

# ***The Burden Of The Past***

**Genesis 4:17-24**



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***Begin with reading of Genesis 4:17-24.***

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In a Boston courtroom, six-year-old Kai Leigh Harriott sat in her wheelchair and looked directly at the man who had just pleaded guilty to firing the shot that paralyzed her three years ago. Her face was stained with tears as she spoke to 29-year old, Anthony Warren, who had fired three rounds at the house where she was sitting on a porch with her sister singing songs. One of those bullets severed her spine and left her paralyzed for life at the age of three.

"What you done to me was wrong," she said to the man seated just a few feet away. "But I still forgive you."

Warren pled guilty to firing the bullet that severed the spine of 3-year old Kai Leigh as she sat on the porch singing songs with her older sister. After hearing Kai Leigh, Warren told her and her mother, "I'm sorry for what I've done to you and your family ... I was known in the street for all the wrong reasons, and now I want to be known for the right reasons,"

Kai Leigh's mother, Tanya David, walked over to Warren, shook his hands, and then gave him a hug. Later Tanya told the court, "We are not victims here. We're victors."

Lest you think the forgiveness and grace demonstrated by Tanya came cheaply, hear what Tanya told the court, "Kai was not born unhealthy or in a wheelchair. I can still remember the pitter-patter of her little feet. If I can spend the rest of my life with my daughter seeing her smile each and every day and have forgiveness in my heart, then it's a peaceful day."

"If I can have... forgiveness in my heart, then It's a peaceful day."

What do you suppose that Tanya meant?

On November 13 CBC's *As It Happens* interviewed Michael Berg. His son, Nick, was kidnapped and beheaded by Jordanian terrorist Abu Musab al-Zarqawi and his forces in May, 2004. In a speech Berg spoke about his journey to forgiveness -

"...hating them, seeking vengeance against them, only seemed to keep the cycle of hate and escalated violence going...

...When we seek to even the score, we rarely do. Mostly what we do is a little more than even it, at least in the mind of the one who withstood the evening. And so that person's response is to even the score against us. And so it goes."

I wonder how Lamech would have responded to Tanya?

What would he have said to Michael?

*"I have killed a man for wounding me....  
Lamech is avenged seventy-seven fold."*

That's the Bible's record of the beginning of the cycle of violence that has plagued humanity ever since.

In Northern Ireland.

In the Middle East - Revenge for a brother's death. Counter-revenge for a mother's loss; payback for a village's rocket attack, response of a house's bulldozing.

Vengeance?  
Or forgiveness?

As human beings we've all got a choice.  
The Bible tells us which is heaven's choice.

We've just prayed that choice.

*Forgive us our sins*

**as we forgive**

*those who have sinned against us.*

Forgiveness.

In addition to praying it, Jesus spoke very clearly about it.

Let's hear him from -

### **Matthew 18:21-35, p.20 (NT)**

From the earliest fog of human history comes the echo of Lamech's voice -

*I will get even.*

*I will make 'em pay... **seventy-seven times.***

Which was an ancient way of saying,

*"again and again and again and again.....*

*no ending.....*

*again and again and again and again..."*

Seventy-seven times.

Jesus says to Peter, "*The Lamech thing - I want you to do the opposite of that.....*

*I want you to do that again and again and again and again.....*

*no ending.....*

*again and again and again and again..."*

*77 times.*

And then comes the mind-blowing parable of the unforgiving servant, telling us:

Forgiveness or vengeance - choose your lifestyle.

Just remember, as you sow, so you will reap - forgiveness or vengeance.

How you treat others will be how God treats you.

Choose your lifestyle...

...and sow your seeds for eternity.

Forgiveness is not some cruel divine joke meant to add insult to the injury I've already experienced. Instead, it is a **necessary** divine road to release and healing for my life.

Check out verse 34. The unforgiving servant - see what happened to him? Tortured!

Lack of forgiveness will leave me tied up, imprisoned and tortured.

Revenge, malice, anger, bitterness are like poison flowing in my veins.

It will torture me continually till I can let it go!

Meaning that forgiveness is more a spiritual project about **ME** than it is about the one that has offended me.

Just think about a time in your life when you held and nursed a grudge.  
Most of us have.

Who was the one staying awake at night?  
Who's stomach was tied in knots?  
Who's performance at work suffered?

There can be many different types of torture which can afflict us:

Physically - colon trouble, arthritis, tension and anxiety, nervous disorders, headaches. Let me hasten to say that by no means do **ALL** illnesses come from a root of unforgiveness. But, lack of forgiveness **CAN** lead to dis-ease of some sort.

Someone I knew was continually haunted by depression, and a whole range of physical disorders including skin rashes, joint swelling and neck problems. The doctors had thrown up their hands in exasperation. When I asked her about her mother, her eyes began to blaze with fire and cry with hurt at the same time. Asked her about her husband, and a horrible air of resentment filled the room. To my knowledge she still carries that burden - nursing it - with her to this day. She is still ill.

Physical torture.  
Emotional.

And spiritual.

Look again at Christ's words. The servant who would not forgive – not only was he tortured; the forgiveness he sought was revoked.

This world's not a safe space.

Hey - **we're** not always safe to be with.

Certainly from God's point of view– how often we've violated His space, stood Him up, wronged and betrayed our relationship with Him. Yet we come here, week after week, seeking His forgiveness; that He would let go of that legitimate right He has to get even, to make us pay.

We're multiple offenders.

The gospel promise is that forgiveness **IS** available – full and free in Jesus.

**Amazing.** It flows into and through our lives like a crystal clear river, sweeping away the sin and guilt and wrong we've done. Cleansing us. New beginnings. Renewed relationship with our Heavenly Father.

## **HOWEVER**

When we refuse to forgive others we behave like beavers building a dam across a sparkling stream. The water backs up. Brush and debris accumulate. Everything clogs up. Stuff begins to rot and eventually death happens.

When we deliberately hold back forgiveness, we build a dam that holds back the flow of God's mercy from sweeping through our lives and washing away the junk that accumulates within.

Bitterness, a brooding spirit, dark attitudes, and even demonic oppressions begin to gather. Joy rots away. Christian freedom gets all clogged up and muddied.

And if this condition lasts long enough it can kill us spiritually.

Forgiveness.

So, how would you describe this necessary spiritual act?

Think of it this way - it is when I can take my deep desire to get even, to make that wretch pay, to have **them** feel the pain they caused - even if just for a little while, and.....

**release** it,  
into the Heavenly Hands of Almighty God.

Forgiveness is when I can look at the drunk driver, the cheating employee or ruthless boss, the loose-lipped friend

and give the anger, the desires to *"let them have it, let 'em rot"....*  
.....to bundle it up and let Jesus deal with 'em.

Forgiveness – one of the **biggest, most difficult** projects in life.

Michael Berg, said -

*I learned that forgiveness is like quitting smoking.  
Sometimes the evil gets to you, and you have to quit all over again.  
Sometimes you have to forgive over and over again.*

Yes, forgiveness is hard work.

Hard because sometimes the pain is so deep.

Hard because of the constant barrage of little offenses that come our way and trip us up.

And so, friends, see Jesus.

See the one who sacrificed his life to set us free.

Because of Him our Heavenly Master forgave us the huge debt we owed Him.

And now looks us in the eyes calling us to forgive the 100 denarii debt that others owe us – know how much that is in today's currency?

About \$20.

That's no coincidence on Jesus' part. You see, **most** of the offences committed against us, the poison that clogs our pores and brain, are little \$20 offences.

But they build up over time. And come back to haunt us if we don't release them to the Lord.

Forgiveness.

Vital for our own spiritual life and liberty.

Vital for the sake of community – do you think it is a coincidence that Jesus brings it up immediately after the section about trying to sort things out between you and someone who has wronged you, sinned against you?

Where there is no forgiveness, there can be no renewed relationships.

Where there are no renewed relationships, the body of Christ is broken.

So - that's the theory of forgiveness.

Permit me to “meddle” for a couple of minutes before we head home.

1. Last week we shared Holy Communion.  
***Is there someone in this congregation that you would not be willing to sit beside to take communion?***
2. Each Sunday we are invited to extend a hand and pass the peace of Christ.  
***Is there someone at Calvin to whom you'd just as soon not extend a hand?***

Ask yourself “why?”

Is it one or more \$20 items?

Is there something more significant?

Is Jesus, perhaps, calling you to do some hard work?

If so, let me leave you with a few very quick notes about the whole process of forgiveness. Beginning with some things to watch out for.

1. Forgiveness ***isn't*** avoiding or excusing the hurt done to us. The parable deliberately counts the cost of the debt. Up front. Really.
2. Forgiveness is not giving permission for the hurtful behaviour to continue. The judicial process may still need to be followed. Precautions may be put in place. Things may ***NOT*** be the same as before.
3. Forgiveness is ***NOT*** forgetting. It is letting go of vengeance. Scars may still remain.

Finally - some way points to consider as you map out the road to forgiveness in your life.

1. Recognize that granting forgiveness may be like peeling an onion. Layer after layer. It is a process.... like quitting smoking.
2. Forgiveness is an act of the will. Jesus doesn't command us to ***feel*** like we should forgive. If we wait till we ***FEEL*** like forgiving, nobody would do it. In your ***will*** recognize the hurt. And you recognize the need for releasing that response into the hands of Jesus. Say it. Act like you mean it. “*Fake it till you make it*” some would say. The feelings, if they come at all, come later.

3. Forgiveness needs lots of prayer. Taking the violations, and our hurt, and our desires for revenge, before Christ's heavenly throne. Asking for protection from Satan's temptations to dam the resentment within.  
Maybe a visit with the prayer partners is needed?
4. And, as we pray, let's visualize the cross of Jesus - where **our** offenses against God were forgiven by Jesus - "*Help me, Jesus! Help me to forgive!*" It's hard to forgive without seeing ourselves first as forgiven people.
5. Then give it time. You may need to say the words over some time, with much prayer, maybe again and again. But slowly, bit by bit we'll move to the point where **YES!!** we can sense that this forgiveness is coming, and the malice is melting. And maybe even – by some divine miracle of grace – we will eventually find growing inside of us the ability to wish that other person well.  
When that happens you know that real healing is taking place!

Forgiveness - for Peter, for you and me. Essential, difficult, but with God's help, the most liberating act in life that we can practice. May our Lord guide us in this challenge. May the Spirit grant us strength to flow forgiving mercy through us.