

Forgiveness 2:
Forgive as we are Forgiven
Matthew 18:21-35

Sermon

Hobart, May 10th, 2015

Devonport, May 16th, 2015

Launceston, May 17th, 2015

Matthew 18:21-35

Parable of the Unforgiving Debtor

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³⁵ “That’s what my heavenly Father will do to you if you refuse to forgive your brothers and sisters from your heart.”¹

* Or *seventy-seven times*.

* Greek *10,000 talents* [375 tons or 340 metric tons of silver].

* Greek *100 denarii*. A denarius was equivalent to a laborer’s full day’s wage.

¹Tyndale House Publishers. (2004). *Holy Bible : New Living Translation*. "Text edition"--Spine. (2nd ed.) (Mt 18:21-35). Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers.

INTRODUCTION:

I. FORGIVING OTHERS

A. ONE OF THE MOST CENTRAL AND DIFFERENTIATING ASPECTS OF CHRISTIANITY IS "FORGIVENESS"

1. Most people believe in strict natural justice
 - a) That everyone should get what they deserve, good or bad.
 - b) People talk about karma, not letting people get away with things, getting even, not having peace until the guilty are suitably condemned and made to pay for their wrong doing

B. EVEN CHRISTIANS CAN TRY AND FIND WAYS AROUND THE CHALLENGE OF FORGIVING THOSE THEY DON'T FEEL DESERVE IT

1. Many insist that we don't need to forgive unless the other person has repented

C. BUT JESUS MADE MANY RADICAL CLAIMS ABOUT FORGIVENESS

1. One of the most famous of which we are going to see in our passage in Matthew 18 today.

D. PRAYER

BODY:

II. MATTHEW 18

A. BEFORE OUR PASSAGE

1. Jesus has been talking about the radically different life of the Kingdom,
2. Matthew 18:1-10 The disciples are concerned about who will be the greatest in the Kingdom.

B. JESUS POINTS OUT THAT CHILDLIKE HUMILITY IS THE QUALITY THAT CHARACTERIZED LIFE IN THE KINGDOM

18 ³ Then he said, "I tell you the truth, unless you turn from your sins and become like little children, you will never get into the Kingdom of Heaven. ⁴ So anyone who becomes as humble as this little child is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven.

⁵ "And anyone who welcomes a little child like this on my behalf^{*} is welcoming me.

⁶ But if you cause one of these little ones who trusts in me to fall into sin, it would be better for you to have a large millstone tied around your neck and be drowned in the depths of the sea.

1. Causing others offence, tempting them or pushing them to their limits and provoking hurtful behavior is clearly not the way of God.

⁷ "What sorrow awaits the world, because it tempts people to sin. Temptations are inevitable, but what sorrow awaits the person who does the tempting. ⁸ So if your hand or foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It's better to enter eternal life with only one hand or one foot than to be thrown into eternal fire with both of your hands and feet. ⁹ And if your eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It's better to enter eternal life with only one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into the fire of hell.^{*}

^{*} Greek *in my name*.

^{*} Greek *the Gehenna of fire*.

2. Living the life of God means radical changes to our attitudes and actions
 - a) To the point of sacrificing and getting rid of those things that lead us to damage or relationship with God and with other people
3. One of those things we need to cut off and throw away is resentment, the treasuring up and nurturing of festering hurts and irritations about others

¹⁰ "Beware that you don't look down on any of these little ones. For I tell you that in heaven their angels are always in the presence of my heavenly Father.*"

4. We shouldn't be looking down on others, seeing them as inferior, or viewing them as unforgivable, and deserving of exclusion and punishment
 - a) God views them as his beloved, forgiven children
 - b) That is their kingdom status
 - c) That is the future reality that we should be living in the light of today
5. In a presentation at the International Conference in the US in 2013, Cathy Deddo made this clear;

God is working to bring about righteousness, to bring about right relationships. He is transforming everything so we will live right with him, each other and all creation.²

6. She pointed out that our calling and purpose is to;

Reflect the love, joy and peace of the triune relationship to the glory and praise of God.

Life here is lived in the light of this future, always. That is the greater reality. See the present in light of God's purposes and eternity, not through our present circumstances.

* Some manuscripts add verse 11, *And the Son of Man came to save those who are lost*. Compare Luke 19:10.

² Cathy Deddo, *Seeking Healing Through Forgiveness*, from notes taken by Phillip Hopwood, August 1st. 2013, GCI International Conference, Orlando, Florida.

7. She talked about that when we think about forgiveness, it isn't just a matter of God "bringing about a change of status but the transformation of all creation."

a) God is about transforming all of creation, setting things right again, making things whole and good, at peace.

b) Forgiveness isn't just about a change of status, just a change of the legal records. You were guilty—now you have your guilty status removed.

8. God is about reconciling us to him, and us to one another, and leading us through his Spirit to share in the relationship Jesus has with the Father.

a) To share in their life of love, of unity and peace, harmony, grace, service and helping others without conditions.

9. Cathy said;

Scripture speaks of maturity as active. Hebrews tells us to strive to enter his rest. So many voices want to take us away from this. We need help to remain in his rest.

Work out our salvation with fear and trembling. Live with a sense of anticipation... with the realisation that God is at work in us. Use all our energies to participate in his work in us. Walk in the Spirit, straining forward. Don't remain children. Set aside grumbling, fear, anger, resentment. WHY? They don't represent truth. They keep us from hearing what he is saying to us today.³

10. This is what Jesus is saying in Matthew 18

a) The life of God, of his future kingdom is one in which we pursue his way of loving relationships at all costs, not letting anything get in the way of growing in that life.

11. This is illustrated in the following parable

³ Cathy Deddo

Matthew 18:12-14

Parable of the Lost Sheep

¹²“If a man has a hundred sheep and one of them wanders away, what will he do? Won't he leave the ninety-nine others on the hills and go out to search for the one that is lost? ¹³And if he finds it, I tell you the truth, he will rejoice over it more than over the ninety-nine that didn't wander away! ¹⁴In the same way, it is not my heavenly Father's will that even one of these little ones should perish.

12. Harpers Commentary points out how this fits with the following statements about church discipline

When persons have been finally excommunicated, the community must spare no effort to win them back. ⁴

C. **GOD IS ABOUT RESTORING RELATIONSHIPS**

1. That is who he is, how he is, how the Trinity is
2. And that is how the kingdom will be
3. And the way we are to be seeking his help to live today in the light of these values and realities
 - a) We are to seek to find those who have drifted out of relationship with us, or with the church or with society
 - b) Like a shepherd—like God—we should go out of our way to reconcile, to heal, to restore, to repair, to make whole that which has been damaged or broken
 - c) With Jesus, and the help of the Holy Spirit we do it out of love, because we don't want harm to come to anyone, we want everyone to live the life of the kingdom

⁴Mays, James Luther, Ph.D., Editor, *Harper's Bible Commentary*, (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, Inc.) 1988.

**D. IN THIS CONTEXT JESUS RAISES THE TOPIC OF
RELATIONSHIP PROBLEMS AMONG BELIEVERS**

Matthew 18:15-18

Correcting Another Believer

¹⁵ "If another believer* sins against you,* go privately and point out the offense. If the other person listens and confesses it, you have won that person back. ¹⁶ But if you are unsuccessful, take one or two others with you and go back again, so that everything you say may be confirmed by two or three witnesses. ¹⁷ If the person still refuses to listen, take your case to the church. Then if he or she won't accept the church's decision, treat that person as a pagan or a corrupt tax collector.

1. What is the goal here?

- a) To encourage the mending of relationships
- b) By communicating about divisive behaviours
- c) And seeking to bring about a reconciliation and repair
- d) Bringing back wholeness by dealing with the sin or offence

2. He then goes on to talk about the disciples' future role in the church

¹⁸ "I tell you the truth, whatever you forbid* on earth will be forbidden in heaven, and whatever you permit* on earth will be permitted in heaven.

¹⁹ "I also tell you this: If two of you agree here on earth concerning anything you ask, my Father in heaven will do it for you. ²⁰ For where two or three gather together as my followers,* I am there among them."

* Greek *If your brother*.

* Some manuscripts do not include *against you*.

* Or *bind*, or *lock*.

* Or *loose*, or *open*.

* Greek *gather together in my name*.

3. After telling the leaders among the disciples that in the future they will have authority to make binding decisions about church teachings and practices, which would be for the good of the community and its reflection of the kingdom life of God, Peter asks about forgiveness.⁵

4. It flows as a natural question from what has been talked about before regarding kingdom life and relationships

III. MATTHEW 18:21-35

A. PARABLE OF THE UNFORGIVING DEBTOR

²¹ Then Peter came to him and asked, "Lord, how often should I forgive someone who sins against me? Seven times?"

1. Peter is getting what Jesus is saying about kingdom relationships

a) He has got to the point of thinking that in order to live in harmony—to restore relationships and be merciful like God—we need to forgive more than just once or twice.

b) Seven was seen as a number of completeness, and seemed like a generous limit

2. Peter, and most of us, figured that if someone has sinned against us 7 times then they must be beyond forgiveness and that enough is enough.

⁵ Bible Knowledge Commentary; Matthew 18:18-20; This was in keeping with Old Testament precedents, as in Deuteronomy 19:15. If the sinning brother still failed to recognize his error, the situation should be told before **the entire church**, or "assembly." The disciples probably would have understood Jesus to mean the matter should be brought before the Jewish assembly. After the establishment of the church, on the day of Pentecost, these words would have had greater meaning for them. One who **refuses** to acknowledge his sin is then to be treated **as an outsider (a pagan or a tax collector)**.

This corporate action was entrusted to the entire apostolic group. Their actions of binding and loosing were to be directed by **heaven** (Matt. 18:18; cf. comments on 16:19). Clearly all are addressed for the **you** pronouns are plural. Besides their binding and loosing, they were also to engage in corporate prayer. Whenever they came **together in the name** of the Lord, He would be **with them**. And if **two or three** would agree together **about anything** it would be **done for** them by the **Father in heaven**.

a) But Jesus tells him there are to be no limits on our forgiveness;

²² “No, not seven times,” Jesus replied, “but seventy times seven!”*

3. To make the point dramatically and graphically clear, Jesus tells what is called the *Parable of the Unmerciful Servant*, or as the NLT entitles it, the *Parable of the Unforgiving Debtor*.

²³ “Therefore, the Kingdom of Heaven can be compared to a king who decided to bring his accounts up to date with servants who had borrowed money from him. ²⁴ In the process, one of his debtors was brought in who owed him millions of dollars. [Greek *10,000 talents*]*

²⁵ He couldn’t pay, so his master ordered that he be sold—along with his wife, his children, and everything he owned—to pay the debt.

²⁶ “But the man fell down before his master and begged him, ‘Please, be patient with me, and I will pay it all.’ ²⁷ Then his master was filled with pity for him, and he released him and forgave his debt.

²⁸ “But when the man left the king, he went to a fellow servant who owed him a few thousand dollars. [100 denarii] * He grabbed him by the throat and demanded instant payment.

4. Bible Knowledge Commentary;

100 denarii. A denarius was a Roman silver coin, worth about 16 cents; it represented a laborer’s daily wages.⁶

5. Harpers Commentary tells us;

The exact value of ten thousand talents is uncertain, for it is always difficult to assess the value of ancient coinage. However, it gives us some idea of the amount involved to note that the revenue of Herod’s kingdom came to

* Or *seventy-seven times*.

* Greek *10,000 talents* [375 tons or 340 metric tons of silver].

* Greek *100 denarii*. A denarius was equivalent to a laborer’s full day’s wage.

⁶ *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Scripture Press Publications, Inc.) 1983, 1985.

nine hundred talents per annum. The amount owed the unforgiving servant was paltry by comparison—one hundred denarii.⁷

²⁹ “His fellow servant fell down before him and begged for a little more time. ‘Be patient with me, and I will pay it,’ he pleaded. ³⁰ But his creditor wouldn’t wait. He had the man arrested and put in prison until the debt could be paid in full.

³¹ “When some of the other servants saw this, they were very upset. They went to the king and told him everything that had happened. ³² Then the king called in the man he had forgiven and said, ‘You evil servant! I forgave you that tremendous debt because you pleaded with me. ³³ Shouldn’t you have mercy on your fellow servant, just as I had mercy on you?’ ³⁴ Then the angry king sent the man to prison to be tortured until he had paid his entire debt.

³⁵ “That’s what my heavenly Father will do to you if you refuse to forgive your brothers and sisters from your heart.”

6. Joseph Tkach,

God wants us to forgive others because he forgives us. He forgives us far more generously than 77 times. The point is that we are to realize our need for mercy, look to him for mercy, depend on his mercy, and instead of harboring our hurts and nursing our grievances, we need to ask him to help us begin to forgive others.

In this world of sin and ignorance, offenses are inevitable. We’ve all been hurt. So, what’s the worst thing that has happened to *you*? What resentment do you carry? For our own good, we need to let our resentments go. Jesus will help us—that’s something worth praying about.

We have been forgiven an enormous debt; the sins that people commit against us are much smaller. Even if someone beats you to a bloody mess and nails you to die on a cross, God has forgiven *you* more than that.

Perhaps you find that hard to believe, as I do, but this is the point of what Jesus is saying, and he has earned the right to say it.⁸

A. **STORY: JOSEPH TKACH:**

At the height of World War II, Japanese forces attacked Singapore and captured British Officer Eric Lomax. Over the next few months, he was forced

⁷ Mays, James Luther, Ph.D., Editor, *Harper’s Bible Commentary*, (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, Inc.) 1988.

⁸ Joseph Tkach, *The Key to Forgiving*; <https://www.gci.org/spiritual/forgive>

to work on the deadly Burma-Siam railway. Every night Lomax and his fellow prisoners planned their escape: creating maps, building a radio and storing food. But before they could make their attempt, they were discovered.

As punishment, the Japanese soldiers brutally tortured Lomax. At each session, a translator was present – his name: Nagase Takashi. For Lomax, this man became the voice of the enemy. And in his heart, he swore that one day, he would make him pay.

Fifty years later, Lomax got his chance.

Nagase had published a book recounting the atrocities he had committed during the war. It was the first step in a journey that would ultimately lead Lomax back to Japan, where he would come face-to-face with his torturer.

As the two met, Nagase bowed. He had tears streaming down his face and was only able to speak these words: “I’m sorry.” Over the next few days, the men talked and listened to one another. And before Lomax returned home, he gave Nagase a letter. This is what it said: “Although I can’t forget the ill treatment – taking into account your change of heart, your apologies, the work you are doing, please accept my total forgiveness.”

Isn’t that a powerful concept? Total forgiveness? It’s one of the things that we all need. But it’s also one of the most difficult virtues to foster. It seems to go against our fallen nature. We hold onto our wounds – hoping that by doing this, somehow justice will be done. But clinging to these emotions isn’t how we’re called to live as Christians.

Paul wrote this in Ephesians: “Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you” (Ephesians 4:31-32).

While it can be difficult to let go of our hurts and pains, we know that in Christ, we have a sympathetic high priest who has suffered alongside us. He knows each of our wounds and is willing to take them from us – if we only let him. And he not only takes them but also undoes them, so that they are made to contribute to our eternal benefit—by sharing in Christ’s own crucifixion and resurrection. Although Eric Lomax might not have known it, when he forgave Nagase Takashi, he was actively participating in Christ’s divine mission, extending the healing grace of our Creator God to the world.⁹

⁹ Joseph Tkach, *Total Forgiveness*, Speaking of Life, <https://www.gci.org/SpOL359>

CONCLUSION:

A. JOSEPH TKACH CONTINUES:

Forgiveness does not mean that we pretend like nothing ever happened. It does not mean trusting a swindler with money, trusting a wife-beater to not get abusive again, or appointing a child-molester to be a youth pastor.

However, forgiving means that we do not harbor grudges, we do not seek vengeance. It means letting go of our need to get even. It means praying for our enemies. It means seeing ourselves in their shoes, knowing that God has, for the sake of Christ, forgiven us all our sins too. No groveling required. God does not want us to sin again, but his mercy lasts forever.

God wants us to forgive, and he knows that it's hard. He wants us to obey him in everything, and he knows that we don't. That's why our salvation does not depend on our performance, but on the righteousness of Christ. Our salvation does not depend on our performance in keeping the law, or in having enough faith, or in forgiving as well as we ought. In all these areas, we are sinners who fall short of the glory of God.

Our salvation depends not on us, but on Christ, and on our connection to him. He is the one who forgives with the sincerity and frequency that is required, and when our lives are hidden in Christ ([Col. 3:3](#)), God attributes Christ's perfect obedience, including his perfect forgiveness, to us.

God wants us to forgive others because he forgives us. He forgives us far more generously than 77 times. The point is that we are to realize our need for mercy, look to him for mercy, depend on his mercy, and instead of harboring our hurts and nursing our grievances, we need to ask him to help us begin to forgive others.

In this world of sin and ignorance, offenses are inevitable. We've all been hurt. So, what's the worst thing that has happened to *you*? What resentment do you carry? For our own good, we need to let our resentments go. Jesus will help us—that's something worth praying about.¹⁰

¹⁰ Joseph Tkach

1. Cathy Deddo reinforces this;

Not always easy to forgive. Can take years. Knowing that God is who he is, has allowed us to hate others, knowing God will take it, and will work with us until we come to a place of loving them with his love. God takes our hate. Keep handing him what we have. Not that he doesn't know. Not forgiving through gritted teeth. God wants us to be made free and whole.

May help to have another person come along side us.

Hand things over to God to nail to the cross.

We want to keep a short account. Let God deal with things. May mean some things take a long time to deal with. Hand things over before they sit too long. Don't want to live in the places of garbage. But takes time to no longer be irritated. Take time to work through and hand it over. ¹¹

2. I think John Kramer sums it all up beautifully;

God wraps us in forgiveness. We breathe it (him) in. We exhale it (him) out to those around us. ¹²

B. PRAYER

¹¹ Cathy Deddo

¹² John Kramer, comment at; <http://thissideofsunday.blogspot.com.au/2009/11/karl-barth-on-christ-ian-forgiveness.html>