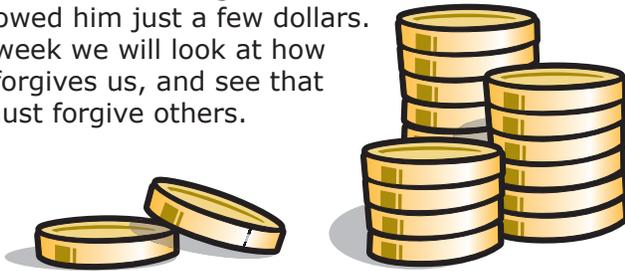




The Unforgiving Servant

Matthew 18:21-35

In Matthew 18:21-35, Jesus tells the parable of a servant who owed the King millions of dollars. The gracious King forgave his debt, but the unmerciful servant would not forgive a man who owed him just a few dollars. This week we will look at how God forgives us, and see that we must forgive others.



Day #1: forgiveness

Have you ever done something to upset someone else? You know how it feels when you need forgiveness. And you know how it feels when the person can't seem to truly forgive. We all have the desire to be forgiven because we want our relationship with the other person to go back to the way it was before we did something wrong.

The dictionary says that to forgive is "to grant pardon without harboring resentment." In other words, it means to excuse someone for something he did wrong, and to give up the right to feel angry about it.

When we confess our sin (that means agree with God that our sin is wrong) and ask forgiveness, does God really forgive us? YES! 1 John 1:9 says, "*But God is faithful and fair. If we admit that we have sinned, He will forgive us our sins. He will forgive every wrong thing we have done. He will make us pure.*" We are forgiven. God purifies us! Through the substitution of Jesus' perfect blood on the cross, we are made pure - perfect.

Not only are we made pure, but also God does not harbor resentment! He isn't just sort of putting up with us, but still kind of mad at us. The Bible tells us that God is crazy about us!

† *The LORD your God is with you, He is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, He will quiet you with His love, He will rejoice over you with singing.*
- Zephaniah 3:17 (NIV)

* Have you ever thought about the Creator of the universe rejoicing over you with singing?! Pray and thank God that He forgives you when you repent from our sin. And God forgives **completely!** (Hebrews 8:12)

Day #2: Mercy & Grace

When we think about the word forgiveness, two other words come to mind: mercy and grace. **Mercy** is *not punishing* someone who deserves to be punished. **Grace** is something good given by someone who doesn't have to give it to someone who does not deserve it.

In this week's parable, the king's forgiveness of the servant's debt was a great example of mercy and grace. The servant deserved for him and his family to be sold into slavery to pay the debt. But the king withheld this punishment. That is mercy. When the king said the servant didn't have to repay the money he owed, that was grace. The servant did not deserve the gift of millions of dollars.

We are all sinners (Isaiah 53:6, Romans 3:23). The Bible tells us that the punishment for our sin is eternal separation from God in the lake of fire (Revelation 20:14-15). But God is a loving God! **He is full of mercy and grace.**

In His **MERCY**, God sent Jesus as our substitution. If we place our trust in Him, we will not face the punishment we *deserve*. In God's **GRACE**, our relationship with Him is restored and we will be given eternal life. These are wonderful things *we do not deserve*.

† *But the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared. He saved us. It wasn't because of the good things we had done. It was because of His **mercy**. He saved us by washing away our sins. We were born again. The Holy Spirit gave us new life. God poured out the Spirit on us freely because of what Jesus Christ our Savior has done. His **grace** made us right with God. So now, we have received the hope of eternal life as God's children.* - Titus 3:4-7

Jesus gave up the riches of heaven to come to earth in the form of a poor, humble baby. He chose to die for our sin so that we could gain life in His kingdom. (2 Corinthians 8:9).

* Pray and thank God for His mercy and grace. Thank Jesus for giving up heaven to come and give us what we do not deserve - life in His kingdom!

Day #3: Monkey Trap

In Southeast Asia, monkeys are trapped in an unusual way. A trap is made by hollowing out a gourd. It has one opening, which is only large enough for the monkey to put his hand in. The gourd is tied or nail near the ground so it cannot move. Then, the hunter puts a

Day #3 continued:

piece of fruit inside for bait. When the monkey smells the fruit, he puts his hand inside to grab the bait. When he tries to pull the fruit out, he can't because his closed fist is too large to pull out of the small hole. The monkey is trapped! It would be very easy to get away - simply let go of the bait. But the monkey will not let go. He is in terrible danger as the hunter approaches, but he will give up his freedom to keep holding onto the bait. If only the monkey knew the terrible price he was going to pay for refusing to let go of that bait!

Sadly, people are often the same way. Refusing to forgive someone is like the monkey refusing to let go of the bait. Unforgiveness brings terrible consequences to the one holding on to it. Unforgiveness is a sin and it often leads to more sin. It causes hatred, envy, bitterness and more. The unforgiveness truly holds that person captive (Acts 8:33).

Strangely enough, all the person has to do is let go of the unforgiveness to be set free. This isn't always easy. Sometimes we have been hurt deeply. When forgiveness is difficult, we must look to Jesus, our ultimate example, because the Bible says, "Forgive, just as the Lord forgave you." (Colossians 3:13). Jesus was perfect. He had never done anything wrong to anyone. Yet, when He was nailed to the cross, He forgave.

 Jesus said, "Father, forgive them. They don't know what they are doing." - Luke 23:34a

God commands us to forgive those who have hurt or offended us (Colossians 3:13). We must rely on His Holy Spirit to give us the ability to obey His command.

 Are you wiser than that monkey? Can you see that you will be free from sin and bitterness when you let go of the unforgiveness you have toward someone who has hurt you? Is there anyone that you need to forgive? Ask God to help you forgive that person. Ask every day until you are able to let go of your unforgiveness.

Day #4: New Math

In Matthew 18:21, Peter asks Jesus how many times he is supposed to forgive someone. Peter asks if 7 times is enough. Jesus tells him that 7 times won't do, but 70 x 7 times! Can you do the math? Why so many times?

How many times does God forgive us? We know the Bible says we are all sinners (Romans 3:23). And Jesus taught that every wrong thought is sin as well as every wrong thing we do (Matthew 5:22,28). Each of us probably sins many times each day. But let's say we only sinned one time each day. There are 365 days in a year. The average life span in America is 78 years. If God forgave one sin per day for every day of the believer's life, that would be 28,470 times per person! When Jesus died on the cross, He took away EVERY sin of everyone who believes in Him!

Day #4 continued:

 Psalm 103:8,10 says, "*The LORD is tender and kind. He is gracious. He is slow to get angry. He is full of love. He doesn't punish us for our sins as much as we should be punished. He doesn't pay us back in keeping with the evil things we've done.*"

When God forgives our sin, it is **complete** forgiveness. Micah 7:19 says, "*Once again you will show loving concern for us. You will **completely** wipe out the evil things we've done. You will throw all of our sins into the bottom of the sea.*" God does not hold on to the right to be angry with us. He holds no grudges against His children. (See also Psalm 103:12)

 The next time someone needs your forgiveness, remember how God has forgiven you with complete forgiveness. As you forgive, ask the Holy Spirit to help you forgive **completely** - without holding any ill feelings toward the person. One way to do this is to pray for God to bless that person (1 Peter 3:9).

Day #5: pass it on

If you were having trouble with a subject in school, who would you ask for help? You could ask your teacher or another student who had really high grades. You would want to learn from someone who was really good in that subject. You would not get study tips from someone who was failing the class.

In a similar way, if you are "good at" forgiving, you will be able to teach others about God's forgiveness. Those who have placed their faith in Jesus and been forgiven of their sins are called to tell others that God loves them and wants to forgive them.

 On the road to Damascus, Jesus told Paul, "*I am sending you to [the people who aren't Jews] to open their eyes. I want you to turn them from darkness to light. I want you to turn them from Satan's power to God. I want their sins to be forgiven. They will be forgiven when they believe in Me. They will have their place among God's people.*" (Acts 26:17b-18) We are all instructed to do the same thing. (Acts 1:8)

Let your forgiving attitude help other people to understand God's forgiveness. The next time someone does something that is hurtful to you, think about the enormous storehouse of forgiveness God has lavished on you. (Remember our math problem from yesterday - that is a lot of forgiveness!) Just as you would rather take study advice from a friend who really knows his subject, people will listen to you tell of God's forgiveness when they see you live it.

 Ask God to help you fully understand His forgiveness of your sin. Then you will freely forgive others. And people will listen when you tell them about the forgiveness God offers to them.