

Forgiveness

Lately I've been thinking a lot about forgiveness, and how forgiveness actually makes life possible at all. All human life is constituted by forgiveness. But forgiveness is both costly and difficult – for both offerer and receiver. Costly, because the *telos* is not to be drawn into a situation of truce but reconciliation, trust and love. Difficult, because two estranged parties are moved from a place of dissatisfaction and what has often become a strange comfort of calloused survival towards a place of new vulnerability, raw tenderness and tentative hope.

Forgiveness makes life possible because it brings us face to face with the true nature of divine majesty which is neither material vastness nor the majesty of force, neither the majesty of mystery nor the majesty of thought. The true majesty of God – revealed in Jesus Christ – is his mercy. The true majesty of God is that he did what we would never have done – he had mercy on all flesh. His greatness is not in his loftiness, but in his nearness. God is great not because he is above feeling, but because he feels as none of us can. The majesty of God is completely saturated through and through with his forgiving love, which comes out most of all in his treatment of sin ... his treatment of those who would wish him dead.

Jesus was not playing semantic games with us when he declared, 'He who has seen me, has seen the Father' (John 14:9). There is no God behind Jesus Christ. In Jesus, we see the full brunt of God's attitude to us, and it is one of unbridled grace. There is no shadow side to God's love, as if God might be schizophrenic, or somehow different from the one who 'stretched out his hand and touched' lepers (Matt 8:2), or healed the Centurion's paralysed servant (Matt 8:13), or who gave a widow's dead son back to his mother (Luke 7:11–17), or who had his feet washed with the tears of a prostitute (if this is what she was; Luke 7:38).

The incarnation of God into our broken and insolent world flows out of the undivided heart of a Father who has spared nothing in order that we might know his forgiveness, and so life. God did not have to be bribed or appeased into forgiving us. That's not why Jesus died. Jesus died that God might treat sinners he loves as daughters and sons, seeing us free from all that keeps us entangled in our shame, pain, isolation and guilt. Jesus died that we might – by the same eternal Spirit through whom Jesus 'offered himself without blemish to God' (Heb. 9:14) – know the purification of our consciences from dead works and be set free to serve the living God.

Jason Goroncy

Day 1

Psalm 145 - David's Praise

I lift you high in praise, my God, O my King! and I'll bless your name into eternity.

I'll bless you every day,

and keep it up from now to eternity.

God is magnificent; he can never be praised enough.

There are no boundaries to his greatness.

Generation after generation stands in awe of your work;

each one tells stories of your mighty acts.

Your beauty and splendour have everyone talking;

I compose songs on your wonders.

Your marvellous doings are headline news;

I could write a book full of the details of your greatness.

The fame of your goodness spreads across the country;
your righteousness is on everyone's lips.
God is all mercy and grace –
not quick to anger, is rich in love.
God is good to one and all;
everything he does is suffused with grace.
Creation and creatures applaud you, God;
your holy people bless you.
They talk about the glories of your rule,
they exclaim over your splendour,
Letting the world know of your power for good,
the lavish splendour of your kingdom.
Your kingdom is a kingdom eternal;
you never get voted out of office.
God always does what he says,
and is gracious in everything he does.
God gives a hand to those down on their luck,
gives a fresh start to those ready to quit.
All eyes are on you, expectant;
you give them their meals on time.
Generous to a fault,
you lavish your favour on all creatures.
Everything God does is right—
the trademark on all his works is love.
God's there, listening for all who pray,
for all who pray and mean it.
He does what's best for those who fear him—
hears them call out, and saves them.
God sticks by all who love him,
but it's all over for those who don't.
My mouth is filled with God's praise.
Let everything living bless him,
bless his holy name from now to eternity!

'Father in heaven, open the fountains of our eyes, let a torrent of tears like a flood obliterate all that which has not found favour in your eyes. But also give us a sign as of old, when you set the rainbow as a gateway of grace in the heavens, that you will no more wipe us out with a flood'. – Søren Kierkegaard (1813–1855).

Day 2

1 Thessalonians 5:1–11

I don't think, friends, that I need to deal with the question of when all this is going to happen. You know as well as I that the day of the Master's coming can't be posted on our calendars. He won't call ahead and make an appointment any more than a burglar would. About the time everybody's walking around complacently, congratulating each other – "We've sure got it made! Now we can take it easy!" – suddenly everything will fall apart. It's going to come as suddenly and inescapably as birth pangs to a pregnant woman. But friends, you're not in the dark, so how could you be taken off guard by any of this? You're sons of Light, daughters of Day. We live under wide open skies and know where we stand. So let's not sleepwalk through life like those others. Let's keep our eyes open and be smart. People sleep at night and get

drunk at night. But not us! Since we're creatures of Day, let's act like it. Walk out into the daylight sober, dressed up in faith, love, and the hope of salvation. God didn't set us up for an angry rejection but for salvation by our Master, Jesus Christ. He died for us, a death that triggered life. Whether we're awake with the living or asleep with the dead, we're alive with him! So speak encouraging words to one another. Build up hope so you'll all be together in this, no one left out, no one left behind. I know you're already doing this; just keep on doing it.

Dear Lord, I have some bad clothes. Please dress me today with your wardrobe – with faith, love, and the hope of salvation.

Day 3

1 Thessalonians 5:12–28

And now, friends, we ask you to honour those leaders who work so hard for you, who have been given the responsibility of urging and guiding you along in your obedience. Overwhelm them with appreciation and love! Get along among yourselves, each of you doing your part. Our counsel is that you warn the freeloaders to get a move on. Gently encourage the stragglers, and reach out for the exhausted, pulling them to their feet. Be patient with each person, attentive to individual needs. And be careful that when you get on each other's nerves you don't snap at each other. Look for the best in each other, and always do your best to bring it out. Be cheerful no matter what; pray all the time; thank God no matter what happens. This is the way God wants you who belong to Christ Jesus to live. Don't suppress the Spirit, and don't stifle those who have a word from the Master. On the other hand, don't be gullible. Check out everything, and keep only what's good. Throw out anything tainted with evil. May God himself, the God who makes everything holy and whole, make you holy and whole, put you together – spirit, soul, and body – and keep you fit for the coming of our Master, Jesus Christ. The One who called you is completely dependable. If he said it, he'll do it! Friends, keep up your prayers for us. Greet all the followers of Jesus there with a holy embrace. And make sure this letter gets read to all the brothers and sisters. Don't leave anyone out. The amazing grace of Jesus Christ be with you! Lord, in a world that is constantly letting us down, how great it is that your hope will never disappoint us. Help us to cling to this hope today. Amen.

Father, we thank you for blessing our community of faith with a dedicated, generous, and gifted pastor in Alasdair. We thank you for the many sacrifices he and Cathy make in order to serve you and us. We also thank you for those who serve as leaders of young people and Bible study groups. We ask you to bless them and to fill them with your gifts of humility, grace, patience, discernment and wisdom. Give them a great sense of humour, a deep love for you, and joy in ministry. Fill them with your Spirit so that they will reveal your character and commitments in the way they relate to others. Fill them with the love of Jesus that permeates and shines out of them. Lord, we have all often tried to tell you that we feel ill-equipped and unprepared for the ministries you call us into. We ask, dear Father, that as these servants and friends of Jesus spend energy praying and preparing for their ministry responsibilities, that they might know your grace and be fed with the Word who comes down from heaven. Reveal to them afresh the loving resources of the Holy Spirit who is our true strength. And may all they are and all they do bring glory to you. In Jesus' name. Amen'.

Day 4

Matthew 6:25–34

“If you decide for God, living a life of God-worship, it follows that you don’t fuss about what’s on the table at mealtimes or whether the clothes in your closet are in fashion. There is far more to your life than the food you put in your stomach, more to your outer appearance than the clothes you hang on your body. Look at the birds, free and unfettered, not tied down to a job description, careless in the care of God. And you count far more to him than birds. Has anyone by fussing in front of the mirror ever gotten taller by so much as an inch? All this time and money wasted on fashion – do you think it makes that much difference? Instead of looking at the fashions, walk out into the fields and look at the wild flowers. They never primp or shop, but have you ever seen colour and design quite like it? The ten best-dressed men and women in the country look shabby alongside them. If God gives such attention to the appearance of wild flowers – most of which are never even seen – don’t you think he’ll attend to you, take pride in you, do his best for you? What I’m trying to do here is to get you to relax, to not be so preoccupied with *getting*, so you can respond to God’s *giving*. People who don’t know God and the way he works fuss over these things, but you know both God and how he works. Steep your life in God-reality, God-initiative, God-provisions. Don’t worry about missing out. You’ll find all your everyday human concerns will be met. Give your entire attention to what God is doing right now, and don’t get worked up about what may or may not happen tomorrow. God will help you deal with whatever hard things come up when the time comes.

‘Father in heaven, let your face shine upon me, that I may walk in your ways and not stray more distantly from you, where your voice can no longer reach me. Oh, let your voice inspire faith and let me hear it, even if it overtakes me with its terrors upon my erring paths, where I live as one sick and tainted in spirit, apart and lonely, far from fellowship with you and with neighbour! Lord Jesus Christ, you who came into the world to save the lost – you who left the ninety and nine sheep to seek that one which was lost - seek me, lost as I am upon my erring paths. Good Shepherd, let me hear your voice, let me know it, let me follow it! Holy Spirit, come to me with groanings that cannot be uttered. Pray for me as Abraham did for Sodom, that if there be but one pure thought, one better feeling in me, the time of probation may be prolonged for the barren fig tree. And Holy Spirit, you who give birth to the dead and youth to the aged, renew me also; create in me a new heart’. – Søren Kierkegaard (1813–1855).

Day 5

Psalm 138:1–8 - A David Psalm

Thank you! Everything in me says “Thank you!” Angels listen as I sing my thanks.

I kneel in worship facing your holy temple
and say it again: “Thank you!”

Thank you for your love,
thank you for your faithfulness;

Most holy is your name,
most holy is your Word.

The moment I called out, you stepped in;
you made my life large with strength.

When they hear what you have to say, GOD,
all earth’s kings will say “Thank you.”

They'll sing of what you've done:
"How great the glory of God!"
And here's why: God, high above, sees far below;
no matter the distance, he knows everything about us.
When I walk into the thick of trouble,
keep me alive in the angry turmoil.
With one hand
strike my foes,
With your other hand
save me.
Finish what you started in me, God.
Your love is eternal – don't quit on me now.

Gracious, steadfast, reliable and long-suffering God, thank you for your love, thank you for your faithfulness, all revealed in Word made flesh. Most holy is your name, most holy is your Word.
Amen.