

**Matthew 18:23-35**

23 "For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. 24 When he began the reckoning, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him; 25 and, as he could not pay, his lord ordered him to be sold, together with his wife and children and all his possessions, and payment to be made. 26 So the slave fell on his knees before him, saying, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.' 27 And out of pity for him, the lord of that slave released him and forgave him the debt. 28 But 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, he said, 'Pay what you owe.' 29 Then his fellow slave fell down and pleaded with him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you.' 30 But he refused; then he went and threw him into prison until he would pay the debt. 31 When his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their lord all that had taken place. 32 Then his lord summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked slave! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. 33 Should you not have had mercy on your fellow slave, as I had mercy on you?' 34 And in anger his lord handed him over to be tortured until he would pay his entire debt. 35 So my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart" (NRSV).

When Jesus was preaching, teaching, and healing, there was a plot to kill him. So, he left the area and went outside of Judea, Samaria, and Galilee, to be out of the reach of the religious leaders that were trying to kill him. After the transfiguration he sets out for Jerusalem, returns to Galilee, and stops at Capernaum. While he is there he gives several lessons. Peter responds to the teachings of Jesus and asks "How many times should I forgive?" and posts a hypothetical of seven times. He is thinking that seven is really good. But Jesus pretty much tells him that seven is not good enough. It's much more than that. It's more like seventy seven times. Or it could even be interpreted as seventy times seven. It is not the number that is significant. It is not a matter of how many times you forgive. The perspective of Jesus is that you always forgive. The actual number is insignificant.

After Jesus answers Peter's question he tells a story. Personally, I love it when Jesus tells a story. It is a lot better than just giving the answer. The story makes the lesson more interesting and memorable. Jesus uses realistic hypothetical scenarios that people can imagine and relate to. This story is another example of heaven. Many times Jesus says what heaven is like. The kingdom of heaven may be compared to: someone who sowed seed, yeast mixed in flour, treasure hidden in a field, a merchant in search of fine pearls, or ten bridesmaids. The kingdom of heaven is like a king who had a servant that owed the king a very large debt that was way beyond his ability to pay. At first the king wanted to force payment that was harsh. If the man could not pay then the king would sell all of his possessions and sell him, his wife, and his children. The man pleads for mercy. The King has compassion on him and completely forgives debt. Then the man encounters someone that owes him but he fails to pay it forward. He fails to have the same compassion for others. He refuses to give what he himself has pleaded for. The king is shocked by the man's action and responds harshly, calls him wicked, and asks if he shouldn't have shown the same mercy that was shown to him. Then the king flips the verdict. The punishment is harsh. The man is tortured until he is able to pay.

The contemporary lesson is forgiveness. I have preached on forgiveness many times because it is found in the Bible in many places. Notice how this lesson unfolds in the Scripture from calculating the number of times you forgive to a story of about one example of forgiveness. The lesson is about how forgiveness plays out in real life. It is not a matter of quantity - how many times you forgive. It is not a matter of seven, or seventy seven, or seventy times seven. It is a matter of quality - the character of your forgiveness. God has forgiven you a tremendous debt that is way beyond your ability to pay. Some people try to calculate the dollar value of ten thousand talents. But that is not the point. The point is that it is an enormous debt that is way beyond your ability to pay. This correlates to our relationship with God. We owe a huge debt to God that is way beyond our ability to pay and God has completely forgiven all of this debt. Since God has forgiven this colossal debt, we owe our thanks and gratitude to God. The lesson Jesus is teaching is you are to pay it forward. You have been forgiven a lot. Therefore, you are to forgive others.

A very significant point that Jesus makes is that your forgiveness has to come from the heart. The character of forgiveness is that it has to be real and sincere. The lesson is not how many times you forgive. The lesson is not the amount you have to forgive. The lesson is the sincerity of your forgiveness. Jesus teaches a theological lesson about the very nature of God. The one true God is both loving and forgiving and your forgiveness of others is positively correlated to your salvation. There are many Bible lessons that demonstrate the correlation between your forgiveness of others and God's forgiveness of you.

Things are hard in the real world. Real people create real problems for you and they come with real pain. We all want justice, punishment, and pay back. God has every right to call for justice with humanity and demand righteous justice for our transgressions. Jesus teaches that God is merciful and we are to be merciful too. The blood of Jesus is the most valuable thing on heaven and earth. It cost the highest sacrifice from God to forgive us our debt. Forgiving others is hard to do. Forgive the things you cannot forget. Forgive the times you have been hurt. Forgive whatever makes you angry. You don't have to tell the person; you simply have to turn it over to God. When you forgive you feel better about yourself and you feel better about others. Allow the Holy Spirit to work in you. Have mercy on others as God has had mercy on you. Forgive from your heart.