



The Unforgiving Servant

St. Matthew 18:21-35

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The parable of the unforgiving servant is a familiar story. Jesus used it to answer St. Peter's question: "How oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him?" As Jesus tells the story, a king decides to settle his accounts. He looks in his books and notices that one of his servants owes him ten thousand talents. If Jesus were telling the story today, that would translate into something like a gazillion dollars. It was a debt that could never be paid. The king threatened that he would sell this man with his wife and children to be slaves if the money wasn't forthcoming. And as if somehow more time would make a way for him to repay the unpayable debt, the servant begged the king for an extension. And seeing the man beg for mercy, the king, we're told, chose to have compassion on him and forgave the entire debt.

And yet that same servant, on his way home from the king's palace, went looking for one of his fellow servants who owed him the relatively small sum of a third of a year's wage. As the king had first threatened him, he threatened his friend. And yet when his friend begged for mercy, instead of reflecting the compassion he had just been shown by the king, the servant had his friend thrown into prison. It's no wonder that the king was enraged when he heard

what had happened. It's no wonder that the king called his servant back and, as the text says, "delivered him to the tormenters, till he should pay all that was due."

Jesus' point was forgiveness, but not just that we would forgive others. He wants us to understand first and foremost the forgiveness that God had first shown to us. And so in Jesus' parable we also have a profound illustration of what God had done for each of us through the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Think of the king who was mercifully willing to forgive that gazillion dollar debt. We forget that the king had loaned that money out expecting to get it back. To forgive it cost him tremendously. And just so for God when he forgave our debts. To satisfy his justice, to satisfy his holiness, he gave his own Son, who left his Father's side, took on human flesh, condescended to our level and become one of us, and painfully died the death of a common criminal so that he could repay the debt that we owed him – the debt that we could never repay. *The amount of our debt to God was incalculable.*

All this "while we were yet sinners" – while we were his enemies. We committed cosmic treason against our Creator, yet in his love for us he chose to have mercy. That's amazing grace. We talk about grace. We sing songs about grace. Do we understand what grace is? Grace is God's favour shown to those who do not, cannot, and will not ever merit it. It is God's amazing grace that propels us into the world ready to share the Cross of Jesus Christ with every person we meet. But that

only happens when we understand just how low we are by nature and just how great God's love and mercy are toward us.

People and churches that lose sight of their unworthiness, of their sin, and of their need for divine grace are often great at preserving orthodox doctrine, at preserving classical Anglicanism, the 1928 Book of Common Prayer, or the 1940 Hymnal. They may even be great at providing a home for the disaffected and persecuted members of other denominations. But they're terrible when it comes to spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

As St. James says, our faith – our understanding of ourselves and our understanding of what God had done for us – is reflected not so much by what we say, as by what we do. Dear friends, where is our passion? Is our passion for spreading the Gospel, or is our passion for other things, however good they may be? Because a people who are not spontaneously motivated to share the Gospel by the great grace they have been shown, are a people that have never truly understood the great grace of that Gospel in the first place.