

Message: At What Cost?

Forgiveness comes with a cost.

“There was a lot of tension when Jay’s oldest daughter started college. She wanted to see what life was like on the other side of the life she learned about at church. She got involved with the wrong crowd and, as the situation got bad, each day brought another fight.

Things got so bad that Jay and his wife Cherise drove to college one day without their daughter’s knowledge to pull her out of school. But once she settled back at home, things just got worse.

Finally, their daughter left a note saying she couldn’t stand the rules and she was leaving. For a week, Jay and Cherise had no idea where their daughter was. Over the next few months they had limited contact with her and, a few months later, she texted them she had fallen in love and got married via a justice of the peace.

That following weekend, Jay was at the wedding of one of his daughter’s friends. ‘My heart broke. I was devastated,’ he said. But that’s when he heard it for the first time: ‘***Love like you’ve never been hurt.***’ A voice inside Jay was telling him there was another way. Jay realized that this was a choice he needed to make. Thankfully, he did.

I wish I could tell you that everything was easy after that, but that isn’t the case. Rebuilding their family has been difficult.

‘We still have challenges that we have to get through,’ Jay says. ‘But we have determined to love like we’ve never been hurt. It’s a choice we have to make over and over and over again.’

Today, Jay’s oldest daughter is the media director at a church in Atlanta. Her husband is a graphic artist there, too. Their second daughter and her husband have a son. Their third daughter is involved in ministry. Their youngest daughter is in her second year in college and their son will start in the fall.

Jay and Cherise sum it up this way, ‘This has been the fruit of refusing to allow hurt to dictate how we love our children.’”¹

¹ http://www1.cbn.com/video/SUE580_JayFranklin_030818/love-like-youve-never-been-hurt?show=700club

You can hear the pain on both sides of that conversation.

The parents were in pain, their daughter was in pain and their other children were in pain. Love was needed, but the kind of love needed was extraordinary. It's the kind of love that requires a sacrifice; a surrender. Only then can forgiveness and healing begin.

Forgiveness comes with a cost.

Have you ever been wronged by someone? I mean really hurt to the core? It's happened to all of us at least once or twice in our lives. The pain is worse when someone close to us does it, like family, friends or fellow Christians.

Our natural human reactions can be revenge, anger, bitterness, or disillusionment. We often draw away from the offender to protect ourselves. The problem is these feelings and actions affect others as well, there's a ripple effect – like throwing a stone in a pond. Drawing away can lead to isolation from everyone, a self-imposed exile of loneliness.

Waiting for the offender to make things right is usually futile. The offender either doesn't realize the damage they've done through their words or actions, or they just don't care. Your suffering means nothing to the offender. They couldn't care less! The injured one carries the hurt.

Jesus shows us a higher way. He taught us to forgive. And he walked the talk! After the betrayal, denial, rejection, humiliation, beating, flogging and crucifixion, Jesus still said, “*Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they're doing*” (Luke 23:34). That sounds easy and loving, but after our reading today, we know Jesus' words came at great cost. They were only possible by surrendering to grace...even on a cross

True grace is uncommon. It requires faith and courage. To show uncommon grace, one has to have the courage to do what's right, no matter what.

- Even when the law – civil or religious, says otherwise
- Even when it costs us our pleasure, peace and contentment

- Even when we must do it because it’s right for God, not because it’s asked of us and not because we are free to do otherwise. That choice, that kind of grace calls for sacrifice.

Uncommon grace is what it takes to really, truly change. It begins with our closest relationship, then our family and friends, then our neighbors and, eventually, uncommon grace reaches across the world. Uncommon grace is what it takes to be in a covenant relationship with God as a joint heir, not as a servant or passing stranger. To accept and share uncommon grace, we have to love with the kind of courage that makes sense of sacrifice.

Jesus did. He showed us the way. Jesus changed the world.

You see, God knew exactly what we needed.

- ...if prayer was enough,
Jesus would have spent all his time praying
- ...if listening to sermons was enough,
Jesus would have spent all his time preaching
- ...if serving was enough,
Jesus never would have been alone or just with his disciples
- ...if we needed a teacher,
God would have sent a teacher
- ...if we needed a healer,
God would have sent a physician
- ...if we just needed the right system,
God would have sent us a business leader
- ...if we just needed the right government,
God would have sent us a politician

We needed forgiveness. So God sent us a Savior.

Jesus changed the world one person at a time until it was time to do more. He did so through close, personal, intimate spiritual experiences with friends until it was time to save us all. Then he acted with uncommon grace, sacrificing himself for us out of love. And Jesus forgave and forgave and forgave and forgave and forgave his friends, family and others, even when they (and we) killed him.

Jesus didn't die on the cross ...

- ... for a book, an institution or a government.
- ... because he was outwitted by the politicians, religious leaders or dictators of the day.
- ... because he was outmaneuvered politically, nor did he escape to Spain with Mary or whatever your favorite fiction may be.

Jesus died on the cross for you!

Jesus surrendered, freely and willingly, because the only way to take away the power of fear, hatred, wickedness, evil and death is to offer something greater: unending, eternal, unconditional love.

Jesus showed us the cost of uncommon grace is sacrificial love.

So he willingly went, knowing Judas would betray him, Peter would deny him and the other disciples would run away in fear. Jesus went, knowing we would do the same. Jesus went, knowing his name would be a curse for some, a blessing for others. Jesus went, knowing that we would need his love, because he knows our weaknesses and flaws.

Today, we take off our old ways of protecting ourselves and our old ways of living, to lay them before Jesus. We join him on the journey to the cross. We take on a new way, a mantle not of power, might and rights, but a mantle of gentleness, humility and love. Jesus is our protector. Follow him to new way of life. Forgiveness is the key.

How will you offer and ask for forgiveness when you leave here and go back to your daily life? Will you embrace the lesson and gift Jesus gave you on the cross or is it too uncomfortable and inconvenient? My prayer is for courage for us all.

It all started with a party ...

- ...that turned into a parade
- ...that ended with tables being turned over
- ...that led to an intimate meal
- ...that demonstrated humility & awkward responses
- ...which led to a garden for late night prayer
- ...which was betrayed by a friend, leading the authorities
- ...which resulted in a mock trial & public denial
- ...which led to humiliation, beating, spitting, flogging, thorns

...which led to the final betrayal by those who need salvation
...which led to a cross, more humiliation, rejection and death
...until it was finished
...which is the cost Jesus paid to forgive us with love.

Today, we remember Love Incarnate who came to live, work, and dance among us. Let's lay down our fears, faults and feelings as Jesus passes by this week. The story continues, and we have prepared our feet to follow its path with a hope that is stronger than despair, a light that is stronger than darkness, and a love that is stronger than death.

Let us pray ...

Jesus, what can we say? We hear the story of your last hours and feel your passion, love and majesty. Tears come to our eyes, for we, too, betray, deny and run away from you. We aren't present at the foot of your cross. We prefer our own way. We choose comfort and convenience over faith and sacrifice. Forgive us, Lord. Forgive us for the way we use our words and actions to pierce others, without realizing that we are really piercing you. Open our ears. Open our hearts. Open our minds. Open our doors. Let love enter in so healing may begin. In Jesus' name, amen.

Isaiah 50:4–9a (CEB)

The LORD God gave me an educated tongue
to know how to respond to the weary
with a word that will awaken them in the morning.
God awakens my ear in the morning to listen,
as educated people do.

The LORD God opened my ear;
I didn't rebel; I didn't turn my back.
Instead, I gave my body to attackers,
and my cheeks to beard pluckers.

I didn't hide my face
from insults and spitting.

The LORD God will help me;
therefore, I haven't been insulted.

Therefore, I set my face like flint,
and knew I wouldn't be ashamed.

The one who will declare me innocent is near.
Who will argue with me?

Let's stand up together.
Who will bring judgment against me?
Let him approach me.

Look! The LORD God will help me.
Who will condemn me?

Luke 23:1-25, 32-49 (CEB)

The whole assembly got up and led Jesus to Pilate and ²began to accuse him. They said, “We have found this man misleading our people, opposing the payment of taxes to Caesar, and claiming that he is the Christ, a king.”

³ Pilate asked him, “Are you the king of the Jews?”

Jesus replied, “*That's what you say.*”

⁴ Then Pilate said to the chief priests and the crowds, “I find no legal basis for action against this man.”

⁵ But they objected strenuously, saying, “He agitates the people with his teaching throughout Judea - starting from Galilee all the way here.”

⁶ Hearing this, Pilate asked if the man was a Galilean. ⁷ When he learned that Jesus was from Herod’s district, Pilate sent him to Herod, who was also in Jerusalem at that time. ⁸ Herod was very glad to see Jesus, for he had heard about Jesus and had wanted to see him for quite some time. He was hoping to see Jesus perform some sign. ⁹ Herod questioned Jesus at length, but Jesus didn’t respond to him. ¹⁰ The chief priests and the legal experts were there, fiercely accusing Jesus. ¹¹ Herod and his soldiers treated Jesus with contempt. Herod mocked him by dressing Jesus in elegant clothes and sent him back to Pilate. ¹² Pilate and Herod became friends with each other that day. Before this, they had been enemies.

¹³ Then Pilate called together the chief priests, the rulers, and the people. ¹⁴ He said to them, “You brought this man before me as one who was misleading the people. I have questioned him in your presence and found nothing in this man’s conduct that provides a legal basis for the charges you have brought against him. ¹⁵ Neither did Herod, because Herod returned him to us. He’s done nothing that deserves death. ¹⁶ Therefore, I’ll have him whipped, then let him go.”

¹⁸ But with one voice they shouted, “Away with this man! Release Barabbas to us.” (¹⁹ Barabbas had been thrown into prison because of a riot that had occurred in the city, and for murder.)

²⁰ Pilate addressed them again because he wanted to release Jesus.

²¹ They kept shouting out, “Crucify him! Crucify him!”

²² For the third time, Pilate said to them, “Why? What wrong has he done? I’ve found no legal basis for the death penalty in his case. Therefore, I will have him whipped, then let him go.”

²³ But they were adamant, shouting their demand that Jesus be crucified. Their voices won out. ²⁴ Pilate issued his decision to grant their request. ²⁵ He released the one they asked for, who had been thrown into prison because of a riot and murder. But he handed Jesus over to their will.

[...]

³² They also led two other criminals to be executed with Jesus. ³³ When they arrived at the place called The Skull, they crucified him, along with the criminals, one on his right and the other on his left. ³⁴ Jesus said, “*Father, forgive them, for they don’t know what they’re doing.*” They drew lots as a way of dividing up his clothing.

³⁵ The people were standing around watching, but the leaders sneered at him, saying, “He saved others. Let him save himself if he really is the Christ sent from God, the chosen one.”

³⁶ The soldiers also mocked him. They came up to him, offering him sour wine ³⁷ and saying, “If you really are the king of the Jews, save yourself.” ³⁸ Above his head was a notice of the formal charge against him. It read “This is the king of the Jews.”

³⁹ One of the criminals hanging next to Jesus insulted him: “Aren’t you the Christ? Save yourself and us!”

⁴⁰ Responding, the other criminal spoke harshly to him, “Don’t you fear God, seeing that you’ve also been sentenced to die? ⁴¹ We are rightly condemned, for we are receiving the appropriate sentence for what we did. But this man has done nothing wrong.” ⁴² Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.”

⁴³ Jesus replied, “*I assure you that today you will be with me in paradise.*”

⁴⁴ It was now about noon, and darkness covered the whole earth until about three o’clock, ⁴⁵ while the sun stopped shining. Then the curtain in the sanctuary tore down the middle. ⁴⁶ Crying out in a loud voice, Jesus said, “*Father, into your hands I entrust my life.*” After he said this, he breathed for the last time.

⁴⁷ When the centurion saw what happened, he praised God, saying, “It’s really true: this man was righteous.” ⁴⁸ All the crowds who had come together to see this event returned to their homes beating their chests after seeing what had happened. ⁴⁹ And everyone who knew him, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance observing these things.