

September 14, 2014
Sermon for the Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost
St Peter Lutheran Church
Bowie, TX
Larry Knobloch, Pastor
Matthew 18:21–35

J.J.- Jesu Juva—Help me, Jesus

Matthew 18:21–35 (ESV)

²¹ Then Peter came up and said to him, “Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?” ²² Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times. ²³ “Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. ²⁴ When he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. ²⁵ And since he could not pay, his master ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made. ²⁶ So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.’ ²⁷ And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt. ²⁸ But when that same servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii, and seizing him, he began to choke him, saying, ‘Pay what you owe.’ ²⁹ So his fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you.’ ³⁰ He refused and went and put him in prison until he should pay the debt. ³¹ When his fellow servants saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their master all that had taken place. ³² Then his master summoned him and said to him, ‘You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. ³³ And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?’ ³⁴ And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers, until he should pay all his debt. ³⁵ So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.”

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God, our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ!

Have you ever given much thought to forgiveness? Christians speak quite a bit about forgiveness. However, much of their conversation is about being forgiven and too little is about forgiving. Today's Gospel account is about both kinds of forgiveness. After all, forgiveness is a two-way street.

A man once enlisted his pastor's help in his search to find a good everyday prayer. As the two discussed the subject, it became evident to the pastor the man's much-sought after prayer had a specific agenda. The man trailed out a list of things he wanted his perfect prayer to include. The overriding theme of this prayer was to be, "Lord, this is what I want and this is how I want it."

When the man finished his model for the prayer, the pastor suggested that maybe it would be helpful to review the perfect prayer, which Jesus gave us – The Lord's Prayer. The two men spoke about the seven petitions, that make up The Lord's Prayer: 1) hallowed be Thy name; 2) Thy kingdom come; 3) Thy will be done; 4) give us our daily bread; 5) forgive us as we forgive; 6) lead us not into temptation; 7) deliver us from evil (Mt 6:9-13 NIV).

It was at this point that the conversation began to bind up. The man explained he didn't truly want God's kingdom to come or His will to be done because that would require the man to follow God's plan for his life.

He went on to explain that his goals and God's goals didn't always agree. Furthermore, he felt it was unreasonable for God to give him a free will and then expect him to surrender that free will back to God.

Serious as this was, the man's last complaint about the Lord's Prayer overshadowed all the others. He explained he couldn't honestly pray for God to forgive him the same way he forgave others. Although he wanted God's forgiveness, there were some people in his past he could not, or would not, forgive. At least, he wouldn't forgive them until he felt he had somehow gotten even or that they had done something to earn his forgiveness.

Do you know anyone like that? Here's a more important question – are you like that?

The world is full of people who think God should treat them differently than they treat other people. They believe the only way to close the book on an issue, to put an issue to rest, is to get even. There are people who end up making it their life's work to balancing the scales to their satisfaction.

Today's Gospel says all that needs to be said on God's stand on His forgiveness and our forgiveness. So, let's look at the text.

The reading opens with Peter asking a logical question:

²¹ Then Peter came up and said to him, "Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?" Matt. 18:21 (ESV)

I think it's safe to assume Peter was asking about forgiving the same offense. Peter's suggestion of seven times is very generous. The popular teaching of that time was three.

Jesus' response confuses some people. Our reading quotes Jesus as saying 77 times. The original Greek reads 70 times 7, or 490 times. Of course, Jesus doesn't mean for us to keep track and stop forgiving at 490.

He means forgiveness should have no end. From there, Jesus moves into the parable. There are some things we need to highlight about this parable so Jesus' point hits home for us.

First, we stop at the words: "...*the kingdom of heaven may be compared to ...*" *Matthew 18:23 (ESV)*

Make no mistake about what is being said here. Jesus is saying this is exactly the way things operate when we pray: *thy kingdom come* (Mt 6:10 NIV).

The king in the parable is going to settle accounts. It's payback day. The text tells us the king's servant owed him 10,000 talents. Let's get a handle on that amount. A talent was the equivalent to about 20 years worth of wages for a laborer. According to the Social Security Administration, the average yearly wage for 2012 was \$42,498.21, which would make 20 years worth of wages \$849,964.20. That times 10,000 gives us \$8.5 Billion in today's dollars.

When the servant can't pay his debt, the king orders him, his family, and all he has to be sold. This was common practice at that time. Hearing that he and his family are to be sold as slaves, the servant begs for mercy. The king responds by cancelling the debt.

Wow, that's quite a chunk of change to just forgive, but he did.

The king took a personal loss of billions of dollars just because his servant asked him to. Pure mercy in action.

Out from under such an enormous debt, the servant goes out and finds a man who owes him 100 denarii. In the currency of that day, 100 denarii would be 100 days wages.

When the man is unable to pay, the forgiven servant, just forgiven for \$8.5 B. has the man thrown into jail until the debt is paid. Stop here. Can you see how ridiculous this is?

Our last point is when the king finds out what happened, he responds by reinstating the unforgiving servant's original debt and has him thrown in jail until the billions of dollars is repaid.

Of course, this isn't going to happen any sooner than the man who owed a hundred denarii would pay his debt from prison – the wicked servant's condition is hopeless.

Jesus says: ³⁵ *So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.” Matt. 18:35*

Now, take away the dollars and think about sins. How many Billions of sins do we owe God for? And has He not forgiven them?

How many sins does our neighbor owe us for?

God does not ask us to forgive others – He demands we forgive others. This parable casts a very serious light on the concept of forgiving.

We are accountable to God just as the servant was accountable to the king. And, just as the servant carried a heavy load of debt that was owed to the king, we are in debt to the Father.

However, the debt we owe to the Father isn't as simple as borrowed money. The debt we owe is a debt of sin.

Our sinfulness puts us in a position much like that of the servant. We owe a debt we can not possibly pay.

This debt is greater than any payment we could ever make.

Furthermore, our debt and our inability to pay our debt means, that just like the servant in the story, we must be removed from the presence of the Father and into the prison of hell.

Because of our pitiful condition, we can only throw ourselves on the mercy of God. The mercy of God is Jesus Christ. Because of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, the Father has mercy on us. His grace covers our debt of sin. He pays our debt in order to rescue us from our lost condition.

Now, what about the person who sins against us?

This person gossips about you, cheats on you, steals from you, or does any of the other many things that can be considered sinning against you. In short, this person is now in debt to you because of their sin. What do you do?

Before you answer that question, let's go one step farther. Let's imagine this person's sin against you is a big one; something that cut you to the quick, something that hurt you to the core of your soul. You confront this person and they ask for forgiveness.

Now, what do you do? Do you forgive? Do you swallow the pain of the offense and tell the person all is forgiven?

Beyond that, do you truly mean all is forgiven and do you let bygones be bygones?

Or ... do you react like the wicked servant? Do you figure forgiveness is going to be given only after satisfaction is achieved – only after you feel justice has been served, that they have paid fully for their sin?

I'm sure all of us are taking the high ground and comforting ourselves with the knowledge we would be as forgiving as the king in the story – as forgiving as God. But the truth is, we all have had times when our forgiveness has fallen short of the mark our Father has set by forgiving us. Sometimes it may be over something that we consider huge and unforgiveable, sometimes over something simple and even silly in light of eternity.

When Jesus died on the cross, He paid your debt of sin in full. That debt was enormous. It was more than we could ever atone for on our own.

Any forgiveness we could ever grant to another person pales in comparison to the forgiveness God has given us through Christ.

Our Father in heaven expects us to forgive as He has forgiven us. I encourage you to spend some time this week thinking about how your forgiving attitude measures up to God's forgiveness.

It's going to be hard; and it may not be pretty but try it. Strive to let those painful sins go. Work to forgive those small petty ones.

Forgiveness may not mean that you give that person access to hurt you again, there are earthly consequences to sin, but strive to forgive as you have been forgiven, let it go, with God's help you will be able to move on.

In this as in all things, your forgiveness will not be perfect. Strive to do your best and ask for God's help and forgiveness in the process.

Go forth in that knowledge of your salvation, that in the name of Jesus, you are forgiven for all of yours sins.

Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding keep our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Amen.

S. D. G - Soli Deo Gloria
To God alone be glory

“Forgive as you have been forgiven”
Matthew 18:21–35

1. How much do you think about forgiveness?
2. How much has God forgiven you for?
3. How much do you forgive?