

**The Parables of Jesus #16**  
**The Parable of the Unforgiving Servant**  
**(Mt. 18:21-35)**  
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INTRODUCTION

- A. What is the hardest thing for you to do?
  - 1. We might say it is some physical feat or act
  - 2. We might say it is working advanced math problems
  - 3. We might say it was getting a college degree
  - 4. Life is full of things that are hard to do
  
- B. Based on our knowledge of human behavior, the hardest thing for people to do might be to forgive someone
  - 1. When a person has been sinned against:
    - a. pain can be deep
    - b. shame or embarrassment can seem insurmountable
    - c. they may suffer terrible, negative consequences
    - d. they may suffer the loss of the most important things in their life
  - 2. When a person must deal with those issues, it can seem almost impossible to forgive the person who caused the problem
  
- C. There are two elements that precede the parable we will study today
  - 1. Mt 18:15ff -- Jesus taught that when someone sins against us we have a responsibility to go to that person in an effort to resolve it
  - 2. Mt 18:21f -- Peter's question about how many times he should forgive his brother -- Jesus said 70 X 7 (as often as needed)
  
- D. We're skipping a lot of important information to get to the parable, but we need to be aware of several things:
  - 1. Resolution of the sin and its consequences is the responsibility of both the sinner and the one sinned against (cf. Mt 5:23-24; Mt 18:15f)
  - 2. Forgiveness cannot have limits when there is any possibility of resolving the problem
  - 3. Forgiveness is central to God's will for mankind
  
- E. With that introduction, Jesus then tells another parable that illustrates the importance of forgiveness

## I. THE PARABLE

- A. Again, it is important to understand what is being described by the parable
  - 1. The parable is another description of the kingdom of heaven
  - 2. Matt 18:23 -- Therefore the kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. (NKJ)
  - 3. To understand the kingdom, we must keep our focus on the king settling accounts with his servants
  
- B. The story details
  - 1. One servant was brought in who owed 10,000 talents
    - a. silver talent = \$1,650
    - b. gold talent = \$26,280
    - c. average wage was about 17 cents or \$62 per year
    - d. giving all his wages, it would take 4,240,000 years to pay off the debt, at 0% interest
    - e. we ought to see the debt as unpayable!!
  - 2. The servant couldn't pay, so it was commanded that he should be sold, along with his wife and children and all he had to pay the debt
  - 3. The servant begged for patience
    - a. he did not deny the debt
    - b. he did not seek to get out of the debt
    - c. he promised to pay the full debt
  - 4. The master then did something surprising
    - a. he was moved with compassion for his servant
    - b. he released him and forgave the debt
  - 5. This servant then went out and confronted another who owed him
    - a. this man owed 100 denarii = about 100 days wages
    - b. it was a debt that could be paid with patience
  - 6. This man too begged for the first servant to be patient and he would pay all the debt
    - a. the first servant was not understanding at all -- he demanded this man be thrown in jail until he paid all
    - b. Lev 25:39ff -- actually provided that a man in debt could sell himself and his family to pay his debts
    - c. the Law did put some limits on his servitude, both in kind of servant he became and the length of time he and his family served (until year of Jubilee)
  - 7. Fellow servants saw the injustice and told the master what had happened
    - a. the master -- "you are a wicked servant
    - b. the master -- "I forgave you"
    - c. the master -- "you should have had compassion"
  - 8. The master then reversed his earlier forgiveness of the debt and threw this man to the torturers until he paid all

- a. if the debt was unpayable, he didn't stand a chance of ever escaping the torturers
- b. Matt 7:2 -- For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you. (NKJ)

C. The point Jesus was making

- 1. Matt 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. (NKJ)
- 2. Now remember, the story was told to illustrate the kingdom of heaven
  - a. the focus must be the actions of the king
  - b. he was the one settling debts with his servants
- 3. The story tells us some good news and some bad news
  - a. good news -- the king is compassionate, merciful, willing to forgive debts that are beyond payable
  - b. bad news -- he expects his servants to treat others with the same compassion, mercy and willingness to forgive
  - c. if they don't, he reserves the right to withdraw his own forgiveness and exact the same judgment demanded by the servant
- 4. This is a parable that connects several things
  - a. the nature of the kingdom of heaven and the King of heaven
  - b. the human condition and natural tendencies
  - c. the consequences of judgment against those who do not learn how to adopt the ways of the kingdom

## II. LESSONS TO LEARN

A. We learn something about the nature of God

- 1. Obviously, God is the king in the parable
- 2. We see those positive attributes
  - a. he holds his servants accountable
  - b. he is approachable
  - c. he is compassionate
  - d. he forgives debts that are beyond payable
- 3. We see negative attributes
  - a. he expects his servants to learn from what they receive
  - b. he expects his servants to practice toward others that which they have received -- compassion, forgiveness
  - c. he holds his servants accountable here, too
  - d. he withdraws that which his servants are unwilling to practice toward others

B. The first servant's debt is equivalent to the debt of a man's sins

1. Isa 64:6 -- But we are all like an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags; we all fade as a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away. (NKJ)
  2. We seldom recognize the true immensity of sin
    - a. sin separates us from God
    - b. sin condemns us
    - c. sin kills us (both spiritually and physically)
    - d. sin is repugnant to God
  3. We like to console ourselves into thinking the debt of sin is small
    - a. sin creates a huge debt
    - b. it is completely unpayable
    - c. perhaps the servant in the story didn't realize just how great his debt was
- C. God's forgiveness is an act of mercy and grace just like the king's forgiveness of the servant's debt
1. Eph 2:4-5 -- But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), (NKJ)
  2. Eph 2:8-9 -- For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. (NKJ)
  3. 1 Pet 1:3 -- Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, (NKJ)
- D. Those who receive forgiveness must also give it
1. Matt 6:12 -- And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. (NKJ)
  2. Mark 11:25 -- And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses. (NKJ)
  3. Col 3:12-13 -- Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. (NKJ)
  4. Note the direct connection between our willingness to forgive and God's willingness to forgive us
- E. Those who do not forgive others will receive according to their own judgment
1. Matt 5:7 -- Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy. (NKJ)
  2. James 2:13 -- For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment. (NKJ)

3. Luke 6:36-38 -- Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful. Judge not, and you shall not be judged. Condemn not, and you shall not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you. (NKJ)

## CONCLUSION

- A. Just preceding the parable Jesus had made two important points
  1. We have a responsibility to forgive others
  2. That responsibility is unlimited
- B. Therefore, the story that illustrates the kingdom is important to our understanding of both the king and the subjects of the kingdom
  1. What kind of king is he
  2. What kind of people make up the kingdom
  3. We must see that the people must develop the same characteristics possessed by the king
- C. Are you a forgiving person?
  1. If you are, celebrate the fact that you are able to give what you have received
  2. If you aren't, you need to realize the very real danger you are in
- D. Invitation