

Life in the Kingdom: Forgiveness From the Heart

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[0 : 00] My name is Matt Sear, and I'm the third of three pastors here, along with new daddy Billy. I'm one of the rookies, and it's a real privilege to open the Word together today.

The last three weeks, and for a little bit longer than that even, we've been talking about life in the kingdom, kind of principles that function within the realm of God's saving reign, principles that govern how we as disciples of Jesus live in the here and now.

This life in the kingdom is wonderful, isn't it? It's a life of living in truth, a life of a reconciled relationship with God through Jesus.

It's a life of being a disciple of the universe's greatest and brightest teacher. It's a life with real, living resurrection hope, a real promise of reward for obeying the Father's will.

We could go on and on and on about the immense goodness of this life in the kingdom, but we know that it also comes at cost.

[1 : 17] Jesus, in chapter 16, has called his followers to deny themselves, to take up a cross and follow him.

Life of a kingdom is a death to self. It's a self-denying life, not just for the sake of self-denial, but for the sake of living for Jesus. It's a losing of one's life for his sake.

And in fact, it's in that losing of our lives, of ourselves, that we find life. Well, forgiveness is one of those acute areas of cost for the follower of Jesus.

Though we love Jesus and we love one another as Christians, sometimes we hurt each other. Sometimes we hurt each other really, really badly.

Often it's a nagging sin, like a repeating flare-up of anger from a husband to a wife. Sometimes it's a much weightier matter, that of sexual immorality or some sort of verbal or physical abuse.

[2 : 30] Sometimes forgiveness involves a hidden sin that's been sort of in the dark for a long time and all of a sudden revealed, and the weight of it can feel unbearable.

Well, questions like these come to mind as we think about what forgiveness may cost us as disciples. What if I've really been hurt?

What if this is the 3,000th time I've had to deal with this same sin from this same brother or sister?

What if her apologies are just growing cold and it seems like his repentance is fake and not sincere?

What if a brother shows no remorse at all? When it comes to being sinned against, how costly is the forgiveness that we must offer?

Might there be a sin that's so big that as Christians we're under no obligation to forgive a brother or sister? Can a sinning sister commit so many offenses that I'm off the hook in forgiveness?

[3 : 41] That I can stop forgiving because, well, that 3,001 sin crossed the line. Can a Christian ever reach a limit in forgiving a fellow Christian?

Whether in size or number, how much and how often must we as Christians forgive each other?

We've asked this question, right?

We've wrestled with this internally. Some more than others. Some because of grievous sin.

Grievous wrongdoing that other Christians have committed against us.

Well, in answering these questions, we're not left in the dark. Jesus gives us the answer in our text.

Last week, Mike walked us through these practical steps of seeking reconciliation.

When a brother or sister sins against us, the steps we take to pursue reconciliation with him or her.

Well, this week, we're going to get surgical on our hearts.

[4 : 42] How must my heart be towards a sinning Christian? Towards a brother or sister who has wronged me? What is my obligation?

Well, let's read the text together. We're in Matthew chapter 18. If you haven't opened there yet, Matthew chapter 18, starting in verse 21.

We'll go to the end of the chapter. Then Peter came up and said to him, to Jesus, Lord, how often will my brother sin against me and I forgive him?

As many as seven times? Jesus said to him, I do not say to you seven times, but 70 times seven. Therefore, the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants.

When he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him 10,000 talents. And 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.

[5 : 56] So the servant fell on his knees imploring him, have patience with me and I will pay you everything. And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt.

But when the same servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him 100 denarii. And seizing him, he began to choke him saying, pay what you owe. So his fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him, have patience with me and I will pay you.

He refused and went and put him in prison until he should pay the debt. When 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.

Then his master summoned him and said to him, you wicked servant, I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant as I had mercy on you?

And in anger, his master delivered him to the jailers until he should pay all his debt. So also, my heavenly father will do to every one of you if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.

[7 : 23] There's three parts to our text this morning. There's a Q&A.; There's a parable about the kingdom. And there's a stern warning. We're going to examine them each in turn.

First, this Q&A.;, verses 21 and 22. Good old Peter, leading the way here once again, probably thinks he's being super holy.

Typical teaching was to forgive a fellow three times. And once that fourth occurrence happens, no more forgiveness. So Peter, in his seven, seems extra generous.

Especially thinking of last week's passage, the time commitment that having to go to a brother and pursue him for reconciliation can be. Surely, it seems that Peter is slowly but surely kind of picking up on the teaching of Jesus.

He knows to not go, well, you know, just add one or two more instances of forgiving requirements here. I'll more than double it. I'll be really generous. And if Jesus is going to, you know, bring me down a little bit, all the better.

[8 : 34] But Peter still, in his typical way and in our typical human way, is still doing no more than legalistic ledger keeping here. What's my quota?

What? Jesus, please quantify my obligation toward a dirty, rotten, sinning brother. Seven times? Probably patting himself on the back a little bit and the other disciples are kind of cheering him on. But really, it's still a sort of attitude that says, well, I want to be compassionate. I want to be understanding. But I have my limits. That's the kind of posture of heart that Peter's bringing in this question.

But look at Jesus' answer. In verse 22, I do not tell you seven times, but 70 times seven.

Maybe your translation says 77. There's a footnote in the ESV. It's a little ambiguous whether Jesus means seven times seven or equals 490 or 77 times.

[9 : 39] But let's not miss the point, right? It's doubtful that Peter now is pulling out his iPhone and checking for a forgiveness app that can store up 490 wrongs.

It's like, well, I could probably, you know, remember seven, but 77 or 490, that's too many. I need some electronic assistance here. No. He would understand.

But to drive the point home, Jesus is going to share a parable with Peter and the disciples and with all of us.

We'll spend the bulk of our time walking through this parable now. So don't get nervous if the clock's ticking by and we're still lingering here. This parable in verses 23 to 34 summarizes a warning given to all of Jesus' followers about the nature of forgiveness.

Notice the therefore that begins verse 23. But more importantly, notice the connection behind that therefore. Verse 21 and 22.

[10:52] Forgiveness must be unceasing. Therefore, let me tell you a story about the kingdom and how a king deals with those who refuse this kingdom principle. It's sobering, but it's real.

Notice what's going on here. A king is settling accounts with his servant. But Peter has asked a horizontal forgiveness question between two brothers or sisters in Christ.

And Jesus is going to defend his 77 answer with a vertical forgiveness principle. He's going to appeal to God's mercy to show that his principle of always forgiving one another in the kingdom of God stands.

And it stands firm. So this king has authority to settle all accounts with all of his servants because he owns all of the kingdom.

And they are his servants. They are under his authority, under his command. And he calls the shots. Right up front, it's not too hard, right, to see that this parable is getting really close to our relationship with God.

[12:08] Sovereign ruler over all of us. Calling the shots of how his kingdom is to be run and organized and responded to by all of the people that he welcomes into it. So verse 24, a servant is brought to this king who owes like a bajillion dollars.

10,000 talents. 10,000 is the largest number in the Greek language. And a talent is the largest monetary unit available.

So Jesus is saying the largest number of the largest monetary unit. That's how much this servant owes. Well, I did a little math to help us try and grasp just how great this debt is.

Let's say we're talking about a talent of gold. Well, one ounce of gold today is worth \$1,290. So 16 ounces in a pound means that one pound of gold is worth \$20,640.

Let's say because I like round numbers that a talent is 100 pounds rather than, you know, 75 to 100 at somewhere in there. Let's say it's 100 pounds. That means one talent of gold costs \$2,064,000.

[13:23] One talent. This guy owes 10,000 of those. \$20,640,000,000 of debt.

It's astronomical. One commentary writer said it's like 193,000 years of wages. The servant may have to delay his retirement for a little bit in light of that number.

Well, Jesus uses this astronomical number with great purpose. He's not super interested in what kind of job the servant has that would sort of accrue such a debt to the king.

Nor is he interested in trying to justify using a number that's more money than it would have been in circulation in the entire region at the time.

No. His astronomical figures are for a theological point. Remember, this is a kingdom parable.

Verse 25.

[14:31] Notice the consequence. The servant, his wife, his children, and all he has are to be sold. Now, of course, this won't even scratch the surface of repaying the debt.

But at least the king can recoup a little something. At least he is only out 9,999.5 talents and not 10,000. Verse 26.

The waterworks start. The servant falls at his feet, lies prostrate, total and last-ditch effort of desperation.

Assumes the posture of a beggar. And he even throws in an empty promise to repay the debt.

Because surely he doesn't have 193,000 years to repay.

But maybe in his mind he's saying, I can at least buy myself a little bit of time here. Then something phenomenal happens in verse 27.

[15:38] Out of pity, the king releases him from the debt. And we've seen this word three times before in Matthew's gospel. We may not recognize it because it's translated as compassion the previous three times.

But we've seen Jesus having compassion over and over and over on people in need. We see him see the people as sheep without a shepherd and he has compassion. And he goes and he starts teaching them.

We see a group of 5,000 Jews and later 4,000 Gentiles. And Jesus has compassion and he meets their need of hunger. Over and over and over in this gospel we see that Jesus is compassionate.

That he extends pity and mercy towards those in need. So too this king in our parable. Now the release of any size debt would be generous of this king.

But 20.5 billion dollars? It's unheard of. Who is this king? Jesus is brilliant here.

[16:47] He not only describes the kingdom policy of forgiveness. But in this parable he's helping to define forgiveness for us. What happens to the debt of this servant?

The servant himself is off the hook. But does the king get his money back? Certainly not. The king takes the debt on himself.

That's what it means to forgive, isn't it? Someone sins against us. And we choose to absorb what they owe us.

We take the debt. We release them from it. Notice the king here doesn't say, Okay, I'll release you so you can repay.

He cancels it. Paid in full. According to his ledger. The king assumes the debt. He cancels the servant's obligation.

[17:54] That's forgiveness. When we are wronged, we assume the debt ourselves. We don't retaliate.

We don't get even. We cancel the debt. We don't let that wrongdoing determine how we treat a brother or sister from that point on.

Never. Now to get Jesus' point here, the grounds of his argument that 77 or 490 is the number, that forgiveness is to be ceaseless, we need to notice the relationship between this king and this servant.

The king is a sovereign ruler. He rules sovereignly and with full authority over all that he has, his whole territory.

The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king. When we shift from money to morals, from money to righteousness, we immediately find ourselves in this servant's position, don't we?

[19:03] From our perspective, innumerable transgressions leading to an immeasurable debt of sin.

Each and every wrongdoing intimately known by our Heavenly Father. And he knows full well that to pardon us would not result in our ability to repay him.

Not such a grievous moral debt. So, just like this king, our Heavenly Father, filled with such immense compassion and mercy, in seeing our need, cancels our debt.

He takes it on himself. Right? It doesn't magically disappear. He doesn't get the debt he owes.

He absorbs the cost. Our passage doesn't spell it out, but we know, right? We know how he does this. We've been singing about it all morning. That's why we gather every Sunday.

[20:12] Jesus was wounded for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities. On him was the chastisement that brought us peace.

By his stripes we are healed. Isaiah 53, 5. I like how Mark 10, 45 puts it. The Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.

Friends, our freedom comes at great expense to God. It's a debt much greater than \$20.6 billion.

It's a sin debt of infinite proportions, and it's paid in full by Jesus. What a compassionate king.

Can you even begin to believe the kindness that God has shown us? It's incredible. Let me stop and just say now, when you're in need of the heart, the posture of heart to forgive a brother or sister, you turn to God's mercy.

[21:27] Don't go anywhere else. Turn to His mercy, and you remember what He's done in Christ. There's strength and power in that. Our story's only halfway done.

We've got to keep reading here. Jesus isn't done making His point. Verse 28, this servant, still wiping tears from his eyes and the sweat from his brow, heads out.

Phew, that was a close one. He searches out a fellow servant and joyfully releases him from his comparatively minuscule debt of 100 denarii. At least that's how we'd expect him to respond.

But no, this four months wages versus 193,000 years, the servant is outraged at his fellow servant.

He starts choking him violently by a debt one 600,000 the size of the debt he had just been forgiven. Verse 29, notice the intentional near word for word repetition of his fellow servant's plea.

[22:44] This guy should have known that, man, I just said this to the king a short while ago, begging for patience, promising to repay, and here's a fellow servant asking the same of me.

Likely, this servant even had a real chance to repay the debt. four months wages, probably do that, set up a savings account, maybe work a little extra on the weekends. Maybe.

But no, the freshly forgiven servant rejects the plea and he throws his fellow servant in prison until the debt could be paid.

Servant's not going to be making license plates in there to earn money. He can't pay the debt from prison. It's overly harsh and it's inconceivable anger that this servant is showing to a fellow servant. No wonder in verse 31 that his fellow servants are so dismayed and distraught over this. They're grieved beyond belief. Terrified by what has transpired.

[24 : 00] just as a little aside, I wonder, I've been asking myself this week if I'm as concerned by witnessing a lack of forgiveness among God's people as these servants are in witnessing unforgiveness of a debt among their fellow servants.

A lack of mercy should be incredibly disturbing to us as people who know the mercy that the king has shown us. So the servants go and they report every last little detail to the king.

Verse 32 to 34, the king takes action. His guns are blazing and he is red hot. He doesn't sort of ease into this conversation.

He just straight away wicked servant. You evil doer. And the next thing out of his mouth, it's hard to see it in English, but the next thing he says, all that debt.

He can't even finish a sentence to get it out. All that debt. Every last shekel. Totally forgiven you because you begged me. Because you fell and asked for mercy.

[25 : 13] Verse 33, the king asks a really telling question. And the should language is probably a little soft.

It's more in lines of wasn't it necessary? You wicked servant, were you not under obligation to pay the mercy forward to your fellow servant?

Of course. Of course he was. That's the answer. Remember the king's mercy. It wasn't a mere suggestion.

It was a silent but obvious authoritative mandate to pay mercy forward. Let me just step aside.

Sin is real. And the grievous nature of it can be very, very, very weighty. Jesus in this parable and in this text is not minimizing real wrong that people have committed against us.

[26 : 25] He's not minimizing it. He's not saying, oh, just forgive and forget. Don't let them have power over you. You need to just forgive and move on with your life. That's not what he's saying. He's saying there's a real debt and there's a real cost.

And yet, he does not flinch in reframing the entire realm of wrongs done to us in light of God's mercy.

He refuses to say, well, there's some things that maybe you're right to just never forgive from a brother or sister. He doesn't. He says, look at God's mercy.

You've got to pay it forward. You have to. It's an obligation of the kingdom to be merciful. We'll see in verse 34, the formerly compassionate king now responds in anger.

The servant heads not just to jail, but this jailer's word, you may have a footnote, saying, torturers. This is bad news for the servant.

[27 : 36] He's thrown in prison for the sake of being tormented for his lack of mercy. This has eternal scope and weight to it.

He's going to remain in a torturous place until his debt is paid and obviously he cannot have any hope of paying the debt until life's sentence and notice that the punishment is now more severe.

At first, he was going to be sold. The king recouped a little bit. Now he's thrown in jail. The king's out the whole sum of money, but he's going to get justice. The pardoned debtor's failure to be merciful results in a much more severe judgment for him.

Well, to make sure that Peter and the other disciples and we ourselves today understand this parable Jesus summarizes with a warning in verse 35.

So also, in this same way, my heavenly father will do to every one of you if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart.

[28 : 53] let's not tread lightly over this warning.

But in light of what we've just seen in this text, I think we can summarize the whole of it in this way. In light of his mercy, your heavenly father demands that you always and forever forgive your fellow Christians.

In light of his extravagant generosity and compassion shown a bunch of rebels like you and me who owe a debt that is immeasurable and unpayable by any stretch of our imagination, in light of that mercy, our God demands, he obligates us as his people to always and forever forgive one another, all of our wrongdoing, always.

Let me just try and make two points of application to close. Jesus addresses our hearts here and we often need great amounts of wisdom to practically obey this command.

He places an obligation upon our hearts to always and forever forgive because of God's willingness to forgive us. Remember, there's real consequences to sin.

[30 : 37] Someone has to pay the cost of each and every wrongdoing. forgiveness may be a hard attitude, it may be a matter of the heart, but reconciliation and restoration is a process, often full of pain, often long, often coming at further cost to us.

But a heart of forgiveness longs for that reconciliation. Jesus is addressing our hearts, he's saying, have this posture as a disciple, as a kingdom citizen, a heart of forgiveness that always forgives. Christian, you bear the cost owed to you by your brother or sister who wrongs you. You bear it. it takes a lot of wisdom.

Sometimes sin really, really, really affects us for the rest of our lives. And yet Jesus does not compromise this principle of the kingdom.

You must be merciful because God is merciful to you. Second, why, you may be asking, does Jesus zero in here on Christians forgiving other Christians?

[32 : 03] What about unbelievers? What's our responsibility to them? Well, there's other places in Matthew's gospel where we can turn to kind of see a fuller, more robust understanding of forgiveness.

Jesus says, you've heard it said, love your neighbor and hate your enemy, but I tell you, love your enemy. Pray for those who persecute you. But I think he's specifically talking about Christians here for a real reason.

And we come to understand that reason by asking what's at stake in what Jesus is calling us to, forgiving one another within the body of Christ forever and always.

Well, there's a three-fold reason. Unity, witness, unity, and eternity. What's at stake?

Our unity as one body in Jesus Christ is at stake. Each one of us as Christians belongs to one another. We're inseparably joined because of what God has done for us in Christ.

[33 : 13] We're not just a room full of individuals detached from one another. We're one body. We're in this together. together. I love how Paul says it in Ephesians 4-3 that we are to be eager to maintain the unity of the spirit and the bond of peace.

Well, eager to maintain implies that we didn't earn it, we're not achieving it or accomplishing it on our own. We're maintaining something that God has already established in our midst.

a unity that is purchased by the blood of Jesus Christ. That unity should be precious to us. We must always maintain it.

And often that means we absorb the cost of a sinning brother or sister. Our unity is at stake, but not just our unity, our witness. Last week we ended the service by reading from John 13 where Jesus says, I'm giving you this new commandment that you'd love one another.

And then he says this interesting thing, by this all people will know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another. The world holds grudges.

[34 : 30] The world strangles each other and demands payment. Not so with God's people. We are a city set on a hill and in love we forgive one another so that our witness would be salty and bright in Kenosha and among the nations.

Our witness is at stake. And finally, to end on a sober note, our eternity is at stake.

I've had to lay aside some theological frameworks this week and just try to take the text at face value and not do a bunch of gymnastics with it.

But we see that warning in verse 35. If you do not forgive from your heart, God will judge you accordingly. Let this warning from the lips of Jesus correct your heart today.

let it give you a gritty determined purposed resolve to always forgive brothers and sisters in Christ no matter what.

[35 : 44] Now that might look different, right? It doesn't mean that relationship is just perfectly restored immediately. It doesn't mean that some sins are to the point where we have to separate ourselves from one another.

But we forgive from our hearts. We don't let a debt mentality show up in our hearts towards other believers. Let this text set you on a path to forgive any brother or sister you've got an issue with. Make no mistake, if somebody's coming to mind now, go to them. Resolve this. Let them know that you forgive them. Free them from thinking that you're holding them under some kind of obligation.

maybe there's nobody in your mind right now. Then let this text strengthen your resolve. Someday there's very high likelihood that you will be wronged and Jesus will call you to forgive because of God's mercy.

And just as we've been singing all morning and we're going to close with another song about God's mercy, let this passage remind you just how great debt Jesus Christ paid for you.

[37 : 02] He died for your sins and made full payment on the cross that you and I might be free of obligation to him in the sense of paying for sin.

Life in the kingdom is a really good life and it's a life that comes at great cost at different points in our lives. here Jesus tells us that life in the kingdom means that we have an ongoing commitment to forgive one another in light of God's mercy.

Let's take that to heart today and be quick to forgive. Our unity, our witness, and our eternity are at stake. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you so much for the mercy that you have shown to us. paying off our immeasurable debt of sin and forgiving us all of our trespasses. God, help us to be merciful in light of this.

Give us grace to forgive even the hardest of situations that we may face when a brother or sister does us wrong. Help us, God.

[38 : 20] We need help here. This is hard, but you're good. we want to follow you. Help us, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Thank you.