

Forgiven to Forgive

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 02 February 2025

Preacher: Craig Dowling

[0 : 00] Amen. And thank you. You certainly are blessed, lovely singers and a fantastic pianist. I must point out, absolutely wonderful playing. Let's read. I'm going to read from Matthew chapter 18. Matthew chapter 18. I noticed my little mic wasn't on when I was up here earlier.

Is it all working now? Matthew chapter 18, beginning at verse 21.

Which reads, Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?

Jesus answered, I tell you, not seven times, but 77 times. Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants.

As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand bags of gold was brought in. Since he was not able to pay, his master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt.

[1 : 40] At this the servant fell on his knees before him. Be patient with me, he begged, and I will pay back everything. The servant's master took pity on him, cancelled the debt and let him go.

But when the servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants. He owed him a hundred silver coins. He grabbed him and began to choke him.

Pay back what you owe me, he demanded. His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, be patient with me and I will pay it back. But he refused.

Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. When the other servants saw what had happened, they were outraged and went and told their master everything that had happened.

Then the master called the servant in. You wicked servant, he said, I cancelled that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?

[2 : 50] In anger, his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured until he should pay back all that he owed. This is how my heavenly father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart.

Amen. Let's pray. And Lord, we thank you for these gracious words which explain so much, Lord. And I just pray that you unravel our hearts and minds now as we go over them. Bring us your peace, your guidance and your help, Jesus.

Amen. Amen. So, a few of those words again.

Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me?

[4 : 01] Up to seven times. Jesus answered, I tell you not seven times, but 77 times.

Now, Peter is a great guy, isn't he? He has this huge personality and an amazing attitude.

He is so excited to be a disciple of Jesus. And he is fully devoted to Jesus.

At one point, he boldly states, Jesus, we, as in him and the disciples, have left everything to follow you.

He famously declares he will protect Jesus, fight for Jesus and follow Jesus to the very end.

[4 : 57] All he wants is to be as close to Jesus as he possibly can be.

He is obsessed with learning more and more about Jesus. He is always asking questions, always listening to Jesus. And often, he gets so excited at Jesus' teachings that he can't wait for the conclusion.

And he jumps in with an answer just before Jesus is finished, just hoping it will be the right answer.

And more than once, we read of how Jesus has to correct Peter and bring him back down to reality.

And then, not to put a downer on this, but our Peter does seem to have a little bit of a temper. Peter, he is a bold, outspoken, passionate guy.

And that comes out many times and in many ways. But, but, the overarching point with Peter is that just like with King David, he is a guy after God's heart.

[6 : 19] He has sacrificed his whole life to Jesus and he just wants to serve the kingdom. He just wants to serve the kingdom.

And if we take a step or two back and have a good spiritual bird's eye view of the writings about Peter, it gets a little deeper, a lot deeper.

I'm thinking it was Holy Spirit inspired that Peter's ups and downs would be recorded as a way to tell me and you that nothing we do, no attitude, no amount of wrongs, no matter what life we once led, no matter who we have ever been or ever thought about or ever done, nothing, absolutely nothing is too big for God to handle.

And our mistakes, our human mistakes, are handled in the same way that Jesus handled Peter's mistakes.

Handled with fatherly love, forgiveness and lots of grace. And Peter's story proves it. Peter's story proves that nothing we can do can get us beyond the love of Jesus.

[7 : 52] And that's why it's told. That's why the ups and downs are recorded and talked about. It is the big teaching we get from Peter's life.

And so, focusing on today's reading, this passage, we have Peter up to his same old ways.

Peter asks Jesus, how often should I forgive someone? Seven times a day? Now, let's backtrack for a second. For in the passage before today's parable, Jesus is teaching about forgiving a brother or a sister in the church.

So, the subject is on everyone's mind. Now, the rabbis, they thought that people should indeed forgive, of course, forgive those who hurt you, but only up to three times before you start to think about having to cut that person off and say enough is enough.

There was a limit and three was a good average for how much you should persevere with someone. So, this is what I love about Peter.

[9 : 13] He can see that Jesus doesn't support that teaching and he can see that Jesus is simply fed up with what the Pharisees teach and it's as if he gets the idea in his head, hey, I can get in Jesus' good books here.

I could be top disciple here and so he basically says, Jesus, forget about what those rabbis teach, that three times nonsense.

I know you don't like it, so get this, I will forgive someone seven times. What do you think? And then there once again is Jesus.

Well, not quite Peter. How about 70 times seven? Meaning that we shouldn't even keep track of how many times we forgive someone.

We should always forgive those who are truly repentant, no matter how many times they ask. In other words, there is no limit.

[10 : 23] There is no stopping point. There is no keeping track. It all sounds a bit tricky, a bit difficult to grasp and get your mind around it.

So Jesus, he knows how tricky it sounds. Brain. So Jesus as always embarks on a parable as a means to explain a great story in three parts.

And part one of the story goes as so. heaven can be compared to a king who decided to bring his accounts up to date with servants who had borrowed money from him.

In the process, one of his debtors was brought in who owed him millions, but he couldn't pay. So his master ordered that he be sold, along with his wife, his children, and everything he owed to pay the debt.

That's Matthew 18, 23 to 25. Now, looking at this first scene in the story, we read about debt.

[11 : 38] Now, according to Google, he owed six billion pounds in today's money. of course, what Jesus is really talking about here is sin.

It's a parable. It's an earthly story with a heavenly teaching. And the meaning is sin. He is describing the debt of sin, our debt of sin.

sin. You see, we all owe God a well-lived life. Because he created us to live a well-lived life.

He created us for goodness and joy with him. But none of us, absolutely none of us, have given him anywhere near that.

So yes, we are in debt to him. It's a debt tallied up by sin after sin after sin after sin instead of righteous living.

[12 : 56] So what I think we should do is a little bit of maths. Let's calculate our debt to our king, Jesus.

I mean, like, how often do you sin? In an hour. To sin is to fall short. That's Romans 3 23 tells us that.

So worry is falling short on faith. Impatience is falling short on kindness. The critical spirit falls short on love and so on and so on and so on.

And these little sins are happening as long as we're awake. so for the sake of discussion, let's say we sin ten times an hour and tally the results.

Ten sins an hour times sixteen waking hours on average, assuming we don't sin in our sleep, times three, six, five days a year, times the average current lifespan according to Google of 78 years, I'm rounding the total off at 4,555,200 sins per person.

[14 : 13] So, tell me, how do you plan to pay God back for your 4.6 million sins?

Your payout is unachievable. Your payout is unreachable. I, you, we all, were swimming in an Atlantic ocean of debt.

Jesus' point precisely. The debtor in the story is you and me. The king is God and look at what king God does.

Jesus filled with happiness and love as usual says, he, the servant, couldn't pay. So, his master ordered that he be sold to pay the debt.

But the man fell down before his master and begged him, please be patient with me and I will pay it all. Then his master, God, was filled with pity for him and he released him and forgive the debt.

[15 : 25] The entire debt. not part of the debt or a lump sum of it. Not a debt repayment plan where he would still have to clear it in the future.

Not a debt relief order where he would declare bankruptcy and suffer the consequences of that. Not even a debt delay and deal with it later.

Nothing. Absolutely nothing. Just completely forgiven, released and free to go. Think about Jesus here.

Out of sheer generosity he put us in right standing with himself and it makes him so, so, so happy to do so because he loves us so, so much.

It's a pure gift from him God to us. He got us out of the mess we were born into and restored us to where he always wanted us to be and he did it by means of Jesus Christ.

[16 : 37] Romans 3 24 this time, freely forgiven and saved by Jesus. And grasping the message from today's parable, we are taught that God fully and completely not in part but in full forgives the unforgivable.

parable. But there is a part two in this parable. The punch line is yet to come. So part two, the forgiven refuse to forgive, like this guy here in this story.

Let's read it. when the man left the king, he went to a fellow servant who owed him a few thousand dollars. He grabbed him by the throat and demanded instant payment.

His fellow servant fell down before him and begged him for a little more time. Be patient with me and I will pay it, he pleaded. But his creditor wouldn't wait.

he had the man arrested, put in prison until he could pay the debt in full. Disgusting, hypocritical behaviour.

[17 : 58] Multi-million pounds forgiveness should indeed produce a multi-million pounds forgiver, shouldn't it? The forgiven servant can forgive a petty debt.

can't he? Do we? Do I? Do you? Something to ponder. But as for this particular fellow, in this parable, he doesn't.

He doesn't. Note verse 30, he won't wait. He won't wait. He refuses to forgive. He could have, he should have, the forgiven should forgive, which now poses a new question, a big question here, a massive question.

Did this servant truly accept the king's forgiveness? Something is wrong. Something is missing from the story.

Gratitude. Notably absent from the parable is the joy, the gratefulness of the newly forgiven servant. You know what it's like the day you got saved or when you have really messed up and you have come before him for some fresh forgiveness.

[19 : 19] You're so happy. You're so grateful. You worship him. You give him lots of thanks. You say, thank you, Jesus. This guy doesn't. He never tells the king thank you.

He offers no words of appreciation. He shows no gratefulness, no joy, no thanks, nothing. His life has been spared, family liberated, sentence lifted, and he says, nothing, nothing.

I think, I wonder, if this guy is a grace rejecter. He never truly accepts the grace of the king.

I can almost imagine him leaving the strong room with a sly smirk, as someone who dodged a bullet, found a loophole, worked the system. But the real proof is in his attitude.

For his attitude bears the mark of the unforgiven, and that mark is he refuses to go and forgive. Hurt people, hurt other people, blessed people, blessed other people, unforgiven people, unforgiven other people.

[20 : 41] This guy, in this story, did not truly accept the offer of forgiveness. He acknowledged it, he smiled at it, but stopped at that.

Later, when the king hears about the servant's stingy heart, he blows his crown. You wicked servant, he says, I forgive you all that debt because you begged me to.

Part three continues of verse 32. Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?

And his master was angry and delivered him to the torturers was due to him. So my heavenly father will also do to each of you if from his heart he does not forgive his brother his trespasses.

Then the parable ends and we are left to ponder the principles of the story. And the big one comes quickly. We've already covered it.

[21 : 50] Those who receive grace go and give grace forgiving people forgive other people and let's be honest it's a high expectation 70 times 7 or don't keep count or just endlessly do it.

And to make it harder the parable also teaches and when you do this unlimited forgiveness do it with the same attitude that Jesus Christ forgive you with.

So for a moment let's look at Jesus forgiveness. We know Jesus carries out the greatest act as he hangs upon the cross.

His very prayer is Father forgive them they do not know what they are doing. Simply and clearly the greatest act of forgiveness ever.

But let's break it down a minute because they falsely arrested him. They chained him up. They dragged him away. Imprisoned him.

[23 : 02] Court marshalled him. They slapped him. They punched him. They kicked him. They beat him. They spat upon him. They mocked him. They wept him. They speared him.

Forced a crown of thorns on his head. Nailed him to the cross. Hung him in the air. And even went further and in the most evil of ways actually stood there laughing at what they had just done.

And Jesus simply says Father forgive them for doing this to me. Jesus was suffering the most horrible painful death ever devised by sinful man's hands and he looked at the people responsible for his very suffering and asked God to forgive them.

He showed amazing mercy. Jesus asked God to forgive the people who were putting him to death.

The Jewish leaders, the Roman politicians, Roman soldiers, mocking bystanders, and merciful Father God answered that prayer by opening up the way of salvation even to Jesus' murderers.

As within minutes of Jesus' prayer, the Roman officer in charge then says, surely this is God. And in the mercy of Jesus, the officer was invited to repent, believe, and be forgiven.

[24 : 43] Soon many Jewish priests were converted to the Christian faith, and again in the mercy of Jesus they were forgiven. Again, clearly the greatest act of forgiveness ever.

We need to ponder what does this mean for us today? Well, we all played a part in Jesus going to the cross.

We have all done wrong. We covered that earlier, Romans 3, 23. We have all sinned. We have all destroyed the world. We have all hurt God and hurt other people.

Jesus' time on the cross was him being punished for those wrongs instead of us. His merciful prayer of forgiveness was for me and you as well as the Roman officer.

So now anyone and everyone who seeks God and his forgiveness will be forgiven and blessed by God. And again I say to myself as well we should forgive like Jesus.

[25 : 59] Yep it's hard to forgive. In fact it's impossible for us humans to forgive as Jesus did. It doesn't happen overnight. It's something God molds us into during life's journey.

It will not happen in our strength. Again it's something God strengthens us to do. But getting back to Peter the initiator of this parable from Jesus.

The point that Holy Spirit makes by detailing Peter's life is that what God is looking for is men and women who will fully and completely acknowledge that we cannot do this.

We just simply can't do it and that we are 100% dependent upon him to enable us to live his ways and do things like forgive others.

Peter got to a point in his life where he fell to his knees and said Jesus I can't I just can't do it I need your help.

[27 : 12] God is looking for us to let him take full control of our entire minds when you do finally let God have all everything then you can begin to forgive as Jesus forgives.

It starts very small and simple. It's really rather easy isn't it to forgive someone over a simple talking behind our backs or simple lie. These things we do every week and bit by bit God enables us more and more to keep on forgiving in this way.

And sometimes the same person comes back seeking your forgiveness again and again and again Holy Spirit bit by bit enables you to persevere endure in that have the strength to keep forgiving and keep going.

But beyond that there's those really really big ones. Just a few years back in Sheffield after what had been a joyful Christmas Eve night and an old colleague of mine Church Army's Maureen Greaves was national news.

Her husband was on his way to play the organ for the midnight carols when three youths for no real reason at all murdered him.

[28 : 42] They didn't just steal Christmas they stole life, everything. In February the following year outside court Maureen publicly forgave them and hugged the mothers of the three youths, mothers who had now lost their sons to life sentences.

In the early 2000s a Robert Rule in a US court forgave his daughter's murderer and as he did so he was very very keen to point out in his speech that this forgiveness is only possible by the power of Jesus inside his life and without the power of Jesus in his life he wouldn't be able to do this act of forgiveness.

We Christians can forgive these big massive sins only by allowing God to move and work in our lives and never can we do it in our own human strength.

That's why we need God. And hearing life stories real life stories of major forgiveness like this serves to remind us of another very important lesson on forgiveness.

As often said forgiveness is about the hurt person going free. Because for as long as we hold the grudge we will never be truly free from that event in our lives.

[30 : 22] And now to finish by one last time getting back to Peter. We all know Peter's ultimate story.

At the Last Supper he is full of words of support for Jesus. But then he denies knowing Jesus. And we all know the wonderful passage of John 21 when Jesus reinstates Peter.

But Mark 16 gives us a deeper lovelier look on this. I'll read it to you. Mark 16 verses 1 to 7.

Read. Read. When the Sabbath was over Mary Magdalene Mary the mother of James and Solomon bought spices so that they might go to anoint Jesus' body.

Very early on the first day of the week just after sunrise they were on their way to the tomb. And they asked each other who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb.

[31 : 34] But when they looked up they saw that the stone which was very large had been rolled away. As they entered the tomb they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side and they were alarmed.

Don't be alarmed he said you are looking for! Jesus the Nazarene who was crucified he has risen he is not here see the place where they led him but go tell his disciples and Peter he has gone ahead of you in the Galilee there you will see him just as he told you.

Jesus has risen and Mary has come to the grave where she meets the angels who say to her Jesus is alive so go go and tell the disciples and Peter that Jesus is going before you to Galilee now tell me if that's not a hidden treasure if I might paraphrase the words God's angel says don't stay here go and tell the disciples and then perhaps a pause and a little smile in the angels face and especially tell Peter go and tell the disciples and especially tell Peter tell Peter that Jesus is going before you to Galilee tell Peter that Jesus will see his forgiven friend there what a line it is if all of

heaven had watched Peter fall and all of heaven had wanted to help Peter get back up again be sure and tell Peter that he's not left out tell him he's forgiven tell him he's still one of the bunch no wonder they call this the good news the gospel of the second third fourth fifth sixth seventh and beyond chances no wonder the apostle Peter had no way of knowing how meaningful his story would become to generations of us Christians today his story serves as an inspiration to tell all of us who have our less than perfect moments that Jesus will forgive us Peter demonstrated just how far someone could fall and still give back up again and God made sure Peter's story was well recorded to tell me and you that he will always forgive us to tell us that nothing absolutely nothing we do is enough to keep us from his grace his mercy and forgiveness forgiveness and all like the guy in today's story just accept the forgiveness choose to embrace it let it change your life be grateful for it and joyfully go and give it to others forgiveness forgiveness it's God's own idea it's created by him to make the world a better place to help humans get on better with each other but ultimately to restore us to father God to himself and give his life and life to the full let's pray father thank you for refusing to allow us to be defined by our failures thank you for the wisdom experience and perseverance that you holy spirit drive into us open our eyes to the second third and beyond chances you offer continue to give us courage and humility and thank you so so much and thank you for picking us up and restoring us to our relationship with you thank you that you are committed to forgiveness you're committed to us thank you for loving us thank you for sharing these words with us bless our day ahead bless our fellowship over coffee in the moments to come all for which we give you thanks for and we're going to stand and sing in

[36 : 05] Christ alone alone let's remember that after the resurrection and just before he returned to heaven he said therefore go and baptise in them in the name of the father and of the son and of the holy spirit and teaching them to help the jew and surely i'm with you to the very end of the age and so let's now go into the week ahead ready and willing looking for opportunities to make disciples remembering that as we go jesus is with us always peace until the lord bless you lord keep you the lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you the lord turn his face towards you and give you peace amen