

## A Personal Revival of Forgiveness – Matthew 18:21-35

**Introduction:** Two brothers were playing outside and somehow, the oldest one hit the youngest one with a stick, and a fight broke out. Their mother heard the ruckus and went outside to break up the fight. Since it was already late, she ordered them straight to bed. As she went in to tuck them in, she said, “*Now boys, you need to forgive each other before you go to sleep.*” But the younger one said, “*No, he’ll pay for what he did. I’ll never forgive him.*” To which the wise mother said, “*Now son, what would happen if either of you died tonight and you never had the opportunity again for forgive your brother?*” The younger one spoke up and said, “*Well, OK, I’ll forgive him tonight, but if we’re both still here in the morning, he’d better look out.*”

This morning we’re talking about forgiveness. Last Sunday, I said that in all our lives, there’s room for revival. And one of those areas in is the area of forgiveness.

In the verses prior to our text, Jesus is speaking to His disciples about maintaining unity within their fellowship. Unity is one of; if not the most important element that is necessary in accomplishing the purpose of God in His church. If God’s people are not united in their purpose and in their fellowship with each other, the work of the church will be severely hindered or even brought to a screeching halt. That is why the practice of forgiveness is important.

Satan is good at attacking us in the area of relationships. He’ll try to create tensions, misunderstandings, and breaches of trust between people in order to divide and conquer. And since we are imperfect people, living in an imperfect world, we have trouble with forgiveness even within relationships in the church.

That is why we need a personal revival of forgiveness. If we want to have relationships that last; if we want God’s work to be accomplished among us, then we must be willing to extend forgiveness to others.

Will it be easy? Probably not. **Proverbs 18:19 (NIV)** says, “*An offended brother is more unyielding than a fortified city, and disputes are like the barred gates of a citadel.*”

Yes, we struggle with forgiveness because for one thing, forgiveness is not natural for us, and also, we see forgiveness is being unfair to our sense of justice. We want to be vindicated. We want revenge. We love to wallow in resentment. We want to keep on remembering how we have been treated.

So, bringing ourselves to the point of forgiveness is a very difficult thing to do, and you may not be at that point yet. But we have to remember; the bottom line is this: If you're a Christian – if you have come to Christ in your rebellion, in all your dirty, rotten sins, and you've begged for His mercy and grace, then you have been forgiven, so you must be forgiving as well.

Today, let's talk about this wonderful virtue of forgiveness. First, I want us to see from our text:

### **1. Unlimited Forgiveness (READ 21-22)**

Peter came up to Jesus and asked him a question about the limit of forgiveness. Now, it may be that Peter was thinking of a time when he had forgiven someone several times, but now he's just getting tired of it all, so he wanted Jesus to help him know when it's OK to say, *"That's it. You've gone too far now. The friendship is over!"*

Well, before Jesus could answer, Peter responded to his own question by suggesting that seven times would be a good limit. That's not a bad answer. The rabbis back then taught that you had to forgive someone three times and then you could retaliate. Peter doubled that and added one for good measure. He must have thought his answer would impress Jesus.

But Jesus didn't give Peter the answer he was looking for. Jesus said in vs. 22: *"I tell you, not seven times, but seventy times seven times."* Can't you see Peter getting out his pocket calculator and multiplying that out? You mean I've got to forgive this guy 490 times?

But let's think about what Jesus is saying in His response to Peter's question. He isn't suggesting that we count the number of times we forgive someone. The phrase *"seventy times seven"* is hyperbolic language that means, there is no limit to the number of times we are to forgive someone. Actually, if you were forgive someone 490 times, forgiveness would be then a habit. And that's the point Jesus is making - you don't keep score when it comes to extending grace and forgiveness. Second, let's see an example of:

### **2. Unmerited Forgiveness (23-27)**

Jesus knew that this concept of unlimited forgiveness would be hard for Peter to understand, so He told a story to illustrate what He meant. The first half of the story deals with those who need forgiveness, and the second half targets those who need to forgive others. We'll get to the second half in a moment.

Let's start with verses **23-24 READ**. Here's the picture. The king in the land decided to call in all his debts. He sent out his collection agents and they came back with a man who owed the king a considerable chunk of change. In today's currency, it would be about \$25 million - the entire yearly income for the whole kingdom. Now we don't know how this guy ran up this kind of debt. But the point is; the man owed the king an amount he could never pay back.

Since he couldn't pay the debt, the king ordered the man's family and all his possessions sold to repay at least part of the debt. He just wanted to get back whatever he could.

In desperation, the man fell to his knees and begged for more time and promised to pay back his debt somehow. He doesn't want his family being sold.

Well, the king filled with compassion for this man, so he does something the man doesn't even ask for. The king not only forgives the debt, he also releases him. Maybe he was in a good mood. Maybe his kingdom didn't need the money anyway, but for whatever reason, the king wiped the slate clean, erased the books, and canceled the debt. Now the man owes him nothing.

Now this is exactly what forgiveness is all about. To forgive is to cancel the debt. When we've wronged someone, and they choose to forgive us, they are in essence saying, "*I cancel the debt. The slate has been wiped clean. You don't owe me anything. I release you from ever having to pay me back.*"

Now did the servant deserve to be forgiven? No! He owed the debt, but the king's action was an act of grace and mercy.

Now let me ask you a rhetorical question: Is there anyone out there today who is in the same predicament this servant found himself in? You've amassed a debt so great, you can't repay it? And you've been brought face to face with your creditor, and he's demanded payment at once? And have you been found guilty and even though you're guilty, have you thrown yourself on the mercy of the court and begged for forgiveness? And has the king forgiven you even though you don't deserve it?

Well, there may be someone out there today and perhaps you've done something to someone but you've never asked for forgiveness. Maybe you know that you've offended someone but you haven't owned up to it. According to God's Word, here's what you need to do:

The first step you need to take if you're the guilty party is to meet with that person face-to-face. In Mt. 5:24, Jesus said, "*If your brother has something against you...go and be reconciled to your brother.*" Is there someone you need to go to this week? You'll never experience a personal revival if you don't.

The second step is to own the wrong that has been done. There's a phrase that's used in sports all the time. When someone makes an error or a fumble or throws the ball out of bounds, often the player will pat him or herself on the chest and say, "*My bad.*" It's their way of saying that they messed up and it's no one else's fault. When we mess up in our relationships, Jesus wants us to own the wrong, and say, "*My bad.*" It's not enough to just acknowledge a mistake -- we need to own it.

The next step is to ask for release. You need to actually say the words, "*Please forgive me.*" If they say something like, "*It's no big deal, don't worry about it,*" you might want to say, "*I appreciate that, but I need to have your forgiveness. Do you forgive me?*" It's really important to be released from the debt.

Is there someone you need to face this week? Is there a wrong you need to own up to? Do you have the courage to ask for release from the debt? Finally, let's talk about:

### **3. Unshackling Forgiveness (28-35)**

In vs. 35, we see this forgiven man walking away, and running into a man who owed him money. Now in comparison to the \$25 million that he had owed the king, it was about \$10. Instead of canceling the man's debt, he grabbed him by the collar and demanded that he pay him back.

Our typical response when someone has done us wrong is, we want retribution, and we want it right now! We want to see that person suffer. We want them to be punished.

Jesus said that this man too fell to his knees and asked for some time. In fact, his plea was almost identical to the other man's when he was before the king. But, there's one big difference. Instead of forgiving the man out of gratitude for the forgiveness he had received, vs. 30 says, "*He went off and had the man thrown in prison until he could pay the debt.*"

May I submit to you that when we're not willing to forgive others when we've been forgiven ourselves, it's like putting that person in prison? In fact, we enjoy putting people in prison if they've wronged us. We want

them to suffer, to hurt as bad as they hurt us. We put people in prison when we use the silent treatment, when we avoid them, or by verbally assaulting them.

Are you holding someone hostage right now? Are you trying to make them feel miserable? Are you determined to punish a friend or family member for something that he or she said to you? Let's pick up the story again to see what happens.

This man obviously made the mistake of having this guy thrown in prison in broad daylight because the other servants saw it and reported it to the king. It wasn't the fact that the man would not forgive the man that shocked them. It was the fact that he was so unforgiving after he'd been forgiven.

Well, the king is really upset now. He sends his soldiers to bring the man before him. Notice what he said in vs. **32-34 READ**. This guy had a \$25 million debt forgiven. Shouldn't he have done the same for someone who owed him 10 lousy bucks?

May I suggest to you that what happened to that man is what will happen to us unless we learn to forgive and forgive and forgive? If we don't extend forgiveness to those who have wronged us, the torturers are going to come and take us away. And they are going to torture us with anger, bitterness, frustration, and resentment. These things will eat your insides out. They'll cause ulcers, high blood pressure, and migraine headaches. They'll stalk you by day and keep you awake at night stewing over the wrongs that someone has done to you. They'll never leave your side. They'll drain you of every bit of happiness and joy, because you will not forgive from your heart.

You see, all the time we're trying to punish and imprison those who hurt us, the reverse is actually happening. When we don't forgive we end up being tortured. The worst prison you can be in is the prison of an unforgiving heart. When we refuse to forgive, we lock ourselves up in solitary confinement where we're tortured and walled in by bitterness, and we will soon become the most miserable people in the world.

The good news is that you don't have to stay in that prison. You can keep that root of bitterness from growing into a tree of hatred and resentment. Lewis Smedes wrote, "*When I genuinely forgive, I set a prisoner free and then discover that the prisoner I set free was me.*"

Someone put it this way. They said: *“Forgiveness is like meeting someone for the first time. They have no baggage, no history, no grudges, and no hidden resentments. To forgive means to start over by giving people a fresh start.”* I like that. Giving someone a fresh start sounds a lot like revival to me.

I’m glad Jesus gave me a fresh start. I had a pile of sin higher than Mount Trashmore. I owed a debt that I couldn’t pay, but when I laid it at the cross of Jesus, out of a compassionate heart, he said, *“Steve, your debt is paid in full! You don’t owe it anymore. The slate is wiped clean. I’m giving you a fresh start.”*

You may be here this morning and someone has wronged you terribly. And you’re listening to this message and you’re saying, *“Yea, I know all that, but you don’t know my situation. I can’t possibly forgive this person.”* But let me say to you, that you can. I know you can because God’s Word says you can. God says to us in **Col 3:13 (NIV)**, *“Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.”* You can forgive because Jesus has forgiven you.

**Conclusion:** With head’s bowed and eyes closed, let me ask you: Do you need a personal revival of forgiveness today? You may need to ask forgiveness of someone. There is someone you’ve wronged and you haven’t owned up for it. Are you ready to go to that person and make things right?

On the other hand, you may need to extend forgiveness to someone you’ve been nursing a grudge against. But this morning, the Holy Spirit has touched to your heart and now you ready to forgive that debt.

I’m not going to embarrass you by asking you to raise your hand, but I am simply telling you that you will never experience a personal revival until you make things right. You may need to go to that person right now if they are here. Or you may need to make a personal visit or a phone call today. Do it quickly before the devil talks you out of it.

Finally, there may be some here today who need to admit your sins to a holy God and receive His forgiveness. If you’ve never done that, now is the right time. The cost of your sins is more than you can pay. But the gift of our God is more than you can imagine. If God is calling you to be saved, then you come.