

The Most Beautiful Word!

What is the **most beautiful word** in the English language? Some people say that the most beautiful word in the English language is **love**! True enough, loving companionship is one of the most satisfying experiences any of us ever has. Some people say that the most beautiful word is **peace**! Few things are more satisfying than peace & tranquility. Others suggest that the most beautiful word is **home**. Certainly no one needs to be reminded of the joy of a loving home & family!

But I have another word in mind that I think is more beautiful than all our feelings about love & companionship, peace & tranquility, or even home & family. **It is the word, forgiveness!** If you have ever been guilty, & you knew it, & everyone else knew it, & you then experienced forgiveness, you know what I mean when I call **forgiveness** the most beautiful word in any language!

No sweeter words ever fell from the lips of Jesus than those words: **"Your sins are forgiven!"** When Jesus said to the sick, **"Go in peace & be healed of your disease"** those were great words! When He said to the bereaved, **"Thy brother shall rise again"** those were inspiring words! When He said to the dead, **"I say unto thee, Arise!"** those were tremendous words! But the most important words Jesus ever addressed to anyone are these: **"Thy sins are forgiven!"**

Illness & sorrow are heavy burdens! Their weight has broken bodies & snapped minds! But mankind's heaviest load is the consciousness of sin, along with the guilt that sin brings. **The words of forgiveness** lift that burden & set the oppressed spirit free to serve & enjoy God!

There are many wonderful stories about forgiveness found in the Bible, one of which is recorded in John's Gospel chapter 8. The first 11 verses of John 8 describe an action packed picture. While Jesus was seated in the Temple, instructing the people, a number of the Scribes & Pharisees arrived, bringing with them a woman who had been caught committing a most degrading & serious offense! -- **John 8:2-11**

Early in the morning (Jesus) came again into the temple, & all the people came unto him; & he sat down, & taught them. And the scribes & Pharisees brought unto him a woman taken in adultery; & when they had set her in the midst, They say unto him, Master, this woman was taken in adultery, in the very act. Now Moses in the law commanded us, that such should be stoned: but what sayest thou? This they said, tempting him, that they might have to accuse him. But Jesus stooped down, & with his finger wrote on the ground, as though he heard them not. **So when they continued asking him, he lifted up himself, & said unto them,** He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her. And again he stooped down, & wrote on the ground. And they which heard it, being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, even unto the last: & Jesus was left alone, & the woman standing in the midst. When Jesus had lifted up himself, & saw none but the woman, he said unto her, Woman, where are those thine accusers? hath no man condemned thee? She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go, & sin no more.

The words of Jesus that morning were words of forgiveness! The woman's guilt was not in doubt! The distraught woman had been, after all, caught "in the very act" according to her accusers! I have occasionally wondered **how** it was that they had witnessed this "very act." Had they been hiding in a closet? Or under the bed, or peeping through a bedroom window, to have caught her in the act? **And where was the man who was also guilty?** She was indeed guilty: guilty of sin; guilty of disobedience to God's greatest desire for her life; guilty of

trashing her own worth; guilty of violating the best for which God had created her! She was indeed guilty!

The men who brought this adulterous woman to Jesus were not interested in cleaning up the community, nor in stamping out immorality! They were tempting Jesus, trying to find something with which to accuse Him! It was an effort to trap Jesus! But Jesus simply stooped down & wrote in the dust with His finger.

The men kept demanding an answer, so Jesus stood up & said, **“He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her”** & then again, He wrote in the dust with His finger while the men looked on. The accusers heard this, & they began to slip away, one by one, beginning with the oldest, until only Jesus was left alone there with the woman. What the accusers intended as missiles of condemnation for a sinner, became proof of their own sinfulness! **No one threw the first stone!**

Then Jesus turned to the accused woman, & said to her, “Woman, where are your accusers? Didn’t even one of them condemn you? Didn’t even one of them cast a stone at you?” Jesus did not ask, “Are you guilty as charged?” No! He simply displayed mercy & compassion & wisdom!

Her reply to Jesus is most significant! She said: “No man, **Lord!**” **She called Him “Lord!”** The words of Jesus had brought faith to her heart, & she acknowledged Him as **Lord**. She reverently called Him “Lord.”

Jesus said to her, “Neither do I condemn thee: go, & sin no more.” Those amazing words, “Neither do I condemn you,” was just another way of saying: “Your sins are forgiven!” Oh what beautiful, beautiful words! **Your sins are forgiven!** Jesus in no way condoned her serious offense, but he did forgive her! He saw a wounded life that had tragically failed to weigh the consequences of her poor choices. He saw a hungry hearted woman who had sought to fill the emptiness of her life by tramping through a number of one night stands. He saw a soul that had earned for herself spiritual death. He saw a person whose self-worth had been corroded by sin. He saw someone of immense value & potential, & whose future could be radically different from her past. And having seen all this, Jesus who had come to seek & to save that which was lost, said to her: “I do not condemn you; you are forgiven; go & sin no more!”

That long ago morning, in the temple courtyard, Jesus spoke to a helpless & hopeless soul, & offered the **gift of forgiveness!** Oh how beautiful is that word forgiveness! Like the guilty woman before Jesus, **you & I** also stand in need of God’s forgiving grace!

Divine forgiveness cannot be purchased with money; it cannot be earned; it cannot be garnered through our own efforts; it can only be had through faith in Jesus Christ who died upon an old rugged cross so He could say: **Your sins are forgiven!** Let me tell you why that word ‘forgiveness’ is so beautiful: --

1. Forgiveness is a most beautiful word -- because it involves full Acceptance!

Allow me to tell you an old familiar story in modern up-to-date terms: -- There was a boy who lived on a great ranch that had been handed down from generation to generation. But the boy’s heart was just not in ranching! He had an older brother who was content to settle down on the ranch & work it, while the younger brother continued to look across the mountains, & say, “I wonder what is over there!”

Finally the younger brother got fed up with ranching, & so with the financial blessing of his father, the younger brother left home for the city, where his enthusiasm compensated for his inexperience. He became a real swinger! Everybody liked him because he had a sports car, plenty of money, & an apartment which served as a center of social activity. **Then one day his money ran out!**

Going downhill fast, the boy got one poor job after another. Finally he wound up among the storefront missions, & the unemployment lines. Suddenly one day it dawned on him what a fool he was. He thought of that great

ranch back home where the hired hands of his father had more food for breakfast than he had all day long. He said to himself: "I would rather be one of my father's cow hands than to work in this industrial ghetto with society's rejects." Climbing up out of skid row, the boy hitchhiked back home. He walked up that long lane leading up toward the ranch house, & his father, who was actually looking for his return, saw his prodigal son coming & ran to meet him! **When the father & son came together, every act of the father was a gesture of acceptance & forgiveness!**

Instead of his father doubling up his fist to strike his son, he opened his palm & shook hands, & opened his arms & embraced his son. Instead of putting his hands out to reject the boy, he opened his arms with a welcome that spelled complete forgiveness & acceptance! And that, my friends, is one of the reasons why forgiveness is such a beautiful word! It involves the kind of acceptance that you & I can have with God -- & the people who love God!

When God could strike us down, instead, He lifts us up! When He might push us away, He draws us to Himself! **Our forgiveness toward one another is so often limited, but God's forgiveness toward us is unlimited!**

2. Forgiveness is also a beautiful word -- because it means Understanding!

Jesus was misunderstood; He was beaten & given a mock trial; He was forced to carry His own cross; He was mocked all the way to Golgotha! He was humiliated to the limit! Now, Jesus was on a cross, stretched out with the weight pulling on His flesh. His weight resting heavily on those nails driven through His hands.

On either side of Him, in cruel mockery, were condemned thieves. For the purpose of ridicule, a crown of thorns had been pushed against His brow, letting the blood run down over His face! While the crowd watched Him die, they heard a prayer that no one could ever forget! Suffering from the misjudgments of street rioters & religious leaders, Jesus prayed: "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."

This must have proved His Divinity to some, because He not only prayed for their forgiveness, but told God why they should be forgiven: **they just did not understand the issues that were involved!** When God could be justified in punishing us for our sins, He forgives us instead, because He understands us & loves us!

3. Finally -- Forgiveness is a most beautiful word because it provides a New Beginning!

Returning to the story of the adulterous woman, what Jesus provided for her, was not only **forgiving** grace, but also **transforming** grace! Jesus not only said to her, "Neither do I condemn you, or your sins are forgiven," but He added, **"Go & sin no more."**

The only way that is made possible is through the transforming grace of God! Jesus knew her past, He saw her present, & He understood the change that His grace could make in her life! Jesus did not minimize her sins, but His forgiveness wiped away her sins, & gave her a new heart & a new start! Because she called Him **"Lord"** there is no doubt in my mind that this woman was **saved** as a result of her encounter with Jesus, & I expect to meet her in that great Resurrection Morning!

When Jesus said, "Go & sin no more," He was saying, "Leave now your life of sin! What is past is past. What is behind you is behind you. Let God's forgiving, healing, transforming grace shape who you are, & who you become." **These words offered a new beginning & a new hope!**

The **world** was the same world she knew only too well. The streets were the same streets; the bed was the same bed; the neighbors were the same neighbors; the vegetable market was the same market; the town's

shaded well was the same well; the pressures were the same pressures; the temptations were the same temptations! Back into that **world** Jesus sent her, a world where everything was the same, **except she was no longer the same!** Into her familiar **world** she would go, as a living testimony of God's desire & ability to **transform** a life!

It would be interesting to have more history of this nameless female. While the Bible is silent on that subject, I believe she went forth from the presence of Jesus, & in obedience to Christ's command, she entered a new life of pardon & peace & purity! **Forgiveness changes lives! It provides a new beginning!** God, who loves you & accepts you & understands you, is also willing to forgive you, by wiping your slate clean, & giving you a new heart & a new start!

Conclusion: Forgiveness. Forgiveness. Oh, what a beautiful word! It is a beautiful word because it involves full **acceptance**; it means **understanding**; & it makes possible a **new transformed beginning!**

My friends, there are only two ways of covering our sins: man's way & God's way! If you seek to **hide** them, they will have a resurrection sometime, **but** if you let the Lord cover them with His precious blood, neither the Devil, nor man, will ever be able to find them again!

In a cemetery not far from New York City, is a headstone engraved with a single word: **Forgiven.** There is no date of birth, no epitaph; there is only a name & the solitary word "Forgiven." **But that is the greatest word that can be applied to any man or woman, or written on any graveside!**

Sin separates us from God! We all stand equally guilty before God. It is easy for us to condemn other people. In fact, it is easy to condemn ourselves if our sins seem too awful to qualify for forgiveness! But Jesus does not condemn. He forgives the repentant sinner! He forgives because His Father did not **drop the stone of His wrath!** He hurled it upon Jesus & crushed His Son for our iniquities as He hung on the Cross.

So the joy of forgiveness can be yours -- right now! Our principle source of joy is found in the realization that, although we are guilty of sin, though we are unlovely, we are loved by God Almighty, & His promise of forgiveness can be ours through faith in His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ! **You can truly experience the joy of sins forgiven!**

1 John 1:9 is still true, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful & just to forgive us our sins, & to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." The Bible closes with a very beautiful paragraph that goes like this: "And the Spirit & the bride says, Come. & let him that heareth say, Come. & let him that is athirst come, & whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." The experience each one of us receives when we partake of the water of life freely is the beautiful forgiveness that comes through the transforming power of Jesus Christ!

Don't be satisfied with any thing less than Divine Forgiveness, for, "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered" (Psalm 32:1).

Love divine, so great & wondrous! All my sins He then forgave;
I will sing His praise forever, For His blood, His pow'r to save.
He the pearly gates will open, So that I may enter in;
For He purchased my redemption -- And forgave me all my sin.

Rev. Lyle Pettit -- Calvary Baptist Church -- Benson, AZ
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