

Sermon Parable of the Unmerciful Servant Matthew 18:23-34

23 *“Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. 24 When he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. 25 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. 26 So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.’ 27 And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt. 28 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.’ 29 So his fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you.’ 30 He refused and went and put him in prison until he should pay the debt. 31 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. 32 Then his master summoned him and said to him, ‘You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. 33 And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?’ 34 And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers, until he should pay all his debt. 35 So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.”*

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

The teaching Jesus gives us in today’s parable is a teaching to diligently consider. In the church we have all sorts of knowledge, doctrines, and teachings. Much of it is about the nature of God, the nature of creation, promises and fulfilments, and the like. This teaching, however, cuts all of us to the quick.

At the end of the parable Jesus asserts that, *“So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.”* Jesus could not be any plainer than that. So many of the Bible’s teachings call us to accept them as true. God is a triune God, for example. Fine. God created everything that can be seen. Got it. Jesus is a real live human being. Cool. This world is coming to an end. Thankfully. Lots of things we are taught to which we simply say, “Yes.” This, however, is not one of those times. This is a reality check for us and helps us figure out whether or not we have the main element of the faith correct. If we are not forgiving, merciful, kind and patient with others, we need to get that fixed right now, because our heart is not right with God. And if our heart is not right with God, well, bad things will happen. If we do deal with others in forgiveness, it assures we are on the right track and can see into the heart of God and what how he deals with people in this age. Jesus is the Lord of forgiveness. As we bear his name, we also live in forgiveness - and all the rest - toward others.

This parable is about the importance of forgiveness. Jesus is big on forgiveness. At the end of Jesus’ time down here, Luke recounts what Jesus said to his disciples.

Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem." Luke 24:45-47

Forgiveness is preached and given by Jesus. Forgiveness is then a way of life for all believers. The apostle John tells the story of a woman who was caught in adultery and brought to Jesus by the Pharisees. In Leviticus chapter 20 the Lord said anyone caught in adultery was to be put to death. The Pharisees wanted to see what Jesus had to say about this woman. He asked her, "Has no one condemned you?" She said, "No one, Lord." And Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more." This fits in very well with what Jesus said to Nicodemus, "For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him."

We've all seen the video from the unsuccessful assassination attempt of former President Donald Trump. As of the writing of this sermon, no solid motive has been uncovered that would have led the young man to such an act. However, it does not seem like the shooter cared much for the former President, since he tried to kill him.

Murder and attempted murder are physical manifestations of the inner spiritual evil of hate. Jesus explains this in 1 John 3:15.

Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.

This teaching strikes the same tone as the one from the parable where Jesus says we must forgive from the heart, or we will not be forgiven.

Is it safe to say we are all murderers? Or at least we have been at some point? Most likely. Hate on the inside is equivalent to murder on the outside. If we follow in Jesus' way and live in forgiveness, kindness, gentleness, and patience with others, we will not be dragged down the road into hate. And that sounds far easier than we know it actually is.

Martin Luther writes about forgiveness in his explanation to the fifth petition of the Lord's Prayer.

And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.

What does this mean?

We pray in this petition that our Father in heaven would not look upon our sins, nor deny such petitions on account of them; for we are worthy of none of the things for which we pray, neither have we deserved them; but that He would grant them all to us by grace; for we daily sin much, and indeed deserve nothing but punishment. So will we, on our part, also sincerely forgive and gladly do good to those who sin against us.

It's quite clear that as God's people He wants us to live in forgiveness. It's important to understand this is not something we just decide to do. We can't force ourselves to be forgiving, because then it wouldn't be genuine. We can't think ourselves into it, train ourselves to do it, read books or listen to podcasts explaining how to forgive people and then somehow be forgiving people.

Remember what Jesus said at the end of the parable?

So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.

Therein lies the key that unlocks a life of forgiveness and therefore salvation. Jesus says it is from the heart that we must forgive. Therefore, it is our heart that must be changed. If we are not forgiving people, it is simply a matter that our heart has not been changed from a hating heart to a loving heart. From a bitter heart to a forgiving heart. From a fallen human heart to the heart of Jesus.

The first step is to absorb what Jesus is teaching us in the parable.

In case we didn't see it, we are the man who has been forgiven the astronomical amount of debt by the king. We have taken the Lord's commandments and run over them with a steam roller. Every time we act against God's will we owe him. Every time we fail to act, we become debtors to God. Imagine what each of our accounts would look like if the debts were not cancelled, forgiven. Having been forgiven a debt higher than we are able to count, hopefully that will change our heart toward others who displease us, and, unlike the unmerciful servant in the parable, live in forgiveness toward others.

The other way to receive a change of heart is to consider Jesus.

The only thing Jesus did in his life was work for the benefit of others. What did it get him? A crown of thorns and nailed to a cross. If you have ever attended a Good Friday service where they recite the seven last words of Christ on the cross, perhaps you remember the very first word Jesus spoke.

"Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing." Luke 23:34

I think I would have had some other more “choice” words to utter. Look at the grace that flows from the lips of Jesus, even in the midst of all his suffering and pain, about to die at their hands. Jesus spoke words of forgiveness to those putting him to death. Neither did Jesus condemn the woman caught in adultery. Nor does Jesus hold your guilt against you any longer. And he is both our Creator and Righteous Judge. What a wonder. The sacrifice Jesus made on the cross where he asked forgiveness for his persecutors now flows to and blesses us. Jesus says of the Holy Communion,

“... for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.” Matthew 26:28

Here the King is bestowing His forgiveness upon us. Do we feel the need for it? Do we take to heart the significance of it? Do we grab the forgiveness for ourselves but are unable to live in it towards others? Does it change at all the way we think of and interact with others? Especially those we don't like?

As we remember the debt of sin we owe to God, as we see the forgiving heart of Jesus even on the cross, and as we receive a full pardon from the Lord, do we not receive a changed heart that both desires and lives a life in God's forgiveness? This is one of the most important ways we can share Jesus with the world. It is hard. Sometimes seemingly impossibly hard. But we know that with God all things are possible and that we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us for the task. So we pray God would make this a reality in our lives.

God bless you with His Word and Spirit that you lead a life of true repentance, receive the fullness of God's grace and forgiveness in Christ, and be a merciful servant of the King Most High. Amen.

**The peace of God guard your hearts and minds as you believe and trust in him.
Amen.**

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