

MATTHEW 18:21-35

THE GREATEST DEBT HAS BEEN FORGIVEN

There once was a young boy who was given his first slingshot. He took it into the woods in order to practice with it, shooting at anything he saw, but he hit nothing. Upset at his failure to hit even one target, he went back to his grandmother's house. Upon entering her yard, he saw her pet duck. On a whim, he took aim and for the first time, he hit his target. The duck fell dead. Not knowing what to do, he hid the duck in the nearby woodpile, but upon looking up, he saw that his sister was watching. He knew that she had seen everything.

After supper, his grandmother told his sister that it was time to do the dishes. It was at this time that the sister told the grandmother that her brother had wanted to do the dishes. She then leaned over to her brother and asked, "Remember the duck?" So the boy did the dishes. The next day the boy was supposed to go fishing with his grandfather, but according to his sister, he wanted to stay in the house and help clean. The little girl went fishing in his stead. This went on for some days until the little boy confessed to his grandmother and asked her forgiveness. The grandmother replied, "I saw the whole thing from the window and have already forgiven you. I was just wondering how long you would let your sister enslave you."

And that is what un-forgiveness does. It enslaves us. It eats us up from the inside.

Last week we talked about the first half of chapter 18. The major theme of last week's message was that of reconciliation. But people cannot be reconciled unless there is forgiveness. Jesus gave us some practical steps to take in bringing about that reconciliation last week. And now as we pick up with the second half of the chapter, Jesus uses a question asked Him by Peter to drive the point home and to show us the bigger picture.

Mt. 18:21,22

21 Then Peter came to Him and said, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?"

22 Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven."

It is crucial to remember that this question comes on the heels of Jesus' instructions on reconciliation, forgiveness and humility. These things all go together. The question shows Peter's state of mind. And I would venture to say that to most of us it is a practical one. I mean, how long are we to let people just walk all over us and take advantage of us? Jesus answered that last week, in that we are to go to those who stumble us and try to work out the problem. But Peter seems to have deflected this. He has come back to him. In his mind, forgiveness can be the thing that allows someone to get away with something. But that is the wrong way to look at it, as we will see.

- Peter asks if seven times is enough.
- The rabbis taught that three was enough.
- Peter thought he was going above and beyond the call of duty.
- We get caught up in the legality and miss the heart of the matter.
- But Jesus came back with another number; $70 \times 7 = 490$.
- The number 70, it's meaning practically, numerically and prophetically.

Jesus then tells a story in order to illustrate His point.

Mt. 18:23-30

23 Therefore the kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. 24 And when he had begun to settle accounts, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. 25 But as he was not able to pay, his master commanded that he be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and that payment be made. 26 The servant therefore fell down before him, saying, 'Master, have patience with me, and I will pay you all.' 27 Then the master of that servant was moved with compassion, released him, and forgave him the debt.

28 "But that servant went out and found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii; and he laid hands on him and took him by the throat, saying, 'Pay me what you owe!' 29 So his fellow servant fell down at his feet and begged him, saying, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you all.' 30 And he would not, but went and threw him into prison till he should pay the debt.

- How much is 10,000 talents? The entire tax revenue from the region, according to according to Josephus was 800 talents. In today's money, 10k talents us upwards of 60 million dollars.
- A denari was one day's wage of the common laborer. It was sort of the minimum wage of the day. That would equal around 150,000 years of annual wages.
- Who could ever pay that? It is doubtful that the debt would have been recouped, even having sold everything the man had.

- But the king had compassion and wrote off the debt. Who could write off or absorb that much debt? This king did.
- The man absolved of the debt then went to collect what was owed him.
- 100 denari = in today's money, roughly \$60.00.
- The debtor begged for time just as the other man, but got no grace. He was thrown into debtor's prison.

Mt. 18:31-35

So when his fellow servants saw what had been done, they were very grieved, and came and told their master all that had been done. 32 Then his master, after he had called him, said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. 33 Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?' 34 And his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him. 35 "So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses."

- Fellow servants intervened. Un-forgiveness doesn't go unnoticed, by God or those around us. It can't not have an effect on us and thereby those around us. It poisons the very atmosphere around us, not to mention our hearts. Bitterness begins to manifest and it takes over our lives. It enslaves us! (Ebenezer scrooge)
- The wicked servant seems to be unaware of his hypocrisy. And many times we are also. This is why we are to go to a brother or sister and attempt to reconcile. We have blind spots and many times aren't aware of having offended anyone. We have to check ourselves.
- The wicked servant wasn't considered wicked because he had owed money to the king and failed to pay. He was wicked because He had failed to forgive as he had been forgiven.
- **Matthew 6:12**
- **12 And forgive us our debts,**
- **As we forgive our debtors.**

It was his lack of giving what we have received that made him wicked. It was his failure to appreciate the grace and then reciprocate that gift that made him wicked.

- Look at the difference in the amounts owed – tens of millions compared to less than \$100.00.
- And that is the point. How can we hope to work off a debt of unrighteousness to repay a just and holy God?
- When our sin and forgiveness become little more than a theological concept.
- This is why Jesus uses money in the parable. We can all relate.

- A debt never just goes away - someone always absorbs it. (The broken lawn mower example.)
- Seeing things the way God sees them.
- Hogs, dogs and horses – we can always give what we don't have.
- But we have received forgiveness. Therefore we are bound to give it.
- Jesus takes un-forgiveness seriously.
- **35 “So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses.”**

Put simply, if we have truly understood what God had done for us and how much even the “smallest sin” flies in the face of a holy God, then we can never downplay the importance of forgiveness. That is the point to Peter as well as all of us. There is no limit to how we are to forgive when we have been forgiven of so much.

- Corrie Ten Boon

If someone came and wrote a check that covered all your outstanding debts as well as placing an even greater sum in a trust, allowing you to live as comfortably as the wealthiest person in the world so that you no longer had to work, would you then serve them? Would you appreciate what had been done for you? Of course you would.

Well that is the situation in which the believer finds himself. So, when you are tempted to hold a grudge and not forgive someone, think of being forgiven millions of dollars of debt and see that the person whom you begrudge owes you a couple of dollars in comparison.

Think of Corrie Ten Boom, the grandmother with the pet duck or Thomas Moore who forgave the man the klansman who murdered his brother.

If you want to recover all the precious sleep and years lost to those who have wronged you, forgiveness is the only way to do it. And with that comes the peace and kingdom of God.