

Call to Worship:

Beloved, let us love one another, because love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.

This is how God's love was revealed among us: God sent His one and only Son into the world so that we might live through Him. And love consists in this: not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as the atoning sacrifice for our sins.

Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God remains in us, and His love is perfected in us.

Prayer:

Father, you order all things according to your ways of mercy and faithfulness. Teach us the great truths of how your Kingdom advances on this earth that we may participate fully in your work. In Jesus Name, Amen.

Hymn: 'The great love of God', Daniel T Niles

1. The great love of God is revealed in the Son,
who came to this earth, to redeem everyone.
2. That love, like a stream flowing clear to the sea,
Makes clean every heart that from sin would be free.
3. It binds the whole world, every barrier it breaks,
The hills it lays low, and the mountains it shakes.
4. It's yours, it is ours, O how lavishly given!
The pearl of great price, and the treasure of heaven.

Scripture Readings

- Matthew 18:21-35,
- Colossians 3:12-13,
- 1 John 1:9

Forgiven and forgiving : the spearhead of world dominion.

There are many ways we might talk about this foremost Gospel truth, forgiveness, but let's start with the wonderful joy and the peace of feeling forgiven. Quite different from the relief of the prisoner who has finished her punishment and is now free. Or the acquitted against whom insufficient evidence has been presented. Nor the guilty person who has been declared innocent as if their crime, their sin, never existed before the eyes of those they wronged.

It is more than that, guilty, yes and of a heinous, degrading wrongdoing before all eyes, particularly the judge of all the earth, the Living God, with unbearable consequences and deserved punishment. Then in helplessness to see the one you have

Forgiven and Forgiving

wronged declaring a mercy and grace so bountiful that you are free from punishment, which another has paid and lived out with all the consequences of your wrongness. You are freely forgiven and reinstated in the favour of the one you wronged.

I visited Jake in prison many times, we did Bible study. His own hands had horrifically murdered a young woman. He received a life sentence but the gospel of everlasting forgiveness through Christ's death on the cross penetrated and cleansed his soul. He was engrossed with the love story of Jesus' shed blood for him. He was a man at peace. And now, at last free from prison as well, he evangelises the Gospel.

All of us are challenged at some time to forgive and let the gradual working of forgiving grace dissolve bitterness and injustice into forgetfulness. Jesus said to love and forgive our enemies. He stunned Peter with 'seventy times seven'. You must forgive your brother who harms you but repents and comes for forgiveness. He tells us to forgive from the heart. Your prayers only reach our Father if preceded by forgiveness from your heart for anyone against whom you have held a grudge or some rejecting distaste. This must be a our ready attitude of heart because it even precedes the offender's request for forgiveness.ⁱ

Forgiving means leaving the instinct for revenge, to God. That, which he alone can justly manage, not us. That is why the Psalmist cries out to God to deal vengeance upon the one who has harmed him. Our cry for justice cannot prevent forgiving.

Forgiveness is the spearhead of the Gospel. It gets you in love with Almighty God and it launches the miracle of sanctification, of character change in you.

It is seen in the great Gospel commission given by our risen Lord to Saul on the Damascus road: "I will rescue you from your people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive **forgiveness** of sins and an inheritance among those **sanctified** by faith in Me."ⁱⁱ

This is the masthead action that brings the Kingdom of Heaven to earth. Jesus fired this penetrating rocket of love with His unbelievable words of love from the cross: "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."

Here is a problem. We easily forget the forgiveness we have received when someone has offended us. Jesus addressed this too. In a parableⁱⁱⁱ The wickedness of unforgiveness betrays the terrible indifference a person might have developed towards the forgiveness of Jesus they once trusted in.

Let's ponder this parable with its piercing truth. A man is forgiven much- millions of dollars and saved from a life of slavery and hell! This, Jesus teaches, is the massive weight of sin each of us carries before the court of God our rightful judge. It would take eternity for any of us to pay it off. The blood of God has born it all. He has in love for us made it his problem and carried our sorrows away by him in sheer mercy and grace for us.

But then the forgiven man goes out and demands payment of a few measly dollars from one of his debtors, rejecting all of the man's pleas for mercy and kindness. The great Lord is incensed at this. Not only the pitiless act of the man but because it shows he has debased and despised the earlier forgiveness he had received.

Forgiven and Forgiving

Our Lord's response is devastating but deserved and just: *"That is how My heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart."*

You see, this is the way the Kingdom of God is conquering evil. By profound forgiveness upon the sinner, who in turn forgives his enemies. Saul turned Paul, experienced this. So did Corrie Ten Boom^{iv}, and so did the Abdullahs who lost three of their children to a drug-crazed driver in Queensland.

Our daily walk should include a refreshed memory of His forgiving grace. The humble believer lets Jesus forgive him whenever something comes up. And they become evermore safe within the community of faith, the church.

This amazing forgiveness before the face of the Judge of all the earth is felt and experienced as we in turn forgive our sister and brother.

The early church was frequently urged to live this way: *Bear with each other and forgive one another if you have a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.* Paul with blood on his hands knew from sweet experience what this meant. *Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ, God forgave you,* Paul says in another letter. By this action, first and foremost the little band of Christians conquered the great Roman Empire. Their communities were characterised by this unique, unheard-of practice; mutual forgiveness!

In this God Himself is seen amongst us. The Kingdom of God is seen on earth. It is your eternal contribution to that great cause of Christ. This is where heaven's medals are pinned.

Hymn: 'We reign in one, Christ Jesus, Lord', Geoffrey Bingham

1. We reign in life by one, Christ Jesus, Lord; We are the conquerors, truly sons of God.
Let us then live in Christ's great victory, submitting to the leading of the Lord.
2. There is no power greater than the Lord's,
Christ's Cross has conquered through His precious blood;
Satan and all his hosts are vanquished now, O lift your hearts and praise the glorious Lord!
3. We lift our hearts in praise, O Lord, to You; You brought to life, by Your most holy breath,
Those who were wholly dead and lost in sin— Gone is the terror, gone the sting of death.
4. See now the Spirit poured forth by the Son!
Look! there an army stands in new-found life.
Watch too, the wave on wave of God's true sons,
equipped with power, engaging in the strife.
5. Christ's hosts shall labour till men know His love,
God's sons shall toil until the end has come;
Then—wave on wave—His sons shall be unveiled
And meet the Father in that glorious home.
6. Lift then the feet that falter in the way, Rise! stand erect, before the Father-God;
Be filled with Him who maketh all things new, and walk within the victory of the Lord!

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Prayer:

Lord Jesus, I now see how much I need your forgiveness. Thank you for taking all my wrongs and sinful actions into yourself, and freeing me from God's deserved wrath. I want now to forgive as you forgive. I will let you guide me in this wonderful way to live. I gladly take your gentle yoke upon my shoulder and follow you. Even now I look in my mind's eye to another whom I have held out against, and declare your forgiveness, my forgiveness to them. Restore me in your pure love Lord Jesus. Amen

Hymn: The love of God is greater far, by Frederick Lehman
(based on a poem written in the twelfth century.)

1. The love of God is greater far than tongue or pen can ever tell;
It goes beyond the highest star, and reaches to the lowest hell;
The guilty pair, bowed down with care, God gave His Son to win;
His erring child He reconciled, and pardoned from his sin.
*O love of God, how rich and pure! How measureless and strong!
It shall forevermore endure the saints' and angels' song.*
2. When years of time shall pass away, and earthly thrones and kingdoms fall,
When men, who here refuse to pray, on rocks and hills and mountains call,
God's love so sure, shall still endure, all measureless and strong;
Redeeming grace to Adam's race— the saints' and angels' song.
3. Could we with ink the ocean fill, and were the skies of parchment made,
Were every stalk on earth a quill, and every man a scribe by trade,
To write the love of God above, would drain the ocean dry.
Nor could the scroll contain the whole, though stretched from sky to sky.

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Benediction:

Now to Him who is able to strengthen you by this Gospel and by the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery concealed for ages past but now revealed and made known through the writings of the prophets by the command of the eternal God, in order to lead all nations to the obedience that comes from faith— to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen

This service was prepared by Rev Ian Clarkson for HopeNet SA

ⁱ Matthew 18.22, Mark 11.25

ⁱⁱ Acts 26.18

ⁱⁱⁱ Matthew 18.35

^{iv} The Dutch woman who suffered much at the hands of prison guards, one of whom, after the war, showed up at a church where Corrie was preaching on forgiveness and begged that of her.