

Come and Listen: The Parables of Jesus

A Hard Parable Matthew 18:21-35

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Introduction to the Text: We are in a series for the summer on the Parables of Jesus. Jesus was a master story teller. People of Jesus' day were not really any different from people of today in the sense that they related to stories. Jesus took these stories using the familiar things of everyday life in the first century to capture the attention of His listeners.

In the most recent weeks of our study we have considered everyone's favorite parable, the Parable of the Prodigal Son. We were reminded there of the Father's great love for us. Last week, I shared with you my favorite parable, the Parable of the Wise and Foolish Builder and applied it to our nation. It seems fitting today then to deal with what might be the hardest parable. When I say hard, I don't mean hard to understand. I mean hard to accept its meaning. You will quickly understand why. It deals with forgiveness.

Text: ²¹Then Peter approached him and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? As many as seven times?"

²²"I tell you, not as many as seven," Jesus replied, "but seventy times seven.

²³"For this reason, the kingdom of heaven can be compared to a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. ²⁴When he began to settle accounts, one who owed ten thousand talents was brought before him. ²⁵Since he did not have the money to pay it back, his master commanded that he, his wife, his children, and everything he had be sold to pay the debt.

²⁶"At this, the servant fell facedown before him and said, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay you everything.' ²⁷Then the master of that servant had compassion, released him, and forgave him the loan.

²⁸"That servant went out and found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii. He grabbed him, started choking him, and said, 'Pay what you owe!'

²⁹"At this, his fellow servant fell down and began begging him, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay you back.' ³⁰But he wasn't willing. Instead, he went and threw him into prison until he could pay what was owed. ³¹When the other servants saw what had taken place, they were deeply distressed and went and reported to their master everything that had happened. ³²Then, after he had summoned him, his master said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. ³³Shouldn't you also have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?' ³⁴And because he was angry, his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured until he could pay everything that was owed. ³⁵So also my heavenly Father will do to you unless every one of you forgives his brother or sister from your heart."

Introduction: Dawn Smith Jordan speaks in churches sharing her tragic story. Over 30 years ago now in South Carolina, Dawn's youngest sister, then 17, was abducted as she stopped at the mail box one day

after school. The kidnapper killed this girl named Shari. To further torment the family, for about a month, the killer routinely telephoned the family until his apprehension by the authorities. The killer, Larry Gene Bell, was sentenced to death for his brutal crime. As Dawn shares her testimony, she says that she remembers thinking upon his sentencing, “Now the story is finally finished. I can attempt to rebuild my shattered life.”

A few years later, though, Dawn discovered that the story was far from finished. The point of impact came when she received a letter from her sister’s killer. Larry wrote that he had become a Christian while on death row. He wrote, “Will you and your family ever forgive me for what I have done?”

How would you respond? Dawn says, “As a Christian, I knew that when somebody wrongs you, you forgive them. That’s basic knowledge. Yet, suddenly, ***forgiveness was a lot harder to do.***” Haven’t we all felt that way? It’s one thing to talk about forgiveness. We readily admit intellectually as Christians that Christians forgive. But, when we are the ones called on to forgive we suddenly learn that “Forgiveness is one of the hardest things that we will ever do.”

Explanation of Text: So, we have a story about forgiveness this morning to help us to understand the view that Jesus had on forgiveness. The story is prompted by a question from Peter as recorded in verse 21. The number 7 is a perfect number. The Rabbinical system said that three times was enough to forgive. So, Peter, is doubling that with the perfect number 7. Jesus shattered that answer with 70×7 . Now, don’t worry about doing that math, because as we will see in the story, Jesus is saying, “Don’t keep the score. Don’t keep up with the record of offenses.”

When we encounter parables in the Gospels, there are a few basic interpretative principles that we must employ in order to get the real meaning of the text.

1. Understand the purpose of all parables. The literal meaning of the word parable is “to throw beside” or “to set beside.” Jesus used parables to throw beside a teaching or an instructive principle. That leads us to the second consideration.
2. We must seek to understand what that principle is. “What is the main point” is the question we should be asking. Most times, if not all times, there is something in the context that reveals precisely what the main point is and the story simply illustrates that main point. That is the case here. The main point drives home the answer to Peter’s question about how many times we must forgive. So, what is point? “Peter, you don’t keep an account. You just keep forgiving.”
3. Because we are looking for the main point, it is also important to understand that we need not press the details of the story. In other words, parables are not allegories in every case. I suggest that this particular parable is not an allegory—that is let’s not press the issue with every detail of the story, but rather seek to get the main point, which is We must forgive.

Important points in the Re-telling of the Story

- The slave owed such a large sum, he could never repay. A talent was the highest Greek unit of currency and 10,000 was the largest number in the language, so this is an infinite amount of debt. He could not pay it.
- The master, in a scene that would be a dramatic twist, forgives the debt. (Unheard of in first century world)
- That forgiven slave holds another slave responsible for a small debt.

- We might just begin to see the point here: How could we (those who have been forgiven a debt we could never repay—sin which condemns us to death, hell, and eternal separation from God) not be willing to forgive those who have wronged us. See yourself in this parable!

Why is Forgiveness So Hard

1. Some do not understand God's grace.

We cannot fathom how much we have been pardoned.

2. Some do not understand forgiveness.
 - Forgiveness does not mean forgetting.
 - Forgiveness does not eliminate consequences.
 - Forgiveness does not necessarily mean reconciliation.
 - Forgiveness is not dependent upon repentance.

3. Some do not want to release the guilty.

4. For some the offense is too serious.

"Forgiveness is a beautiful word until you have something to forgive." --C.S. Lewis

5. For some the offense has recurred.

The point of Peter's question.

Why Should We Forgive?

- **Forgiveness is Biblical.**

Forgiveness is the expectation of discipleship.

➤ We are commanded to forgive.

Matthew 18, Matthew 6:14-15, Ephesians 4:32

➤ Forgiving is part of being conformed to Christ.

- **Forgiveness is Practical.**

➤ Sometimes forgiving the one who has offended you is the only way to move on.

Being Free to Forgive

If we are going to forgive just as Christ forgave us we must understand the connection between . . .

Forgiveness, Repentance, and Reconciliation.

- Forgiveness is the responsibility of the one offended.

- Repentance is the responsibility of the offender.
- The basis of reconciliation is based on genuine repentance.

Dawn says about the letter from her sister's murderer, "It wasn't easy. It wasn't overnight. But, God gave me the answer that I needed. We are to forgive just as Jesus forgave us. I was finally able to sit down and write a letter telling him only because of the grace that I have received in my own life could I let him know the he was forgiven."