**Humble Enough to Forgive**

**Matthew 18: 21-35**

**Mark Hakso**

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**As we continue our study of the gospel of Matthew today we will be spending our time on the final part of the 18th chapter.**

**The Parable of the Unforgiving Servant**

**21Then Peter came up and said to him, “Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?” 22Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times.**

**23“Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants.[**[**g**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=matt+18&version=ESV#fen-ESV-23748g)**] 24When he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents.[**[**h**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=matt+18&version=ESV#fen-ESV-23749h)**] 25And since he could not pay, his master ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made. 26So the servant[**[**i**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=matt+18&version=ESV#fen-ESV-23751i)**] fell on his knees, imploring him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.’ 27And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt. 28But when that same servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii,[**[**j**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=matt+18&version=ESV#fen-ESV-23753j)**] and seizing him, he began to choke him, saying, ‘Pay what you owe.’ 29So his fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you.’ 30He refused and went and put him in prison until he should pay the debt. 31When his fellow servants saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their master all that had taken place. 32Then his master summoned him and said to him, ‘You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. 33And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?’ 34And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers,[**[**k**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=matt+18&version=ESV#fen-ESV-23759k)**] until he should pay all his debt. 35So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.”**

**As Sam rightly pointed out the last two Sundays this chapter is essentially about Christian humility; humility to love and trust as a child does and to love the other children in the kingdom of God, humility to lovingly pursue and if necessary confront the ones we love when they are in unrepentant sin, and now were looking at the humility to forgive the one who has sinned against us or otherwise. It cannot be over emphasized how vital humility is in the life of a Christian, for where pride reigns, these are impossible to live out the way Christ did and the way in which he commands us to live.**

**As we examine forgiveness there are three key points to consider:**

1. **Humility – Our ability to forgive others and ultimately the very love that we have for Christ directly correlates to the degree that we have an understanding of the enormous debt of sin that we have been forgiven by God. This is illustrated very well for us by an occasion in the life of Jesus recorded for us by Luke in the 7th chapter. 36One of the Pharisees asked him to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. 37And behold, a woman of the city, who was a sinner, when she learned that he was reclining at table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of ointment, 38and standing behind him at his feet, weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head and kissed his feet and anointed them with the ointment. 39Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, “If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, for she is a sinner.” 40And Jesus answering said to him, “Simon, I have something to say to you.” And he answered, “Say it, Teacher.”**

**41“A certain moneylender had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. 42When they could not pay, he cancelled the debt of both. Now which of them will love him more?” 43Simon answered, “The one, I suppose, for whom he cancelled the larger debt.” And he said to him, “You have judged rightly.” 44Then turning toward the woman he said to Simon, “Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave me no water for my feet, but she has wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. 45You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not ceased to kiss my feet. 46You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. 47Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven—for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little.” 48And he said to her, “Your sins are forgiven.” 49Then those who were at table with him began to say among[**[**h**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=luke+7&version=ESV#fen-ESV-25236h)**] themselves, “Who is this, who even forgives sins?” 50And he said to the woman, “Your faith has saved you; go in peace.”**

1. **Honesty – In order to forgive someone who has sinned against us we need to be honest about what it will cost us to forgive. Forgiveness hurts, not for the one being forgiven but for the one forgiving. Consider how much pain Jesus went through in order to forgive us. On the night before he was crucified when he was praying in the garden of Gethsemane while his disciples kept falling asleep, he literally sweat drops of blood in anguish as he considered what he was going to suffer to secure forgiveness for the sins of the world.   When we forgive someone who has sinned against us we too, though it’s nothing compared to what Christ suffered, must sacrifice certain things; we must give up our right to be angry at the person, we give up bitterness and the desire to have that person suffer as we have had to suffer because of their sin and we give up the power we have over that person holding them in a place of never ending guilt and misery. In a real sense when we forgive someone we are loosing them from their sin instead of keeping them bound in their sin.**
2. **Hope – Just as Jesus emerged victorious after experiencing pain and death to secure our forgiveness by the resurrection of his body, we too experience new life when we are obedient to forgive others. Anger melts away, bitterness is not allowed to take root, love is restored and God is glorified. If we had been sitting in bitterness for some time, finally coming to a place of forgiveness is like regaining your freedom from prison.**

**Peter’s question**

**This passage which I read to you is often taken alone, out of the context of the chapter it’s in, just as the previous passage on church discipline is. But it must be considered as a continuation of the conversation Jesus is having with his disciples. After having instructed his disciples on how to confront one who is in sin, Peter naturally wants to know how many times he should forgive somebody who continues to sin and repent and sin and repent again and again. The Jewish culture in which Peter had been raised taught that forgiveness was to be given three times and no more. Peter, knowing that Jesus was considerably more gracious than the average rabbi must have thought that if he doubled the present norm of 3 and added 1 for good measure he would be pretty accurate. Unfortunately, Peter was still believing that grace and forgiveness had a limit, so Jesus answered as he did, not seven times, but seventy times seven. This he said to emphasize the fact that in His kingdom, grace has no limit. To further illustrate his point he tells them the parable of the unforgiving servant.**

**The parable**

**Jesus tells of a certain king who calls up one of his servants who owes him ten thousand talents, to collect from him this debt. Now, while it’s hard to calculate exactly how much this would be in today’s economy, just know that the point is to illustrate that it’s an enormous amount, one that would be impossible to repay. If you want to imagine a similarly large amount of money in today’s world, consider the U.S. national debt which is over 18 trillion dollars. That amount is so high that it would take over $56,000 from every man, woman and child in the country to pay it off. And that from over 320 million of us. Now imagine if you were the one who had accrued this debt and were called up by the president to make payment. The only thing you could do would be to do what this servant does, beg for mercy. Hopefully, you’re not so foolish to make a vain promise as does this servant that someday you’ll pay it back. And if your president is as benevolent as the king is in this parable, he will pardon your debt completely and give you your freedom. I’m not so sure that you would experience that type of grace and pardon in this example but the point of this parable is to show us the size of our sin debt and the benevolence of our God in pardoning us. You see, the size of the burden of sin which you were guilty of accruing against God is in reality bigger than the national debt. In fact you would sooner pay off 18 trillion dollars in this lifetime by working hard than ever paying off your sin debt by hard work. No amount of work would make even a partial payment.**

**The servant’s response**

**After being released of his debt of ten thousand talents the servant makes a very poor choice. He immediately goes to a fellow servant, grabs him by the throat and demands payment of a debt of 100 denarii. Compared to ten thousand talents this is a paltry sum, not insignificant, but tiny in comparison. Instead of showing him the same grace he had just been shown, he ignores his pleas for mercy and has this poor fellow thrown into prison until the debt be paid. I know it’s easy to condemn the unforgiving servant and rightfully he should be and is by the king himself when he learns about it from some others who witnessed this amazing turn of events, but before you throw too many stones ask yourself who you are most like in this parable. I’ll give you a hint – you’re not the king. You are one of the two servants. Anytime you’ve experienced non-forgiveness from another Christian you are like the second servant, but if you’ve ever not forgiven someone who sinned against you, then you are the first servant.**

**Now granted, there are times when it’s easy to forgive someone. Primarily when the offense wasn’t that great or didn’t really hurt you personally. The biblical truth of love covering a multitude of sins should be common among us. But there are those sins which are incredibly difficult to forgive, like patterns of abuse, or adultery in a marriage. And when and if the sinning one repents, according to Jesus you must forgive. Of course forgiving in these cases doesn’t mean that nothing in the relationship hasn’t changed, and often times the forgiveness is a process that takes a long time to come. In counseling a married couple where there had been this horrible sin the sinned against spouse forgiveness didn’t take place for at least six months, partly because the sinning spouse was slow to repent and because the pain of marital unfaithfulness had hurt the other spouse so deeply. But eventually, with consistent counseling and lots of hard work and tears forgiveness happened and they are still together. Often times, in these types of situations, divorce happens, and that doesn’t necessarily mean there wasn’t forgiveness. It’s sometimes the consequence of this sin which even Jesus said was permissible although not desired.**

**It is well established in scripture that we are to be forgiving of one another. Not only is it an explicit teaching in this parable, but even in the prayer Jesus taught his disciples where he says, “Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.” Here are a few more:**

1. **Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another as God in Christ forgave you. (Eph. 4:32)**
2. **For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. (Matt. 6:14-15)**
3. **And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses.” (Mark 11:25)**
4. **Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. (Col. 3:13)**

**Paul also gives a stern warning to us about bitterness.**

1. **Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. (Eph. 4:31) and,**
2. **Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord. 15 See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no “root of bitterness” springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled; (Heb. 12: 14,15)**

**The servant who had been forgiven much was bitter toward his fellow servant instead of forgiving when he wasn’t able to pay his debt. In trying to make him pay up he forced his fellow servant into prison but wound up in prison himself. Oh, what a picture Christ here paints for us of the human condition. This is exactly where we end up when we don’t forgive our fellow believer and allow bitterness to take root into our hearts. We end up in a spiritual prison where we will remain until we repent of our bitterness and forgive the one who sinned against us. And here’s an important detail I don’t want you to miss in this story: he may have went to prison alone, but in a sense his wife and children went there with him. In other words, it’s impossible for your bitterness to effect only you. It spreads to those who are closest to you, in this case the members of his own household. But it can also go beyond family. There have been cases where bitterness has infected entire churches. Bitterness is a poison which Paul warns us to not let take root in our hearts. When it has, it may be difficult to see as roots are below the surface, but it won’t be long before it manifests itself in a person’s life. Just as roots can cause cracked and broken sidewalks, so does bitterness cause brokenness in our lives. Finally, a root of bitterness produces fruit that is bitter. Bitterness leads to hatred and hatred is what ultimately leads to murder.**

**The pernicious thing about bitterness is that when you’re bitter you don’t see it as being sinful. You feel completely justified. It was, after all that other person who sinned, not you. You become so preoccupied with the details of their sin that you review them over and over in your mind until it becomes all consuming. The only way to get out of this prison is to get rid of the bitterness. This can only happen when you confess it as a great sin against God and forgive the one who sinned against you.**

**How can such bitterness take root in one who has been forgiven a debt of ten thousand talents? For one who has been forgiven of a lifetime of their own sin and given the promise of everlasting life? As I was preparing this sermon I ran across a bit of wisdom that went something like this. When a cup of sweet water gets jolted, not one drop of bitter water spills out. When it gets jolted even harder, only sweet water splashes out of it. When a cup of honey gets knocked over, only honey spills out. But a cup of bitter water always only spills bitterness when it gets bumped. What’s in the cup is what comes out. It’s a simple story but it’s true. It goes back to what I mentioned at the beginning of this sermon. If you have humility in your heart and gratitude and thankfulness for your own forgiveness, than forgiveness and love will flow out of your heart toward others as well.**

**All of you have your own story. Some of you have been Christians most of your lives; you came to faith in Christ at a young age and have believed ever since. Others of you got saved later in life, maybe 20 years ago, 10 years ago, 5 years or even a year or less ago. Perhaps if you’ve been a Christian for years now you have forgotten how great of a debt you’ve been forgiven and have lately began to believe that you’re actually a pretty good person. Perhaps it’s been a while since you have any of your own sins to God or to anyone else. This is a sign that humility has been replaced with pride which leads to a heart that’s unwilling to forgive.**

**There are so many different circumstances which lead to a person becoming bitter at another person. It’s true that we usually only become bitter at someone when they are close to us. When we hear of horrible atrocities committed by someone far away from us, it’s hard to get bitter at that person no matter how bad it was. In the same way, the closer a person is to us the easier it is to get bitter, no matter how small the sin. Some people hold unto bitterness long after the offending party has died. As though there remains anything to be gained by a continuing bitterness. If the deceased were a Christian, he or she is in heaven with God enjoying perfect peace and happiness. If not, they are presumably in hell where they are getting the perfect justice of God for a life of sin here on earth. Either way, bitterness toward them is a poison that will destroy the one left here on earth.**

**Some remain bitter because they haven’t received a proper apology from the other or because they haven’t repented of their sin. Whether or not the other repents is between God and that person. What’s between you and God is whether or not you will have a heart of forgiveness toward that person. Again, not because they deserve it but because Christ commands it from you and because of the debt you have been forgiven.**

**Having a heart of humility, compassion, and love which leads to forgiveness toward those who sin against you is only possible by the power of Christ who lives in you through the Holy Spirit. The type of unconditional forgiveness Christ commands comes only from the new nature which is given us when we were born again. Our old sinful nature cannot attain it, neither does it desire it. So long as we are in this body we cannot be free of the effects of our sinful flesh. That is why we must go to the cross often to confess our sins and to remind ourselves of our forgiveness and what it cost the son of God to achieve it for us. In this way we maintain our intimacy with God and our fellowship with each other.**

**But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. 8 If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 10 If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us. (1 John 1: 7-10)**

**Conclusion**

**In conclusion, I want to say that while forgiveness may not always be easy, in fact it may be at times very difficult from a purely human perspective, it is I believe a mark or sign of a true Christian. Forgiveness is the stuff of true Godliness. You can be an expert on Theology, know the bible inside and out, serve your church and community sacrificially, and be involved in many other charitable works, but if you lack forgiveness toward the sins of others you can’t possibly be walking closely with God. It’s been said that our aim in life should be to glorify God and to enjoy him forever. Few things in this life will bring him as much glory as when his children model Christ like love and forgiveness for one another. Christ showed us what radical forgiveness looks like when he prayed just before he died, “Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.” Stephen, likewise, imitating the love and compassion of Christ said when he was being stoned to death, “Lay not this sin to their charge.” If Christ and Stephen could have such hearts of forgiveness toward those who were killing them, is it not possible for us to demonstrate forgiveness toward those who have hurt us?**

**So if there be anyone here this morning who has been harboring a heart of bitterness brought on by unforgiveness toward someone I strongly encourage you to let it go. You do that by admitting that you have sinned by being bitter toward someone and confess it and repent. Then in your heart you forgive that person and when and if possible you communicate your forgiveness to the person. Perhaps you are bitter because you still are carrying your own debt of ten thousand talents. To you I say, go to our gracious king right now and beg for mercy and he will pardon you as he did this first servant in our parable. Then, you too will be given a new heart which will desire to forgive and not be bitter.**

**If any one of you would desire prayer, I will be available. Then experience communion again with your Lord and Savior.**