

**Forgiveness**  
**Matthew 18:21-35**  
**September 17, 2023**

Today, we have Peter coming to Jesus to find out something. He wants to know the bottom line, how many times do I forgive someone. Seemed pretty straight forward in his mind. Give the guy a second chance and maybe even a couple more, surely 7 times, would be more than enough. It was the number they used to show completeness as God took 7 days to create, creation.

So how does Jesus deal with this thought? He comes back with something I'm sure Peter never thought of, seventy seven times or as some think it could be translated 777 times, the three fold use of 7 to emphasize the total completeness.

Complete forgiveness. So that it was meant by the 77 times and yet, what is this parable about a guy who forgives just one time? Oh, but what a forgiveness that was, it probably couldn't compare to the forgiveness Peter was dealing with.

This guy was in debt to the king for 10,000 talents. Now a talent, according to the note in the Lutheran Study Bible, was about 20 years wages for a laborer. Evidently this guy was given some responsibility with the king and not a day laborer so what he owed the king might not be 20 times 10,000 years wages but kind of like 7 compared to 777. I don't know what life expectancies in those days but more than likely, even with him not ever taking a wage, he would be dead long before he got it paid off.

The king was willing though to forgive the debt. He must have thought well of him and yet we know what he was really like. He must have really put on a good show for the king to be tricked as to what he was really like.

When this guy gets the break, he then thinks he must somehow make things right with the king. In order to do that, he would have to collect from those who owed him. It is then we get to how this guy handles debts owed to him.

He goes to one of the laborers to collect a debt that would take the laborer, another servant about 100 days wages to pay off. A lot but in time, he should be able to pay it back but what does the other guy do? He has him thrown in prison where he would be unable to pay back the debt owed and would have to rely on family and friends to come up with the money to get him out.

Evidently the other servants who worked with them found all this out, they were upset and reported to the king what had gone on. This didn't set well with the king so he had the first guy tossed into prison, which for him would have been a life sentence.

So what did Jesus have to say at the conclusion of this parable? You who wonder how far you should go with forgiveness, stop looking at those who offend you and look at yourself to see just how far they would be willing to go to forgive you and try to compare how you have had to forgive.

Jesus is saying this before He went to the cross but we have Matthew by the power of the Holy Spirit remembering and putting it down for us and for those of Matthew's day too.

A debt too great to pay; a debt thought by Peter to question as to if it would be forgivable; and a king who was willing to forgive all.

Did Peter and the others there that day put it all together? I guess if they compared what they thought needed to be forgiven with what the servant owed the king it might have struck a chord but did they realized they were about to be forgiven like that unforgiving servant by Jesus?

The guy was about to live the rest of his life in prison for payment. Jesus going to the cross was going to step into the prison that was due all and take the punishment upon Himself. He would pay the greatest payment ever and that was with His very blood, His life for all.

Did those there that day equate themselves with that first guy? I don't think so. Did you, when this text was read, see yourself as that first guy? Probably not and yet what do you owe Jesus? He could put you in prison like some like to think until you have paid off your debt but then what would that mean for Jesus's sacrifice?

Some would say it wasn't that great. No, we need to pay for ourselves, take the edge off of Jesus. Yet, what would Jesus think of that? He paid for all sin, totally, the bill was paid in full as He said with His last words, "It is finished." Finished, no more to do, no more to suffer so that you can be saved. It has been done, it is finished accepted by God the Father as full payment from the removal and eating of the fruit in the garden to the sins of you and me and everyone else, past, present and future.

Think about it. What if you paid the bill off and a person didn't say thank you but tried to keep sending payments to the bank and got mad that the bank wouldn't accept the payment, insisting it had already been taken care of? You may say you would

welcome it but there are those who don't want someone to pay for their bills. They are so proud of themselves that they would rather, it would seem, suffer the consequences. Oh, I know they have a hard time thinking a guy who died on a cross 2000 years ago could have anything to do with them and their situation today but it does.

Too many people don't recognize that they have sinned and need to somehow have it paid off. If the devil can keep them in the dark in this, then he has them, forever in the fires of hell with him and those who have bowed down to his ways.

But you are here. You recognize you are sinners in need of forgiveness of your sins. Jesus comes here in His meal for you to partake of Him for that forgiveness. Do you recognize that you are the first guy, not that you would try to get a little owed you by another guy or gal but that what you owe could never be repaid, even if you spent your whole life and awhile after life trying to pay it off?

Peter probably thought he was going the extra mile in forgiving even 7 times but Jesus put everything in perspective. Yes, a person feels bad when someone sins against them. They run it over and over in their minds wondering how they could have seen it coming or at least not let it happen again and again. Surely there should be a limit to forgiving them and yet when they stand back and look at what Jesus did and continues to do, it can never compare to the forgiveness, given for free to us by Jesus.

Free? Free forgiveness. What do you mean free? What did the servant who owed so much have that he could give to the king? He didn't have anything the king needed when it came to a little more wealth, no the king thought that there were more important things than money. He saw in a human being value even though we find out later that value was misplaced. The one he saw value in, didn't pass on his view of a man who didn't have what it took to settle accounts. No, there was no way this guy could do anything to settle the account. The settlement was all one sided.

There is a United Auto Workers negotiation going on now. Wages have stayed the same while expenses have gone up. Essentially they as well as many today have taken a cut in pay as inflation has been eating into their bottom line. They have the idea that this is all one sided as well, against them.

Jesus was pointing out His one sidedness. Yes, it was one sided but the other way. His was as the king who one-sidedly forgave an immeasurable debt. He forgave the debt of you and me and all mankind by taking it on Himself.

We can dwell on those who sin against us and yet what happened to Joseph in the Old Testament lesson for today and even before the Old Testament lesson. What was the life of Joseph like? He was one of 12 boys. Yes, he was younger with only his little brother Benjamin younger. Yes, we might say he was spoiled by his dad as he was the oldest son of his favorite wife. We remember him as the kid who had that fancy cloak. So being the favorite, the older brothers were jealous and saw a way to get rid of him, once and for all. They thought first just to kill him and say that he was killed by wild animals. But one brother thought it better to sell him off to some traveling traders.

You know the rest of the story as he was sold to Potiphar. Joseph worked for him but was thrown in prison because Potiphar's wife didn't like to be turned down. While in prison Joseph interpreted a couple of dreams and sometime later, one of those whose dream was interpreted, just happened to remember a dream interpreter when the Pharaoh had a dream that needed interpretation. Joseph interprets that dream and becomes the right hand man to the Pharaoh, putting in place measures to save up for the upcoming world drought.

Joseph then is in position of making Egypt even greater as the grain saved is used to purchase land and whatever else to make Egypt even greater. It is then we have his brothers being sent to Egypt to get grain and then having the text we have for today that they are worried that they will be dealt with as they knew they should be. But instead Joseph has this line that we all want to hear ourselves, God meant it for good.

Could God mean it for good that you are put in a situation that someone sins against you? Not that God wants sin but He can use the sins of man to have His purposes met.

You might be saying to yourself that you are being used. Yes, God can and does use people, for their own good as well as His and others. Do you have qualms about being used by God? Why is that? You have been using Him. Using Him to take your sins, sins you rightfully earned and given them to Him to suffer for.

Yes, He is the King who is willing to settle accounts for free. He is willing to settle your account for free. What is your response? Is it going to be like the first guy given freedom to live in thankfulness but thought he now could go about a life, lacking mercy that should be shown?

No, we look to Jesus the author and perfecter of our faith who endured the cross for us, gave up all so that we, in His mercy could have forgiveness. We are grateful.