

The Unmerciful Servant

In Matthew chapter 18 starting in verse 21 we read the parable about the Unmerciful servant. This is one of the longer parables in the Bible. It focuses on forgiveness. Jesus is telling Peter that all men need to show compassion and mercy toward others as practiced through forgiveness. Peter was beginning to understand exactly what the Christ was trying to teach them when he asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?" Jesus famously replies, "I tell you not seven times, but seventy-seven times." Some versions say that Jesus said, "seven times seventy." The total amount is not the point. The point is that we need to forgive a tremendous amount of times because people will let us down. Love is the key.

Let's read Matthew chapter 18 verses 23 – 35 and then try to understand the parable.

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 bags of gold^[a] 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 "At this 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 silver coins.^[b] 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 it 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 outraged 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 handed 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 or sister from your heart."

What does this parable mean?

1. God is represented by the king in this parable.
2. All men are servants of the king.
3. The servant with the enormous debt stands for every unredeemed sinner on earth whose debt is so large that it is impossible for him to pay it. Just so you know, the debt mentioned in this parable would equal \$10,000,000 in today's money for the servant. The fellow servant who owed the forgiven servant 100 Denari would equal about \$20.00.
4. The king's forgiveness, without asking for any repayment from the unmerciful servant, indicates God's grace.
5. The horrible conduct of the unmerciful servant toward his fellow servant shows how God looks upon the refusal of his children to forgive others. That means us.
6. The king's forgiveness "because you begged me to" shows that sinners need only to apply (in the proper way) in order to be forgiven. They need not "pay" anything. We know that we need to accept Jesus Christ as our personal Savior, confess and repent of our sins and then be baptized into Christ for the forgiveness of our sins.
7. The ultimate punishment of the unmerciful servant shows that all forgiveness depends upon the continuing faithfulness of Christians. Jesus certainly taught in this that one may fall from grace.
8. Those who have received mercy must give mercy, or else have the mercy they have already received can be taken away.

Think about what Jesus said in Luke 23: 34 to God, the Father, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." This was said as he hung on the cross at calvary as an innocent man being punished for His actions of mercy, compassion and forgiveness toward others.

Scripture: Luke 23:34, Matthew 18:23 – 35

Questions?

1. Should we forgive others only seven times?
2. Why did the servant that was forgiven by the king not forgive his fellow servant?
3. What did the king do to the unmerciful servant?
4. Should we forgive others for sins against us?

Next Steps: Think of something someone did that was not nice to you. Think about how you would go about forgiving them.