

Sunday Sermon: October 1, 2017

Sermon Text: Matthew 18: 21-35

Sermon Theme: We Forgive Because We Have Been Forgiven

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, canceled 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 canceled 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.”

Over the last few weeks we have heard that our Savior calls out to people of all nations offering his love and forgiveness through his Word. We are part of that call because we have been entrusted with the Word. We use the Word to speak the truth in love to our brothers and sisters about sin and grace.

This week Jesus sums up our last few Sundays by telling us that we are to be his example in this world. As we call out with Jesus’ message that his forgiveness is complete, we are to be examples of that forgiveness ourselves. We are to show other people what forgiveness looks like because Jesus has forgiven us. As we look at our Scripture lesson this morning we will see that Jesus tells us that **we forgive because we have been forgiven.**

Have you ever been so proud of yourself because you figured something out and you were expecting others to be proud of you too? What happened when you told other people what you had figured out? Did they think it was great? Did they already have it figured out and didn’t think it was that big of a deal?

Peter thought he had forgiveness all figured out. He approached Jesus, not to ask Jesus if he was thinking correctly, but to have Jesus compliment him on being able to figure this out and forgive so well.

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?”

To understand what Peter was saying, we must understand the Jewish practice of forgiveness. Like many other things, the Jewish practice of forgiving other people was subject to rules and interpretation of those rules. It was not the Bible that set those rules, rather it was the Rabbis who made the rules and interpreted them. The Rabbis had some teachings about forgiveness that would seem a little odd to us. There were some who taught that there were things that people did to you that you did not have to forgive. Others taught that there was a limit to the forgiveness we have to offer.

This is the teaching that Peter was speaking about. The Rabbis were teaching something very similar to 3 strikes and you’re out. They taught that you must forgive a person 3 times for the same sin, whether they ask for it or not. But after those 3 times, you don’t need to forgive them anymore. We can understand their logic: If it happens once or twice, it might be an accident so forgive. But, it does not appear they are really sorry about what they have done, if a person continues to do the same thing to you again and again.

Peter thought he had this figured out. He thought that he was being very loving, he was going the extra mile, if he more than doubled what the Rabbis said. He was expecting Jesus to be proud of him for coming to this conclusion that he should forgive twice as much as anyone else.

However, Jesus showed Peter that he doesn't expect forgiveness to have a limit. ²² **Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.**

Even if Jesus meant 77 times, or 70 times 7, which is another translation, either one goes way beyond the 7 times that Peter thought was enough. Jesus is not giving us a number to achieve here. If he would have said we need to forgive 77 times or 490 times, our sinful nature would take over and we would do 1 of 2 things. Either we would count the number of times we had forgiven and then stop when we reached the right number, or we would figure we had forgiven someone at least that many times and then not forgive them anymore.

Jesus is pointing out the Rabbi's problem, Peter's problem and our problem in thinking that there is a limit to forgiveness. Jesus is not giving us a number to achieve, he is telling us that we are to forgive more than every time someone sins against us.

To illustrate his point, Jesus told the parable of the unforgiving servant. The unforgiving servant owes the king a million dollars. There is no way that he can pay this amount off. He lives in fear that one day the king will call him in and demand that he pay the amount owed. Every day is clouded by this fear. He knows he can't pay, his wife knows she can't pay, his children know they can't pay. The debt looms over them in everything they do.

Then, one day it happens; the king's messenger comes to his house, he is brought to the palace to settle his account.

As the king looks at the account, it is clear that the man cannot pay. The king sentences him and his family to work until they pay off the debt.

The servant falls on his knees and begs the king for mercy. He begs not to sentence his family and him to a life of being slaves to pay off his debt. Instead, he promises that if he is given more time he will pay off the debt.

The IRS would not let this man go without paying his debt, the bank would not forgive this man if he were behind on a loan, even a hospital would not allow this man's payment plan to go unpaid. But the king is different. He is merciful and loving and kind. He does what no one else will do. He forgives the debt.

We understand the lesson Jesus is teaching us here. He is showing us how he has forgiven us our sins completely. We are the servant who has run up a large debt of sin on our account. We are the ones who know in our hearts that we cannot repay that debt of sin. We cannot work off our sin in any way. We fear a just God, because we know that we deserve the punishment that our sins deserve. We know that God is right in declaring us guilty of our sins because we know we sin.

Yet, when we are called into the presence of our God, as we sit in his house this morning, we do not hear our God demanding payment. We don't hear words of judgment or punishment. Instead, we hear his mercy and love repeated to us over and over. You are forgiven of your sins, go in peace with God. We have been shown great love by Jesus, we are forgiven by Jesus of all of our sins

The first part of the parable shows us the amazing love of Jesus in forgiving our debt of the sin. The second half hits us a bit harder. It shows us how unloving and unforgiving we can often be. How did the man respond to the mercy and love that his master had shown to him? We would expect that he would show the same kind of love to another, at least for a little while. But we don't see that, we see how quickly he forgets about his master's love and goes out and does not forgive as he has been forgiven.

In the second half of the parable it is now the servant who is owed a very small amount of money, maybe a hundred dollars. He demands that this debt be paid by his fellow servant. The one who owes him begs for mercy, but instead of showing that mercy and forgiving as he had been forgiven, he throws the man into prison.

While our Savior is willing to forgive us of all of our sins, no matter what they are, we want to put limits on the forgiveness we give. We hear ourselves say things like: "I am still working through my process of forgiveness." "I don't know if I can forgive them for this." "I have forgiven, but I don't want anything to do with you." "I can forgive, but I can't forget." "I am willing to forgive, as soon as they say they are sorry about what they have done." Just like the man in the parable we would rather throw someone into a prison of our own revenge and anger than forgive as we have been forgiven.

But what if Jesus would say those same things to us? What if he would use the way we forgive to forgive us? Would we ever be forgiven? Could we ever be forgiven?

Jesus forgiveness is unconditional. He is perfect in forgiving us and he is telling us to take his example and make it our own, We forgive others as he has forgiven us. His forgiveness of us is not based upon who we are, our ability to make it up to him, to smooth things over, to grovel, or to apologize and to work off that sin. He forgives us fully and freely. With this as our example, why should we think our forgiveness should be any different?

Forgiveness is not something that many people show today. Instead we see people hold a person, a group of people, or even a great number of people in their own little prison of anger and revenge and refuse to forgive. We see uprisings and protests that are based upon people's refusal to forgive others.

Forgiveness is not natural. Many think that if we do not seek vengeance that we are weak. But forgiveness is not weak. Forgiveness is God-pleasing, it is a blessing to us and to others when we forgive.

Sometimes, forgiveness is for the other person, to let them know that we have forgiven them, but most of the time forgiveness is for us. Forgiveness allows us to remove our own sins of anger, frustration and revenge. Forgiveness trusts that God is in charge and what he wills for us and for others is best.

We forgive because we have been forgiven. We forgive someone when they are joking with us and the joke goes too far. We forgive our spouse when they are on edge, or their words are not as loving as they should be. We forgive the little things and the big. We forgive those who hurt us physically or emotionally, we forgive someone who has hurt or harmed us or someone we know not because of who they are, but because of Jesus.

As Christians, people are watching to see if we practice what we believe. When they see Christ's example of love and forgiveness on display through us, when they see us forgiving as we have been forgiven, they will see the love and forgiveness of our Savior, the same love and forgiveness that he has shown to us.
Amen