

## "Why Are You Crying?"

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Acts 10:34-44 • John 20:1-23

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There was a Sunday School teacher who had just finished her lesson on forgiveness and wanted to make sure that the kids understood. So she asked the class, "Can anyone tell me what you must do before you can be forgiven of sin?" All the kids sat quietly until finally one little boy in the back said, "You have to sin!"

As humans, we are pretty good about figuring out how to sin. We find creative ways to hurt other people and to hurt our relationship with God. What we're not very good at is forgiveness. But God is, and that's why we're here today. Over the past several weeks we have been studying the meaning behind the statements of the Apostles' Creed and so I think it's fitting that as we celebrate the Resurrection of Jesus we are also studying the statement in the Creed that says we believe in the forgiveness of sins.

More than anything else, Easter is about forgiveness.

Let me begin by saying that I am certainly not an expert on forgiveness. I struggle with it like I'm sure many of you do and there is a lot about forgiveness that I don't understand. I don't fully understand how to forgive or to be forgiven. I sometimes struggle with why God would even forgive me. The good news is that I don't have to fully understand forgiveness in order to accept it. However, to help us understand forgiveness better I've come up with the five P's of forgiveness: The Problem, The Personality, The Proof, The Process and The Prescription.

Let's begin with the *problem*. There are two areas where we all struggle with forgiveness. One is

in our relationship with God. There's not a person here who doesn't desperately need God's forgiveness, but that's not where our problem lies. Some of us aren't ready to admit that we need forgiveness. We look around at the terrible things other people do and we think, "I'm not as bad as *him*." But God doesn't grade on a curve. We all fall short of his standards for our lives.

Others of us, however, recognize how sinful we are and become overwhelmed with guilt and shame. We may begin to think that there is no way God could forgive *me*. These feelings for guilt are like weights tied to our ankles. The more guilt we feel the more weight we're dragging around. Hebrews 12:1 uses the image of running a race to describe living the Christian life. It says, "lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us." The only way to get rid of those weights is by forgiveness.

The other area where we need to know about forgiveness is in relationships with other people. It is simply a fact of life that as humans we will sometimes hurt others and sometimes be hurt by them. Meaningful relationships can only be built by being willing to ask for forgiveness and being willing to forgive.

So that's the *problem*. The second P is the *personality*. I'm talking about God's personality. Throughout the Bible God is portrayed as willing and even eager to forgive. 1 John 1:8-10 says, "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just

to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." What God wants is a relationship with you. How much? He loves you so much that He was willing to die on a cross to restore that relationship.

And that brings me to the third P this morning, the *proof*. Over and over again the New Testament says that we are saved by the death of Jesus. In theology this is called atonement. But the Bible is not exactly clear on how atonement works. In some places Scripture describes his death as a substitute for the punishment that we deserve. In other places Jesus is described as the perfect sacrificial lamb, and in yet other places Jesus is described as dying to conquer death.

Jesus loves us so much that he was willing to die to prove that we are forgiven. In Christ, God is saying, "you can betray me, you can hate me, you can misjudge me, and you can crucify me. But nothing you do can alter my love for you." So if Jesus' death on the cross is the proof of God's willingness to forgive us, the Resurrection is the proof of his power to forgive. Jesus was really dead, sealed up in a tomb and yet on that first Easter morning he was alive again.

That brings us to the fourth P, the *process*. The question now is what does this have to do with us? If I need to be forgiven and if God is eager to forgive, how do I experience that? In the Bible we find that we are able to experience God's forgiveness for ourselves through confession and repentance. The Greek word for repent is *metanoia*, which literally means a change of mind. In other words, to repent means to change our thinking. It means that we recognize what we are doing is sinful and determine to change. It implies a turning around of our behavior as well as our thinking. To repent means to stop running away from God and

turn back toward Him. Zechariah 1:3 says, "Return to me, says the LORD of hosts, and I will return to you."

Once we have changed our thinking about ourselves and about God we need to confess our sins to Him. Two of the most powerful words in the English language are "I'm sorry." When we have hurt someone - whether accidentally or on purpose - the first step to forgiveness is to apologize from the heart. It's the same in our relationship with Christ. When we have sinned against Him, the first step to forgiveness is to confess to Him. In our worship service you hopefully notice that we have a prayer of confession near the beginning of the service. Confession and forgiveness are what make worship possible. We recognize that the only way we can be a part of the church is because we are forgiven and we believe God when He tells us that we are forgiven.

Our final P, then, is the *prescription*. When we looked at the problem I said that we struggle with the idea that God forgives us, and also that we struggle to forgive others. Actually, the Bible makes it clear that these two are related. First of all, our passage from John 20 ends with the Risen Jesus saying, "If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld." We can take this statement several ways, but if nothing else, our ability to forgive other people affects their experience of God's forgiveness. As followers of Christ, if we refuse to forgive someone who has hurt us then they may miss out on experiencing God's forgiveness as well.

Second, Jesus was very clear that our ability to forgive other people affects our ability to experience God's forgiveness. In Matthew 6 Jesus says that if we forgive others their

"trespasses" then God will forgive us but if we don't forgive others, neither will God forgive us. What He is saying is that if your heart is bitter and unforgiving, you are not ready to accept God's forgiveness. Your own unforgiving attitude makes you *incapable* of being forgiven!

So what is it that stands in the way of you experiencing God's life-changing forgiveness? Has someone hurt you - maybe a spouse, a parent, a child, a friend? Do you feel like you've been cheated out of a job or promotion or some kind of blessing? Are you carrying around the weight of guilt for something in your past? Jesus invites you to lay those burdens down and take up his. He says, "my yoke is easy and my burden is light." That's because with Jesus comes the freedom that is only available with forgiveness. He died on the cross to prove that he wants to forgive you and he rose again that first Easter, proving that he has the power to forgive you. This Easter, put down the weight of sin and guilt and experience the freedom of forgiveness. Friends, believe the good news of the Gospel: In Jesus Christ you are forgiven. Hear it, believe it, and share it with others.

*Amen.*