

## **“The Kingdom of heaven is like...” Matthew 18:21-35**

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. 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, and 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.

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. Then his master summoned him and said to him, ‘You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. 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.”

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ!

The question that Peter asked Jesus is, indeed, a very practical question. How many times are we to forgive those who sin against us? I imagine at some point many of us may have asked similar questions.

We want to know how we are supposed to live as Christians. Peter asks and Jesus seemingly answers. But does He? What do you think? Does Jesus’ answer make any sense? Is that doable? What is He really saying?

Today we will try to understand Jesus’ answer to Peter and what it means for our new lives in Christ, what it teaches about forgiveness.

Peter asks the question, but the way Jesus answers, He actually gives us a new perspective. Jesus’ answer helps us to see our situation in a different light. Peter asks: “How many times?” Jesus answers: “The Kingdom of heaven is like...”. What is going on, we may wonder? “The Kingdom of heaven is like...”.

This is important. We may be looking for simple answers, like, what shall we do and what not. But Jesus wants us to understand that Christian life is not just about shall and shall not. Your new life in Christ is about something much greater.

“The Kingdom of heaven is like...”. What Jesus is saying is that you don’t belong to this old world anymore. Of course, we still live in this world, but our true citizenship and our true loyalty belongs to the age to come.

Having received the Holy Spirit you have already crossed the invisible border between this world that sinks in darkness and perishes, and the New Creation – where life never ends, never runs out, where there is no more death, nor suffering, nor mourning.

You have already received this new citizenship, this new identity as royal priests and God’s holy people, as co-heirs of God’s Kingdom together with Jesus, and this new reality now should define how we understand and live our lives here.

“The Kingdom of heaven is like...” it operates differently from this world. What Jesus does with His answer to Peter – He helps us to see everything from His perspective, as His fellow-heirs and citizens of God’s Kingdom. Yes, that’s what you are.

So, to make His point Jesus tells this parable about the king and the servant. What are the main points of this parable? The debt of the first servant is huge, we can say unreal. Ten thousand talents, that’s the weight of precious metals, silver or gold, as great as ten thousand men could carry.

The point is to show that such an amount is unpayable. There was no way for the first servant to repay this debt. No way! What does the Master do? He listens to the servant’s pleas for mercy and ... He mercifully forgives.

You know what it means to forgive someone’s debt? The debt doesn’t somehow magically disappear... and everyone is happy. If you want to forgive the debt, it means that you are incurring the costs, that you are suffering the loss, that you are bearing the consequences of that person’s actions, that you are enduring the pain yourself.

This is what the Master chose to do. He forgave the servant. And how did the servant respond? He finds another servant who owes him, and that is not a small amount, it is 100 days wages, count for yourself, he seizes him and chokes him.

**“Have patience with me, and I will pay you.”** This servant could at least in theory repay, but his pleas fall on deaf ears and he is thrown in prison. What do you think about it? Can we make sense of it?

Humanly speaking, of course. That’s a big debt. He wants his money back. His actions would be perfectly reasonable for the old order of things. If he hadn’t been forgiven by his Master. But he was forgiven. So much more.

What Jesus teaches us with this parable is that we, as His disciples, do not belong under the old-world order anymore. We now belong to His Kingdom and we were

brought into God's Kingdom by someone paying all our debts. Debts, that were so great, that we could not possibly pay them on our own. Instead, it was our Master, Jesus Christ, who did it. Now whenever we encounter any situation where the issue of forgiveness comes up, we can't just think about us and the other person.

Not according to the old order. "Should I forgive, or not? Do they deserve my forgiveness, or not?" We are to see such situations as those who belong to God's Kingdom. We need to bring our Master and what He has done into our considerations.

We need to remind ourselves of the debt that we were forgiven. We need to remember what pain and suffering it cost Jesus to grant us His forgiveness. Then God's grace towards us shapes our attitudes and actions towards others. How does all of this sound? Reasonable? But there is a practical difficulty. Can you guess what it is?

This parable implies that our Master has forgiven us this huge debt, right? But now, honestly, do you feel that way? Do you feel that what God has forgiven you is such a huge debt that now, of course! it makes sense that you would forgive others?

I guess this varies from person to person. For those who are blessed to be raised in good Christian households, who have received loving and wise Christian upbringing, how have been spared of stupid mistakes and have avoided making total mess of their lives, along the way causing pain to many others, for them it may be quite difficult to see – where is that my huge debt? I have lived a decent life.

For those who come from non-Christian backgrounds and who have made mess and havoc in their own lives and harmed and hurt others, for them it is much easier to see the debt. It is no wonder that prostitutes, tax collectors and all kinds of sinners were drawn to Jesus and that His forgiveness changed them so much.

Remember Zacchaeus, the tax collector, how God's grace instantly made him humble and generous. Remember Saul, the persecutor of the Church, how God's grace instantly made him the most devoted apostle to Gentiles.

Remember the prostitute from Luke 7, and how Jesus commented on her actions. Her sins that were many had been forgiven and now she could love much, and forgive much. As Dr Martin Luther said **"if you [only] see yourself as a little sinner, then you will inevitably see Jesus as a little Saviour"**.

This is one of these challenging truths that without the Word of God we can't know the magnitude of our sinfulness, which means that we shouldn't rely on our feelings, or even on our reason. We need to trust the Word of God and the Holy Spirit to enlighten us in the matter of our sinfulness and on how huge our debt is.

Still, let's spend a bit more time on this. So, what is sin? How would you answer? We could say that sin is anything that is contrary to God's good design for our lives. To see how great our debt may be, let's briefly examine two aspects of our lives – our attitude towards our God and the impact our sinfulness may have on others.

The Triune God is our Creator and our Redeemer, He is the One who sanctifies us. To Him we owe everything. Our very being, every minute of our lives, our daily bread, everything. It should be the most natural thing to love Him with our whole heart and mind and strength, to fear to displease Him and to trust Him unconditionally.

Is that what we do? Not by any stretch... We are too lazy even to listen to Him. We are indifferent to Him in our very hearts and we seldom have time to express our gratitude for His unceasing care. How little do we trust Him? And what happens next?

Our lack of love and fear and trust, they encourage similar attitudes in others; when we fail to pray, to confess, to serve, to witness, our lukewarmness encourages other Christians to be slack, and the chain of causes and effects goes on and on. Which means that consequences of our failure to love and fear and trust our God spread further and further. We are responsible for that. I am. You are. It is a part of our debt.

Now let's think about the impact of our sinfulness to others. Let's assume that you have never done anything that would qualify as explicitly immoral. Now, look at your life, have you ever rejected someone, mocked, ridiculed, betrayed, slandered, gossiped about, or maybe even deliberately hurt with your words and attitudes?

Or maybe you turned away and stood silent when you should have spoken up for other or should have warned others? It will be hard to find someone who hasn't done any of these. If there still is someone, the explanation may be quite simply... bad memory.

We may think, so, what's a big deal? Everyone does that... But now think about what impact these relatively "small" things could have on those who suffer them? You know how deeply words can hurt. You know how painful can be unjust attitudes. You may remember right now something that was that way done to you.

Such things can easily scar, or even change our characters forever. Now think about the next step – you have sinned against someone, and you may not even remember it, but that person may be carrying that bleeding wound, or that scar in their heart for years and years, perhaps for the rest of their lives.

What you have done may be defining how that person relates to others. They may be walking through life bitter and harsh and spitting their anger to the right and to the left, hurting everyone in their way. The ripple effect of your sin just goes on and on.

Further and further. Because of our sin... because of what we did... or failed to do. If we could clearly see the extent of damage and destruction that our sin has caused, and the scale of what we will be held accountable for, how terrified would we be?

Now tell me, how can you repay such debt? How can you fix such harm done to God's beloved, when the impact of your sinfulness has spread far beyond your reach and your knowledge? Can we say: "Have mercy of me, Master, I will fix it!" Really?! We can't ... we rightly deserve our Master's wrath and punishment.

But... thanks be to our gracious Master Jesus Christ! He has provided a way out for us. This is the Good News for us, the Gospel. That Jesus Christ has taken care of our debts, of all of them. He has taken the losses upon Himself. He has paid the price and bore the pain. He has done all of that so that you can hear the new life-giving words: "I forgive you all your sins! They are forgiven! Your debt is gone! I paid it."

See, regardless of how much we have messed things up in our lives, we don't need to worry that on the Last Day the true scale of the impact of our sinfulness will be revealed and that we will be held accountable for all of that. You are free.

A new reality has dawned. The Kingdom of heaven... You are forgiven. You can live as forgiven servants whose fate was changed forever by the mercy of your gracious Master. Now what? How does this shape our lives, our attitudes, our actions?

Now the Spirit of God helps us to imitate our Master in His undeserved mercy and in His unconditional forgiveness. The Spirit helps us to comprehend how much we have been forgiven. The Spirit creates in us grateful hearts that want to see the Kingdom grow. The Spirit changes us and we desire to extend this life-giving forgiveness to others. Even if it may cost us dearly. For we begin to realize how much it cost to Jesus.

Thus, when someone sins against us, let's not worry how much they owe us, or how many times we would need to forgive them. That's the old order of things. Too small... Now, for you, the Kingdom of God is yours, that's where you belong.

Lift your eyes to your Master Jesus, rejoice in your debt forgiven, and pray that the Holy Spirit enables you to be so, so generous that when others experience your forgiveness, they may exclaim: "So this is what the Kingdom of God is like!"

Amen.