

Stuck on Jackass Hill

Matthew 18:15-35

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October 10, 2004

Recently we've been preaching through Matthew 18. At the beginning of the chapter, the disciples are arguing over who is the "greatest in the kingdom of heaven." Then Jesus starts talking about cutting things off. And so that week, we cut off and burned our resumes. Then Jesus says, "See that you do not despise one of these least ones." And then, verse 15:

If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses.

One hot August night in 1978, after a day of jeeping with my church youth group, I floored the accelerator on my parents' orange VW bus and raced 30 miles an hour to the top of Jackass Hill on Jackass Hill Road in Littleton. I slammed on the brakes, turned to my girlfriend (Susan Coleman) and said, "I am so damned mad at you," and I told her why.

I confronted her with her fault, like Matthew 18 stipulates. But instead of repenting of her obvious sins, she yelled back, "Well, I'm so _____ mad at you."

Well, the two of us sat on Jackass Hill for hours crying and yelling as we unwrapped the sins of the day.

The nearest we could tell, it started with me when I'd jumped out of the jeep in which we'd both been traveling to go goof off with some friends. Feeling insulted, she then switched vehicles and was riding in another, a truck. Not knowing she was there and needing a ride, I ran and jumped into the back of that truck. About half way over the tailgate, the truck hit a bump and a couple thousand pounds of truck bounced up and hit me in a very sensitive spot. I rolled into the bed of the truck, trying to act cool on the outside, while on the inside, I walked through the Valley of the Shadow of Death. Little did Susan know that the fruit of her own womb was hanging in the balance... she just thought I was ignoring her.

At the next stop, I jumped out of the truck to weep in the woods alone. I jumped out having not even noticed Susan. Next thing I know, Susan is getting all friendly with Dave Weld, the Patrick Swayze of our youth group... long blonde hair, tan, washboard abs, and pensive.

Well, I retaliated for that. She took vengeance in return. All day long, every glance, every look, every gesture was a weapon. Then even on Jackass Hill confronting each other, according to Matthew 18, it only seemed to get worse. I suppose we could have each called two or three witnesses, called "counselors," but I think it would have just turned into war.

It's times like that, it's awfully tempting to just give up, call it off, say it just didn't work or to give up by growing a shell around the heart to keep it safe from the pain of love. C.S. Lewis wrote, "The only place safe from the danger of love is hell."

So we sat on Jackass Hill, mighty tempted to Hell, or to use a Biblical word, Hades — the outer darkness —

tempted by isolation, by darkness, by deadness... tempted to quit. We almost quit.

We usually do quit, just when real love is about to happen. We quit because we're afraid of the pain. We almost quit... Jonathan, Elizabeth, Rebekah, Coleman, honeymoon vacation, walks along the beach, the best parts of me, my favorite windows into the heart of God almost didn't happen.

Why? Was it just a bump in the road? Was it a simple misunderstanding? If so, why couldn't we get past it? Excuse it and go on. Why was it so frustrating and so painful and so hard? How do we understand the confusion? Well, we understand it with a Sin and Vengeance Vectorial Analysis Diagram:

Sin and Vengeance Vectorial Analysis Diagram



Dignity Reservoir



Dignity Reservoir

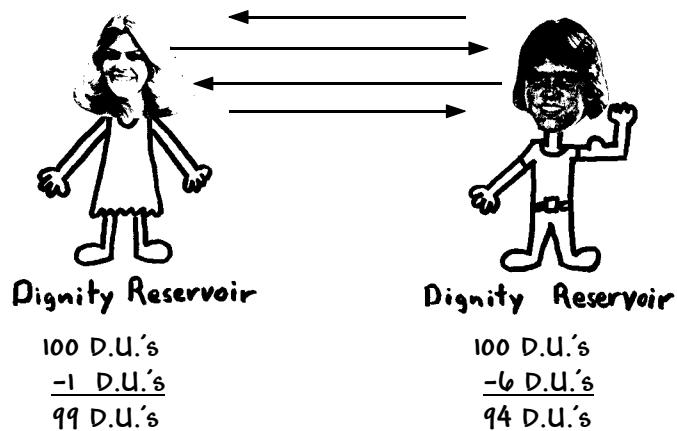
Each of us has a certain amount of dignity in our dignity reservoir, which is roughly equivalent to our resume, which we preached on a few weeks ago — the flesh, your measure of yourself.

Well, let's assume that each one of us began with 100 D.U.'s in our Dignity Reservoir that morning in 1978. Every time you sin against someone, you rob them of some dignity.

- So first, I hopped out of Susan's Jeep, I was inconsiderate, about a 1 dignity unit sin vector. That's minus 1 in her Dignity Reservoir, bringing it down from 100 to 99.
- Second, she felt a little empty so she retaliated by switching Jeeps, a 1 D.U. vengeance vector. However, it's not subtracted from my dignity units because I didn't even know she did it. Furthermore, she doesn't really get the 1 D.U. back because vengeance never really satisfies.
- Third, I encountered the tailgate and ignored Susan; that's like 3 D.U.'s. But in reality, I didn't know she was there, so it wasn't a sin and could have been excused, but she didn't bother to check.
- So she retaliated looking for 6 D.U.'s. 6 D.U.'s? How do you get 6 D.U.'s? Well, you take the 3 D.U.'s, plus the 1 D.U. that didn't satisfy, plus interest for making her go through all that. That's like 6 D.U.'s. Where on earth is she going to find 6 D.U.'s? Dave Weld's abdominal region.
- 6 D.U.'s? That's a lot. I'm thinking I'm good for maybe 2, but 6? That's a D.U.I. — a Dignity Unit Infraction!

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Sin and Vengeance Vectorial Analysis Diagram



I retaliate, she retaliates, every glance, every gesture until you've got like this black out of sin and vengeance vectors. It just keeps growing even on Jackass Hill. Sin all over the place, especially when you consider the Lord says, "Vengeance is mine," and Jesus tells us, "Do not retaliate. Turn the other cheek." See it wasn't righteous anger; it was "damned madness" (like I had said). We were walking sin bombs. We were sin.

So it wasn't a simple misunderstanding in which the dignity units could be restored with a little communication. It wasn't simply a misunderstanding; it was becoming a

dreadful *understanding*. We weren't arguing over a poorly timed bump in the road; we were arguing over who was the greatest in the kingdom of God. And in the process, we were despising one another trying to scratch, scrape, and steal every little bit of dignity we could from the other.

It's easy to excuse a misunderstanding, but this was becoming an *understanding* that each of us was a tangled mass of self-centered, egocentric, manipulations, masked in a cloak of civility, constrained by pride. A bump in the road just brought it all out. And now our dignity reserves were just about down to zero, like tax collectors or pagans. Next verse:

If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.

Jesus died for pagans and tax collectors. He died for us while we were yet sinners.

Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them." Then Peter came up and said to him, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?"

That is, “Lord, when can I quit? Lord, surely there must be limits to grace for if there weren’t, it would be the death of me!” Simon Peter is thinking, “Lord, I only have so much dignity to give.”

During World War II, Simon Wiesenthal was taken from a death camp to a make shift army hospital where a nurse led him to the bedside of a young Nazi soldier named Karl. He was 22 years old. His head was completely covered with puss stained bandages. He was dying.

The nurse left the room. Karl’s hands groped for Simon’s hands. He grabbed hold and told Simon that as a dying wish he’d asked the nurse to find a Jew that he could confess to. So for hours, Karl confessed to Simon in excruciating detail how his unit had driven 200 Jews into a house and set it on fire, how he shot and murdered father, mother, and child as they tried to escape.

He cried out, “Oh, God, I shall never forget it. It haunts me.” When he finished, he said, “I know what I’ve told you is terrible, but in these long nights, waiting for death, I’ve so longed to talk to a Jew and beg forgiveness from him. I didn’t know if there were any left. I know that what I am asking is almost too much for you, but without an answer, I cannot die in peace.”

And then there was a long, devastating silence until at last Simon made up his mind, stood up, and, without a word, turned and left the room.

The debt was too much, unforgivable for Simon. Too much dignity had been taken and by not forgiving, he, at least, obtained a little vengeance. Yet the vengeance did not restore his dignity. He was haunted all his life by his

decision — trapped, like a man in his own prison of resentment.

In 1976 he published his book, The Sunflower, in which he tells the story and invites 32 scholars to debate whether or not what he did was right. The Jew, Simon Wiesenthal, writes, “But who was to forgive him? I? Nobody had empowered me to do so.” That is, “Who was I to speak on behalf of Heaven, to loose on behalf of Heaven? And, as for myself, how could I find the resources to forgive so much?”

The Jew, Simon Peter, asks, “Lord, how many times do I forgive? Seven?” Jesus, the Jew, answered him,

Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven.”

No limit, Simon.

Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. When he began the reckoning, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents; and as he could not pay, his lord ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made. So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, ‘Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.’ And out of pity for him the lord of that servant released him and forgave him the debt. But that same servant, as he went out, came upon one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii;

and seizing him by the throat he said, 'Pay what you owe.' So his fellow servant fell down and besought him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you.' He refused and went and put him in prison till he should pay the debt. When his fellow servants saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their lord all that had taken place. Then his lord summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you besought me; and should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?' And in anger his lord delivered him to the jailers, till he should pay all his debt. So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.

Jesus' story tells us why it is so hard to forgive. It tells us that sin is a debt. Forgiveness is canceling the debt by absorbing the loss, and that hurts.

I hear people say, "Well, that really hurt. I can't forgive that; that was inexcusable!" If it were excusable, it wouldn't be forgivable because there would be nothing to forgive. We excuse mistakes, but we must forgive sins. So we say, "I excuse you. I thought you owed me 100 denarii, but there was a misunderstanding. You're excused."

It's precisely when something becomes inexcusable that it becomes forgivable. "Oh, I understand you left the Jeep to glorify yourself among your friends and despise me in your heart. I understand, and I forgive you." "Oh, I understand, you *do* owe me 100 denarii, but I forgive you."

That is, I take your debt, and I turn it into a gift, absorbing the loss of 100 denarii or 100 dignity units. Either way, it *hurts*. Maybe it's all I have. Maybe it's more than all I have.

So you see Simon Wiesenthal's problem:

"If I forgive Karl, it takes more than all the dignity I have, and I die."

"To forgive Karl is the death of what I call me, myself. Indeed, I am defined by his sin against me. It's my resume. For all I have is my hatred and my resentment for he took everything else."

"To forgive him is the death of me."



Perhaps always, to forgive is to die...
somewhere, somehow, some way.



Well, Jesus' story involved more than two people, not just me and Susan, or Simon and Karl, or one servant and another servant. Jesus' story involved the King of all who forgives ten thousand talents, or as some translate it, tens of thousands of talents.

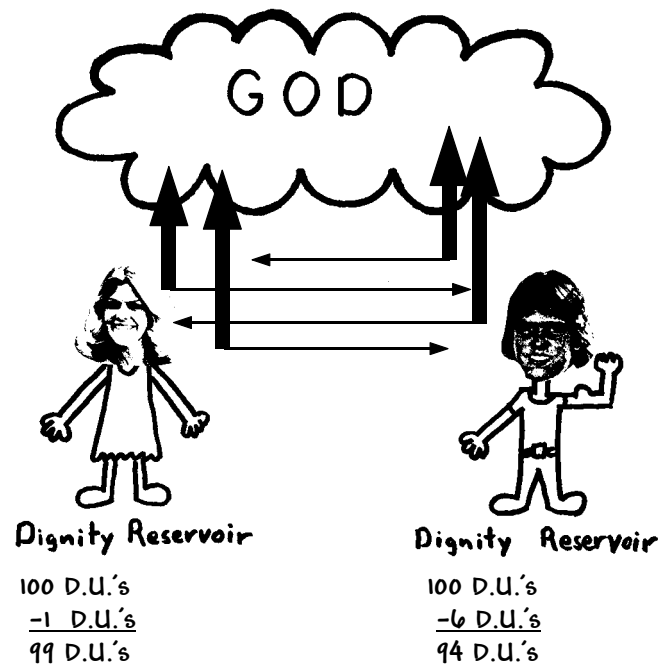
Just ten thousand talents was 12 times the entire annual revenue of the Roman Empire. Just to carry that

much would take 8,600 men, each carrying 60 pounds of money in a line 5 miles long. It would be impossible to steal. The only imaginable way that a servant could incur that kind of debt against a King would be to steal something far more valuable to Him than His entire kingdom... like the life of His only Son — His heart, His body, His blood.

Well, Jesus' story reveals that forgiveness hurts because it is sin absorbed. It also reveals that there is a vertical component as well as a horizontal component.

You know, every time that I sin against Susan, I sin against the one who made her, I sin against God.

Sin and Vengeance Vectorial Analysis Diagram



Every time I sin against Susan, I despise Susan, and then I also despise her Father, her Creator, her King. Every time I have contempt for Susan, I have contempt for God, and God is Judge. Every time I have contempt for Susan, I'm in contempt of court. I'm in contempt of Justice, Truth, Love, Life, Light, and Fire. I despise all that's good, and I despise God. It's blasphemy—a debt far greater than I could ever pay, greater than ten thousand talents. “The wages of sin is death,” and yet, even my death could never pay a debt of ten thousand talents.

Yet God says, “Vengeance is mine. I will repay.” How?

Well, as Jesus told Simon Peter the story of the King and the debtor, Peter probably laughed. He must have thought, “What servant could ever owe that much money? And what King would ever forgive that much money?” But I don't think Jesus laughed because He was the King; even more, He was the payment to the King. His death would pay the debt. He was the only begotten Son of the King.

Soon, He would pay the debt no human could pay. He paid it on a cross outside of Jerusalem where He bore our nails, our pain, our sin, and where He bore the wrath of God. He bore our Hell to forgive us our sin.

God damned God for the love of you.

Forgiving a debt of ten thousand talents hurts; forgiving you hurts more. When we sin, we take the life of the only begotten son of God, breaking His body and nailing it to the cross. We hurt Him immeasurably. And so this arrow [the vertical arrow on the “Sin and Vengeance Vectorial Analysis Diagram”] should be immeasurably greater than the horizontal arrow. And yet, even though it is

so great, He doesn't retaliate. "Vengeance is mine," He says, and He bears His own vengeance on our behalf.

To let people hurt you and to choose to bear the pain is forgiveness. We are forgiven the ten thousand talents. We are forgiven the blood of Jesus.

We take the life of Jesus, and yet, we do not take it from Him. John 10:18, "No one takes my life from me. I lay it down of my own accord." In other words, the deepest truth is that, while we take it at the cross, we can't really take it because He already gave it! He forgave it from the foundation of the world. It was His choice. God forgave us, even as He made us, all to reveal to us His incredible love for us in Christ.

If you really believed that, do you have any idea what it would do to your dignity reservoir? Well, first, it would obliterate it, and you'd die. You'd have no dignity of your own for you'd realize you murdered the Truth, Life, Love, Justice, God, despising all that's good and then taking His life. But then, realizing that God *let* you take His life to exhibit His love for you and to make you His own child, realizing that He *gave* His life for you and to you... well, that means that you are worth...

God wrapped in flesh,
hanging on a cross,
bearing Hell.

You are worth the blood
of the only begotten Son of the King.

You are worth "all things" by grace.
Scripture even says, "He gave us His only begotten Son.
Will He not give us all things with Him?"

You are worth the life of God.

You have so much dignity, you can't possibly begin to understand how much dignity you have. This is the sign for infinity [Peter draws the infinity symbol, 8, on the diagram]. You have dignity beyond your wildest dreams *by grace*.

You have so much dignity that if you just began to believe and someone took your coat, you'd give them your cloak, too. If someone slapped you on one cheek, you'd turn the other. That's no threat to your dignity.

You'd be impervious to insults and only give blessings.

No one could take from you
for you'd immediately forgive it to them.

You couldn't be robbed
for you'd turn it into a gift,
and so you couldn't be imprisoned
by bitterness and resentment.

Hell would hold no sway over you.

This world would no longer control you.

You'd be loosed.

You wouldn't have to always guard your dignity,
and you'd never have to work your resume.

Your life might still hurt *like a cross hurts*,
 but believing you're forgiven much,
 you would love much,
 and forgive much,
 and *you would be free*.

You know, when you forgive someone a debt to you, you are not necessarily saying that God forgives that person's debt to Him. But maybe you could, and maybe you should, and maybe you would. For when you see how much you are forgiven, you want everyone else to be forgiven. "Whatever you loose on earth is loosed in Heaven," said Jesus. And from His cross, He cried, "Father, forgive them. They know not what they do."

God's about far more than getting you forgiven. He's about making you a forgiver, in the image of His Son — the perfect image of the invisible God. Believe you're forgiven much, and you will forgive much, like Him. If someone owes you 100 denarii, you will forgive him on the spot, without reservation.

In Jesus' story, the first servant owes ten thousand talents. He falls on the ground saying, "Lord, I will repay." The King knows he's an idiot. No one can pay 12 times the annual revenue of the Roman Empire. He's an idiot. He's a liar, and he's insanely arrogant. He does not ask for mercy. He appeals to his own dignity, saying, "I will repay." Knowing these things, the King has pity and forgives him ten thousand talents.

When did God forgive you?

When you were an arrogant, lying idiot.

When did Christ die for you and pay your debt?

*When you were dead in your trespasses and sin.
 When you thought you could pay your way.
 When you had no idea how much you hurt him.*

So how *dare* you call yourself a believer and then say you can't forgive someone because it's just too much or because they didn't say, "Sorry," or say it with proper remorse and understanding of how they hurt you.

Even now you have no idea how much you've hurt Christ.

Even now your repentance is thoroughly flawed.

Even now He cries, "Forgive them Father, they know not what they do."

If you don't forgive *with your heart*,
 you must not believe you're forgiven *in your heart*.

The guy forgiven ten thousand talents immediately finds the guy that owes him 100 denarii (a few thousand bucks), beats him up, and demands payment. He must not believe he's been forgiven. He must still be living in fear and trying to pay. Well, ironically, the King finds him and says, "Okay, you will pay."

Well, did the King unforgive him? Can Jesus undie on the cross? 1 John 2:2, "He's the atonement for the sins of the whole world." Does that change? Does God change? Forgiving and taking it back? Gracious, then not gracious? Is God one? Does God change? *Or*, do we change?

I suspect that the jailors to whom the King delivers this man is himself, and his resentment, and his hatred, and his unforgiveness.

Forgiveness is granted, but until it is believed and received, we live in prison—trapped in our own Hell,

utterly alone, subject to the accuser (the Satan), making ourselves pay, and demanding payment of everyone we meet. For we believe that we can pay, we must pay, and so someday, we will pay.

Although God's grace knows no bounds, we can only see Him as Wrath, for the "measure we give is the measure we get," for it's the only measure we will believe.

How do we know what we believe? We know what we believe by how we forgive or don't forgive.

We know that we believe and receive forgiveness,
when we forgive.

We forgive, because we believe and receive
forgiveness.

Forgiveness must be *believed and received* to be
complete.

Simon Weisenthal didn't forgive because he didn't believe that he was much of a sinner, and so he didn't believe that he had much sin that was forgiven. You see that's a problem with legalists. They don't make much of sin, and so they don't make much of forgiveness.

Simon Peter soon forgave because he soon believed he was a great sinner, forgiven much sin. When you stand at the foot of the cross, see your sin, and behold His grace... well, He kills you, and He fills you, and He sets you free.

Sabina Wurmbrand was a Jew, like Simon. Her family had been exterminated in Poland. One night in WWII, her husband, Richard Wurmbrand, met a Nazi soldier, home on leave. The Nazi's name was Borila. He boasted of how he strangled Jews in one particular town in

Poland. Richard invited Borila to his home the following night. While Sabina slept in the next room, Richard set a trap. He chatted with the Nazi soldier, winning his friendship. Then, he gradually revealed that Borila had most likely, very recently murdered his wife's entire family in that particular town in Poland.

When Borila realized what was being said, he jumped up as if to strangle Wurmbrand.

But Wurmbrand held up his hand and said,

Borila, Let's try an experiment. I will wake my wife and tell her who you are and what you have done. I can bet you she will not speak one word of reproach. She'll embrace you as a brother and bring you supper. Now if Sabina, who is a sinner like us, can forgive and love like this, imagine how Jesus, who is Perfect Love can forgive and love you! Only return to Him, and everything you have done will be forgiven.

Well, that was the sword that cut to his heart. For all at once, he tore at his collar crying out, "Oh, God, what shall I do? I'm a murderer. I'm soaked in blood. What shall I do?" As tears ran down his cheeks, he dropped to the floor, trembling and sobbing as Wurmbrand led him to the cross.

Wurmbrand forgave because he had been so forgiven. And what was loosed on earth was loosed in Heaven. And Wurmbrand did what we read a first, He confronted a brother with his sin. He swung the sword. He confronted Borila with his debt. Not to be repayed, but to

turn his debt into a gift. He confronted him with forgiveness.

Then Wurmbrand woke Sabina, his wife, saying, “Sabina, there is a man here. We believe he has murdered your family, but now he has repented. He is your brother.” Wurmbrand writes,

Sabina came out in her dressing-gown and put out her arms to embrace him: then both began to weep and to kiss each other again and again. I have never seen bride and bridegroom kiss with such love and passion and purity as this murderer and the survivor among his victims. Then, as I foretold, Sabina went to the kitchen to bring him food.

Who empowered her to do such a thing?! How was she so free?! How was that possible?!

Answer: Her reservoir of dignity was full of blood — turned to wine. She was intoxicated with it. For she had also been a murderer of Jews, actually one Jew, the King of the Jews, and He forgave her and filled her with Himself.

Well, in case you think forgiveness is only for Holocaust survivors and disciples who deny Jesus on good Friday, let’s go back to Jackass Hill.

Susan and I were stuck on Jackass Hill. The sun was going down on our anger, and our anger was only growing. Each confrontation only made it worse for we expected payment. So each, “I’m sorry,” had to be at least as painful as the original offense, and most of the “I’m sorry’s” were just weapons of further vengeance.



The sins were too numerous to comprehend. It was just sin on top of sin. But not just sins, we were sin, and our dignity reservoirs were just about on empty. And then, finally, in desperation and by grace, we saw what we needed, and for the first time in our relationship, we reached out and grabbed hands and really prayed... to a King, who gave absolutely everything for a 16 year old, selfish, self-centered, insecure boy, and a 16 year old, selfish, self-centered, insecure girl.

You know, when you pray to God in Jesus' name, you come into the presence of the King. Well, in the presence of the King, Jackass Hill turned into Mount

Calvary. And as she smiled at me and kissed me, Mount Calvary turned into Mount Zion, and we were free.

And so, on the night He was betrayed and denied by Simon Peter, and abandoned by all twelve, and then crucified, He went to the kitchen and brought food, and He kissed us with grace. He took the bread, and He broke it, saying, "This is my body given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." And in the same way after supper, He took the cup, and He said, "This is the cup of the new covenant in my blood, shed for the forgiveness of sins. Drink of it all of you, in remembrance of me."

And so we invite all of you, in remembrance of Him, to come forward, tear off a piece of the bread and dip it in the cup. The black cups are wine; the purple cups are juice. They're both blood, for your dignity reservoir. And when you come forward, you are saying this, "Oh, God, I need your forgiveness. Save me. And oh, God, I want to be a forgiver, like You. Be my Savior, be my Lord."

And if you struggle with belief, you can even say this, "I believe, help my unbelief!" And He does. In Jesus' name, believe the gospel. Amen.

Satan has designs to turn us into Jackass Hill Community Church. And his plan is to trap you and your spouse on Jackass Hill, in prison. His plan is to turn you into a disciple of Jackass Hill, but God has given you a weapon, more powerful than any weapon in all the world. You just ingested it; it's the weapon of His blood.

Underneath your seat, you'll find one of these [Peter holds up a nail]. It's a nail to remind you of the nails that were driven into the hands and the feet of Jesus for the

love of you. It's to remind you of the forgiveness of the great King. And I invite you to take that nail.

I can't tell you exactly when to confront. I can't tell you exactly when to restore trust. I can't tell you who did the right thing, who did the wrong thing in every conversation that you've ever had in your marriage or with your friends. But if you would take this nail and keep it in your pocket, and then whenever you get into an argument with your wife or your husband, whenever you have to confront an employee at work, whenever you have to discipline your children, whenever you go to a committee meeting at LMCC, whenever you get frustrated with someone in this body, and you're feeling convicted because you should do this, to go confront them with their sin, and you don't know what to say, reach in your pocket and grab this nail.

And remember your King.

And remember His love for you.

And you'll do just fine.

In Jesus' name, forgive. Forgiven much, you will love much, and forgive much, and speak the right word, Jesus. In His name, Amen.

Relevant Texts and Quotations (from bulletin)

Pray then like this: Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father also will forgive you; but if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

Matthew 6:9-15

“If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them.” Then Peter came up and said to him, “Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?” Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven. Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. When he began the reckoning, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents; and as he could not pay, his lord ordered

him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made. So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, 'Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.' And out of pity for him the lord of that servant released him and forgave him the debt. But that same servant, as he went out, came upon one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii; and seizing him by the throat he said, 'Pay what you owe.' So his fellow servant fell down and besought him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you.' He refused and went and put him in prison till he should pay the debt. When his fellow servants saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their lord all that had taken place. Then his lord summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you besought me; and should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?' And in anger his lord delivered him to the jailers, till he should pay all his debt. So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart."

Matthew 18:15-22

Jesus has not only set Peter up in this passage, he has set us up as well. He has been saying with utter clarity that he, the Messiah, is going to solve the world's problems by dying. His answer to our sins will be the oblivion of a death on a cross. His response to our loss of control over our destinies will be to lose everything himself. What he tells us in this parable, therefore, is that unless we too are willing to see our own death as the one thing necessary to our salvation...unless we can, unlike the unforgiving servant, die to the gimcrack accounts by which we have justified our lives...we will never be able to enjoy the resurrection, even though Jesus hands it to us on a silver platter. If we cannot face the price he has paid to free us, we might as well never have been freed at all... In heaven, there are only forgiven sinners. There are no good guys, no upright, successful types who, by dint of

their own integrity, have been accepted into the great country club in the sky. There are only failures, only those who have accepted their deaths in their sins and who have been raised up by the King who himself died that they might live. But in hell, too, there are only forgiven sinners. Jesus on the cross does not sort out certain exceptionally recalcitrant parties and cut them off from the pardon of his death. He forgives the badness of even the worst of us, willy-nilly: and he never takes back that forgiveness, not even at the bottom of the bottomless pit. The sole difference, therefore, between hell and heaven is that in heaven the forgiveness is accepted and passed along, while in hell it is rejected and blocked. In heaven, the death of the king is welcomed and becomes the doorway to new life in the resurrection. In hell, the old life of the bookkeeping world is insisted on and becomes, forever, the pointless torture it always was. There is only one unpardonable sin, and that is to withhold pardon from others. The only thing that can keep us out of the joy of the resurrection is to join the unforgiving servant in his refusal to die.

Robert Capon, Kingdom, Grace, Judgment

My little children, I am writing this to you so that you may not sin; but if any one does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is the expiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world. And by this we may be sure that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He who says "I know him" but disobeys his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him; but whoever keeps his word, in him truly love for God is perfected. By this we may be sure that we are in him: he who says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.

1 John 2:1-6

And he said to all, "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me."

Luke 9:23

For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life, that I may take it again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again; this charge I have received from my Father.

John 10:17-18

When someone has taken from you - give it to them, and then you can't be robbed.

A Grandmother in Reader's Digest

To forgive the incessant provocations of daily life - to keep on forgiving the bossy mother-in-law, the bullying husband, the nagging wife, the selfish daughter, the deceitful son - how can we do it? Only, I think, by remembering where we stand, by meaning our words when we say in our prayers each night, "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those that trespass against us." We are offered forgiveness on no other terms. To refuse it is to refuse God's mercy for ourselves. There is no hint of exceptions and God means what he says.

C.S. Lewis, The Weight of Glory

Forgiveness is not a one time event but a permanent attitude of the heart.

Martin Luther King

It may be infinitely worse to refuse to forgive than to murder, because the latter may be an impulse of a moment of heat, whereas the former is a cold and deliberate choice of the heart.

George MacDonald

Any one whom you forgive, I also forgive. What I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, has been for your sake in the presence of Christ, to keep Satan from gaining the advantage over us; for we are not ignorant of his designs.

2 Corinthians 2:10-11

You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much; but he who is forgiven little, loves little.

Luke 7:46-47

Martin Luther used a graphic figure to depict our responsibility in the death of Christ. He said we carry around the nails of Christ's cross in our pocket. We cringe at the very thought of the crucifixion; we hardly feel responsible for spikes driven through the hands and feet of Jesus. But that is what our sins did. He "was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed."

Doug Webster, The Easy Yoke

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