

God's Forgiveness, An Awesome Thing

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[0 : 00] For our meditation tonight before the Lord's Supper, I'd ask you to open to Psalm 130. For as long as some of us can remember, we have heard that our God is a forgiving God.

That He forgives sin. Indeed, the Bible tells us over and over and over. No small part of the glory of God is that He forgives sin. Remember when Moses prayed, show me your glory, Lord.

The Lord passed by proclaiming, the Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion, and sin.

His glory is that He forgives sin. And yet perhaps just because it is so familiar, we've lost the wonder of it to where we perhaps just come to expect it.

Well, if I sin, then I just ask God and He forgives. Like that skeptic on his deathbed, lived his whole life without God, and when a minister came to visit him on his dying bed, asked him, do you think God will forgive you?

[1 : 33] And he replied, of course he'll forgive me. That is his job. Just to take it as a matter of course. Of course. Well, we don't like that attitude.

We don't want to have that attitude. So my aim tonight is that we might stand in awe afresh before our God who forgives sin. Because forgiveness of sin is a downright amazing thing.

Psalm 130, verses 1 to 4. Most likely a psalm of David, and he's crying out in the depths of woe under a powerful sense of sin.

He does not yet enjoy that peace in his conscience of knowing there is nothing between my soul and the Savior. And out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord.

O Lord, hear my voice. Let your ears be attentive to my cry for mercy. And now our text. Verses 3 and 4. If you, O Lord, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand?

[2 : 38] But with you there is forgiveness. Therefore, you are feared. We have in these two verses a terrifying if, followed by a reassuring but.

We might wonder why God's forgiveness would be the cause for fearing God. We might rather think just the opposite, that his forgiveness is a cause to not fear him.

But no, it's precisely because with you there is forgiveness, that you are therefore feared. Well, I believe the answer, in part at least, is that the fear mentioned here is not that terrifying dread that causes us to run from God.

But rather a loving awe and reverence before God. An amazement, to be astounded, to stand and wonder at this wonder that God forgives sin.

There's something about God's forgiveness of sin that ought to leave us stunned with reverential awe before him. So if we're to be amazed at God's forgiveness of sin in verse 4, then we must be sure to not get verse 3 wrong.

[3 : 59] It says, if you, O Lord, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand? And a careless reader might conclude from the if, that the Lord does not, in fact, keep a record of sins.

That would be a colossal error. The rest of scripture tells us. Hosea 13, 12, the guilt of Ephraim is stored up. His sins are kept on record.

Daniel 7, 9 to 10. Envision Daniel looked, and thrones were set in place. And the Ancient of Days took his seat. His clothing was as white as snow.

The hair on his head was like wool. His throne was flaming with fire. And its wheels were all ablaze. A river of fire was flowing from out, out from before him.

Thousands upon thousands attended him. And ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him. The court was seated. And the books were opened.

[5 : 00] Now this is a picture of what Pastor Colin was holding before us today. That we have an appointment to be judged. And here is that throne of judgment. And the books were opened.

So the Lord does keep a record. Revelation 20 takes us to this same final judgment and says there, The books were opened.

And the dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. What they had done in their lifetime was recorded in the books.

The Lord keeps a record of sins, you see. And this is what makes the if so terrifying. If you, O Lord, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand?

If that's all there is, is a God who knows everything and sees everything, keeping record of our sins, well, who could ever stand before him?

[5 : 58] Even the psalmist with his heart beating for God knows he couldn't stand. Indeed, no one can stand before the Almighty in our own righteousness.

But there is forgiveness with you so that you may be feared. What is, is not like what if.

There's more than just God keeping record of sin. There is a God who forgives sins. And that's what makes us fear him with this wild-eyed amazement and reverence and awe.

So tonight let's consider four reasons why God's forgiveness of sin is so awesome. And the first is because of what sin is. Forgiveness will not be awesome unless we see something of what Romans 7 and verse 14 calls the exceeding sinfulness of sin.

Isn't that a statement? The exceeding sinfulness of sin. Our sins are not just making a few unintentional mistakes.

[7 : 10] That's not how the Bible defines them. It's rather rebellion. It's hostility against the King of heaven and earth. It's refusing to submit to God our Maker.

It's breaking his laws. Indeed, sin is lawlessness. It's belittling his justice. It's ingratitude for many mercies received. It's arrogance.

To think that it's more important for our will to be done than it is for his will. It's presuming upon his mercy, thinking he won't punish us. It's brushing aside his threats as if they were empty threats.

John Piper has his own list of what sin is. And the sum total of it is that it's against everything that God is. So he says, sin is the glory of God, not honored.

It is the holiness of God, not revered. It's the greatness of God, not admired. The power of God, not praised. The truth of God, not sought.

[8 : 13] The wisdom of God, not esteemed. The beauty of God, not treasured. The goodness of God, not savored. The faithfulness of God, not trusted. The promises of God, not believed.

The commandments of God, not obeyed. The justice of God, not respected. The wrath of God, not feared. The grace of God, not cherished. The presence of God, not prized.

The person of God, not loved. That's what makes sin exceedingly sinful. And that God would forgive that?

That is amazing. That's a God to be feared, to stand before in astonished wonderment that God should forgive that sin.

Secondly, God's forgiveness of sin is awesome because of the unchanging nature of the judge who forgives. He's too holy to ignore sin, to treat it with indifference.

[9 : 14] Habakkuk 1.13. Your eyes are too pure to look on evil. You cannot tolerate wrong. It's impossible. You can't tolerate wrong because of who you are.

His wrath is that reflex response of his holiness to sin. He hates it. He's not neutral toward it. He can't not hate it because of what he is, holy.

And his justice demands full payment for sin. Can't let bygones just be bygones. His righteousness is his determination to punish sin wherever it is found.

He will by no means clear the guilty. And if a God like this should forgive sins, it is shocking. It is amazing. So think with me of a king who in the realm of his kingdom passes a law.

In the interest of justice, he sees innocent people's lives being taken by drunk drivers. And so in the interest of justice, he passes a law that any drunk driver taking the life of another in an accident is to have his own life taken.

[10 : 27] Life for life. Life for life. Life for life. Life for life. Life for life. Life for life. Life for life. Life for life. Life for life. And so the nation is impressed with his moral outrage against this evil seen just in his making of the law.

But they're even further impressed when they see him enforcing his law. Putting to death those who killed others in accidents when driving under the influence of alcohol. But the real test of his justice comes when his only son is found to have killed someone while driving drunk.

Is the king really just? Will he apply the law evenly across the board, not giving more favorable rulings to some than his son?

Well, we can know that if his son is executed, then we could know for sure that the judge is an even-handed God of justice. Or a king of justice. He's a just judge.

And so we consider God Almighty. The one true king and judge of heaven and earth. And when we examine the laws of God, they're like him. They're righteous.

[11 : 39] They're holy. They're just. And we're further struck with his justice when we see in the scriptures the attending punishments for disobeying his laws.

There's a hell to pay for sin. The breaking of his laws. And we say, wow, what a God of justice. And when we see him punishing transgressors of his law, we can't help but be impressed with his holy wrath and justice that enforce his laws and demand payment.

So we look at the worldwide flood in the days of Noah. We have heard the language of biblical proportions of the floods that we are presently going through have suffered in our day.

And we've been stunned with the devastation and the claiming of hundreds of lives. But the flood in Noah's day wiped out the entire human population minus eight.

Or Sodom and Gomorrah when fire and brimstone just fell out of the sky and burned up those cities of the plague. Ten plagues in Egypt and then the Red Sea drowning the enemies of God's people.

[12 : 53] The earth opening up and swallowing the families of Dathan and Abiram who rebelled against God's authority in Israel. And when we see justice being meted out, the guilty being punished, we see just how holy and just this judge is.

Just how much he hates sin. And it causes us to tremble. Revelation 15 records the song sung among the saints in heaven right now in response to the righteous judgments of God's wrath being poured out on the earth.

And they sang the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb. Great and marvelous are your deeds, Lord God Almighty. Just and true are your ways, King of the ages.

Who will not fear you, O Lord? And bring glory to your name for you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship before you for your righteous acts have been revealed.

Even in heaven, there is a trembling of reverence in how holy this God is as he pours out his justice, his wrath upon those who sin against him.

[14 : 06] But the greatest test of God's holy justice is what God will do when sin is found to be on his own son. The son of his love for all eternity, his delight.

And when he finds sin on his son, will he punish him? Granted, the sins are not his own. He was tempted in every way like us, but without sin.

But they are sins that have been placed upon him, though they're ours. They have been put upon him so that he is now liable for them.

He has so identified himself with his people that when he took upon him our sins, he became liable for them. Liable to suffer the punishments for them.

And so Isaiah 53, 6, God laid on him, the suffering servant son, the iniquities of us all. All of us who are his people, the true Israel of God.

[15 : 10] The law foreshadowed this when the guilty sinner would come to confess his sins. And he would lay his hands upon the sacrificial lamb and thereby visually transfer his sin and guilt onto the innocent sacrificial lamb.

And thereafter, the innocent lamb was treated like the sinner. And his throat slit, his blood shed, his life taken. And the person, the sinner, was treated like the innocent lamb.

Now, that was just a picture. That's just a foreshadowing, a symbolic transferring. But what God did to Jesus Christ, the lamb of God, was no symbol.

It was reality. Second Corinthians 5, 21. For God made him who had no sin to what? To be sin for us.

He so identified with us that our sins were put upon him. Actually transferring all of our ugly sins of all of his people of all time onto our sin-bearing substitute.

[16 : 22] What will God the Father do now when he finds sin in his son, on his son? How holy and just is he? Will he enforce his law?

Will he actually punish those sins or just let it slide just this once since, after all, it is his only son? Romans 8, 32 says that he did not spare his own son.

But delivered him up for us all. Us who are no longer condemned because we're in Christ. He delivered him up for us.

Delivered him up to what? To the hellish cross where God's wrath fell full force upon his son. So ultimately Christ was not delivered up by Judas who betrayed him.

Not delivered up by the Jewish high court that falsely condemned him. Or the crowd that shouted crucify him. Or by Pilate, the Roman governor presiding over the trial.

[17 : 21] He was handed over by God the Father himself. He delivered him up for us all. He made his life a guilt offering for sin. Isaiah 53, 10.

He crushed him. He caused him to suffer. He struck the shepherd such that the sheep were scattered. So bearing our sins in his body to the tree, Christ was punished by God, his father, in our place.

And when he did, the son cried out, My God, my God, why have you abandoned me? And when he did, the world had the greatest demonstration of the justice of God.

Just how just he is. To punish sin wherever it is found. That's what God says. And turn to Romans chapter 3. Never does justice stir up reverential fear and awe in our hearts as it does at Calvary.

As we see this, the justice of the judge. Romans 3 and verse 25. It says, God presented him, that is Christ Jesus, as a sacrifice of atonement through faith in his blood.

[18 : 43] God presented him as a propitiation is the word used here. That which turns God's wrath away from us by putting it on his own son. He presented him as this sacrifice to turn away sin, to turn away wrath.

And then notice there, at the last part of verse 25, why did God do this? Why did he present Jesus as this sacrifice of atonement? Well, he did this to demonstrate his justice.

Because in his forbearance, he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished. Think of all the sins of Adam and Eve, of Abel, of Enoch, of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, Moses, Joseph, Joshua, Elijah, David, Isaiah, Jeremiah.

All the sins of all the Old Testament believers. They were left unpunished. You say, well, didn't they kill the lambs and the bulls instead of them? Yes, but that punishment does not take away sin.

It would be like me killing your spouse and you killing my dog. It's not an even trade, is it? It's not justice. And that's why the sacrifices of animals could never take away sins.

[20 : 01] That was just a picture pointing to the coming sacrifice that would take away sins. So all those Old Testament sins were left unpunished. And if they're left unpunished, then God is not just.

Because he said he would punish. All sin. So God, in patience and forbearance, left those sins unpunished for all those years.

But if he never punishes them, then his justice is compromised. He's no longer just. He's no longer righteous. He's no longer holy after all. He does go light on sin.

His threats of punishment really are just empty threats. And he does sweep sin under the rug and just ignore it and show it really doesn't matter to him. He does play favorites.

He overlooks sin in some, but not in others. But you see, this is the point. That God never saves a sinner in a way that will compromise his justice.

[21 : 00] His holiness. His wrath. The Bible teaches that he is just. It's his essential nature. It's what he is. He cannot deny himself, he says.

That would be to un-God himself. He cannot not be just. He is and evermore must be just. And so verse 26 says he did it.

He presented Christ as this sacrifice for sin. And he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time. So as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.

You see, he's able to go on being just and yet to say to us wicked sinners, you are just. To declare us just.

To declare us right in the sight of God. To declare us righteous. How can he do that? Because he punished those sins in his son.

[22 : 02] To justify means to declare righteous in a court of law. And so the just judge is able to bring down the gavel in the courts of heaven and say of every one of you who by faith have put your trust in Jesus and what he's done for you.

He's able to bring the gavel down as soon as you exercise faith and said of you and you and you not guilty but righteous. There's nothing between him and me.

Nothing in the law books that they have violated. Why not? Because they now see the righteousness of Jesus put to your account. And that's what he says there in chapter 4 of Romans. Well, let me say before that. If justice has been served for our sins at Calvary, then there's no charge of injustice in God.

Because God did not spare his son anything. He was wounded for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities. The punishment that brought us peace was upon him and by his stripes we are healed.

[23 : 12] So justice was served. And it was served in full. It was satisfied as it came down full force on Christ, the sin bearer. So we sing in those hymns, justice smiles and asks no more.

It doesn't smile while there's this one sin unpunished. But when sin has been punished in full, justice smiles and asks no more.

For God the just is satisfied to look on him and pardon me. Justice was not compromised. It was satisfied. By the wrath of God falling on his own son.

So we are forgiven. And God is no less judged for having forgiven us. No less just for having done so. And that's what makes the forgiveness of sins amazing.

Because of the justice of the judge who forgives sins. And then thirdly, forgiveness is amazing because of what forgiveness is.

[24 : 22] Notice our text helps us understand what forgiveness is. If you, O Lord, this is Psalm 133 and 4. If you, O Lord, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand?

But with you there is forgiveness, therefore you are feared. So forgiveness is to not keep a record of our sins. That's what forgiveness is. And we've seen that God does keep a record of sins.

So how does that, how can sin be forgiven then? How can it not be kept on our record? Well, we've seen that God keeps a record.

But when the debt is paid, it's blotted out on the accounting book. It no longer exists in the ledger of our debts. Isaiah 43 and verse 25.

Even I, even I am he who blots out your transgressions for my own sake and remembers your sins no more. That's what David prayed for in Psalm 51.

[25 : 22] One, blot out my transgressions. So if you had a debt at the bank and I went in and I paid it. I said, this is for him. Well, they would, they would remove the debt once it's paid in full.

And in the old days, it wasn't on a computer and they just push a race or something. But they would literally blot it out so that you couldn't read the debt anymore.

And that's what the blood of Jesus does for all who trust in him. That debt that we owed is now blotted out, out of the record book and remembered no more.

And that's what David found in Psalm 32 and verses 1 and 2. Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered.

Blessed is the man who sinned. The Lord will never count against him. Never counted against him in his book. It's blotted out. Blessed is that man who has found in Christ a righteousness to cover over all his sins.

[26 : 30] That's what forgiveness is. It's to have your very real sins covered. Blotted out in blood so they're no longer on the record. Gone.

Remember that chorus? Gone, gone, gone, gone. Yes, my sins are gone. Now my soul is happy. In my heart's a song. Buried in the deepest sea. Yes, that's good enough for me.

Thank God my sins are gone. Remember that burden on Christian's back? His sin and guilt. But when he came to the cross, it fell off. Fell into the tomb to never be seen again.

That's what forgiveness is. It blots out our sin before the Lord in his records. And that's the highest praise that David has as he's counting up all God's benefits.

He starts with this one. Who forgives all my sins. He does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities.

[27 : 27] As far as the heaven, as the east is from the west, so far as he removed our sins from us. Completely blotted out. Is God's forgiving our sins not amazing because of what forgiveness is?

The end of the record of sins. And then last, it's amazing because of who paid the debt. It was the perfect, eternal, sinless son of God, born of woman, born under the law to redeem us who had broken God's law and stood under his condemnation.

And the son of God assumed our debt and paid it for us. And though that meant the curse of damnation and meant the wrath of God falling on him, as we heard this morning, he did it willingly. For when Christ came into the world, he said, sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me. With burnt offerings and sin offerings, you were not pleased, those animal sacrifices of the Old Testament.

And then I said, here I am. I've come to do your will, O God. What was that will? It was for him to stand in as the sin bearer for his people.

[28 : 47] And to take the full brunt. He, the loved one, who's known nothing but the love and delight of the Father in him. He must be abandoned. He must be forsaken.

Full-hearted obedience to the Father. Even unto death. Yes, the death of the cross. The good shepherd willingly laying down his life for the sheep. But why him?

Why not someone else? Well, simply because only he could pay the debt. Remember as he's praying there in Gethsemane. Father, if it be possible, take this cup.

What cup? The cup of God's wrath. He's going to drink in a few hours. Take this cup from me. If it's possible for me to save my people in any other way.

Take this cup from me. But not what I will, but what you will. And you remember there was no other way. There was no other way to save us. There was no other way to save us. Than him drinking the cup for us.

[29 : 48] And so he drank it down to the dregs. Left nothing for us to drink. There's no condemnation to us who are in Christ Jesus. Because he bore the condemnation. He drank the bitter cup of wrath that we might drink the sweet cup of salvation.

The weight of our sin is something we'll never understand. You know, the weight of the cross was heavy on Jesus, wasn't it? As he bore it to the place of execution.

He's been up all night. He's prayed in the garden with sweat drops of blood. So weak that angels had to come and strengthen him so he could keep on praying. He's been arrested.

He's been tried. Drag around from one trial to the next. They pounded a crown of thorns into his head. They beat his face beyond human recognition. They flayed his back with a cat of nine tails.

And then they made him carry his cross to the place of execution. He must have stumbled. He must have slowed down to nearly a stop under the weight and weariness of that burden.

[31 : 03] Because remember the soldiers impressed a passerby. Simon of Cyrene. Simon of Cyrene. You carry his cross. So weak.

So heavy was that burden of the cross. Oh, but he was bearing a far heavier weight upon his soul. All of my ugly sins. All of your ugly sins.

Heaped upon him. Placed upon him. By God. And he bore them in his body to the tree. And his soul buckled under the mere thought of it the night before in Gethsemane.

My soul is heavy. Anxiety crushing me. Almost to the point of death. Just at thinking of drinking the cup of God's wrath.

But now it hits him full force. The burden of our sin. But why him? Because no one else could bear that burden.

[32 : 05] There was no other good enough to pay the price for sin. He only could unlock the gate of heaven and let us in. And so he suffered the equivalent of all of our hells.

Condensed down into those six hours on the cross. That's what it took to forgive our sins.

The son of God. Alone could bear it. None other lamb. None other name. None other hope in heaven or earth or sea. None other hiding place.

From guilt and shame. None beside thee. The lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

Does that not make forgiveness. Of sins. Amazing. Do you not fear this God with adoring wonder?

Do you not esteem him in your heart to say where do we find a God like this? Nowhere. A God who forgives sin. Through the sacrifice of his own son.

[33 : 07] If you oh Lord kept a record of sins. Oh Lord who could stand. If that's all there was. A strict God of justice keeping strict account of our sins.

Well then the evidence in the books would cry. Guilty. Guilty. The law of God would ever cry. Damn him. Damn him. Your own conscience would scream.

You know you're guilty. You know you deserve hell. God's justice would cry. Vengeance is mine. I will repay. And God's righteousness would say I will by no way. It means clear the guilty.

Can you imagine what it would be like to live without the forgiveness of sins? You know the Bible tells us it's good for us to think and to imagine. If God had not been on our side.

What would have happened to us? Psalm 124. If God had not forgiven our sins. We would live every day of our life with that heavy burden. Knowing that at the end of my life I must pay for my own sins forever and ever.

[34 : 07] And never make the last payment. It would be that worm that would eat out the pleasure of every pleasure on earth. Just to know what was coming. And then we'd be turned into hell.

But just when all seemed hopeless and every mouth stopped of excuses and found guilty before God. It was then that this but of the gospel was heard to say.

But with you there is forgiveness. Therefore you are feared. What good news for us sinners. And because of that we greatly fear him.

With adoring love and reverence. A closing application. Believer this is your assurance. The cross means that God's justice is now working for you.

No longer does it cry against you. Vengeance is mine. I will repay. Now it cries forgive him Lord. Forgive her Lord. Because it wouldn't be right for you to demand double payment.

[35 : 05] You punished her sins in me. On Calvary. You can't punish her again. You see justice is on your side now. So the justice of God is no longer an attribute to run and dread from.

No it's one that you cling to with joy. That God is a God of justice. That he damned me for sin in my substitute. Jesus paid it all.

And so now justice cries. You must forgive all those for whom Jesus has paid that penalty. What a comfort that. That's why if we confess our sins he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins.

His justice guarantees the forgiveness of sins. Because they were punished once. They cannot be punished again in us. Our sins are blotted out.

So justice is now our friend in the very court of heaven. And pleads and speaks and claims for us. Guaranteeing our forgiveness. With him there is forgiveness.

[36 : 14] Here's the heart of God laid bare. Mercy and forgiveness is his desire. He'd rather pardon you than punish you. And the proof is he sent his own son into the world to die for sin.

Even his warnings of judgments are kindnesses. Like a policeman chasing a murderer and saying stop or I'll shoot. Why does he say that?

If he wants to shoot he'll just shoot him. But if he wants to spare him he'll warn him. And our God warns us of the coming judgment.

Because he wants to spare us. What we heard this morning is so important. That's the love of God saying stop. Stop now. Turn. Why will you die?

I would rather that you turn and live. Why will you die? Rather turn and live. Well we receive tonight the emblems of Christ's body and blood.

[37 : 10] And as we do let's remember the high cost of our forgiveness. And glory in Jesus Christ. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.