

A Study of the Book of Matthew: Chapter 18 21-35

The Parable of the Unmerciful Servant

- **18:21** – “Then Peter came to Him and said, ‘Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?’”
 - We are still talking about forgiveness and restoration of a sinner. Forgiveness was the point in **verses 15-17**.
 - **“How often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him?”**
 - There had to be a reason that Peter asked this.
 - Jesus has just finished describing a process for what to do when another believer in Jesus sins against you.
 - It's a process that starts with a one-on-one conversation and ends, if there is not repentance on the part of the sinful person, with removing that person from the community of Jesus-followers (**Matthew 18:15–20**).
 - How many times are we willing to forgive? How many times can a person “wrong” us before we decide we’ve forgave enough?
 - The Talmud limited forgiveness to three times.
 - **“Up to seven times?”**
 - Peter likely thinks he is being generous and noble in more than doubling that; even in making it the perfect number seven.
 - Or Peter knows that Jesus' standard will be higher.
 - As usual, Jesus will give Peter a surprising answer.
- **18:22** - “Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.””
 - What is Jesus saying?
 - Can stop forgiving at 491 then say “Sorry, I cannot forgive you anymore.”?
 - No! Instead, you must be prepared for effectively unlimited forgiveness.
 - We forgive, and we forgive, and we forgive some more. That is the way it should be.
- **18:23** – “Therefore the kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants.”
 - To illustrate why and how we should forgive, Jesus begins a parable that is unique to the book of Matthew.

- As with other parables, Jesus starts by saying that the "**kingdom of heaven may be compared to...**"
- The time had come for that king to settle accounts with his servants or slaves.
- **18:24 – “And when he had begun to settle accounts, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents.”**
 - Jesus might have been using a deliberately exaggerated figure simply to make a point.
 - A talent was about as much money as a low-level laborer could make in twenty years.
 - It was a unit of measurement for weighing precious metals like silver and gold and weighed about 75 pounds.
 - The New American Standard Version’s footnote (1970) says this is about \$10 million in silver content (gold would be more).
 - This man owed 10,000 talents = 750,000 pound of gold/silver= 200,000 years of daily pay = an unbelievable debt that he can never pay.
 - Why might Jesus use such a large amount as an example?
- **18:25 – “But as he was not able to pay, his master commanded that he be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and that payment be made.”**
 - It was a common practice in ancient times to sell into slavery those who owed more than they could pay.
 - Since the man could not pay, the king decided to get what he could. He ordered that the servant be sold into slavery, along with his wife and children and all he owned, so some payment could be made.
 - The selling of wives and children was allowable under the Law of Moses
 - **Ex 21:2**
 - **Lev 25:39**
 - **2 Kgs 4:1**
- **18:26 – “The servant therefore fell down before him, saying, ‘Master, have patience with me, and I will pay you all.’”**
 - Did it really seem possible that the servant could do this?
 - Given the amount owed everyone listening to Jesus tell this story would have understood that to be absurd.

- There is no way to pay everything, and he knows it, and the king knows it.

- **18:27 – “Then the master of that servant was moved with compassion, released him, and forgave him the debt.”**
 - An unexpected twist: The king takes pity on the man.
 - He doesn't set up a payment plan.
 - He doesn't cut the debt in half.
 - The king simply forgives the entire amount.
 - What’s the point of the parable?
 - This is meant to be an analogy for salvation through faith in Christ.
 - **Romans 5:8**
 - **Titus 3:5**
 - The parable is not done, yet.

- **18:28 - “But that servant went out and found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii; and he laid hands on him and took *him* by the throat, saying, ‘Pay me what you owe!’”**
 - SAD Irony - 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.**”
 - According to **Matthew 20:2** the pay for a days’ work was a “denarius” which was equivalent to 18 cents a day.
 - 18 cents x 100 = \$18.00!
 - \$18.00 vs \$10 million
 - 100 denarii = 100 days wages!
 - 100 days of daily pay vs 200,000 years of daily pay
 - This man was just forgiven an impossible debt.
 - The man was free.
 - His story had a happy ending.
 - For those with ears to hear (**Matt. 11:15, Matt. 13:9, Mark 4:9**), this part of the story gives perspective to humanity's relationship with a forgiving God.
 - **Romans 5:8**
 - **John 1:12**
 - **John 3:16–18**
 - This story is not over.

- Jesus continues, following the man out from the presence of the king and into a confrontation with another servant.
 - This fellow servant owes the man 100 denarii (\$18.00).
 - This is not a tiny sum; a denarius was about a days' wages.
 - All the same, the man angrily demands payment, grabbing the other servant and even choking him.

- **18:29 “So his fellow servant fell down at his feet and begged him, saying, ““Have patience with me, and I will pay you all.””**
 - Same words different reaction.
 - His words were the very same that he himself said just hours before.
 - Common sense would expect the servant to remember how he had received mercy earlier.

- **18:30 – “And he would not but went and threw him into prison till he should pay the debt.”**
 - Scenario recap:
 - Two servants face each other, one on his knees begging for an extension on an amount of about 100 days' wages.
 - The other servant has just been forgiven a debt of, roughly, several thousand *lifetimes* of wages by the king after begging for an extension.
 - Jesus’ Story Twist:
 - Jesus' parable turns who are rooting for the servant stuck in impossible debt to rooting against a man that is so ungrateful he will not spare another from the fate he just escaped himself.

- **18:31 - So when his fellow servants saw what had been done, they were very grieved, and came and told their master all that had been done.**
 - Outrage would be an appropriate emotional response to what the servant in Jesus' story has just done.
 - They knew both sides of the story.
 - They knew that, incredibly, the accusing man had been forgiven for an impossible sum.
 - They knew that, unbelievably, the man had refused to forgive or even negotiate the much smaller sum.
 - The ugliness of that action got to them. It could not stand.

- They went and reported to the king what had happened.

- **18:32-34 - “Then his master, after he had called him, said to him, ‘You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?’ And his master was angry and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him.”**
 - The master, the king, calls the servant back into his presence and then calls him wicked.
 - The king reminds him that he just forgave the enormous debt because the man pleaded with him.
 - This will not go well!

- The Point of the Parable
 - Who’s the king?
 - Who is the first servant?
 - Who is the second?
 - In the parable the first servant’s debt was forgiven because he begged the king.
 - . This demonstrates:
 - The importance of asking for forgiveness, and
 - our Lord’s willingness to forgive us.
 - **1 Jn 1:8-10**
 - From this parable, how many times does the Bible say we should forgive before God will forgive us?
 - Can we expect God to forgive us and us not do that to others?
 - What is our “debt”?
 - How much does our debt add up to?
 - **Romans 6:23**
 - How long will it take us to pay it?
 - Jesus' point is obvious now. God has forgiven those who believe in Jesus of an enormous, unpayable debt of sin instead of sending us away to the fires of hell.
 - In what ways is God like the king from the story?
 - He is patient
 - **2 Peter 3:9**
 - **Romans 2:4**
 - He offers complete and total forgiveness.
 - **Romans 5:8**

- **John 3:16–18**
 - He was willing to forgive our enormous, unpayable debt of sin, the sin that has earned us His wrath and judgment.
- IF a person does not forgive, do they really understand their own relationship to God?
 - **Matthew 6:14–15**
- That, in fact, is the point Christ will make in the next verses.

- **18:35 - “So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses.”**
 - **“from his heart”**
 - A person can say he forgives but still hold the grudge.
 - That is not the kind of forgiveness God wants from His children. He wants us to forgive in the same way He does.
 - **Isaiah 43:25**
 - **Hebrews 8:12**
 - **Psalm 103:12**