

Forgive as You are Forgiven

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Date: 19 October 1997

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[0 : 00] This is the AM service on October the 19th 1997. The preacher is Ian Baker. The sermon is entitled Forgive as you are forgiven and is taken from Matthew 18 verses 23 to 35.

And if you'd like to find in your Bibles page 800 you'll be able to follow the reading which is Matthew 18 and it starts at verse 23. So page 800 of the Bible in front of you and let's start by praying. Father God thank you very much that we can have Bibles that we can read about you. We pray that you'll speak to us today and challenge us and change us. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Excuse me. Has the cash machine ever swallowed your card? It has mine. Is it for you? If it swallowed your card why did it do it? Had the card run out? Had you typed in the wrong number? Or did you not have any money left? That's happened to me. It especially used to happen to me when I was at university where putting a card into a cash machine was a bit like playing the pokies. You put something in and you didn't know whether you'd get any money out. If indeed you'd ever get your card out again. It's quite worrying.

[1 : 40] What was worse was when you knew you had no money. When you knew you'd run out. Or even worse than that when you were overdrawn. You'd spent all your money. There's nothing left. You couldn't do what you wanted to do.

You'd run out. And there was that sort of sinking feeling. I've got no money. Now if you've not felt like that I can help you. You can give me all your money. And then you'll be able to experience what I'm talking about.

What I'm talking about is an awful feeling of no money at all. And worse is being in debt. It's that feeling of being out of control if you're in real debt. Imagine you're really overdrawn. That you've really overstretched your mark with the bank.

You've got credit cards and they need paying off. And you're spending more on them because that's your only option. You've got bills to pay. You've got final demands. You've got envelopes landing on the map every day.

You've gone to a loan shark to collect money. To borrow money so you can pay off your other debts. And you're just spiralling into deeper and deeper debt. You feel in real pressure. You feel out of your debt. You feel overwhelmed.

[2 : 51] You're scared of being bankrupt. You're scared you're going to lose everything. You're wondering where your next meal will come from. And you feel all alone. And then suddenly there's a banging on the door.

And you know it's the bailiffs. You know they've come to get their money. You know they're coming to take your stuff away. And you're sweating. And your heart is beating. And it's racing. And you're wondering what are you going to do. And how are you going to manage.

Where do you turn. Will you run away. Will you bury your head in the sand. Will you pray. What will you do. Where will you go. And Jesus tells us a story of a man that's happening to.

And as we look at the story. Just imagine you're that person. And how you feel. As the king has demanded to see you. Because you're overdrawn. There's this king.

Who's this man's boss. And it says in verse 24. When he began the reckoning. One who owed him 10,000 talents was brought to him. The king's done his books.

[3 : 51] The king's looking at the figures. And he realised. He realised this one bloke has just gone a bit too far. He owes loads of money. Now how has that happened. Well it says in here.

He's a slave. But it's probably better to think of him as a servant. A sort of civil servant. Working for the king. He's in really high office. And he's been responsible for some money perhaps. Perhaps he's been dishonest.

And lost a load. Perhaps he's been fiddling the books. Perhaps he's just completely incompetent. And has just lost it. Or perhaps. Perhaps it's his personal money. And it's taxes he owes. Perhaps he's not done his tax return. Or he can't do his tax return. Because he's lost all his receipts. Perhaps. Well who knows. But the point is. He's in serious, serious debt. 10,000 talents. Now a talent was the largest coin the Jews had. And 10,000 was the largest number they knew.

[4 : 49] Or the largest number they used. So 10,000 talents. That's like millions. And billions. And billions. And billions. Of dollars. It's serious money.

It's serious debt. And the boss has found out. Imagine how he'd feel. The boss has found out. And it says he's been brought. To the king.

And that's not a willing thing is it? He's not volunteered. To come to see the king. And tell him about it. He's been brought. It's like a parent. Taking a child by the ear. And says come here my lad.

He's been arrested. He's worried. He could lose everything. He could lose his wife.

His car. His house. His family. Everything. And his fears are realised. If you look in verse 25. As he could not pay. His Lord offered him to be sold.

[5 : 45] Together with his wife and children. And all his possessions. And payment to be made. Usually if you're in debt. You were sent into jail. And then your family.

Had an incentive. To get you out of jail. And to pay the debt. To get you out. If they liked you. But this is more serious. This is such serious debt. That his property.

Is going to be sold. But it's worse. He's going to be sold. And even worse. His wife's going to be sold. And worse than that. His children. Are going to be sold. This is desperate.

The thing is. It's not going to be enough. To pay the debt. Because the average slave. Would fetch one talent. At the best of times. And he's got 10,000 to pay off.

He's not reimbursing. He's not paying back. He's being punished. So what can he do. But beg. Verse 26.

[6 : 42] So the slave. Fell on his knees. Before him. Saying. Have patience with me. And I will pay you everything. Imagine that in court. You're in court. You see a person. Who's just been convicted.

He falls on his knees. And he begs. He falls flat on his face. And says. Please give me more time.

Please have mercy with me. I'll pay it all back. Just give me time. A king is amazing.

And he says. In verse 27. And out of pity for him. The lord of that slave. Released him. And forgave him the debt. Not only. Is he not now.

Going to be sold into slavery. It's not only. A restructuring of his debts. It's not even. A second mortgage. To help him out. It's just wiped out.

Completely. Forgotten. Billions. Of debt. Forgotten. That's more than he asked for. He just said. Can I have more time?

[7 : 40] But the king. He just. Wiped it out. The man said. He'd repay everything. He repays nothing. He's forgiven everything.

There's no conditions. There's no discussion. It's just a new start. It's pure grace. Now imagine if the bank wrote to you.

And you got the letter tomorrow. And it said. We've cancelled all your credit card bills. We've paid off your bank loan. You don't have to pay off the mortgage. Imagine even more than that.

That you've been saved from bankruptcy. Saved from redundancy. Poverty. Even slavery. You'd be pretty grateful.

Wouldn't you? And our man here. Well. Verse 28 says. That that same slave. As he went out.

Came upon one of his fellow slaves. Who owed him a hundred denarii. And seizing him by the throat.

[8 : 37] He said. Pay what you owe. And his fellow slave. Fell down and pleaded with him. Have patience with me. I will pay you. But he refused.

And he went and threw him into prison. Until he would pay the debt. That's not just hypocrisy. That's worse than hypocrisy. He's been forgiven ten thousand talents.

Yet this man only owes a hundred denarii. Now at the current exchange rate. There's about six thousand denarii to a talent. If you went to the shops. You went to Coles. And bought yourself a Mars bar with a talent.

You'd get quite a few thousand denarii as change. Yet the man seizes this man by the throat. He throttles him. He strangles him.

He's shaking him. He's saying. Give me the money you owe me. Give me it now. Again. A man falls and he begs. Please. I'll pay it all back.

[9 : 34] It's a promise that's not impossible. A hundred denarii is not that much money. He could pay it back. And yet the other man just refuses. It sort of implies he continually refuses.

Like the man keeps begging all the way to prison. Please let me have another chance. And the man says no. It's as though being free from debt is not enough.

This man is greedy as well. He wants to start scrabbling back some other money. It's all been forgiven him and forgotten. He doesn't owe anyone anything. He's still scrabbling for a few pounds for himself.

And the poor man. He's thrown into prison. It doesn't look good. Because unless his family can scrape together the money. He's stuck there. He can't earn any money in prison.

He's trapped. The outlook doesn't look good. What a contrast. One man has been treated honorably. But he treats his fellow completely shabbily.

[10 : 37] And the irony is not lost on his colleagues. If you look at verse 31. When his fellow slaves saw what had happened. They were greatly distressed. And they went and reported to the Lord.

All that had taken place. All that had taken place. Every little detail. Then his Lord summoned him and said. You wicked slave. I forgave you all that debt.

Because you pleaded with me. Should you not have mercy on your fellow slave. As I have mercy on you. All that debt had been forgiven. All that huge amount.

And he wouldn't help another person out. So the king punishes him. Verse 34. And in anger his Lord handed him over.

To be tortured. Until he would pay his entire debt. It's a shocking end isn't it? It's a horrible picture of judgment. But by not forgiving.

[11 : 33] He invited the king to not forgive him. It's a shocking story. But the biggest shock is reserved for last. This story has a sting in the tail.

Verse 35. So my heavenly father will also do to every one of you. If you do not forgive your brother and sister from your heart. It's a stark message isn't it?

Jesus says we're in the same position as the slave. Like that servant. We've wronged the king. We've wronged God. We're in debt to God.

Not a financial debt. But worse than that. Even greater debt than finances. We've fallen short of God's standards. We've sinned. And our sins are piling up like debts.

Higher and higher. Every day that goes on we get deeper and deeper into debt. We're out of control. We're out of our debts. And we're in debt to God. I imagine if God summoned you now to pay that back.

[12 : 35] It would be overwhelming. You're just in so deep. You'd be nervous. You'd be sweating. Your heart would be beating. It would be like the bailiffs are coming to knock on the door to demand it back. You're in debt to God.

And you can't pay it back. You can try but you can't do it. You could say, Lord give me more time. Please give me more time. I'll try my best.

I'll go to church more often. I'll become a missionary. Just give me time. You can try. But it won't work. It's no good because we're powerless. The problem is so huge that we can't even begin to deal with it.

Yet Jesus can. And Jesus did on the cross. There's a passage in Acts when Peter is preaching one of his evangelistic sermons.

And he ends with these words. Repent, therefore, and turn to God so that your sins may be wiped out. Jesus wiped away our sins on the cross.

[13 : 35] Wiped away our debt. It's like there's a big ledger of sin piling up. With it all written in. Everything you've done. Every time you've offended God. Everything you've done wrong. Written in that ledger.

And Jesus comes along and wipes it all out. He rubs it all away. Swipes it clean. There's a song we're going to sing at the end of the service called, Lord I lift your name on high.

And one of the lines in that is, My debt he paid. I once saw someone singing that. Not in English, but in sign language. Doing all the actions because they were deaf.

And the action for my debt he paid was this. It was though this was the ledger. And my debt was wiped out. And I think that's a beautiful picture of what Jesus has done.

We're no more in debt. It's like the billions that the servant owed were forgiven. Total forgiveness. Yet the point of the story is clear.

[14:32] If we don't forgive, we won't be forgiven. And is that really true? Isn't that a bit surprising? Has that been sprung upon us suddenly?

Doesn't really sound like God who's all forgiving. Well, I point out to you that it's not all that new. We actually pray for God to do this every week when we pray the Lord's Prayer.

Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Excuse me. That bit of the prayer says, Forgive us as much as we forgive other people. Lord, if we don't forgive others, treat us in the same way we treat them.

We pray every day or every week. The point is that God is so full of compassion, so amazingly loving, that he can't accept those who are not compassionate and not loving and not merciful themselves.

So listen again to Peter's sermon, where it says, Repent, therefore, and turn to God, so your sins may be wiped out.

[15:35] Our forgiveness depends on something. It depends on one action. Just one thing we have to do, and that's repent. When we repent, we're repenting of our unforgiveness.

And we become a Christian. We say, I'm sorry God, I'm sorry for what I've done for you, and I pray for forgiveness, but I pray for forgiveness for other people, and pray they'll forgive me, and that I can forgive them.

When we become a Christian, it's natural for us to forgive. It won't do if we've been forgiven, but we won't forgive others if there's no difference in our lives. God's forgiveness is dynamic.

God's forgiveness is life-changing. It's incredible. It's radical. And we've been forgiven so much, we're called to respond with the same generosity. That's why this story follows those verses we heard last week.

If you look at verses 21 and 22. Peter came and said to Jesus, Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive?

[16:43] As many as seven times? Jesus said to him, not seven times, but I tell you 77 times. That's forgiven more than we can forgive.

That's 77 times. Or as Hillary said last week, it's forgiving until it becomes a habit, unceasing. It's wholeheartedly forgiving. It's not grudging. It's total forgiveness, always.

And that forgiveness flows from a relationship with God. If you're not forgiving, we can question whether you really have a relationship with God.

And people that don't face the same judgment that that servant faced. The trouble is, forgiveness is hard, isn't it?

We all find it hard to forgive. Why? Well, the point about forgiveness is we're having to forgive someone because they've done something wrong. And we don't like that.

[17:40] We want to see the right thing happen. We want to see justice. We want to see people brought to account, brought to task, to receive their just desserts. And that's good because God hates injustice.

He wants to see the same thing. He wants to see justice done. But God is the judge and not us. In a verse in Romans, it says, Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath.

For it is written, It is mine to avenge. I will repay, says the Lord. It's God's place to seek vengeance, not ours. And if we're bearing a grudge, that's the same as seeking vengeance because it's in our heart and it's enmity to another person.

We must not bear grudges. The trouble is, it's hard to forget, isn't it? When someone's done something wrong, we say we've forgiven, but we can't forget. And there's that saying, forgive and forget.

But it's okay not to be able to forget. Sometimes we can't forget. We can't choose to forget. That's not in our ability. We can't sit there and say, I will forget.

[18:53] It's just not possible for us to do that sometimes. But it is always possible for us to forgive. It's a matter of will to forgive. If I say, I cannot forgive, I'm wrong.

If you say, I cannot forgive, you're wrong. You can, and you must forgive. If you find it so difficult, perhaps the first step is to say to God, Lord, please help me so I want to forgive.

Please change my heart so I want to forgive. Just to say, I forgive you, by itself, is not enough. Our heart needs to change. Perhaps if we become determined to forgive, absolutely set in our minds to

forgiveness.

And every time we feel bitter, every time we feel like grievance rising up again, we forgive afresh in our minds. And when we forgive again and again and again in our minds, eventually our hearts will catch up.

And we truly will have forgiven. It's a great story, isn't it? It's a great story that tells us how much God has loved us. nothing we have to forgive is greater than God has forgiven us.

[20 : 09] He has forgiven us so much. But let's remember the warning. If we don't forgive, the consequences are terrifying. Rather, let's be inspired by God's love.

Let's be inspired by that incredible forgiveness. Let's be inspired by the huge debt he took himself on the cross. Let's be generous in our forgiveness. Let our lives reflect that forgiveness, that love, that mercy.

His amazing love. That's something that the world doesn't see. The world doesn't see forgiveness. It's because forgiveness is radical. So let's be forgiving.

And we'll turn the world upside down. Let's pray. Father God, thank you for that story Jesus told. Thank you for the great amount you've forgiven us. How we can see we're truly forgiven a huge debt. Father, please help us and change us.

[21 : 17] Move in our hearts so we can forgive others. in Jesus' name. Amen.