

Parables: Showing the Way of Jesus

The Way of Forgiveness

Matthew 18:21-35

Over the past three weeks, we have been in a series called the **Parables of Jesus**. In the first week, Pastor John began with the *Parable of the Four Soils* and spoke of our hearts' receptivity to the gospel. Then we learned about the *Parable of the Two Builders* and the way to obedience. And last week, Pastor Josiah spoke about the *Parable of the Good Samaritan* and the way of mercy.

This week, we will be reading and learning about **forgiveness** by studying the *Parable of the Unforgiving Servant*.

"We all agree that forgiveness is a beautiful idea until we have to practice it." C.S. Lewis

Forgiveness is hard! It's in our human nature to want justice for the injustice done to us. We want that person to feel what we feel. We want them to cry as we cried. We want them to suffer as we have suffered. **But Jesus calls us away from that spirit of revenge and anger and commands us to forgive.**

Main Idea: The Way of Jesus Empowers You to Forgive as You Have Been Forgiven

"Then Peter came up and said to him, 'Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven

*times?' Jesus said to him, 'I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times. Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. When he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. And since he could not pay, his master ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made. So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, "Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything." And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt. But when that same servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii, and seizing him, he began to choke him, saying, "Pay what you owe." So his fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him, "Have patience with me, and I will pay you." He refused and went and put him in prison until he should pay the debt. When his fellow servants saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their master all that had taken place. Then his master summoned him and said to him, "You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?" And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers, until he should pay all his debt. So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.'" **Matthew 18:21-35***

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Three Approaches to Forgiveness:

I. Unlimited in How Often We Forgive – Matthew 18:21-22

Prior to this passage in verses 15-20, Jesus is talking about what to do when a brother sins against you:

*"If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother." **Matthew 18:15***

If this initial step doesn't work, Jesus says to get witnesses and approach the brother. If that doesn't work, let the church know, and if that still doesn't work, that offender should be removed from the church family.

Peter comes forward and asks for clarification:

*"Then Peter came up and said to him, 'Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?'" **Matthew 18:21***

According to the Jewish tradition and oral law at this time, you only had to forgive a maximum of three times. The fourth time, you did not have to forgive, and you were free from the command to do so. Peter knows this and suggests 7 times to be generous. He thought he knew the answer but quickly realized he was wrong.

Jesus answers:

*"Jesus said to him, 'I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times.'" **Matthew 18:22***

Jesus is saying that you should not keep count but continue to forgive without limit. Why? Because God forgave us and continues to forgive us. His forgiveness is unlimited toward us.

*"For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing." **Romans 7:19***

There is a battle going on between our fleshly desires and the Spirit within us. The Bible says in Galatians that if we walk by the Spirit, we will not gratify the desires of the flesh. But oftentimes we fail and sin. We are not perfect, and we won't be until we see Jesus again. But thank God for His promises and faithfulness:

*"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." **1 John 1:9***

Forgive without limit, just as Jesus forgives us without limit.

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II. Generous in How Much We Should Forgive – Matthew 18:23-27

"Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. When he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. And since he could not pay, his master ordered him to be sold,

with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made. So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.'" **Matthew 18:23-26**

The servant owed the king 10,000 talents, which is equivalent to \$60 billion in today's currency. Not only did he owe this debt, but it was due immediately. In those days and throughout history, if a debt was owed, you were sold as slaves or jailed until your debt was paid. But even if the person worked every day at the going wages, it would have taken him 164,000 years to pay back what was owed.

The debt is shocking. The claim that it will be repaid is shocking. But that's not even the most shocking part of this parable: *"And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt."* **Matthew 18:27**

The king in this story is God. The servant is us, and we have an insurmountable debt that we cannot pay. This debt is called sin. The cost of sin is death.

"For the wages of sin is death..." **Romans 6:23a**

"And you were dead in the trespasses and sins..." **Ephesians 2:1**

Our sin is the greatest offense to God. We sometimes fall into this idea that our good behavior and good deeds will pay this enormous debt that we owe. But this parable shows that we cannot

earn forgiveness, nor can we become righteous out of our will or through our works. Forgiveness is a gift that only God can give. Forgiveness is given to us through the finished work of Jesus Christ.

"For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." **Romans 6:23**

"But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved." **Ephesians 2:4-5**

You may be saying, "But you don't know what this person has done to me. It's too deep. It hurts too much."

I'm not minimizing the offense done to you. What was done to you was awful. But God sees and knows your pain. And the Bible says that vengeance is His, not yours. And the pain you have, He wants to take it from you.

"Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." **Matthew 11:28**

Give your unforgiveness toward others to the Lord, and by the power of the Holy Spirit within you, you will be able to forgive that great offense committed against you because our offense to God was greater, and yet He forgave us. So let us be generous in how much we should forgive.

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III. Ungrateful When We Refuse to Forgive – Matthew 18:28-35

"But when that same servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii, and seizing him, he began to choke him, saying, 'Pay what you owe.' So his fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you.' He refused and went and put him in prison until he should pay the debt. When his fellow servants saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their master all that had taken place. Then his master summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?'" **Matthew 18:28-33**

The same servant that was just forgiven of 10,000 talents, or \$60 billion, has now found a fellow servant that owed him a hundred denarii, or \$12,000, and begins to choke him, demanding that the debt be paid immediately.

The fellow servant does the same thing the servant did to the king – he falls to his knees and pleads for patience for the debt. But the servant **refused**. It wasn't that he *couldn't* give him more time to pay, but that he *wouldn't*. These actions are the opposite of what the king granted to him.

The king finds out and calls the servant "wicked." Why? Because he was shown compassion but *refused* to be compassionate. He was shown mercy and *refused* to be merciful. He was forgiven and *refused* to forgive. He had an ungrateful heart!

"Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!"

Romans 7:24-25

God's forgiveness isn't something that we just receive; it's something that we need to experience. As believers, when we understand how offensive our sin is before a holy God, His forgiveness should change us. It must change us.

"Be kind to one another; tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you." **Ephesians 4:32**

Let's look at the repercussions of having an ungrateful heart:
"And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers, until he should pay all his debt. So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart." **Matthew 18:34-35**

I want to be clear. These verses do not have anything to do with losing your salvation or with us having to forgive others to receive salvation. When we are saved, the Bible says that we are sealed by the Holy Spirit, and no one can snatch us from His hand. Our salvation is secure through faith, by grace and not by works.

What Jesus is saying is that we **forfeit blessings**. And that blessing we forfeit is freedom and peace. When we refuse to forgive and settle for life with an ungrateful heart, we give up God's peace in our lives. **We put ourselves in this jail.**

There is no need to live with an ungrateful heart. Take yourself out of that jail. The Holy Spirit gives us the power to forgive and live in the freedom and peace that God offers through His forgiveness. Reflect God's forgiveness to all those around you.

Practical Tests for Forgiveness:

1. First thought test
2. Opportunity to help test
3. Positive thought test
4. Revenge Test
5. Failure test

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We can only forgive others because He has forgiven us. And this forgiveness is for all of us. Your debt of sin is not greater than his love for us. Make Him your Lord and Savior today.

*"And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross." **Colossians 2:13-14***