

# Red Chairables

## *The Unmerciful Servant*

Part 1 - July 11, 2010

*Video location: Anacortes Police Department*

When we commit un-forgiveness, we break God's law. Those who refuse to pardon are thrown into prison. But, the strange thing about this particular jail 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 un-forgiveness?

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 after Peter questions 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", he could mean his *actual* brother, Andrew, who was also a disciple. Ever notice that the majority of our wounds and offenses come from those *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*.

Sometimes they make us happy; sometimes they make us *holy!* Both were designed by God for our benefit and ultimate blessing.

The Rabbis taught that if you forgave a specific offense *three times*, you were under *no* obligation to forgive it again. Peter uses the number “seven” (which represented completion and perfection) to display mercy *beyond* what the law required.

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

That’s *two* sevens! Jesus re-raises! He’s not being *literal*; He’s *not* saying, “Well, I forgive ‘em 77 times; but, one more after that, and WHAMO!” It’s a saying that means there’s *no limit*. This isn’t possible if we focus on the offender. The forgiveness we extend must be founded on the grace we’ve received.

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, it was 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)! And, 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*).

However, in Jesus’ day, 10,000 was the biggest number they had a name for. So, it’s more like saying the guy owed a *gazillion*.

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

Notice, the king’s mercy goes way *beyond* the servant’s 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 might be the key to understanding the servant’s odd response.

He didn’t ask for a *cancellation*. He thought that, given enough time, he could figure this thing out on his own. His pride prevented him from fully appreciating the king’s mercy. And this lack of appreciation leaves him powerless to forgive.



Gratitude motivates us to forgive.

There's no compelling reason to forgive if I only see it as my generosity toward the one who hurt me. But, I'm *empowered* to forgive when I see it as my gratitude toward the God who forgave me!

To the extent I'm unforgiving, I'm ungrateful.



The reason we have a hard time forgiving others, is that we don't feel the fullness of the forgiveness we have received. Either: because of *pride* I don't think I require much; or: because of *shame* I don't think I deserve much.

Well, you're not above His grace, and you're not below His love. We're created in His likeness; He's *embedded* our worth within us! Even as Jesus hung suffering and dying on the cross, "[He] said, 'Father, forgive them ...'" (Luke 23:34). We've been *spectacularly* forgiven, and yet we can be *ridiculously unforgiving*.

When the servant confronted the man who owed him 100 denarii ...

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



You've probably heard the expression: "Hurt people hurt people." Well ... forgiven people *forgive* people! To remain merciless is to dismiss the filthiness of our own sin and the enormous price Christ paid to cleanse us. Offering mercy is inner evidence of having received and embraced mercy.

Let's make sure we're clear on what forgiveness is and isn't. Forgiveness is *not* ...

- 1) **Forgetting**; God has the ability to choose to forget sin; *we* don't! We have to learn to live *with* painful memories.
- 2) **Dismissing**; it isn't passing off an offense as "no big deal."

By making the second debt 100 day's wages Jesus shows that the sin against the *servant* in and of itself was a pretty big deal.

- 3) **Condoning**; it's not excusing or justifying or rationalizing someone's inappropriate, harmful behavior.
- 4) **Resolving**; forgiveness doesn't mean a relationship has been restored. This requires repentance from the offender.
- 5) **Pardoning**; forgiveness doesn't release an offender from the legal or moral consequences of their actions.

So, what in the world *is* forgiveness?! Well, forgiveness is ...

- 1) **Surrender**; first and foremost, we must place into *God's* hands the desire to harm or “pay back” the person who wronged us. He'll use it for *His* glory and the *offender's* redemption.
- 2) **Perspective**; it's an effort to *see* the offender as a needy, weak, complicated, fallible, human being ... like us!
- 3) **Gradual**; it's a commitment to the *process* of forgiveness. Just as you rehearse a grudge over and over, you have to release it over and over as well. You forgive the offense, but *then* you *re-forgive* the pain of the memory, every time it crops back up.
- 4) **A decision**; it's not a feeling, it's a choice. It's a conscious decision to release our resentment and set ourselves free.
- 5) And of course, it's **gratitude**; forgiveness is expressed gratefulness for God's grace toward me. We don't *owe* mercy to those who've hurt us, but we do owe it to God.

So, who do you need to forgive? Resentment and bitterness are sneaky. We can harbor it without being aware of it. So, I'll give you three simple tests to help you see if you're currently committing un-forgiveness.



Stick your finger out and point at somebody.

1. This is the finger pointing test.

“If it weren't for so-and-so my life would be great!”

“If I'd had a different father or different mother ...”

It's healthy to assign appropriate responsibility in order to deal with it effectively, but it's unhealthy to blame instead of working through and moving beyond past hurts and offenses. If you point the finger, you haven't really forgiven.



Now, hold out your hand and count your fingers.

2. This is the score keeping test.

Someone may have neglected, betrayed, bullied, or abused you, but no matter how they try to make amends, you won't let 'em off the hook until they've suffered enough to settle the score. If you keep score, you haven't really forgiven.



Now, make a fist and pound it into your palm!

3. This is the overreacting test.

You ever react to someone more because they do something that painfully reminds you of your mother or father or an “ex”? And all that pent up hostility is transferred and the volcano blows! You ever yell at someone: “You’re just like ...!” Well ...



If it’s hysterical it’s historical. If you have a hysterical reaction, there’s most likely a historical reason. Don’t allow past resentments to destroy present relationships.

If you overreact, there’s likely *someone* you haven’t forgiven.

And it’s vital that we forgive. Jesus compares the consequences of resentment to a harsh and cruel dungeon.

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



Resentment and bitterness will rob the peace and joy that comes from that inner-evidence that you’re forgiven, accepted, embraced, and loved in *spite* of *your* “debt” of sin.

- Resentment imprisons and torments the resenter

Then Jesus goes beyond three, seven, and seventy-seven, and shows Peter that’s it’s about attitude not arithmetic.

This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you **forgive your brother from your heart**. - *Matthew 18:35 NIV*

It’s got to be more than words. When it comes to bitterness and resentment and grudges, we only have two choices:



- We can restrain ‘em or release ‘em.

You can trap it in your heart, and reinforce the bars of your self-imposed prison; or release it, through forgiveness, as a gift of gratitude in honor of your gracious and generous King.