

Instead of Christmas being for giving, we are saying it is for forgiving!

Christmas Is Forgiving #3 – Receiving Forgiveness.

We are in week three of our series Christmas is forgiving. So far we have talked about forgiving those who have hurt us and asking for forgiveness from those we have hurt and this week we are talking about receiving forgiveness.

Christmas is the time we celebrate the birth of Christ. It all started when an angel told Mary, *“You will be pregnant even though you are a virgin.”* Matthew 1:21-22

Her fiancé, Joseph, didn’t understand. So God sent an angel to clarify the situation. Verse 21 the angel said, speaking of Mary, *“She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.” All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet.”*

The name “Jesus” means “the Lord saves.” *“You are to give him the name Jesus.”* Why? *“Because he will save his people from their sins.”* This is why God sent Jesus. *“Not to condemn the world, but to save the world.”* John 3:17. *You will call him Jesus, the Lord saves.”* Because He will save His people from their sins.

Verse 22 says, *“All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet.”* Christmas is a big family time and should be a spiritual time also.

During this holiday time, for a lot of people, there are good reflections of what God has done. But for some, this can be a season of disappointment and hurt and regret, and a lot of pain can surface during the holidays.

Someone said, ***“Life is all fun and games until someone gets hurt.”*** That’s the truth, isn’t it? It’s fun until you get hurt or someone that you love gets hurt.

Years ago when our children were small, we were moving and we had already moved all the lamps out of the living room so it wasn’t very bright. And a number of our friends came to help. We had gotten a new dog, a black lab, and people were going in and out of the house to have a look at the dog. The last one who had come back in had closed the sliding glass patio door. Well, in all the commotion and the low light in the room, our daughter, Jackie, went to run into the back yard and didn’t see that the sliding glass door was shut. She was just a child but she hit it hard and it shattered. She bounced back into the room but a piece of glass made a gash in her leg. The doctor stitched up her leg with about 20 stitches and he was very careful so she wouldn’t have much of a scar. The nurses were impressed and kept saying, *“if I get cut I want you to stich me up.”* But the stitches got infected and she ended up with a scar anyway.

And until something happened everything was fun and games but when that happened Barb starting proclaiming **“everybody out, everybody out.”** No more fun and games, things had turned serious.

In real life, unfortunately there is hurt, and a lot of us will experience pain. As the holidays approach, a lot of people will feel some pain and loss.

A couple will come to me and speaking about their pain will say, *“I thought we raised our kids better than this. I can’t believe they turned out like this.”* And their heart is breaking. Then someone says, *“You know, I never, ever thought I’d end up divorced and with a broken family.”*

Many people carry a lot of pain, a lot of regret, and we are going to look at how to move beyond the pain and move into the blessings that God has for us.

The Bible teaches about **two different kinds of sorrow**. There’s Godly sorrow and there’s worldly sorrow. What is the difference? The Bible says that *“Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret...”* 2 Corinthians 7:10.

There’s another kind of sorrow that’s called worldly sorrow. And where does worldly sorrow lead to? It brings death. *“...but worldly sorrow brings death.”* And it’s this kind of sorrow most people carry around, a worldly sorrow. *“I’m sorry I did this. I’m sorry for how it is affecting me,”* and it’s a very inward and depressed sorrow.

And today, with God’s help, we move from a worldly sorrow to a Godly sorrow, which leads to salvation and new life. In order to do that, we are going to look at an Old Testament story of a guy who had it good and then made a huge mistake.

It is a story about **King David**, a king chosen by God, but made a tremendous mistake. What did he do? He had an adulterous affair with Bathsheba.

The adultery led to her getting pregnant, David had her husband, Uriah, brought back from the war thinking he would sleep with his wife and then think the baby was his. **But Uriah refused the comforts of home** saying he couldn’t in good conscience go home when his comrades were in the thick of battle.

So what did King David do? He had Uriah put on the front lines and had everyone else pulled back and he was killed. **Basically, King David had him murdered.**

And in doing that, David lost his good name, his reputation and his integrity. Bathsheba had a little baby boy. The baby got very sick and David’s heart broke for his sick little boy.

He didn't eat for seven days and he lay on the ground in sack cloth and ashes and he cried out to the Lord and prayed: *"Lord, this isn't the boy's fault, it's my fault, please spare him."* But on the seventh day the boy died.

David was the guilty one but because of his guilt two innocent ones died. He carried the guilt. Now David had a choice to make in the middle of his pain. He could let his pain take him away from God or he could let God use the pain and the difficult time David was in to soften his heart and bring David back to God.

And that is what David did and he ended up closer to his Heavenly Father than he had ever been before. This is what he did to move forward. He did **three things**.

1. The first one is this; we need to learn to accept what cannot be changed.

When David heard that the child had died he got up and washed, put on clean clothes, went to the temple and worshipped and then ate.

The servants couldn't believe it and said to David, *"Why are you acting this way? While the child was alive, you fasted and wept, but now that the child is dead, you get up and eat!"* 2 Sam 12:21

David responded, *"While the child was still alive, I fasted and I wept. I thought, 'Who knows? The Lord may be gracious to me and let the child live.' But now that he is dead, why should I fast? Can I bring him back again?"* (2 Samuel 12:22-23)

What did David do? **He accepted the fact that nothing he did could change what happened in the past,** the child was not coming back. And some of us must embrace that truth, as well.

Some continue to mourn for something that cannot be changed. And God's loving word for you may be along the lines *"the child is not coming back."* There may be something that you wish would change, but it's not going to change, and before you can move forward, you have to accept that it can never be changed.

There were **two monks**, who were traveling together and came up to a very rough river, and there was a lady beside the river who wanted to get across, but she was afraid the river might be too rough and carry her away.

The younger monk wanted to help, but the older monk said, *"No, you can't do that. Remember, you cannot let the skin of a woman touch you, or it may cause you to have impure thoughts."* But the younger monk wanted to help, and finally he said, *"Ma'am, I will help you across?"*

And she said, *"Would you please? I need help desperately,"* & so she locked arms with him, & carefully, he led her across. When they got to the other side, she threw her arms around him & said, *"Thank you, thank you. You saved the day!"*

The other monk said, *"I cannot believe you let that happen."* Then the two monks continued on their journey, walking for hours and hours, the older monk was too upset to even speak.

Finally, the older monk said, *"I cannot believe you let the skin of a woman touch you,"* and the younger monk, with a surprised look said, *"I let her go hours ago, but you are still carrying her in your heart."*

There are some things that God has forgiven years ago, but some here today still carry the pain in their hearts. In order to move forward with God, the first thing we must do is accept the fact that some things are not going to change.

2. The second thing that we must learn to do is what David did, is we must learn to give it to God. Whatever the burden is, the guilt, the heaviness, the regret we are carrying, we must give it to God. Verse 20, *"Then David got up from the ground. And after he had washed, and changed his clothes, he went into the house of the Lord and he worshipped."*

What did he do? He got up and went to church. In the middle of his lowest time, he turned to God, and that's what we must do, as well. In fact, we can turn to one of **three places** when we are hurting.

a. The first place is, **we can turn inward**. *"Oh, I can't believe this happened. Oh, I feel so badly about this. Oh, I'm such a miserable person."*

b. Second place **we can turn is outward**. That is, *"Would you please validate my existence? Would you please tell me I'm not a bad person? Would you please tell me that my car or my image or my house or my title or my position is enough, would you please tell me that I'm not as bad as I think I am?"*

"Or, if you can't do that, would you move out of the way, because I need a drink or I need a hit or a smoke or a drug, or something to help numb the pain and guilt that I feel."

c. **We can turn inward. We can turn outward, or we can turn upward.** We can turn to God, and let God be our source of strength and peace during times of pain.

If we call ourselves followers of Christ, but cannot find peace and strength in God's presence, then our so-called Christianity is nothing but a **big joke**. God is a comforting God. The Bible says there is a peace that surpasses all understanding.

Everyone goes through ups and downs, and ministers are not exempt. Unfortunately, even in the middle of tough times, Sundays still come. A few years back I got a call early on a Sunday morning.

It was from my sister in California, our father had just died that morning. Later that morning I spoke here at Baxter church. It was a difficult time, but it was something I could absolutely do nothing about. Many times, we have no control over something that is rocking our entire world.

It's easy to give advice, I'm not asking you to do something that I have not experienced myself. We can be great at giving advice but it's a little harder to live it. When we find it happening to ourselves we have to release the burden and say, **"Lord, I cannot handle it. You need to take care of it."**

I am sure there are those here today that are facing that kind of burden. We must learn like David, to give it over to the Lord. In Isaiah 6, God called the prophet Isaiah to ministry.

Verse 1, *"In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple."* Isaiah 6:1

When Isaiah said, ***"In the year that King Uzziah died."*** Basically, he was saying, ***"In the year that our whole world fell apart."***

He could have said it this way. *"In the year that the person that I loved passed away."* He could have said, *"In the year that my loved one walked out on me."* *"In the year that my business went under. In the year that I did something so stupid that I destroyed my life and hurt many people. In the year that my world fell apart."*

It was in that year, *"I saw the Lord."* In the year where nothing made sense, I still received the presence of God. I saw Him high and lifted up, and His presence, and His power, and His peace were enough for me to keep going.

Some here today may need to embrace the fact that the past is not going to change, and we must take our burden, our heaviness, our guilt, our regret and give it over to God.

3. The third thing that we must do to move forward is like David, **we must learn to focus on what is left, not lost.** We must learn to focus on what else God has for us, rather than what we have lost. King David messed up big time. Sin got Bathsheba pregnant.

The baby died because of David's guilt, and the next verse says, *"Then David comforted his wife Bathsheba, and he went to her and lay with her. She gave birth to a son and they named him Solomon. The Lord loved him."* (2 Samuel 12:22)

Did God replace the first son that died? No. Could the pain and loss of losing that first child ever go away completely? I don't think so. God didn't change the past, but God brought something new.

Our spiritual enemy wants us to live in the pain of the past. Paul put it this way, *"I'm forgetting what is behind, and I am pressing on toward what is ahead."* (Philippians 3:12-14)

The problem is, **we tend to remember the things that we should forget, and we forget the things we should remember.** We go back into the past and we strum up things that God would say about, *"I forgave that years ago. Why do you dig up that pain once again?"*

We forget the healing promises of God. When we are carrying pain and guilt and regret, we wonder if life will ever go back to normal. The past cannot be changed, but the meaning of the past can be changed. We cannot change what happened, but God can change the meaning of the past...if we will allow Him.

In the 1929 **Rose Bowl** it was University of Georgia against California. **Roy Riegals** made an amazing hit. At almost halftime he hit a guy and forced a fumble. Then Riegals picked up the ball, and disoriented from the hit, ran the wrong way.

He was running as fast as he could toward the wrong end zone. The coach was screaming, *"Somebody stop him"* when finally, after running sixty-five yards the wrong way, one of his own teammates tackled him from behind at the two-yard line. His mistake ended up leading to a score for the opposing team.

At half-time he was totally defeated. He sat in the corner of the locker room, crying. He had humiliating himself, his team, his university; he was the laughing stock of the football world.

And at the end of half time, the coach shocking everyone, said, *"All who started the first half, back on the field to start the second half."* Well, Riegals had started the first half, and everybody else jumped up to go out on the field except Riegals, who sat in the corner crying.

The coach said, *“Riegals, didn’t you hear what I said? Everyone who started the first half starts the second half? Riegals, who hadn’t even taken his helmet off, looked up and said, “Coach, I can’t go back out there. I’m the laughing stock of football. I’m embarrassed. I’m going to lose the game for us.”*

The coach reached down and grabbed him by the face mask, pulled him up and looked him in the eye and said, *“Riegals, you are my player. You made a mistake. You are forgiven. Now, get out there and win the game!”*

Those who saw the game said, *“Roy Riegals played like a man possessed and helped lead the team to a large victory.”* Bringing glory to his school. What caused him to go from the depths of defeat to moments later, victory? What was the change? Where did it come from?

It came from **two things**. The **first** thing it came from was forgiveness. **He was forgiven**. The **second** thing that it came from is that he was given a **second chance**. Forgiveness and a second chance.

His name is Jesus, the Lord saves, which means He will save His people from their sins. Jesus did not come to condemn the world, but to what? To save it.

Isaiah 43:18-19, *“Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the desert and streams in the wasteland.”*

What was God saying? He was saying, *“Don’t dwell on the past, I’m doing something new, something different. Let it go, there’s a new day.”* And His message for you is as the New Year approaches is, seize a new beginning in the risen Christ, who says, *“I forgive and I give second chances.”*

And when you realize He is allowing you to play the second half, even though you messed up bad in the first half, then you can still win by playing with passion and fire in your eyes and bring glory to God.

You messed up in the past? Well, join the stinking club. We all have. Don’t die there. Godly sorrow leads to life. Worldly sorrow leads to death.

I tell this story about David this weekend, because the story of David’s fall and God’s rebuilding his life is a big part of the Christmas story. It really is. Matthew 1 is a genealogy and is what some people call a boring part of the Bible.

Most people skip over it when they're reading it because it's just a bunch of names. Matthew 1:6. (This is the human genealogy of Jesus.) *“And Jesse, was the father of King David. David was the father of Solomon, whose mother had been Uriah’s wife.”*

We see in **the genealogy of Jesus** the story of David’s fall and God’s restoration. With that thought in mind, let’s go back to our opening verse, Matthew 1:21-22, and read it with new eyes.

“She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, [“the Lord saves,” why?] because he will save his people from their sins.”

Vs 22, *All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet.”*

All of what? “All of this,” including the lowest point in David’s life and God’s restoration, all of this took place to fulfill what the Lord said through the prophet. We have an amazing God who forgives sins and gives second chances.