

## Matthew 18:21-35

Read Matthew 18:21=35

The setting of this parable is important. The whole discussion begins at the beginning of the chapter 18 and deals with Jesus' teaching on church life.

Matthew does not tell us why Peter asked this question or what response he expected to hear from Jesus but he probably assumed Jesus would praise him for his keen insights. He had been with Jesus long enough to know that Jesus expected more of them than the religious leaders of his day did. Jesus introduced various lessons with the statement "The law says, but I tell you." The law says do not murder but I tell you not to even be angry with a brother. In Peter's day the religious leaders taught that a man was expected to forgive only three times. Peter knew that law so, perhaps to impress Jesus or perhaps because he was finally getting it, he doubled that and then added one more. If the Pharisees demanded 3, then probably Jesus would say 6 so going to seven would surely impress Him.

Read Jesus' response is verse 22. The Greek here can be translated either as 77 or 70 X 7. You can use either one, the point is the same. We are to forgive beyond what anyone would count if he wanted to keep a record. Read I Corinthians 13:5.

The issue is whether it is legitimate to expect anyone to forgive that many times, so Jesus told a story or a parable to illustrate the truth He wanted His disciples to understand. **Jesus said "the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants."** While the parable ultimately points to God's forgiveness of our sin debt, the king in this parable was not God. In a parable one can make up characters to illustrate a truth and that is what Jesus did here. In all probability the disciples understood the story as picturing a Gentile king. Read verse 25. It was against Jewish law to hold wives and children responsible for the debts of the father but that was not the case with Gentile kings.

In the parable the servant owed 10,000 talents. That is not an accounting number of what he actually owed but would be like our saying he owed zillions of dollars. Ten thousand was the highest number the Greeks had so he literally owed more than one can actually count to. Commentators who have translated that into today's economy put the amount into billions of dollars. The man was probably a tax collector who, instead of collecting taxes and turning them over to the king either did not collect them or embezzled the money. The man's offer to repay the debt in verse 26 would have been as ridiculous as our telling God we will pay off our sin debt by working hard for Him. Read verse 27. You can almost hear the disciples going, "Wow." That idea had to have been as outrageous to them as it is to us. In the larger implications of that forgiveness we have the picture of God forgiving an incredible debt we owe although the whole gospel is not in this parable since our God, unlike the king in this parable, did not simply write off the sin debt, He paid it Himself on the Cross.

Read verses 28-30. This man, who had been forgiven from such an incredible debt, went out and encountered a man who owed him only a hundred denarii or a couple of thousand dollars. Although a mere fraction of the debt this man had been forgiven, it was significant. In the parable Jesus used the same structure to describe how this other man acted, begging for the same mercy the servant had received from the king. The servant, who had just been forgiven of much, chose to ignore his plea and instead ordered that he be thrown into prison.

Read verse 31. Why did the other servants report him to the king? They did so because they saw what happened as being unjust. Have you ever thought about where we get the idea of justice from? Our sense of justice comes from the fact that God is just and we were created in His image. There is an aspect of His justice built into each of us. We often forget the justice aspect of God because it is easier to focus on His mercy, but He is just. It is His justice that demanded that sin either be judged or paid for and that is why Jesus went to the Cross on our behalf. Paul said in Romans, God is both just and the justifier of those who believe. Being created in the image of God and thereby being conscious of justice is important when we think of forgiving one another. Satan uses our sense of justice when we are offended to keep us from forgiving the offender. "I have been hurt and therefore deserve justice." That is often the reason for not forgiving. If the offender apologizes and begs that may satisfy my sense of justice but if not, well you deserve punishment.

In the parable the king was angry and confronted his servant with the issue of having been forgiven of so much and then not willing to forgive so little. Read verses 32-34. It was noted that the king was not God but merely a character in the parable. God does not give salvation and then, when we fail Him, take it back. God may discipline but He never takes back the redemption He provides.

End of parable so Jesus gives us the teaching of the parable. Read verse 35. Three issues come out of the application Jesus gave. **First**, what does Jesus mean by the Father treating us the same way if we do not forgive from the heart? **Second**, what does Jesus mean by forgiveness? **Finally**, forgiveness may be OK for minor things but seems all but impossible for major offenses. What are we to do?

**Does Jesus mean by verse 35 that if we fail to forgive we lose the forgiveness God has given us?** No. God does not take back a gift He has given unconditionally to us. God's forgiveness for salvation is judicial forgiveness whereby, because of the sacrifice of Jesus which we accepted, we are declared judicially righteous. The incredible penalty of our sin has been transferred to Jesus. The account book shows nothing owed on the sin debt. Read Psalm 103:12 and Isaiah 43:25. Salvation is God's judicial forgiveness but His forgiveness expects a life response on our part. If a life response is not forth coming such as obeying His command to forgive, we suffer broken or restricted fellowship. We forgive so we can have the fellowship and blessing God wants to have with us.

**How do we define forgiveness?** Answering that is not easy. There are 7 different Hebrew and Greek words used in the Bible to describe forgiveness and each has its own special implication. Dr. Everett Worthington, professor of Psychology at Virginia Commonwealth University and a committed evangelical Christian, has spent the last 25 years studying forgiveness and the various aspects of it. That says there is no simple definition that will not raise other questions. One simple definition is “forgiveness is a conscious, deliberate decision to release feelings of resentment or a desire to seek retribution or vengeance toward an individual or group regardless of whether they deserve or even desire it. For the Christian forgiveness is releasing one from a debt we perceive they owe us because we have been forgiven an incredible debt by God.”

**Why forgive?** Study after study has shown that holding onto an issue leads to stress, depression, discouragement, anger, bitterness etc. Studies show that forgiveness liberates the one who forgives and radically improves his life. But the real reason is that God has commanded us to forgive and made it clear that fellowship with Him on a day by day basis is dependent on that forgiveness.

**How do we do that?** In some cases, we just need to make up our minds to let it go. We need to eliminate thoughts that someone owes us at least an apology and perhaps more. In other cases, it is much harder to let go. That is why God has given us His Spirit. If we allow the Holy Spirit to control us He will give us the strength and peace of mind to forgive. Read I Corinthians 2:16.

Forgiveness is a critical concept as far as God is concerned. The Bible talks over and over about the need to forgive. It illustrates forgiveness not only in God but in others such as Joseph and Stephen. It is easy to hold onto hurts because they represent wrongs we have suffered and we deserve justice, but God tells us that since we have been forgiven of so much we must forgive others. It is a challenge for everyone.