

THE HEART OF THE GOSPEL
PROVERBS 15:1-4, 19; MATTHEW 6:9-15, 9:1-8, 18:21-35
2026-05-17

Easter is now in our rearview mirror. **Because of Easter everything is different.** We can have new life, eternal life, a real and living relationship with God. We can be forgiven.

The empty tomb is ground zero for our faith. If the tomb wasn't empty, we wouldn't be here today talking about anything significant, because **if the tomb was empty nothing else matters. If the tomb wasn't empty, nothing else matters.** Yet we saw that **even amongst** Jesus' disciples some doubted. He appeared in the locked room after His resurrection, ate with His disciples and met them again in Galilee, but **even with Him in front of them**, some doubted.

We often live like that. Though we profess that we believe, we don't live lives that reflect it. We live timidly. As David Clayton Thomas sang: "I swear there ain't no heaven, but I'll pray there ain't no hell." **Sadly, we don't live in the power of the resurrection**, often living lives that don't reflect the joy we should have as recipients of the greatest gift the world has ever known. We live more like the world than like believers. We grumble. We scratch and claw to get ahead. We mistreat others. We hold grudges. We're unfriendly. We speak or act unkindly.

I want to talk today about **the heart of the Gospel.** If you say that's love, you'd be right. But the heart of love begins with forgiveness. Jesus' first words in Mark? "**The time's come. The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the Good News. Repent. Turn from your waywardness and ask God to forgive you**"(Mark 1:15). We get that but don't live lives that honour that. No we don't.

Proverbs reminds us over and over again:

"A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger. The tongue of the wise commends knowledge, but the mouth of the fool gushes folly (Proverbs 15:1-2). "The tongue that brings healing is a tree of life, but a deceitful tongue crushes the spirit" (Proverbs 15:4). "A hot tempered person stirs up dissension, but a patient one calms a quarrel." (Proverbs 15:18).

You know the Lord's Prayer, but not so many know the next verse:

*"For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will forgive you, **but if you don't forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.**" (Matthew 6:14-15)*

If you think God isn't serious about that, consider our text from Matthew 18. Peter proposes that a person who sins against you should be forgiven **seven times**. This was magnanimous—the Jews were big on baseball forgiveness; all is fair ball up to three strikes, but on the third strike you're definitely outta' there. There would be no more forgiveness. But Jesus flat out rejects even Peter's proposed seven times. **Would you forgive someone seven times?** Jesus says not seven times, but **seventy-seven times**. The way it's written, the number could be seventy times seven. Who could remember **seventy-seven**, let alone four hundred ninety times when someone

sinned against you? That's the point. You are to forgive and forgive and forgive—without limit. In 1 Corinthians 13:5b Paul says, “**love keeps no record of wrongs.**” Are you keeping score?

To really drive the point home Jesus tells of a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. A man owing him 10,000 talents was brought to him. What's a talent? Are you ready? It was roughly about 9 years of wages for the average working person. But this was 10,000 talents—that's over \$10 million. **Everyone listening knew there was no way** this man had a snowball's chance of ever paying this debt back. But he promised to do just that and begged for patience. The **king took pity on him, canceled the debt** and let him go. Awesome!

Immediately after he was pardoned, he confronted a servant who owed him 100 denarii—maybe \$2,000—not insignificant but manageable to repay. **Amazing how God puts you in the very** situation where you've just said, “Oh, that guy's an idiot!” and you catch yourself doing what you just condemned. The freed man went postal, grabbing, choking and demanding repayment. Though the servant made the same plea for patience, promising to repay, the forgiven man refused, showed no mercy and had the servant thrown in jail until he repaid the debt. I never understood how someone who couldn't afford to repay something when free, could suddenly afford to pay when they were jailed.

But it's not the end of the story. Other servants who saw this reported it to the king. ‘Whaddyathink’ happened? The king had a change of heart and called up the servant he'd freed.

“You wicked servant, I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me. Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?” (verse 32) And he turned him over to the jailers to be tortured until he paid back all he owed.

If you missed it, Jesus wraps it: *“This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart. In the parable God is the king; we are the servants.” (verse 25)*

At the Last supper, Jesus took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to His disciples saying, *“This is My blood of the covenant which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.” (Matthew 26:28)* You and I have drunk from this cup. We have received Jesus' forgiveness. Some of us take that for granted. **Here's the question of the day.** Has any one of us any grievance with anyone greater than the grievance God has about the sinful behaviour or attitude that each of us bring to Him? But Doug, you don't understand what...how?

You're right. I don't. But God does and **He paid** for your sins, your debts, your grievances. He wants you to make it right, whatever it is. You can't be right with God unless you rid yourself of these grievances. Wondering why you have no joy/peace? A forgiving heart may be the place to start.

Is there someone in your family you need to make things right with? A neighbour? Colleague? Someone at church? Change your future; change your life and ask or offer forgiveness.

And get this. Even if the junk between you is not your fault, God still expects you to take the first step. But whatever you do, don't lead with, "If you think I've wronged you..." That's a conditional offer, not an apology. Take responsibility for anything you've handled wrong. **Own it;** don't try to coerce an apology out of the other. **God can/will** deal with that side of the story. You're not alone. And there's more to this forgiveness thing. How many times have you heard someone say, "I can forgive, but...I won't forget." That's really saying I'm not going to forgive you at all. I'll pretend that I forgive you, but underneath I intend to keep it stored up, I do in-tend to keep a record of these wrongs.

Particularly when I was a VP, students would be sent down for me to deal with their (bad) behaviour. I always started by asking them why they were here. Invariably, they would tell me how the teacher did this or that or how the teacher didn't like them/hated them. I would steer the conversation by asking what they had done that put the teacher over the top in terms of what they would normally deal with in class that moved this situation to require them being sent to me. Some explanation would follow. I would ask, "So what do you think you should do?" They would invariably respond, "I know, sir. You want me to go and apologize." This is where things got interesting. I would say, "I'm not going to insist that you go and apologize. (that was most likely what the teacher was looking for, plus some weightier discipline like a thousand detentions). The student would invariably look puzzled. So, we would start again. Because a forced apology, a demanded apology is no apology at all. It's a no-win because it's done while ill-will still continues and may even deepen resentment.

What did you do that was wrong? Well, I did this and this. So what can you do about that? Well, I could apologize. Do you think that would help? Maybe/probably. Sometimes it would take a side trip. But sir, he/she doesn't respect me.

And that's when I'd start. Everyone should respect everyone else—agreed? Everyone always agrees with that. And here's where it goes. You should respect someone else—especially when they disrespect you. Then the student looks at you like you're off your rocker. Sir! No way! Then I tell them there are three reasons why you should respect someone—even when, especially when they disrespect you. 1st, it's the right thing to do. Second, it will make the situation way better. Third, it will make you better.

So, I never insist that you nor anyone else must apologize. A forced apology is 100% useless. It may even make the perpetrator more agitated, feeling pinched and resentful. God says it pretty well, don't you think?—*"I, even I, am He who blots out your transgressions, for My own sake, and remembers your sins no more"* (Isaiah 43:25—also Hebrews 8:12, 10:17; Jeremiah 31:34)

In Psalm 69:4 **David is falsely accused:** *“Those who hate me without reason...many are my enemies without cause those who seek to destroy me. **I’m forced to restore what I didn’t steal.**”*

In Luke 24:46-48 Jesus says: *“The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the 3rd day and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in His Name to all nations...You are witnesses...”*

In Ephesians 1:7-8 Paul adds, *“In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace that He lavished on us...”*

Forgiveness is costly. Hebrews 9:22: *“The law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood and without the shedding of blood there’s no forgiveness.”*

This is what Jesus came for. It’s what He died for. This is love. **Will we go to the heart of the Gospel and show the same love?**

Matthew 9:1-8: **What a remarkable event this would have been to see!** Can you just picture the men carrying their paralyzed friend on a mat to Jesus, in the hope that He would heal him? What must their thoughts have been like? Were they confident? Skeptical? Thinking it might be at least worth a try? Thinking that they might be able to get only so close to Jesus and then be turned away—like we might be if we tried to see the Prime Minister by just walking up to him? And **what would they have been thinking when they got to see Jesus and His response was:** *“Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven.”* *“Thanks, Jesus. But we brought him here for you to heal him.”* And then the undercurrent started: *“This fellow is blaspheming. Only God can forgive sins. Who does He think He is!”* Jesus isn’t taken aback. He knows their thoughts—evil thoughts.

*“Why do you entertain evil thoughts in your heart? Which is easier to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven, or to say, get up and walk?’ **But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins...**”* Then He said to the paralyzed man *“Get up, take your mat and go home.”*

The people were filled with awe. **Jesus just connected forgiveness with healing. Do you want healing in your life?** In this case it was physical. But I think Jesus did that just to let people see the connection. What He has healed us of is our brokenness. When we forgive others, our spirits are healed; we are made whole. Is there a hole in your spirit, to use a play on the word? If you want that hole healed, forgive others. You know your assignment this week. Test it out. Don’t let another day go by without forgiving one who you’ve alienated or are alienated from.