

18:21

Well we're still talking about a brother who sins (18:15), and look what Peter introduces as a possibility: **Then came Peter to Him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him?** Now, it's not like he's forgiving him without any kind of repentance. We're not told to just haphazardly forgive people that are just flippant and careless in our lives. If you look at the cross-reference sometime, Luke 17, it, actually the entire thought is implied here but it's explicit there. And the only reason I'm referring to it is because I don't want to make you think something that's not true. You're not required to just willy-nilly forgive everybody, because that's really not love. Remember, one of the principles that we find in the gospel is justice. And it's very hard to show people gospel love if you're not requiring justice. Let me say that again. I don't think you hear that enough. We're not showing gospel-centered Christianity if we don't require justice. You can't enjoy God's grace and His mercy if you are not under some sort of sense of obligation to Him. So, in Luke 17 it says, "If your brother sins against thee and says, 'I repent,' you forgive him." Here it's implied.

So here is what happens when a brother wants to get it right. Peter says, "What happens if a brother wants to get it right?" And he says, **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.**¹ In Genesis 4, you have this guy named Lamech. And he kills a man and he says, "I killed a man for wounding me. If Cain would be avenged sevenfold, truly Lamech seventy and sevenfold." Or, seventy times seven. It's kind of like in a math problem. If you leave the "x" in there it's the same as just putting the number in parenthesis. So, I just wanted you to see they're using the same numeric formulas here and I don't know the point, but it's the only times in the Bible where you can find this sort of idea. And maybe one day I'll get really smart and I'll find the connection.²

18:23-25

I think when we read the Proverbs 6, "These six things does the Lord hate, yea, seven are an abomination,"³ Jesus is saying "Look at that perfect number and go one beyond it." If you want to find it in about six times in about three chapters, look at Amos. I have a feeling this is another Hebraic formula of saying "countless," because if you're keeping a tally and you're up around seventy three, and you're like me, you lose count and you have to start over. "Just keep forgiving."

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. Again, you could weary yourself for the next three hours trying to figure out what that means, but a talent is a year's wage. There's no way this guy is going to repay ten thousand years worth of labor. So you're getting the story of a fixed fight. Jesus is setting the stage to make a point. He wants you to consider something that is just as bombastic, or even more, than four hundred and ninety forgivenesses. And so He says, "Here's a man that owed ten thousand years of labor to his master."

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. Seems kind of harsh, until someone gets indebted to you ten thousand years worth of salary. Then it doesn't seem so harsh to be owned and sold. Who in the world lets themselves get so far into debt? And I guess that's the point of the Lord, isn't it? How in the world can we let ourselves get so far into debt to God?

18:26-27

¹There are four hundred and ninety years in Daniel's seventy weeks.

²How do I know there's a connection? Look what Jesus is referencing in Matthew 19:3-5 (just a few short verses away). He's referencing Genesis, so I have no issue saying He's referencing Genesis just verses earlier. If Genesis is on Jesus' mind or on Matthew's mind in 19:4 and 19:5, then I have no problem believing it was on His mind in 18:23. I don't know the connection but it does appear to be on His mind.

³Proverbs 30 showcases the "three, yes four" formula as well.

The servant therefore fell down, and worshipped him. That word worship, you probably see something different if you don't have a King James. It means that he lies prostrate. The servant therefore fell down flat. In the Greek, the idea is to lick the hand of the master like a dog does his master. And if you don't have a dog you don't have any idea the frustration that that can produce.

Saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. Well that's pretty arrogant. How patient would you like the master to be, for you to pay back ten thousand years of labor? We'll say just about anything in a foolish vow though to get out of trouble. And here we are having our character displayed to us.

Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt. **Loosed** is the same idea as **forgave him**. Right there in the verse we have forgiveness defined for us. It actually means "to let go or to disregard." When you forgive someone you're disregarding what they've done for you. It's like you're deciding to not care about it anymore. That's very hard. And the reason it seems so very hard to us is because, well, the answer is found here in this parable.

18:28

But the same servant. We'll call him Servant A.

The same servant went out, and found one of his fellow servants, which owed him an hundred pence. a denarii, which is a day's wage. So this guy owes him what amounts to be three months worth of wages, which is quite a bit different I think than ten thousand years.

He laid hands on him. That is a judicial term. It's not like he's shaking him; it's that he's grabbing him and pulling him to the magistrate to settle, which was certainly in the right of the person who was owed.

Took him by the throat, saying, Pay me what you owe. Drags him in front of the judgment seat and says, "Pay me those three and a half months worth of wages."

18:29

Now, it is striking how similar verse 26 is to verse 29. In fact, it's almost a carbon copy. Servant B fell down at Servant A's feet and besought him saying; and he says the same thing, **Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all.** Servant B is a little bit more realistic. Servant A really doesn't understand what he owes but he does totally understand what Servant B owes him.

18:30

Servant A **would not** He would not have patience with Servant B. **But went and cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt.** Now here's my question, how are you going to do that? Now that you're in prison; how do you work it off in prison? It's not like you could earn a Master's Degree back then in jail. Make license plates. This is not Angola State Pen. That seems so contradictory. "You owe me this money. I'm putting you in jail." Well the idea is that if you put someone in prison your family would feel sorry for you and pay off your debt. Might be kind of considered like posting bail except it was actually the payment for your crime; It was actually the settling of your debt. Maybe that's a better way to say it. But any case, putting him in prison would perhaps get others to feel sorry for him and pay the debt. Three and a half months.

Now, I'm sure that's a lot of money. You know what you make every month. Multiply that by three and that's what this man owes you in this story. It's a lot of money, there's no question. But now, take your annual salary and multiply it by ten thousand and you'll know what you and I owe the king. It's astronomical. And that's the point. This is not a real deep passage.

18:31

These **fellow servants** are C through Z: **So when his fellow servants saw what was done, they were very sorry, and came and told unto their lord all that was done. Then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because you simply desired it: Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellow servant, even as I had pity on thee? And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him.** Once again, this would be absurd if we didn't understand that people would feel badly that this man is being tortured in jail until someone pays his debt. You've already decided it certainly doesn't mean purgatory "because we don't believe in that," and already the Scripture has been stymied before it can even do any work in our hearts. It sounds like all of a sudden not only are you going to be tortured until someone pays your debt, but it also sounds like you can actually lose your salvation.

18:35

So likewise shall My heavenly Father do also unto you if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses. First of all, I feel like I need to talk about this idea of Paul. Is this in agreement with Paul? Does the, first of all, church discipline square with Paul? Now folks, I'm asking you these reasons on purpose. Well, I want you to see they actually do very much agree. Especially when you look in verse 15 through 20. Please notice how much this has in common with 1 Corinthians 5:1-10. Paul sounds a lot like Jesus.

So I guess what I'm trying to say is we're not surprised. Remember the last verse of chapter 17. Jesus tells us that He did not want to give offense to people so He paid His taxes that He really honestly didn't owe (sounds like Paul, 1 Corinthians 10:32). **So also My heavenly Father will do to you if everyone of you do not forgive your brother from your heart.** This, again, sounds like Paul (Ephesians 4:32). Then, we find that Genesis 2 is quoted by Jesus (Matthew 19:1-6) and Paul (1 Corinthians 6). Paul and Jesus sound a lot alike. So with four straight episodes that are like Paul, we should expect whatever salvation is being spoken of in this passage to be much the same.

Now let's talk about three things that are not in this passage that are in salvation as Paul would preach it:

1. In this passage there is no evidence of salvation by faith, only a presumptive arrogance that one could repay a debt. That is not Paul's salvation. We don't see anything in here about a servant having faith in a God who will forgive him. That's not what we believe about New Testament salvation. You are not going to find salvation this way.
2. We don't find propitiation in this passage. Now propitiation is the satisfaction of an angry ruler by paying a debt and satisfying his wrath. But no debt is being paid here. Here's the reality. The king doesn't require payment of ten thousand talents but it's still owed. No one paid it. That is not propitiation.

When we sinned against God Almighty, someone had to die for it for our salvation. What do the Muslims teach? You get saved if God says so. That's it. You know, well why would God forgive you? Because He decides to. It's up to Him. Well we don't believe that. We believe that the debt really does have to be paid. In this story there is no debt paid. It is arbitrarily forgiven because the king has pity on Servant A.

3. We have no advocacy. So long as Jesus the High Priest is living at the right hand of God the Father I don't have to worry about falling from grace. Hebrews 7 says that "He ever lives to intercede." I don't have to ever worry about losing my salvation so long as the High Priest lives, because He's going to continually keep His work on the cross before the Father and there will never be a chance of my debt being brought up again, because of faith in Jesus. That's the whole point of intercession. Jesus is at the right hand of God assuring my salvation, keeping the work of Calvary before the Father. Here, there is none of that. There's nothing but a god who is re-angered and reapplies the same debt.

Well then, what are we talking about? Because if it's salvation, if you decide, "No, no, no, Paul and Jesus are just preaching a different salvation, that's just all there is to it. Well, Paul and Jesus and John

and Jude... They're all just teaching a different salvation." Well, think about what we have to deal with here. In verse 34 I already introduced to you the fact that you have a man going to jail until he pays. Now think about the problem if you're willing to say that you have to go to hell until your sins are paid for. It's like there's two ways to get saved: either Jesus paid for your sins or you can. Now it will take you ten thousand years, but at least it's just ten thousand years and not an infinity. Well that certainly does seem like a wasted trip for Jesus from heaven. There is a plan B. You can either trust Jesus as your Savior or you can go to hell and pay for your sins and then get out. Well, I don't think that's what the passage is teaching. It's not because my system says it doesn't work; it's because I've already shown you three things that are missing from this passage that are present with New Testament salvation. Propitiation, intercession, and salvation by faith. All of them are not in this passage. So I have to believe that verse 34 is not talking about some sort of go to jail in hell until you pay for your sins.

Also, if the jail that Servant A puts Servant B into is not hell, then the jail the king put Servant A into cannot be hell, because the parable is not parallel then. There's no proof that this is an after death judgment.

So, what is it then? Well, here's what I think: does Matthew use this language any other place in Matthew? And he has, one other time. Matthew 6.

Matthew 6:9-13 showcases the Lord's Prayer. In the middle we read "Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors." Now, there's an explanation to follow after He closes the prayer in verse 13 in verse 14.

For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

Well, we have a couple thoughts once again. Is this passage, just like Matthew 18, teaching that in order for you to have your sins forgiven you have to be a forgiving person? Well, there's a number of reasons why I would say yes and no:

1. First, the "no": It's incredibly difficult for your heavenly Father, which you did not have until you got saved, to punish you like a lost person while He's still your heavenly Father. Only saved people have a heavenly Father. So how can you be punished by your heavenly Father like a lost person if you're unsaved? The other thing is, it's just poor theology. "You're saved if you're forgiving. You're not saved if you're not forgiving." I mean, you could potentially be unsaved and saved fifteen times a day.
2. Second, the "yes": There are two ways in which a person could talk about forgiveness. One is God as your judge and the other is God as your Father. And let me just propose a scenario to you if I could. Let's just say that I was elected to be a district judge. Let's say that my son is involved with tomfoolery and stupidity and all manner of dumbness downtown. And he decides to monogram vehicles with his initials in his key. There is a solid chance that I'll find out about it, both as his father and as the judge. This is not a perfect illustration but it will illustrate enough what I'm trying to say. He has his day in court. He admits his guilt and the person whose car he defaced drops the charges. I as the judge will not bring judgment upon him because the charges have been dropped. But I'm also his dad. I will take off that gown at the end of the day and I'm no longer his judge. He has nothing to worry about as far as serving the sentence of a convict. But I am going to blister his hind end when we get home because I'm his dad.

There are two ways in which God can judge you, judge me. One was taken care of at Calvary. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shall be saved" (Acts 16:31). You'll never have to worry about being under condemnation again and God will continually work on your heart, time after time after time, to make you a forgiving person; that's true. But if you decide as a Christian, as one of the sons of the Father to ask for forgiveness in this manner and not grant forgiveness in this manner, then you will be worked over by your heavenly Father. It says nothing about being in danger of hellfire. It says forgiveness. Why do we have 1 John 1:9 in the Bible? "To confess our sins and He is found faithful to

forgive us our sins.” Is it so that we can be saved? No, it is because we are saved that we have the ability to come to God and ask for forgiveness.

I don't want anyone reading this to think that I am decreasing the load of responsibility upon us to be forgiving people. Now, this might seem kind of irrational. Why is it that I am just going to put my brother in prison, but God, if I am unforgiving, will put me to tormentors? Remember it is a parable. It is not doctrinal, it is not a doctrinal teaching passage; it is a parable. It's not like an epistle. It's a story being told to illustrate Biblical truth. So it's not like Jesus is saying, "This is exactly how it'll happen and oh here, by the way, here's the tormentors." But if you have ever met a miserable Christian you will know someone who is being tormented. I want you to know the reason many Christians you know are being tormented in bitterness and anger and despondency, is because they are ridiculously irrational Christians. If you are bitter and angry there's a solid chance that you've got someone in your jail, and you are with the tormentors. And you're going to stay there until you forgive the debt.

It is not a light thing to be irrational. I have always been humored by the lost world who thinks that God is irrational. "If I was God I would take better care of my world and not let hurricanes and tsunamis and tornados. If I was God I would not let my children die of starvation. If I was God..." As if God needs permission to be anything to anybody. How about those of us who have been forgiven amazing amounts of sins against our king? It is so irrational to be American more than Christian. You can sit around and sulk about how you have a right to hold a grudge if you want to, but you're the one that's going to be with the tormentors. "You better let them out of prison or I'll leave you with the tormentors."

We have been forgiven absurd amounts of offense against God and all we can think about is how we've been wronged. "They've taken my rights. They've stepped all over me. They have..." Yes, I know and I'm not trying to reduce the depth of the pain that you're feeling. And I don't think Jesus is either. Nor do I think that He is magnifying your plight. I don't think that He's saying, "Ah, what you went through is nothing." But I do think He's saying, "Have some perspective." In your little, "I need time to recover," you have been holding a grudge for five and seven and thirteen and seventeen years. You need to ask God to forgive you and write a letter of forgiveness to somebody and ask their forgiveness for being such a jerk. So how irrational are we when we keep someone in our jail?

Oh, we need to be careful because while we're keeping people in jail for their offenses against us... I know it hurts, I know you could use that hundred pence, I know they should say sorry. I know they should. I know they should say it like they mean it. I know they should. I know they should stop doing it all the time. I know they should. I know you could use that hundred denarii. I know. But you're the one with the tormentors. And so am I. Let's not spend any time with the tormentors. Let your brother and sister out of jail.