

# The Forgiven, the Forgiving

Matthew 18 : 21-35

First of all, I do have three questions to ask you. Do you remember the message delivered last Sunday? If so, please raise your hand. "Owe anyone nothing except loving one another." We were reminded that we are in debt to love God and others forever.

The second question. During the message time last Sunday, I asked "How can we love others all the time." Do you know what Bible verses I introduced to answer the question? It is Ephesians 4:32. "be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you."

The last question: Did you do love others last week by being kind, tenderhearted, forgiving, as God in Christ has forgiven you?

Today's Gospel lesson is about forgiveness.

One day Peter and Jesus had a conversation. Peter asked Jesus, "Lord, if anyone sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?" The rabbis taught in the first century that you should forgive your brother or sister three times. And they also taught that anyone who begs forgiveness from his neighbor must not do so more than three times. Forgiving three times was considered as generous according to the first century Jewish tradition.

No doubt Peter thought he was really offering to be very generous, more than generous when he offered seven times. He expected to be praised by his master for the generous seven times. Instead, Jesus surprised him and his friends, saying, "No, not seven times, but seventy times seven" (Matthew 13:22).

Some versions translate this as seventy-seven times. Whichever translation is correct, Jesus' answer says that you do not make score. There is no limit at all to God's forgiveness and no limit on a Christian's forgiveness - it is forgiveness unlimited.

Jesus then tells the story of a man who was forgiven but went out and refused to forgive someone. You recall the story. A king called in his servants to settle accounts. One owed the king 10,000 talents. In Jesus' day, a king's annual income was only 900 talents, so we quickly see the debt is an amount impossible to pay. In fact, it was \$10 million in our today's value.

Not because the servant deserved it, but because the king was the king and was merciful, he forgave the servant the entire debt. Not part of it, but all of it, no strings attached.

The forgiven servant had no sooner left the throne room than he encountered a friend of his who owed him 100 denarii, about \$20. Though the Little Debtor likewise asked for mercy, the forgiven servant would not forgive and had him put in prison.

Naturally when the king heard what the Big Debtor had done to the Little Debtor, he had the cruel man turned over to the jailers to be tortured. The Big Debtor's unforgiving heart had ruined his reconciled relationship with the king.

There is a big difference between the two debts. The first person's debt was a lot of money, 10 millions of dollars. The debt that the fellow servant owed was a tiny one compared to the first, 20 dollars. A few dollars is what it is called in the Today's English Bible. In fact, it was approximately five-hundred thousandth of the first debt. The contrast between the two debts is overwhelming.

That's the point Jesus was making:

Any debts anyone owes to us are so small compared with what God has forgiven us. If God is willing to forgive us all we owe him, we should be willing to forgive each other.

We owe God for our lives. We owe God for everything. Most of all, we owe God for our salvation through Christ, the forgiveness of our sins, our rescue from eternal death. We cannot possibly repay God.

So when ask God, God forgives us all unconditionally. Hallelujah! We are forgiven by God. God set us free from all debts.

What do we do with this freedom?

1

First of all, we are set free to forgive ourselves. We can forgive ourselves our failures and mistakes and begin anew again.

We dreamed and planned to achieve many things, such as good education, fine job, healthy relationship, and happy family situation. But all these do not always work out as we expected. We made bad choices and unintended mistakes. We goofed here and there. We hurt our family members and friends with sharp words and violent acts. We did not enough time together with our significant others and children.

So we are disappointed in ourselves and feel we don't measure up. We blame ourselves. We treat ourselves losers.

But because we receive God's 10 million dollars forgiveness, we can forgive our 20 dollars debts to ourselves. Compared to all God has forgiven us, nothing is too big for us to forgive. We can let go of our past and self-doubt and move on with confidence.

"Jesus, who represents God, usually transforms people at the moments when they most hate themselves, when they most feel shame or guilt, or want to punish themselves. Look at Jesus' interaction with the tax collector Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1–10). He doesn't belittle or punish Zacchaeus; instead, Jesus goes to his home, shares a meal with him, and treats him like a friend. Zacchaeus' heart is opened and transformed." (from Richard Rohr's morning devotion)

Jesus does not belittle or punish us; instead, Jesus shares a meal with us and treats us like a friend. Why? Because he knows we are God's beautiful and precious masterpiece and God loves us. So, knowing Jesus who cares about us and accepts us as we are, we can forgive ourselves and begin a new life with Jesus.

2

Second. We are forgiven and set free by God from all the debts to forgive others.

We know forgiving is not easy.

Old Joe was dying. For years he'd been at odds with Bill, formerly one of his best friends. Wanting to straighten things out, he asked Bill to come and see him. When Bill arrived, Joe told him that he was afraid to go into eternity with such bad feelings between them. Then, very reluctantly and with great effort, Joe apologized for things he had said and done to Bill. He also assured Bill that he forgave him for his offenses.

Everything seemed fine until Bill was about to leave. As he walked out of the room, Joe called out after him, "Now, just remember Bill, if I get better, this doesn't count."

Forgiving is not easy, for sure. But it is possible. I believe Jesus would not ask us to forgive one another if it were not possible.

Corrie ten Boom, a Dutch Christian who, along with her father and other family members, helped many Jews escape the Nazi Holocaust during World War II and was imprisoned for it.

She told once of being haunted by a wrong that had once been done to her. She had forgiven the person, but the incident kept alive in her mind and kept her awake at night.

Finally, Corrie cried out to God for help in putting the problem to rest. And God answered her prayer. God sent her a wise pastor. Corrie confessed to this pastor that for many weeks she had gone without sleep hashing and rehashing this incident in her mind.

The pastor gave her a simple advice.

"Corie, up in the church tower," he said, "is a bell which is rung by pulling on a rope. But you know what? After the ringer lets go of the rope, the bell keeps on swinging. First ding, then dong. Slower and slower until there is a final dong and it stops.

I believe the same thing is true of forgiveness. When we forgive, we take our hand off the rope. But we must not be surprised if the old angry and resentful thoughts keep coming for a while. They're just the ding-dongs of the old bell slowing down."

This was just the advice Corrie needed. This is the advice we need today.

Maybe there is an incident from our past that still bothers us; maybe there are still resentment and anger in our heart but if we continue to ask God's help, forgiveness is possible.

I don't have to let them haunt me forever. You don't have to let them haunt you forever. We don't have to be suffered by resentment and anger forever. We will be resentment-free and anger-free ultimately as we keep forgiving.

In closing, in his short story "Capital of the World", Ernest Hemingway tells about a Spanish father who wanted to be reconciled with his runaway son. The despairing father missed his son so much that he placed an advertisement in the local newspaper. The advertisement read simply, "Paco, meet me at the Hotel Montana at noon on Tuesday. All is forgiven! Love, Papa." But Paco is a very common name in Spain—and when the father went to the hotel the next day, there were eight hundred young men named Paco waiting for their forgiving fathers!

Many want to be forgiven. Many are waiting for your tenderhearted and sincere forgiveness. They might be one of your family members or friends or coworkers. Pick out someone to whom you will offer forgiveness today. Offer the hand and heart in love. Restore the relationship and strengthen the friendship.

I am sure our Lord will be rejoicing to see us forgiving others and make His face shining upon us.

Jesus taught us to pray, "Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors...." It isn't that God doesn't want to forgive us if we don't. But if we don't forgive, it tells that we have not fully accepted and appreciated God's magnificent forgiveness and the joy and the gratitude that come with it.

Let us remember that by God's grace, our sin is blotted out of God's sight forever. Yes, we are justified by faith through grace. With this remembrance, we join joyfully to sing with the writer of the hymn, "It is well with my soul"

"My sin—O the bliss of this glorious thought—  
My sin—not in part but the whole,  
Is nailed to the cross and I bear it no more.  
Praise the Lord, Praise the Lord, O my soul."

It is well with my soul. It is well. It is well with my soul.

Let us accept God's forgiveness, the greatest gift in the world and rejoice in the way God has forgiven us. Let us forgive ourselves and others freely and joyfully and share God's greatest gift with them to the glory of God.

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.