

Isn't it great to watch baptisms? To see God working in the hearts of people in our church community? Let's remember to pray for those who were baptized today. They have made it their goal to arrange their lives around following Jesus. As you see them, remember to offer an encouraging word to them.

They will learn a lot of things. One is this—Only Jesus is perfect. No one in our church family is perfect. You can't live in community with other believers for any length of time, and not figure that out.

We soon learn that we can't live connected in a community of believers who seek to follow Jesus without getting hurt. We are flawed and broken people, and eventually, someone hurts us and we hurt someone else. The outcome is inevitable. If I were to ask who's here has been hurt by a fellow believer, every hand would go up including mine. I can't count the number of times I have heard from people I love how they have been wounded, mistreated, let down, victimized by their fellow followers.

And none of this should surprise us. It doesn't surprise Jesus. He proclaims us to be his children, his bride, his brother's and sisters, as prized possessions worthy of giving his life to save. But he also proclaims us to be sheep, who are dumb, dirty, weak, and prone to wander. So he gives us a powerful and liberating tool called forgiveness and a powerful story to illustrate the rationale behind choosing forgiveness.

You may have walked through the doors of this church today carrying the weight of a serious wrong done to you this past week, this past year, or even years ago by a fellow sheep. If that's your situation, the message today is going to be hard to hear because it involves spiritual surgery to remove that weight. Surgery is never fun, but the good news is that God wants to remove what's toxic to our hearts so we live our lives with love and joy. The surgery is called forgiveness.

Who needs to come up with a good opening illustration on forgiving one another when Jesus, the master storyteller gives his own?

Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?" (Matthew 18:21)

Peter gets it right. Jesus is Lord. He is the divine King and deserves the divine title. And Peter also gets it right because he understands human nature. He understands that brothers and

sisters will hurt each other and that even followers of Jesus need forgiveness, and oftentimes repeated forgiveness for repeat offenses. And good for Peter. He seems eager to apply what Jesus had just taught in verses 15–20 about what to do when a brother or sister sins against you personally.

So Peter knows that we need to forgive, and then he tries to quantify it. Probably thinking my brother Andrew keeps messing up with me and I know I need to forgive him. Peter was Jewish, and he knew the rabbis of his day interpreted the law to say that the normal forgiveness limit was three times. So Peter feeling generous asked, would seven times do? Aren't you impressive Jesus, I will take the three and double down and add one more as a cherry on top? Because these rabbis also taught that the number seven in Hebrew was the number that represented completeness. So let's go with seven, it's a great and generous number.

My Forgiveness is to be Unlimited

Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times. (verse 22)

You mean doubling plus one is not enough? Jesus redirects them: Forgiveness is to be **unlimited**. That would have shocked anyone within earshot. How do you process that statement by Jesus? We love to hear about forgiveness in the abstract, but when it is close to home, we hate it in the concrete.

"Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand bags of gold was brought to him. (verses 23–24)

Now ten thousand bags of gold sounds like a lot of gold and it should but it also sounds like a limited amount, maybe they were small bags, maybe a few camels loaded down with gold brought into the king's palace. Lay them before the king, pay off the debt, declare bankruptcy and move on.

That's not the picture Jesus has in mind here. Each bag would be equivalent to a measurement called a talent. There are different interpretations on the modern day value of 10,000 talents and I've never been that great in math but as I see it, each talent was likely 75 lbs. of gold. How many talents? 10,000. Based on modern day numbers the servant owed 750,000 pounds of gold to his king. At a modern-day price of 1,250.00 per ounce, that servant owed his king over 11 trillion dollars.... So before we move on Jesus depicts human beings, due to their sin, not being \$10,000 in debt, but trillions in debt. Another way we can look

at it is that the separation between God's goodness and my badness are trillions of miles.

Jesus' point is that there is no possible way to pay back our debt, no loan we can qualify to pay over time. Take my debt, multiply it by your debt and the debt of every other human that has existed in the world, and then consider that on the cross Jesus paid the price for all the debts of the world. And when he cried out from the cross at his crucifixion, "*My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?*" It was a cry resulting from trillions and trillions of sins laid on him all at one time.

The king says, "You know what you owe me, right?" "Yes sir" replied the servant. "And payment in full is due today." the king continued. "Yes sir, I mean no sir, I don't quite have all the money just yet."

Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like (literally the eternal kingdom that God is building that includes us the present church can be compared to...) a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants.

Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt. (verse 25)

So the king likely looked at his ledger book and came up with a plan to at least get some price for what the servant owed him. His plan? He would sell him and his entire family as slaves. Hearing this....

"At this the servant fell on his knees before him. 'Be patient with me,' he begged, 'and I will pay back everything.' The servant's master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go. (verses 26–27)

I love this, "Hey, just give me a few more days, I had a good week, my sales numbers are up, I should have 11 trillion in no time." The king, His court, the servant and now us, all know that there was absolutely no way he could pay back even close to everything. What did the king do? He did better than just give him a little more time.

God's Forgiveness is Infinite

This kind of thinking doesn't make sense to us. The king reached into the ledger book that listed all the man's debts, and he took hold of the page and ripped it out. He ripped it to shreds, and turned to the servant on his knees and said, "I have forgiven your debt. You are now free and clear, go in peace." May this truth this morning change our thinking. May it comfort and encourage you. God's forgiveness offered you is infinite.

Can you imagine what that servant had to be feeling as he walked out of the palace? Utter ecstasy.... Shouts of Joy?.... His heart overflowing with gratitude? Wouldn't you? I picture him floating like a butterfly out of that palace. Hurrying home to his family to celebrate with them. But that isn't how Jesus' story goes.

"But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred silver coins. He grabbed him and began to choke him. 'Pay back what you owe me!' he demanded. (verse 28)

What kind of person would think like that? We all expect that this guy emerge from that palace a grace dispenser. A new superhero named Captain Forgiveness. A hundred silver coins was three months average wages. Jesus says, this forgiven man actually grabs his fellow servant and literally tried to choke the money out of him. In modern dollars like a guy saying, I was just forgiven \$100,000, now you owe me three dollars and fifty cents now pay up, I need my small vanilla latté no whip cream.

"His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay it back.' (Isn't that what the other servant said to the king back in verse 26?) "But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. (verses 29–30)

So he throws the poor guy in a prison, hoping I guess that some rich relative would pay his debt to earn his release. Whatever the specifics, this is what a Christian brother not forgiving a guilty but repentant brother looks like to God. And the picture is ugly.

So not only is God's forgiveness to us unlimited,

My Unwillingness to Forgive Others Betrays God's Grace to Me

Jesus isn't giving us a lesson on finance here. What is revealed to us is this man's heart. No mercy, no patience, no forgiveness, no gratitude, and no grace, no belief that the King's actions toward him should change his heart toward others.

There was another disciple listening to Jesus words here. His name is Judas. It's a common thing to believe that Judas' greatest sin was betraying the disciples by stealing from the disciple's money bag or betraying Jesus by selling out Jesus to the religious leaders.

But could it be that both of those betrayals were symptoms of a deeper heart issue? That his root betrayal was that he just didn't believe Jesus. Think about it. When Judas saw Zacchaeus, who was a traitor to his Jewish people, and then he saw Zacchaeus express sorrow over his past and pledge to live differently going forward, Jesus said to Zacchaeus, "*Today, Salvation has come to this house. The Son of man has come to seek and save what was lost.*" Zacchaeus I see your sorrow, your readiness to follow me, welcome back to the family, you are forgiven. Do you think Judas truly believed what Jesus said was possible?

And when Judas saw the crowd drag a woman caught in adultery right up to Jesus. And Judas knew what the law required for this kind of sin. The people picked up rocks to stone her. But Jesus saw her remorse and said, "I don't condemn you. Go know and leave your former life. Woman, you are forgiven." Do you think Judas truly believed what Jesus said was possible?

Or the prodigal son who had humiliated his father, returned home, willing to become a slave, and when the father saw the son's grief over what he had done, he said, "Let's celebrate. My son has returned. This son of mine was dead and now he is alive again. He was lost and now he is found." Do you think Judas truly believed what Jesus said was possible?

What Judas did to Jesus seemed almost unpardonable. Trading Jesus to his enemies for 30 pieces of silver, how bad is that? But what was worse he betrayed the words of Jesus. He betrayed even rejected his offer of grace. He couldn't accept that Jesus could forgive even him. And he killed himself.

Here is the deal, Jesus is either telling the truth about the heart of God or he isn't. If he is, we have hope. If Jesus words are true here, his grace is the most amazing thing ever. And if his grace is the most amazing thing ever, then we can forgive ourselves and others. This story challenges us to dare to believe Jesus' words.

I found a definition of Matthew 18 forgiveness I want to share with you.

"To give to someone by releasing them from the debt of whatever offense they committed against you."

The "Someone" the "Them" are people who we like and want to forgive, but they are also people we don't like and don't want to forgive. Forgiveness is an unnatural act. Jesus is saying, choose forgiveness. It's not easy; it feels unnatural, but choose it anyway. I want to put up a slide to remind us Matthew 18 forgiveness is not.

Approving

When we forgive we are not to send a message that we approve or tolerate what that person did to us. Jesus forgave the woman in adultery, but he didn't approve of her actions. He told her to leave the life of sin.

Excusing

When someone recognizes their sin and asks your forgiveness, we are to let the process work. Don't say, that's okay, no big deal. I understand you were under a lot of stress, and I was overly sensitive or not attentive to you, so really it's my fault too. Don't short-circuit what God is doing in that person's life when they ask you for forgiveness. Something powerful is going on.

Denying

True forgiveness can only be granted by us when we can actually admit, "Hey, this brother or sister sinned against me in this way." I need to forgive them for their specific sin as God forgives me for my specific sins.

Trusting

We can immediately forgive the sin but it may not be healthy to immediately trust again. Rebuilding trust takes time. Trust

requires safety. Forgiveness can be immediate but trust must be earned.

Reconciling

Forgiveness and reconciliation are not the same. Reconciliation requires two people who want to restore a relationship. That's always the goal of Matthew 18. But the person you forgive may not be able to see or talk to you. He or she may be dead or in prison. According to Matthew 18, forgiveness is where it starts, and reconciliation is the next step. Let's leave it there for today.

Forgetting

We have all heard, "It's best to forgive and forget." That just isn't in the Bible. We can't wipe away every memory of everything bad that we have forgiven others for doing to us. I understand the intention, but it isn't reality. God doesn't literally forget our sins. He chooses to overlook our sins and look at his perfect Son Jesus who made forgiveness possible through his shed blood on the cross. And that is where we are to look as well.

Let's finish up our story:

When the other servants saw what had happened, they were outraged and went and told their master everything that had happened.

"Then the master called the servant in. 'You wicked servant,' he said, 'I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?' In anger his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed.

"This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart." (verses 31-35)

At first glance, we might hear Jesus as saying that we are saved from hell only if we forgive others. Or that our salvation, can be lost if we don't forgive...

On the contrary, the good news of Jesus is that he offers to all people the gift of salvation through the forgiveness of sins. We must receive the gift of salvation through the forgiveness of sins to get out of our sin debt prison. We won't get out of prison if we ignore the gift or somehow try to do enough good to pay back God and earn our way out of prison. But when we receive the good news of salvation through the forgiveness of sins we are set free from prison forever.

Remember Matthew chapter 18 is for believers. Why would he talk about hell in a teaching for believers to forgive each other? Jesus is not teaching we can lose our salvation. Jesus is saying that we can identify his followers by the fact that they forgive one another. There is to be no such thing as an unforgiving

Christian. The gospel transforms lives. What was unnatural becomes supernatural. A final observation from Matthew 18.

My Unwillingness to Forgive Puts Me in a Prison

And here is something else for us to gain from verses 31–35. When we don't forgive others we place ourselves in a prison of our own making. God isn't torturing his children, we torture ourselves.

There is only one key that unlocks the prison door. It's to embrace the unlimited forgiveness of God and in turn pass forgiveness on to another. I liken it to every time I forgive another I pass on a drop of water from the bucketful that God has already given me.

Some of us need to be set free from your self-imposed prison of unforgiveness. There is so much joy to experience in the Christian life. So much ministry for us all to do together, and so much life to live. I want to encourage you to work through your wounds and experience the victory of forgiveness. Maybe work through it with your community group, your WBS table, your men's fraternity table, one of our CPC Biblical counselors, elders or pastors. What is that next step for to experience the fullness of the gospel of Jesus Christ? Imagine a life like this! It's supernatural.

Forgiveness Is:

- Being Fully Aware of the Offence and still Forgiving
- Choosing to Keep No Record of Wrong
- Showing Mercy
- Refusing to Gossip
- Absence of Bitterness

As I prayed about where to land this today, there are one of three places each of us could land after studying this parable. For some of us, we need to respond in gratitude for God's unlimited forgiveness.

My Gratitude Level

I don't encourage gambling in any fashion, but I want you to imagine a scenario. A couple of months ago imagine you filled out the Publisher's Clearing House Sweepstakes not expecting to hear anything in return. Well here you are today, and after church, you meet someone over coffee on the patio and you decide to go out to lunch. You have a great lunch and when the bill comes, he or she nudges you and says, "I forgot my money, would you mind picking up the bill today?" Okay, sure, no problem. Then they tell you, "On Monday I will drop by your office and give you the \$20.00 I owe you for my lunch." Well, Monday passes, and no \$20.00. It's now Tuesday and no \$20.00. But late in the afternoon on Tuesday you get a long distance phone call. The voice on the other end is excited. The voice says, "Congratulations, I'm pleased to announce that you have just won our super duper sweepstakes. You have just won 1 million dollars." Imagine what you are feeling. Could you be any more excited? Could you be

any happier? You hang up the phone, and what is the first thing you think about? Is it, "Hey I need to call that guy I had lunch with at CPC, he owes me \$20.00." "No! No, it's not. That would be a crazy response? Kinda sick, I think. You would never think about getting that \$20.00 back ever again.

In light of your great big prize, you will let him off the hook. You will forgive his small debt. It's the same thing with forgiveness. When we walk out of the king's palace knowing deep in our hearts that the gospel is true and our huge debt has been removed our only response is to float out of there filled with gratitude. And No one will have to remind us how to behave toward others. No one will have to tell us to not shake down the guy in the courtyard the next Sunday. For some of us here today we need to reflect on Jesus' words when we do our response this morning should be one of gratitude. Be grateful. You won the gospel sweepstakes!!

My Blame Level

For others of us, we are here today feeling fully trapped by a bad relationship. You are unable to extract yourself and be free in Christ's grace and mercy today. There is something backing up the grace hose that is meant to flow into you and out through you. Your pain today comes with a face and a name. A person at church, a fellow believer, maybe a pastor has hurt you. They don't see they hurt you and that makes you angrier. The point is you see it and you know you need to forgive. Follow the steps we studied last week in chapter 18 verses 15-17. I encourage you to progress toward forgiveness. It's likely you will want to talk with someone to figure out how to proceed toward freedom from what they did to you.

My Bitterness Level

And this next one is more common than we want to admit. Is God reminding you today of someone in your life right now who has hurt you and you have kept them in debtors prison? You have refused to let them off the hook, and you continue to demand regular repayments, because dang it, they owe you and will owe you the rest of their lives. You need to forgive. You are becoming bitter. It's destroying you. And now I'm going to ask you to progress toward something supernatural. God may be telling you, that you need to ask their forgiveness for your bitterness toward them.

In the next few minutes, may God have his way in all of us and bring what he wants to our minds and touch our hearts. And as we quietly reflect consider the response he wants for your next step as you respond to his amazing unlimited forgiveness.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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