

## **Parable of the Unforgiving Servant**

*Matthew 18<sup>21-35</sup>*

### **Warm Up Question(s)** – Choose one

- What kinds of things did you tend to argue about with your parents or sibling when you were growing up? How did you tend to resolve those arguments?
- What would you do to celebrate if all of your debts were suddenly canceled?

### **Introduction**

In his book, Mere Christianity C.S. Lewis made the simple observation that “Everyone thinks forgiveness is a lovely idea, until they have something to forgive.” At that point it often becomes “one of the most unpopular of the Christian virtues.” But Jesus was clear in his model prayer that his followers were to ask God to “Forgive our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.” But what if we don’t want to, or can’t find it in ourselves to forgive others? Let’s see what Jesus has to say.

### **Discovering the Word**

- 1) **Read Matthew 18:21-35** as a role play (Narrator, Peter, Jesus, Servant #1, Servant #2, Master). Peter’s question suggests that he had already learned something about forgiveness. What does his question imply that he already knew?
- 2) What answer do you think Peter was expecting when he asked Jesus if he should forgive his brother up to seven times?
- 3) How does forgiveness in “the kingdom of heaven” compare or contrast to the standard practice of that culture and/or of our culture?
- 4) Since “a talent was worth about 20 years of a day laborer’s wages”<sup>”NIV2011 Footnote</sup>, what was the size of the servant’s debt in today’s dollars? In scene one, what did the servant ask for from the king (v.26)? What did his master give him instead (v.27)?
- 5) Since “a denarius was the usual daily wage”<sup>”NIV2011 Footnote</sup>, what was the size of the 2<sup>nd</sup> servant’s debt in today’s dollars?
- 6) What would your perspective of servant #1 be if the only part of the story you knew was vv.28-30? How did what “the other servants” had seen (v.31) influence their perspective of the debt collection they witnessed in scene two?
- 7) Which character do you feel for each scene and why? How does your “place” in each scene affect your perspective of it?
- 8) What perspective does Jesus’s story suggest Peter is missing from the question Peter had posed?
- 9) What objections would you have to Jesus’ response in v.22 if that was all he said (i.e. no story)?
- 10) What objections do you have to Jesus’ response in verse 35 (i.e. even with his story)? Is it ever appropriate to withhold forgiveness (v.35; cf. vv.15-17)? Is forgiveness conditional? Unconditional?
- 11) How is Jesus’ story intended to help Peter (and us) forgive others like God does? What have you found helpful in forgiving those who have wronged you?

**Matthew 18:21-35** as a Readers' Theatre in three scenes

**Narrator:** <sup>21</sup> Then Peter came to Jesus and asked,

**Peter:** "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?"

**Narrator:** <sup>22</sup> Jesus answered,

**Jesus:** "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times."

Scene One

**Jesus:** <sup>23</sup> Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. <sup>24</sup> As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand bags of gold<sup>[b]</sup> was brought to him. <sup>25</sup> 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. <sup>26</sup> At this the servant fell on his knees before him.

**Servant #1:** 'Be patient with me,' he begged, 'and I will pay back everything.'

**Jesus:** <sup>27</sup> The servant's master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go.

Scene Two

**Jesus:** <sup>28</sup> But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred silver coins.<sup>[c]</sup> He grabbed him and began to choke him.

**Servant #1:** 'Pay back what you owe me!'

**Jesus:** he demanded. <sup>29</sup> His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him,

**Servant #2:** 'Be patient with me, and I will pay it back.'

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

Scene Three

**Jesus:** <sup>32</sup> Then the master called the servant in.

**Master:** 'You wicked servant, I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. <sup>33</sup> Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?'

**Jesus:** <sup>34</sup> In anger his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed.

**Jesus:** <sup>35</sup> This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart.