

The Example of Forgiveness

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[0 : 00] I invite you to please open your Bibles to Matthew chapter 18. Matthew chapter 18 can be found on page 19 in the New Testament section of your Pew Bibles.

We'll spend our time looking at verses 21 to 27 of Matthew chapter 18. Today we begin a very short series on forgiveness.

And I think there is nothing academic about forgiveness. Just yesterday, after I finished my sermon, I decided to go to the barber to get my hair cut.

And I remember saying to him, just, you know, bring it low. And so I took off my glasses. And of course I can't see without my glasses. And he started walking on my head.

Anyway, by the time he finished, I looked into the mirror with my glasses. I put on my glasses, looked into the mirror, and looked at him. Looked into the mirror again. I wasn't sure whether the head was mine or somebody else.

[1 : 16] And I had a wonderful opportunity to experience the gift of forgiveness to somebody. So that moved the sermon from the realm of the academy to the realm of reality.

So I had to forgive him. And I gave him my card, just in case he needs more forgiveness. I can't come to church. Well, it is right to say that Christianity is about forgiveness.

We become Christians by receiving the forgiveness of God. And we continue to be Christians by continuing to receive the forgiveness of God.

The gateway into Christianity, into relationship with God, is through the door of forgiveness.

We need God's forgiveness on a daily basis because we offend him every single day of our lives.

We need other people's forgiveness because we offend them.

[2 : 26] And other people need our forgiveness because they offend us. Christianity is about receiving forgiveness from God.

It is about giving the grace of forgiveness to other people. And I think it is right for me to say that Christianity is upheld by the triple towers of forgiveness.

It is a triple tower of forgiveness. God's forgiveness of us. Our forgiveness of others. And their forgiveness of us.

Without forgiveness of sin, there is no Christianity. There is no fellowship. There is no authentic relationships without forgiveness, especially if you are married.

There is no unity. No spiritual health. And of course, without forgiveness, there is no eternal hope.

[3 : 28] And so my task this morning is to examine the first part of the parable of the unmerciful servant, which centers on God's forgiveness of the offender.

Looking at the first tower of forgiveness. God's forgiveness of us. And next Sunday, we will look at the second part of the parable, which focuses on our forgiveness of those who offend us, as well as their forgiveness of us when we offend them.

And so I'll begin by exploring the immediate context of the parable, verses 21 and 22. Peter comes to Jesus and says to him, Very, very familiar, isn't it?

Somebody had done him wrong. Somebody had done us wrong. And Peter had forgiven him. The same person had done it again, and he had forgiven.

And he had done it again, and Peter had forgiven. And this is the fourth time. And so Peter says to himself, This time, I'm not going to forgive.

[4 : 56] It's enough. I've had it. He said, Peter wanted to know, When you stop turning the other cheek, how long do you wait before you can really let the other person have it?

In other words, when is it okay to blow your sack? And of course, Peter being Peter, did not wait for an answer.

He already had one ready. He said, As many as seven times, do I forgive as many as seven times? And of course, historically speaking, Peter was being very generous.

Because according to the rabbinic synod and consensus, a brother might be forgiven for a repeated offense up to three times. Rabbi Jose Ben Yehuda once said, and I quote, If a man commits an offense once, they forgive him.

If he commits an offense a second time, they forgive him. If he commits an offense a third time, they forgive him. The fourth time, they do not forgive.

[6 : 13] And he went on further to say, Do not ask for forgiveness more than three times. Because by the fourth time, you are not going to get any forgiveness.

So Peter takes the rabbinic three times and multiplies it by two. And adds one for good measure. And so of course, Peter expected to be warmly commended by his generosity.

And in a sense, he needs to be commended. Don't you think so? Because for most of us, by the time it happens twice, we are done.

We are frustrated. We begin to play the game of avoidance. We begin to gossip. We begin to pull away or get ready for a fight, depending on your temperament.

But Peter was willing to go up to seven times. And he expected to be commended. But Jesus didn't think so.

[7 : 19] Jesus did not commend Peter. In verse 22, Jesus said, I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven.

That is devastating. You mean, I am going to forgive for seventy times seven, four hundred and ninety times, as we heard. You see, what Jesus is doing here, is that he is rejecting a mathematical, calculating, quantitative approach.

To forgiveness. In the kingdom of God, and in the church, there is no limit, to forgiveness. In our relationship, to our brothers and sisters, and even to people, who are not Christians, there is no limit, to forgiveness.

Love, within the church, says, Jeremiah, is expressed, by an ever-expanding, and inexhaustible, and tiring capacity, to forgive the brethren.

Love, within the church, is expressed, by an ever-expanding capacity, and untiring capacity, to forgive, to forgive, to forgive, our brothers, and sisters.

[8 : 45] Revenge, is replaced, with remission of sin. Forgiveness, is the way, of God's people. And there is no other way, for the disciple, of Jesus Christ.

We must, be willing, to forgive, our brothers, and sisters, with extraordinary, extravagance. And why, should we be so, willing to forgive?

It is because, God himself, has been very extravagant, in his forgiveness, of us. God, has forgiven us. God, continues to forgive us, whenever we ask him, for forgiveness.

And of course, most of us know, that this is the case. Then why, why is it, that we still do not forgive, our brothers, and sisters? We know that God forgives, and we ask for forgiveness, and he forgives, but we are not willing, to forgive one another.

Why is that? I think the reason, lies in the fact, that we have not, fully appreciated, the magnitude, and the bounty, of God's forgiveness, of us. It is a lack, of appreciation, of the greatness, the magnitude, and the vastness, of God's forgiveness, of our sins.

[10 : 08] And why, do we not appreciate, God's forgiveness? It is because, we have not, fully apprehended, the wickedness, of our sins, and the degree, of God's hatred, for our sins.

If we understood, how wicked, our sin is, if we understood, the jeopardy, that our sin, puts us, in the presence of God, we will then, understand, and appreciate, the greatness, of God's mercy.

Our sin, destroys, our relationship, with God, and with one another. Our sin, brings the judgment, of God, on us. And this is why, Thomas Watson, once wrote, and I quote, Till sin, be bitter, Christ, will not be sweet.

Till sin, be bitter, Christ, will not, be sweet. End of quote. In other words, until we see, the bitterness, the wickedness, of our sin, and the trouble, that sin, can bring us, into our relationship, with God, we will not, appreciate, the forgiveness, that comes to us, through the death, and resurrection, of Jesus Christ, of Nazareth.

And this is why, Jesus begins, this parable, and of course, ends the parable, as well, by showing us, the fact, that God, is a God, who judges, sin.

[11 : 48] God, is a God, who judges, sin. Here is a king, who wished, to settle accounts, with his servants. And when he began, to settle accounts, one servant, was brought to him, who owed him, 10,000 talents.

And of course, from historical documents, of the time, the total, annual revenue, collected by the Roman government, from the four provinces, of Edomia, Judea, Samaria, and Galilee, was about 900 talents.

And based on those figures, 10,000 talents, amounted to more than, 11 years of taxes, from those four provinces. And so Jesus, is being hyperbolic here.

There's a touch of, hyperbolism, in this. And of course, his master summons him, and says, pay what you owe, and he couldn't, because he has spent it, all on himself.

And that is the nature, of sin. God has given us, so much, and we spend it all, on ourselves, rather than, for the glory of God.

[13 : 07] And so when he could not pay, the master, ordered him, and his wife, and his children, and all his possessions, to be sold.

God is a God, who brings, makes us accountable, and brings us, under judgment. And it is clear, the principle, of retributive justice, and punishment, for evil, in this parable.

See, this is not about, a king, and a master, or a king, and a servant. Jesus said, therefore, the kingdom of heaven, may be compared.

In other words, Jesus is talking, about the kingdom of God, in this parable. He is talking, about God, he is talking, about the values, of the kingdom of God, and in God's kingdom, there is accountability, there is reckoning.

And of course, the whole idea, of accountability, is very counter-cultural, in both church, and society. God, the God, we have created, in our image, is a God, who never makes us, accountable.

[14 : 25] We have tried, to reduce God, to our size, and to our standards, and to what we feel, he ought to be like. And of course, we insist, that this God, God, must accept, our standards, of behavior.

He must be tolerant, and non-judgmental, with sin. Otherwise, we will not bow to him. And of course, the bad news, is that the God, of the Bible, the God, of the kingdom of heaven, is a God, of holiness.

He is a God, of moral perfection, who hates sin, and cannot stand it. The God, of the Bible, the God, of the kingdom of heaven, is a God, who settles account, with each, and every one of us.

And he does, summon us, to reckoning, in this world, and of course, on the last day, we have the final, reckoning. And for most people, it's going to be too late, at that time.

And I think, what is happening now, is that, the divine act, of reckoning, is taking place, as I speak to you, this moment. God, has spoken to you, before, about your sin, God, is speaking to you, right now, about your sin.

[15 : 47] God, in his mercy, is calling you, to account, at this moment, asking you, to come clean, before him, and accept, the fact, that your sin, is huge.

You and I, owe God, a debt, of sin. And contrary, to our calculation, this debt, is not minimal. It is not, a casual, sin.

Our sin debt, is incalculable, and unpayable, by divine standards. The extent, of our sin, is beyond, comprehension. My sin is big, it is bad, and it is huge, and God hates it.

Your sin, is big, and bad, and huge, and God hates it. And so, we are in a state, of utter, spiritual bankruptcy, and facing, impending, divine judgment.

The Bible says, the wages of sin, is death, the soul, that sins, shall die. And this, is the state, of every sinner, before God.

[17 : 09] And we have to do, something about it. Because, God is not going to, ignore it, as a matter of fact. And so, this brings me, to the second, principle, in the passage, which is this.

We must, repent, of our sin, in order to receive, forgiveness, from God. God, is a God, who calls us, the accountability, and judges our sin, and we need, forgiveness.

But in order, for us to receive, forgiveness, for our sin, we must, come to God, in repentance, and humility. And of course, this goes against, the doctrine, of our cultural acceptance, and the whole doctrine, of universalism, in the church.

In our modern culture, we have a culture, of acceptance. You know, this is the kind of, hair that I like, and you have to, accept me, and if you don't, you're going to go to hell.

Of course, that is not true, that's a joke. See, but that's the way we go. You know, God has to accept me, the way I am. I do not need to repent.

[18:19] It is my personal style. And God is not impressed, with that. We have a culture, of irresponsibility, refusing to take responsibility, for what we have done.

And of course, we minimize our sin, by making excuses. And God is not impressed, for a moment. I want to read, this story.

It's a story, written by, Rebecca Miles. Rebecca Miles, is a professor, in a seminary, in the United States. And I read the story. Quote, a 13-year-old, a 13-year-old girl, picked up by the police, for breaking into a gift shop, gave me this explanation.

Well, I was like, standing around, and saw the window, was open. One thing led to another, and like, the next thing I knew, I was like, standing inside, eating a candy bar.

It just like, kind of happened. You know, just like, kind of happened. In other words, some alien, picked her up, from the street, dropped her, in the middle of the candy shop, and fed her, a candy bar.

[19:37] And she just ate it, and didn't know, what was going on. It is a culture of, irresponsibility, a temporary law, of willpower, and ability.

And God, is not impressed, for a moment, because we are moral creatures, who are responsible, before God, and God will, make us responsible, whether we like it or not.

People do not, enter the kingdom of God, by osmosis. They do not, enter the kingdom of God, by ignoring their sin, or pretending, that it doesn't matter.

And fellowship, with God, does not continue, by ignoring our sin. We must repent. Look at verse 26. So the servant, fell on his knees, imploring him, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay you, everything.

This servant, recognized his sin, he acknowledged his sin, but he also recognized, the goodness, of his master. And he throws himself, at the mercy, of the king.

[20:51] And he begged him, be patient with me. Now, which is a ridiculous, comment. You know, be patient with me, I'm going to pay you. Well, he couldn't pay, in a million years.

I mean, a thousand lifetimes, was not enough, for him to pay, for what he owed, the master. And of course, we do that all the time, when the spirit, finally catches up with us.

You know, we say to God, I've got to, shape up my life, and be a better person. I must turn over, a new lease, and reform my life, myself. God, if you get me out of this, I'm going to be a good guy.

And that's all fine, but it's, beside the point. Because, you cannot pay, for your sin. I cannot pay, for my sin. But the good thing, was that he recognized, his sinfulness, and his guilt.

I want to say, to us this morning, we all need to calm down, and take off the mask, and come clean, before God. I want us to take, a hard look, at our lives, and come clean, before God.

[22:00] Because, God knows exactly, who you are. He knows exactly, who I am. And we can never, hide before him. We can never, cover it up. He knows exactly, what is going on.

And we need, to take off the mask, and come clean, before God, for forgiveness. I am not talking, to sinners out there.

I am talking about us, in this sanctuary, this morning. We all owe God, more than we can ever repay, and we have nothing, to repay. Self-righteousness, going to church, being a nice person, isn't going to, wipe away your sin, because the magnitude, of your sin, is enormous.

It is so big, it is huge, and it is bad, and nothing, is going to wipe it out. We need, free forgiveness, from God. And we need to seek, that forgiveness, as this man did.

And of course, when we do, we discover, to our joyful amazement, that God, forgives sin. And that is my, third point. God judges, our sin, we need to repent, of our sin, and when we repent, thirdly, we discover, to our amazement, that God, is a God, who forgives sin.

[23:22] Verse 27, And out of pity, for him, the Lord, of that servant, released him, and forgave him, the debt. This is an, extraordinary picture, of God's, compassionate love.

God's love, for us, is immense. God's love, for those, who seek for forgiveness, is great. See, you notice, what's going on, in this passage.

This man, asks for patience, from the king, so that he can repay him. But instead, the king, released him, from his promise, and forgave him, the debt.

He released him, from everything. So he was forgiven, and he was set free. And that's exactly, what God does for us. He wipes, the slate clean, he raises the books, cancels the debt, and we owe him

nothing.

That is, free forgiveness. God, you do not owe God, anything else. He has forgiven, full, complete, and final. And the man, walks away, caught free, a free man.

[24 : 35] See, the miracle of this story, is that the king, forgave, this man's, great debt, an unbelievable, amount of money. And this is what God does, with the sins, of those who come to him, in humble, and sincere repentance, through faith in Jesus.

God's forgiveness, of our sin, is possible, because God, gave his son Jesus, to die, in our place. And so, because of the death, of Jesus, there is spread, before us, even this morning, a banquet, of mercy, and forgiveness.

it is mercy, beyond comprehension, it is mercy, beyond description. God's mercy, is great, it is wonderful.

And as I conclude, this morning, I invite you, to examine your heart, and come before God, and confess, your sinful attitude, and actions, and words, and the source of your heart, that are contrary to God.

God has called you, to reckon, do not miss, this opportunity, because it may be, too late. I want you, to admit your sin, and to seek, for God's forgiveness, through Jesus Christ.

[26 : 01] And when you have, sought God's forgiveness, I encourage you, to accept, his forgiveness. I am a pastor, and I understand, what goes on, in our hearts.

Some of you, have confessed your sin, you fasted, and prayed, and you still do not believe, that God has the capacity, to forgive. And that is not true.

There is no sin, that is too big, there is no sin, that is too wicked, or too small, for God, to forgive. He lavishes, his mercy on us.

It is true, that sin is big, and bad, and huge, but God's forgiveness, is bigger, and more huge, and greater, and more gracious, and merciful.

The Bible says, that the east, is far from the west, so far, does God, remove our transgressions, from us. And in the book of Isaiah, he says, come, and let us reason together, even if your sin, is as red, as scarlet, you shall be, as white as snow.

[27 : 09] Jesus, has died, on the cross, and if you have time, to watch, the passion, by Mel Gibson, you will understand, that it is enough.

He has suffered, and his suffering, is enough, and God, does not want you, and I, to suffer, any longer. So I want you, to accept God's, forgiveness, this morning, and walk out of here, a free woman, and a free man, forgiven, by Jesus Christ, of Nazareth.

Amen.