

## THE PARABLES OF JESUS, #25 A Chronological Study

*"To Him who opened His mouth in parables and  
uttered things hidden since the creation of the world."  
Psalm 78:2*



### The Wicked Unforgiving Servant

**Beyond Stumbling Blocks:** This parable breaks down into multiple sections. We'll look at the text almost one sentence at a time. It is obvious that Jesus wants Peter and the disciples to understand the importance of **forgiveness**. We touched on this topic last time in Parable of Jesus #24, "Danger, Stumbling Blocks Ahead." This time Jesus will alarm us with what He has to say about forgiveness - hard things that we must all take to heart!

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**THE TEXT:  
Mt 18:21**

***The inquirer: Peter***

***21a Then Peter came and said to Him [Jesus],***

Jesus and the twelve disciples are still in Capernaum, a beautiful lake side town on the Sea of Galilee (it's a very large lake, like Okeechobee here in Florida). Jesus has just finished telling them about the man with a hundred sheep and the one that had GONE ASTRAY. This plays directly into our story. That little parable stresses the importance of each individual believer. If one goes astray, the shepherd the Shepherd's heart demands that He will take the time to retrieve that one and return him/her to the flock. We've also just studied a lesson where it makes it clear that Jesus is now speaking about what relationship a believer has to other believers, even constantly sinning ones – who seek forgiveness... constantly. We are to forgive constantly – like Jesus does!

***The inquiry made by Peter***

***21b "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?"***

Apparently Peter wasn't listening carefully to Jesus remarks, or to the 14 or so verses earlier, for now he wants to know what to do if a brother (in the faith) asks for forgiveness for the same sin more than seven times. In the intervening verses Jesus has been stressing the importance of the responsibilities of members of the body of Christ to each other and the importance of understanding that they are all ONE in Christ. Said another way, all of the Sheep that belong to the Shepherd are ONE FLOCK.

***The Response from Jesus:***

***22 Jesus says to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.***

We need to be careful here and remember that Jesus is talking in metaphors. The magic number to walk away from a penitent sinning brother or sister in Christ is not 490 times ( $70 \times 7 = 490$ )... **You're just not supposed to end your forgiveness and walk away.** In the last lesson we came to the conclusion that because it is the nature of God to provide absolute and eternal forgiveness to His children... **We are too!** Again we'll also remember that an unrepentant sinning member is a matter for Deacons and Elders and Church discipline--for a complete unrepentant attitude perhaps indicates either the lack of belief, or they present a clear and present danger to that local body.

### **Defining the moment for all the disciples:**

#### ***23a "For this reason"***

As always, paying attention to the words, we see here that Jesus is about to speak directly to Peter's question. Because of the length of Jesus parable here I surmise that all of the disciples are now standing around Jesus and He's taking the time to instruct them all on this extremely important understanding of the nature of God and His forgiveness.

### **The Parable:**

#### **23b continued**

#### ***"the kingdom of heaven was compared to a king"***

So, now we have the parabolic story. The Kingdom of Heaven - the sovereignty of God expressed over a time and place. The comparison is not going to take the form of just a man who is playing a king. A king is a sovereign who has a kingdom where He rules. Context is everything: As Jesus tells this story we are to focus on this man who is the sovereign king. What He does is an indication of what God does in His sovereign rule over the kingdom of heaven - His earthly rule over believers in Jesus' time and even till now, and beyond.

#### ***"who wished to settle accounts with his slaves."***

Jesus sets the stage... our king wants to settle money matters with his slaves or, if you wish, a king who is owed something of great value from a worker of his. It's a good place to remind ourselves that the word for slaves is also often translated servants. It is perhaps easier to understand these money matters if you see them as servants.

#### ***24 When he had begun to settle them, one who owed him ten thousand talents [15 years wages] was brought to him.***

We're not told the financial arrangements in the background. We'll use the scenario that you are the servant and you borrowed a sum of money that could be paid back by you over 15 years, perhaps by working a 2<sup>nd</sup> shift for someone else, or just waiting for a rich relative to pass away, but in the end, you couldn't pay. However, not to miss the point... It's an awful lot of money and it is owed to his sovereign king.

#### ***25 But since he (the servant) was not able 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.***

What the servant had done with the money is not the point of the story. The king threatens him severely, along with his wife and children, etc. As I look at this story I see verse 25 as where the unbeliever stands. Without Christ (obedient by faith in Christ) everything is lost. There is nothing he or we have that can repay the debt. Unless the king changes his mind... all is lost. The wife and children are also at risk, spiritually speaking, because they too may never recover from the "sins" of the husband. It is all too often that unbelieving husbands create a situation where family members may never be exposed to the Gospel.

***26 So the slave fell to the ground and prostrated himself before him, saying, 'Have patience with me and I will repay you everything.'***

When the king had spoken to him and told of his complete loss... the servant asks the king for forgiveness and makes promises. We need to remember that throughout the Old Testament, which the disciples would be most familiar, the proper position to take when called-out by your king, is face to the ground, arms and legs spread out in suppliance to his absolute sovereignty.

***27 And the lord of that slave felt compassion and released him and forgave him the loan.***

Right off, we should not miss the change in the title of the king, Jesus now refers to him as "**lord.**" The lord of that servant/slave felt compassion. The lord of that servant brought forgiveness to him, and released him. As a believer, that's exactly what God has done for you through Christ. Compassion given, release given and Forgiveness given in that order. You might consider the value of the forgiveness of all of everyone's sins - the whole world--for that's the price that was paid by **our** King in His Compassion.

***28 But that slave went out and found one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii [100 day's wages VS 15 year's wages]; and he seized him and began to choke him, saying, 'Pay back what you owe.'***

Not to get too involved in the details... but our servant owed his master 5,474 individual day's wages. The fellow slave who owed him money only owed 100 individual days wages... 1/55<sup>th</sup> Of the amount he was forgiven. And was demanding full payment.

***29 So his fellow slave fell to the ground and began to plead with him, saying, 'Have patience with me and I will repay you.'***

The same quest for forgiveness is asked here. Please keep in mind that the relationships here represent one servant to another - once forgiven by the Lord, now not forgiving a fellow believer (the focus of the parable).

***30 But he was unwilling but went and threw him in prison until he should pay back what was owed.***

I'm sure we all see the conundrum here. No one in prison in those days could earn any income while in prison. One believer has thrown another "Down the drain!" The question arises... "Have you ever done that?"

***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.***

Nothing happens in a vacuum. We all should be aware of that - others always see and hear. And so it was with this servant's demands. Those around him saw the injustice and were DEEPLY GRIEVED and went to their LORD. Perhaps, hidden in this story is Jesus concerned that one or more of the disciples are then in an unforgiving state with another.

***32 Then summoning him, his lord says to him, 'You wicked slave, I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. 33 Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave, in the same way that I had mercy on you?'***

So, here now is the message of the story. Because the forgiven servant did not reflect his Lord's compassion in His forgiveness - the question is asked, "Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave, IN THE SAME WAY that I had mercy on you?" Again, one believer to another - shall you not forgive your brother or sister in the Lord - not once, or seven times, but always?

***34 And his lord, moved with anger, handed him over to the torturers until he should repay all that was owed him.***

In the story our human king responds in anger... and puts him in a place to suffer until his debt is fully paid - because he would not forgive his fellow servant.

***35 My heavenly Father will also do the same to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your hearts."***

Then Jesus speaks - and we should listen carefully... *"My heavenly Father will also do the same to you, if each of you does not forgive his (believing) brother (or sister, mother, father,) from your heart."* These are some of the strongest words that Jesus will speak to His followers - in this case the Twelve.

We cannot stress enough the individual's responsibility to ACT according to the **nature** and **will of God**, especially in the area of the forgiveness of our brothers and sisters for their human shortcomings. No one but each individual can know the hurt and pain that has shaped another's life or the circumstances whereby God had reached down and rescued each one of those who have come to Him for forgiveness and faith.

All too often we believers look upon the sin of another believer and make rude comments like, "I don't know how they can call themselves believers!" When it is Jesus who reminds us that God's forgiveness is absolute and because we are mere humans we need to be constantly reminded to take on His attributes to the best of our abilities and exercise them especially upon our brothers and sisters when they fall down. Forgive them from the heart, Jesus says - or you may be in trouble with Him.

Let me wrap up this lesson with a quote from Pastor, Professor, and Evangelist of this past century, John R. Rice: <sup>i</sup>

"The attitude of the king toward his servant in verse 34 represents the way God feels toward even His own children who do not forgive 'from your hearts... every one of his brother their trespasses.'

Any Christian who will not forgive is destined for certain punishment and the wrath of God. There is no way to measure the infinite harm and sin that follows in the wake of unforgiveness. Hindered prayers (1 Peter 3:1-7), the grieving of the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 4:30-32), and countless other evils follow the unforgiving heart.

Suppose you this moment close the door to your room, get down on your knees and ask God to search your heart. If there be one shred of unforgiveness or grudge or bitterness toward any person on earth, especially a brother or sister in The Lord, you should here and now forgive it freely for Christ's sake and trust Him also to forgive you all your trespasses and let it be truly "from your hearts."

## Questions Without Answers

- 1. Peter asks, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" What is the critical moment in this question?**
  - 2. Then... How many times shall we forgive our brother or sister in the faith for their failure to be Christlike?**
  - 3. What does Jesus really mean by suggesting forgiving 490 times a believer who continuously fails in sin and asks for forgiveness?**
  - 4. What does the rest of the story teach?**
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## Questions With Answers

**1. Peter asks, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" What is the critical moment in this question?**

We should see that Peter's idea of forgiveness limits him to forgiving up to 7 times (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 times?). Having read through the whole parable you can see that 7 times VS infinity is an enormous difference. Like many things that Jesus wants to change in us the difference between what we want to do... is infinitely smaller than what God will do, and what He wants us to do.

**2. Then... How many times shall we forgive our brother or sister in the faith for their failure to be Christlike?**

Jesus is pretty straight forward with Peter. "Seventy times seven." - What, 490 times? No, just a metaphor for unending forgiveness. Another indicator of where we stand in our reception and putting into practice of the ever present Holy Spirit of God and His work in the believer--and how hard it sometimes is. It should also be remembered that this parable of Jesus reaches out to us to consider where we stand in forgiveness to the unbeliever, who continually sins. God is the judge, not we who are here on the earth with them. Through His Son He has reached down to earth and forgiven every member of the world - from beginning to the end of their lives. What they do with that forgiveness will determine their ultimate eternal home.

**3. What does Jesus really mean by suggesting forgiving 490 times a believer who continuously fails in sin and asks for forgiveness?**

One of God's attributes demonstrates His love for mankind, especially for those who choose to love Him. What God has done through His Son on the Cross has brought eternal forgiveness for those who would believe Him, believe His Son, believe in His Son, and repent (turn around) from their sin, and ask for forgiveness - He did so with infinite forgiveness. God's ultimate desire is that all believers take on **His loving heart** toward all believers. We should do no less than provide unending forgiveness for all those who have found infinite forgiveness in Christ Jesus Our Lord. Exercising this wonderful lesson may also have an infinite value in bring an un-believer to Faith in the Father's precious Son.

**4. What does the rest of the story teach?**

The rest of the story teaches that there are consequences for lack of infinite forgiveness between believers. Jesus does not go on to say what those consequences are, but He does tell us that they are Almighty God's reaction to us being absolutely forgiven and then not forgiving our fellow heavenly



citizens during our earthly years. Forgiveness is one of the ultimate attributes of almighty God in the forgiveness He expresses towards all humanity--until life comes to an end. Ultimate forgiveness is granted to believers because they voluntarily choose to believe, believe in, His Son--whose life was sacrificed at the Cross on their behalf. How hard it is for Him to see a believer who will not forgive another. Jesus says, there will be consequences for the lack of forgiveness.

**Matthew 18:34-35**

***"And his lord, moved with anger, handed him over to the torturers until he should repay all that was owed him. My heavenly Father will also do the same to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your hearts."***

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Jeremiah 18:15

"Don't stumble from the Ancient Path"

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<sup>i</sup> Rice, John R., The King of the Jews [Book of Matthew], Sword of the Lord Publishers, Murfreesboro, Tennessee, 1955, p. 283