



Dealing with the Sins of Others: Why Forgive?

Matthew 18:23-35

Message Notes, February 19, 2017

Today we shift from brokenness that arises from our own sin to focus on the sins of others against us. There are several elements of healing from such wounds; chief among them is forgiveness. We will first explore why we need to forgive; next week we will examine what forgiveness really is and how to forgive.

Wiesenthal was a Jew who survived the Nazi concentration camps in Germany, but 89 members of his family died in those camps. After the war, Wiesenthal devoted his whole life to hunting down Nazi war criminals to bring them to justice. He had a powerful encounter with a dying Nazi guard, who invited him to his hospital bed and spent two hours confessing the many atrocities he committed. The guard then asked Wiesenthal if he could forgive him. Wiesenthal left the man there without saying a word, without extending any forgiveness. For years this moment haunted Wiesenthal – “Should I have forgiven that man?” he wondered. If you have a similar story of deep pain from another, how do you answer this question?

In Matthew 18:23-35, Peter is pondering forgiveness, so he asks Jesus – “How many times must I forgive my brother who sins against me?” Peter pre-empts Jesus’ answer with his own – “Seven times?”, thinking surely this will impress Jesus; the standard of perfection in that day was only three times. Jesus responds with convicting hyperbole – “77 times!”, meaning forgiveness is not about a numerical limit; it is a perpetual posture, a way of living in the flow of God’s grace.

Jesus proceeds to tell a story to fuel this vision of forgiveness as a way of living.

- How much did the first servant owe the king? How much is this monetarily?¹
- What is Jesus’ point in assigning this astronomical value to the servant’s debt?
- When brought before the king, what did the servant beg for? What did he actually get?
- Did he leave the king joyous and free? What indication do we have? (v. 28 leads with, “But ...”)
- How much did the second servant owe the first (forgiven) servant? How much is this monetarily?²
- What did this second servant beg for? What did he actually get?
- What is your emotional, gut response to the unforgiving servant’s reaction?
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In the same vein as Nathan’s lamb-story confrontation of King David’s sin (2 Samuel 12):

- When you hear this parable of “the unforgiving servant,” do you hear Nathan’s same stinging words, “You are that man!”?

Our Holy God, through the sacrificial death of Jesus, has forgiven all our sins – which far outweigh the GNP of Judea – for each one of us! It’s truly absurd, beyond hyperbole even, that we would hold on to the sins of others against us; that we would refuse to forgive their 100 denarii against us.

- When word of the forgiven servant’s unforgiving spirit gets back to the king – how does he respond?
- What do the “tormenters” represent (v. 34)? What consequence of unforgiveness is expressed here?



- What is the correlation between being forgiven and extending forgiveness? (Receiving God's forgiveness is not contingent on our ability to forgive, but ...)
- Did the first servant really understand he was forgiven by the king? What do his actions show us?

We cannot simply understand the theological concept of redemption; we must grasp forgiveness in our hearts. We must know it deeply, personally, soulfully – we need the Holy Spirit to sow this in our hearts. Knowing our forgiveness is a work of His grace. "Holy Spirit, help us know our forgiveness in our hearts."

Why forgive?

1. Because we live under extravagant forgiveness.
 2. Because unforgiveness of others will choke and rob the life and joy of God's forgiveness towards us.
 3. Because when we refuse to forgive, we are the ones who suffer. We stay bound up in the hurt. We become obsessed with the offender. They remain attached to us. Our unforgiveness becomes the breeding ground for consuming bitterness, resentment, and vengeance.
- The most powerful person in your life is a person you refuse to forgive (even if they are dead).
 - This matter of forgiveness naturally arises in this series on wholeness, because we can never know true wholeness if we are holding onto the sins of another against us.
 - Forgiveness is challenging and it is a process, but it is not a burden. It is a means of grace.
 - Unforgiveness creates a prison; forgiveness brings freedom and opens the way for healing.
 - Yes, forgiveness can feel very difficult, even beyond our capacity. Are we willing to come to God and give Him permission to change our hearts and empower us to begin the journey of forgiving?

Reflection Questions

1. What has most stirred your heart in this message?
2. Do you struggle to embrace, in your heart, the gracious forgiveness of God for your personal sins? Why is this difficult for you?
3. If you are battling forgiving someone, what is the obstacle? What are you afraid of?
4. Can you give testimony to experiencing freedom and healing through forgiving another?

¹10,000 Talents - The Gross National Product for the entire region of Judea/Samaria was around 900 talents. Jesus is multiplying this exorbitant sum by 10, establishing this man's debt as completely unpayable.

²100 Denarii – 1 denari was about a day's wages for a laborer. Yes, a material amount for a poor man, but definitely repayable over time (a year or less perhaps).