The Unreasonable Jesus – Part Four

# That’s Just Unforgivable!

# (Matthew 6:14-15)

Welcome to Christ’s Community Church. We’re so glad to have you with us this morning as we’re wrapping up our series “The Unreasonable Jesus”. We’ve been looking at those words of Jesus which sometimes, at first glance, are just unreasonable because we can’t grasp the depth of their meaning.

Last week, we looked at Jesus words, “Do not judge” and discovered that what Jesus was really saying was that instead of peering into the lives of others, trying to find that little speck, that piece of sawdust in their eye, first we’re going to look in the mirror, removing the plank from our own eye. Because if we don’t see ourselves correctly, if we don’t deal with our own issues, we’re just going to project our own dysfunction into the lives of others and that’s not going to help anybody. And so, today what I want to do is go a little deeper, because one of the things that hasn’t changed over the course of history is our ability to offend one another.

As a matter fact, many of us have the spiritual gift of taking offense for the silliest things; and so we find ourselves at odds with one another and even years after the fact we allow an offense to get in the way, harming that relationship. In the Word of God today, Jesus is going to warn us that we can’t be in a right relationship with God when our relationship with others is so wrong. And so, his intention is that we would learn how to get it right with others so that we can worship God appropriately.

We’re going to continue studying from this series of teachings that Jesus gave that is known as the Sermon on the Mount. And in Matthew chapter 6, we discover Jesus teaching his disciples, and he begins in verse nine saying,

“This, then, is how you should pray…”

In other words, he was laying out an outline for them, not a prayer to be memorized or recited over and over again, but he was saying, “Pray in this manner, use this as a pattern of prayer” and he says:

"Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one” (Matthew 6:9-13).

Jesus teaches us to pray with adoration, confession, and thanksgiving as we make our requests because the purpose of prayer is to glorify God’s name, accomplishing his will on earth. And so, Jesus teaches us to put God’s concerns first, before we bring our own needs, praying for our daily provision, for forgiveness, for direction and protection. But then, in the next passage, Jesus attached a note, kind of like a PS, which is the focus for the message today.

Jesus tells us in verse 14 and 15, “Oh, and by the way…

“If you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins” (Matthew 6:14-15).

In other words, Jesus says, “After all that I’ve forgiven you, if you can’t forgive those who’ve offended you, that’s just unforgivable.”

And so, he includes this appendix to the prayer, expanding on verse 12, because if we’ve truly experienced God’s forgiveness, we need to understand that the forgiveness of God is not just flowing to us, but that the forgiveness of God flows through us. Therefore, because I’m forgiven, I can forgive, but how do we do this with all the pain and emotion that’s attached to each offense? How do we forgive like that? Well, number one, that kind of forgiveness begins with knowing the Father’s heart.

## 1. Knowing the Father’s Heart

Now, I know that any time we talk about forgiveness it creates a lot of tension and emotion, because so many people are carrying around incredible pain, they’ve been crushed and devastated by someone. And so, Jesus telling us that we must forgive can seem like cruel and unusual punishment, considering the emotional pain you’ve experienced because someone did you wrong, they hurt you, disappointed you, or betrayed you.

For many of you, it may have been someone who lied to you, someone who let you down, someone who didn’t pay you back, and they used you, took advantage of you, and broke their promise. Others of you, tragically many of you, have suffered from verbal, emotional, physical, or sexual abuse. Even now, many years later, you still feel that pain because you were the victim of someone that you trusted and who should’ve protected you.

In fact, I was just reading an article from Jared Pingleton, the director of Mental Health Care and Ministry for the American Association of Christian Counselors. And in this article, he wrote that every minute, 24 people are victims of domestic violence. Nearly 2,000 children are abused or neglected every single day. One in three girls and as many as one in four boys are sexually abused before the age of 18. And in addition to that, about 117 people commit suicide every day, and so more than anything else I want to acknowledge the pain. It’s inexcusable what someone did to you, and so how do we live out what Jesus taught us to do; how do we forgive, as we’ve been forgiven?

Well, I believe there’s a powerful clue in the prayer that Jesus taught us to pray. In verse nine, he said,

"This, then, is how you should pray: "'Our Father in heaven…” (Matthew 6:9).

Notice, he didn’t say, you should pray to “My Father” but he said, “Our Father.” In other words, we share him in common, he’s our Father and we’re his children. And so, our relationship with his other children matters to the heart of God.

As a parent this makes sense to me, because nothing grieves me more than when my children don’t get along. In fact, I don’t like it, but in my house there’s a whole lot of boasting, comparing, complaining, and even outright lies and accusations. And maybe you’ve heard this before in your house, but “He called me this, or she touched me, he took my toy, or he did this or that” and it goes on and on and on from sunup to sundown. And so, I often find myself praying as Jesus told us to pray, “Your kingdom come, your will be done,” because there’s nothing that grieves me more, nothing that breaks my heart more, than when my children don’t get along.

And so, I can understand why God would say in Galatians chapter 5, that those who live with hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions, and envy won’t share the glory of heaven with him, that their place would be on the outside, in the fiery lake of burning sulfur (Gal. 5:19-21; Rev. 21:8). I can feel the emotion of all that, I can understand why he would say you must be born again, because when you come into his house you’ve got to let go of all the hostility, antagonism, bitterness, hatred, and accusations against your brothers and sisters. And so, Jesus said, if you’re going to fight, if you can’t get along, if you won’t reconcile, you can just take it outside…

“…into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matt 8:12).

And that’s what I tell my kids all the time, just take it outside, come back when you’ve got it settled, come back when you’ve reconciled. And so, number two, our Father expects us to reconcile with his kids.

## 2. Reconcile with His Kids

Now, last week, we were talking about judging others and Jesus said, “Look in the mirror, take the plank out of your own eye, before you begin looking for the speck of dust in your brother or sister’s eye.” And this is so important, because if we don’t see ourselves correctly, how can we help anybody else with their own issues? Instead, we’re just projecting our own messed up lives on to them and trying to fix them from the platform of our own dysfunctional lives.

And so, what I want to do today is to back up a little bit so that we get the context for what Jesus was saying in Matthew chapter 6. Let’s turn back to chapter 5, at verse 21, where Jesus begins a series of theological upgrades, where he’s going to take some wisdom that’s been passed down and alluded to from the law of Moses, illustrating for us how he’s the perfect wisdom fulfilling the law. And so, he says,

"You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, “Do not murder… anyone who murders will be subject to judgment” (Matthew 5:21).

And then he proposes the concept that long before anything as violent or aggressive as that happens in our lives, it had already begun to happen in our hearts, and so he tells us in verse 22,

“Anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment.”

And he’s describing an unholy anger, an unsettled anger, a rage that is nursed inwardly until it explodes outwardly in words. He continues saying,

“Anyone who says to his brother, 'Raca,' is answerable to the Sanhedrin (Or in other words, will stand before the council or the court). But anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell” (Matthew 5:22).

And so, the scenario that Jesus is describing is the demonstration of a sinful heart; of angrily assuming a position of superiority over another by calling them a derogatory term such as Raca, which is a term of contempt, and then adding fuel to that fire by calling them a mindless fool. And he’s warning us, giving us insight that what starts in your heart doesn’t stay in your heart, what starts as a thought becomes a word which can actually erupt into a living hell in your life.

The word he uses here is “Gehenna” which is a garbage dump in the valley, south of Jerusalem, where there was always a smoldering fire consuming the city’s waste. And what he’s saying is that your home and your relationships can become like Gehenna, like that burning fire, because of the things that you allow to fester, smoldering in your heart. It’s that anger, that unresolved conflict, that offense that can make your heart a living hell.

And the reality is, that the closer the relationship, the greater the opportunity for offense. That’s why nobody can make you as furious as somebody that you really love. Nobody can hurt you as deeply as somebody whom you’ve given your heart to. And that’s why we often find ourselves wondering how we ever got here in the first place? You know, once you had such hope, joy, and excitement, but now a couple kids later you can barely stand to be in the room with one another. And that’s why Jesus was warning us to watch our emotions, watching what you think and what you say, because if you get something in your heart and you nurse it and rehearse it long enough it will literally become a smoldering garbage dump of fire in your relationship.

And it happens in so many different ways, but it always happens one offense at a time, and so we’re here this morning, gathered together, worshiping and smiling like everything’s okay and Jesus said in verse 23,

"If you’re offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift” (Matthew 5.23-24).

In other words, he’s stressing the importance of getting it right with others, not ignoring the fact that your relationship is going up in flames, and coming to worship when on the inside your full of anger, bitterness, and resentment. He’s not saying don’t come to church, but he’s saying get rid of the offense and then come and worship. You see, he knows that from time to time we all find ourselves in that place where the enemy starts to build a fence, separating us one offense at a time, dividing us one plank at a time, and we’re all easily offended, and so we fire back saying, “Raca, you fool.” But Jesus tells us that we need to deal with it, deal with it now he says in verse 25,

"Settle matters quickly with your adversary…” (Matthew 5:25).

Reconcile, deal with it now, do what you can even while you’re on the way. You see, it all started with a word, “Raca”, that small offense, but the enemy is going to come and blow things out of proportion. And so, Jesus is teaching us to settle matters quickly, and then number three, to drop our offenses against one another.

## 3. Dropping Your Offenses

He said this is so important that even if you’re in church, you’re at the altar, you’re worshiping and there remember that your brother or sister has an offense, “Go and settle matters quickly.” And so, we need to drop our offenses, reconciling with one another, because we can’t worship properly, we can’t connect with our God who’s forgiven us of all our sins, when we’re still holding rocks in our hands, we’re still holding offenses against our brother or sister and refusing to forgive. And so, we need to drop the offense, because if God dropped the charges against us, what offense is there in the universe that we can’t let go of. For us to live in a perpetual state of offense as a believer in Jesus Christ denies the very nature of the salvation that we’ve received.

You see, the forgiveness of God is not just flowing to us, the forgiveness of God flows through us, and therefore because we are forgiven, we can forgive. God has given us another way to deal with offense, he’s given us an example of someone who had every right to be offended, someone who had every right to hold a grudge, someone who had every right to turn away from us, but instead he opened up his arms and said,

“Father, forgive them, for they don’t know what they are doing” (Luke 23:34).

And it’s there in those outstretched arms on the cross where all relationships are restored. It was God who led the way, giving us an example to follow, so that we could learn from him, learning to drop the offense and settling matters quickly.

Now, I know there may be some of you, it may have been decades ago, months ago, or maybe even on the ride to church this morning, but someone hurt you and you’re holding onto it, you’re refusing to let it go, but if you would drop that offense, you would discover that forgiveness is the key that sets you free.

This morning if you’ve been trapped, overwhelmed by hurt, anger, and bitterness, what do you do with all the emotions? How do you deal with all of those emotions and forgive? Well, here’s what Jesus said to do, he said,

"Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” (Matthew 5:44).

In other words, you start by praying for the person who hurt you. You start by praying for the one who caused the offense. And you may not even feel like it, but you’ve got to let it go, and so you begin praying, and as you begin praying your heart begins to change. The amazing thing is that your prayer may not change them, it may not change your circumstances, but it will always change you. You see, it may not happen immediately, but at some point, you’ll recognize that just as you’ve been forgiven, with God’s help you can forgive. And so, your prayer is not denying the offense, it’s not pretending like it didn’t happen, it’s not explaining it away, but it’s dropping that rock, casting that offense as far away from you as you can.

The apostle Paul encourages us to do this in Colossians chapter 3, verse 13. He says,

“Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you” (Colossians 3:13).

And so, how do you forgive? You forgive as the Lord forgave you. You forgive the same way that God has forgiven you, with a forgiveness that you don’t deserve and a forgiveness that you could never earn. That’s the same way we forgive those who’ve hurt us or offended us, because forgiveness is merely passing the gift from one undeserving soul to another. And so, we give forgiveness the same way that we have received it, and Jesus promised,

“If you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you” (Matthew 6:14).

If there’s any message that we need to hear today, that we need to share today, it’s the message of forgiveness. If there’s any example that we need to set for the world its the example of forgiveness. If there is any action that we need to take in the direction of imitating Jesus Christ, it’s forgiving others as the Lord has forgiven us, because it’s that grace that has the power to spread through our families, churches, and communities.

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