

# Forgiven, so Forgive

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, the last two Sunday nights, we've been in Matthew chapter 18, and we've seen these! two safety features or pressure valves that Jesus has given his church, humility and repentance.

! And tonight we're on to the third, which is forgiveness. I don't know how you found Jesus' seminar so far. I imagine that it's been challenging for all of us in different ways, perhaps, certainly it's been challenging for me to preach and for me to work through personally.

You know, sometimes you hear people say, don't you, that of all the things about Jesus, the thing that they love or the thing they like is his teaching. And maybe you're sitting here tonight and you would say something like that, something like this. He gave us great values to live by. And, you know, if everyone did what Jesus taught, what a great world it would be. And now that is absolutely true.

That's really true. But I wonder, having listened to Jesus' teaching now over an extended period through Matthew's gospel, if that isn't such a comfortable thing to say. As if his being God and dying on the cross and rising from the dead are hard things to accept, but his teaching is easy to accept. Friends, Jesus is the greatest teacher, but his teaching is not easy. It is deeply searching, isn't it? It's uncomfortable to listen to, and it's hard to put into practice. If we think that a love for his teaching is a given, let me respectfully ask whether we have taken time to properly listen to it, and indeed, whether we are serious about putting it into practice for ourselves. And I don't only ask that if you're here visiting tonight, but it's particularly searching, isn't it? It's even more stretching and challenging for those of us who claim to follow the Lord Jesus. He's speaking to us.

[ 2 : 16 ] I said at the start of chapter 18, the stakes couldn't be higher. Jesus reminds us of that as he finishes tonight in verse 35, doesn't he? But he has not left us to get on with it on our own.

Okay, he is with us in it. That's where we left off last time, isn't it? When we're putting his words into practice and living as his church, there I am among them, among you, he said. I am with you, and at the start of the chapter, remember, he said, when we receive his people as little children, we receive him. We welcome the Lord Jesus Christ himself. And so, brothers and sisters, as we hear his words, his teaching tonight, let's be reminded that we can only live as his church in his strength and with his presence. And we need to be reminded of that tonight as we come to his teaching on the need for us to forgive. We can only forgive, says Jesus, if we know that we have been forgiven by him.

And so, our first point then, tonight, forgiven much. Now, the subject of forgiveness comes up when Peter asks in verse 21, Lord, how often will my brother or sister sin against me and I forgive them? As many as seven times?

And now, we should imagine a really smug look on Peter's face when he says this. Just for context, it was taught by the rabbis at that time that the number of times that you should forgive somebody was three. And so, Peter is really going above and beyond, isn't he? He's more than doubled the number of times that he says, perhaps we ought to forgive each other. He is expecting a big, blessed are you, Peter?

Instead, what we have is only another example of the way that the disciples at this point are only half getting Jesus. Peter has surely picked up, right, hasn't he, that Jesus is probably a big fan of forgiveness. But he has missed, hasn't he, just how big on forgiveness Jesus really is.

[ 4 : 43 ] Imagine his face falling then when Jesus replies, verse 22, I do not say to you seven times, but 77 times. Some translations say 70 times seven, so 490 times.

The Greek can actually go either way. The point is, in any case, that Peter's most generous and forgiving number is far, far, far too little, isn't it?

And the fact that Jesus' answer is made up of seven suggests that he's not playing the same game as Peter and the rabbis trying to put an exact number on it. So, we're not to hear this as if he's actually expecting us to have, you know, a tally for each person in our life of the number of times we've forgiven, and when we get up to 77 or even 490, then we're to finish. No. In the Bible, the number seven often represents perfection or completeness. And so, when Jesus picks up on the sevens, he's really saying the number of times you should forgive a brother or sister who sins against you is fully, completely, completely, perfectly. So, how many times is that, Jesus? Well, every time.

No, no, what's the limit on the number of times? Well, there is no limit, says Jesus, to the number of times you should forgive a person. Now, clearly, that was as shocking for the disciples back then as it is for us to hear now, because Jesus then goes back and begins to fill in the gaps, and he does that for us with a story, with a parable. The kingdom of heaven, says Jesus, that is, his kingdom is like this. A king decides it's about time that the people who owe him money begin to pay, and so a list is brought to him of servants who owe him money, and there is a man on that list who owes him an astonishing amount of money, 10,000 talents. Now, there's a note in the Bible, if you've got the blue Bible there, that says a talent was worth something like 20 years wages for a laborer. So, do the maths. How much is that? If this is what wage that man was on, okay, how many years of free labor would it take for him to repay the debt of 10,000 talents? Okay, you must be really good at maths, because no one's got their calculator out.

Okay, but if you're not there yet, yes, it really is that big of a debt. 200,000 years, it would take him to work off that debt without being paid a penny, if that was what he was paid.

[ 7 : 54 ] Needless to say, it can't be done. It is an unpayable debt, and so the king decides he's going to cut his losses. He'll get back what he can by selling the man, and his wife, and his children, and everything that he has. Their lives are over, aren't they? Right, finished. The servant now has nothing that he can offer, right? It has all been put up for sale. So, what is left for him to do?

Well, he does the only thing he can do. He begs. Verse 26, so the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.

Now, notice that there is still a kind of disconnect, isn't there, between what the man is offering and what is possible. Notice that he is still saying, isn't he, give me enough time, and I will pay you back. But that can't be done. And yet, and yet, it is still a cry for mercy. And his cry is heard.

Out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt. The king wasn't patient.

He was extravagant, lavish in his grace, unsparing in his generosity. He doesn't give the servant more time to pay. He simply cancels the whole debt. 200,000 years worth of wages written off with a word.

[ 9 : 47 ] It's unbelievable, isn't it? Just in financial or monetary terms, picture it. I had a little look this week. The average UK salary is about 31,000 pounds a year. 200,000 years of that comes out as 6,320,400,000 pounds. It's a lot of money. For context, that is how much debt Lehman Brothers held when it folded back in 2008. And it was the biggest bankruptcy in history. That is how much debt this was.

much more for an individual. If that was you who owed that amount, what wouldn't you give to have that debt written off with a word? Well, what did the servant have to do? What does he do to be forgiven that debt?

He does nothing but ask. Nothing but ask. Why was he forgiven them? Well, the reason is actually not found in the servant, is it? But in the king. Notice verse 27.

Why did the king forgive him? Out of pity for him. Now, that's the same word that's already been used three times in this gospel of Jesus. And each time it is translated compassion.

And literally, it describes a kind of ache that arises from the heart. We could say his heart went out to him. He burned with a compassion towards him.

[ 11 : 33 ] So the only reason the servant is forgiven this colossal debt is because of the king's gracious and compassionate heart. And friends, it's not hard for us to join the dots for ourselves, is it? Why is Jesus telling us this? We have owed him an astronomical debt.

We have rebelled against his will. We have broken his laws. We have disobeyed his commandments. We have failed to love him. And we have done so, so carelessly, without even thinking.

And often without regret. We've spent and spent and spent our whole lives living off his kindness and grace, taking the life and breath and bodies and goods and time that he's given us and spending them on ourselves without thought of him.

Perhaps as we listened to the story, we wondered, how could the servant have ever built up a debt that big and thought that the king would never require it back? But we know exactly how he did that, don't we? Because we have done that to a real king, to the living God, to the creator of the heavens and the earth. If he demanded payment in full for our debt, we could never pay it. It would take eternity to service that debt, and he would require eternity of us.

And we can do nothing to change that. We have nothing we can offer him. No gifts we can give him. We cannot work enough for him. Our lives already belong to him.

[13:28] There is no repayment scheme that we can come up with to repay our great debt to God. God, the only thing we can do is throw ourselves upon his mercy.

God, be patient with us. Lord, have mercy upon us. Show us grace, we pray. And friends, Jesus Christ wants you to know that God hears those prayers.

And Jesus Christ wants us to know and to hear tonight that God answers those prayers with grace and mercy and compassion.

Out of his pure compassion, his free grace, out of his own heart, he wipes clean every wrong that we have ever done against him.

He forgives all our sins. He cancels our debts. And not so that we can then start paying him back with interest, but instead so that we can begin to live and to serve him without fear of punishment or vengeance.

[14:39] What an amazing thing for Jesus to tell us about God, that he will fully forgive our sins for nothing in return. That is wonderful news if you are sitting here as a Christian tonight.

Because, brother and sister, that has already happened to you. That has been done. If you have turned from your sin and put your trust in Jesus, then your sins are forgiven.

John writes this in his first letter, chapter 2. I am writing to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven for his name's sake. He said this back in chapter 1.

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. God forgives everything we have ever done against him and left undone when we turn to him and simply ask him.

Because Jesus has already paid for it all upon the cross. So if you have turned and put your trust in him, your debt is cancelled in full. If you have never done that, John also says this in his letter, If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.

[16:07] Right? We're living a lie. Think of how long you have lived not thanking God for his goodness and kindness to you.

Even in the simple things, the warm weather we've had this week, or the friend who brought you along here, or the fact that you're alive. You owe a debt of gratitude and praise to God that he would so freely forgive if you were simply to turn and ask him.

All your sin, past, present, and future, written off in an instant, simply because God the Father in the Lord Jesus Christ is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, and overflowing in unchanging love.

That's really important. And it's really important for our second point, because it's only if you have been forgiven much, that you can forgive much, says Jesus.

This is Jesus' expectation then, for those of us who have been forgiven by him. Our second point then, forgive much. Jesus carries on the story, doesn't he?

[17:26] He doesn't leave us there. The servant gets up off his knees and leaves the king's room, and the first thing he does is a surprise, isn't it? Right? The servant doesn't go to his family and say, listen, we're not going to be sold as slaves, because the king was so gracious to us.

Right? He goes to find another servant who owes him money. And we think, surely to forgive him.

No. Verse 28, when that same servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him 100 denarii, and seizing him, began to choke him, saying, pay what you owe.

And now you can see another note in your Bible there that says a denarius was one day's wage for a laborer. And this other servant owes 100 of them, so 100 days' wages.

Now that's still a significant amount of money, isn't it? It's kind of a third of a year's salary. That's a lot of money, isn't it? But I did the math. It's 730,000 times smaller than what the original servant

owed the king.

So compared to 10,000 talents, 100 days' wages is small change. But the servant isn't letting go lightly, is he? He treats his fellow servant very, very differently than the way the king treated him, seizes him, chokes him, demands that he pay.

[ 18 : 51 ] But this servant also knows how he can find mercy. So he too falls down, doesn't he? And begs, using exactly the same words as the original servant used before the king.

Have patience with me, and I will pay you. Now, of course, this debt is much smaller, and it is payable.

So unlike the original servant's plea, this offer is real, given time, and he probably could pay back what he owed. It's a vastly less serious situation, isn't it?

But unlike the king, what does the servant do? Verse 30, he refused, and went and put him in prison until he should pay the debt.

Now, how does that leave us feeling? How do we feel about that? Whatever we could say about the king, we have to say the opposite, don't we, of the servant.

[ 19 : 54 ] He is ungracious, unmerciful, uncompassionate, lacking patience. His heart does not ache with pity towards his fellow servant in the way the king's heart went out to him.

If anything, it burns with rage against this man. How much more, right, did the king forego to punish his servants? And yet this servant has come down so hard upon his fellow servant for a fraction of the same offense.

And if we're not there yet, Jesus helps us to know, doesn't he, how we should feel at this point. The other servants saw this and were greatly distressed, greatly distressed, and went and told the king.

And given what we already know about the king, that he is gracious and compassionate, patient, merciful, forgiving, his response to the servant now should hit us really hard.

His master summoned him and said, you wicked servant, I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant as I had mercy on you.

[ 21 : 09 ] And in anger, his master delivered him over to the jailers until he should pay all his debts. It was England's first poet laureate, John Dryden, who famously wrote, beware the fury of a patient man.

Friends, beware the wrath of a patient God. We are not to confuse, are we, the king's grace with indifference. His forgiveness was not because he didn't care about the offense.

But now his kindness has been repaid with what? What does he say? With wickedness. And our own hearts and consciences cry out, don't they, saying that what the king says is right.

The only right response for the servant to have had and his fellow servant was to have had mercy as the king had had mercy on him to forgive as he had been forgiven.

The king's compassion, it should have overflowed and rubbed off on this servant's heart, shouldn't it? But it clearly hasn't. And so fearfully, fearfully, the king now sentences the servant to worse punishment than he had originally threatened.

[ 22 : 29 ] Notice that. The king originally said he'd cut his losses and sell the man and his family and his stuff. Now he puts the man in prison until he should pay all the debt.

So my heavenly father will do to every one of you, says Jesus, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from the heart.

An unpayable debt, but he will exact it all from us. If his mercy, compassion, and forgiveness do not cause us to become merciful, compassionate, and forgiving people.

If we have truly been forgiven our debt by God, that eternal debt, brothers and sisters, we will truly forgive others. They're significant, but much smaller debts against us.

If we find we are unforgiving, therefore, unable to forgive, we have to ask, don't we? We have to ask ourselves whether we have truly been forgiven.

[ 23 : 47 ] Because if we had been shown such grace, it would be impossible for us to withhold it from one another. Can you see now, friends, why it's not an easy thing to love Jesus' teaching?

It strikes at the very core of who we are, doesn't it? It's not a nice dream for a better world. It is the clearest of mirrors held up to our very soul. And what we see reflected in his words, they tell us a great deal, says Jesus, about our relationship with the living God.

Am I gracious and merciful? Am I quick to forgive? Do I keep a record of wrongs? Am I a person who holds a grudge?

Do I long for revenge? As we look hard into that mirror and we reflect on Jesus' words tonight, there's a few questions I want to ask that I think it will be helpful for us to do that with. Firstly, do I have to? Must I forgive? I hope we can see through the gospel that Jesus' answer to that question is, yes, we do.

[ 25 : 07 ] Now, we will all have had very painful things done to us by other people, maybe some things that have lasted for years with us or a lifetime, and maybe some things so painful that we haven't even told anyone about it or perhaps only one or two others.

Friends, nothing that Jesus says here diminishes the wrong or diminishes the pain that has been done to you. Sin is real, right?

That's been the drumbeat of this chapter all the way through, hasn't it? Terrible wrong happens to us and it happens in the church. So forgiveness is not the same as whitewashing it or covering it up. It is seeing what has happened in its fullest and clearest light and deciding to respond to it like the king with grace and compassion.

The king looks sin right in the face but doesn't hold it against the sinner. Forgiveness is acknowledging the debt then but forgoing the payment.

[ 26 : 14 ] And so I want to say that forgiveness is not a feeling and nor is it forgetting. It is a choice. It is a decision not to hold someone's sin against them, not to hold it over their head, not to pursue repayment or revenge.

That includes, I think, wishing ill on people or holding a grudge against them or kind of punishing them emotionally or verbally.

Jesus says if we're Christians we have to decide at some point not to do that or we risk forfeiting the forgiveness that we have been given by God because we cannot have been forgiven by the king if we are so unlike him ourselves in our hearts.

And so the question for us as Christians isn't really do I have to but how can I? You know, I don't think it's by accident that Jesus' parable is very emotive, right?

There's lots of strong feeling words, isn't it, from the king and from the servants. These issues can bring out the very best in us, can't they? Compassion, mercy and the very worst.

[ 27 : 36 ] Anger, vengefulness. I want to say really clearly that forgiving doesn't mean we have to instantly feel fine. Still feeling hurt by something doesn't mean that you haven't truly forgiven.

It might take time to feel right again. It might also take time to forgive. Jesus says from the heart so I don't think he's assuming it's necessarily an instant snap decision that we come to.

so how can we get ourselves to that point? Well I think Jesus gives us the way in this parable and it's to have the right perspective on wrong.

Sometimes people say something is unforgivable. Maybe you've said that, maybe you feel right now I can't forgive that person. Unforgivable.

But Jesus actually says that there is only one sin that is unforgivable and it's denying him. And he is the only way to forgiveness from God and so to deny him is to forfeit forgiveness.

[ 28 : 47 ] That's why it's unforgivable. Therefore Jesus says in Matthew 13 verse 31 I tell you every sin and every blasphemy will be forgiven people but for that one.

Friends take that in what is unforgivable to God? Only one sin and it is not done against you it's done against him.

He will forgive every other sin in Christ which means if you are a Christian then you have been forgiven every sin past, present and future done case closed.

So if none of your sins were unforgivable to God how can anybody else's sins be unforgivable to you?

And if we understand rightly the magnitude and the scale of our sin against God we'll see not only the quality of sin done against us is not unique but the quantity of sin done to us while it may still be very big very significant comes nowhere close to the wrong that we have committed against him.

[ 30 : 10 ] Friends it is those with a right perspective on wrong who are able to respond rightly when they are wronged. It is those who have been forgiven much and know they have been forgiven much who are able to forgive much.

Now that perspective might take time to gain through prayer through speaking with other Christians through talking with your elders or life group leaders but that is the change that needs to take place in our hearts so that we can forgive from the heart.

Now if this is hard to hear or you're finding it hard to forgive please do you come and speak to me afterwards or Donald Ben one of the elders one of the life group leaders you please find someone we would love to talk this through with you and walk with you through it.

I think it's also important to say in the context of this chapter that coming to that point of forgiveness doesn't mean not following up on the wrong that was done. Tonight's passage comes straight off the back of last week's passage doesn't it that also has to do with how we respond to sin and that involved challenging sin remember telling someone their fault even if it came to it putting someone out of the church family.

Now clearly what Jesus says in verse 22 doesn't contradict what he said back in verse 17. So even where there is real forgiveness forgiveness things sometimes still do have to be followed up depending on the sin depending on the circumstances and the response of the one who sinned.

[ 31 : 59 ] But by the same virtue what Jesus says in verse 17 doesn't contradict what he says in verse 22. So even where there is no repentance there still must be forgiveness.

forgiveness. And yes that means that we must forgive even when there is no apology. There are very few words more powerful aren't they than I'm sorry.

But those words are fomenting relationships not procuring forgiveness. Right think about it we prayed earlier on didn't we together as the Lord Jesus teaches us to pray forgive our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.

But that isn't because God hasn't already forgiven our sins is it? He has. So why do we say sorry again regularly daily to him? Well when we say sorry to God and ask him to forgive us it's to clear the air.

It's because he has forgiven our sins. And we want that closeness that intimacy of relationship to be restored again between us. Humanly though that might not happen and an apology might not come and yet we should forgive.

[ 33 : 18 ] Not because of what has been given or not given to us right but because of what God has first given us. We forgive because we have first been forgiven.

Forgiveness takes place first in here then and not out here. and so the forgiveness that we offer it is not the opposite of challenge is it?

It can't be says Jesus but it is the opposite of revenge. And we can only challenge without a vengeful heart if we have already forgiven from the heart.

So you see how these things are not opposites but actually one piece together. We actually have to forgive someone before we even go to them to tell them their fault.

Jesus' teaching is totally one piece isn't it? And finally and briefly why must I forgive? Well in short because the one who teaches us to forgive is the one who fully paid our debt to God so we could be forgiven.

[ 34 : 26 ] Again Jesus has been teaching his disciples in the past chapters hasn't he that he must suffer and he must die and this is why. So that on the cross he could sign his name against our whole record of wrongs.

Take that debt upon himself and pay it to God by his priceless blood. Do you see how God can write off our debt without being indifferent to it?

By demanding payment from another even himself in the person of his son upon the cross. So that through the cross at one and the same time he receives what he is owed and he sets us free.

That is the miracle of his grace isn't it? The miracle of the cross. So when you are struggling to forgive friends look to Christ upon the cross and see what he paid there for you.

Hear his words spoken from the cross father forgive them. Forgive them. And listen to his teaching on the path to the cross.

[ 35 : 42 ] But those who have been forgiven much by him are those who forgive much to others. Let's pray together for help as we do that.

gracious and forgiving Lord we come before you humbly and acknowledging father our wrongs against you have been so so many more than we can count.

Lord our debt to you is unpayable and if you had required it from us oh Lord our eternity would be lost in darkness. But we give you so much thanks and praise our father that you have given us Christ instead.

Jesus who took our debt who suffered hell upon the cross bearing your wrath to pay for what we owe so that we can be freed to stand before you to thank you to call you father to worship you.

Lord this is so undeserved and so we thank you humbly from our hearts. Father we confess that we are unlike you in so many ways but in this way Lord you have spoken to us tonight but so often Lord we struggle to do what you have done and we find it hard to forgive when we have been forgiven. [ 37 : 16 ] Lord forgive us afresh for our unforgiving hearts and help us we pray from the heart to forgive others. Grant us by your mercy that that eternal and divine perspective on wrong.

Help us to draw near to Christ upon the cross to seek strength and help and mercy from him. Father I pray particularly for any here tonight who are in that struggle very pressingly just now and Lord I pray that they would know the comfort of your love and the fellowship of other believers around Lord to walk with them through it.

Grant us the grace we pray to forgive as we have been forgiven. For this we pray in Jesus name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.