

FORGIVENESS:
Will That Be One Goat Or Two?
Message 6
Date: 4/6/2011
Scripture: Matthew 18:21-35

INTRO: We have covered what I believe to be the key portion of Scripture in the OT regarding forgiveness. The key word for forgiveness is 'nasa', to bear or carry away. The idea is that of bearing or carrying away sin, to a place where it will never be found again. We said that two goats were required to give the proper picture of forgiveness. One was the 'for the Lord' goat. It's blood was shed to picture the payment of sin. The other goat was the 'sending away' goat. On it the sinner's sins were confessed and then to picture forgiveness it was sent into the wilderness where it would never be found again. Thus forgiveness requires that the payment for sin be made and that repentance take place before forgiveness could be extended.

A key passage on forgiveness in the NT is Matthew 18 It comes in the form of a parable, and we had it read earlier as given in verses 21-35. The key NT word for forgiveness is 'aphiemi'. It occurs in this chapter in verses 21 and 35. This word means to 'send forth' or to 'send away'. The concept is basically the same as that of the OT. In the parable of the NT, again we will have the concept of repentance before forgiveness.

So I want to show you both the context and the setting of the parable. Basically the context is this. In Matthew 18:1-14, we have a picture of Jesus coming to this earth in order to seek and to save that which is lost (read vs. 11). We will see later that when He saves a lost sinner, He forgives such a magnitude of sins that it is literally immeasurable! You could not measure the amount He forgives one lost sinner! There is no number big enough to describe it!

Then in 18:15-17, Jesus shows how believers, who have been forgiven such a vast sum of sins, are to forgive one another. So serious is the matter of sinning against a brother, another Christian, that if the offender does not repent and take care of it he or she is to be excommunicated. A three step process is involved. At each point, if the wrongdoer does not repent, excommunication is to take place (read 15-20).

I might just insert here that if unconditional forgiveness is correct, excommunication is wrong. How can you excommunicate one you've already forgiven? You see, if the view of unconditional forgiveness were correct, then one would forgive the moment someone did us wrong. Since we are not to bring the matter up again once it is forgiven, we could not even practice this passage! In this passage we are to go and mention the matter again. And if he refuse to repent we are to take one or two more and mention it again. And if there is still no repentance the church is to mention it again!

Now one of the most important aspects of interpreting parables is the setting. The immediate setting is found in verses 20-21 (read 21). You see, when Jesus had finished this teaching on forgiveness in verse 20, Peter then had a question for Him in verse 21, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" Jesus then answered him that seventy times seven would be more like it. What He is saying is, there is no limit! And so, we are now ready to look at this parable.

V. THE NEW TESTAMENT PARABLE

Peter's question forms the setting for the parable Jesus will now give. Jesus will deal, I believe with both human and divine forgiveness, and the conditions to both. Peter's question has been, "When can I stop forgiving? What is the number? Seven times?" Then Jesus told him something no Jew would have easily accepted. If somebody sins against you 70 times 7, you shall forgive him. When can you stop forgiving? How many times can a person sin against you and it has become too many? The basic answer is that no number can be set. And now Jesus will give a parable to show Peter how very little 70x7 is. It is miniscule in comparison to what we, as believers have been forgiven by God. Whenever repentance takes place, forgiveness is always an obligation.

So let us now go to the parable that follows here (read 23-35). Now you must realize this is a parable. The most simple definition of a parable is that it is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. So in a parable, you can put the earthly story in one column on the left. And then you can put the heavenly

meaning in the column on the right. Here is how I understand this parable. Let us begin by reading verse 23 (read). We have three key items here; a king, accounts, and a servants. So in the left column, the earthly story, we have a king. In the right column, the heavenly meaning, I believe we have God. You might wish to note these in your bulletin outlines set up for that. As we go through this parable, you could put the earthly story in the left column and the heavenly meaning in the right column. What we have thus far is:

Earthly story	Heavenly meaning
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Certain King.....	God (v. 35)
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Then on the left we have the king seeking to settle accounts. The accounts represent sins.

King seeks to settle.....	sins
Accounts	

Then on the left we have servants and these servants represent people.

Servants.....	.people
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Now let us read verse 24 (read). As he begins a servant was brought to him that owed him 10,000 talents. The original text does not have a number here. The original word is *murioi*. It may mean 10,000 but it may also mean a numberless sum. We get our word 'myriad' from this word. I think what we may have pictured here is a numberless amount. John MacArthur says, and I quote, "The Greek expression translated 'ten thousand' does not necessarily even signify a precise amount. This was the largest number expressible in the Greek language. It is the word from which we derive the English term myriads, and it was often used exactly the same way" (104).

What we have here is the picture of a lost sinner whose sins can never be paid for. This corresponds to what Jesus was dealing with in the first part of Matthew 18. You see, the picture here is that of a lost sinner and the amount of his debt. It is innumerable, it is myriads. Maybe you are in this

service this morning and you have never repented of your sins and received Christ as your Savior. Maybe you wonder if you need to get baptized or if you need to join a church or give money or some such thing in order to be accepted by God. What we have taught here is that your debt is so huge, nothing, but nothing you can do can bring about salvation. But this passage will show us what must be done to be saved.

So in verse 24, what we have is the king facing this servant up to his debt. No doubt, what we have here is a picture of conviction of sin. The servant is caused to face his debt. Nobody ever gets saved unless they are faced up with their debt. Conviction of sin brings about a realization of one's condition.

So the picture in verse 24 is this:

King seeks to settle A sum so vast it is without
a debt totaling number
myriads

So, let us read verses 25-26. What we have pictured here, as I see it, is repentance. This man is in desperation. His wife and children and all that he has will be taken from him, and he pleads for patience. Now let me say a word about repentance. The NT word for repentance is *metanoia*. In brief, it is simply this; a change of mind. Now let me tell you what repentance is not. It is not tears, or crying, or any such behavior. Repentance, a change of mind may bring about tears etc... but the tears are not repentance. Repentance is a change of mind.

So I see the earthly story, the left hand column where the servant begs for patience as picturing the meaning of repentance in the right hand column.

Servant begs patience.....Repentance

Verse 27 then says, "Then the master of that servant was moved with compassion, released him and forgave him." Here is a picture of God Almighty being moved with compassion. It is a word closely related to mercy. It is something that pulls on your innards. The word is *splanchnizomai*. The *splanchnon* are the bowels. It is those deep, inner feelings of

servant owes him 100 denari. From this we get the picture. You see, the difference owed by the first servant and this second one is so vast, the second servant's debt is hardly worth mentioning. You see, when we forgive our brother 70x7 it amounts to next to nothing! So in the left hand column we have a servant who finds another servant who owes him 100 denari. On the right, that is the size of sin between believer and believer. Compare that with the size of the unbeliever's sin against God, and 70x7 is nothing.

Servant finds another.....Sin between believers
servant who owes him Puny amount

Verse 29 now says, "So his fellow servant fell down at his feet and begged him, saying, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you all.'" What we have here is precisely Matthew 18:15 (read). Here, one believer has pointed out to the other his debt. He has reproved him. Then, once more we have the picture of repentance. This servant said, "Have patience with me and I will pay you all." This is the very same thing the first servant said to the king, whom he was indebted to. Here is the picture of a believer sinning against another, and then when it is pointed out to him, he repents. So in the left column we have the servant begging for patience, picturing on the right side, repentance.

Servant begs patience....Repentance

After the repentance of the debtor, verse 30 says, "And he would not, but went and threw him into prison till he should pay the debt." Here we have a man who has been forgiven an innumerable sum, and he is not willing to forgive a very small amount. A man who has been forgiven an innumerable sum, will not forgive his fellow man a pittance. Now, here is the sin of unforgiveness. When someone does not forgive before repentance takes place, that is not the sin of unforgiveness. When one person repents to another and the other does not forgive, that is the sin of unforgiveness. The debtor has repented, but no forgiveness is extended.

Now I must say a word about the prison mentioned here. John MacArthur says, "Debtor's prisons were common in that time. The debtor was imprisoned and given some menial labor to do, for which he was paid a pittance. Those wages went toward the payment of the debt, and the prisoner was not released until the debt was paid" (pg. 107). What is the picture here? On the left, no compassion. On the right, no forgiveness.

No compassion.....No forgiveness

Now the King of this kingdom represents God. The kingdom is all the subjects of the King, and that is other Christians. So this kingdom has more workers and they see what has happened (read verse 31). So these other servants go and bring their grievance to the King. The interpretation is this:

Other servants inform....	God discovers one who
King	will not forgive,
	though He has been
	forgiven millions

So let us read verses 32-33 (read). Now if there is one thing God does not take kindly to from Christians, it is failure to forgive when the condition of repentance has been met. And no matter how much we forgive our fellow man, it is minimal in comparison to what we have been forgiven. When a fellow believer has repented, we have an obligation to forgive. To not forgive when we have been forgiven so very much, is a very huge offense to Almighty God.

Now it is noteworthy that the king says here, "Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?" It is a point I have made before, but I make it again. We are to forgive like God forgives. And the point is that He never forgives before repentance takes place. So it is to be among men as well. But the point of this verse is that this servant ought to have forgiven his fellow servant in the same way that God forgave him. So in the left hand column the King says to the servant He forgave that he should have forgiven in the same way he had been forgiven. On the right hand

we have the truth that a believer should forgive his fellow believer when repentance has taken place.

King says to servant he..Believer should
should have had forgive fellow believ
compassion as he did -er if he repents
on him.

Now there are some major questions raised here with regard to whether the first servant pictured a true believer or not and what the implications are. I will not take time to discuss that here. What I do want to take some time for is to seek to answer a pertinent question: The text says, "And his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him." The question is what is meant by, "...until he should pay all that was due to him."

We are talking about the first servant here who was indebted to the king. It pictures the unbeliever getting saved. And the words, "...until he should pay all that was due to him" could be interpreted in three different ways. First, it could mean "...until the first servant should pay the 'myriads' he owed the king in the first place." If that is so, then, when God forgives and we are unforgiving, does he hold us responsible once more for the sins He already has forgiven? That seems unbiblical, as God removes our sins as far as the east is from the west and he promises not to remember them any more.

Second, when it says, "...until he should pay all that was due to him", does it mean, "until he, the first servant, should pay the king all that the second servant owed him, the first servant? This would mean that when a Christian repents to another, and the other does not forgive, he becomes responsible for that debt.

Third, it could refer to a new debt incurred by the first servant for not forgiving his fellow servant. It would then read, "...until he, the first servant, should pay all that he now owed the king by incurring this new debt." In other words, to be unforgiving to another after having been forgiven a huge sum by the king incurs another debt to the king, and now this

first servant who was forgiven is once more in debt. This debt in itself could be huge as God looks very dimly on the person who does not forgive when repentance has taken place.

Whatever those words mean, there is another matter of great importance here with regard to the words, "...his master was angry with him and delivered him to the tormentors..." Let me read a comment from Barnes commentary here. He writes, "The word *tormentors*, here, probably means *keepers of the prison*. Torments were inflicted on *criminals*, not on debtors. They were inflicted by stretching the limbs, or pinching the flesh, or taking out the eyes, or taking off the skin while alive, etc. It is not probable that anything of this kind is intended, but only that the servant was punished by imprisonment till the debt should be paid."

So we have two things to consider here; the debtors prison and the tormentors. Now the debtor's prison gained the state a lot of cheap labor. This labor brought very cheap wages but would eventually pay the debt the prisoner owed. So the prison sought to extract payment from the prisoner. However, the tormentors, I think, did not seek to extract a payment, but a confession. They sought to bring about repentance, a change of mind, in order to extract a confession as to the crime. A confession presupposes repentance. You see, the second goat was the one over which the sins were confessed.

Now let me say a word about confession. The NT word is *homologeō*. It means literally, *to say the same thing*. It is to verbalize the same thing as we have done. Repentance is a change of mind. Confession verbalizes the wrong deed to the one we have wronged. The picture of the tormentors here is, I think, to bring about confession. You see, this second servant once owed the king an outstanding amount and was forgiven when he repented. He is now again in the same predicament. And what he owes is a confession, "Lord, I say the same thing as You. I am a wicked servant. I will go to my brother and confess my sin to him that I am a wicked servant and I will forgive him."

So, let me give my interpretation of the tormentors. I think it is a picture of the conscience. When we are unforgiving, God will deliver us to the tormentors. So, in our left column we have the king delivering the servant to the tormentors. On the right, God imprisons us to our conscience.

King delivers him to.....God inflicts guilt via
tormentors. the conscience

No matter how much we fight this prison, we have been put behind the bars of the conscience. And it will torment us until a confession is drawn from our lips. There are no bars stronger than those of the conscience. The conscience has the capacity to torment day and night. It has the capacity to make us become willing to confess to almost anything, just like tormentors can.

So, in summary, what does this parable teach? It teaches that God has compassion on repentant sinners and He forgives them such huge amounts that they are without number. This is an incredible message to us. His forgiveness cannot be measured. The thing in man that brings about compassion in God so that He grants forgiveness is repentance. And no true teacher of the Word will tell you that God will forgive man without man's repentance.

But what is most instructive in this parable, is that Jesus answers the question of whether repentance is condition to forgiveness between people. Those who teach the view that forgiveness is to be extended unconditionally agree that God only forgives upon repentance. But they say we are to forgive our fellow man, though he has not repented. So listen again to the NISBE, "It is not to be supposed, however, that failure to repent on the part of the offender releases the offended from all obligation to extend forgiveness. Without the repentance of the one who has wronged him he can have a forgiving state of mind."

Furthermore, in the parable the king asks the unforgiving servant, "Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?" The answer, of course, is "Yes." And how or

when did the king in the parable forgive? After the servant repented. How then is man to forgive man? After repentance, of course.

McLintock and Strong said, "It is a mistaken idea that in the matter of forgiveness we are strictly to imitate God the Father, and not forgive those who trespass against us until they repent and ask our pardon." So they say, "It is a mistaken idea that in the matter of forgiveness we are strictly to imitate God the Father..." yet the NT says we are to forgive like Christ forgave, and it is not hard to determine how or when He forgives. And, furthermore, in this parable the forgiveness man is to extend to his fellow man is exactly the same way as God's forgiveness. It is repentance and then forgiveness.

CONCL: So, let us conclude regarding this parable in Matthew 18. There are two major teachings in this parable. The first major teaching is that the unsaved owe a debt that is immeasurable. No amount can be put to it. But when a very horrible sinner repents before God, the compassion of Almighty God is aroused and He forgives. We are familiar with this truth.

The second major teaching in this parable is how believers are to forgive. This forgiveness is to be extended exactly like that of Almighty God to the repentant sinner. When the person who has sinned repents, forgiveness is to be extended without reservation. To not forgive a fellow Christian after repentance is tantamount to a crime. It is the sin of unforgiveness. If a sinner who has been forgiven an immeasurable sum will not forgive a fellow believer when that fellow believer has repented, God will imprison him until he confesses and forgives.

I want to assure you this morning, if you are unforgiving, you are in this prison; and I also want to assure you of one thing, there is only one door out. Repentance leading to confession.