

DEVOTED
God Forgives
February 9, 2025

INTRO.: When asked to describe a person you know, what words do you use? Maybe you talk about their physical features. They have brown hair, blue eyes, and they're about 5 feet 10 inches tall. Maybe you use other words in your description: caring, kind, generous, and thoughtful. You've gone much deeper in the second description because you're describing their inner qualities. As you describe them in this way, you're also highlighting the things that truly matter to them. How do you know that the qualities I've just mentioned are an accurate description of the person? It's because you've seen those inner qualities confirmed or proven through their actions. You've described them as kind because you've observed their actions towards others. You've used the word thoughtful because you've observed them remembering someone's birthday or they recognize what a good job you've done on a project at work, and they share their appreciation. Generous is a word you used because you have observed them helping others through the giving of their time, talents, and resources. This morning, we are continuing our series, **DEVOTED**, and we're looking at answering this question, "How has God shown His devotion to us?" It's with this in mind that we look at the theme, *God Forgives*. There are three things I'm going to share: **GOD'S CHARACTER**, **THE COST**, and **THE CHOICE**.

GOD' CHARACTER

How is God described in the Bible? As we gather each Sunday, this is the book we look at. If you've never spent time reading the Bible, I would highly encourage you to do so. As you open the book, ask God to teach you about Himself and about you. We preach and teach from the Bible because we believe it is the Word of God and 100% true. In it we find truth about God and about ourselves.

When somebody asks people what words would they use to describe God's character what do you think would be some of the most popular words? I would guess some of the favorite words might be loving and forgiving. Who wouldn't want God to be described in that way? Yet, there is much more to His character than just those three words. He is also holy, just, and righteous. God's forgiveness is part of His character which can be found throughout the Bible. He is a forgiving God but there is so much more to His character than just this one attribute. The passage we're going to look at for this point is in the book of Numbers, which is found in the Old Testament. I also have listed several other passages you can look at on the bottom of the sermon outline in the bulletin and at the end of the sermon notes. In Numbers 14 we have the Israelites complaining to God once more. God had promised to lead them to the promised land, which was in Canaan. The Israelites sent twelve spies, one representing each of the tribes, to check out the land, which they found to be "flowing with milk and honey." This just means it was an awesome place! There was only one problem: there were giants in the land. Numbers 14 details their reaction, God's judgment, Moses' pleading, and God's response to Moses' pleading. I'm going to read the first 12 verses (you can follow along in the pew Bible on page 229) and then we will stand and read the verses 13-23 together.

Numbers 14:1–23 That night all the people of the community raised their voices and wept aloud. All the Israelites grumbled against Moses and Aaron, and the whole assembly said to them, "If only we had died in Egypt! Or in this desert! Why is the LORD bringing us to this land only to let us fall by the sword? Our wives and children will be taken as plunder. Wouldn't it be better for us to go back to Egypt?" And they said to each other, "We should choose a leader and go back to Egypt." Then Moses and Aaron fell facedown in front of the whole Israelite assembly gathered there. Joshua son of Nun and Caleb son of Jephunneh, who were among those who had explored the land, tore their clothes and said to the entire Israelite assembly, "The land we passed through and explored is exceedingly good. If the LORD is pleased with us, he will lead us into that land, a land flowing with milk and honey, and will give it to us. Only do not rebel against the LORD. And do not be afraid of the people of the land, because we will swallow them up. Their protection is gone, but the LORD is with us. Do not be afraid of them." But the whole assembly talked about stoning them. Then the glory of the LORD appeared at the Tent of Meeting to all the Israelites. The LORD said to Moses, "How long will these people treat me with contempt? How long will they refuse to believe in me, in spite of all the miraculous signs I have performed among them? I will strike them down with a plague and destroy them, but I will make you into a nation greater and stronger than they." Moses said to the LORD, "Then the Egyptians will hear about it! By your power you brought these people up from among them. And they will tell the inhabitants of this land about it. They have already heard that you, O LORD, are with these people and that you, O LORD, have been seen face to face, that your cloud stays over them, and that you go before them in a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. If you put these people to death all at one time, the nations who have heard this report about you will say, 'The LORD was not able to bring these people into the land he promised them on oath; so he slaughtered them in the desert.' "Now may the Lord's strength be displayed, just as you have declared: 'The LORD is slow to anger, abounding in love and forgiving sin and rebellion. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation.' In accordance with your great love, forgive the sin of these people, just as you have pardoned them from

the time they left Egypt until now.” The LORD replied, “I have forgiven them, as you asked. Nevertheless, as surely as I live and as surely as the glory of the LORD fills the whole earth, not one of the men who saw my glory and the miraculous signs I performed in Egypt and in the desert but who disobeyed me and tested me ten times— not one of them will ever see the land I promised on oath to their forefathers. No one who has treated me with contempt will ever see it.

Out of the twelve spies sent in to examine the land, only two (Joshua and Caleb) told their fellow Israelites to take the land. The other ten agree the land is great and the food abundant BUT (watch out for that word) the giants are too big, and they’re convinced they will die, and their wives and children will be taken as slaves. They display a very poor memory in declaring that it would be better to go back to Egypt. They declare they want to choose a new leader to take them back. What were they in Egypt? They were slaves and were treated miserably.

Moses and Aaron fall face down in front of all the people. What did this represent? This was a sign of awe and worship, not of the people, but of God. This also communicates a sense of fear of God’s judgment. Joshua and Caleb follow by tearing their clothes as a sign of mourning and great distress because of the people’s actions. They urge them not to be afraid, to not rebel against God, for He will be with us. Yet, they wanted to stone Moses, Aaron, Joshua, and Caleb. Stoning was used as a punishment for a variety of offenses that were seen as a threat to the spiritual well-being of the people. It was a means of upholding God’s moral standards and ensuring obedience to His commandments. The religious leaders wanted to stone Jesus when he claimed equality with God. They wanted to kill these four men (Moses, Aaron, Joshua & Caleb) rather than obey God.

This is where we see God’s response. He asks Moses two questions.

1) How long will these people treat me with contempt?

This is clear disobedience on their part, a refusal to believe God and His power to defeat their enemies.

2) How long will they refuse to believe in me, in spite of all the miraculous signs I have performed among them?

Miraculous signs included:

*The ten plagues (Exodus 7-11)

*Parting of the Red Sea & drowning of Pharaoh’s army (Exodus 13-14)

*Turning bitter water into water fit to drink at Marah (Exodus 15-16)

*Providing manna & quail from the sky (Exodus 16)

*Having Moses strike the rock and water comes out (Exodus 17)

Because of their continual disobedience God says that He will destroy them with a plague and make Moses into an even greater nation. Now, for the passage we read together, as Moses pleads on behalf of the people based on the reputation of God. If You put all these people to death and the nations hear about it they will say: ‘The LORD was not able to bring these people into the land he promised them on oath; so he slaughtered them in the desert.’ His appeal is based on the glory of God and not the merit of the Israelites. It isn’t by our merit that we gain favor with God. None of us can earn or deserve God’s forgiveness.

Moses now repeats what the Lord said to him after Moses had chiseled the second stone tablets to replace the first ones; ‘The LORD is slow to anger, abounding in love and forgiving sin and rebellion. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation.’

God’s character is one of loving and forgiving, yet not without discipline for sin. It is in accordance of God’s great love that Moses pleads with God to forgive the sins of the people like He had done from the time they left Egypt.

God replies by telling Moses that He had forgiven them but those who disobeyed Him would not enter the promised land. Forgiveness does not do away with the consequences of our sin. God is a forgiving, but He is still just in His dealings with mankind. God can’t just overlook sin or dismiss it lightly. Nobody gets a pass. How does God show His devotion to us by His forgiveness. Let us think about:

THE COST

I have been reading through the book of Leviticus in my Bible reading. There are many different sacrifices listed that the people had to make. There was the sin offering, guilt offering, burnt offering, and peace offering (thanksgiving, vow, and freewill) that included the sacrifice of an animal. When there was sin committed an animal had to be sacrificed by the priest on behalf of the people. There needed to be the shedding of blood to cover the sin. The animal offered had to be without blemish or defect. They were not to bring a diseased, blind, or disabled animal. This is a foreshadowing

of the perfect sacrifice that was to come, the Lord Jesus Christ. There was a cost for forgiveness and the sacrifices described in the Old Testament could only cover sin. Jesus Christ would come to take away sin!

There are two New Testament passages I want to look at to show the cost that was paid for our forgiveness. There are a few words in these passages that I want to look at more deeply.

Ephesians 1:3–7 (page 1817 in pew Bible) Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. **4** For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love **5** he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will— **6** to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. **7** In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace

Colossians 1:9–14 For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding. **10** And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, **11** being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and joyfully **12** giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light. **13** For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, **14** in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

Let’s take some time to look at the words used in these passages.

“in whom, in Him:” they are both referring to Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Messiah, the Lamb of God

“we have:” this is a present tense. What Paul is about to describe is a present possession to the believer.

“redemption:” in the Old Testament this referred to someone who is in bondage or danger. In the New Testament this is an expression of the deepest possible relationship. It is never a stranger who has the right to come to the aid of a person who is owned by another or burdened with an unpayable debt. The verb and other words in the family focus attention on both a release won and the means by which that release is accomplished. (Lawrence O. Richards, *Expository Dictionary of Bible Words*)

Thayer, “a releasing effected by payment of a ransom, deliverance, liberation procured by the payment of a ransom.”

Prior to coming to faith in Christ our master is Satan. That does not mean that we are the worst possible human beings. The Bible tells us that we can only have one master, and prior to knowing Christ our master is the devil. Jesus Christ came to buy us back.

1 Corinthians 6:19–20 Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; **20** you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.

What was the payment?

“through His blood:” by means of. Jesus Christ was the perfect and only sacrifice that can take away our sin.

1 Peter 1:18–19 For you know (perfect tense participle) that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, **19** but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.

So we have as common words in Ephesians & Colossians: *“in Him, in whom”* (common source: Jesus Christ); *“we have”* (present tense); *“redemption”* (buying back), and the last common words:

“forgiveness of sins:” this word is form of the word meaning to release. The key words for forgiveness involve a taking away of sin. (Lawrence O. Richards) This is something that only God can do!

In Mark 2 there is the account of the paralyzed man who was lowered down through the roof by his friends so he could see Jesus. When Jesus saw their faith he said to the paralyzed man, “Son, your sins are forgiven.” The teachers of the law knew that, in this statement, Jesus was claiming to be God because only God can forgive sins.

God is a forgiving God, that is His character. But this forgiveness was very costly, the shed blood of Jesus Christ for our sins. This brings us to:

THE CHOICE

Every person here, including me, and those listening on the radio or watching online are sinners in need of God's forgiveness. Are we going to believe what God has to say about sin, judgment, and forgiveness? To do nothing leaves us under God's condemnation.

Here are the two options:

John 3:18 Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.

Romans 8:1 Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus,

Where do you want to stand when it comes to your relationship with God? How do you and I receive this forgiveness? Somebody has to pay the price for our sin. We need to respond in faith, recognizing we are sinners, repenting or turning from our sins, seeking God's forgiveness based on Christ's sacrifice, the shedding of His blood. Nobody can earn or deserve God's forgiveness but if you receive it, you will never be the same. Sin is an affront to God and deserves God's judgment and punishment.

My sin is awful, your sin is awful. I was listening to a radio program while driving this week and the person was quoting a famous preacher who said to his congregation, "If you knew me like I know me, you'd walk out. But before you do, if I knew you like you know you, I wouldn't listen to you either." All of us are messed up and in need of a Savior. If you make the choice to receive God's forgiveness, coming to know Christ as Savior and Lord; He'll change your life.

You will have a new master, and your life will be headed in a different direction. The better you get to know God, the more you will begin to understand the immensity of His forgiveness. He redeemed you (bought you back) by means of Christ's shed blood and provided forgiveness (a taking away) of your sin.

SO WHAT???

*Have I received God's forgiveness?

*If I have, is my life a reflection of God's forgiveness? A life of worship, obedience, and service to God?

*Have I forgiven myself? To do otherwise is to put myself in the place of God and to say that Christ's sacrifice was not enough.

Many years ago, as a young adult, I was struggling with this issue of forgiving myself. I went the speaker, and he asked if I had come to know Christ as my Savior. Since I had, he asked me what the Bible had to say about my sin and God's forgiveness. He told me that to say I couldn't forgive my sin was actually saying that I knew better than God. Was I going to rely on how I felt or believe the truth of the Word of God?

*Understand that even though I am forgiven by God, sin does have consequences

*Take some time to read, study, and mediate on passages that speak of God's forgiveness.

I have several at the bottom of the outline in the bulletin or the handout notes. God's forgiveness is according to His riches of grace and is lavished on us.

Exodus 34:1-7; Nehemiah 9:1-21; Psalm 86:1-10; Daniel 9; Acts 10:34-43; Acts 13:26-39; Ephesians 1:3-7; Colossians 1:9-14; 1 Peter 1:13-21