

FORGIVING OTHERS

Friday, February 27

Reading: Matthew 18:21-35

Matthew 18:21 *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."*

We all want to be forgiven when we do something wrong, but forgiving others is hard! Human nature wants to get even – to hurt the other person like they hurt us. We want retribution, not reconciliation; payback, not pardon. But forgiving others is so important that it is the only statement in the Lord's Prayer that Jesus repeats.

Matthew 6:14-15 For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

In Matthew 18, when Peter asked Jesus if forgiving someone seven times was enough, he thought he was doing pretty good. The Jewish rabbis taught to forgive three times but no more. Jesus' answer must have shocked Peter: "...not seven times, but seventy-seven times" – in other words, keep on forgiving.

He then tells a parable to drive His point home. The king/master (obviously picturing God) forgives his servant a debt so great he could never possibly pay it off (somewhere in the range of 12 million to 1 billion dollars). The king graciously forgives the entire debt, but the forgiven servant goes out and finds a fellow servant who owes him about 100 day's wages – a pittance compared to what he had owed the king. But he shows no compassion and has the man thrown in prison until the debt was paid.

When the king hears of this, he is rightly outraged! "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?" The unforgiving servant is then thrown in prison himself to be tortured until his entire debt is paid – something he will never be able to do! Jesus' last words are ominous: "This is how My heavenly Father will treat you unless you forgive your brother or sister from the heart."

If you are a child of God, forgiveness is NOT an option. Both Jesus' statement after the Lord's Prayer and the parable of the unforgiving servant tell us that if we are unwilling to forgive, it may be because we don't really belong to God's family.

The Greek word translated forgive means to let go or release. We let go our grudge and desire to get revenge and release it into God's hands. You can forgive someone even if they never repent or even acknowledge they have wronged you. Holding a grudge does not hurt them, but it does hurt you! Forgiveness does not always lead to reconciliation either. We strive to be restored with the other person, but sometimes circumstances don't make that possible. Forgiveness also does not mean "forgive and forget." We do not hold grudges, but building back trust takes time and effort. There may also be legal, financial, emotional, and relational consequences that still result. Our example of forgiveness is Jesus Christ, who forgave from the cross those who mocked and executed Him (Luke 23:34). We also remember Stephen who prayed for those who were stoning him to death (Acts 7:59-60). How do these examples show us what it means to forgive? How can you apply these lessons to your life?