

Podcast 119: God Forgives

In this episode, Denver discusses God's willingness to forgive us—to leave our errors in the past and remember them no more.

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DENVER: Isaiah, in the temple, saw God high and lifted up, and his first reaction is, *Woe is me! ... I am undone; ...I am a man of unclean lips, ...I dwell [among] a people of unclean lips* (Isaiah 6:5). And a Seraphim, one of the “fiery ones” (we ought to know more about that), improvises an ordinance where they take a coal with tongs off the altar and touch his lips to purify them. And the Lord says: *[Who] shall I send?* And Isaiah says: *Here am I; send me* (ibid, vs.8; see also Isaiah 2:2 RE). Same man that is cowering, *Woe is me*, is now *Here am I; send me*. And what accounts for the difference? The compassion, the forgiveness, the integrity of the Lord. *I know thou art a God of truth, and [cannot] lie* (Ether 3:12; see also Ether 1:12 RE). When He testifies to you that your sins are forgiven, only a fool will thereafter charge you with sin. The world is stocked with fools, though.

The parable starts with the Lord, who's trying to get people to come to the wedding, telling the servants the wedding's ready but those that I've asked are not worthy:

Go...into the highways, and as many as ye shall find, bid [them] to the marriage. So those servants went out into the highways [always the servants, always angels do this work; they do the gathering], and gathered together all as many as they found, both bad and good: and the wedding was furnished with guests. ...when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there [was] a man which had not...a wedding garment...saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou...hither not having a wedding garment?...he was speechless...the king [said], Bind him hand and foot...take him away...cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping [and wailing] and gnashing of teeth. (Matthew 22:9-13; see also Matthew 10:18-19 RE)

So, I want to put that on the table, because in this part of this parable, you have anyone who will come being invited, because the people that were targeted for attendance simply aren't worthy to come. So anyone gets to come. And now you have among them someone who doesn't have on a wedding garment. And for that I want to refer you to Luke chapter 15, because in Luke chapter 15 we run into the Lord talking about a robe being supplied. This is the son who found himself, having been in a far-off land, filling *his belly with the husks that the swine did eat; ...no man gave unto him. ...[He comes] to himself, ...[says], How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!* So when he goes back to see his father, look at what happens in verse 22 of Luke chapter 15. *But the father said to his servants [again, it's the angels that do this], Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; ...put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet* (Luke 15:16,17,22; see also Luke 9:13-14 RE).

You see, this, I think, has to be kept in mind whenever you're looking at someone who has arrived at the feast, bidden from the highway, who arrives and doesn't have on the robe. The Master is the one that wants you to wear it. The Master is the one that will furnish it. Don't think that the purpose of the Lord is to judge. The purpose of the Lord is to redeem; and for that purpose, He is infinitely patient and willing, if you will respond with forgiveness of your sins, as He does consistently throughout the Book of Mormon.

You must look to Christ for forgiveness of your sins, and follow His example of self-sacrifice, patience, obedience, and virtue. I can only urge you to patiently allow the True Shepherd to guide us all into His pastures—showing Him the respect due to a Redeemer. Remember, the Great King, Christ, came not to be served but to serve. He did not “lord it over” others, but He knelt to elevate them. He came as a meek and lowly servant, and went about doing good. He died to save the lives of others. When He arose from the dead, He went to the Father and advocated forgiveness for those who despised and abused Him.

He knew what it was like for men to satisfy their ambition by clothing their hypocrisy in religious garb. He also felt what it was like to be the victim of religious oppression by those who pretend to practice virtue while oppressing others. He knew the hearts of those who would kill Him. Before confronting their condemnation of Him in the flesh, He suffered their torment of mind when they recognized He was the Lord, and then found peace for what they would do by rejecting Him. In this extremity, there was madness itself as He mirrored the evil which would destroy Him, and learned how to come to peace with the Father after killing the Son of God; and to love all those involved—without restraint and without pretense—even before they did these terrible deeds. His suffering, therefore, encompassed all that has happened, all that did happen, and all that would happen in the future.

As a result of what the Lord suffered, there is no condition—physical, spiritual, or mental—that He does not fully understand. He knows how to teach, comfort, succor, and direct any who come to Him seeking forgiveness and peace. This is why the prophet wrote:

By his knowledge shall my righteous Servant justify many, for he shall bear their iniquities (Isa. 19:3). And again: Surely he hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows, yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed. (Isa. 19:2)

He obtained this knowledge by the things he suffered. He suffered that we might avoid sin by being obedient to His commandments. None of us need harm another, if we will follow Him. He knows fully the consequences of sin. He teaches His followers to avoid sin.

But remember that without the fruit of repentance, and a broken heart and a contrite spirit, you cannot keep my covenant; for I, your Lord, am meek and lowly of heart. Be like me. You have all been wounded, your hearts pierced through with sorrows because

of how the world has treated you. But you have also scarred one another by your unkind treatment of each other, and you do not notice your misconduct toward others because you think yourself justified in this. You bear the scars on your countenances, from the soles of your feet to the head, and every heart is faint. Your visages have been so marred that your hardness, mistrust, suspicions, resentments, fear, jealousies, and anger toward your fellow man bear outward witness of your inner self; you cannot hide it. When I appear to you, instead of confidence you feel shame. You fear and withdraw from me because you bear the blood and sins of your treatment of brothers and sisters. Come to me and I will make sins as scarlet become white as snow, and I will make you stand boldly before me, confident of my love.

I descended below it all, and know the sorrows of you all, and have borne the grief of it all, and I say to you, Forgive one another. Be tender with one another, pursue judgment, bless the oppressed, care for the orphan, and uplift the widow in her need, for I have redeemed you from being orphaned and taken you that you are no longer a widowed people. Rejoice in me, and rejoice with your brethren and sisters who are mine also. Be one. (T&C 157:49-50)

There remains a great work yet to be done. Receive my covenant and abide in it, not as in the former time when jarring, jealousy, contention, and backbiting caused anger, broke hearts, and hardened the souls of those claiming to be my saints. But receive it in spirit, in meekness, and in truth. I have given you a former commandment that I, the Lord, will forgive whom I will forgive, but of you it is required to forgive all men. And again, I have taught that if you forgive men their trespasses your Heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if you forgive not men their trespasses neither will your Heavenly Father forgive your trespasses. How do I act toward mankind? If men intend no offense, I take no offense, but if they are taught and should have obeyed, then I reprove and correct, and forgive and forget. You cannot be at peace with one another if you take offense when none is intended. But again I say, Judge not others except by the rule you want used to weigh yourself. (ibid. vs. 58)

But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me. (Jeremiah 31:33-34; see also Jeremiah 12:9 RE)

This is not, "They shall all know *about* Me." This is, "They shall *know* Me." And it will no longer be necessary for anyone to say, know the Lord, because you shall *know* Him. It's not knowledge concerning Him; It's Him. And those that know Him shall be *from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more* (Jeremiah 31:34; see also Jeremiah 12:9 RE). That's who He is. That's what He does. He doesn't want to remember your sin. He would rather prefer it if **you** don't remember your sin. Because if you don't remember your sin and you go on in a positive way, having laid down the burden that He so willingly will accept from you, and

remove from you that burden of guilt, then you can go on and become healthy again. You needn't be troubled about all of those things that have bogged you down. He wants to remove that. He wants to carry them.

I will remember their sin no more. Thus saith the LORD, which giveth the sun for a light by day, and the ordinances of the moon and of the stars for a light by night, which divideth the sea when the waves thereof roar; The LORD of hosts is his name: If those ordinances depart from before me, saith the LORD, then the seed of Israel also shall cease from being a nation before me for ever. (Jeremiah 31:34-36; see also Jeremiah 12:9-10 RE)

If I can help you envision our Lord a little more, let me describe Him in terms of His characteristics. Our Lord was and is affable, but He is not gregarious. He was approachable, and He is approachable, and He's not aloof. He's patient. He's willing to guide, and He's willing to teach. He's intelligent, but He is not overbearing. He's humble in His demeanor, even though the power that He possessed and possesses is undeniable. He is, therefore, both a Lamb and a Lion.

I want you to entertain three truths about Him in your mind as we begin the subject today. Those three truths are:

- He is quick to forgive sin;
- He allows all to come unto Him; and
- He is no respecter of persons.

In some respects, our own respect for (or our disrespect for) ourselves is the impediment in coming to Him, because we tend to think that we aren't good enough. Because He is quick to forgive sins, it really doesn't matter if you're not good enough, because one of the first orders of business when you come into His presence is He forgives you. He cannot look upon sin with the least degree of allowance, but He has the capacity and the ability to forgive sin. Therefore, although your sins may be as scarlet, He can, He will, and He does make you white as snow, no longer accountable. Therefore, you needn't fear, but you can approach boldly, our Lord.

You must each decide whether I'm sent by Him and acting as a true witness, or whether I'm just another of the many deceivers who use God's name in vain, having no authority. I claim to testify to the truth and do not deceive you; and I claim that He has sent me to preach deliverance from sin by obedience to Him. It is His Doctrine that all mankind should repent and be baptized, in His name, for the remission of sins. If you do so, He will be faithful and forgive.

Repentance means to turn from whatever else is distracting you and face God. Heed Him, follow Him, and obey His will. Repentance substitutes virtues for sin, trades weakness for strength, and remakes us heart, mind, and spirit into a new creature—a son or daughter of God.

I know I am no better than any other man. My weaknesses and foolishness have provoked the Lord to sternly rebuke me on several occasions. My many shortcomings cause me to mourn, and wish someone else were responsible for the things entrusted into my hands.

But I will not refuse the Lord. He warned me, long ago, that once we begin, we cannot look back. Therefore, I dare not depart from the course, no matter how difficult. Like you, I hope to do what the Lord asks, when He asks it, in the way He requires it to be done; and I leave everything else to the Lord.

It is a terrible thing for anyone to presume that they can proscribe and limit the scope of truth into which any of you can inquire and get an answer for yourselves. It is a terrible responsibility. I would suggest that anyone who tries to keep you from inquiring of your Father, to know the truth of all things, is like Satan, trying to use fear in order to eliminate your approach to that Being who loves you more than life itself.

God is no respecter of persons. All are alike to Him. Qualifications are based upon the behavior and faith of the person, not on their status or past mistakes.

You probably think your errors are more serious an impediment to God accepting you than He ever has. He doesn't want to judge you, He wants to heal you. He wants to give you what you lack, teach you to be better, and to bless you. He doesn't want to belittle, demean, or punish you. Ask Him to forgive and He forgives—even very serious sins. He does not want you burdened with them. He wants you to leave them behind.

His willingness to leave those errors in the past, and remember them no more, is greater than you can imagine. It is a guiding principle for the Atonement. Asking for forgiveness is almost always all that is required to be forgiven.

What alienates us from Him is not our sins. He will forgive them. What we lack is the confidence to ask in faith, nothing doubting, for His help. He can and will help when you do so.

The sins that offend Him are not the errors, weaknesses, and foolishness of the past. He is offended when we are forgiven by Him, and then return to the same sin. That shows a lack of gratitude for His forgiveness. Even then, however, there are addictions, compulsions, and weaknesses that we sometimes struggle with for years, even decades. When the sin is due to some difficulty based on biology, physiology, or an inherent weakness that we fight for years to overcome, then His patience with us is far greater than our own. He will help in the fight. He will walk along side you as you fight. He does not expect you to run faster than you have strength. When, at last, because of age or infirmity, a troubling weakness is at last overcome, He will readily accept your repentance and let you move forward—clean, whole, and forgiven. That is His ministry—to forgive and make whole.

The foregoing excerpts are taken from:

- Denver's *40 Years in Mormonism Series*, Talk #1 entitled "Be of Good Cheer," given in Boise, ID on September 10th, 2013;
- Denver's *40 Years in Mormonism Series*, Talk #2 entitled "Faith," given in Idaho Falls, ID on September 28th, 2013;
- His conference talk entitled "The Doctrine of Christ," given in Boise, ID on September 11th, 2016;
- Denver's *Christian Reformation Lecture Series*, Talk #3 given in Atlanta, Georgia on November 16, 2017;
- The presentation of "Answer and Covenant," given at the Covenant of Christ Conference in Boise, ID on September 3rd, 2017;
- Denver's *40 Years in Mormonism Series*, Talk #7 entitled "Christ: Prototype of the Saved Man," given in Ephraim, UT on June 28, 2014;
- His talk entitled "The Mission of Elijah Reconsidered," given in Spanish Fork, UT on October 14th, 2011; and
- Denver's blog post entitled "God is No Respector of Persons," posted April 27, 2010.