus.

Peter comes to Jesus one day and says **"Suppose someone's hurt me. I know I'm supposed to forgive. But how many times should I forgive? Up to seven times?"**

The concern behind Peter's question is the same concern many of us have with imperfect people... *"At what point is it ok for me not to have to forgive anymore? When am I justified in holding a grudge and speaking badly about someone or getting even or you know letting someone really have it?"*

Now, Peter probably thought he was being pretty generous with his level of forgiveness. Peter is likely familiar with Lamech's story and the 77 times vengeance. And he's likely familiar with Jewish law that says, "An eye for eye, a tooth for a tooth..." and he's probably familiar with the Rabbi's tradition that said "there was an obligation to forgive someone up to three times."

If Peter was influenced by the rabbinic thinking he probably thought he was being pretty generous...he says "up to seven times?"

He was doubling the legalistic amount of forgiveness and throwing in one extra for good measure!

Imagine Peter's response when Jesus tells him, **"I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times."**

Of course the important thing is to not get caught up on the number. That's what Peter was doing. *"Ok I'll keep track and forgive someone 77 times, then I'm justified in not forgiving."*

Jesus point is, there is no end. You just keep forgiving.

More than that, on a deeper level, do you see what is going on here with these numbers of forgiveness? Jesus is reversing the way of Lamech. There's a different way of dealing with human imperfection and Jesus raises the bar for his followers.

And so to emphasize his point, Jesus tells a story about forgiveness...Jesus says think about it like this.

**"...the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. <sup>24</sup> As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand bags of gold<sup>[h]</sup> was brought to him."**

Picture, the founder-President-CEO of the largest and most successful tech Start-up Company in the world. The head honcho, the boss, the "old man behind the desk", the owner, the oldest person in the organization. (A company like that in our day, the person has to be at least 25 years old.)

Anyways, he calls a management team meeting. It turns out that during auditing time, it was discovered that his VP (vice president)...of the company...was embezzling funds, got caught and now owes a huge debt.

I have read differing opinions on exactly how much 10,000 bags of gold is equivalent to in modern language...You can think about it like this...sometimes when young kids are arguing about who has more of something, you know how they start making up numbers. Like who has more toys. I have 10 toys. Well I have 100 toys. Well I have 1000 toys. Well I have a millions toys. I have a million-billion-gazillion toys. And then there's always that one kid whose always smarter than everyone else and he's who says, well I have infinite. That's similar to the idea behind the debt.

The point is, it's an astronomical sum of money the VP can never pay back.

**<sup>25</sup> Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt.**

He has no hidden assets, no rich uncle, no lottery winnings. He will be thrown into jail, he will be sold into slavery – and not just him, but his whole family.

The VP stands before his peers, stockholders, and his boss. Doomed.

**<sup>26</sup> “At this the servant fell on his knees before him. ‘Be patient with me,’ he begged, ‘and I will pay back everything.’**

The VP falls on his knees. *“I know I’m guilty. I know what I owe. But please give me just a little more time.”*

Now, his plea is laughable. Because when you owe zillions, more time will not help. Jesus listeners all know this. That's not how it works between debts and debtors.

They are all too familiar with the way of Lamech...an eye for an eye. Make it even.

In fact, when it comes to debt every economy that has ever existed has been founded on this one rule: **You owe, you pay.** In today's world we use a metaphor to express this concept. Someone who lends money is often referred to as a "loan shark." Not a loan bunny. Not a loan puppy. Not a loan kitty. It's a loan shark.

You owe. You pay. You've been forgiven three times. Now you're out of chances.

The crowds watch, they listen to Jesus with eagerness...but they all know how these kind of stories end. VP will get what he deserves.

But here is where Jesus breaks from the typical wisdom of the day.

As the CEO looks down at the man before him and his family...something happens in his heart. His heart fills with compassion. His eyes fill with tears. His lips tremble as he speaks...quietly and kindly...he says...

***"You don't owe a thing. Your debt is forgiven."***

In an instant, in two short sentences, the man is forgiven. His debt is completely wiped away. Jesus is starting a new kind of economy with imperfect people. The man will not go to jail. He will not be a slave. He will not lose his family. He may keep what he owns. That's what forgiveness does.

Folks, forgiveness, plain and simple, means letting go of the wrong done to you...

Forgiveness is the decision not to try to inflict a reciprocal amount of pain on everyone who has caused you hurt.

When we forgive, we are giving up our right to hurt the other person back. You choose not to hold the wrong against the other person and keep bringing it up. You

don't talk to other people about it. You choose not to allow your mind to linger on it. It means not holding onto bitterness or grudges (MacDonald 462).

I was trying to think of an illustration to help us all grasp the magnitude of this. And I came across this real life story...

**VIDEO: 00:15 – 3:18** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o2BITY-3Mp4>

This is the way of Jesus. Extravagant, limitless, debt-canceling, life-changing forgiveness.

It is...**The most important single concept in Christianity...**

Now let's just pause here for a minute because I know forgiveness always brings up all kinds of questions. CS Lewis has this great line, he writes...**“Everyone says forgiveness is a lovely idea, until they have something to forgive...”**

### **C. Yeah but...**

#### **1. Isn't forgiveness, then, a license to sin.**

If we just go canceling debts, won't people just get away with all kinds of wrong?

I think it's important to remember that forgiveness is one aspect of a larger concept...which is **loving relationships**. Love forgives. But love also involves **accountability**. Forgiveness, doesn't mean we excuse, condone or overlook bad behavior. Forgiveness does not mean that there are no consequences or that we don't set up boundaries.

There's a story in the OT about the prophet Nathan confronting King David with his sin. He had an affair with Bathsheeba and then killed her husband Uriah. Nathan confronts David with his sin. And David is conscience-stricken.

**2 Samuel 12 - <sup>13</sup> Then David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the LORD."**

**Nathan replied, "The LORD has taken away your sin. You are not going to die.**

**<sup>14</sup> But because by doing this you have shown utter contempt for<sup>a</sup> the LORD, the son born to you will die."**

Forgiveness and consequences.

Yeah but...

## **2. I just can't forget.**

Have you heard people use that phrase, "forgive and forget"?

It's just not helpful phrase in thinking about forgiveness. I think this phrase comes from the fact that sometimes Scripture writers use language about "God forgetting our sin" and say "see therefore you'll know you've really forgiven someone when you can't ever remember what they did anymore." But when Scripture talks about God forgetting our sins, it does not mean that God has a memory retrieval problem. Rather it means that our past sins are no longer held against us. God doesn't hold a grudge against you for your sin.

In fact, the phrase, "forgive and forget" is counter-intuitive to forgiveness. If you could forget the wrong, you wouldn't need to forgive someone, because you wouldn't remember it anyway.

There is no way realistically for ?? to forget what ?? did. She lives everyday remembering that her son was taken from her.

Forgiveness does not mean forgetting. But it does mean, even when we remember the hurt and pain, we choose not to act out of vengeance or bitterness or ill-will toward the other person.

This is why forgiveness, especially related to deep wounds, is often a long process. Forgiveness is often a daily choice.

One day, in heart you don't feel that bitterness towards someone and you think you've forgiven them. But then the next day you feel it creeping back in. It doesn't mean you haven't forgiven, it simply means forgiveness is a process.

So,

## **II. How do we respond?**

The first step is to

### **A. Receive God's forgiveness.**

Do you ever think about the debt that you owe? Sin is not a popular concept to talk about in our world, but Jesus makes clear in his teaching there are things we do that are wrong...that's called sin. We have to come to terms with that.

God I lied again today. God I lost my temper again. God I spoke badly about someone behind their back today. God I wasn't completely honest. God I put my trust in my money again this week. God you know the thoughts I had about that person or that group of people. God I closed my eyes to the poor. God I turned a blind eye towards racism. God I put myself first.

I was dreaming one time that I died and arrived at the Gates of Heaven. And St. Peter was there to welcome me and as we were walking the streets of heaven I noticed all of these clocks everywhere...with names on them. Like there was a clock had Moses on it and King David. But I noticed they were ticking at different speeds. So I asked St. Peter, "What are all those clocks for?"

And he said, "Those aren't clocks, those are sin-o-meters". Everyone on earth has a sin-o-meter. Every time you sin the hands on your meter will move."

And I began notice meters of people I recognized there was a sin-o-meter for Pastor Ray. Tick. Tick. Tick. And for Pastor Chris. And for Pastor Bill. Tick. Tick. And for Pastor Brady Tick. Tick. Tick.

Eventually, I started looking for my own meter. And I started feel pretty good when I couldn't find it. So I said to St. Peter "I don't see my meter, I guess, guys like me don't have one."

St. Peter, "Oh your sin-o-meter, it's in God's office. He uses it as His ceiling fan."

I have a sin-o-meter and so do you. And it's taking away and once you come to recognize that you'll realize you have a debt you'll never be able to repay.

And it's a horrible feeling. Knowing you did something wrong and deserving of consequences hangs over your head. It causes shame and remorse, embarrassment and regret. It can start to overpower our lives and it robs us of joy and contentment and self-confidence.

The other night I was putting our daughter Adalyn to bed. And she had done something a little bit earlier, that she knew she shouldn't do and she had received consequences for bad behavior. But as we were getting ready for bed it was kind of like the shame and embarrassment and regret of what she had done, hit her all at

one time. And the poor little girl started to tear up and she “Daddy, I’m such a bad girl.” That’s what our sin does to us, that’s how it makes us think. I’m such a bad person.

And it was all I could to hold it together. And I had to get down on my knees and put my arms around her and hug her and hold her for a little while and just remind her, “No, no, no sweetie. What you did was wrong and we’re gonna work on not doing that any more. But you are not a bad girl. And daddy loves you so much.”

And it just kind reminded me of that story Jesus told and the servant who couldn’t pay and how the master said, “You don’t owe a thing. Your debt is forgiven.”

You see, the King in the story, the CEO, is God. And the embezzling VP, that’s you and me. All human beings we owe an enormous debt that we will never be able to pay back and at Easter God pays the debt for us.

Remember Jesus hanging on that Roman cross, last week, Easter story...what does Jesus say... “Father forgive them...” forgive all those spitting on me, laughing at me, beating me, killing me...forgive them.

John, one of Jesus closest followers wrote this in a letter...it’s one of those great memory verses to hang on to.

**1 John 1:9 - If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just he will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.**

See what I’m learning more and more is that I, Shaun, need someone who will cancel my debts. Who, when he knows the mess that I often make, won’t hold my worst moments against me?

And when I look around this world, I'll just tell you it becomes hard to find that kind of forgiveness anywhere.

But there is one place where you can find this kind of forgiveness...it's at the foot of the cross of Calvary, where Jesus opens his arms wide and says, "Shaun, daddy love you so much and **Your debt is forgiven. You don't owe a thing.**"

Maybe you have been hanging to some shame and regret in your life. Your failures and your brokenness are overwhelming.

I want to encourage you to come to the foot of calvary, to the cross...humble yourself...and receive God's forgiveness.

This is why Easter, the Cross of Jesus is at the heart of Christianity. It shows us the heart of God. He feels compassion, his eyes fill with tears, his lips tremble out of his great love us...as he chooses to the pay debt we could never pay.

And then second...I just want to ask you to consider...

### **B. Is there someone in your life you need to forgive?**

Paul wrote to that early group of Jesus followers...**"Forgive as the Lord forgave you."**

In fact, Jesus prayed...**"Forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors."**

And right after concluding this prayer Jesus affirms this concept...**"For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your Heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins your father will not forgive your sins."**

**There is no slightest suggestion that we are offered forgiveness on any other terms. It is made perfectly clear that if we do not forgive we shall not be forgiven. There are no two ways about it.** (Lewis 116)

Jesus doesn't give us any wiggle room on this.

Part of the reason, I believe that Christian forgiveness is so distinct from the world, is because it is offered even to our enemies. Jesus said, **“If you love those who love you what reward will you get, do not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your own people what are you doing more than others? Do not even the pagans do that.”**

We live in a world that so desperately needs a group of people who will be willing to offer this distinct, incredible, extravagant forgiveness to others.

Is there someone you've holding something against? Someone you've been harboring bitterness towards. Someone you need to reach out to.

You must forgive as the lord forgave you.

It just may be the most important concept our faith has to offer!