

The Unforgiving Servant

Written by Dr. John E. Russell Sr - Last Updated Thursday, 06 April 2017 17:14

Introduction

This parable was precipitated by Peter's question to Jesus,

..."Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?

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

Matthew 18:21-23, NIV

Then Jesus presents the Parable of the Unforgiving Servant. This parable is found only in Matthew 18:23-35.

The Story

"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 talents was brought to him. 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.

"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, canceled the debt and let him go.

"But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii. 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 you 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 greatly distressed and went and told their master everything that had happened.

"Then the master called the servant in. 'You wicked servant,' he said, 'I canceled all 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?' In anger his master turned him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed.

"This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart."

Matthew 18:23-35, NIV

The story begins with a king settling accounts with his servants. One servant who owed him 10,000 talents (equal to about 12,000,000 US dollars) was brought before him. Since the servant was unable to pay, the king ordered that he and his family be sold as slaves and all that he had be sold to pay on the debt.

The servant fell down before his king and begged him to be patient until he could repay him.

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The king had mercy on him, forgave the debt and let him go.

The forgiven servant went out and found a fellow servant who owed him 100 denarii (20 dollars). He grabbed him, began choking him and demanded that he pay him the small sum.

His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him to be patient until he could repay him.

The forgiven servant refused to wait and had his fellow servant thrown into prison until the debt was repaid.

Other fellow servants saw what had happened and told the king.

The king called in his wicked servant for not having mercy and canceling the insignificant debt as the king had canceled his astronomical debt. The king was furious and had him turned over to jailers to be tortured until his debt was paid.

The Interpretation

The story characters represent

1. The king. God
2. The servants. believers

The debts and what they represent are:

3. The 12,000,000 dollars. . . .our debt of sin to God.
4. The 20 dollars. thee debt of wrong done to us by others.

Peter probably felt he was being generous in offering to forgive someone 7 times. (Two Rabbis of that time had taught not to forgive more than 3 times). Jesus replied that we should forgive 77 times, or it could be translated 70 times 7 or 490 times, therefore teaching that we should forgive others as a lifestyle..

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Jesus was using a literal figure to represent the Christian *attitude* and practice of forgiving others.

In this parable, the unforgiving servant was probably a thief:

This one *was brought unto him*; he never would have come of himself; he would have made that ten into twenty thousand, for the secure sinner goes on treasuring up (Rom. ii 5) an even mightier sum, to be one day required of him. In all probability, from the immensity of the debt, this man was one to whom some chief post of honor and dignity in the kingdom had been committed,—a satrap who should have remitted the revenues of his province to the royal treasury.

Trench, *Notes on the Parables of Our Lord*, 56

The king could have been an actual oriental monarch, and if so, the figure would have been appropriate. Or, Jesus could have been using hyperbole. Jesus was actually emphasizing the utter hopelessness of our ever paying the immeasurable debt of sin that we owe. The debt of sin must be forgiven by God. To symbolize this, it would be impossible to exaggerate the figures.

Earle, *Beacon Bible Commentary, Matthew*, 173-174

The custom of the day was to sell the wife and children into slavery to help satisfy debts. Another practice was to have debtors jailed and tortured to reveal any hidden sources of revenue.

[R. G. V. Tasker, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, Matthew* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1976), 179].

Barclay sees these lessons:

1. Jesus said that we must forgive others in order to be forgiven:

Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.

And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive them, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins."

Mark 11:24-25.NIV

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Blessed are the merciful for they will be shown mercy.

Matthew 5:7, NIV

Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment!

James 2:12-13, NIV 2. There is a tremendous contrast between the debts in the parable. The smaller debt could be carried in one pocket. The larger debt would take an army of 8,600 carriers, each carrying 60 pounds of money—at a distance of one yard apart the carriers would form a line 5 miles long! We have been forgiven a debt beyond our ability to pay. It was paid by the death of God's own Son. Therefore we must forgive others as God has forgiven others, or we can hope to find no mercy.

Barclay, *Daily Bible Study Series, Matthew*, 212 ff. **Central Truth**

We must forgive others

as God has forgiven us

or we will not be forgiven. **Conclusion**

Thank God for his grace and forgiveness. Let us ask God to search our hearts and reveal all unforgiveness and grudges. Then, with God's help, let us forgive everyone and give up all grudges.

How do we forgive those who have wounded us? We forgive by faith. *Forgiveness is a choice to forgive regardless of our feelings.* We can do this. God has commanded us to do it and has given us the ability to forgive. Do it now.

Part II, Chapter 11 of my Book, *The Astonishing Parables of Jesus*. Download this book free at <http://BusterSoft.com/JRCM/>

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In Essentials: Unity; In non-essentials: Liberty; In all things: Charity

—Peter Meiderlin 1626.

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