

Matthew 18:21-35

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[0:00] Well, good morning, and thank you guys so much. Another just joyful morning to sing together, to recount all these wonderful truths.! And I'd invite you to open up to Matthew chapter 18. So we're going to continue. This is our third week in the summer parable series.

And thank you to the other elders who have been serving us tremendously. As you make your way over to Matthew chapter 18, I wanted to bring kind of a sober illustration for us this morning, but one that I think is effective in introducing what we'll be discussing.

So by way of introducing the text, there was a courtroom scene that you probably saw if you were paying attention to the news about five years ago.

This courtroom scene was one that caught many news outlets' attention, and I'm not going to get into all the details of everything involved in the case, but there was a woman who was convicted of murder, and she had fatally shot a man.

And in her testimony, she said that she thought that this man was an intruder in her apartment. But the very unfortunate thing was she had actually gone to the fourth floor.

[1:16] She had bypassed her third floor apartment building, and of course, this guy was unexpected the door to open up. And she shot this man, and he fatally died, and this was about five years ago.

So very, very sad events that took place. But what caught the attention of the news outlets was not really just that this had happened, but particularly that there was a victim impact statement that was made by the younger brother of the man who had been killed.

And a victim impact statement, if you don't know, that generally happens when a verdict is announced, and then the family can come up and say how this has caused an effect on the suffering party.

So this is what he said. He said, if you truly, he was saying this to the lady, of course, if you truly are sorry, I can speak for myself. I forgive. And I know if you go to God and ask him, he will forgive you. And I don't think anyone can say it. Again, I'm speaking for myself, but I love you just like anyone else. And I'm not going to say that I hope you rot and die just like my brother did, but I presently want what is best for you.

[2:36] And I wasn't going to even say this in front of my family or in front of anyone, but I don't even want you to go to jail. I want the best for you because I know that's exactly what my brother would want you to do.

And the best would be to give your life to Christ. I'm not going to say anything else. I think giving your life to Christ would be the best thing that my brother would want you to do.

Again, I love you as a person and I don't wish anything bad on you. And then he said, I don't know if this is possible, but can I give her a hug?

Please, please. Now, this is one of the most striking pictures of human forgiveness that has ever been captured on at least modern TV.

And I don't know the state of this brother. Of course, I've never met him. But by all accounts, this appears to be a man who has been touched within him by the redemption, the forgiveness that he's received by Christ.

[3:45] And beyond the profound amazement that this act is worthy of, I actually bring this up to draw attention to the types of responses that I saw happening in some of the comments of the videos that were online.

Now, there's only two categories. The first is profound amazement. Those who saw this act as astonishingly commendable and beautiful.

But the other category was those who reacted in very strong anger. People saw this act as a desecration of what they came to expect as real justice.

And while it's very easy for us to critique this latter response, there's actually a lot of sound or not sound, but logical reasoning in the way that they're thinking through this.

They see the heinous nature of the crime. And because of how bad that crime was, they expect for justice to come quickly, to come with force without any delay.

[4:53] And while we can understand that type of perspective, what's missing in that perspective is recognizing that everybody in that courtroom believes in justice.

It didn't matter if you were an atheist or an agnostic or a Christian. Everybody believes in justice, especially when something like that happens.

Now, if pressed, I am very certain. It can be an interesting question to ask. Of course, I probably never will. But I bet you that that brother probably said, you know what, I have never believed in the need for justice as strongly as I have until an event like that took place.

And I think that that is true. We often don't experience stuff like that. But when hard things happen, when justice is called for, there's really a dividing line question with how we're going to respond.

And the question is this, especially as Christians, we are called to put into action our belief of whether or not what Jesus did on the cross was sufficient as a means of justice to hold out forgiveness for offenders.

[6:12] Is it a strong enough basis for me and for you when we encounter sin, and we surely will, you have this week? Is it enough for us to look to Jesus and say that Jesus' act of justifying sinners, those who would one day put their faith in Christ, is that sufficient as a means in and of itself?

Because we are always responding with our system of justice. Is Jesus sufficient, or is human justice, what is called for when tragedy happens?

We're going to read chapter 18, and we'll pick up in verse 21, and we'll read through the end of the chapter. And you guys apologize for being a little sniffling this morning.

Okay, the text reads this way. 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.

Jesus said to him, I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times. Therefore, the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants.

[7:29] When he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. And since he could not pay, his master ordered him to be sold with his wife and children and all that he had in payment to be made.

So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything. And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt.

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.

So his fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him, Have patience with me, and I will pay you. He refused and went and put him in prison until he should pay the debt.

And when his fellow servant saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed. And they went and they reported to their master all that had taken place. Then his master summoned him and said to him, You wicked servant, I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me.

[8:39] And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant as I had mercy on you? And in anger, his master delivered him to the jailers until he should pay all his debt.

So also my heavenly father will do to every one of you if you do not forgive your brother from your heart. Well, our outline this morning, if you are a note taker, is going to come in three primary points.

The first of which is forgiveness withheld. The second is forgiveness resisted. And the third is unforgiveness exposed.

So our first point this morning is forgiveness withheld. And our primary example from our text is the disciple Peter. Now, you guys are familiar with Peter, or I would expect most of you are.

Peter's resume is one that is one that leaves us with the impression that he should be very thankful in general to the Lord, very humble in his heart.

[9:46] Listen to just a couple things. So Peter was called out as a fisherman by Jesus. In Matthew chapter 16, though, we are reminded of some of the things that Peter struggled with.

So Jesus had said he was going to be going to the cross, that he was preparing himself. And Peter tried to dissuade Jesus from doing this. And Jesus rebukes him strongly.

In Matthew chapter 14, a couple of chapters earlier, even more well-known story, Jesus calls Peter out onto the water and Peter tries to come and he loses sight of the Lord.

He's distracted. And what happens is his faith, his lack of faith is exposed and he begins struggling.

And then later in the book of Matthew, Matthew chapter 26, I believe, we find the account of Peter who is told by Jesus that he's going to betray Jesus in the days leading up to his crucifixion.

And that's exactly what happens. Not one time, not two times, but on three different times, Peter denies the Lord. Now, again, I bring this up because Peter is a man upon hearing the words that Jesus is saying.

[11:06] And I'll give you some of that context in the verses that precede what we read. But Peter should be a guy who is very grateful, very aware of all this grace that belongs to him that has changed his life and brought him into a brand new reality of being a disciple of Christ.

The context of our passage is one that you are likely familiar with. We generally refer to this as the stages of church discipline, right?

So right before our text, Jesus walks through the different stages that happen when somebody is entangled, ensnared by sin. Generally, one person goes and pursues the unbeliever.

And if that is not successful, a smaller group goes. And then lastly, the whole church is called to give accountability to the one who is stuck in sin for the aim of restoring that struggling person to repentance.

But if you look with me at verse 21, Peter does not have any humility. He actually responds to Jesus with a hint of self-satisfaction, perhaps thinking that he will maybe even win some congratulatory approval from Jesus for what he's about to say.

[12:23] You see, it was well known in the rabbinic tradition of the day that extending forgiveness ought to happen three different times. and Peter thinks he's going to come and impress Jesus by more than doubling that amount.

That's why he says seven times. Peter is very bold in his personality. Listen to these words. It says, 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? It's this important question that sets the stage for the rest of the parable that Jesus is going to unpack.

Jesus doesn't see this just as a regular question, but this question brings Jesus to tell this story.

There's a weight to it. There's something that needs to be corrected in the way that Peter is speaking of this situation, how he's responding to the Lord's words.

The how many times question demonstrates that Peter actually has a framework that's already existing which he needs to apply as it relates to those who offend him, that sin against him.

[13:37] He's purposed. He's measured. And he is trying to think through what are the occasions by which I can apply the rules of justice, his rules of justice.

And when are the times that I'm called to apply these teachings, these words of Jesus that seem to lean into mercy and forgiveness? Peter has probably heard often some of the familiar things that Jesus has said about forgiveness, right?

He has heard that Jesus has said, this is how you should pray. Father, forgive our debts as we forgive those who sin against us.

As the layers of Peter's question are peeled back, we begin to see that what's happening in Peter's heart is not just inquiry.

He's not just interested in something. He's making a statement. He's coming to grips with how do I actually feel about things when stuff is hard in my life?

[14:46] What am I called to do when it's very uncomfortable for me to keep going on and extending grace when it feels like justice needs to be applied?

See, it might be, we don't know this, but it could be that Peter has somebody in mind. You might even be thinking of someone in mind that their ways of sinning against you are particularly hard for you.

There's often a repetitious cycle that happens when we're with people closely. they sin against us and maybe they ask for forgiveness and then we grant it.

But when it happens again and again and again, then we start to question what other things need to happen to make this situation change.

The same sort of results from me are getting these same responses and that doesn't seem right. But beyond Peter's question, beyond just the impatience, what Peter's actually doing here is he is showing us what Jesus is showing us, that he's actually struggling to put his faith and his trust in Jesus himself.

[16:06] Peter is no mathematician. He's not interested in numbers. He is actually troubled with this idea that he may be called to endure significant pain so that others can receive the offer of forgiveness.

He might be thinking, how many times are you asking me to do this? Do you want me to trust you that enduring offenses is what brings about the unfolding of your plan?

Are we called to give an indefinite free pass on people who don't even understand the pain that they have brought into our life? You see, Peter's question is not innocent.

Neither are our questions that we ask innocent at times like this. Now, with all of these parables and all of God's Word, 2 Timothy 3 reminds us that all of Scripture is for the correction of our hearts.

The piercing and the dividing of our souls, our inward desires. That's what this parable in all of God's Word is meant to do. So this parable, this story, is not only about Peter.

[17:21] This is a reality that exists in your heart and in my heart.

There are many questions that my heart asks when I've got five kids and a big family.

We stand against each other all the time as I'm sure you do and these questions come up regularly. Will this person ever understand?

Will he change course? Will things look different if I perhaps respond with the silent treatment or maybe just a mini episode of my anger?

Will he figure out how much inconvenience this is bringing into my life? See, all of these questions that we ask remind us that we have a resistance to the Lordship of Christ.

So Jesus responds to Peter in verse 22 and he paves the way for the course correction for Peter and for us and the disciples and Jesus says to him, I do not say to you seven times but 77 times.

[18:32] Now clearly Jesus is not ascribing a numeric limit to the amount of times that we're to have a heart of forgiveness. He's not saying in any measure Peter, make your threshold larger and then all will be well.

No, he's doing the exact opposite. The number 77 is intended to communicate that counting is completely out of the question.

Counting of sins implies that there is a limit on the sacrifice that Jesus was preparing himself to endure. Jesus has completely done away with all types of counting as it relates to our sins.

2 Corinthians 5 and verse 19 says, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself not counting their trespasses against him.

We sang a song that said the same thing. What a beautiful song. His mercy is more. God doesn't count the sins we commit against his infinite worth and glory when we put our faith in Christ.

[19:47] How ought I to resist counting the sins of others when it just brings some inconvenience to my life? So the parable continues to show us the reason that the heart resists forgiving.

That's our second point. Forgiveness resisted. Excuse me. So resistance to forgiving others occurs because we have resisted the master's forgiveness offered to us.

Let's look at verse 23. Therefore, the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. When he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents.

and since he could not pay, his master ordered him to be sold with his wife and his children and all that he had in payment was to be made.

Since he could not pay, his master ordered him to be sold with his wife and children and all that he had in payment to be made. See, the resistance of the servant to forgive others is correlated with how he views his debts to his master.

[21:11] You may have heard before of this ten thousand talent number. This number represents not just a day's wages, and it's not a year's wages, but it's actually the wages of a servant, which is who this man was, and it would have cost 20 years of his life without interest to pay back his master.

To help even illustrate this, number further, if you remember King David, he donated 7,000 talents, or he gave 7,000 talents of silver, and 3,000 talents of gold, totaling 10,000 talents for the construction of the temple.

And this servant has racked up that amount of debt against his master. This is a quantity of debt that is a picture for us to show just how desperate a position this servant was in.

He could not dig himself out of this debt if he had 10 years, or 100 years, or 10,000 years. And the same is true for every one of us, every one of us who miscalculates the debt that we are under without Christ to God for all the ways that, as an image bearer of God, we have failed to honor him and to glorify him, to steward what he has given to us, all the worth that he is so entitled to.

We are those who should be cautious about how we view the debt that we were under towards the Lord. Now look at verse 26.

[22:57] Notice the absurdity of what this servant says next. So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.

So it's the one who failed every account of his stewarding responsibility. Everything that he mismanaged and he failed to use appropriately, he promises to bring back the lost value to restore everything that he was wasted.

He's like the child who takes his dad's prized childhood possession and he breaks it and then what does he do? He looks for the things in his room, the Elmer's glue, the Plato and promises to put things back together.

It is utterly impossible to repay the Lord. Incorrectly assessing our debt and our ability to pay it back is an eternally horrific mistake to make.

Only mercy can be applied to in relationship to what belongs to God and the debt that we are under. So the error and miscalculating debt always leads to a mishandling of how we treat the debts of others, especially those who sin against us.

[24:19] Verse 28 says, when the 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.

So his servant fell down and pleaded with him, have patience with me and I will pay you. He refused and went and put him in prison until he should pay the debt.

Now this is incredibly instructive for us. When my heart is aware of all the grace that God has given me, when my heart is postured appropriately to remember that I've been adopted as a son of the King of Kings, when I remember the path that I was on and the one that the Lord has now set me on, then it's much easier to be able to forgive somebody.

But so often when I am sinned against, I would imagine the same is true for every one of us in this room. I feel the urge for a very quick course correction for the one that has inconvenienced me, so I can become angry quickly, grumbling and complaining, restricting forgiveness until a certain set of deeds are done that appease me.

And what we do every time we do this is we paint a picture, and this is a picture for the people who need grace the most, the people that need to be restored in their hearts to the Lord who sent his son for them.

[25:56] And the picture is the same picture, it's pay what you owe. How can I tell others to pay what they owe when I have paid nothing for the cost of redeeming my own soul?

And we require nobody to pay what only Christ's blood was sufficient to pay for. See, the parable makes it very clear that there are eternal consequences and dangers for maintaining a heart that lacks forgiveness.

We could spend a good amount of time, but just a couple passages for our attention. Matthew chapter 6 says, verse 12 says, forgive us our sins as we forgive our debtors.

Notice the logical connection between forgiving and being forgiven. Two verses later, verse 14, for if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly father will also forgive you.

But if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your father forgive your trespasses.

And back to our text, the response of the master is striking.

[27:14] Verse 34 says, and in anger his master delivered him to the jailers until he should pay his debt. The word jailer here is also translated in other Greek literature of that time as a torturer.

This is not a picture of a jail with modern conveniences. This is a place where this man will be delivered for justice to be appropriately applied.

So Matthew 18:35 says, my heavenly father will also do to every one of you if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.

And notice how severe these warnings are without the external evidence of forgiveness applied to others, one is called to question the legitimacy of our gospel profession and allegiance.

The practice of forgiveness then is a meter which all proclaiming Christians are called to give appropriate attention to. And while no actions, no amount of forgiveness that we ever extend to others could position us rightly before the Lord, nonetheless, the Lord makes it clear.

[28:34] If there is a lack of forgiveness in our heart, then we may be in danger. Many who have false professions of faith will need to look at their ongoing struggle to forgive others to find themselves as the subjects of these grave and dire warnings.

So our last point this morning is exposing unforgiveness within. sin. We cannot read such a sobering parable without self-reflection, right?

Without doing the sort of self-examination that Jesus is calling us to. Perhaps you're not characterized by regular lack of forgiveness.

Maybe it just comes up from time to time. Or maybe this morning you're in the camp and you are thinking yourself to be somebody who regularly struggles with objecting to acts of forgiveness.

Well, what are we to do in light of this parable? How are we to examine our hearts? How are we to see which ways this parable is meant to be understood and assessed and repented of if necessary?

[29:50] I'm going to give you two things to look for within the parable. The first one question is this. It's a question. Are there observable changes in you and me in the way that we respond to the sin of others in light of what Jesus has done for us in the gospel?

This is really the great thrust of our text. The great cost that the master absorbed is intended to produce change, real change, in the heart of the servant.

And yet no change can be observed. Tragically, this reveals the depravity of our hearts. This is the basis on which the master calls out the servant by saying, you wicked servant.

See, the effectual love of Christ is always intended to produce change by those who were once indebted to the king of kings.

For this reason, we are to humbly assess our relationships with others. This is a hard thing to do, but what may be warranted from this text is to think about the people that maybe sin against you the most.

[31:09] It could be your brother or your sister kids. It could be your parents. It could be your roommates, your spouse, your employer.

anger. There are so many categories. What we are called to do is to go to them and to ask them, hey, when you have sinned against me, as you think about my response, do you see within me a hope and a desire for you to be restored, to be in right relationship, to experience the grace of

Jesus and him alone?

Or are you receiving from me anger for me and expectation that I be pleased, that my respect be honored? See, it's a very humbling thing for us to do, but often the people that we are with, that those people ought to feel Christ and his work within us when we respond to their sin.

Ephesians chapter 4 verse 32 says, be kind to one another. tenderhearted and forgiving one another just as God in Christ forgave you.

The second thing that we can do and look for in this parable is another very important question and I saw this for the first time studying this week.

[32:36] Here's the question, does God's forgiving of my sin result in an increasing joy in him? Now, part of the devastation of the unmerciful servant is that the master's treatment towards him should have resulted in great enthused joy in the master himself.

But you notice that the servant only views what happened to him as a transaction. As soon as it happens, he moves on and he's off and running and nothing has changed.

changed. There's a striking similarity if you think of the picture that's given in the book of Luke of the ten lepers, right, who are healed by Jesus. What happens to those lepers?

Well, nine of them, nine go away and only one comes back. That one was so affected deeply within his heart that he came back praising God and with a loud voice he fell on his face at Jesus' feet giving him thanks.

Have you found yourself responding to God's love with a similar type of thankfulness? If you're struggling to forgive others, could it be that this type of thankfulness is lacking within your heart?

[34:03] Could it be that you have separated what Jesus has offered from Jesus himself and only taken what he offers and viewed it in transactional forms but forgot that Jesus intends to call you to himself to be enjoyed?

John Piper has a very helpful book that discusses this theme. Perhaps you've read it. It's called God is the Gospel. Let me just read a quick excerpt. It says there are ten thousand gifts that flames the news that he has purchased by his death ten thousand blessings for his bride.

But none of these gifts will lead to final joy if they have not first led to God. And not one Gospel blessing will be enjoyed by anyone for whom the Gospel's greatest gift is not the Lord himself. see we are forgiven so that we may enjoy the Lord. First Peter 3 says for Christ also suffered once for sin the righteous for the unrighteous so that he might bring us to his father to God.

What an amazing gift that we can come not being fearfully reminded of our debts but we can be welcomed because Jesus has expensed the payment of our sin when he died on the cross.

[35:42] Lastly as we move towards our conclusion and consider the application that this text calls for there are several categories of people that the Lord brought to mind this week and I'm hopeful that it may help to serve these people in particular because forgiveness often finds itself into very difficult situations.

Sometimes the type of sin that we are called to endure is so serious that you feel the impact of it for years or even decades after it has occurred.

You can't always easily forget it or dismiss this sin that happened to you from your mind and you wonder what does forgiveness look like in this type of situation?

What am I to do? How can I be faithful to honor the Lord? The second category is people that maybe have wronged you and they have no understanding of the forgiveness that they need. Maybe they're denying that they actually hurt you in the first place. Maybe they have no idea. Maybe they're unbelievers and forgiveness is not in their vocabulary what do we do?

[36:59] Well, as one of your pastors, I first want to encourage you that we know and we recognize just how hard it is in these situations to forgive others.

We know it can be tremendously difficult to love and to find appropriate boundaries for what relationship looks like after great sin has happened.

So just a few clarifying remarks that I hope are helpful. Forgiveness is not a restoration of trust. Forgiveness doesn't always mean that trust is rightfully restored just because you have forgiven somebody. Trust within relationships is based upon standards which allow for a relationship to

flourish.

And as Christians, the best relational harmony that happens is when we're walking in obedience and faithfulness before the Lord.

[37:59] See, many have lost this trust within relationships because they have either drifted from the Lord or they never were disciples after all. And while we long for these relationships to have this really deep and meaningful trust, oftentimes it is absent and we should not be assuming that we are called to act as if it's there.

That's a hard thing to think about, but it is not good for us to trust people that are not able to be trusted and the Lord doesn't call us to that.

The second is forgiveness is not pretending that consequences don't exist and that things should always go back to the way that they used to be after somebody has been forgiven.

Now, very similar to our previous point, but let's be clear here, consequences for sin are sometimes very necessary. They're helpful, they're wise to apply with discernment to your situation.

This may mean that it's good to place restrictions on relationships so that sinful patterns and tendencies are not allowed to continue.

[39:16] You can have a heart of forgiveness and still honor Christ by changing some of the relational boundaries that should be there as you move forward.

And thirdly, a specific word for those who are in situations where forgiveness is not sought by the person who has sinned. These are so hard.

We can often get very confused and think that we can't fulfill what Jesus is calling us to because it feels like it's a two-party act when forgiveness is there.

Somebody asks for forgiveness and then I give it. That's not actually quite the case. In some situations, we can try to show someone how they've sinned against the Lord, but we cannot control how they respond.

and we're helped in this way by looking at Jesus and what he did in the book of Luke chapter 23.

This is what he says to those who were clearly not seeking the forgiveness of him.

[40:25] In fact, they were furthering their sinful rebellion and that is when Jesus said these words. Jesus said, Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.

So we can view the punishment of Christ is completely sufficient for them. We can trust that the Lord alone is able to make the gospel effective in the heart of the one who has sinned against us. It could be that the Lord uses your picture that you paint, your picture of forgiveness and long suffering, your loving response that is patient not three times or four times but indefinitely to show a window into the loving and gracious forgiveness that the Lord offers to all who would put their faith in him.

See, what forgiveness is, is forgiveness is a desire within our hearts to see the ultimate good of people who have sinned against us, to see that their sins are not a reason to justify the way that we respond, but their sin are a reason why they need Jesus all the more.

And it's a hard thing to do, but we believe, just like the opening illustration, that the death of Christ is completely sufficient for the small sins and for the large sins that the Lord may call us to endure.

[42:03] Now, very last encouragement before we close, if you are struggling to forgive the sins of others, if you have a hard time knowing how to apply and feel yourself regularly giving way to anger, maybe there was a life-changing event that happened to you many, many years ago, and this is weighing on your heart, or maybe you just struggle with your children or a close friend how to forgive them in practice, let me give you this encouragement.

I would encourage you to take a look this week at Psalm chapter 32, and when you read through this, you can pray thinking about the person that may be sinning against you regularly, the one that's hard to forgive, and as you pray and posture your heart, remembering what God has done for you, the Lord by His Spirit, can allow your heart to change, and to remember that Christ and His death is completely sufficient.

So you can just listen to a couple verses. Verse 1 and 2 of Psalm 32, Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.
Blessed is the man against whom the Lord counts no iniquity, and whose spirit there is no deceit.
Verse 5, I acknowledge my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity.
I said I will confess my transgression to the Lord, and you forgave the iniquity of my heart. Verse 10,
Many are the sorrows of the wicked, but steadfast love surrounds the one who trusts in the Lord.
[44:00] So be glad in the Lord, and rejoice, O righteous, and shout for joy, all you upright in heart.
Please join me in prayer.