

## Sunday, August 8, 2021 | Summer Baggage

Week 1 | Matthew 18:21-35 | The Forgiveness of the Forgiven

Announcements:

- Join us tonight for a communion service and business meeting @ 6PM.

Summer Baggage is a three-week series that uncovers some of the heaviest weights we tend to carry around with us. These burdens can make life more challenging than it needs to be and often leads to more difficulties. In this study, we'll learn that if we leave our emotions to fester, it is only a matter of time before our luggage bursts open, leaving a mess in its wake.

The irony, of course, is that the Christian is supposed to be filled with the kind of peace that "passes all understanding" (Phil. 4:7). Followers of God ought to be regularly unpacking their thoughts and feelings before God. After all, it is the Lord Himself who invites us to release all our burdens and trust Him to restore our brokenness and help us experience the freedom He offers. With any luck, Summer Baggage will help the believer unpack their emotions in a healthy and productive way.

And the first suitcase we need to unpack is the baggage of bitterness.

**READ: Matthew 18:21-35(ESV)**

<sup>21</sup> 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?" <sup>22</sup> Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times.

<sup>23</sup> "Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. <sup>24</sup> When he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. <sup>25</sup> 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. <sup>26</sup> So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.' <sup>27</sup> And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt.

<sup>28</sup> 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.' <sup>29</sup> So his fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you.'<sup>30</sup> He refused and went and put him in prison until he should pay the debt. <sup>31</sup> 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. <sup>32</sup> Then his master summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. <sup>33</sup> And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?' <sup>34</sup> And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers, until he should pay all his debt. <sup>35</sup> So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart."

I want you to notice three things about this passage.

### i. An Understanding King

Peter's question about how many times he should forgive plays off rabbinic teaching that said you only had to forgive your brother three times; after that, you were well within your rights to withhold forgiveness.<sup>1</sup> Thus, when Peter suggests that the number of times he should forgive be "seven times," he was, in his mind at least, being overly generous. Yet, Peter's idea of generosity was nothing compared to God's idea of generosity. Because Jesus responds by telling Peter that seven times wasn't the upper limit to forgiveness, but "seventy-seven times."

Now, I know some bible translations have the phrase "seventy times seven," resulting in the count that one should forgive at 490. But the Greek term Jesus uses is a word-for-word quote from Genesis 4:24 in the LXX where it was said that Lamech's revenge is "seventy-sevenfold."<sup>2</sup> Whether the phrase is "seventy times seven" or "seventy-seven" makes little difference since Jesus was hyperbolic. Because the point the Lord was trying to make is that ***forgiveness should be without restriction***. That, just as Lamech's revenge would last for nearly 80 generations, a veritable eternity, so too ought the disciple's forgiveness be equally unending. "The disciple must be as extravagant in forgiving as Lamech was in taking vengeance."<sup>3</sup>

To illustrate this point, Jesus then tells them a parable. In this parable, we're introduced to two main characters. The first is a King, and the second is a servant. The King has decided to balance his books, and so he calls some of his debts due. One such debt was in the astronomical sum of "10,000 talents." The amount of this enormous debt is hard to grasp. For instance, records show that the entire tax revenue for Judea, Samaria, and Idumea around this time came to only 600 talents.<sup>4</sup> Or, to think of it another way, it would take roughly half a lifetime for a working

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<sup>1</sup> Keener, Craig S., *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, (Grand Rapids; Eerdmans Publishing, 1999), p. 456.

<sup>2</sup> Carson, D. A., *Matthew & Mark*, The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Revised Edition, Volume 9, Tremper Longman III, & David E. Garland, General Editors (Grand Rapids; Zondervan Academic, 2010), p. 459.

<sup>3</sup> France, R. T., *The Gospel of Matthew*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, (Grand Rapids; Eerdmans Publishing, 2007), p. 705.

<sup>4</sup> Keener (1999), p. 458.

man to earn just one talent.<sup>5</sup> Thus, the man would need to live 5,000 lifetimes just to pay his debt back. The weight of such a sum is around three hundred tons of silver,<sup>6</sup> which is roughly the same weight as 4 space shuttles stacked on top of one another.<sup>7</sup> What's more, Jesus is combing the largest single number that could be expressed in Greek at this time with the largest single unit of currency.<sup>8</sup> The effect on the story is to convey how genuinely hopeless this man was. No one would be able to pay this debt. So, we, as the reader, then expect the King to do anything but forgive this man. However, to our shock, the King does precisely that.

Jesus tells us that the King was about to cart off the servant, along with his wife and children, to be sold into slavery as a means to recoup the King's losses. The most he would've gotten was 3 talents, assuming the servant only had one child, should he have done this.<sup>9</sup> However, we're told that the servant begs and pleads for his life, which, in turn, moves the heart of the King. The exact phrase is, "out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt." A truly remarkable turn of events. The King based his decision on compassion rather than calculation. Aren't you glad that God deals with us according to His warm and unmerited love rather than some cold and calculating logic?

Now, bear in mind that this is a parable where God is represented in the story as the King, and the disciple is represented as the servant. The effect that this has on our understanding of God's mercy is astounding. In the eyes of God, our sin debt is incalculable. Try thinking of the largest sum of money, and know that our sin costs far more. After all, God gave His only Son to pay off our debt. So, in light of this, how should we react when we experience God's forgiveness? Gratitude? Sure, this much is obvious. But how should we respond when someone offends us? We should forgive them the same way that God has forgiven us. But in our story, is that how the servant responds when one of his colleagues comes and asks for more time to pay his debt? No.

## ii. An Uncharitable Servant

The first servant owed the King 10,000 talents. Here, we're told, the second servant owed the first servant 100 denarii. Now, admittedly, this isn't an insignificant amount of money. A hundred denarii were equal to about a hundred days work for a common foot soldier.<sup>10</sup> But

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<sup>5</sup> France (2007), p. 706.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Wikipedia contributors, "Space Shuttle," *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, [https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Space\\_Shuttle&oldid=1034360785](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Space_Shuttle&oldid=1034360785), [accessed August 8, 2021].

<sup>8</sup> France (2007), p. 706.

<sup>9</sup> Keener (1999), p. 459.

<sup>10</sup> Carson (1999), p. 460.

when that sum is compared to what the first servant owed the King, the contrast is laughable. Remember, it would've taken the first servant 5,000 lifetimes to pay back his debt to the King; whereas, it would've only taken the second servant 3 months to pay back his debt.

The one servant who should've been the most merciful and the most forgiving because he had been shown such extreme mercy and such extreme forgiveness is here acting petulant, bitter, and cruel. He goes so far as to "seize" this poor man and begins to even choke his fellow servant. Rather than show compassion, as the King had for him, this first servant turns violent.

Interestingly, the phrasing in this second scene is nearly a one-to-one with what the first servant said and did before the King in the first scene. It is almost as if this first servant had utterly forgotten that he and his family were practically carted off to become slaves. Though the irony of the situation may have been lost on the first servant, it isn't lost on us or the other servants in the story. Everyone sees how messed up this situation is. And the effect this has on us and the others who witness this is sorrow. The phrase used in verse 31 is "greatly distressed," which is bible-speak for offended, grieved, distraught. Everyone who saw this was shaken by what they saw. And it bothered them so much that they went and told the King.

### iii. An Unending Payment

The first thing the King calls this servant is "wicked." And this word is more often translated as "evil." By refusing to show the same mercy that he had been shown, the servant proved by his actions how deeply depraved he really was. It even throws their whole exchange earlier into doubt. The fact that this servant would not be forgiving meant that he wasn't really sorry for the debt he incurred with the King. Had he been, this servant would've gone from the King's presence showing mercy and forgiveness to everyone. A man who knows he's been forgiven of much will forgive much in others. But a man who thinks he's been forgiven of little will forgive little in others.

The scene then ends with the servant being hauled away by "jailers." This word is the Greek word βασιανιστής (ba-sa-nees-tace), and it is better translated as "tormentors" (cf. Mat. 8:29).<sup>11</sup> This is in reference to a commonly known practice where debtors were tortured by rulers to extort money from the debtor's friends and family.<sup>12</sup> Considering how this servant treated his fellow servants, I wonder what sort of friends would come to his aid.

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<sup>11</sup> Turner, David L., *Matthew*, The Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, (Grand Rapids; Baker Academic, 2008), p. 451.

<sup>12</sup> Keener (1999), p. 461.

The irony here is that the King throws this man into prison to be tortured "until he should pay all his debt." Which should lead us to ask, "Would this man's debt ever be paid off?" No. As I've pointed out two times now, it would've taken 60 million days, or roughly 193,000 years, to pay back his debt.<sup>13</sup> In this way, Jesus is implying the servant suffered eternal damnation as a result of his unforgiveness. "His destiny is not detention but painful punishment."<sup>14</sup>

This is not to say the servant "lost" his salvation as much as to say the servant was never saved. "A community of the forgiven must be a forgiving community."<sup>15</sup> Should one claim to be a Christian yet persistently maintain an unforgiving spirit, that person's faith has proven itself invalid. There is no such thing as a Christian who doesn't forgive.

So, what's the takeaway?

If God's forgiveness is unending, so too should our forgiveness be without end.

**READ:** Matthew 6:14-15 (ESV)

<sup>14</sup> For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, <sup>15</sup> but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses

**READ:** James 2:13 (ESV)

Judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy. [But] Mercy triumphs over judgment.

The point that Jesus makes when Peter tries to cap his forgiveness at 7 times is to say that the one who keeps track of how many times they have forgiven is someone who hasn't really forgiven at all. Either forgiveness has no limits, or it's not really forgiveness. And the one who keeps a tab of wrongdoings keeps themselves from God's mercy. Because if there is a limit to God's generosity, it is found when we meet an unforgiving person. Even God cannot forgive one who refuses to forgive others. The uncharitable servant was well within his rights to throw his fellow servant into debtor's prison. But should he insist that he has the right to do such a thing, he cannot begrudge the King for acting, in the same way he himself has acted (cf. Mat. 7:1-2).

Forgiveness ought to be like an unending chain that leads others back to God. Every time someone refuses to forgive, they break that chain. And rather than something good like mercy

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<sup>13</sup> Turner (2008), p. 450.

<sup>14</sup> France (2007), p. 708.

<sup>15</sup> France (2007), p. 702.

and grace being multiplied on the earth, something bad like bitterness and resentment is magnified. A fist that remains clenched cannot be open to receive God's mercy.

This parable shows us that we will never incur a debt greater than the debt that God has already forgiven in us. No one can offend someone more than we have offended God. As such, anyone that has experienced the free gift of salvation through Jesus Christ our Lord has no right to keep a record of wrongdoings. We must, MUST, forgive everyone. This forgiveness is from the heart and not mere lip service. This is what Jesus meant when he said, "if you do not forgive your brother from your heart," God will do with you what the King did with the unforgiving servant.

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## Video Description

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TEXT: Matthew 18:21-35

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Forgiveness ought to be like an unending chain that leads others back to God. Every time someone refuses to forgive, they break that chain. And rather than something good like mercy and grace being multiplied on the earth, something bad like bitterness and resentment is magnified. A fist that remains clenched cannot be open to receive God's mercy.

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Pastor's manuscript can be found here: <https://docdro.id/TbWOMXR>