

Jesus' Greatest Hits

The Unmerciful Servant

Part 23 – December 23, 2007

[VIDEO: POLICE DEPARTMENT]

When we commit unforgiveness, we break God's law. Those who refuse to pardon are thrown into prison. But, the strange thing about this prison is that the locks are on the *inside* ... and the convicts hold the keys. In the parable of the Unmerciful Servant, Jesus wants each one of us to ponder a critical question: Am I a prisoner of unforgiveness?

Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "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. "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 18:21-35 NIV*

This parable begins when Peter approaches Jesus:

Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?" - *Matthew 18:21 NIV*



When Peter says "my brother", it may be literal. His brother Andrew was also a disciple. Frustration, irritation, hurt, and offense naturally come *chiefly* from those who are relationally closest to us. That's how God designed it to work; if you *have* to live with 'em, you *have* to learn to forgive 'em. Family and friends are heavenly *sandpaper*.

Peter would consider himself *very* gracious here. The Rabbis taught that if you forgave a specific offense three times, you were under no obligation to forgive it again. Jesus emphasizes *mercy*, so Peter doubles it and adds one more! “Seven” was considered a number of completion and perfection, so Peter probably thinks Jesus will be pretty impressed.

Jesus answered, “I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times. - *Matthew 18:22 NIV*

When Jesus says “seventy-seven times”, that’s not literal. He’s *not* saying, “I’ve forgiven you 77 times ... just try it one more time, buddy, and WHAMO!”



It’s a saying that means that there’s *no* limit; the spirit of forgiveness knows no boundaries. If I’m keeping score, it’s not really forgiveness. Peter learns that forgiveness is not a matter of celestial arithmetic, but an attitude of the heart.

To illustrate this, Jesus tells about these two guys in debt.



Let’s talk about the difference between ten thousand talents and a hundred denarii (*duh-nair-ee-eye*). One denarius was a standard day’s wage. A talent isn’t a coin, it’s an amount; in fact, the largest unit of currency in use at the time of this parable.

- One talent is equal to 6000 denarii (i.e. 20 years wages)!
- The first servant owed the king, 10,000 of THESE!

Herod the Great, who ruled over Palestine at the time of Jesus’ birth, had annual tax revenues of only about 900 talents. Figuring a day’s wage at today’s equivalent of about \$100; the first servant owed the king about: \$6,000,000,000 (*give or take*).

The fellow servant owed (100 denarii) which is about: \$10,000. Now, that’s a sizable amount. Jesus’ point isn’t that the second guy didn’t need to be forgiven of much ... just, in comparison to what the first guy was forgiven, the second debt was *nothing!*

Notice the king’s mercy goes way *beyond* the actual request:

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. - *Matthew 18:26-27 NIV*

This may be the key to understanding the servant’s odd behavior. He didn’t *ask* for a cancellation. Perhaps he didn’t want to be indebted to the king - even though repayment was impossible. He failed to fully appreciate and appropriate the mercy he’d been given, and therefore His heart wasn’t softened by the gift.

When we are deeply touched by the depth of God's forgiveness, our hearts are *changed* and we are able to forgive in His name.



At its core, do you know what motivates us to forgive?

Gratitude: Gratitude motivates us to forgive

Therefore, on some level: If I'm unforgiving, I'm ungrateful. We are all deeply in debt to our King, and none can pay what he owes. But through Christ's death, our debt has been canceled. And what we owed God is infinitely more than what others owe us!



- Forgiving others is a gift of gratitude to God.

As a believer, the greatest gift I can offer the Lord is to treat others the way He has treated me.

Q: What's the most you've ever owed? How would you have felt if it had all been erased - wiped clean? Relief? Joy? Freedom?

Q: Would you have been more gracious to those who owed *you* money?



The reason we have a hard time forgiving others, is that we don't feel the fullness of the forgiveness we've received. Because of *pride* I don't think I require much. Because of *shame* I don't think I deserve much. We're *not* worthy of His grace (we're just too sinful and He's just too holy). But, we *are* worthy of His love, because we were created in His likeness and we bear His image.

He grabbed him and began to choke him. - *Matthew 18:28b NIV*

People who are harsh, condemning, judgmental, and unforgiving are carrying a sense of guilt that's not been washed away by grace. Forgiving others is inner evidence of having been forgiven.



... his master turned him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed. - *Matthew 18:34 NIV*

If I refuse to forgive, I lose the peace of that inner-evidence (that I'm accepted in spite of my sin), and I'm thrown into a despair of bitterness. Resentment imprisons and torments the resenter.

Q: If we prayed: "Father, forgive us *our* debts as we forgive our *debtors*." Would that be a *blessing* or a *curse* upon yourself?

So, who do you need to forgive? Sometimes we're unaware. But, there are three tests that'll help us to see if we're currently committing unforgiveness.



1. The finger-pointing test.

Is there *anyone* that you blame for your *unhappiness*? It's healthy to assign appropriate fault and responsibility, but not to blame someone else for my lacking of the fruit of *joy*. Who do you blame? You need to let it go, and give it to God.

2. The score-keeping test.



Do you keep tabs on those who have wronged you? Score keepers like to keep track of who owes what. Maybe you were neglected or abused as a child. Maybe you had a brother or sister who betrayed you. Maybe a friend or business associate was disloyal. Maybe you've been teased or mocked or bullied. Maybe you had or have a spouse who was unfaithful.

That's a bad one - to feel *cheated* in marriage. They haven't lived up to your expectations and you think you got a bum deal. And you've become "unpleasable"; because, no matter what they do it's all just repayment of a debt that can never be satisfied. You are "unpleasable" because you're *unappeasable*. No matter how they repent you still resent, because they *owe* it! This applies to so many different relationships in life. Who are you keeping tabs on? Let it go, and give it to God.

3. The over-reacting test.



Do you ever find yourself reacting to someone, not so much for what they've done - but because they remind you of someone else ... that you resent?!

If you had a parent you've never been able to express your hurt and anger to, and your spouse *happens* to act like them, you transfer all those years of resentment - and the volcano blows! You're allowing a past relationship to destroy a present one. You need to let it go, and give it to God.



When it comes to hurts, we only have two choices: I can restrain 'em or release 'em. I can trap it in my mind, hold onto it, and add chain upon chain of resentment; or, I can release it as a gift of *gratitude* to God, in small exchange for the forgiveness He's offered to me.

Let's see how well you've been listening; answer *true* or *false* when I ask the questions. In this passage, we've learned that:

1. It's *better* to forgive than to hold a grudge.
2. It's *easier* to forgive than to hold a grudge.
3. I'll never be asked to forgive more than I've been forgiven.
4. We should do unto others what they've done unto us.