

# First Baptist Church Smiths Falls

October 28, 2018

## **Scripture Reading:** Matthew 18:21-35

21 ¶ Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?" 22 Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times. 23 "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 talents was brought to him. 25 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 "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, cancelled the debt and let him go. 28 "But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii. 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 you 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 greatly distressed and went and told their master everything that had happened. 32 "Then the master called the servant in. 'You wicked servant,' he said, 'I cancelled 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 turned 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 from your heart."

## **Prayer of Illumination:**

O God, lover of all those whom you love, cause the pure light of your divine knowledge to shine forth in our hearts, and open our eyes to that which you wish us to understand, that we may be able to comprehend your precepts. AMEN

**Message:** "If I Forgive You, THEN..."

## **INTRODUCTION:**

- A teen sat in the small room - a jail cell. He was angry at himself - HE

KNEW BETTER. He had gone to a party, found that there was no adults present, and that there was alcohol everywhere. Yet he stayed and drank. When his parents arrived at the police station, they did not yell, but quietly asked the teen how he was, then drove him home. The next morning, they asked for the teen's version, and he truthfully told his story, confessing all the mistakes that he made. THEN he asked for their forgiveness. Impressed by his honesty they agreed to forgive him and promised to be there when he went to court. An hour later the same teen saw his sister wearing his favourite Blue-Jays sweat-shirt without his permission. He went BALLISTIC! He screamed at her and it looked like he would physically hurt her. Then the teen saw his father. His Dad was simply standing there, looking very hurt at his son. All the colour had drained from his father's face and a single tear rolled down his cheek. "I cancelled all of your debt of your sins because you begged me to," the father said quietly, "Shouldn't you have the same mercy."

- Forgiveness is an amazing thing. We all need forgiveness. In Matthew 18 Peter asks Jesus a simple question about forgiveness, and Jesus tells him a parable that we shall consider today.

Part 1: The Parable of the Unmerciful Servant (Matthew 18:21-35):

- This a parable of huge contrasts. A man is told that he must repay a

enormous debt which he owes to the King. The amount of the debt is part of the contrast that Jesus sets up. Just as the mustard seed was known as the symbol for being the smallest thing, so too, the talent represented the largest possible denomination of money, and the number 10,000 was the largest number that the Ancient Near East World could understand. Today, the number is a billion - as in 1.6 billion in the lottery won by someone in South Carolina last week.

- A debt of 10,000 talents would equal to 100 million denarii, or, to take it home by changing it to today's currency and trying to convert, about 10 million dollars. It's a sum which is today above anyone's ability to pay, as it was back then. This type of debt could only be run up by a provincial leader, or a SATRAP, one who is responsible to the King for the whole revenue of an entire province.
- Jesus sets the stage. A king wants to settle his debts. The debtor is brought before him. The Greek suggests that the man was brought out of prison. Unable to pay, the King demands that the man loses all his possessions - including his family. Jesus knows his audience: he has once again set them up. Only a Gentile ruler would demand the family of the debtor, as it was absolutely forbidden by Jewish law. It is also a funny request in light of the enormous debt - all of his wealth, including

his family, would not have come close to appeasing the debt, as a debtor sold into slavery would get between 500 and 2000 denarii - hardly enough to repay the 100 million denarii which he owed. The only way to understand this demand is to see it as an expression of the King's wrath. Jesus has set him up as a Gentile ruler who is demanding and wrathful - something which the Hebrews fully believed to be true.

- The debtor then falls at the feet of the king (v. 26). He throws himself fully on the mercy of the King - and the King goes from being wrathful to merciful (v. 27). Not only is the man's family not to be sold, but the debt is completely erased. Instead of slavery, the debtor is allowed to walk away with a clean slate .
- Already we have a great parable. Think about it - one could end the parable here, and draw a conclusion about the kingdom of Heaven - that God is ready to forgive a great, unforgivable debt - one which the debtors are incapable of paying. This part of the story is suggesting that if even a foreign King could see fit to forgive the huge debt of a person, so too, God will forgive even more, because God's mercy is even larger. Act one of this parable had a happy ending, the Kingdom of Heaven is like the incredible mercy of the great ruler who erases an enormous, incomprehensible debt with the blinking of an eye, and the debtor leaves

freed and released. But with a twist: his is bought by the king, a slave.

- But the parable doesn't end there. The drama continues (vv. 28-30), and act two sees the same debtor going directly to someone who owes him money. Here, the audience of Jesus who would understand that the SATRAP or provincial ruler, went to one of his subordinate officials who did not do his job properly and owes him money. Here comes the contrast. This man owed only 100 denarii, a debt which could be paid off, yet it is still a great debt. The man grabbed his debtor by the neck (v. 28), and again, we have the same begging for mercy (v. 29).
- But the contrast is startling - and the newest debtor is thrown into jail (v. 30). The mercy extended to the Unmerciful Servant, is not returned to others. In his wrath, the King puts the Satrap into jail, a place of torture (v. 34), knowing that he will never come out.

#### Part 2: The Meaning of this Parable:

- God is to be seen in that King. He is able to make demands of our debt of sin to Him - demands which far out weigh our ability to repay. BUT when we cry out for mercy in the face of our huge, unpayable debt, God forgives us. God's mercy is enormous, so that our debt, in our case, our debt of sin, is erased, and we are freed.
- We are the Debtor - we are released from slavery of sin to the freedom

which is found in obedience to Jesus. We become slaves to Jesus, indebted to him for our freedom, but what a great Master we have!.

- And the Master has given us a command. The master has told us to forgive others as we have been forgiven, so says this parable (v. 35), so says the Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:12: "*Forgive us our trespasses, as WE FORGIVE those who trespass against us.*"). We are told to forgive others, but do we? Really?
- Now, let's take a scan to see the setting. Let's go back to Matthew 17. In verse 24 we see that Jesus is with His disciples in Capernaum. This was His main base, used to wind down from journeys and to teach His disciples. There is no record of Jesus leaving Capernaum prior to Matthew 18 verse 21, so picture Jesus in a house with a lot of His followers close by. By scanning back to Matthew 17 we see that Jesus has spent much time teaching His disciples about money (Matthew 17:27), power (Matthew 18:1-9), being lost and found (Matthew 18:10-14), and how to restore others who need forgiveness when they sin against you (Matthew 18:15-20).
- This leads to our passage for today, starting with Peter who must have been thinking about the teaching of Jesus on forgiveness when he asks how many times he should forgive someone who sins against him

(Matthew 18:21). He even stretches his willingness to forgive up to seven times. And to this Jesus responds by saying not just 7 times, but 77 times, or 7 times 70 times (depending on how the words are translated (v. 22)). What does this mean? The number seven is a holy number in the Bible (days of creation; seven woes, etc.). Peter used a sacred number in his question, and Jesus multiplied it upon itself. This has only one meaning: Jesus is suggesting that forgiveness should come in an abundance so large that you lose track of the number of times you forgive others who hurt you.

- Let me ask you this: Do we do this? We hear this story. We know 70 times 7. We all agree it is true. “Thanks for the message on forgiveness, Jesus!” Then we go home, and BAM! Someone hurts us. Do we forgive? Even once? “I will never forgive him!” “She does not deserve my forgiveness!” “How dare you ask me to forgive that horrible person!” I have even heard Christians say such things. In fact, some Christians have a bigger memory capacity and a shallower ability to forgive than the rest of the world - an irony that should shame us.
- Jesus says forgive. That’s good enough. It is clear and it is simple.
- And then He tells this parable to back it up: don’t just pretend to forgive. Really forgive. You are forgiven by God, therefore show to

others to same mercy that you have received from God.

- Let me ask you 2 questions for you to reflect upon: In the Lord’s Prayer we ask God to forgive as we have forgiven others... What happens to us if we don’t forgive others (Matthew 6:12)? Second question: In this parable from Matthew 18 the debtor gets a debt back because he refused to forgive others. What is God telling us about our willingness to forgive others?

### Part 3: Taking It To The Heart

- Can you forgive? Should you forgive? Let’s ask 3 more questions:
  - 1. Forgiving and forgetting? Let me say this about the phrase “forgiving and forgetting:” It’s not in the Bible. It may (MAY) be a good way to live, but with a caveat. To forgive someone means that we should learn from it to make sure that we are not abused again and again. Forgive someone. Forget the act in order to go on with your life freed from the hatred and the hurt of the event, but always cautiously remember - remember in order to avoid falling into further abuse.
  - 2. How do I forgive? I would say that the answer is you just do it. And I will go back to that answer and stand on it as the truth. Just forgive. Choose to forgive and do it. But I must say that the process of forgiving may take a long time. There are so many situations that you cannot go

back and fix. So many times that hurt has happened to you that you will never have the opportunity to have closure in any way. So the scenario replays in your mind over and over, but without you being able to find the peace you need to fully forgive. What should you do with this: let it go. Give it to Jesus. Think about this: Jesus did not arise from the grave to go and haunt down those who hanged Him on the cross. He let it go. When you start to reflect on those hurts of the past, give them to Jesus, and learn from them, and walk away.

- 3. Why forgive? Did you know that you mostly forgive for yourself?

You hold onto your baggage. You can choose to hang onto your hate, your anger, your pain. You hold it like a bag of dirty trash, stinky to everyone around you. It will hold you back. Hebrews 12:1-2 (NIV) says: *“Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, 2 fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith...”*

What are we throwing off in this passage? All that which would hinder us. That is: past sins, past attitudes, past actions, and any hardness in our heart that would stop us from running the race for Jesus Christ to the finish line in our lives. When you forgive the one released of the actions

of the past the most is you yourself. And once you have forgiven others, and asked God to release you of the pain of holding onto the past, your heart will become freed to become workable by God. Ezekiel 36:26 says: *“I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.”*

God, teach me how to forgive, that my hard heart of rock will be turned into a heart of flesh.

- Think about this (2 things): 1. What would it mean to go through your life living as a FORGIVEN person? God can and will forgive you, if you ask Him. 2. What would it mean to go through life as a FORGIVING person? You and others around you would be on fire for Christ. That is what we all should want. God does.

#### Conclusion

- Shakespeare wrote these words which are a fitting conclusion: “The quality of mercy is not strained; it droppeth, as the gentle rain from heaven upon the place beneath; it is blessed twice; it blessth him that gives and him that takes...”
- Here it is: Can we leave here remembering that we are forgiven? Can we show this truth in our lives, truly living it? The next time someone cuts you off on the highway or the Walmart lanes; the next time someone

says something thoughtlessly; the next time someone leaves you crying;  
the next time that someone bullies or hurts you in any way, could you  
please remember this: you are a forgiven person. God has forgiven you  
greatly - all your sins are gone, all your sins are removed from you as far  
as the east is from the west, erased by the atoning blood sacrifice of  
Jesus as you have asked. And as a forgiven person, we must learn to  
forgive others. Remember: The forgiven also forgive.