

“He paid my debt.” (14)

I heard a story about a guy who got his first assignment as a car body parts repairer trainee. He began work on a car, which needed a new wing and some door repairs. He spent hours doing a perfect job, but when the owner came back to pick it up, he wasn't pleased. The trainee was baffled and couldn't understand why, so he asked the guy, "What's wrong?" Pointing to the side of the car, the man complained about the paint not matching, uneven gaps between panels and a host of other problems and so he demanded an explanation and refused to pay. The trainee said, "Well I don't know what to say, except that the repairs I made were to the other side of the car!"

And I guess the point of the story is that when it comes to fault finding most of us are experts. Please turn your Bibles to **Matthew 18**. Jesus has been talking with His disciples about right relationships and He said to them in **Matthew 18:15-17**, “If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.”

And as usual Peter needed some things clearing in his head. And so he comes to Jesus and asks Him in **verse 21**, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?" What he's basically asking is, "Lord what I really want to know is, how often should I forgive my brother, as many as seven times, is that enough?" And in Peter's mind, he was looking to be complimented by Jesus because he was willing to forgive more than most people would.

You see loved ones in the Jewish mind set many Rabbis' taught that a man was to be forgiven **3 times**, but no more than **3**. And so what Peter did was, he multiplied this number by **two** and then added an extra **one** in there just for good measure. And he gave himself a pat on the back and thought to himself, “Look what a wonderful person I am, to be willing to forgive like that.”

You see Peter was willing to forgive but his mistake was that he measured himself by human standards rather than by divine standards. And so Jesus answers Peter in **verse 22**, He says, “I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.” In other words Jesus says, “Peter, you shouldn't just forgive your brother seven times, but seventy-seven times.”

Now please don't misunderstand what Jesus is saying here. He's not saying, “You forgive someone **77 times** and when you get you **78** that's it, you don't have to forgive them anymore.” He's not saying that, what He is saying is that a person should always be ready to forgive, it's not a matter of counting; it's a matter of conduct.

We are going to look at “The parable of the unmerciful servant” today, Jesus is going to teach us **3 things** about relationships, and He is going to reveal more truths about the kingdom of God. Our Scripture reading was **Matthew 18:23-35** and we're going to try and understand what Jesus is trying to teach His disciples here. Jesus says the **first thing** He wants to teach them is “The nature of human judgement.” He says that, “Human judgement is always condemning.”

Let's look at the actions of **the unmerciful servant first**. He's just had all his debts cleared by the master and it says in, **Matthew 18:28-30** "But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii. He grabbed him and began to choke him. 'Pay back what you owe me!' he demanded. 'His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay you back.' "But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt.”

This poor guy who only owed him **100 denarii** was grabbed by the throat, and this was nothing less than pure heartlessness. You see during these times in Greek and Roman culture it was common practice for a debtor to be taken by the throat and brought before the court to stand trial. In fact you've probably heard the saying, “He almost choked the life out of me.”

Well that saying came from the Greeks and what it meant was that this debtor was going to be made to pay his debt. So what he was basically doing was demanding payment, in other words he was saying, “Pay me what you owe me!” And in the unmerciful servant's mind he's probably thinking, “Honest people pay their debts.”

But what a short memory he has **hasn't he?**

It was only moments ago that he had “ten thousand talents” cancelled and yet the text tells us that even though his fellow servant begged and pleaded with him, he didn’t listen and so he had him thrown into prison. You see the unmerciful servant expected from his fellow servant what he didn’t expect himself. In other words, it is very easy to see other people’s faults and failures, but we’re so slow when we look at our own. It is in mankind’s nature when we judge people, to also condemn them.

Two well known famous preachers were getting together one time to have dinner. And when one of them went to the other’s door, his friend who was smoking a large Panama cigar greeted him. He said to him, “How can you a man of God stand there and smoke that cigar?” The man turned around, poked him in his stomach, and said, “The same way you as a man of God can stand there with your big belly.”

What do we see in the lives of our fellow Christians? Do we see mistakes, which we call sins in other people’s lives, but they are only faults in ours? Do we see what is selfishness in others but it is just mischief in ourselves? Do we see what is harshness in others but it is just openness in ourselves?

You see loved ones in the work of the church; we often expect much more of others than we do of ourselves. We expect others to take the lead; we expect others to set the example. We expect others to do the work and we’re quick to criticise if they don’t.

But what did Jesus say about condemning judgment? Matthew 7:1-5 “Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. “Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.”

In other words before you go judging and condemning others, take a close look at yourself first. Take a look at your own life and see if you are sinless. Or in the words of Jesus when he’s speaking to those who claimed that a woman had been caught in the act of adultery in John 8:7, “Let you who have no sin throw the first stone.” If only we were as gentle and as understanding and as kind to others as we are to ourselves.

2. When it comes to the divine nature of forgiveness, God is merciful and just. Matthew 18:23-27 "Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him. 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. "The servant fell on his knees before him. 'Be patient with me,' he begged, 'and I will pay back everything.' The servant's master took pity on him, cancelled the debt and let him go.”

Now it’s obvious that the king who owns everything is God, the debt stands for sin and the servant stands for all of mankind. Now the **first thing** that strikes you with the King is His pity. The King couldn’t hold His pity back from His servant who had wasted his money. And that’s because that’s the kind of God we have, He is merciful to everyone.

Psalms 130:7 says, “O Israel, put your hope in the Lord, for with the Lord is unfailing love and with him is full redemption.”

Isaiah 1:18 says, “Come now, let us reason together,” says the Lord. "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.”

Psalms 103:12 says, “As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.”

You see loved ones God is willing to forgive all of our sins. Isn’t He wonderful, isn’t He great? Isn’t He a truly awesome God? Because although He is merciful to us, He is also just in forgiveness. The heart of this parable is that God will not forgive us our sins unless we freely forgive others.

What did Jesus say on the Sermon on the Mount? Matthew 5:7 “Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.” What’s He saying? He’s saying that forgiving others is truly a Christian grace.

You see the Law of Moses didn't obligate a man to forgive his fellow man; forgiveness of enemies wasn't regarded as a virtue in Israel. But Jesus comes along and says, "Forgiveness is a duty."

Let me ask you; have you ever seen your fellow brother or sister involved in a sin you know they shouldn't have been involved with? If you have what did you do about it? Do you just leave them too it, because you don't think it's your responsibility to say anything to them? And what about if their sin is against you? What do you do about that?

Let's ask Jesus to see what He says, Luke 7:3+4, "So watch yourselves." If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him. If he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times comes back to you and says, 'I repent,' forgive him." Jesus says, "If someone sins and they repent, then it's your duty as a Christian to forgive that person."

You need to be careful not to get involved with their sin too but if they have truly repented and are seeking forgiveness from you, you can't hold their sin against them. Because all that does is stop that person from learning from their mistakes and stops them growing into the likeness of Christ. Ephesians 4:32 "Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you."

There's not an offence which is so great which your brother or sister can commit against you that you cannot forgive. I'm not saying it will be easy all the time, to forgive, but what I am saying is that you need to forgive them because we are to forgive each other just as God forgave us.

And does God forgive with a grudge? Absolutely not! 1 John 1:9 "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." Now does all this mean that sin is to be ignored or overlooked?

Of course not, the person who sins is to be rebuked and the person who repents is to forgive and to be forgiven. God doesn't pass over sins lightly and neither should we. And remember that the man who has no pity for his fellow man will not get pity from God.

What else did Jesus say concerning forgiveness? Matthew 6:12 "Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors." That text was never meant to be rehearsed week in and week out, that text was meant to be understood and lived by. God forgives as we have forgiven others. In other words we must forgive others before we can be forgiven.

Think about it! If we address God with hatred and bitterness in our hearts, if we pray to God knowing that we are at odds with our brother or sister. What we are doing is making it impossible for Him to forgive our sins.

Robert Louis Stevenson used to pray the Lord's Prayer every day at home at his family worship. One day he was about to pray "The Lord's Prayer" when he stopped and said, "I can't pray that prayer today."

And loved ones there are times just like that when we need to be on our guard against empty phrases in our prayers. And we need to be extra careful when we say, "Forgive us our debts, as we have forgiven our debtors."

When you read the newspaper and you hear about Siamese twins being joined at the head sometimes. And the surgeons most times can successfully separate them and they go on to live healthy lives. But sometimes they can't do anything and so they are born joined together and stay together for the rest of their lives.

And loved ones Jesus says that when it comes to forgiveness, God's forgiveness and man's forgiveness of each other is inseparable. A man walked up to John Wesley one time and said, "John, I never forgive." And Wesley turned around and said, "Then I hope sir, that you never sin."

And that brings me to my final point. 3. All men are debtors to God. I remember hearing a story about a country church somewhere in England and one day they got a special guest into their service. An elder came up to the preacher and said, "Now be careful what you say today, you don't want to offend the Prime Minister." And so the preacher got up, started his sermon, and said, "If the Prime Minister doesn't repent of his sins, he will be condemned to hell."

You see loved ones, I don't care who you are or where you're from, you are a debtor to God and you need to know that. Romans 3:23 "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."

Or as **Isaiah** tells us in **Isaiah 53:6** “We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way.” In other words man’s relationship to God is one of debtor to creditor. Loved ones we owe much more than we can ever pay.

Jesus deliberately chose the **two** sums of money mentioned in the parable, because both amounts are extreme. In **Matthew 18:28**, Jesus said that, “The servant owed his fellow servant 100 denarii.” Now a **denarii** was Roman coin, which was worth around **5p or 6p**, which made the total debt around **£5 or £6**. But Jesus said in **Matthew 18:21**, that “The unmerciful servant owed the king ten thousand talents.”

And loved ones it’s hard to imagine just how large amount of money that was. The **talent** was worth around **£500** so that meant that **10,000 talents** would be worth around **£5,000,000**. This was a staggering amount of money; it was an unimaginable amount of money. **When you read your Biblical history, it is said that Judea, Idumea, Samaria, Galilee and Perea brought 800 talents in tax money every year.** So this guy’s debt was much more than all the tax money brought in from many provinces.

Now what’s the point Jesus is making? The point is simply this, neither guy could pay! And so church, it is the same with our obligation. **How much do we owe Him?** Because some people believe that they owe Him nothing and yet they breathe in His air, they enjoy His sunshine and rain but yet they never give Him a passing glance or an ounce in return.

Now there are people who acknowledge that they owe the Lord something, but there are others who confess that they owe much. This parable of Jesus screams out and says to each and every one of us, “**You owe the Lord much more than you can ever pay.**”

What can we give to God? Shall we give Him some animal sacrifice? **Psalm 50:9+10** “I have no need of a bull from your stall or of goats from your pens, for every animal of the forest is mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills.” We can’t give Him animals because He owns the animals.

Or shall we give Him our life-long service? **Luke 7:10** “So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, ‘We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.’” So if our debt to God is enormous and if we really have nothing with which to release our obligation, then salvation truly is of divine grace and not of mortal merit. We all are debtors because none of us has anything to offer God.

I don’t know if you have noticed but this parable has got many contrasts. For example there is a contrast between **Peter’s number and the Lord’s number**. Peter was willing to forgive **seven times** but the Lord said to **forgive infinitely**. There is another contrast in the **two debts**. One was almost a silly sum of money, the other was unpayable. And likewise the wrongs done to us and the injuries we receive from our fellow servants are amazingly small in comparison with the magnitude of our sins against God.

And lastly there is a contrast of **the creditors**. The mighty king forgave but the lowly servant would not. If God is willing to forgive the more, then surely we should be willing to forgive the less. Let me leave you with this thought.

The servant got into trouble after he was forgiven, **have you been forgiven?** If you have, **what are you going to do with your forgiveness? Are you going to hold grudges against your fellow brother or sister? Or are you forgive them as God forgave you?**

If you’re not a Christian this morning then you need to realise that you have a debt to be paid. But you can’t pay it yourself; you need someone to wash your debt away. Paul says to the Christians at Corinth, in **1 Corinthians 6:9-11**, “Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.”

The people around you today were once like that, they were all debtors to God but they were washed in the blood of lamb. They were baptised for the forgiveness of their sins and their debts have been paid. They didn’t pay for it themselves; they accepted the payment that Jesus offered God through His death on a cross. The precious blood of Christ pays for our debt.

Loved ones, He paid my debt and He paid yours and He's waiting to pay for yours. And everyone here today needs to take these words home with them today and think about them deeply. "He paid a debt, He did not owe, I owed a debt, I could not pay; I needed someone to wash my sins away. And now I sing a brand new song, "Amazing Grace", Christ Jesus paid the debt that I could never pay."