

Harris Creek Baptist Church
Scott Kedersha
Series: Summer of Stories
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The Forgiven Forgive
Matthew 18:21-35

It is so good to be here today. As JP shared, I live with my wife and four boys, who are 16, 16, 13, and 11. It is a very loud, obnoxious, smelly home with a lot of males in it. Then, of course, we had to add on top of that a male puppy, Jack Bauer. We just brought Bauer home a few weeks ago. He's another quarantine puppy. We moved down here to Waco 16 days ago. As JP shared, for the last 14 plus years, I've served as a marriage pastor. I've loved it.

One of the things I love about being a marriage pastor is that it forces me to work on my marriage. I want to lead with integrity. I want to be somebody who practices what they preach. I want to be somebody who's authentic. Just to be candid and authentic, I struggle with fear of man, of what people think of me. I want to keep it real in life, and I want to keep it real in my marriage. I don't want to have a marriage that is just subpar. I want to work on my marriage. So we work really hard on our marriage.

I want to practice what I preach. So I tell people often, whether they're dating, engaged, newly married, married for decades to continue to date one another. Dating doesn't stop when you say, "I do." It's something you continue to do. If you're married, don't date somebody else, but date your spouse.

We like to go on dates. One of the ways we would date each other in Dallas is we went to this summer musical series of plays. We like plays and musicals, but the reason, candidly, we bought these tickets solely is to go see the show, *Hamilton*. Maybe you've heard of *Hamilton*. If you haven't, the first thing I'd say is this. "Welcome to 2020." It's a great show. It's this story that you can now watch on Disney+, but we saw it live. I was so pumped to go see this play.

We went out there on a date night. The story, to give you a little bit of background, is about Alexander Hamilton, who's one of the founding fathers of America. It's his role of moving to the United States before it was a united states and helping win the Revolutionary War and then helping found this nation.

He comes from poverty. He is young, scrappy, and hungry. He writes as if he's running out of time. He is ambitious. He wants to take over the world. He moves here, and he meets the Schuyler sisters: Angelica, Eliza, and Peggy. He eventually marries Eliza, and it's the story of their marriage.

I was excited to see the choreography and the dancing and the music. I love the music. It's hip-hop. It's super fun. I was excited. I knew most of the lyrics. But what I was really blown away by was not just the choreography and the music and the acting, but one of the storylines. This is not a spoiler alert.

Let me give you a little bit of background. It's been on Disney+ for 23 days, which in quarantine days feels like about six or seven years. So it's been on TV for a couple weeks now. It's been on Broadway for five years. Even more so, it's 250 years old. So there's no spoiler alert. This is real history.

What I was really touched by was the story of Alexander and Eliza. Maybe it's because I'm a marriage pastor. I don't know what it is, but the story, and the big story really quickly, is the way he works so hard to start our nation. At times, unfortunately, he sacrifices his family for the sake of forming the nation.

At one point, his wife goes away. She goes to Upstate New York and leaves Alexander behind. He's alone working, and a woman knocks on his door. He starts to have an affair with this woman, and eventually, Eliza comes back home from Upstate New York. She finds out about the affair, and this once happily married couple is now struggling because their marriage vows have been broken by Alexander.

He not just one time but repeatedly gets in bed with this woman who's not his wife. So happily married to not so happily married. It's a story I see played out way too often in real life today as well. Add to it, they had a son named Philip. Philip gets in an argument with a guy named George Eacker. They get into a duel, and Philip dies.

Now this family, again once happily married, happily ever after, now is faced with infidelity repeatedly, a guy who sacrifices his family for the sake of his job, and now their oldest son has died. In this incredibly powerful moment in the play, you see Eliza says, "I'm writing myself out of the narrative of our family. I'm going to stay married, but I'm no longer in love with this guy."

They get to the funeral for their son after he passes away, and in this incredibly powerful moment, Alexander actually begs for forgiveness from his wife. In a moment that blows me away, she takes him back. She says, "I'm going to put myself back in our story. We're going to be a family once again."

As I watched that, I go, "What would I do?" What would you do? If you're married to somebody and your spouse repeatedly cheats on you, what are you going to do? Will you take them back? Will you be a happily married couple once again? I just have to think that the reason Eliza took Alexander back is because she's a forgiven person. She has a faith in Christ, and a forgiven person forgives others. Again, I go, "What would I do?" What would you do?

Maybe that's a part of your story. For many of us out there, maybe you have walked through infidelity. Maybe it's not infidelity. Maybe it's pornography. That you have looked at porn, or your spouse has looked at porn, and your relationship is broken.

Maybe you work with a coworker, and you have this trusted relationship that has worked really well, and then your partner at work betrays you. What are you going to do? Are you going to reconcile and restore that relationship? Maybe one of your children lies to you repeatedly about what they look at on their phone or how they're spending their time.

That's universal. Every single one of us watching online, no matter what state you're in, no matter how old you are, your gender, your marital status, everyone in this room, we have all walked through situations where we either need to forgive someone or ask for forgiveness. We so often misunderstand forgiveness. We minimize our part, and we maximize what you have done. Or, I want you to forgive me, but I'm probably not going to forgive you. We're just really, really confused about what forgiveness is and what forgiveness isn't. That's why it is so important that we take some time to see what the God of the universe says about forgiveness.

We're in the middle of a series called the *Summer of Stories*, where we're looking at the parables of Jesus Christ. I have been so encouraged by the teaching of God's Word and by the staff over the course of the summer. We're looking at different parables. A *parable*, if you've never heard of it before, is a story told by Jesus that illustrates a point.

Today, we're going to look at Matthew 18:21-35, the parable of the unmerciful servant. I love this parable. I'm excited to talk through what it says about forgiveness. We're going to see as we look at this parable that every single one of us has a debt that we owe that we cannot pay. We're going to see that this debt has been paid by Jesus, and we're going to see the response that as forgiven people, we're to forgive others.

Right before verse 21 come verses 15 through 20, and the context there is we're talking about this. *What do you do with sin in the church?* If somebody sins, how do you address it? First, you go one on one. Then you bring another around. Then you widen the circle continually. On the heels of that, Peter says, "Now, I understand what we do with sin, but what do we do when we want to forgive someone?" So we're going to look at Matthew 18, starting in verse 21.

The first thing we're going to see is that there's a problem. We owe a debt we cannot pay. In verse 21, Peter comes up to Jesus. He says, "**Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?**" Here's a little bit of background there. In rabbinic teaching, it would say, "If you ask someone for forgiveness, you do it three times. After time three, you don't have to do it." Peter's like, "Jesus, check me out. I'm going to multiply it two times and add one. How many times do I have to forgive a brother or sister? How about seven times? Look at me. I'm hyper-spiritual Peter."

"Jesus answered, 'I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.'" Your translation may say, "Seven times seventy." The point there isn't that you forgive 77 times, and then on 78, you don't have to. The point is that you forgive a lot. You stop forgiving others when God stops forgiving us. It means we need to be radical in forgiveness because God is radical in forgiveness towards us.

As we continue in the parable, let me give you a high-level summary of it. The story is about a very wealthy king who is settling accounts with his servants. So he's calling them in one at a time to settle accounts. "Here's what you owe me. Here's what you owe me." This guy comes, and this guy has a massive amount of debt. It's really an unpayable amount of debt. It's the equivalent of \$75 million today. He doesn't have a high-paying job. He's not Elon Musk. He's not Bill Gates.

He's not Taylor Swift. He probably makes minimum wage, and this guy is supposed to pay back \$75 million.

The king forgives him. The man leaves, and this man comes across somebody who owes him a very small debt. Instead of forgiving him as he's been forgiven, he throws the man in jail. So we're going to see what Jesus has to say about our response and how we are to respond. Verse 23:

"Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand bags of gold was brought to him. Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt."

When I read that, I have no idea what 10,000 bags of gold is. Look it up. It sounds like a lot. I'd like to have 10,000 bags of gold. One bag of gold is about 20 years of wages. Do a little bit of math. I had to get my calculator out, but 10,000 bags of gold and 20 years of wages equals 200,000 years of wages. How do you accumulate that much debt? Where is this guy's Life Group who's telling him, "I wouldn't buy that many homes or that many donkeys or camels," or whatever he buys? It's a massive amount of debt; he cannot repay it.

You and I might have some credit card debt. You might have a mortgage, but none of us has a debt of 200,000 years of wages. So the point here is that this debt is unpayable. If it was just money, it would be a big enough problem, but it's a much bigger problem than a money problem. This is why a parable is genius.

A parable is a story that is told to illustrate a point. This isn't about a financial debt. It's about a debt that we have against the God of the universe, a debt that you and I cannot pay. The price must be paid for what we have done against the God of the universe. There is no declaring bankruptcy. We can't get out of jail for free. There's a price to be paid.

Isaiah 53:6 says, **"We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity [the weight of our sin] of us all."** Romans 3:23: **"...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God..."** Romans 6:23: **"For the wages of sin is death..."** We owe a debt we cannot pay, and for you and me, that debt is much greater than 200,000 years of wages. It's a debt and sin against the God of the universe.

I grew up very far from the Lord. I grew up in a home with a mom who I loved and a younger brother. Dad passed away at a young age. Mom remarried. We moved. I had good friends. I was very successful at everything I did in high school and then college. I assumed I was a Christian because I wasn't Buddhist or Muslim or Jewish. I was just the average American.

I went off to school at Wake Forest in North Carolina and, again, did everything that the world would tell me I needed to do. I was the president of my fraternity, knew everyone on campus, set up well to go to grad school. I got to the end of my time at Wake and was absolutely miserable.

The world would've looked at me and said I had everything. I looked at myself and said, "I have nothing." I hated myself. I was embarrassed. If you knew what I did, I thought you would hate me. I come across as this likable guy. I was at this point where the only solution I knew of was to end my life.

A friend shared the gospel with me, shared a different way I could go, and it started to change my life. Like this man in this story, I had a debt that I could not pay. It wasn't a financial one. It was a sin against the God of the universe. God brought me to this point of brokenness, from sexual immorality, from gluttony, from worshiping my reputation. I cared so much about what others thought about me that it affected every part of my life.

God brought me to this point where I realized I had a debt I cannot pay. There was no way I could make it right. Fortunately for me, at the age of 22, and fortunately for you and fortunately for this man in this parable, this is not the end of the story. Let's continue looking at this parable. Reminder: this man has a massive debt he cannot pay. The king wants him to pay it back. He can't pay it back, so this is what the response is. We see, next, the solution. Our debt has been paid by Jesus.

Verse 26: "**At this the servant fell on his knees before [the king]. 'Be patient with me,' he begged, 'and I will pay back everything.' The servant's master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go.**" So I owe this king 200,000 years of wages. I fall on my knees. I beg for forgiveness. I realize my need that I cannot do this on my own, and this king forgives me.

Again, a *parable* is a story that illustrates a point. It illustrates that when we realize the depth of our brokenness, the debt we cannot pay, when we realize our need, the God of the universe forgives us of our debt, forgives us of our sin.

There's a lot of confusion about what forgiveness is and what it is not. Very briefly, let me just address a few things to help bring some clarity around forgiveness. Here's what forgiveness is not. So often we're afraid to forgive someone because we think if we forgive them it's going to condone what they do.

Forgiveness is not condoning behavior or saying it's okay. It's not stuffing your hurt or your feelings or denying the hurt that's been done for you. It's not contingent upon a request. You can actually forgive someone without them asking for forgiveness. It's not granting immediate trust to the other person. You can say, "I forgive you, but I still don't trust you." It's not full and complete reconciliation of the relationship. It's not full restoration. It's not justice, getting what you deserve, and it's not forgetting.

So often we hear the phrase, "Forgive and forget." That just doesn't exist. You can forgive someone and still remember the hurt that's been caused to you. So we often misunderstand what forgiveness is. What it actually is is a release of a debt owed. I've done something against you. I owe you something, and "I'm going to release you of it. You don't owe me any money. I'm not going to hold it over you."

When you forgive, a couple of things typically happen. You don't wish ill will upon the other person. You don't want them to suffer or to fail or to want them to receive revenge. You actually wish them well. You pray for them. You bless those who curse you. Then you do everything you can possible to restore and reconcile the relationship if it's possible. Romans 12:18: **"If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all."**

We also see that asking for forgiveness requires a level of humility. This might be the part that's hardest. It's recognizing and acknowledging the need that I need to ask for forgiveness. We see this in this man who falls on his knees and begs for forgiveness. It reminds me of a story from my home. As I mentioned, we have four boys, so it's not quiet in our home, ever.

One day, Kristen has two of the kids. I have the other two at home. Names don't matter, so I'm not going to name drop on them. I'm in one room, and I'm probably praying or doing something spiritual. I don't know what I was doing at the time. The other two were in the other room, and I'm watching them and listening. As boys do, it starts to get a little bit competitive. They're wrestling or playing basketball inside. I'm not sure what it was, but it starts to escalate.

A good parent in that moment would get up from reading, praying, checking email, and go and stop the fight and the argument. I just decided to watch the show. I'm watching it, and it starts getting worse and worse. It's yelling, and now it becomes physical. At some point, one of them actually takes their foot, rears it back, and kicks the other one right between the legs. That child comes running into me and says in a high voice, "Dad, my brother just kicked me."

"I know. I just watched it. I'm so sorry. That looked really rough." So I call the other brother in. I say, "Hey, bro, what do we do when we hurt our brother? Whether it's by our words or something we do to them physically, what's the right response?" He's like, "Well, we're supposed to say, 'I'm sorry.'" So I say, "Well, go apologize."

He marches up, and he says, "I'm sorry for whatever I did," and marches the other direction. Okay, that's not what we do. We're humble. We say, "I'm sorry for kicking you between the legs. Will you please forgive me?" And it's the other one saying, "I'm sorry for patronizing you. Will you please forgive me?" Finally, after way too much time wasted for me and wasted for them, they apologized and asked for forgiveness.

I sat back down, went to praying again, I'm sure, in that moment, thinking, "Why are my kids so foolish? Why can't you get this? You do something wrong. You apologize. You ask for forgiveness. You're humble. It's so simple." I love the way that God works. Later that day, Kristen is home, and I don't remember much of what we started arguing about, but we get into a little bit of an argument, and we're short with each other.

All I remember about it is we're sitting in bed, and I have my computer on my lap and thinking, "I probably should talk to my wife right now. We probably need to restore this relationship because I need to ask for forgiveness, but here's the deal, God. She's more responsible than I am. I'm typically the one at fault, but this time, I have done the math, God, and she's 51 percent (maybe even more than that) responsible, so she needs to go first."

You know those times when words are coming out of your mouth, but your brain is saying to do something different? It's saying, "Scott, you're a follower of Jesus Christ. You forgive as you've been forgiven. You're a marriage pastor. You love your wife." Instead, I heard, "You need to apologize, or I'm not saying anything to you."

The other thing I remember thinking is this. A little insight, not to get too detailed, but we spoon every night. I'm big spoon. She's little spoon. I thought, "I am not spooning with her tonight. I will show her what's up." We go to bed. I wake up the next morning and realize, "I am such a fool."

The irony of it, of me being really frustrated with my kids who are being foolish, and I'm the biggest fool around. So I got the opportunity to restore our relationship and ask for forgiveness. I love being married. Apart from Jesus, the greatest thing that has ever happened to me is meeting and marrying Kristen Kedersha.

I want to do marriage well. I want to be somebody who's humble. Marriage gives you many opportunities to realize that you owe a debt, and we need to be people who ask for forgiveness. We see in this parable this beautiful picture of being humble, of acknowledging the need. We all owe a debt we cannot pay. That debt has been paid by Jesus.

Next, we're going to see what our response is should be, to forgive as we've been forgiven. Again, a king has settling debts. A man has a massive debt of 200,000 years of wages. He forgives. So what's going to happen to this guy as he leaves the presence of a king now a free and forgiven man?

It says in verse 28, **"But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred silver coins. He grabbed him and began to choke him. 'Pay back what you owe me!' he demanded. His fellow servant fell to his knees..."** This should look familiar. **"...and begged him, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay it back.' But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt."**

Let's do a little bit of math again. I have no idea what 100 silver coins means. It sounds like a lot. One silver coin is about one day's worth of wages. He's been forgiven of 200,000 years of wages. This man owes him about 100 days worth of work. We can pay that back. Instead of showing forgiveness as he's been shown, he takes it out on this guy and has him thrown into prison.

Verse 31: **"When the other servants saw what had happened, they were outraged and went and told their master everything that had happened. Then the master called the servant in. 'You wicked servant,' he said, 'I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?' In anger his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed."**

He really couldn't do that. You can't earn money in prison, and we can never pay back that kind of debt. Verse 35: **"This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart."** In the conclusion to this parable, Jesus gives us the,

"So what?" He tells us that even though a wrong has been done to us, we are to be people who forgive others. We are forgiven people, so we forgive people.

We live as though we are people who realize what we have been forgiven of. Honestly, when you and I don't forgive others, it's because we forget what we've done. We minimize our sin; we maximize the sin of others. We forget what God accomplished through his son Jesus on the cross. We forgive as we have been forgiven.

Ephesians 4:32: **"Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you."** Colossians 3:13: **"Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you."** Forgiven people forgive people.

Verse 35 is a difficult verse. It makes it sound like the gospel is conditional. It's not. We always interpret one verse in light of the passage, in light of the chapter, in light of the book, in light of the larger entirety of God's counsel. The gospel is not conditional, but it seems to say very clearly that if you understand forgiveness, if you are a forgiven person, then you forgive others.

This man who would not release the servant from his small debt must not have rightly understood forgiveness. We become forgiving people to the extent to which we understand God's forgiveness of us. These would be great questions to ask of yourself as you leave.

So as you think about your relationship with your roommate, your children, your spouse, your Life Group, asking yourself and asking among each other, "Is there anyone I owe forgiveness to? Is there somebody that I'm holding a grudge over? Am I living as a forgiven person? Is there anyone who has asked me for forgiveness, and I have been unwilling to grant forgiveness to them?" Talk amongst your people, your family. Work through this. The problem we need to figure out is that we owe a debt we cannot pay. The debt has been paid by Jesus. We're to forgive as we've been forgiven.

I know many of you out there might be saying right now, "Scott, you don't know my story. You don't know what I've done. You don't know where I've been. You don't know what's been done to me. So it's easy for you to talk about a small financial debt, or maybe a coworker lied to you, or one of your children frustrated you. You don't know my story." You're right. I don't. One of the best pictures of this that I've seen recently takes away that excuse for every single one of us, and the gospel still applies no matter your story.

There's this guy named Larry Nassar who is now sitting in jail for a very, very, very long time. Larry Nassar was the former USA Gymnastics national team doctor. He was a physician at Michigan State University. He was the physician that every gymnast in the country wanted to see. If you had a problem, you go to Larry.

Larry, instead of using the gifts the Lord had given him to make others better, he chose to pursue his own selfish, sinful desires. These young girls... God's daughters. Not even young ladies. Little girls. They would come to him, and he abused 250 of them. He finally got caught, and finally was put on trial, and 156 women confronted their abuser in this trial.

I watched some of this. I was watching along with it, reading the articles online, watching some of the testimonies. At one point, there was a dad who had three daughters who were abused. And the dad, after his three daughters testified against the doctor, said to the judge, "Give me five minutes with that guy, and I'll give him what he deserves." The judge says, "No, I can't do that." He says, "Give me one minute. That's all I need." The judge says, "No," again.

This guy literally breaks through police and everyone in the courtroom and tries to attack Larry. That's probably what I would've wanted to do. I have four sons, and if you want to cross me, go after one of them. I don't have any little girls, but some of you do. What would you do if that's your story? How would you respond? What would you want to do to that doctor?

I know the gospel calls us to do something radically different when we understand forgiveness. There's this powerful picture we got to see. This woman named Rachael Denhollander. She was the first victim to publicly accuse Larry of what he had done. She was the last to testify and the most powerful.

In his trial, Larry would walk around with a Bible and said, "Pray for forgiveness." You can google it. You can see the way she confronts Larry Nassar. She says to him, "...if you have read the Bible you carry, you know forgiveness does not come from doing good things..." In other words, you have a debt you cannot pay.

"The bible you carry speaks of a final judgment where all of God's wrath and eternal terror is poured out on men like you. Should you ever reach the point of truly facing what you have done, the guilt will be crushing. [...] I pray you will experience the soul crushing weight of guilt so that you may someday experience true repentance and true forgiveness from God, which you need far more than forgiveness from me—though I extend that to you as well."

I watched that, and I go, "How did she do that? We see Eliza in *Hamilton* forgiving her husband. You see Rachael forgiving the man who has abused her. It's really unimaginable, but it's what we do as forgiven people. If we really want to talk about what is unimaginable, we think about the God of the universe, who sent his only Son, lived a perfect life on this earth, and died on the cross, taking our sin upon himself.

We recognize our need. The debt has been paid. We are forgiven people. Let's be people who forgive others because we're forgiven. Forgiven people forgive people. I pray that you will and I will.

God, help us in this. God, thank you for the truth of this incredible parable that helps us to see we have a debt we cannot pay. Every single one of us, whether it's financial or relational, it could be any kind of sin, we all have a debt that we cannot pay. It's a debt that is beyond massive. God, help us to be people who realize what we've been forgiven of. Help us to be people who are forgiven people who forgive others, realizing the debt has been paid. Not because of anything we've done, but because of your son, Jesus.

Thank you for your word that speaks so clearly into areas where we're confused. Thank you that you help us understand we're forgiven of this debt and that you have paid the debt. God, help us to live accordingly, that we'd been forgiven people who forgive people. Amen.