

The Parables of Jesus Week 5: Indebted – Matthew 18:21-35 **David Bawks - Pathway Community Church (August 1, 2021)**

Welcome everyone to our service today! Let's begin with a story.

There was a landlord who owned a number of rental properties throughout the Bay Area. One family was renting a single-family home for \$4,000 a month. The father lost his job in 2019 and stopped paying rent in early 2019. The landlord was about to evict him and his family, when, due to the covid-19 pandemic, an eviction moratorium was put into effect in 2020. The father owed \$50,000, and this amount increased each month until in mid-2021 he owed \$100,000.

Finally, the father met with the landlord and shared his story of losing his job and the challenges they had faced throughout the pandemic. Due to some clerical errors, he had not qualified for any federal or state aid to help him with rent. The landlord listened to the story and decided to forgive the entire debt.

The father went home, and in the living room he found his son who had just turned 18. They had agreed that the son would begin paying rent at age 18, set at \$500 for his bedroom. The son had applied to several jobs but hadn't yet been accepted at any of them. The father brought out a calendar and pointed out that it was the 1st of August, so you owe me \$500 for the month. His son had turned 18 on July 31. The son pleaded for mercy to have more time to find a job and pay the rent, but the father refused to listen. It was crystal clear, we agreed rent would be due on the 1st of the month! You're out, buddy. He forced his son to leave the house until he could find the money to pay.

His son put some clothes into his backpack and left. He wandered around until he found a place to sleep outside a warehouse. Early the next morning, a man came by the warehouse to meet with the management and found him sleeping outside. He recognized him and woke him up to ask him what was going on. It was his father's landlord, and the son told him the whole story.irate, the landlord canceled his meeting and went with the son directly to his father's house. He told the father that he was now responsible to pay for the entire \$100,000 of back rent, and it so happened that the federal eviction moratorium had expired yesterday. He gave the father the address of a shelter a few blocks away and said that the sheriff would be there by 6 pm to enforce their eviction. The landlord added that the son could stay in the house by himself for the next six months rent-free, to allow him to get a job and find his own place. This is how God will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart.

As we've been exploring the parables this month, we've seen that the parables are stories intended to bring conviction and drive truth home. To make them effective for us today, our task is to learn the intended lesson and then translate that into our current context.

This is our fifth week looking at parables. So far, we've looked at the parable of the Samaritan, the workers in the vineyard, the lost sheep, and the ten virgins. What do you remember from these parables?

Turn with me to Matthew 18 for our parable for today. A few weeks ago, I read a few verses from Matthew 18 when we looked at the parable of the lost sheep. I'll read from verse 21 to verse 35.

²¹ Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who 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 bags of gold 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. 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."

The main point of this parable is clear:

- **Just as God has forgiven us, we must forgive others.**

How did you feel when the father kicked his son onto the streets for being one day late on rent? It is totally unreasonable. But that is what we do when we fail to forgive someone who has wronged us, when God has forgiven us so much. Here are two ways for us to apply this story in our lives today:

1) Recognize how much God has forgiven us.

My story did not quite capture the true amounts of money that Jesus used in his parable or the right proportion. What the NIV translates as bags of gold was literally *talent*, a measure of gold weighing about 75 pounds, or about 1.4 million dollars each. The first man owed ten thousand talents, the highest unit of money possible, about 14 billion dollars – a ridiculous amount that meant nothing to the average person. If I told you that you owe me 14 billion, unless you're Elon Musk, that kind of money is simply

unfathomable. It would take the average worker 200,000 years to make enough wages to pay that off, assuming they never spent anything. Utterly impossible.

In contrast to the ten thousand bags of gold, the second servant owed 100 denarii, or 100 days' wages. That comes to \$16,000 if you make \$20 an hour and work eight hours a day. It is a decent amount of money to owe, but nothing compared to 14 billion! The contrast between the two is exceptional. The ratio between the two amounts that Jesus used was 600,000 to 1. In my example, if the father had owed 100,000 in rent, the amount of rent he would have thrown his son out for would have been 17 cents.

God is saying that if we think of the amount we owe, it comes to 14 billion for the average person. We could never pay it off. When we sin against God, and dishonor his name and his standards of perfection, then what we have done wrong is calculated against God's perfection of love, purity, and holiness. Held against that standard, there was absolutely no hope of us ever paying off our debt.

But in sending Jesus to die for us at the cross, God was wiping out our debt in full. He was making the payment on our behalf. He was setting our record clean, and covering us with his perfect righteousness. We don't have to worry about our debt or repayment.

2) Forgive others as often as necessary.

The parable is prompted by Peter's question about how often he should forgive someone. He is good to go up to seven times, but Jesus says that he must go much higher than that – seventy times seven. Basically, as often as necessary – no limit. Since God has forgiven us an incredible amount, and continues to forgive us every time we wrong him, our new life of faith is a life of forgiveness.

How do we forgive?

A. Ask the Holy Spirit to bring to mind people who have hurt you.

Hurts lead to all kinds of negative emotions, including unforgiveness, disappointment/ disillusionment, anger, bitterness, and isolation. We must acknowledge and feel all these feelings for them to be healed and overcome. Every day there are opportunities to be wounded and so how we deal with our hurts in respect to other people becomes crucial to our Christian witness and indeed survival.

We are the total result of all the experiences that we have lived. Jesus came to heal the brokenhearted (Psalm 147:3). He knows that someone trampled all over you and left you in pieces. Many people want to serve in the work of the Lord but it's hard because they are still wounded. A wounded person has bondages and these bondages cause them to also hurt others. Think about a wounded animal; it is the most dangerous! The more severe the pain and injury, the more resistance to any effort to help; a wounded animal will try to strike back.

A seriously wounded person is a person too emotionally crippled to see his future objectively. When a person has received a wound of any sort in their soul, they can stay bond to the person or situation that has caused the wound. Many of us have walked around in this life carrying others. What does this do to us? Our lives can be completely dominated by the people who have wounded us and the situations we

have never let go of. It has been said the unforgiveness is like drinking poison, and hoping the other person will die.

Many of us carry special wounds inflicted by fathers. The devil seeks to break people's image of the Father and Mother primarily because a breach in this relationship alters significantly our relationship to God. God wants to heal us and restore that wrong image of a true father and mother because God Is father. When the model of Father fails and doesn't fulfill the function, then we find it difficult to properly relate to delegated authority.

The wounds of the heart are difficult to define and diagnose. They can enter into a deeper level than the mind and memory. Many people carry deep wounds that they don't even know they have. They have kept them hidden. Their minds don't want to confront them and their memories don't want to bring them to the surface. But they are there...deep down. This can be from rejection, betrayal, abuse, or even harsh words from others.

The symptoms of a wounded hurt include:

1. Inner rawness-touchy – the reaction does not march the offense
2. Inability to receive correction
3. Critical spirit-
4. Closed spirit
5. Inability to trust
6. Hopelessness- defeat mentality
7. Self-harm

Once you've taken time to identify where you have been hurt, and who you need to forgive, the next step is fully acknowledge

B. Forgiveness recognizes what has been done – it does not deny or downplay it.

Sometimes we may think that forgiveness means we must deny what has happened to us. We may think it means reducing or downplaying what has happened, to say it is not very serious, it is not a big deal. But that is not true. True forgiveness requires us to understand and acknowledge exactly what has happened to us, and how serious and wrong it is.

Pete Scazzero writes, "I do not believe it is possible to truly forgive another person from the heart until we allow ourselves to feel the pain of what was lost." (Scazzero, Peter. *The Emotionally Healthy Church, Updated and Expanded Edition: A Strategy for Discipleship That Actually Changes Lives* (p. 164). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.)

Forgiveness doesn't mean we forget. But it does mean we have decided to release this person for what has happened. Forgiveness is not a denial of what happened. It is even in the midst of our pain releasing the bitterness we hold against them and releasing them from their guilt as Christ did on the cross by saying, 'Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing.' At times it will seem last casting the pearls to the swine...they don't care that you forgive... but he petitioned the Father to forgive them not to hold it against them.

God has not planned for us only to be reconciled to Himself (2 Corinthians 5:18 -19) but also that we are reconciled in our relationships with other people. He has commanded us to love others including our enemies (Matt 5:23-25, 43- 44; John 13:34-35).

Remember that forgiveness is a choice – an act of will and faith. Forgiveness does not come easy for most of us. Our natural instinct is to recoil in self-protection when we've been injured. We don't naturally overflow with mercy, grace and forgiveness when we've been wronged. Forgiveness is a product of the will. I believe forgiveness is a choice we make through a decision of our will, motivated by obedience to God and his command to forgive.

It is also only not a matter of feeling. It must move beyond that and go deeper than that and also be a product of our soul and spirit. Jesus said we must forgive others from the heart.

We forgive *by faith*, out of obedience. Since forgiveness goes against our nature, we must forgive by faith, whether we feel like it or not. We must trust God to do the work in us that needs to be done so that the forgiveness will be complete. I believe God honors our commitment to obey Him and our desire to please him when we choose to forgive. He completes the work in his time. We must continue to forgive (our job), by faith, until the work of forgiveness (the Lord's job), is done in our hearts. Another reason to forgive is that this affects our prayers. *And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins. Mark 11:25*

My greatest personal struggle so far with forgiveness came in college when my girlfriend broke up with me. After we broke up things went from bad to worse, and she ended up cutting off all contact with me. I realized I didn't know how to forgive and it was destroying me, so I did all that I could – I prayed about it, I asked friends, I bought books about it, and tried to figure out what to do. It took me years to fully process what had happened, but ultimately, I was able to forgive her and move on. It was very difficult, but it is worth the effort. God is faithful to work in our hearts if we are willing to take that step of forgiveness.

It's not a one-time choice and then we automatically live in a state of forgiveness. Forgiveness may require a lifetime of forgiving, but it is important to the Lord. We must continue forgiving until the matter is settled in our heart. We must also recognize that when we harbor offenses against people and that we are also sinning holding on to those wrong attitudes. We all must repent of unforgiveness in our hearts.

Corrie Ten Boom, a Christian woman who survived a Nazi concentration camp during the Holocaust, said, "Forgiveness is to set a prisoner free, and to realize the prisoner was you." To review, here is the main message of the parable of the unmerciful servant:

- **Just as God has forgiven us, we must forgive others.**

Apply this parable today:

- 1) Recognize how much God has forgiven us.**
- 2) Forgive others as often as necessary.**
 - A. Ask the Holy Spirit to bring to mind people who have hurt you.**
 - B. Forgiveness recognizes what has been done – it does not deny or downplay it.**