

INTRODUCTION

I live in East Texas where there are lots of country music fans. One of the greatest country music singers is Miranda Lambert who lives in Lindale, Texas, a suburb of Tyler. I wonder what the reaction of our congregation would be if I announced one Sunday that Miranda Lambert was here? I can imagine they would be pretty excited. But instead of the "real" Miranda Lambert, I just showed a picture of her on the big screens. They would be disappointed. I could say, "That's a picture of Miranda Lambert. In fact, she's bigger than life in that picture. Isn't the picture the same thing as having her here?" No!

By this time they would be ready to commit me to the loony bin. Everyone understands the difference between a picture and the real thing. A photograph is just a representation of a person or thing.

Here's the point. Over the past few weeks we've been learning the difference between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant. The Old Covenant with all its rules and regulations was only a PICTURE, and the New Covenant that Jesus brought is the REAL thing. Given a choice between seeing a picture of Miranda Lambert or meeting her in person is a no-brainer. That's why the New Covenant is so much better than the Old Covenant.

Hebrews 10:11-18. "Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when this priest [Jesus] had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God. Since that time he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool, because by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy. The Holy Spirit also testifies to us about this. First he says: 'This is the covenant I will make with them after that time, says the Lord. I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds.' Then he adds: 'Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more.' And where these have been forgiven, sacrifice for sin is no longer necessary."

We're coming to the end of a long section of Hebrews that shows the superiority of Jesus over the Jewish High Priest and the Old Testament Sacrificial system. All the blood from the repeated animal sacrifices could never forgive one sin. But because of the once-for-all death of Jesus, we are forgiven. The focus of this message is found in Hebrews 10:18, "Where these have been FORGIVEN, sacrifice for sin is no longer necessary."

I want to talk about the perfect forgiveness we have through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. If you have placed your faith in Jesus, you are totally and absolutely forgiven. ALL your sins are forgiven, past, present, and future. The cross is timeless. You may wonder, "How can Jesus forgive my future sins?" Let me ask you, "How many of your sins were in the future when Jesus died two thousand years ago?" All of them!

If you have placed your faith in Jesus you are eternally forgiven. However, you may not FEEL forgiven. Satan wants to make you doubt your forgiveness, and other people may try to make you feel guilty. I want you to leave today with absolute assurance of your full forgiveness. Let

me share with you four ways in which the Bible says God has forgiven your sin. I am making these in the first person so they can be a confession for you.

1. GOD HAS COVERED MY SHAME.

When we were talking about the Scarlet Thread through the Bible, I mentioned that Adam and Eve first felt the shame of their nakedness after they had sinned. They made garments of fig leaves, but that wasn't adequate. God had to shed blood to cover their shame with an animal skin.

In the same way, there's nothing we can do ourselves to cover our shame. But through the death of Jesus, God covers our shame. He doesn't just cover it like someone throwing a tarp over a pile of dirt. He covers our shame by giving us a robe of righteousness.

The prophet Isaiah describes forgiveness with these words: "I rejoice greatly in the Lord, I exult in my God; for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation and wrapped me in a robe of righteousness." (Isaiah 61:10 CSB)

On the cross, Jesus exchanged His perfect righteousness for our sin. 2 Corinthians 5:21 says, "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." There on the cross, Jesus traded garments with us. He took our soiled and stained garment of sin and placed on our shoulders a perfect garment of His righteousness. And today, when God looks at you, He doesn't see your sin; He sees the perfect righteousness of His Son.

Dr. Erwin Lutzer is the Pastor Emeritus of Moody Church in Chicago. He has a radio broadcast that reaches thousands of listeners. He relates the story of getting a letter from an inmate in prison who heard him talk about forgiveness. This inmate related that he was serving time for multiple counts of sexual assault. He didn't deny his guilt. His question for Dr. Lutzer was simple. "Can I be forgiven?" Our kneejerk reaction is to say, "That guy deserves to go to hell." Well, actually, we all do. Some sinners have committed terrible, heinous acts of wickedness. And other sinners have committed what we mislabel as nicer sins. But all sin is an abomination to God.

Dr. Lutzer gave a brilliant reply. He wrote to the man and told him to imagine several trails through a field. One trail was only lightly trodden, smooth with flowers growing beside it. Another trail was deeper with a few potholes. A third trail digs into the earth with deep ruts and dangerous rocks jutting up. These trails represent the moral path of different kinds of people. But all those paths lead to destruction. Then Dr. Lutzer said, "Imagine that two feet of snow falls on that field, you can't tell one trail from the other. All of them have been covered completely by the snow and all you can see is the beauty of the snow. God says, "Come now, let's reason together, though your sins be as scarlet they shall be as white as snow." Thanks be to God, He has covered my shame.

2. GOD HAS WASHED AWAY MY GUILT.

God not only covers our sin; He cleanses it. King David was a man after God's own heart, but he understood the terrible consequences of sin. He had committed the double-barreled sins of adultery and murder. For months he had tried to hide his sins, but he was miserable. He said, "My sin is ever before me." He was constantly nagged by a sense of dirt and filth in his soul that no amount of soap could wash away. It wasn't a blemish on the outside; there was a stain on his soul. He woke up with guilt. He went to sleep with guilt. Guilt was his constant companion. Finally, God sent the prophet Nathan to confront him. At that point David was broken before God and he poured out his heart to God seeking His cleansing. He prayed, "Completely wash away my guilt, and cleanse me from my sin...wash me, and I will be whiter than snow." (Psalm 51:2, 7 CSB)

After David repented before God, he experienced the liberation and joy of forgiveness. He knew what it was to have his guilt removed. David sang about the joy of forgiveness in the Thirty-second Psalm. The Dutch artist van Honthorst painted a beautiful scene of David singing to the Lord. He sang, "Blessed is the one whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered." (Psalm 32:1) David hadn't lost his salvation, but he had lost the JOY of his salvation. And when he accepted God's forgiveness he could once again rejoice.

Even though we have been forgiven, we should hate the presence of any sin in our lives. Some people are misled and say, "If all my sins are forgiven, then I can just do anything I want to right?" That reveals a wicked heart and an ignorant mind. We don't want to sin because there are always natural consequences to our sin. God forgave David's sin, but there were terrible consequences to his sin. Uriah was still dead. A baby was born that died, and David had to reap the bitter fruit of a dysfunctional family because of his sin. God washes away our guilt, but we should avoid sin like the plague because sin will always take you farther than you want to go. It will keep you longer than you want to stay, and it will cost you more than you want to pay.

3. GOD HAS FORGOTTEN MY FAULTS.

In verse seventeen of our text God says, "Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more." We all know the older we get, the more of a challenge memory becomes. Two older couples were walking together and John said to Bill, "Hey Bill. Do you remember what a problem I used to have with memory?" Bill said, "I sure do." John said, "Well, that's all fixed now. I went to a seminar on memory and I learned how to remember things." Bill said, "That's great. What's the name of that seminar?" John said, "What's the name of that flower with a long stem, thorns, and a red blossom?" Bill said, "You mean a rose?" John said, "That's right." He turned and said to his wife, "Hey Rose, what's the name of that seminar on memory we attended?"

Although I say that God has forgotten our faults, we need to understand there is a difference between forgetting and choosing not to remember. In the English language, forget is the exact opposite of remember. They are both mental processes. But in the Hebrew language, "to remember" isn't just a mental recall; it involves some action. In Genesis 30 we read that God remembered Rachel and then gave her children. So, if God remembers sin, there will always be

an action of punishment. But when He chooses NOT to remember, it's more than just forgetting. It doesn't just slip His mind. He chooses to withhold the action of punishment that our sin deserves.

For instance in Isaiah 43 God says, "I sweep away your transgressions for my own sake and remember your sins no more." (Isaiah 43:25 CSB) God chooses not to remember my sins for HIS sake! He loves us so much that He doesn't want the memory of our past mistakes ruining our fellowship with Him.

4. GOD HAS REMOVED MY TRANSGRESSION.

How many of you remember using a typewriter? I learned to type on a manual typewriter where you had to press the keys hard for them to strike the ribbon to leave a mark on the paper. And then came the marvel of electric typewriters. But if you made a mistake with a typewriter, you had to stop typing to fix it. You could use a little piece of white tape, or there was that magical bottle of whiteout where you could use the little brush to paint over the mistake. But the evidence was still there.

Today we have something much better. It's called a delete key. When you press the delete key, what happens to that mistake? It is completely gone. I heard a preacher once compare a delete key to how God removes our sins. But that comparison breaks down. Because when you delete a letter or file on your computer, it's really not gone. It is stored somewhere inside your computer for you to recover or to undo. So God just doesn't delete our sins. They aren't kept on some heavenly hard drive that can be recovered to be used as evidence against you. He completely removes our sins. How far does He remove them?

The Bible says, "As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us." (Psalm 103:12) That's a long way. In fact, it represents infinity. Have you ever wondered why the Bible doesn't say as far as the north is from the south, so far has he removed our sins? For many years I was a private pilot, and some of you are pilots or you understand navigation. If you got in an aircraft and flew a heading of true north 360°, you would fly up over Canada until you eventually reach the North Pole, and if you kept flying around the earth, you would soon no longer be flying north, you'd be flying south. North and south are close to each other at the polar caps on the top and bottom of our planet. So I'm glad the Bible doesn't say as far as the north is from the south he has removed our sins.

However, if you got in an aircraft and flew a heading of 270°, due West, if you had unlimited fuel you could fly forever and ever around the planet and you would NEVER be flying East. That's how far away God has removed our sins!

So what about the practical truth of forgiveness? How can we apply it to our lives? There are many take away truths, but let me mention two.

1. BE FREE! Accept God's forgiveness and stop living with guilt.

Now you may be thinking, "But pastor, doesn't the Bible talk about the importance of confessing our sins?" Of course! James 5 says when we have sinned against another person, that we should confess that sin to them. And 1 John 1:9 says that Christians should confess our sins to God. But we don't have to confess every sin to be forgiven. We confess individual sins to God to say in close fellowship with Him. Confession means, "to say the same thing." Confession is for our sake. When we agree with God that what we've done is wrong, then our intimacy is restored.

Could you imagine the misery of trying to confess every single sin to God in order to go to heaven? There once was a Catholic monk who believed that and it almost drove him crazy. His name was Martin Luther.

Luther was a man who struggled mightily with a sense of guilt. In 1507 he entered the monastery in Erfurt to try to find a sense of relief for his sinful soul.

He knew God demanded righteousness, so he set out to work hard to be righteous. But he kept getting confronted with his sins. He slept on a cold, stone floor with no blanket. He fasted so long and so much he often fainted. But the more religious activity he performed, the more guilt he felt. He later wrote, "If ever a monk got to heaven by monkery, I was that monk!"

His favorite sacrament was Confession, going into the booth and confessing to his supervisor Father Staupitz. He often confessed for six hours at a time. He believed that omitting even the tiniest sin would banish his soul from God. He became frustrated. In order for his sins to be forgiven, they had to be confessed, and in order to be confessed they had to be remembered. So if there were sins he couldn't remember, then he couldn't confess them and he couldn't be forgiven. It was a vicious cycle. He was sinking deeper into guilt. It was like trying to mop the floor while the faucet was still running.

His supervisor, Father Staupitz, tired of hearing Luther's constant confession, assigned him to the University at Wittenberg to teach. At first he taught philosophy and history. Later he was assigned to teach the Bible. Luther hadn't read the Bible very much, but in order to teach it, he had to start studying it. In 1515, when he was teaching Romans, his life was changed. He came to Romans 1:17 which says that "In the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith." He came to understand that righteousness is not gained by religious acts, it is a gift from God.

Then Romans 8 was the clincher for him. Romans 8 begins with "there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." It ends with there is "no separation from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus." But in Romans 8:33 he read the question: "Who can bring a charge against God's elect?" No one. Who is it that condemns? No one. It is Christ Jesus who died and rose again and is seated at the right hand of God making intercession for us." He would later write, "Here I felt as if I were entirely born again and had entered paradise itself through the gates

that had been flung open wide. I realized that my sins did not belong to me, they belong to Jesus! His gift to me was His righteousness!"

What happened? Luther accepted God's forgiveness by faith, and suddenly his guilty conscience was cleansed. And 500 years ago this Halloween, he nailed a list of 95 points of dispute with the Catholic Church on the door of the church in Wittenberg. Those hammer blows launched the Protestant Reformation. It all happened when Luther claimed his forgiveness! If you know Jesus, you are fully forgiven. Will you accept God's forgiveness and put an end to your guilt trip?

2. BE MERCIFUL! Forgive others because you have been forgiven.

Jesus taught us to pray, "Forgive us our sins AS we forgive those who sin against us." Jesus said if we don't forgive others sins against us, our Heavenly Father wouldn't forgive us. Don't switch that around. Jesus wasn't teaching that by forgiving others, you could earn God's forgiveness. He was saying that a heart that has been touched by God's forgiveness would be validated by a willingness to forgive others. If you have received God's mercy, you will be willing to show mercy to those who wrong you.

People are desperate to be forgiven. Earnest Hemingway wrote a short story entitled "The Capital of the World." It was the story of a young man named Paco who had an argument with his father and was kicked out of his home. Paco was forced to wander the streets of Madrid. Sometime later, Paco's father had a change of heart but knew it would be impossible to find him in the large city. So he placed an ad in the Madrid newspaper saying, "Paco, meet me at the Hotel Montanya on Tuesday. All is forgiven! Love Papa.

Paco is such a common name that when the father arrived on Tuesday there were 800 young men named Paco waiting for their fathers—waiting for the forgiveness that they thought would never come. Is there someone in your life to whom you need to say, "I forgive you?"

CONCLUSION

Have you placed your faith in Jesus? Your sins: past, present, and future are covered, washed away. God doesn't remember them and He has removed them as far as the East is from the West. So claim your forgiveness! And forgive others because you have been forgiven.

I want us to make a confession about forgiveness: I have been declared forgiven, clean and whole in the presence of my Heavenly Father. The forgiveness that God has given me is total, unconditional and permanent. I will never come into condemnation, for Jesus Christ is my righteousness. No demon—not even the devil himself can bring any charge against me! Because I am forgiven, I can forgive myself, and others! And now my aim is to please the One who saved me and has forgiven me! Hallelujah. I'm forgiven!

OUTLINE

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TAKE-AWAY TRUTHS

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2. BE MERCIFUL! Forgive others because you have been forgiven.

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes



*David O. Dykes, Pastor
Green Acres Baptist Church
Tyler, Texas*