

Tusculum Hills Baptist Church
Paul Gunn, Pastor

THE PARABLE OF THE UNMERCIFUL SERVANT

Matthew 18:21-35

January 13, 2019

For public use: See non-copyright comments at the end of the message.

There are two points to my sermon today:

- A massive debt was forgiven by the king
- A small debt was not forgiven by the servant

First, some background to the parable of the unmerciful servant.

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 18:21-22

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."*

EXPLANATION: There is no doubt that this was a shocking statement because I read that rabbis of the day taught that forgiving someone three times was enough. Peter upped the ante by going to seven and probably thought he was being gracious. Your translation may say seventy times seven. Jesus wasn't giving a limit to forgiveness, he used an expression to make light of Peter's limit of seven times and to say that forgiveness really has no boundaries. And so, to really make a point, Jesus tells the following parable.

A MASSIVE DEBT WAS FORGIVEN BY THE KING

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 18:23-24

"Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. ²⁴ As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand bags of gold was brought to him.

EXPLANATION: Through the years, I've read about the value of 10,000 talents. A talent was a bag of precious metals that weighed 75 pounds. Some believe the

bags of talents were bags of silver. Some believe gold. Ten thousand bags that weighed 75 pounds! In today's terms, one bag of gold would be worth about a million and a half dollars. Really, it would be childish for us to spend a lot of time figuring up the value because that is not the point. Ten thousand of anything would have had a lot of value.

The fact that the man who owed the king was brought to the king indicates someone had to go get him. He was avoiding the king in the same way a person avoids debt collectors.

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 18:25-27

“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.

²⁶ “At this the servant fell on his knees before him. ‘Be patient with me,’ he begged, ‘and I will pay back everything.’ ²⁷ The servant’s master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go.

EXPLANATION: The man who owed knew that he was at the mercy of the king. The king had ultimate authority and as a subject of the king, the man had absolutely no recourse whatsoever. And when you do the math, you realize that selling the man's family and all he had to repay the debt would not have equaled the value of the gold.

The attitude of the man was humility. He begged. “Be patient with me and I will pay back everything.” He did not offer to pay interest, nor did he offer to pay on the principal or to make any arrangement whatsoever. What he offered was nothing, he didn't even offer excuses, other than a promise the king knew he couldn't keep.

Keep in mind the spirit of the parable. Jesus spoke in extremes here to make his point. A man – a commoner – owed 10,000 bags of gold. What king makes loans like that to a servant? Probably none. Maybe to another kingdom, but not to a common servant. And who borrows 10,000 bags of gold? Jesus spoke in extremes on purpose because he was making a point about trespasses and forgiveness.

Jesus knew human nature quite well. This part of the parable is not about a man who owed another man just a few coins and was forgiven for being unable to pay, is it? No, it's not. This part of the parable is about a massive debt that was forgiven.

ILLUSTRATION: And now it's time for me to do sensitivity surgery. When talking about seeking forgiveness and forgiving others, we tend to think of it in levels of severity. If a person commits a minor infraction, that person might say, "Oh, I am sorry," and the response from someone else will usually be, "It's OK." I'll call that a level one... and from there, it only becomes more severe.

A few times in my ministry I've heard someone say, "But you don't know what that person did to me." I remember an old, angry man years ago who was mad at a preacher. He said, "I will never forgive him for what he did to me."

APPLICATION: Ultimately, who is the parable about? Who is the king? Who is the man? I'll tell you. Jesus is the king, and you and I are the man. We have a huge sin debt, whether or not we want to admit it. If the value of the 10,000 bags of gold represents debt, let's do our own math:

- If you sinned only one time per day, that would be 365 sins that need forgiven per year. 3,650 sins in ten years.
- Let's be generous and subtract two years of sins for newborns through two years old. That would be 2,920 sins that need to be forgiven by age ten.
- By age twenty, that would be 6,570 sins.
- That would be 10,220 sins by age 30, and by age 60, we're talking 20,440 sins to be forgiven. *That's if a person only committed one sin per day.*
- How many times does a person sin in a day? I have no idea! If a person sins ten times per day, that would mean by age 60 a person would have 204,000 sins that need to be forgiven.

Let's go back to Peter's question. Should I forgive someone up to seven times? What if God the Father only forgave us seven times? What if he only forgave us seven times for the same sin? We'd be in a mess, wouldn't we?

Let's move on. A massive debt was forgiven by a king, but we learn the servant was ungrateful. He doesn't even say thank you, does he? We know he was ungrateful because of the way he treated a person who owes him.

A SMALL DEBT WAS NOT FORGIVEN BY THE SERVANT

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 18:28-35

"But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him

a hundred silver coins. He grabbed him and began to choke him. ‘Pay back what you owe me!’ he demanded.

²⁹ His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, ‘Be patient with me, and I will pay it back.’

³⁰ But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. ³¹ When the other servants saw what had happened, they were outraged and went and told their master everything that had happened.

³² Then the master called the servant in. ‘You wicked servant,’ he said, ‘I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. ³³ Shouldn’t you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?’ ³⁴ In anger his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed.

³⁵ “This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart.”

EXPLANATION: You’ll note this second man said the same thing as the servant did to the king: “Be patient with me and I will pay it back.”

If you refuse to forgive someone – and I think about the old angry man who said, “I will never forgive that preacher.” – then something is terribly wrong. Why? Because through Jesus, God has completely forgiven your sin debt in the same way the king forgave the debit of the man who owed him 10,000 talents - a massive sum of money.

ILLUSTRATION: Any Christian who harbors unforgiveness does not understand the work of the cross. One time when I was new at a church, a man took me to lunch to get to know me better. In the conversation, he said, “Just don’t make me mad.” I thought, is that what this is all about? Meeting a man for lunch so he can let me know in advance it’ll be a bad day for me if I make him mad? He went on to tell me about the people he was holding grudges against. Really, it was bizarre.

Holding grudges, lack of forgiveness, bitterness – or whatever we want to call it – has serious health consequences.

ILLUSTRATION: One time another man told me how he had been wronged. He said he’d never forgive the man. He told me what the issue was, but I don’t

remember. It sounded as if it had happened recently. I asked him when the offense occurred. He said, “1959.” He had held a grudge, nurturing it and revisiting it every day, since 1959! Who lost in that deal? The man holding the grudge and all his close friends and family who had to hear about it over and over since 1959.

I don't have any scientific proof to share with you, but I've noticed through the years that those who are carrying bitterness are unhappy people with scowls on their faces.

EXPLANATION: In Jesus's parable, the man was forgiven a massive debt, but refused to forgive, or even make arrangements for a man who owed him very little.

I found verse 34 to be a curious verse *“In anger his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed.”*

I spent some time studying this verse. Your translation might say tormentors or torturers or just jailers. A close look at his parable is reflective of the times. It was common for a person to be beaten or tortured to get something out of them as a part of a judicial examination. The root word (bas-an-is-tace') has a variety of forms and uses. Some of those uses are to annoy or vex.

APPLICATION: Listen, because I want everyone to learn something. This parable is symbolic. You and I are the first man asking for forgiveness and being forgiven. In turn, if we refuse to forgive, we are putting ourselves through a life of mental torture, a life of vexation. Why? Because God hands us over to it. Verse 35 says: *“This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart.”*

Here is the take away - The reason we should forgive is not only because it's good for our health, not only because it sets a good example for others, but because Jesus forgave us!

SCRIPTURE: Ephesians 4:32

Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

Colossians 3:13 says:

Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.

CONCLUSION: We have a sin debt before God we cannot repay. Through Jesus, God forgives us. Others who have wronged us have a debt that needs to be repaid, but it comes nowhere close to what we owe God. As God has forgiven us, we must forgive!

I firmly believe much of this life is learning to let go. Last week I read an article that the average American home has 300,000 items and we are all drowning in a sea of stuff. As we age, we must learn to let go. If we don't, we only create a mess for others to take care of when we die.

We tend to like to control things, don't we? As we age, we must learn to let go. If we don't, we'll find we have fewer and fewer friends.

We tend to hold grudges and keep mental records of who's wronged us. We must learn to let go. We must learn to forgive. If we don't, we've set ourselves up for a life of mental torture. We have one life to live, why live it in self-inflicted torture?

To preachers, teachers, students, and anyone else reading or using this message: I have posted this for all to use as you see fit. There is no need to cite me as the source. You are free to delete sections, add your own, or do whatever you want. There is no copyright. My request is that you do not copyright or sell my work. I am sharing my preaching notes in good faith with you because I know the challenges of putting together a lesson, especially when your week gets consumed with other things. Use it and enjoy!

I use the NIV translation of scripture because of its conversational nature. Feel free to go to Bible Gateway and copy and paste whichever translation you want to use. This transcript has been edited to an outline format that improves readability and therefore may not exactly follow the video edition.

Find me at www.thbc.com. Click on sermons or YouTube channel: Pastor Paul Gunn
Thanks to Jennifer Anderson for her editing assistance.

Sincerely, Paul Gunn
Tusculum Hills Baptist Church
Nashville, Tennessee
USA