

**Matthew 18:21-35**

21 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?”

22 Jesus answered, “I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.

23 “Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. 24 As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand bags of gold was brought to him. 25 Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt.

26 “At this the servant fell on his knees before him. ‘Be patient with me,’ he begged, ‘and I will pay back everything.’ 27 The servant’s master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go.

28 “But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred silver coins. He grabbed him and began to choke him. ‘Pay back what you owe me!’ he demanded.

29 “His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, ‘Be patient with me, and I will pay it back.’

30 “But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. 31 When the other servants saw what had happened, they were outraged and went and told their master everything that had happened.

32 “Then the master called the servant in. ‘You wicked servant,’ he said, ‘I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. 33 Shouldn’t you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?’ 34 In anger his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed.

35 “This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart.”

Are you a scorekeeper? A “scorekeeper” is someone who when hurt by a spouse, coworker, or a loved one, “keeps score” and tries to “even” the score. So, are you a scorekeeper? Do you keep score every time your spouse says or does something hurtful, or every time your coworkers have kept you back and made your job harder, or every time a family member or friend has disrespected you? Do you try to even that score by turning a cold shoulder, or gossiping, or confronting that person?

Well, if you are a scorekeeper, then you can relate to Peter. Peter *really* thought he was being generous. “Seven times?! Isn’t it hard enough to get hurt once by people who should know better? But then to acknowledge that sin and refuse to take any kind of revenge, and to show Christian love to that person who hurt you, isn’t that process hard enough to go through once? Seven times? So, according to Peter’s way of thinking, you can hurt me, and I’ll forgive you, but

I'm keeping score. And after 7 times, we're done. I don't have to forgive you anymore. Seven times, and then I can get mine, and you'll get yours."

Yet, after all that reasoning and "generosity", Jesus shows Peter that he has no idea how compassionate God really is, and how much God has forgiven him. So, Jesus tells a parable, where Peter, along with us, learns that (Theme) Our Master commands forgiveness, and because (1.) He has forgiven our debt, (2) we can and will forgive others.

Jesus tells us about a king. A king who is generous enough to lend money out his servants, and one of his servants comes in, nervous, knowing that he probably owes a lot of money, wincing at the voice of the king, hoping that maybe it's not quite as much as he thinks. He's wrong. 10, 000 talents. For most workers, it would take about 20 years to make one talent. So, if we do the math, it would take this man two hundred-thousand years to pay this off. How anyone gets that deep, who knows? But he did, and even if he worked every single day for the rest of his life, and then his kids for the rest of their lives, and then their kids for their whole lives, it wouldn't even make a dent.

And the man starts to think about his wife and kids, he's never going to see them again. They're going to be sold into slavery, and he's going to go into prison and without thinking he falls on his knees and begs. "I'll pay it back. Please, just be patient with me. I'm good for it, I promise, I'll pay it back."

The king, sitting in his throne, looking at this pathetic man who's completely out of his mind thinking he can pay it back and feels bad for him. And to the shock of all his financial advisors and anyone listening to the story, he cancels the debt, even though he knows that he just took an unrecoverable loss and that he'll never get that 10,000 talents back. The king says the most baffling and scandalous words that a king could have ever said in this situation: "Go in peace."

As Jesus is telling this parable, and as he sees the jaws drop on his disciples' faces when he tells them this part, he knows who the real king is. He knows that the real king doesn't just "forget" the debt of his people like the one in the parable. God is just. And every time we break his law, we take on a debt that demands payment. And as we try to pay that debt off by being good, giving our money, treating people well, going to church every Sunday, thinking that we can somehow pay off that debt, we're just like that poor servant, begging a king to let us try to do the impossible. As we look at the demands of the Law, and see all the ways we've broken it, we hear the king call our name, and pronounce a debt that can only be satisfied by our death.

But the king is as compassionate as he is just. And the king had compassion on all of you, so he sent his Son into the world, who when faced with every situation that we face, never took on a debt of his own. Jesus wasn't only here to tell us about the forgiveness of the Father. He was here to earn the forgiveness of the Father. He was here to pay each of our debts with his blood; to be torn apart by whips, stabbed by thorns, mocked by his own people, abandoned by his friends, pierced by nails, and rejected by his Father. He suffered the pain and the death and the horror that we deserved, and by his resurrection he claimed victory not only for himself but for us. Now the power of the debt is gone. Now, when the Master calls you, there is no fear. There

is no guilt. There is no debt. When God calls your name, it won't be to announce how much you owe him, and it won't even be to tell you that you're free to go. It will be to call you his child, and to invite you to sit with him at his table forever.

The parable continues. The servant, hardly believing what he just heard, runs out of there in joy, set free from his debt, and the first thing he does; hug his children? No. Kiss his wife? No. Celebrate with his friends? No. Instead, he's looking for someone. He's looking for that lazy, good-for-nothing freeloader that owes him 100 Denarii. That's a hundred days wages. Do you know how long it took to save that? No one gets away with taking that money. So he finds the other servant, grabs him, chokes him, and yells in his face, "Pay back what you owe me!" The other servant falls on his knees. He knows 100 Denarii is a lot, but he doesn't have it right now. He says, "Be patient with me. I can get it back to you. I'm good for it."

No. Absolutely not. He can't let him get away with this. It's too much money. So, the servant, who had just been forgiven 10,000 talents, does what, according to the law, he has the right to do, and puts the other servant into jail. It's only fair. But some of the king's people saw this. And they knew that this servant had just been freed from something he could never pay! How could he? How could he forget so quickly? How could he be so appallingly unmerciful when he had received mercy beyond his imagination? So, they tell the king right away, and the King is enraged, and brings that servant in. And he says what everyone else is thinking. "How? How could you do this? How could you forget my kindness so quickly? Didn't you see yourself in the face of the servant begging you for mercy? Didn't you hear your own voice as he promised to pay it back? Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just like I had on you? (33). But now, you want justice. You want what was owed to you? You want to get what you deserve? Then you will." And the king throws him into prison, and when the debt's paid, he'll get out.

It should be clear by now. We are the Servant. God is the king. Jesus says it plainly: "This is how my heavenly Father will treat you unless you forgive your brother or sister from the heart. (35)." We know what God wants from us now. Don't be that servant. Forgive. Easy enough, right? Maybe not.

Because whenever someone sins against us, that person goes into debt to us by taking away our happiness, or our sense of security, or our reputation, or our self-esteem, or our dignity. There's a reason we all love those movies where the bad guy finally gets what's coming to him. We all have a sense of justice inside of us that screams in horror whenever someone does wrong and doesn't get payback, especially when it's against us. It's natural to want payback. When our spouse hurts us, we want to withhold love, to make them feel the pain we feel. When our Christian brothers and sisters make our lives harder, or disrespect us, we want payback, so we might gossip, we might give a cold shoulder, we might confront that person the wrong way and demand what they owe us, but that never solves anything, does it?

Refusing to forgive only drives us apart. It ruins relationships, and really it ruins us. The family that God founded and filled with forgiven people is meant to be together, where we share

forgiveness with each other knowing that whatever our brothers and sisters owe us is nothing compared to what God has forgiven us.

When Jesus tells us to forgive, he isn't telling us that we need to forget the debt or to pretend the sin doesn't exist. Forgiveness is the will to let it go. Forgiveness is acknowledging the debt and not wanting to take revenge. It's the will to say, "I know how much you owe me, but I won't make you pay it back." Forgiveness is loving your brother and sister enough to approach them alone and explain what they have done to hurt you. Forgiveness is willing to accept the apology of our brothers and sisters and comfort them with the promise that Jesus has forgiven them as well.

And if someone has hurt you in an egregious way, or if someone isn't even sorry for what they've done to you, forgiveness is willing to deny the temptation to let a poisonous grudge destroy your heart, allowing for justice to be served, and praying for that person, that they would repent and come to know their Savior and the forgiveness he offers.

And it's difficult, especially when we have to do it over and over again. But we can do it. Not by our own strength, but because the Holy Spirit has entered our hearts through the message of our Father's unconditional forgiveness, and he has created faith that trusts in that forgiveness, and humility to know the vastness of God's compassion for us. We don't forgive so we can earn God's forgiveness. Because we know how much God has forgiven us, we forgive.

Peter really thought he was being generous. But he would find out that he would need God's forgiveness much more than seven times. So do we. But we are free, free from our debt, free from guilt, free to proclaim the compassion and forgiveness of our King that breaks down barriers and heals our relationships. God has freed you. God has restored you. God has forgiven you. Now, forgive. Amen.