

“Forgiving Others is Not Fair” Matt 18:21-35, Sermon Notes
Pastor Marc Wragg
Saving Grace Bible Church
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Morning Worship Service

Text:

“Then Peter came and said to Him, “Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?”²² Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.”²³ “For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a certain king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves.”²⁴ “And when he had begun to settle *them*, there was brought to him one who owed him ten thousand talents.”²⁵ “But since he did not have *the means* to repay, his lord commanded him to be sold, along with his wife and children and all that he had, and repayment to be made.”²⁶ “The slave therefore falling down, prostrated himself before him, saying, ‘Have patience with me, and I will repay you everything.’”²⁷ “And the lord of that slave felt compassion and released him and forgave him the debt.”²⁸ “But that slave went out and found one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and he seized him and *began* to choke *him*, saying, ‘Pay back what you owe.’”²⁹ “So his fellow slave fell down and *began* to entreat him, saying, ‘Have patience with me and I will repay you.’”³⁰ “He was unwilling however, but went and threw him in prison until he should pay back what was owed.”³¹ “So when his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were deeply grieved and came and reported to their lord all that had happened.”³² “Then summoning him, his lord said to him, ‘You wicked slave, I forgave you all that debt because you entreated me.’”³³ “Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave, even as I had mercy on you?”³⁴ “And his lord, moved with anger, handed him over to the torturers until he should repay all that was owed him.”³⁵ “So shall My heavenly Father also do to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart.” (Matthew 18:21-35 NAS)

Text Main Idea:

Those who have been forgiven by God should be forgiving others willingly from the heart

Sermon Main Idea:

We should be forgiving others because of the great debt we have been forgiven by God

Introduction:

Maybe you have heard the old saying: “Life in the Church would be easy if it were not for people”

- We know the Church is the people
- With people come problems. Different personalities, preferences, and maturity levels
- In this marvelous mix of humanity is ample opportunity for us to sin against each other and the need for forgiveness

Thus the need to confront sin and forgive sin is very important for keeping the life of the Church healthy

In Matthew Chapter 18 Jesus tells his disciples how they are to treat one another

- Overview of Matthew Chapter 18

18:1- 6 - Be Humble Towards Other Disciples

18:7-11 - Do Not be a Stumbling Block

18:12-20 - Reprove and Restore the Wayward Disciple

18:21-35 - Forgive the Sinning Disciple

This whole chapter unfolds as a series of instructions to us about how to treat God's people

- Be Humble; Don't cause others to stumble; Rebuke and Restore Sinners; Forgive those who sin against you
- This is normal living in the Church

Which is odd when people say they don't like the Church because there are sinners there

- We are now looking at the fourth quality in this chapter, forgiveness

Addressing the need to work with disciples Jesus teaches on forgiveness

- This discussion on forgiveness comes on the heels of a discussion on church discipline
- There will be sin in the Church. It is inevitable among redeemed sinners and confused professors of faith that sin will arise
- When it does we have the duty to confront it and as we do we seek the repentance and restoration of God's people

Not only are we concerned about corporate restoration in the Church

- Matt 18:15-20
- Which addresses how to deal with sin in the corporate body of Christ

But as we see Peter's question here in verse 21, we are also concerned about what happens when people sin against us personally

- We should not be surprised at the presence of sin in the Church or in our personal lives
- God saves sinners
- And when we sin, we need forgiveness. When people sin against us we need to be forgiving

In fact, if you are not regularly forgiving others, from your heart, you are in danger of having God treat you and your sins in the same way you are treating others

- Not only do others need you to be forgiving BUT you need to be forgiving or you forfeit any hope of eternal life

Outline:

1. Intro: An Understandable Question vs 21-23
2. Scene 1: An Example of Great Forgiveness vs 24-27
3. Scene 2: An Example of Great Ingratitude vs 28-30
4. Scene 3: An Example of Great Justice vs 31-34
5. Lessons Learned vs 35

Intro vs 21-23 An Understandable Question

“Then Peter came and said to Him, ‘Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?’²² Jesus said to him, ‘I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.²³ For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a certain king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves.’” (Matthew 18:21-23 NAS)

Peter starts with asking how often he should forgive. It would probably be better said, “how many times do we need to forgive?”

- This is a great example of normal life in the Church
- We are dealing with sinners

If we are honest Peter’s question is the question on all of our minds

- We can understand forgiving once maybe twice
- But it stretches both logic and our patience to think more than three times
- What if the person keeps going back and sinning?
 - Do we doubt their repentance?
 - Do we stop forgiving?
 - Do we take back our forgiveness for continual sin?
- Isn’t there a natural cut off? A point where we have forgiven enough and the person just isn’t learning his lesson so we need to stop forgiving?
- Lord, how many times must we forgive?
- Is there a ceiling to our forgiveness where we can stop?
- Is there an end to the expectation of forgiveness?
- Can we say that forgiveness has a limit?

If we are honest all of us think this way.

- How many times have we been continually hurt by others sins and thought, enough is enough?
- How many times have we thought that we cannot truly be expected to forgive because their actions, by continually sinning, proves they have not repented?
- How many times have we too, like Peter, wanted a definite number?

So Peter asks: "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?"

Much has been made of Peter's request here

- He was generous in his number
- The Jews had taught that three times was the lawful number
- Peter went well beyond that

It could have been the number of completeness

Peter's reply could reveal a what he supposed as a lavish response. Or it could reveal his understanding of OT quotes

- Forgive 7x

"Peter's extension of that to a sevenfold pattern of forgiveness may reflect OT precedents, e.g., the sevenfold vengeance on anyone murdering Cain (**Gen 4:15**); the blood sprinkled seven times for atonement (**Lev 26:18, 21**); the sevenfold punishment for sin (**Lev 26:18**)." Pg 693 Osborne

- The number 7 being symbolic of completeness or perfection

Blomberg quotes McNeile's excellent summary: "The unlimited revenge of primitive man has given place to the unlimited forgiveness of Christians." Pg 693 Osborne

Peter's number could be extraordinary in his mind and thus what he believed to be lavish and in line with his understanding of His Lord's teaching and practice

- I suspect this is the case. I think Peter is giving us an extraordinary number

Ask yourself how many times you have had to forgive someone 7x in one day?

- I know it is rare, I can hardly think of time myself
- But imagine it, when would your patience run out?
- After a couple of times for sure

To some degree I think if we just hit Peter's number we would be in a lot better of a place than the average person in the Church

- Forgive 7x would be an improvement

But here is the key, what seems lavish and extraordinary for us, is greatly short of God's call for us to forgive

- Since God has forgiven us of great sin we are called to be extraordinary in our forgiveness to others

"It is clear from this parable that one motive for forgiving others ought to be the recollection that we all need forgiveness at God's hands ourselves." JC Ryle pg 231

See Jesus Reply in verse 22

"Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven." (Matthew 18:22 NAS)

There is debate of whether Jesus is saying 77x Or 490 times

- In either case it is well beyond Peter's cap
- Based on the hyperbole Jesus uses in scene one, and the grammatical structure here, I believe Jesus is giving us the greater number
- We are to be forgiving extraordinarily, regularly, and continually

We are to be continually forgiving and never exhaust our forgiveness towards others. This is how God has forgiven us

Jesus answers Peter's question with a parable

- There are a lot of details in this parable since it is 10 verses long
- There are a bunch of elements which can distract us when we seek to understand this parable
 - For example, some spend quite a lot of time trying to figure out what kind of job the slave had
 - We could try all kinds of formulas trying to determine the present day value of the debt
 - We can explore how the king allowed the debt to get so large in the first place

But none of these matter because this is a parable and the king never existed, the servant is not real, and even the numbers are made up

- I am not saying the Bible is made up
- This story is a story which illustrates the point. So if you are trying to find the Historical King who had a real servant who owed him a great amount of money you will be wasting your time and stretching the "Historical" accuracy of the scriptures

We now move to the parable which is told in three scenes

- This is one of the larger parables given by our Lord

Scene #1 vs 24-27 An Example of Great Forgiveness

"And when he had begun to settle *them*, there was brought to him one who owed him ten thousand talents.²⁵ "But since he did not have *the means* to repay, his lord commanded him to be sold, along with his wife and children and all that he had, and repayment to be made.²⁶ "The slave therefore falling down, prostrated himself before him, saying, 'Have patience with me, and I will repay you everything.'²⁷ "And the lord of that slave felt compassion and released him and forgave him the debt." (Matthew 18:24-27 NAS)

The Servants

"These *douloi* were the king's satraps who had been appointed by him to rule great parts of his domain and to turn into his treasuries the grand revenues of their provinces.

Under an Oriental king, great lords though they were in their own right, they would be subject to his absolute authority and would thus be nothing but the king's [Greek]." Lenski pg 711

- The Servant would be doing the Lord's Work and would give an account for his work with his lord's resources

The Servants Debt was great 10,000 talents

- David and the leaders of Israel respectively gave 3,000/5,000 talents of gold and 7,000/10,000 talents of silver for the building of the temple (1 Chr 29:3-7), and Josephus said a total of 600 talents were collected in taxes from Judea and Samaria in 4 BC (*Ant.* 17.320). – Osborne pg 635
- A talent was a weight of silver or of gold coin, and these weights varied in different nations and also at different eras
 - The Attic talent is \$1,200; = 12 million
 - the great Roman, \$500,
 - and the small, \$375;
 - while the Hebrew, Assyrian, and Babylonian ran from \$1,550 to \$2,000. = 15 to 20 million

“Many are inclined to think of the Attic talent in this instance, thus \$12,000,000; others, of the Hebrew, \$15,500,000 to \$20,000,000. An Attic talent amounts to 6,000 denarii, and 10,000 of these talents to 60 million denarii, that is 600,000 times as much as was due this debtor by his fellow-*doulos*. And one denarius was a laborer’s daily wages (20:2).” Lenski 7-11-12

- “. . . the figure (“10,000”; Gr. *mupioi*) here is hyperbolic; Danker (BDAG 661) suggests the English slang “zillions” to translate it (cf. the larger amounts found in 1 Chr 29:3-7 and Josephus *Antiquities* 17.320).” Turner pg 243
- The estimates I have read on this amount varies when trying to estimate in our current currency
- But it could be from 2mil, to 2 Billion, to the fanciful and made up number 2 Billion-gazillion (yes one commentator actually suggested the number)

Vs 25 is important

The Servant’s debt was called and he was found to be without the resources to repay the debt. Vs 25

- The verdict of condemned was read and he was to be sold to slavery along with his wife and kids
- This would have been an acceptable punishment in the Gentile system of Christ’s time
 - If a debtor was unable to repay he was sold into slavery
 - If the debt was great enough, his family was sold as well
 - This was both a means of justice and grace
 - The family would be cared for and the lender would receive some repayment from the sale or service of the family

There is nothing here which indicates that this treatment was overly harsh or inappropriate in any way

The Servants Urgent Plea vs 26:

“The slave therefore falling down, prostrated himself before him, saying, 'Have patience with me, and I will repay you everything.' ”

- The slaves posture demonstrates his great remorse
- He throws himself down to the ground face first

It is as if the verdict is read and the guards are coming forward to lead him away and the servant makes a huge scene

- He throws himself down to make it difficult to be carried out
- He pleads for more time

In one sense, this is every sinner's plea:

- More time and I will fix the wrongs
- More time and I will get out of this mess
- Like the gambler who says, I just need more time and I will get out of this mess while at the same time keeps compounding his losses
 - He is unaware of how seriously over extended he really is.
 - He is oblivious to the greatness of his loss
- So he pleads, Lord more time, more time
- Lord a little more patience and I will fix this.
 - Just a little more time and we will get this resolved

What the servant missed was that this debt needs more commodity than time. Time is not fixing this account. And the King knew it

- If the servant lived 100 years it would take over 1600 life times to pay back the debt
- It is impossible to pay back. He only has one lifetime

But this is where the king does the unexpected

"And the lord of that slave felt compassion and released him and forgave him the debt."

- The servant asked for time
- He received more
- He received release from the obligation
- Not only did he get time, he was given freedom
- He was set free from the terrible requirements of his debts
- He was free, his family was free, his debts were removed

The text says, because the king had compassion.

- Mercy and compassion were shown by the king
- The reason he forgave, because he has compassion
- What he did was show mercy
- This is a great debt relieved

When the king forgives the debt he does the unexpected

- The servant wanted more time to pay back the debt
- The king instead released the whole debt. He goes beyond the servant's request. He does more than simply grant time and an opportunity to right a wrong. He graciously frees the servant from the burden of having to repay the impossible debt

Here is the great truth of this passage, we are the debtors. We have racked up the immeasurable debt

- We keep going to God seeking forgiveness only to return to our sin the very next moment
- We keep asking, God forgive me
- And then the very next moment we are planning evil, imagining evil, or even inventing evil
- We do what we know we ought not to do and then we seek forgiveness. We stack debt upon debt
- We get so overwhelmed with our sin that it consumes us. We have sinned so why not another sin?

We are just like this slave, before we know it our debts are beyond what we can possibly imagine

- We were blissfully adding to our debts
- We multiply and compound the interest on our debts
- We add to our sins daily, and in some days we multiply our sins

Notice as well, until the King decided to reconcile accounts there was no dealing with the debts

- There comes a time when the king calls for account
- The king reconciles his books and verifies the debts

Here the lesson learned is that God graciously forgives great debt because He is filled with compassion

Pg 712 Lenski

“Luther writes well: “Before the king drew him to account, he had no conscience, does not feel the debt, and would have gone right along, made more debt, and cared nothing about it. But now that the king reckons with him, he begins to feel the debt. So it is with us. The greater part does not concern itself about sin, goes on securely, fears not the wrath of God. Such people cannot come to the forgiveness of sin, for they do not come to realize that they have sins. They say, indeed, with the mouth that they have sin; but if they were serious about it they would speak far otherwise. This servant, too, says, before the king reckons with him, so much I owe to my lord, namely ten thousand talents; but he goes ahead and laughs. But now that the reckoning is held, and his lord orders him, his wife, his children, and everything to be sold, now he feels it. So, too, we feel in earnest when our sins are revealed in the heart, when the record of our debts is held before us, then the laughter stops. Then we exclaim: I am the most miserable man, there is none as unfortunate as I on the earth! Such knowledge makes a real humble man, works contrition, so that one can come to the forgiveness of sins.”

Lenski pg 715

“Compassion is the inner motive of God, from which pardon flows. And this pardon is at once complete. The king “released” this debtor and cancelled the order to his officers to sell the debtor and all he had. And in the same instant “he remitted the loan to him.” It is called . . . “the loan,” because it was tribute that was long due to the king. But the . . . [Greek verb] is most significant: “he remitted” the debt, literally, “dismissed and sent it away.” This is the verb we usually translate “to forgive,” and the Greek word means: “As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us” (Ps 103:12): “and thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea” (Micah 7:19). The [word means], “the sending away.”

Scene #2 28-30 An Example of Great Ingratitude

"But that slave went out and found one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and he seized him and *began* to choke *him*, saying, 'Pay back what you owe.'²⁹ "So his fellow slave fell down and *began* to entreat him, saying, 'Have patience with me and I will repay you.'³⁰ "He was unwilling however, but went and threw him in prison until he should pay back what was owed." (Matthew 18:28-30 NAS)

"It is a melancholy fact that there are few Christian duties so little practiced as that of forgiveness: it is sad to see how much bitterness, unmercifulness, spite, hardness, and unkindness there is among men." JC Ryle pg 231

Now since this is a story, there is no reference to time

- Could have been the very next moment
- Or a year later
- The time is not the issue, the attitude of the unforgiving and ungrateful slave is

It would be easy for us to make the ungrateful servant petty in his unwillingness to forgive

"But that slave went out and found one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and he seized him and *began* to choke *him*, saying, 'Pay back what you owe.'"

- Some commentators have done this by attributing the debt owed to be around \$20
- Others have made it clear that the debt was manageable
- 3 months

Compared to the slave before the king who had a debt that many lifetimes could not satisfy, this slave had a debt which had a reasonable opportunity to be repaid

- But look it was still a good size debt
- Which one of us would rejoice if we were given three months' worth of wages?

Let's not trivialize the man's grief

- This was a good number
- BUT it was nowhere near the debt he owed

This is the key – yes he was harmed but in comparison to his debt this was nothing

Notice the servant's response vs 29:

²⁹ "So his fellow slave fell down and *began* to entreat him, saying, 'Have patience with me and I will repay you.'"

- The imagery is the same here as in scene one
- The debt exposed
- The servant falls and pleads
- Both plead the same, just give me more time and I will take care of this debt

The Wicked Response vs 30

"He was unwilling however, but went and threw him in prison until he should pay back what was owed."

- The king had compassion, the forgiven servant did not
- The issue is not with requiring the debt
- The issue is not with slavery – this was the times and what happened when debt was being collected

The issue was, if the servant had been forgiven an impossible debt then he should be showing the same mercy towards others to handle their smaller debts

Scene #3 v31-34 An Example of Great Justice

"So when his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were deeply grieved and came and reported to their lord all that had happened.³² "Then summoning him, his lord said to him, 'You wicked slave, I forgave you all that debt because you entreated me.'³³ 'Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave, even as I had mercy on you?'³⁴ "And his lord, moved with anger, handed him over to the torturers until he should repay all that was owed him." (Matthew 18:31-34 NAS)

Grieved Slaves

"So when his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were deeply grieved and came and reported to their lord all that had happened."

- The first to notice the problem was the man's fellow slaves
- They saw the incongruity
- They see this is wrong

Angered Lord

³² "Then summoning him, his lord said to him, 'You wicked slave, I forgave you all that debt because you entreated me.'³³ 'Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave, even as I had mercy on you?'³⁴ "And his lord, moved with anger, handed him over to the torturers until he should repay all that was owed him."

The king treated the unforgiving servant in the same way he treated his fellow slave.

- You see God's justice is strengthened by His mercy
- He was merciful and willingly so
- But at the same time when God's servants were not merciful He could be justly angry because of their lack of mercy towards others

God treats his people fairly

- This is the problem, we do not want to be treated fairly
- Many say, I just want to be treated fairly
- No, no you do not. You want to be treated mercifully because the debt you have is beyond your ability to repay, no matter how much time you are given as an extension
- Mercy and compassion towards others

Lesson vs 35 A Call to Great Forgiveness

"So shall My heavenly Father also do to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart." (Matthew 18:35 NAS)

The warning:

- The answer to Peter's question: If we are not forgiving impossible debts like God forgave us then God will treat each of us in the same way
- We must be forgiving from the heart

The scary truth in this passage is that the Lord treated the servant in the same way the servant treated his fellow servant

Friends we don't want fair with God. We have no ability to stand before God if we ask God to be fair with us. We want mercy, grace, and forgiveness from God

- With the debt we owe this is the only way we can stand

If we have received lavish grace and mercy from God we need to demonstrate that same

We are not forgiving begrudgingly

- Many in the Church forgive this way
- They forgive because they know they have to but privately they are reliving the sins over and over again
 - They are imagining what they would say to the offender
 - They are imagining how they will inflict harm upon the offender
 - They are imagining how they will destroy all those who hurt them either verbally, emotionally, or physically
- Yes, they say they have forgiven. Yes, they admit they have to let go. But privately in the heart they are seething

They lack the compassion of their Lord

They lack the mercy to let go

They know the words to say but will not carry the burden to relieve the debt of the transgressor

- They assume their debts are so small

"Forgiveness and mercy are essential aspects of kingdom living, and those who refuse to do so will not be shown forgiveness or mercy by God (cf. 5:7; 6:14; 9:13; 12:7; Jas 2:13)." Pg 697 Osborne

"The nature of forgiveness is a most profound aspect of reconciling grace. Forgiveness is never easy; it is hard. It is the most difficult thing in the universe. Forgiveness means that the forgiving person as the innocent one resolves his own wrath over the sin of the guilty one and lets the guilty one go free.

To forgive means that one genuinely loves, and this love can move beyond the issue to the person, and that one cares more about the person than about what he or she has done. Forgiveness liberates. Forgiveness frees the person for the options of living." Page 222 Augsburg The Communicator's Commentary

Paradigm principles:

1. We are not to be exhausted in our forgiving of others
2. Forgiveness goes beyond our rights and what is fair and does the unexpected
3. God's forgiveness obligates us to be forgiving towards others
4. Forgiveness must be from the heart

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