

Forgiveness: Setting the Captives Free Matthew 18:21-35

INTRODUCTION

Revival is...*“the extraordinary movement of the Spirit of God in the hearts of _____, producing extraordinary results.”*

Revival is the Reviver at work in the life of His own, the church. For several weeks we looked at the **vertical** aspect of **revival- that is, our relationship with God**. We studied the **importance of humility, confession of sin, repentance, the provision of grace and the need for obedience**.

Last time, we began to consider the **horizontal** implications of **revival - that is, how a right relationship with God affects our relationships with others**. Part of the **human experience is to be wronged by someone or to wrong someone**. Therefore, we should develop a thin skin when it comes to offending others and a thick skin when it comes to be offended by others. **Last time we focused on the importance of maintaining a clear conscience both toward God and others**.

For this morning, we consider the other side of the coin: **forgiveness**. The fact is, somewhere, sometime, somebody will treat us wrongly. We cannot avoid being hurt and wronged by others. It's easy to say that we should develop thick skin when it comes to others offending us; the reality is that it's too easy to say and extremely hard to put into practice. C.S. Lewis said it **well**: *“Forgiveness is a beautiful word, until you have something to forgive.”*

Forgiveness...the gift everyone wants to receive but finds hard to give. It's not easy to forgive. Forgiveness is not natural to man. Yet forgiveness is exactly what God extends repentant rebels. Nothing so characterizes the new nature of Christians as forgiveness because nothing so characterizes the nature of their Lord. Jesus' most striking and humanly incomprehensible words from the cross were, *“Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing”* (Luke 23:34).

The Bible is clear: when we repent of our sins, God mercifully releases us from our debt, through the great cost of His Son's death on the cross. As recipients of His forgiveness, we are called to forgive those who sin against us. When we release our offenders through forgiveness, we discover the key that unlocks the prison doors of our own hearts and sets us free to experience greater peace and joy than we ever dreamed possible. Conversely, lack of forgiveness is one of the greatest hindrances to revival. There is a high price to pay if we fail to forgive.

The Lord Jesus makes this point in one of His parables.

Please turn in your Bible to **Matthew 18:21-35**. The Parable has **3 scenes**: (1) *the king _____ one of his servants of an astronomical debt he has incurred*; (2) *this same servant refuses to _____ a fellow servant of a comparatively smaller debt*; (3) *the king deals with the servant's refusal to extend _____*.

The three scenes make **one point**: ***you are not really free until you sincerely forgive the ones who have sinned against you***. As a child of God, you and I are commanded to forgive.

Why? Three reasons...

I. We have experienced _____... (18:23-27) **A. EXPLAINED**

Jesus understands that His teaching is difficult, so He tells a parable. He tells Peter about a King who wanted to balance his financial books. One man who worked for the King owed him an exorbitant amount of money. The point of the parable is not to ask how anyone could owe the King that much money. **Remember, Jesus is telling a story to teach about the extent of forgiveness...the figures are great to illustrate His point**. Since there is no possible way for this man to pay that amount of money, the King decides to sell the man and his family into slavery to recoup some of his loss. It was a common practice at that time. The debtor pleaded for mercy. He

promised that he would pay back every cent (an obviously impossible task). The King however, had compassion on the man and forgave his debt.

B. APPLIED

The parable refers to our relationship with God. He is the King and we are the debtor. **We go into debt every time we sin.**

That means every time we...

- *Think an impure thought*
- *Do something the Bible says is wrong*
- *Neglect God in our lives*
- *Despise or look down at someone*
- *Hurt another*
- *Neglect someone who is hurting*

We sin every time we...

- *Want what somebody else has*
- *Every time we lie or twist the truth*
- *Every time we make even the smallest promise and don't keep it*
- *Every time we are selfish, petty, rude, or stubborn*
- *Every time we enjoy thinking about sin*
- *Every time we fail to put God first in our thoughts and actions*
- *Every time we complain*

You may believe that you have never committed any major sins. And maybe you haven't. But day in and day out you and I commit smaller sins with great regularity. And the debt is out of control. Even if we could stop sinning, we could never pay off what we owe. We are like the man who owed millions.

The astonishing message of the gospel is that Jesus came to earth to pay a sin debt...our debt. If we will ask for forgiveness with genuine repentance, God will forgive, cancel, and eliminate our debt. We will be holy and perfect in God's eyes! We should live our lives like those who have had a narrow escape with death. **Why forgive?** Because we have forgiven...all sin is against a holy God; He punishes the unrepentant, but He forgives those who turn to Him by faith in Christ.

Why forgive?

II. We have experienced forgiveness and to not forgive others is to show a lack of _____ for grace... (18:28-30)

What happens next in the parable seems inconceivable — until we realize that each one of us is guilty, in various ways, of doing what that forgiven slave did.

The forgiven man runs into a fellow servant who owed him 100 denarii. We are told that the man grabbed the fellow by the neck and demanded payment of the debt. The man who owed the money asked for mercy. He said he needed a little more time but he would pay the debt back. It wouldn't be easy, but it was possible. But no mercy was extended. The man was thrown into debtor's prison until he could pay the debt. Please understand, 100 denarii was no small debt but it was nothing compared to the debt that had been forgiven.

Please note that the second man is described as one of his **fellow** slaves suggests that he represents a fellow believer and that the principle Jesus teaches here primarily relates to believers' treatment of each other. Although Christians should be forgiving of everyone, they should be especially forgiving of one another, because they are fellow slaves who serve the same King.

Although the second debt was extremely small by comparison to the first, it was nevertheless a real debt and represents a real offense committed by one believer against another. If the offense were not real, it would need no forgiveness. Jesus was not teaching that sins against fellow believers or against anyone else are insignificant but that they are minute compared to the offenses every one of us has committed against God and for which He has freely and completely forgiven us. The wrong you and I suffer from others may be significant and real and painful **BUT** no offense is beyond my forgiveness. Why? Because the wrong I've suffered is insignificant when compared to the debt that has been forgiven me by God through faith in Christ. We **can** and we **must** forgive if we have any appreciation for the nature of God's grace.

Why forgive? We have experienced forgiveness...and to not forgive is to show a lack of gratitude for grace.

Lastly...

III. We have experienced forgiveness and to not forgive others is to show a lack of gratitude for grace and results in the loving _____ of our King (18:31-35)

The King called the first servant back into his presence. This time he spoke with anger, calling him a wicked servant. He berated him for his unwillingness to extend mercy after he had received mercy. The King threw the man into jail promising that he would be there until he had paid back every last cent. Jesus concludes the story with these sobering words, (read 18:35). What did the man have to pay if his debt had been canceled? **The debt of love.** The servant needed to learn the value of forgiveness. **Forgiven people forgive people.** The King comes against him and places him in a situation in which he's able to learn this lesson.

I don't mean to attach meaning to every detail of the parable. A proper interpretation doesn't demand it, but I submit to you that the fact that the other servants were affected by the unmerciful servant's action and told the king has an application for you and me. In the parable, Jesus includes these guys so we can know how the king finds out. Yet, the fact that the other servants were distressed is a powerful reminder that forgiveness is not only personal or private between two people in conflict...it has a corporate component. Oh, that we would be a church that values the importance of forgiveness and reconciliation. Oh, that we would be known as a people who are ready to forgive and reconcile!

CONCLUSION

Time to make it personal...Extending forgiveness does not **mean:**

- *approving of what someone else did.*
- *pretending that evil never took place.*
- *making excuses for other people's bad behavior.*
- *justifying evil so that sin somehow becomes less sinful.*
- *overlooking abuse.*
- *denying that others tried to hurt you repeatedly.*
- *letting others walk all over you.*
- *refusing to press charges when a crime has been committed.*
- *pretending that you were never hurt.*
- *that you must restore the relationship to what it was before.*
- *that you must become best friends again.*
- *there must be a total reconciliation as if nothing ever happened.*
- *that all negative consequences of sin are canceled.*

Forgiveness in its essence is a decision made on the inside to refuse to live in the past. It's a conscious choice to release others from their sins against you so that you can be set free. It doesn't deny the pain or change the past, but it does break the cycle of bitterness that binds you to the wounds of yesterday. Forgiveness allows you to let go and move on.

To forgive is to set a prisoner free and discover that prisoner was you – Lewis B. Smedes.