

Grace Greater Than We Can Imagine

Love Like Jesus, Message #1

ILLUSTRATION

How many of you consider yourself to be someone who has a good imagination?

Imagination is defined as the ability to form mental images of things that are not present to the senses or not considered to be real (NELSON, A. (2006). American Heritage Dictionary).

I can remember imagining myself playing as a member for the Chicago Bulls while practicing my basketball skills. Throughout junior high and high school, I would often practice in solitude on my home hoop. It was the United Center where I would play alongside Michael Jordan in the NBA Finals. MJ wouldn't be the one taking the game winning shots, I would. And I hit it every single time. Not really, it was the product of my imagination.

INTRODUCTION

We have set our vision for 2023 to grow in loving God and loving others. As we pursue this, we know that understanding God's love more is essential. That is why I challenged you to make a portion of Paul's prayer for the Ephesians believers your prayer this year.

BIBLE

“that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.”

Ephesians 3:17-19 KJV

<https://bible.com/bible/1/eph.3.17-19.KJV>

INTRODUCTION

Right after Paul said that, he identified God as the One Who “is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think” (Eph. 3:20). Paul says that God can do more than we can even imagine! He said it right on the heels of talking to us about God’s love. In many ways, God’s love is greater than we can imagine.

Yet, we should seek to grow in our understanding so that we are enabled to love Him and others better. To accomplish this, God has led me to bring messages in a series called *Love Like Jesus*. In this series, we will look at various passages that define and / or demonstrate God’s love, and / or detail how we can reflect His love by letting Him love through us. Let’s begin in Matthew 18 with a message called *Grace Greater Than We Can Imagine*. Please turn to Matthew 18 with me now.

Jesus identified His desire and design for His disciples and, later, for His church to forgive. At the time, Jewish rabbis taught that you should forgive someone for an offense three times and then forgo forgiveness. Peter asked if they should up the rabbis’ requirement to offering forgiveness seven times. This prompted the answer and parable of Jesus. In His answer, Jesus taught that we shouldn’t account of our forgiveness. Instead, we should live lives of forgiveness. Through the parable, Jesus illustrates this as He identifies the depth of God’s grace and love for sinners.

Follow along as we read it in Matthew 18:21-27.

BIBLE

“Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times? Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven. Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, which would take account of his servants. And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him, which owed him ten thousand talents. But forasmuch as he had not to pay, his Lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made. The servant therefore fell down, and worshipped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. Then the Lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt.”

Matthew 18:21-27 KJV

<https://bible.com/bible/1/mat.18.21-27.KJV>

INTRODUCTION

The parable reveals grace and love beyond what we have imagined and can imagine. God pours out His love and grace on us richly. The depth of God's grace and love amazes and challenges us.

What does the parable reveal about the unimaginable grace and love of God?

What does the parable reveal about the unimaginable grace and love of God? Two aspects of the portion of the parable we are considering demonstrate these to us, as well as begin to challenge us with what it means for our lives.

1. CONSIDER THE DEBT OF THE SERVANT (VV. 23-24).

EXPLANATION

Jesus presents an illustration depicting a king who calls his servants to account for how they have conducted his business. Perhaps we could identify with this situation if we have ever worked as a cashier. At the end of the day, the manager will make sure that the register drawer balances out. Or, we could picture an employer or accountant balancing the books to make sure everything has been accurately recorded and balances out.

In this parable, a servant has been called before his lord...and he has gotten it terribly wrong. He owes his master 10,000 talents! If we are talking about gold talents and each talent weighed between 58 and 80 pounds, based on today's price of gold per ounce the total debt would be just under 18 billion dollars to nearly 25 billion dollars.

What was the point? Why did Jesus give such an exaggerated illustration?

A. THE DEBT REPRESENTS THE MEMORANDUM OF OUR SIN.

APPLICATION

Jesus wants me and He wants you to see Him as the King, Lord, and Master. He also wants me and He wants you to see yourself as the servant. I am the servant that owes Him an impossible debt. You are the servant that owes Him an impossible debt.

EXPLANATION

Jesus spoke of the Lord who would "take account" of and "reckon" with his servants. These identify the thought of accounting and computing, including what is said and the motives behind it.

APPLICATION

This should cause us to think about the reality that we are all accountable to God. Everything is known to Him. He knows every action, every word, every thought and intent of our hearts. When all of this is reckoned up and accounted, we are all found wanting and owing a debt to Him that we cannot pay.

B. THE DEBT REPRESENTS THE MAGNITUDE OF OUR SIN.

APPLICATION

The depth of our sin cannot be overstated or exaggerated. The debt that seems impossible to rack up does not exaggerate my sin debt, but adequately explains it. My sin leaves me utterly indebted to God in a way that I can never recover from. How unfortunate that one of the tendencies of sin is to cause each one of us to minimize our sinfulness, even in light of the resplendent glory of the holiness of God. You cannot possibly overstate your sinfulness. Your debt is that big. Your debt is impossible to pay. You could never be enough, do enough, or make enough to pay it down - let alone pay it off.

By the way, this is why salvation by works systems are so contradictory to Biblical truth. Our state really is that bad!

Do not read this Scripture and see someone else in it. Read it and see yourself. This is your story.

2. CONSIDER THE FORGIVENESS OF THE KING.

EXPLANATION

The response of the servant reveals man's tendency and further emphasizes the grace and love of the King. The servant asked for more time to make up the lack and pay off the King. There was no possibility of that ever happening!

ILLUSTRATION

'Be patient with me ... and I will pay back everything' (26) is pitifully untrue, as threadbare as our own excuses and palliatives: 'I will try a bit harder. I will come to church. Surely that will do?' But it won't. The debt is phenomenal: a thousand times the annual revenue of Galilee, Judea, Samaria and Idumea put together! Totally beyond imagining. And the king forgives him the lot. The parallel is plain. That is what God has done to the sins of the disciple—any disciple. They have been piling up for years like

debts: every day, every hour adds to them. They can never be paid. And God says, 'I release you from that debt'" (Michael Green, The Message of Matthew).

APPLICATION

That was His response...I forgive you! What?! Why?! It wasn't about the servant! It was about Him, His grace, His love. His grace and love flowed in the form of forgiveness.

A. HIS FORGIVENESS IS COMPASSIONATE (V. 27A).

EXPLANATION

This phrase is the translation of one word in the original. It literally means to have the bowels yearn, feel sympathy, or pity. It connotes feeling compassion for, having pity on, having one's heart go out to someone; to be affected deeply in one's inner being.

The word is used just twelve times in the New Testament. In every case, it is used in some way of Jesus. So, this is somehow connected in a unique way to Him.

It represents the King Who is moved by the plight of His servant. Though He has been wronged and is owed such a great debt, the King is moved by the situation His servant is in and his inability to do anything about it. Being moved with compassion, the King forgives the whole debt.

APPLICATION

Jesus looked on you and me, was moved with compassion that we are sinful and can do nothing to pay the debt we owe to God, so He did what we could not. He lived the life we should, died the death we deserve, rose again, and offers us forgiveness...all because He loves us!

B. HIS FORGIVENESS IS LIBERATING (V. 27B).

EXPLANATION

I love this statement where it says, "...and loosed him..." It means to free fully!

This was not a conditional forgiveness. It was not a forgiveness that would leave the servant with a price still over him, some duty to perform, nor did it come with a disclosure listing all of the ways that it could be rescinded.

APPLICATION

This is true of God's forgiveness of us.

Freedom indeed is the message of the Gospel!

C. HIS FORGIVENESS IS COMPLETE (V. 27C).

EXPLANATION

Because of Jesus's finished work in his death and resurrection, believers can rest in the security of God's grace. Our debt is paid in full. We don't need "faith and": faith and performance, faith and keeping the Law, faith and perfection. We can rest in the finished work of Jesus for ourselves by believing in what he did for us.

ILLUSTRATION

Research by experts at Johns Hopkins University has found that half of all American adults take a multivitamin every day, spending a total of more than \$12 billion a year. Yet these medical experts conclude that supplementing a healthy diet is not necessary. If the average person eats a healthy diet, a supplemental vitamin has no benefits long-term or short-term, with the only exception being pregnant women who need extra folic acid and iron ("Is There Really Any Benefit to Multivitamins?" Johns Hopkins Medicine, accessed December 15, 2017, https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/healthy_aging/healthy_body/is-there-really-any-benefit-to-multivitamins).

[A Note to the Pastor: Hold up a bottle of vitamins while you talk about supplementing grace unnecessarily.]

APPLICATION

We don't need to supplement Jesus's work with our own work, striving to earn favor or right standing with God. What Jesus did is enough! Because of His grace and love, His forgiveness is complete!

CONCLUSION

The depth of God's grace and love amazes and challenges us.

Though our sin is so great and deserves death (eternal separation from God), God through His grace and love forgives us.

There's Forgiveness

Don't struggle alone, in fear and distress

As if there's no hope, just your ugliness.

Our Lord offers grace, not judgment deserving,
He longs for your love and your soon returning.

THERE'S FORGIVENESS.

It's tough cutting through the darkness of sin
Striving for answers, His favor to win.

He stands with His arms outstretched and extended
To hold and restore you, just mercy intended.

THERE'S FORGIVENESS.

Why search other places your answers to find
To fill the vast void and touch the divine.

Lay down your excuses and learn to confess
Your sins and your shame to His holiness.

THERE'S FORGIVENESS.

There's healing and fellowship waiting for you
The moment you turn, His face to pursue.

You are the temple, His place for abiding,
The only thing missing is your mind deciding.

THERE'S FORGIVENESS.

Don't wait for a feeling or mystical lark,
Just bow down in quietness, open your heart.

Be honest, and tell Him no secret to keep
From there He restores you to fellowship sweet.

THERE'S FORGIVENESS.

His promise is certain, "I will forgive,"

Cleansing and freedom, it's yours to live.

From no other source full joy will you find.

He is your victory, your peace so sublime.

THERE'S FORGIVENESS.

To humble yourself, before Him in prayer,

Is your first step, in unloading your care.

There look Him squarely, straight in the face

And tell Him all of the ways you disgrace.

THERE'S FORGIVENESS.

Refreshment and fullness He will restore

The moment you sincerely open the door.

He is the life you thought you could win,

By going your way and living in sin.

THERE'S FORGIVENESS.

There's no one beyond the reach of His arm

To pick up and pardon, to rescue from harm.

Return to the Master of your faith's beginning.

Give Him your all, and you'll find yourself winning.

THERE'S FORGIVENESS.

What wonderful love eternity holds,

For those who are willing to be in the fold.

The Savior is waiting, Oh come to Him now,

At His nail-scarred feet, in humility bow.

THERE'S FORGIVENESS.

If you are a child of God, this forgiveness is already yours! Revel in the unimaginable grace and love of God. Then, recognize how God desires you to apply His grace and love to your life and interactions with others.

If you are not a child of God, this forgiveness is available to you! Understand that this is the grace and love that God has for you. You can experience it through believing in Jesus Christ Who came to this earth, lived the life that you could not, died the death you deserve, and rose again.