



JESUS STORIES

Sunday,

May 19 Sermon Study Guide Lead Pastor Brian Bales –Jesus Stories: *Forgiveness* - Matthew 18:21-35

The Parable of the Unforgiving Servant

Then Peter came up and said to him, “Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?”²² Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times.²³ “Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants.²⁴ When he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents.²⁵ And since he could not pay, his master ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made.²⁶ So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.’²⁷ And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt.²⁸ But when that same servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii, and seizing him, he began to choke him, saying, ‘Pay what you owe.’²⁹ So his fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you.’³⁰ He refused and went and put him in prison until he should pay the debt.³¹ When his fellow servants saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their master all that had taken place.³² Then his master summoned him and said to him, ‘You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me.³³ And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?’³⁴ And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers, until he should pay all his debt.³⁵ So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.”

Matthew 18:21-35(ESV)

COMMENTARY

b. If each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses: With this, Jesus taught an important and often neglected principle regarding forgiveness. There are many sincere Christians who withhold forgiveness from others for mistaken reasons – and they feel entirely justified in doing so.

i. Their reasoning works like this: We should not forgive another person who sins against us until they are properly repentant. This is because repentance is mentioned in the context of our commands to forgive (such as in [Luke 17:4](#)), and because our forgiveness to others is to be modeled after God’s forgiveness of us. Since God does not forgive us apart from repentance, so we should not forgive others unless they properly repent to us. We even have the *duty* to withhold such forgiveness and to judge their repentance, because it is ultimately in their best interest to do so.

ii. This thinking – even if it means well – is incorrect and ultimately dangerous. This parable shows us why it is incorrect for us to think, “God doesn’t forgive me without my repentance; therefore I must withhold forgiveness from others who sin against me until they properly repent.” That thinking is wrong, *because I do not stand in*

the same place as God in the equation, and I never can. God stands as One who has never been forgiven and never needed forgiveness; I stand as one who has been forgiven and needs continual forgiveness.

iii. Therefore – if it were possible – we should be *far quicker* to forgive than God is, without precondition of repentance, because we stand as forgiven sinners who must also forgive. We have *an even greater obligation to forgive than God does.*

iv. Since we have been forgiven so much, we have no right to withhold forgiveness from others. We are the debtor forgiven almost an infinite debt; will we hold on to the small debts others owe to us? If anyone had the right to withhold forgiveness it is God – and He forgives more freely and more completely than anyone we know. What possible right do we have to hold on to our unforgiveness?

v. It is also important to understand that a distinction can and should be made between *forgiveness* and *reconciliation*. True reconciliation of relationship can only happen when both parties are agreeable to it, and this may require repentance on one or both of the parties in the conflict. Yet forgiveness can be one-sided.

vi. Furthermore, forgiveness does not necessarily shield someone from the civil or practical consequences of their sin. For example, a homeowner may personally forgive the man who robbed his house, yet it is still appropriate for the robber to be arrested and put in jail. On a personal level, forgiveness is required. On a civil and societal level, the man should be punished by the magistrates ([Romans 13](#)).

vii. Nevertheless, the principle clearly stands. In context, this parable was given to make us *more forgiving*, not *less forgiving*. No one could reasonably read this parable and think that Jesus was trying to restrict the forgiveness of His disciples.

viii. People who read this, “Therefore be somewhat stingy with forgiveness as your Father in heaven is somewhat stingy with forgiveness” miss the whole point of the parable. Instead, *Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful* ([Luke 6:36](#)).

ix. **From his heart:** This makes the command all the stronger. “If we forgive in words only, but *not from our hearts*, we remain under the same condemnation.” (Spurgeon)

A Life Application Study Guide

James 1:22-25 tells us to put into practice what we are discovering in God’s word.

1. If you recall, the word *parable* in Greek: *parabolē* is a side by side structured illustration.
 - How are you now thinking of parables after week 3 in this series?

2. In Brian’s message we are challenged to look at the topic of forgiveness and in Matthew 18, Peter approaches Jesus with a question about forgiveness.
 - What do you notice about his question? What is his foundation and understanding behind the question?

- Am I required to have a relationship with that person who inflicted great harm on me or someone that I love?

4. Look at the side-by-side illustration in Matthew 18 and contrast the 2 stories.

- What surprises you the most about the forgiven servant's behavior toward someone who owed him a fraction of the debt that he had been released from?

- In this story who is the King and who might the servant be? Consider the implication that when we choose not to forgive, our witness to the world is diminished.

5. Forgiveness is first a matter of the heart but more importantly it is a matter of freedom.

- When Jesus instructs Peter to forgive (70 x 7 is one interpretation) what is He really saying?

- If forgiving is always God's requirement of those who follow Him, why even use numbers? What is the message inferred in Jesus' answer?

