

The title of this morning's sermon is, *"I Will Remember Their Sins No More."*

On Sunday mornings we're working our way through Luke's gospel verse by verse and we find ourselves in the middle of the parable of the prodigal son, but for Scripture reading open to 2 Samuel 1. Please stand with me for the reading of God's Word. We will start at verse 17...

**2 Samuel 1:17 And David lamented with this lamentation over Saul and Jonathan his son, 18 and he said it should be taught to the people of Judah; behold, it is written in the Book of Jashar. He said: 19 "Your glory, O Israel, is slain on your high places! How the mighty have fallen! 20 Tell it not in Gath, publish it not in the streets of Ashkelon, lest the daughters of the Philistines rejoice, lest the daughters of the uncircumcised exult. 21 "You mountains of Gilboa, let there be no dew or rain upon you, nor fields of offerings! For there the shield of the mighty was defiled, the shield of Saul, not anointed with oil. 22 "From the blood of the slain, from the fat of the mighty, the bow of Jonathan turned not back, and the sword of Saul returned not empty. 23 "Saul and Jonathan, beloved and lovely! In life and in death they were not divided; they were swifter than eagles; they were stronger than lions. 24 "You daughters of Israel, weep over Saul, who clothed you luxuriously in scarlet, who put ornaments of gold on your apparel.**

You may be seated. Let's pray.

I appreciated Jake covering for me last Sunday so that I could enjoy the week at camp without a sermon to prepare. Or I should say I appreciated Jake covering for me until the end of his sermon when he said that he is going to finish preaching through a book of the Bible before I do. He thinks he's funny. He might finish a book before me...unless I don't let him preach again :-).

We're going to lay a foundation for the sermon by talking about the way we forgive, and then we will talk about the way God forgives.

Forgiveness is one of the most common topics I deal with in marriage counseling. When I meet with people there is often hurt, resentment, or even bitterness. To help diffuse the hurt, resentment, or bitterness I talk about asking for forgiveness the right way.

**Proverbs 15:1 A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.**

There are not many **softer** answers that turn away wrath than apologies made the right way.

We have talked before about how to apologize and ask for forgiveness, so I am not going to spend much time on it other than to offer two pieces of advice...

First, avoid the word "but" because it destroys apologies.

When an "apology" contains this word, it is an excuse disguised as a confession and usually serves to upset the person receiving the apology even more, because they can tell the person apologizing is not sorry about what they've done.

For example, you wouldn't want to say:

- "I'm sorry, BUT if you hadn't done that..."
- "I am sorry, BUT this happened..."
- "I'm sorry, BUT I never would've done this if not for..."

Second, avoid the word "you" because it is often a manipulative way of shifting blame and making the other person feel bad about being hurt or upset:

- "I'm sorry YOU did this..."

- “Well, I’m sorry YOU are mad...”
- “I’m sorry YOU are offended...”

Instead, apologizing the right way involves two steps:

1. First, say, “I am sorry for...” or “I am sorry I...” followed by confessing the offense committed.
2. Second, say, “Will you forgive me?”

The second step is important because it does three things:

1. First, it reveals you recognize you have done something requiring forgiveness
2. Second, it shows you are not minimizing your actions
3. Third, it engages the other person and requires a response

Now at this point in counseling when one person apologizes the right way I will often interrupt before the other person can respond, because I have found people will say “I forgive you” when they have not forgiven the person.

We have been so conditioned as Christians to be forgiving that we will say we forgive people when we don’t know what that means.

So, I will say...

*“Don’t say, ‘I forgive you yet.’ If you say those words you need to understand what’s involved. You’re committing to:*

- *not think about the person’s offense*
- *not hold the person’s offense against him or her*
- *refuse to bring up the offense in the future*

*So much is involved in forgiving it is reasonable you might need time to be able to forgive.”*

There have been times that I have hurt Katie and asked her to forgive me and she said, “I am not ready to forgive you yet.”

When people say that they need time to forgive they should not be made to feel guilty or ashamed about not being able to forgive at that moment. Instead, it is a demonstration that they are taking forgiveness seriously, and they should be given the time they need.

Because forgiveness takes such immense effort when we think of asking for forgiveness we wonder if we will be forgiven, We know how difficult it is to forgive, so we wonder if people will forgive us.

And here’s the question...

Why is forgiveness so difficult for us?

It’s difficult because we can’t stop thinking about what people have done to us:

- We can’t choose NOT to remember people’s offenses.
- We can’t say, “I will forgive you by remembering your sins no more.”

But God can do this, and it brings us to lesson one...

### **Lesson One: God doesn’t forgive like us.**

Listen to these familiar verses...

**Genesis 1:26** Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” 27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

God made us in His image, but we have the tendency to switch this around and make God into our image. This is one of the ways we commit idolatry.<sup>i</sup>

—  
The way we make God into our image is:

- We think of Him like we think of ourselves.
- We project ourselves on Him and think He does things the way we do things.
- We think if something is hard for us, it must be hard for God.

—  
For this morning’s sermon what I want to focus on one specific way we make God into our image, and it is regarding forgiveness:

- We believe that God forgives the way we forgive.
- I would even go so far as to say we believe that God finds it difficult to forgive, because we find it difficult to forgive. Our struggle must be God’s struggle.

—  
But listen to this quote from Ed Welch...

*“You may think that God is no better than you. In other words, you couldn’t imagine forgiving someone seventy times seven, so you can’t believe that God would. If this is the way you are thinking, then you are believing a lie. God is not like us. His forgiveness is not like ours. Don’t use your own weakness as the standard by which you understand God’s greatness! Just listen as He reveals Himself in His Word.”*

That’s good, isn’t it...and very true.

—  
If you got to watch the VBS play, take your minds back to it.

One of the characters – played wonderfully by Clara Criss – talked about the three “omni” words:

- Omniscient, which means God is all-knowing
- Omnipresent, which means God is all-present
- Omnipotent, which means God is all all-powerful

Do any of us fully understand these attributes?

No.

And because we don’t fully understand these attributes, they cause us fascination and sometimes frustration.

Last week I was listening to John Piper recount a famous story from early in his Christian life that he has shared many times. He said he listened to a professor – and I quote – *“who was confronting me with these texts that were making me very angry and making me cry in the afternoon as I read my Bible.”*

John found the professor and he recounts, *“I pulled my pen out of my pocket, and I stood in front of him. And after a few minutes of heated discussion, I held my pen in front of his face, and I dropped it on the floor. And with far less respect than a 22-year-old ought to have for a teacher, I said, ‘I dropped it. I dropped it’ — as though that would settle the issue, as though there were no divine authority or power that might have somehow governed my dropping it.”*<sup>ii</sup>

He was struggling with God's omniscience, or omnipotence, or both.

Because God is omnipotent, we like to try to imagine things He can't do. A ridiculous example that circulates through the church is, "Could God make a rock so big He couldn't lift it?"

I don't think there is any value in entertaining this question, but there is one question we should consider especially in a discussion of God's forgiveness, and it's this...

Can God forget things?

In particular, can He forget the sins we have committed?

This is an important theological question because:

- If God can forget things, how can He be said to be omniscient, or all-knowing?
- If God can't forget things, how can He say He forgives us?
  - How can He say He won't hold it against us?
  - Take your mind back to the beginning of the sermon: How can God say he forgives us...any more than angry people in marriage counseling can say they forgive their spouse for what they did, because they can't forget it.

The biblical and theological answer is that God doesn't forget our sins...but He chooses not to remember them.

To be clear, in God's omnipotence He can choose what NOT to remember.

God chooses not to remember our sins, and this is a theme in Scripture:

- **Isaiah 43:25 I WILL NOT REMEMBER YOUR SINS.** He doesn't say, "I will forget them."
- **Jeremiah 31:34 I will forgive their iniquity, and THEIR SIN I WILL REMEMBER NO MORE.**
- **Hebrews 8:12 and 10:17 THEIR SINS AND LAWLESS DEEDS I WILL REMEMBER NO MORE.**

Bad theology is saying God forgets our sins. Good theology is saying God chooses not to remember them.

God also has the power to take our sins and remove them far from us. Here are two verses making this point...

**Micah 7:19 [God] will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea**

We have technology that allows us to search out the deepest depths of the ocean. But in the ancient world the sea was viewed as being bottomless. Because of that, to say that our sins are cast into the depths of the sea is to say that they are removed from us as far as possible. And then He chooses not to remember them.

**Psalm 103:12 As far as the east is from the west, so far does [God] remove our transgressions from us**

You can't get much further than east from west.

The idea is God separates our sin from us as far as possible. And then He chooses not to remember them.

Last sermon we talked about David's sins of adultery and murder: two of the seemingly worst sins.

When he repented...

**2 Samuel 12:13 Nathan said to David, "The Lord also has put away your sin."**

That isn't really worded the way we would expect, is it?

We would expect Nathan to say:

- "The Lord has forgiven your sin."
- Or "The Lord has covered your sin,"...because this is the Old Testament when sin was covered or atoned for by animal sacrifices.

But by saying God put away David's sin it creates the imagery of casting it into the depths of the sea or removing it from David as far as the east is from the west.

—  
I want to give you two of my favorite biblical examples of God's forgiveness.

Hopefully you're still in **2 Samuel 1**.

Here's the context for these verses. David just received the news that Saul died.

For a moment think about what that means, so you can put yourself in David's place and imagine how you would feel if you received this news:

- It means the man who had been single-handedly ruining the nation David loves and will be ruling over is dead
- It means the man who has been trying to murder David for years is dead
- It means the man who drove David away from his family into exile and took some of the best years of his life from him is dead
- It means the one man who has been standing between David and the throne is dead

With that in mind, look at verse seventeen...

**2 Samuel 1:17 And David LAMENTED WITH THIS LAMENTATION OVER SAUL and Jonathan his son,**

You can already tell that something is strange, can't you?

We understand David lamenting over his best friend Jonathan's death, but it also says David lamented over Saul's death.

And it is about to get even stranger...

**2 Samuel 1:18 and he said it should be taught to the people of Judah; behold, it is written in the Book of Jashar. He said:**

David wrote lots of songs, including many of the Psalms, but this is the only one I'm aware of that he told others to learn.

**2 Samuel 1:19 "Your glory, O Israel, is slain on your high places! How the mighty have fallen!"**

He called Jonathan and Saul the **glory of Israel**.

Notice it says **mighty** – plural. He isn't just calling Jonathan mighty, he calls Saul mighty. This is repeated three times in verses nineteen, twenty-five, and twenty-seven.

**2 Samuel 1:20 Tell it not in Gath, publish it not in the streets of Ashkelon, lest the daughters of the Philistines rejoice, lest the daughters of the uncircumcised exult.**

Because the Israelites were the Philistines' enemies, David knew when they learned Saul died they would rejoice, so David said the news shouldn't be spread there.

**2 Samuel 1:21 “You mountains of Gilboa, let there be no dew or rain upon you, nor fields of offerings! For there the shield of the mighty was defiled, the shield of Saul, not anointed with oil.**

Gilboa is where Saul and Jonathan died, so he wants the place cursed and for there to be no dew or rain.

**2 Samuel 1:22 “From the blood of the slain, from the fat of the mighty, the bow of Jonathan turned not back, and the sword of Saul returned not empty.**

David praises Saul's prowess in battle.

**2 Samuel 1:23 “Saul and Jonathan, beloved and lovely! In life and in death they were not divided; they were swifter than eagles; they were stronger than lions.**

Yes, you read that correctly: David didn't just say Jonathan was **beloved and lovely**. He said Saul was **beloved and lovely**.

**2 Samuel 1:24 “You daughters of Israel, weep over Saul, who clothed you luxuriously in scarlet, who put ornaments of gold on your apparel.**

He told the women of Israel to weep over Saul, because of how good he had been to them.

Now let me ask you this...

Despite how sinful Saul had been, in all David wrote about him, where is there any mention of any of his sins?

And this brings us to lesson two...

**Lesson Two: God says, “I will remember their sins no more,” (Part One) like David forgave Saul.**

When I read these verses I think...

*“Who in the world is the other person David's talking about besides Jonathan? He must be talking about a different Saul:*

- *Is he talking about Saul of Tarsus?*
- *Did God give David an Old Testament vision?”*

—  
Notice in verse 17 and 23 it says Saul and Jonathan. David wrote about them almost identically even though:

- Saul tried to murder David
- Jonathan tried to save David

How can this be considering they couldn't have been more opposite forces in David' life?

The answer is David chose not to remember Saul's sins.

—  
This is one of those places that reveal why David is the Man After God's Own Heart.

How did he have a heart after God's heart?

David forgave Saul like God forgives us:

- There is no mention of any of Saul's sins.
- David chose not to remember Saul's sins...like God chooses not to remember our sins.<sup>iii</sup>

---

Now go ahead and turn to **Luke 15**.

Let me give you an analogy that maybe you've heard before...

Every time we hurt someone it's like going to a fence and hammering a nail into it. When we ask for forgiveness, the person forgives us and takes the nail out of the fence, but the hole still remains.

This can be true:

- Even when we try to forgive the holes can remain.
- The relationship might never be the same.

---

Now take your mind back to the beginning of the sermon again...

Because we make God into our image, we assume that when we repent and ask for forgiveness the holes remain in our relationship with Him.

We believe God has forgiven us but:

- He is still mad
- He will hold it against us
- Things will never be the same

And interestingly who thought this?

The prodigal son.

Look at verse eighteen...

**Luke 15:18 I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. 19 I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants."**

The son thought he would repent, be forgiven, but the holes would remain.

The father would still remember his sins:

- Things would never be the same: **"I am no longer worthy to be called your son."**
- The father would hold it against him: **"From now on I will have to be one of your hired servants."**

---

Please understand the background to this parable...

Jesus preached this BECAUSE the prodigal son's thinking captures the thinking about God the Father in Jesus's day:

- You better approach God very cautiously and know exactly what you're going to say...like the prodigal son.
- If you sin badly enough, you are no longer worthy to be called God's son...or daughter...like the prodigal son.
- If you repent and turn back to God, you will spend the rest of your life as nothing more than a servant or slave...like the prodigal son.

So, Jesus preached this parable to destroy this view of God the Father in His day...and in our day.

Look at **verse 20**...

**Luke 15:20 And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. 21 And the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ 22 But the father said to his servants, ‘Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. 23 And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate.**

This brings us to part two of lesson two...

**Lesson Two: God says, “I will remember their sins no more,” (Part Two) like the Father forgave the prodigal son.**

This is the introduction to these verses. We will start digging into them next week.

For now, just notice the prodigal son was wrong in his view of his father’s forgiveness...and if we project ourselves on God, and assume He forgives like we do, we will be wrong in our view of our Heavenly Father’s forgiveness.

—  
It looks like the son has done nothing wrong. You could almost be bothered that the father didn’t say anything about what his son did.

Instead, it looks like the father rewarded him. He gives him the best robe, puts the ring on his hand, shoes on his feet, kills the fattened calf, and has a big party.

It doesn’t look like the son came back from a season of rebellious and immoral living. It looks like:

- He came home after graduating college
- Or he came home after serving his country
- Or he came home after inventing something that helps mankind

—  
You could read this and think there must be some third son we don’t know about, and the father mixed up this son with him, because there’s no way any reasonable, rational father would act this way toward a son coming home after living in complete rebellion and immorality.

But we read this because God does not forgive like us.

When God forgives us:

- The holes are removed.
- He says, “I will remember your sins no more.”

Thomas Adams said...

*“Sins are so remitted, it as if they had never been committed.”*

—  
I will be up front after service, and if you have any questions about anything I’ve shared, or I can pray for you in any way I would consider it a privilege to speak with you.

Let’s pray.

<sup>i</sup> This is why many of the false gods, or idols, throughout human history have resembled man more than the God of the Bible:

- They are petty
- They are immature

- 
- They are covetous
  - They are selfish

Basically, they look like man.

ii <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/the-absolute-sovereignty-of-god>

iii And one other application from this passage...

The way David viewed Saul is the same way you will be viewed the Judgment Seat of Christ:

- Because Christ has taken the punishment your sins deserve, those sins won't be remembered
- They won't be brought up
- They won't be held against you

The Lord will only view you like David saw. To put it simply, he will only see the good you have done...because the bad has been cast into the depths of the sea and separated from you as far as the east is from the west.