Good morning, Family. For the past few weeks, we have shared learning about our identity in the Lord Jesus Christ. We have reaffirmed that we, as Christians, are people of value, created with eternity in mind. We have learned and taken joy in the fact that we are precious in God’s sight, and as His children, we have been redeemed—set free by payment, bought by Christ, by His blood, by the blood of the Lamb. Today, we continue what we began last week, looking into a crucial element of our redemption, an identifier necessary to our Christianity—***forgiven***. Church, forgiveness is a free gift from our Savior, necessary for our salvation and a critical aspect of our redemption and freedom: Colossians 1:13-14 reads “3 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.”

 Redemption is what God accomplished on the cross for propitiation of our sins, our offenses against Him. His grace has given us our characteristics in Christ: Rescued, Redeemed, Restored, and Forgiven. These attributes make each of us part of the body of Christ. For a moment, think about the beauty of this truth. Though we all qualify as those who sin—"for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23), Christ does not condemn but freely offers forgiveness. This forgiveness comes as repentance, a change of mind to learn to agree with God, a recognition that our actions have offended and need redemption. Acts 3:29 says simply, “Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord.” These times of refreshing—this opportunity for repentance and renewal is a beautiful gift from God. It arises from personal sorrow over sin. Church, listen. God’s forgiveness is the story of our salvation. To be forgiven by God, we lay hold of God’s only solution: His Son, Jesus.

 Here’s the truth, Church. I used to struggle with the concept and beauty of forgiveness. For a long time, I had a very misguided, skewed, entirely wrong view of God. I thought Him judgmental, ready to pounce on a sinner like me. I simply didn’t want to get close to Him because He wasn’t an approachable, kind entity. But listen, Family, our God is a caring, attentive God! When God reveals Himself to Moses, the first thing that He wants Moses to know is that He is a merciful and gracious:

 And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, “The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, 7 maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion, and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation Exodus 34:6-7

Though He is slow to anger at sinners, God is Holy. He cannot simply overlook our sin. That’s what makes the gifts of grace and forgiveness so beautiful. He is an approachable, loving, heavenly Father. John Piper has said, “Faith in God’s forgiveness doesn’t merely mean a persuasion that I’m off the hook. It means savoring the truth that a forgiving God is the most precious reality of the universe”(\*Psalm 32:1-5). On the absolute preciousness of this truth review David’s verse 5: “5 Then I acknowledged my sin to you/and did not cover up my iniquity./I said, “I will confess my transgressions to the Lord.”/And you forgave the guilt of my sin.” David’s God is our God! This same God sees us, and upon our confession and then reception of his gracious redemption, removes our guilt.

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\*Psalm 32:1-5

Psalm 32 Of David.

1 Blessed is the one

 whose transgressions are forgiven,

 whose sins are covered.

2 Blessed is the one

 whose sin the Lord does not count against them

 and in whose spirit is no deceit.

3 When I kept silent,

 my bones wasted away

 through my groaning all day long.

4 For day and night

 your hand was heavy on me;

my strength was sapped

 as in the heat of summer.

5 Then I acknowledged my sin to you

 and did not cover up my iniquity.

I said, “I will confess

 my transgressions to the Lord.”

And you forgave

 the guilt of my sin.

 Let me repeat that: Our God sees us, and upon our confession and our reception of His redemption, He removes our guilt. Forgiveness through and from Christ removes the crippling effects of shame. He sets a place for each of us at His table. When we acknowledge and accept His forgiveness, we can embrace our God-given identity. His forgiveness inevitably derives from His Grace. He created us. He wants us to turn to Him. And when we do, our turning liberates us for our future. It causes us to walk in His freedom. Listen, Church. God does not forgive reluctantly or begrudgingly! He does not forgive out of necessity or of OUR necessity; He forgives out of the love of His Heart. It is His nature. God’s forgiveness is the most beautiful, necessary, holy, complete, foundational, and basic element of Christian faith. Because of it, if we accept it, God gives his acceptance, His security, and, most wonderfully, His freedom!

 But, family, God’s gift of forgiveness is a foundational Christian virtue. That means it is not just for us to receive, but it is for us to give. “Well, Pastor Chris, why should I forgive,” you may ask. You must forgive because Jesus has told you to do so:

In Matthew 6:9-15, Jesus tells the apostles,

“This, then, is how you should pray:

“‘Our Father in heaven,

hallowed be your name,

your kingdom come,

your will be done,

 on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

And *forgive us our debts,*

 *as we also have forgiven our debtors*.

And lead us not into temptation,

 but deliver us from the evil one.’

*For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.*”

 Church, listen. God doesn’t want us to be bound to the past or chained to bitterness. The Greek word for forgiveness is “APHESIS.” It means to release from bondage. In the early documents of this church, I came across this statement: *“We will not bring the baggage of the past into what God is doing now.”* We are to forgive because that what forgiven people do. We are to forgive ourselves because of God’s work in us. We are to forgive others for the very same reason. To harbor unforgiveness eats away at us—like the man who somehow takes the poison and waits for the other guy to die. More importantly, unforgiveness separates us from Him. Forgiveness can’t be based on emotion but on the decision to do as Christ directs (see again Psalm 32:1-15, on page 2 of this sermon text). In taking His direction, we are forgiven and free. Our debt is paid. Any shame is removed.

 So, let us live as a forgiven people! God’s forgiveness is the story of our salvation. Our salvation requires embracing in forgiveness the changes of the way we live, both in relation with Christ and with others in the world. The bottom line is this: We are never without hope. Accept forgiveness, be redeemed, be saved. Live not by your standards or the world’s but by His!

Passages in support of this sermon:

Acts 13:38-39

38 “Therefore, my friends, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. 39 Through him everyone who believes is set free from every sin, a justification you were not able to obtain under the law of Moses.”

Matthew 26:26-28

26 “While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, ‘Take and eat; this is my body.’

27 “Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you. 28 This is my blood of the[a] covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.”