Forgiveness of sins

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[0:00] The Acts of the Apostles, chapter 13, verse 38. Be it known unto you, therefore, men and brethren, that through this man, Jesus Christ, is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins.

Verse 40. Beware, therefore, lest that come upon you, which is spoken of in the prophets. Behold, ye despise us, and wonder, and perish.
For I work a work in your days, a work which ye shall in no wise believe, though a man declare it unto you. And my text is in verse 38.
Be it known unto you, therefore, men and brethren, that through this man, Jesus, through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins.
Now, many of you realize that we have begun a short series of addresses on the Lord's Day mornings which deal with the setting forth of the gospel.
[1:06] And I come to this subject again in terms of the text that I have announced with the deliberate intention of trying, if I might do so by the grace of God, to help those who are speaking the Lord in our midst and those who would like themselves to be professing Christians and whose minds are exercised on this subject.

It is said in the book of Proverbs, to those who are sluggards, The ant is a tiny creature, yet it has a number of lessons to teach us.
One of them is this, that it knows that the summer doesn't last forever. And with some strange instinct created within its tiny, shall we say, mind, it knows that it has a limited time in which to gather its supply of food.
The day is going to come in which there will be no summer and in which there will be no provision of food. So this tiny creature, which is just visible, you might say, from six feet height and no more, has the sense, who knows how, to be very busy, whilst the opportunity is given to it in the summertime, of collecting its grains of food and gathering its store for the winter days.
And the Bible comes to us and says, Go to the ant, thou sluggard, thou slothful person. Consider her ways and be wise.
[3:09] They don't have preachers, they don't have central governments with information sheets printed, nor do they have national health services, nor do they have means of communication like newspapers and television, and yet they know that they must make haste while the sun shines.

The Bible means us to take that, of course, above all, in a spiritual sense. And it says to us, Our life is short, like the summertime. Warm days will cease.
Cold days of illness, cold days of old age, when we lose our sight, perhaps, or our hearing, perhaps, or our powers to walk to church, they will go.
In other words, the day is coming when we shall not be in this world at all. So, says the Bible, Go to the ant and consider that whilst the summertime of life and health are with you, you must prepare for the rainy day, the day, indeed, of death and of eternity.
That's not being pessimistic. That's being realistic. And everybody knows that this life is short and should know. For that reason, I bring this text to you, which the Apostle Paul gave as part of a great sermon in the synagogue of Pisidian Antioch on his first missionary journey, accompanied by Barnabas.
[4:41] he stood up and preached unto them Christ and the Gospel, making a passing reference to their Old Testament history and touching on the person of John the Baptist.

He very quickly comes to the summit of his sermon, which is Christ, Christ the Saviour of the world, and he brings our attention to focus on this great subject of the forgiveness of sins.
Be it known unto you, therefore, men and brethren, he says, can't you see his hands moving? Be it known unto you, he says, that through this man, perhaps pointing to where Christ is seated at the

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right hand of God, through this man, is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins.
The forgiveness of sins is my theme, therefore, today. A mighty subject. If you compare the reading of the Bible with a tour around a great city like London, then you must regard the subject of the forgiveness of sins as one of the great sites to be seen, like St. Paul's, or like Westminster Abbey, or Buckingham Palace.
The forgiveness of sins is a great theme. It is a major theme of the Bible. From end to end, the Bible touches on this theme. Moses deals with it, David speaks of it, we were singing Psalm 32, which handles it.
[6:06] The prophets speak of it, the apostles speak of it, and above all, our Lord Jesus Christ himself frequently speaks about the subject before us here, the forgiveness of sins.

My friends, this is the sum and substance of all religion. This is the reason why the gospel is given, that we might know for ourselves the forgiveness of sins.
You might go through life and you might acquire many good things. You might build a comfortable home. You might rear a creditable family. You might gain a name for honorability in your society and in your community and in your lifetime.
But if you do not at the end of the day know this, then you lose all. So I concentrate a little today on this subject which has been said before us by the Apostle Paul that through Christ is preached unto us the forgiveness of sins.
Let me show you how I wish to handle the subject briefly today. First of all, I want to show you that the forgiveness of your sins is not such an easy thing as many people imagine.
[7:22] And second, I want to show you what is the method by which God will forgive sins. And then say something thirdly and briefly in conclusion.

Beginning then in that way, let me start by trying to say to you that the forgiveness of sins is not such an easy thing as many people imagine. Some people think that the forgiveness of sins is one of these little tiny details of life that you can put off right until the eleventh hour of life.
My friend, it is not. The forgiveness of sins is a subject which demands the highest concentration because it is the mighty thing in life.
If my sins are not forgiven and I should happen to die in that condition, I lose all. I lose my soul. I lose all hope.
I lose the love and fellowship of God. I lose wife and children and home and money. I lose friendship and friends. I enter into a condition in which there is nothing to be looked for but misery eternal.
[8:37] All depends on whether I have or do not have this thing called the forgiveness of sins and it's not such an easy thing as many people imagine. Some people think of the forgiveness of sins as so easy it's like putting on a hat and coat to go for a walk.

It's not so easy. It's not so easy to get your sins forgiven as it is proverbially to drop your hat. Not at all so easy. Let me show you.
Take the sins of the devil and the sins of fallen angels. They will never be forgiven. The devil when he sinned had no gospel had no savior.
All the devil had was the absolute certainty that he would never be forgiven. That was the only message God gave to him. There would be no forgiveness for the devil nor for the angels who sinned.
They are reserved unto darkness and chains of fire. The devil goes about today in 1984 like a roaring lion because he knows his time is short.
[9:42] The devil knows his chain is shortening every day. He's coming closer and closer and closer to the day of judgment and he knows that. And the more mischief he can do in the meantime the better for him but he knows there's no hope of forgiveness.

forgiveness. Furthermore there is no forgiveness of sins for the dead once a person passes over the threshold of death there is no further hope of forgiveness.
I want to make that clear. There is no second chance after death. Oh friends let nobody deceive you. There is no wider hope of God's mercy beyond the grave.
Some of us have to go to funerals and some of us have to listen to funeral services being conducted and some of us have to wince as we listen to the nonsense talked. Indeed the packs of liars that are talked at funeral services they make me groan almost to the point in which I have to walk out.

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The awful things that are said about people passing beyond death without Christ. The hope of God's wider mercy. My friends it's a mythology it's not true. Once let your foot go over the threshold of death.
[10:54] If your sins are not forgiven in this life they are not forgiven. Now people have tried to invent various ways to get over this problem. The Mormons take them.

They try to get over the problem of dying without Christ by having baptism by proxy. That is to say you have a person baptised for the dead.
They go in for this. That's why they go in also for the long lists and pedigrees and family trees of their ancestors. They research all about their ancestors for generations past and they are baptised for their ancestors.
That's their custom. But I want to make it perfectly clear that that is impossible and it cannot happen and it will not bring forgiveness of sins to the dead if they're not already forgiven for this reason.
That no sinner can stand in the place of another sinner. In the Bible the only person who can stand on behalf of sinners is Christ who is himself without sin.
[11:58] A sinner cannot be a surety or a proxy or a substitute for another sinner. He can't do it. He hasn't got the merit to do it. It's nonsense. Let me go on and say this.

There's no hope whatever of going to the Lord's Supper in order to have the sins of other people that are dead forgiven. Now this is what some churches do.
They pay money to have special celebrations of the Lord's Supper done for the dead. But it won't work for this reason that if the blood of Christ is not sprinkled upon a person by faith in this life then it cannot be in death.
You search the Bible and see for yourselves the blood of Christ is only applied to the living. It's never applied to the dead if they die without faith.
So it's a nonsense. The Bible also makes it perfectly clear that the forgiveness of sins is not easy for this reason. And I'm coming now to I think what is one of the most deadly of all the mistakes that sinners will make.
[13:07] They sometimes say to themselves, well I'm a sinner but I do admit that I'm a sinner. And I do confess my sins. Let's go on to this question of the confession of sins.

If you confess your sins to God, will they be forgiven? I say to you no, not unless you forsake them.
The only sins which are forgiven are sins which are both confessed and forsaken.
In other words you must both confess them with hatred of them and you must leave them behind. A person who confesses his sins and yet goes back to doing it again has no forgiveness until they confess and forsake.
That's what the book of Proverbs tells us, he that confesses and forsaketh his sin shall find mercy.
But he that confesses his sins without forsaking them by implication has no mercy.
You see, there is this feeling that if I confess my sins I get a clean sheet. Now that clean sheet idea is a theory which is not to be found in the pages of Holy Scripture.
[14:16] The clean sheet theory that every 24 hours or every 4 or 5 days or every 7 days or every 6 months at the communion table that you go and you get a clean sheet, that is not at all what God tells us in his word.

When an unforgiven sinner who is not a Christian confesses his sins, he confesses sins which are not forgiven, as I say, until he forsakes them through faith in Christ.
When a Christian confesses his sins, he is confessing sins that are already forgiven. Every Christian in this congregation, and other congregations, I hope, they confess their sins to God.
They know their sins in a measure, they don't know them all but they know many of them, and they confess their sins to God. But the sins that they confess to God are not sins which need to be forgiven from the start.
They are sins which have already been forgiven. They are forgiven at our conversion. But we still go on confessing them. But they are sins which Christ's blood has blotted out. So if a person is a person unforgiven and graceless and Christless and they confess their sins, if they confess their sins without Christ and confess their sins without forsaking them, they get no mercy.
[15:35] And the forgiveness of their sins has no more importance to God than simply the tinkling of a bell or the sounding of a trumpet. It is of no value. He that confesseth and forsaketh his sins shall find mercy.

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Let me prove this point. Let me prove this point from scripture itself. I take two particular proofs. One is from the Old Testament and one is from the New.
King Saul in the Old Testament was a man who received no forgiveness of sins. We know that very plainly from scripture.
When he died he was lost. But at the very end of his life he confessed his sins. He said this, I have played the fool and I have erred exceedingly.
Now what could be a more eloquent confession of sin? And yet his sins were not forgiven for all his eloquent confession. Why not? Because he did not forsake them. Time went by and he went to see a witch which God forbade.
[16:44] Time went by he tried to commit suicide which God forbade. Take the New Testament case of Judas Iscariot. Judas Iscariot came to the end of his life and he made a confession of sins with the blood money in his hand.

He went to the temple and he said I have betrayed the innocent blood. That was a confession of his sin. It was what he did. He confessed it. But Judas was not saved by his confession and he did not go to heaven.
He went to his own place, unhappy man. The Bible makes that abundantly clear. And yet he confessed his sins. Why did he not receive forgiveness with his confession?
Because he confessed but did not forsake his sins. His heart was unchanged. Do you see the point? The forgiveness of sins is not so easy as you think. You can't fog God off with a few words of confession when you come to the end.
When your last illness strikes you and when the doctors open you up and tell you that they can't do anything and put you together again and send you home for six months or something. When that sort of thing happens don't say to yourself I can start turning to God now.
[17:50] Thankfully you can but it's a very foolish way to proceed because who knows the doctors may not give you even six months. They may not give you even six days. And you may be unconscious in those last six months. So the Bible comes to us and says if you want forgiveness he that confesseth and forsaketh his sin shall find mercy.

This is the tragedy of a man who like Admiral Nelson of Trafalgar brings home to us.
Do you know what Nelson said as he was dying? He was on the deck of his ship. What was it called? The victory was it? And there he was famous and a great and a wonderful man.
In many ways could be said to be a savior of his country perhaps. He was there guiding all his ships against Napoleon's fleet and he was shot through the spinal cord I think it was if I remember the story.
And he knew he was dying. Indeed he had a premonition before the battle began that he would die in that battle. But he didn't want to save himself. He put all his medals on. He didn't want to hide himself.
[18:57] He was conspicuous. But when the blood was pouring from the wound and he knew he was winning the victory he said to his chaplain, oh he said I've not been a very bad sinner.

That was a tragic thing to say. I've not been a very bad sinner. Nobody whose sins are forgiven talks like that. The apostle Paul didn't talk like that.
The apostle Paul said this, I am the very chief of sinners. You look at any real converted Christian whose sins have been forgiven. And in a sense they can hardly even forgive the sins that they committed before they came to Christ.
Oh such a sinner they are. My friends the forgiveness of sins is not as easy as wink. The forgiveness of sins is possible. But as the apostle says here to these Jews who were in the synagogue of Pisidian Antioch, the forgiveness of sins comes by Jesus Christ.
Through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins. And so I turn now to the method that God gives of the forgiveness of sins.
[20:13] There are two points to notice in God's method of forgiving sins. Two points. One concerns Christ. It is through him. The other concerns ourselves.

It is through him our sins are forgiven. Now there are two elements in God's method. How does Christ come into this? Well my friend in the forgiveness of sins there is a big problem.
There is a big problem like this that God cannot just forgive sins without without there being a method of his doing so.

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God must have a basis upon which he can forgive sins. You see God's nature is a nature of justice and holiness. And how can a just and holy God forgive sins as easy as wink?
He does not do it. Without there being a basis in justice for him to forgive sins. And this constitutes therefore a problem.
[21:23] How is God going to forgive sins in such a way as not to derogate from the excellence of his own justice? How can God be just himself and yet also forgive unjust sinners?

You see the problem? It is the problem of the ages. This is a problem not confined to earth but to heaven as well. This was a problem which doubtless the angels have spoken about amongst themselves.
This is a problem which God himself had to think about if I might speak with the utmost reverence. He had to think of it because he will not forgive sins except on the basis of there being some justice, some grounds whereby sins can be forgiven.
And this of course is how Christ enters into the problem and into the solution to the problem because he himself became the surety for sinners. Now we don't use the word surety very often. What does it mean? A surety is somebody who goes to court representing you, taking upon himself all your liabilities and all your guilt.
[22:29] A surety. And that's the way Christ is said before us in the scripture. He is the surety for sinners. He went to court on behalf of sinful men.

He had to answer for sinful men. Let's think of that just for a moment to make it clearer. What's the relationship between Christ and us?
Christ is our righteousness. We are his guilt. And the Christian ought to speak to Christ and say to him, Lord, I am thy condemnation, just as thou art my justification.
Lord, I am thy defilement, just as thou art my sanctification. Lord, I am thy folly, just as thou art my wisdom.
That is the relationship between Christ and us. We are Christ's shame and his embarrassment in the sense that all the misery Christ suffered, he suffered it just because he became responsible for our dereliction and our misery and our corruption.
[23:45] All that we have done amiss, he made himself answerable for. God sent him in this world as the surety, the representative to be answerable for our guilt and condemnation.

Our sin, our death, our shame, our foolishness, every misery and every sin and every corruption of human nature, he came down to be answerable to God for it.
Now, he had to do two things. He had, on our behalf, he had to obey the ten commandments in thought and word and deed. Had Christ ever once had a sinful thought pressing his mind, he could never have saved us.
That's a thought for you. Had our Lord given way to impatience for half a split second, he could never have saved us because he would have broken the law. Had our Lord failed to give God the glory, in all respects, of full obedience to the ten commandments in thought and word and deed, I say, had he failed, he could not have saved because he must keep the law as the surety for us.
Not only that, but more seriously still, he must not only fulfill the ten commandments and therefore satisfy the claims of God's active justice, but he must satisfy the demands of God's offended justice.
[25:06] Our Lord must put himself in a position in which he suffers. On our behalf, he must bear the brunt of the anger of God against the sins which we had already committed and would commit.

So he was answerable to keep the law by his perfect obedience and answerable much more, still more awfully, to suffer the penalty which God's violated justice demanded that we sinners would have to pay unless somebody paid it for us.
and he paid it for us. And our Lord stood in the room of the guilty and himself was condemned, though himself was not worthy of condemnation. Himself was slain, though he himself was not worthy of death.
Himself was made sin for us, though he himself was infinite purity and holiness when in his own person. Himself was laid under the transgression of sinners and so dealt with, even though himself had no sin of any kind or the slightest stain or shadow of pollution.
And yet our Lord Jesus Christ became our surety, answerable for us. And he had to appear before God and to say to him on the cross, Lord, slay me for the world's wickedness.
[26:21] Lord, curse me for the world's transgression. Lord, lay thy wrath upon my soul as an offering so that these who are the guilty party may be forgiven.

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Now that is the first half of God's method of forgiveness. And that constitutes a basis in justice. You can now see how God can be just when he forgives sins. He can be just in this respect that there is somebody who has borne the brunt of the punishment of sin.
That there is a basis upon which the justice of God can be satisfied. I like the way Thomas Boston puts this. Let me just quote him very briefly. That great 18th century writer says this.
He says, If Adam had not have sinned, God's law would have been glorified actively in man's obedience to it. If Christ had not come to die for us, God's law would have been glorified passively in that man would have paid the penalty for it.
But now that Christ has come and died for us, as well as lived for us, God's law is glorified both actively and passively. actively in that he fulfilled it passively in that he suffered the full weight of the wrath of God vicariously for us.
[27:38] So Christ has done more for good than Adam did for harm to the world. You see the legal basis upon which God can forgive sins, is it a light thing that God has made Christ to be the basis upon which he can forgive?

Is it a small bagatelle in your eyes that Christ Jesus had to come down into this world to suffer the malediction and curse of God and to become anathema for us? In order that there might be a basis upon which God could forgive sins, does it seem to you to be a trifling matter or little peccadillo that we have sinned against God so awesomely that this saviour had to suffer so awesomely in our room instead?
Briefly then, what is the second half of God's method whereby sins are forgiven? the second half of the method of God's forgiveness is that we must believe in Christ.
Christ will profit you nothing if you do not believe in him, even though he has died and suffered for sin and sinners. Unless you personally, by a personal act of self-giving to Christ, trust in him, then you still have no benefit from Christ, no forgiveness of sins.
Because there are these two elements in God's method of forgiveness. The first I have spoken of, there must need to be a representative person to live and die and to bring us a righteousness which we haven't got.
[29:08] But the other element is this, that there must be in you personal faith in this substitutionary death of Christ. In other words, God calls upon you to repose the whole of your soul and destiny and mind upon nothing else than upon what Christ is and has done and is able to do for you in the day of death and judgment.

Faith in Christ is what God requires and my friends, faith is always accompanied by other things. Let me enumerate them briefly.
If you have faith, then you must have knowledge. You must know the gospel. You can't be forgiven if you don't have knowledge and you can't have faith if you don't have the knowledge of God's method of forgiveness.
Faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the word of God. And if you have faith, then you have a sense of need because you can't be a person with faith if you don't have a sense of the need of mercy.
Everyone with faith cries out, God have mercy. And if you have faith, then you have a sense of guiltiness and you know that you are guilty in heaven's sight.
[30:18] Everybody who has faith knows that they can't lift up their heads and say I'm the captain of my life, I'm the master of my destiny. They know at once that they are guilty before God. And then everybody who has faith has a sense of value.

Everybody who has faith realizes that the only thing that matters in life is that we should have the forgiveness of sins. A person without faith has no sense of values. They think that the important things of life are the material things.
They have a washing machine, they have a motor car, they have a lawnmower, a lovely lawnmower, a lovely God, a lovely thing. My friend, those things are all right in their place, but the forgiveness of sins is what a man with faith knows is the greatest, most important and serious thing in life.
And everybody who has faith is teachable. Are you teachable? Are you prepared to listen to God's word? Are you like these Jews to whom Paul said, behold you despisers and wonder and perish, says God, because I work a work in your days, a work which you should no wise believe, though a man should declare it unto you.

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And everybody who has faith has also a love for true Christians. You can't have faith and not love the people of God, it's impossible. Those who have faith, they choose Christians as their own friends, they don't scoff at them, they don't laugh at them, they don't think they're foolish and mad and eccentric and unusual and peculiar, they regard them as God's excellence of the earth in whom their delight is placed.
[31:53] And so I come lastly now to this application of what I've had to say. Through this man, Christ, is preached unto you all, here today, the forgiveness of sins.

Here is the decision to which the gospel brings you today, young man, young woman, older person, child, here it is. I want you to weigh up now these two things.
On the one hand you must weigh up that if you come to Christ, you will lose some of your friends, and you will lose some of the goodwill of those who were your acquaintances before.
And you will lose a good name with some people, you lose your reputation with some people, and you will lose in that people will laugh at you and scoff at you behind your back, and they will speak about you and whisper about you and say, he's become religious, she's become awfully queer.
Weigh all that up on the one side, and on the other side, weigh this up, that if you give your life to Christ, you do have one thing, above all others, you have the forgiveness of sins, and all these other things have to be weighed against the forgiveness of sins.
[33:30] How are you going to weigh them up? What's your sense of values today, which matters most to you? In the day when you leave this world, I can tell you what will matter most, because there will be nobody there to laugh at you, nobody there to help you, nobody there to hold your hand.

We're all on our own when we go into eternity, before God and his judgment throne. Weigh that up, and then say to yourself, what are the vain hopes I have?
Have you been saying to yourself, oh, I hope for the best, when I come to the day of death, I hope it'll be alright. My friend, don't bother hoping, because there's no such hope.
Don't say to yourself, well, I'll just have to wait and see. I'm telling you now, before, there's no need to wait and see. I'm telling you what will happen if you don't choose Christ. You will need to wait and see.
You know the answer from this blessed book, there is no hope. Without the shedding of blood, there is no remission of sins. None at all. And then I go on and say to you, you have a fuller assurance that the gospel is true than even these first hearers of Paul.
[34:49] These first hearers of Paul at Antioch in Pisidia in Turkey, they did not have the records to help them that you have the conversion of thousands of Christians, the revivals of Christian history, the biographies of wonderful missionaries, the examples of parents and grandparents and children of the Christian faith.

They didn't have it in the way that some of you have it. And I say therefore as I close today, where do you stand? Have I to say to you, because of your lack of interest in these things, have I to remind you what was said by Solomon in the book of Proverbs, go to the ant, thou sluggard, consider her ways and be wise, who, having neither guide, overseer, nor ruler, prepareth her meat in the summer, the summer of life, before the winter comes.
Or have I to say to you, dear Christian friend, today, that whatever troubles you have on this Sabbath morning, whatever burdens you bear, whatever disappointments there are in your life, one thing you have, the forgiveness of sins, and that's all that matters.
Through this man, he's preached unto you, the forgiveness of sins, and you have it, all of you who love the Lord Jesus Christ, you have that.
and I say to you, therefore, go forth into this dark and shadowy world with the knowledge that through Christ you have the forgiveness of sins, and all the glory of heaven itself lies about you in a coming age.
[36:38] Let us pray. we thank thee, O Lord, for Christ. Who is thou like him, that prophet, priest, and king, Christ Jesus, thy son, our savior, he that was dead and is alive forevermore, and has the keys of death and hell.

O Lord, we bless thee for Christ, and we would wish this day to give ourselves to him whoever we are. Speak to us, we pray thee, young and old alike, make us thy children forever.
And all this we pray for Jesus' sake. Amen.

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