

LESSON 10

TEN THOUSAND TALENTS

Matthew 18:21-35; Luke 17:3-4

MATTHEW 18:21-35

Reading before class: Matthew 18:21-35 and Luke 17:3-4.

Last week we looked at what grows in the ground of a man who has not forgiven. This week the Lord tells a story about one, and He puts numbers in it on purpose.

- 1.** I told you to find two amounts of money before class. Write both here.

The first amount: _____ The second amount: _____

- 2.** In your own words, what does it mean to forgive somebody? Write it before you read the parable again. We will come back to it.

THE QUESTION THAT STARTED IT

- 3.** Read Matthew 18:21. What does Peter ask, and what number does he propose?

- 4.** Peter is not being stingy. He is offering more than he was likely taught. What does his question assume there is?

- 5.** Read Matthew 18:22. Write the Lord's answer.

- 6.** In your opinion, is Jesus giving Peter a bigger number to count to, or is He doing something else with the counting itself?

THE FIRST DEBT

7. Read Matthew 18:23-24. What is the king doing, and how much does the first slave owe?

8. Read Matthew 18:25. What was the sentence, and who else was included in it?

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9. Read Matthew 18:26. Write out exactly what the slave asks for.

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10. Look hard at his request. He does not ask to be forgiven. What does he ask for, and what does that tell you about what he still believed about himself?

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11. Read Matthew 18:27. The king does three things. Write all three, and note which one the slave never asked for.

NOW DO THE ARITHMETIC

Work these out. We are going to compare answers in class.

12. The NASB translators note that a denarius was a day's wages, and you can see it in the text yourself: read Matthew 20:2, where a landowner agrees with laborers on a denarius for the day. So one hundred denarii is about how long a man works?
days, which is about months.

13. Now the first debt. The NASB translators put a note on this verse: one talent was worth more than fifteen years' wages for a laborer. So ten thousand talents is more than how many years of wages?
More than years.

14. A man might work fifty years in his whole life. So how many working lifetimes is that debt?
lifetimes.

- 15.** Now write both debts in one sentence, side by side, in your own words. Take your time with it.
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- 16.** Look at your answer to question 15 and then read the slave's promise in verse 26 again. Was he telling the truth?
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LET'S SUMMARIZE HERE

- 1.** The second debt is real. A hundred days of work is real money to a working man.
- 2.** The first debt is not merely larger. It is unpayable, and Jesus chose numbers that make that obvious.
- 3.** The slave asked for time and received release.
- 4.** Therefore the man in this parable did not understand what had happened to him, and that is the whole problem.

THE SECOND DEBT

- 17.** Read Matthew 18:28. What does the forgiven slave do the moment he goes out? Use the parable's own verbs.
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- 18.** Read Matthew 18:29 and write out what the fellow slave says.
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- 19.** Put verse 29 beside verse 26. How different are those two sentences?
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- 20.** Now think about it. One of those two men could actually have kept that promise. Which one, and why does that make his treatment worse?
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- 21.** Read Matthew 18:30. What does he do instead?
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WHO ELSE WAS WATCHING

22. Read Matthew 18:31. Somebody else sees this. Who, and what does the text say they felt?

23. That is a strong phrase for people who were not involved in the debt at all. Go back to Lesson 9 and Hebrews 12:15. What did we say about how many people an unforgiving heart reaches?

24. What do those slaves do about it, and who do they take it to?

HOW IT ENDS

25. Read Matthew 18:32-33. The king asks one question. Write it out, and underline the three words at the end of it.

26. Read Matthew 18:34. What is the sentence, and how long does it run? Look back at your answer to question 13 before you say how long.

27. Read Matthew 18:35. Jesus applies it. Write the last four words of the verse.

28. In your opinion, what do those last four words rule out?

WORD STUDY · TEN THOUSAND TALENTS (MATTHEW 18:24)

Ten thousand is a large round number. It is not the largest number the Greeks could think about, and they could think about very large ones. But it is the largest number that had its own single word. Past that they had to build: two myriads, or a myriad of myriads.

And the word points two directions. The lexicon gives the noun form of this word two meanings: a group of ten thousand, and a very large number, not precisely defined. That second one is the way we use "a million" when we say a person has told us a million times. Bill Mounce, who wrote the standard first-year Greek grammar, puts it about as plainly as it can be put: the word basically means a gajillion.

Now put that with the coin. The talent was the largest unit of money in use, and the NASB translators note that a single talent was worth more than fifteen years' wages for a working man. One talent. So Jesus took a very large number and multiplied it by the biggest coin there was.

Why it matters here: He is not estimating a large debt. He is building one nobody can pay, so that no listener can quietly work out a repayment plan while the story is going. The absurdity is the point.

And it works either way. If the number is exactly ten thousand talents, the debt is unpayable. If the number means "countless," the debt is unpayable. You do not have to settle which one Jesus meant to feel what the parable is doing.

Source: both money figures are the NASB 1995 translators' own notes — a denarius was a day's wages, and a talent was worth more than fifteen years' wages for a laborer. The two senses of the Greek word are from Mounce, "μυριάς, the Greek word for 'gajillion'," Zondervan Academic blog, citing BDAG. Note that Matthew 18:24 uses the numeral, while Mounce discusses the related noun. Full entries in Works Cited.

And note this: the arithmetic in this lesson survives an imprecise conversion. The fellow slave's debt is a number a man could count. The first one is not, and Jesus expects you to feel the difference.

BUT SOMEONE MAY ASK...

"Luke 17:3 says to forgive him IF he repents. Mark 11:25 says to forgive whenever you stand praying, with no condition attached. Which is it?"

This is a real question, careful brethren answer it differently, and I am not going to settle it for you in print. I will lay out the readings and tell you where I lean when we get there in class.

The first reading takes Luke 17:3 as the governing text. Forgiveness is a transaction between two parties, and like the king's release of the debt it happens when the offender comes and asks. On this view, Mark 11:25 is about clearing your own heart of the grudge so your prayer is not hindered, which is not the same act as pronouncing a man forgiven.

The second reading takes Mark 11:25 as the governing text. Forgiveness is something you do about your own heart, whether or not the other man ever comes, and Luke 17:3 is describing the fuller restoration that happens when he does.

A distinction some brethren use to hold both is between the disposition and the transaction: the readiness to forgive is required of you always and without condition, while the completed exchange, the reconciliation between two people, waits on repentance. Whichever conclusion you come to, notice this. Nobody reading either passage gets to keep a grudge. The disagreement is about what to call the thing you do, not about whether you may hold on to it.

This is one of the places I told you about in the Forward. Read both passages this week, decide what you believe, and be ready to say why.

FOR YOUR LIFE

29. Look back at your definition in question 2. Would you change it now? What changed?

30. The first slave was forgiven and then went straight out and choked somebody. He was not a hypocrite about the debt. What had he actually failed to understand?

- 31.** Think about a wrong somebody has done you that you are still holding. Put it next to question 14. Not to make it small, because verse 28 says the hundred denarii was a real debt. Put them side by side and write what you see.
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- 32.** In your opinion, is it possible to say the words "I forgive you" and not do it from the heart? What would the difference look like from the outside?
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THIS WEEK

- 33.** Read Matthew 18:21-35 out loud once this week, all of it. Write the day you will do it.
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- 34.** Write one thing you will stop rehearsing. Nobody is reading this but you.
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Bring this workbook back next week. Next Sunday is a road and a decision made in about four seconds.

NEXT WEEK. Lesson 11: The Man Who Had Somewhere to Be.

Read before class: Luke 10:25-37 and Colossians 3:12-14.

One thing to watch for: three men come down that road and the text tells you what each one SAW. Watch what happens between the seeing and the doing in each case. It is not the same in all three.