

Jesus' Parable: The Unforgiving Servant

Matthew 18:21-35



Parables of Jesus

Earthly stories with heavenly meanings

The things in nature that are found in Jesus' parables do not in themselves lead us to God.

God Himself must give us the key of understanding and He does give the key to His disciples through His Word.

There are three parts to most parables:

1. The background information or situation.
2. The narrative that tells of earthly things that really happen.
3. The spiritual lesson.

The following observations concerning parables can be made:

- A) Parables have many details but one intended meaning and lesson. Find the one Spirit-intended lesson.
- B) Be aware of local color to help in the understanding of the “every day” part of a parable.
- C) No parable should be explained in any way contrary to the clear teaching of the Word of God elsewhere in Scripture.
- D) No parable should be used as a starting point for doctrine, but rather to confirm and illustrate doctrines taught in plain language elsewhere.
- E) Before we attempt to explain the individual parts of the parable, we should try to grasp the central truth of the parable.
- F) Almost invariably, Jesus’ explanations of His parables, His introductions to the parables, His summary statements, or the general context in which a parable is spoken, supplies the key to proper understanding.
- G) If we are perplexed about the meaning of a parable, we should grasp/teach it as best we can, acknowledging our ignorance. “Sometimes, one may carry an obscure passage around for years when suddenly it begins to shine.”

(note context)

Matthew 18:21-35

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.

- Talent
 - **Approach 1**
 - Largest weight among Hebrews for gold and silver – at Augustus 84 denarii per pound of silver; Nero reduced the value to 96 denarii per pound

- (96 days' work)(75lbs /talent)(10,000)
 - $96 \times \$100 \text{ (day's wage)} \times 75 \times 10,000 = \$7,200,000,000$ (7.2 Billion dollars)

- **Approach 2**

- Talent = 20 years of labor
 - $20 \times \$25,000 \times 10,000 = \$5,000,000,000$ (5 Billion dollars)
- Note the futility of paying his debt. Even selling everything as the king commands, would it make him debt-free?, i.e. **an unpayable debt**, spend a lifetime paying for it and never accomplish full payment

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.

- Patience? Yes. Pay everything? Seemingly unlikely.
- Have pity (literally, "to be moved in your gut/intestines")

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.

- **Danarius = a day's wage**
 - **Approach 1:**
 - $100 \text{ denarii} \times \$100/\text{day} = \$10,000 \text{ vs. } 7.2 \text{ Billion}$
 - **Approach 2:**
 - $100 \text{ denarii} \times \$80/\text{day} = \$8,000 \text{ vs } 5 \text{ Billion}$

1st servant

\$5 Billion

a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. When he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed

‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.’

And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt.

2nd servant

\$8,000

seizing him, he began to choke him, saying, ‘Pay what you owe.’

‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you.’

He refused and went and put him in prison until he should pay the debt.

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.”

Consider God’s forgiveness of us and our forgiveness of others in light of this parable. It is not a one-for-one trade-off, nor do we earn God’s forgiveness by forgiving others. Rather, God’s forgiveness moves us to be forgiving. (*We love because He first loved us*, 1 John 4:19).

“Be kind to one another, tender-hearted forgiving one another just as God for Christ’s sake has forgiven you” (Ephesians 4:32).

The Fifth Petition

“And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.”

What does this mean?

We pray in this petition that our Father in heaven would not look on our sins or deny our prayer because of them. We are not worthy of things for which we are asking, neither have we deserved them. However, we ask that our Father would by His grace give us what we ask; even though we sin often every day and indeed deserve nothing but punishment. We, too, will from our hearts gladly forgive and do good to all those who sin against us.



1. Peter’s question is one we can all understand. Jesus’ answer is one we can all remember to apply.
2. Jesus’ parable identifies our impatience, our hurt, our unwillingness to forgive. This is in sharp contrast to God who would have every reason to be impatient with us. Think of every argument we might have to be unforgiving and consider how easily God could use the same arguments against us, and the grace that He shows by not doing so.
3. Consider God’s forgiveness of us and our forgiveness of others in light of this parable. It is not a one-for-one trade-off, nor do we earn God’s forgiveness by forgiving others. Rather, God’s forgiveness moves us to be forgiving. (We love because He first loved us, 1 John 4:19).