

Forgive Us for Not Forgiving Others

Matthew 18:21-35

(preached Pine Grove 10/28/18; Sunday PM)

Introduction

A woman bought a parrot on Craigslist.

After getting the parrot home, she soon discovered why the previous owners sold it.

All day long, the parrot did not but hurl insults at her...

You're ugly.....you smell....this house is dirty...

And every time, she walked past it, the parrot would reach out and painfully peck her on the arm..

Well, the woman explained that she a Christian and that she forgave the bird for being so unkind.

Sadly, that didn't stop the parrot's insults...

Day after day the insults continued and day after day, the lady forgave the bird.

However, one day after a particularly bad day at work, the lady had enough of the insults..

She grabbed the parrot and told him that he wasn't going to take advantage of her forgiveness any more..

She walked straight to the freezer, put him in there and closed the door.

The parrot continued the insults for a moment but then go strangely silent...

The woman rushed to the door thinking the dead may have died..

When she took him out the parrot was so kind...

He told her..

“Thank you for all your forgiveness..”

I am sorry for taking advantage of it all this time.

I will do better.

Surprised, the lady gladly accepted his apology.

The parrot then said to her, “Can I ask you a question about the freezer?”

The lady replied, “Sure, what would you like to know?”

“Why didn't you forgive the chicken in there?”

One of the strange ironies of the Christian life is that Christians often feel justified in withholding forgiveness to some people...

I have talked to Christians who excused their refusal to forgive others with the following statement...

Quote... "Well, you don't know what he or she did to me?"...End quote...

To which I often reply..

"Oh I know exactly what they did to you. It is the same sin that you have done to God multiple times in your own life, and aren't you glad that God doesn't act like you are acting now?"

This is the irony of the practice of forgiveness in the Christian life..

People who have been forgiven much often forgive very little.

People who have been forgiven an enormous pile of sins often won't forgive one single sin of another...

Well church, it shouldn't be this way.

As believers, we are trophies of God's forgiveness in the world...

We are the people who serve an examples of God's forgiveness to the world..

But when we lack forgiveness in our own lives, we do much harm to the gospel.

We do much harm to the message of forgiveness which we preach to the world..

So I was excited when Charles asked me to take part in this series of messages on forgiveness...

You see, forgiveness is a bedrock principle of Christianity..

If the foundation of our country is freedom, the foundation of Christianity is forgiveness...

Listen to what John Macarthur says about the practice of forgiveness in the life of a believer...

“never are you more like God than when you forgive....never. Never are you less like God than when you will not forgive. And that comes straight from Jesus who said, “Forgive your enemies and demonstrate that you are children of your Father.” Never are you more like God than when you forgive.”

You may have heard that already quoted in this series since there are a number of MacArthur fans in this group of preachers...

But that is powerful statement from one of the greatest preachers of all time...

Never are you more like God than when you forgive...

You know, the church had a language of its own, and one of the words and phrases that we throw around is the phrase, "growing in Christlikeness."

Let me tell you something.

You most look like Christ when you forgive...

Forgiveness is in our DNA as believers..

In your former life, in your old self, you were not a forgiving person...

You held grudges.

You sought revenge.

You wanted folks who wronged you to suffer..

Yet, the new birth has changed your DNA.

You are now wired to forgive, to overlook, to extend love even to those who hurt you.

In other words, forgiveness is not optional for the born again believer..

Listen to 17:3-4..

3 Pay attention to yourselves! If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him, 4 and if he sins against you seven times in the day, and turns to you seven times, saying, 'I repent,' you must forgive him."

So to reiterate, to do a conference on forgiveness is not like a marriage conference or parenting conference is that some may be interested and others not so interested..

To do a conference on forgiveness is to do a conference now what it means to be saved because forgiveness is not optional in the Christian life..

So I am excited to be here, and my assignment is to take you through what is often called the parable of the unforgiving servant in Matthew 18:21-35...

As you find your way there, it is interesting to note that this is not the only parable that teaches the concept of forgiveness...

The parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15 certainly highlights the forgiveness of the father to a son..

And there are other parables with the theme of forgiveness woven into them...

However, the parable in Matthew 18 is probably the most shocking because it lays out the penalty for unforgiveness straight from the mouth of Christ..

It is also memorable due to the fact that it is so unbelievable in parts of it...

Yet, I would submit to you that this parable is unique in that it goes straight to the heart of every Christian who reads it..

One commentator says this, "every Christian of every era can see himself as the slave of this parable."

So, let's get into this parable tonight..

I am not going to read it all together..

I imagine most of you are familiar with it, and even if you aren't, the story is quite easily to follow and even quite easy to comprehend...

I will make a few applications as we move through it, and then we will end with a little summary to help us apply this parable to our lives in 2018...

We will simply begin in verse 21 with what we can call...

I. A Question of Calculation (21)

Let's read verse 21...

21 Then Peter came and said to Him, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?"

As a church who is lead by a faithful and diligent shepherd, you understand that the context of any passage is key..

Well, I don't have the luxury of working out way from Matthew 1 to Matthew 18, but we do need to consider the immediate context...

Well, Matthew 18 is instruction to the disciples..

The chapter began with a selfish question by the disciple about who is greatest in the kingdom of God...

Sadly, pride is a constant temptation in the lives of these men around Jesus..

They know He is the King.

They know that He is the Messiah..

And sadly, they are constantly trying to jockey for position in his cabinet..

We can sympathize in a way..

Look, they are the only ones really believing in Him...

Most of the crowds around Jesus are shallow and only looking at how they can benefit from Him...

So, it is natural for the disciples to sinfully feel a little sense of superiority...

But Jesus tells them in response to their question...

The greatest in the kingdom is always the most humble..

And he grabs a child in the beginning of chapter 18 and sits that child on his lap and begins to teach the disciples...

The first lesson is to be careful not to lead children into sin..

Verse 6 is the shocking warning of it being better to tie a millstone on your neck and jump into the ocean than to lead a little child astray..

That leads to verses 7-14 which speak of the value of children to God..

Then in verse 15, Jesus begins to speak about church discipline...

And the need to confront people in their sin and call them to repentance

And the reason for this teaching here is again the protection of children..

In other words, you don't want to harm the children in the church by having a church full of people living in sin..

The church is to be an example of holiness to the next generation, not an example of sin...

So keep the church pure and deal with sin..

And look, the goal of church discipline is not removal..

Yes, Jesus is clear that you may have to remove people if they refuse to sin...

That is necessary at times to protect the body and the impressionable lives of little ones..

However, the goal is not removal for restoration and forgiveness..

But this idea of discipline and restoration gets Peter to thinking...

And the man with the foot-shaped mouth offers a question to Jesus in verse 21..

Ok, Jesus I understand this need to protect the church and the children...

But how long should we continue this process of forgiveness?

In other words, let's say a man is a thief and he steals money from me...

I confront him according to what you say in verse 15 and he admits and repents and I forgive him..

But let's say he does it again in a week..

And I confront and he repents and I forgive...

How long should I continue this cycle of sin, confrontation, repentance and forgiveness?

Now, a quite note that is quite helpful in this verse is to consider Peter's view of forgiveness...

The first note to make is something that may shock you..

But the first note is that the OT doesn't give explicit teaching on personal forgiveness..

Not that is not to say that personal one on one forgiveness is not in the OT..

It is..

Esau forgave Jacob for stealing his birthright..

Joseph forgave his brothers for selling him into slavery..

David forgave Saul for trying to kill him on multiple occasions..

Yet, despite those examples, there were few verses that commanded personal forgiveness...

That doesn't mean that God didn't want His people to forgive one another...

HE did.

IT simply means that Jewish teaching prior to the time of Christ did not stress the need for personal forgiveness...

In fact, many leading rabbis of Jesus' day said that forgiveness was optional..

And even if a Jew extended personal forgiveness to others, it was limited to 3 times, which was based on Amos 1 and 2 where God would forgive a nation 3 times but not beyond..

Needless to say, personal forgiveness was not part of Peter's Sunday School class as a kid...

If anything, Peter and the rest of the disciples grew up where extending forgiveness was not the highest form of godliness..

In fact, some rabbis saw forgiveness as weakness..

Well, all that changed in the life of Peter after he met Christ..

The sermon on the mount that Peter had heard Jesus preach talked about loving your enemies, about turning the other cheek, praying for those who persecute you..

Then to follow up that sermon, Jesus modeled prayer for the disciples, and in that prayer, Peter heard these famous words..

“Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.”

Now that was revolutionary in Peter's life..

Sure, Peter knew about God's forgiveness of his sins, but now he sees the need to forgive others sins..

And to Peter's credit, he got it..

He saw, he understood, he appreciated the teachings of Christ...

And I think that is the reason, he asks this question to Jesus here..

HE is wanting to be the teacher's pet..

Ok, Jesus.

I understand the need to forgive others..

I know that the rabbis said we are limited to 3 times of forgiveness, but I am sure that you would at least double that number...

So, how about we forgive others 7 times?

Aren't you proud of me?

Came up with that all by myself?

If someone sins against me, I will forgive 7 times now that you are here teaching about forgiveness..

What do you think about that proposition?

Well, let's find out...

Verse 22 become the necessary correction to the pitiful proposition...

II. A Word of Correction (22)

22 Jesus *said to him, “I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.

Depending upon your translation, you may see 70 times
7 or 77 times...

Either one has merit, but the meaning isn't changed..

Jesus is simply telling Peter that personal forgiveness has
no limits..

Even if you see this as 77 times or 490 times, the point is
that both numbers are too large for you to keep tally
marks every time you forgive them..

Can you imagine the conversations in the church if we
took this literally?

“Wait a minute sister, I can hold a grudge against you
since you I have now forgiven you 82 times since
1984...”

Jesus is not telling you to have a notebook by your bed
that keeps track of when you offer forgiveness..

Jesus is telling that there is no scoreboard in terms of
how often you should forgive someone..

But this is our fallen human nature...

WE want to keep score..

Al Mohler said this..

“We too often forget the things we should remember, but we also too often remember the things we should forget.”

Look church, don't keep track of how many times you forgive others because none of you want God to set a limit on how many times He will forgive you.

So, Jesus doesn't set a limit on forgiveness...

Forgiveness in the kingdom isn't like a sale on Duke's mayonnaise at the grocery store

There is no limit on how many or how often you extend it to others..

Now, this correction of Peter's thinking leads to a parable of instruction in verses 23-35...

III. A Parable of Instruction (23-34)

We could spend a lot time here in this parable...

Jesus is a master at telling earthly stories that teach the glories of heaven, but we don't have time to over turn each verse...

So, we will simply let the parable unfold for us one verse at a time and make a couple observations as we go..

Again, it is probably very familiar to you as we get into it..

Verse 23..

23 “For this reason the kingdom of heaven [v]may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves.

Like most parables, this is companion parable...

On one side of the parable is the kingdom of man and on the other side is the kingdom of God..

This comparison works for a number of reasons, not the least of which is the fact that both kingdoms have kings..

The kingdoms of earth have an earthly king and the kingdom of heaven has God as the King..

Now the first note we need to make here is this...

Both earthly kings and the king of heaven settle accounts of those in their respective kingdoms..

Every paycheck, the king of earth takes some of his share...

And in April of each year, your account is made right with him..

God on the other hand is also a King who will settle accounts with his people as well..

Everyone will give God what is due to Him..

He is not a God who simply forgiving to all..

Everyone will give an account to God..

Important truth that is being overlooked in too many pulpits today...

It is not old fashioned preaching to talk about a coming judgment of God..

It is biblical preaching..

Jesus preached it, Paul preached it, and every faithful man of God should preach it today...

God will call to account every person He ever made, so don't be unprepared..

Verse 24..

24 When he had begun to settle them, one who owed him [w]ten thousand talents was brought to him.

In our parable, this earthly king has slaves that work for him...

He gives them money to use to make him more money...

Well, the day of settling up has arrived, but the slave of verse 24 wasn't happy to see it come...

And the reason is clear, he owes a tremendous debt to the king..

We don't know if he squandered his initial allotment from the king..

Maybe he had stolen from the king..

Whatever the reason from his fiscal irresponsibility, he now owes the king 10,000 talents...

I don't want to spend too much time on mini details and no two commentators seem to agree on the amount, but let me give you a quick explanation of this in today's economy..

A denarius is this economy was a day's wage..

Let say you work 8 hrs a day for \$12.50 an hour in 2018.

You gross \$100 a day.

Well, a one talent is equal is 6,000 denarii..

That means that 1 talent is \$600,000.

So 10,000 talents is \$6 billion dollars in today's economy.

So this slave owes the king \$6 billion dollars..

Now consider this..

The entire amount economy of Israel in Jesus' day was around 200 talents..

The meaning of this verse is actually hilarious..

This is a ridiculous debt , and that is exactly what Jesus wants the disciples to see...

He is giving us a shocking number to shock us even further in the next part of the story...

Verse 25..

25 But since he [x]did not have the means to repay

This goes without saying..

The slave literally had no hope of repayment...

Let's continue reading..

25 But since he [x]did not have the means to repay, his lord commanded him to be sold, along with his wife and children and all that he had, and repayment to be made.

Though the selling of this man's family won't come close to settling this enormous debt, it will offer the king some justice..

So this is the plan...

Veres 26..

26 So the slave fell to the ground and prostrated himself before him, saying, 'Have patience with me and I will repay you everything.'

If the amount he owed wasn't enough to make you laugh, his words here will definitely make you chuckle as the slave promises to pay the debt completely off..

There is no way that he could ever pay the debt in full, so what he does here is essentially beg for mercy..

Now, if the disciples weren't shocked up to this point, verse 27 knock them off their feet..

27 And the lord of that slave felt compassion and released him and forgave him the [y]debt.

This is unmatched grace.

This is ridiculous mercy..

This is indescribable generosity on the part of the king.

Forgive a \$6 billion dollar debt...

Let's be honest, kings don't stay kings long who forgive debts of this magnitude..

You can't do this or your kingdom will crumble..

Yet, that is how Jesus tells the parable, and up to this point, the lesson is crystal clear..

God is the king..

The slave is the sinner who has built up an incredible amount of sin debt in his life..

An amount that he could never work off even if he was given an eternity to do it..

Yet, when he comes to God asking for patience and falling on his mercy, he doesn't get just patience, he gets full forgiveness...

This is what we could call scandalous grace..

The world sees this as unfair..

The world is outraged at such generosity...

The world wants justice, yet God gives mercy..

This is the gospel we love..

This is the gospel we preach.

You can live your life a serial sinner, but when you come to God asking for mercy, he not only extends mercy, he grants full forgiveness of all your sin...

The lesson was clear, and I am sure the disciples were "Amening" in their hearts...

Peter was sitting there thinking, “man, that is a great parable. You are right Jesus.”

And look, we rejoice in this truth...

I hope you are also “Amening” in your heart tonight...

And look if you are here with a dump truck full of sin tonight, come to Christ ask for mercy and you will get forgiveness..

It is glorious and it is true...

However, the parable isn't over...

My grandpa told me about a tent revival when he was a kid where the preacher asked everyone to remove their shoes..

Thinking that there was going to be a foot washing, everyone took their shoes off..

Then the preacher said, “stretch those toes out because I am about to step all over them.”

Well, I will say this..

Jesus has got the disciples shoes off here and they are feeling pretty good about having their sins forgiven, but now Jesus is able to step all over their toes..

Let's move to verse 28..

28 But that slave went out and found one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred [z]denarii; and he seized him and began to choke him, saying, 'Pay back what you owe.'

As pleasant as the parable was in verse 27, it is equally unpleasant here..

This slave that was just forgiven an unpayable debt now leaves the presence of the king and heads out to find a friend who owes him some money..

Now the amount is key...

100 denarii..

Now that isn't a small amount..

It would equal 10,000 in today's economy but the fact is that it is not unreasonable in terms of repayment...

I don't want to owe anyone 10,000 but I could repay it if given enough time..

If you buy a car, you repay amounts larger than that in 3-4 years..

However, this forgiven slave demands payment in full immediately...

He even seizes and chokes his friend...

Strangely, this slave who owes now makes the same request we saw in verse 26..

Look at verse 29...

29 So his fellow slave fell to the ground and began to plead with him, saying, 'Have patience with me and I will repay you.'

How ironic is that..

The slave hears the same plea for mercy that had earlier left his own lips...

Sadly, he was not as generous as the king that forgive him..

Veres 30...

30 But he was unwilling [aa]and went and threw him in prison until he should pay back what was owed.

The king gave mercy to this slave but this slave offered punishment to his friend..

The king was willing to forgive but the slave was unwilling..

Now look, this upsets the disciples and it upsets us...

But it even upsets some other people in the parable...

Verse 31..

31 So when his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were deeply grieved and came and reported to their lord all that had happened.

I don't want to put words in your mouth or emotions in your heart, but we all feel this rising anger in us over the actions of this slave..

We sit here tonight 2000 years beyond the telling of this parable and we see the inconsistency in the actions of this slave and we are angered by it..

And let me say this...

The moment that you let your blood pressure rise...

The moment that you roll your eyes..

The moment you kinda blow your breath..

The moment that you grumble in your heart about how in the world could anybody who has just been forgiven so much be unwilling to forgive so little....

The moment that you do any of those things, you incriminate yourself...

Because everyone of us who claim to know Christ have done the exact same thing..

Despite having our sins completely and fully and eternally wiped out by Jesus, we hold onto the sins that others commit against us...

David committed adultery with another man's wife..

So God sent Nathan to David with a story about a man who had one sheep, yet a man with many sheep took his own sheep to feed a traveller through town..

When he heard the story, David was outraged and called for that man's life...

But the Nathan told David, "You are that man. You took a man's wife even though you had many wives."

And I will tell you church, we are this slave..

God forgives our sins but we hold on to the sins of others against us..

Sadly, this slave is us.

This parable is about me and you.

These are our toes that Jesus is stepping on tonight in calling us to stop counting how many times we need to forgive someone..

These are our toes that Jesus is stepping on tonight as he calls us to be like the king who forgives instead of being like the slave who seizes and chokes and tosses people into prison to never escape..

Let me tell you something tonight...

If you have someone in your prison of unforgiveness tonight, see them free as God in Christ has set you free..

Don't be angry at this slave until you have repented of behaving just like him...

And if you dont repent of your unforgiveness, the parable gets much worse...

Verse 32...

32 Then summoning him, his lord *said to him, 'You wicked slave, I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. 33 Should you not also have had

mercy on your fellow slave, in the same way that I had mercy on you?’ 34 And his lord, moved with anger, handed him over to the torturers until he should repay all that was owed him.

As pleasant as the ending of the parable of the parodical is as he returns home to be forgiven by his father, the ending of this parable is equally disturbing...

This slave finds no mercy..

This slaves now finds trouble...

Now let me make a note here that is important lest you misunderstand what we see here..

This isn't a threat of someone losing their salvation..

The point is not that God will freely forgive and then undo that forgiveness...

This isn't evidence of salvation that can be lost..

The slave was not sent to outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth...

The slave is handed over to torturers, not executioners...

And to me the point is clear...

God will chasten and discipline believers who refuse to forgive others..

He won't remove their salvation because His calling and election are sure, but he will discipline believers...

And if you tonight as a believer who refuses to forgive others, you are feeling the torturers of God...

And they will torture and discipline you until you repent...

No, you won't go to hell at death..

God never loses any of his children, but you may never enjoy a good night's sleep until you repent..

And you may see other consequences of your refusal to obey the Lord..

So be warned...

And then there is one final thing to see here in this passage that I think is quite helpful to us...

We have seen a question of calculation, a word of correction, a parable of instruction, and let's with..

IV. A Test of Salvation (35)

In verse 35, Jesus end this parable with one of the most stinging summaries of any of his parables..

Verse 35..

35 My heavenly Father will also do the same to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from [ab]your heart."

Jesus compares the king who threw his slave into prison to God here, and the interpretation is debatable...

Again, is this a picture of a believer being disciplined by the Lord until he offers forgiveness?

I personally believe that is what we see here..

But I want to also add this...

Is it possible for people to profess to be a believer and not be truly saved?

Absolutely!

The Bible contains folks like this from cover to cover..

False prophets, false teachers, false shepherds, false believers..

Remember, Judas is listening to this parable along with Peter, so we know that the world is filled with false believers..

Sad to say but there are likely some of those kinds of people her tonight...

I am not trying to insult but the south is filled with the kinds of folks who love morality but failed to love the Messiah...

And I think verse 35 is great reminder that forgiveness is a test of true salvation...

If you are truly saved, you are a truly forgiving person..

WE don't forgive people to earn salvation, but saved people forgive others...

Its you examine the tree of salvation in a person's life, forgiveness is definitely a fruit on that tree...

If you aren't a forgiving person, you probably haven't been forgiven yourself..

That is not a warning from the preacher, that is warning from Christ in verse 35..

Conclusion

What an incredible parable..

Shocking in some parts...

Glorious in other parts...

And yet convicting in the most important part...

Jesus is the master parable teller, and we as his people who'll be the master parable learners...

Let me end with 3 reasons why believers should be known for our forgiveness of others...

#1 - Forgive others because you are forgiven.

Look half of this parable is a reminder of the debt that Christians have been forgiven..

And the reason that Jesus uses half of the story to talk about the unimaginable debt that you have been forgiven is to set that as motivation for your forgiveness of others..

I am sure you have heard this preached already in this series of messages but it is truth that we must always put at the forefront of our mind..

God forgives us, and his design is for His forgiveness of you to flow through your life into the lives of others..

So don't be a clog in the flow of forgiveness in the world..

As you have been forgiven innumerable sins, you need to forgive innumerable sins against you..

#2 - Forgive others because you need forgiveness from others.

Peter's question in verse 21 is a selfish question in a couple ways..

But it clearly selfish in that he assumes that he will always be the victim of other's sins..

Notice, he is concerned with people sinning against him..

Yet, in the question he forgets and ignores the fact that he is a sinner also..

Peter is going to sin against Christ 3 times on the night of his betrayal, yet Jesus is going to forgive him 3 times and even more..

Look, we are the offender as often as we are the victim in terms of personal sin...

One of my favorite professors at college told us this...

You walk in a church and you show grace to everyone there..

They have their faults..

They won't do things like you want them done and you may be exactly right..

But you bite your tongue and you show grace and forgiveness, and the reason is simple...

You are going to need just as much grace and forgiveness as you give..

This leads to the third and final reason..

#3 - Forgive others to further the gospel.

Look, the church survives because true believers are forgiving people..

Look, Christians still sin and often are sins are against others in the church..

The body of Christ is not perfect, so we must be quick to forgive quickly and frequently and fully..

And when we do, our example to the world is noticed..

It's only when we refuse to forgive others that our testimony is questioned..

Let me tell you something..

In 2018, no one in the world practices Christian forgiveness from the heart but true believers..

The world is filled with grudges..

The world is filled with people who have an ax to grind with others..

There world is filled with people who hold on to offenses against them forever..

Look at the political landscape today..

Bitter people..

Angry people..

Grudges..

Gripes..

Church, we cannot copy the world and hope to win them to Christ...

May God help us forgive others in the same way that He has forgiven us...

And may the gospel be proclaimed not by people who fuss and fight but by people who forgive and forgive without limitation...

Let us pray.