

Willow River Parish: Clear Lake, Deer Park, and Faith Family

Title: FORGIVENESS

Lesson: Matthew 18:21-35

21 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?" 22 Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times. 23 "Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. 24 As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand bags of gold was brought to him. 25 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. 26 "At this the servant fell on his knees before him. 'Be patient with me,' he begged, 'and I will pay back everything.' 27 The servant's master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go. 28 "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. 29 "His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay it back.' 30 "But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. 31 When the other servants saw what had happened, they were outraged and went and told their master everything that had happened. 32 "Then the master called the servant in. 'You wicked servant,' he said, 'I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. 33 Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?' 34 In anger his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed. 35 "This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart."

Almost every night, it is my primary duty to brush my son's teeth before he goes to bed. If you have ever tried brushing children's teeth, you would understand that sometimes it goes smoothly, but there are also many times when it doesn't. Especially when children resist the toothbrush or turn their heads away, you should think of the word "patience."

One day, I had a very busy day. My plan for that day was to finish brushing Evan's teeth as soon as possible, read a few books to him, and then, do my own work once he was asleep. But on that day, he strongly refused to let me brush his teeth. I tried many times without success. Finally, I got a bit frustrated and told him, "Tell your mom to help you finish brushing your teeth!" Then, I went downstairs to do my tasks.

A few minutes later, Evan came downstairs and entered my room. Then, he said to me, "Dad, I came here to forgive you. " Many thoughts ran through my mind, but as I hugged him, I said, "Thank you, Evan, for forgiving me."

Today's message is all about forgiveness. Forgiveness is a word we often hear in church, much like love. However, actually forgiving someone can be much harder

than just talking about it. My dad often talks to me about forgiveness. He always says I should keep forgiving others. A few days ago, even while we were at Clear Lake Park, enjoying the view of the lake and walking together, he said to me, “Hakki, always remember to forgive others.”

(Slide 1) Forgiveness, it’s such a beautiful word. But at the same time, it can be one of the most challenging words. A famous British author named C. S. Lewis, who wrote “The Chronicles of Narnia,” once said this about forgiveness: “Everyone says forgiveness is a lovely idea, until they have something to forgive.” That’s how difficult it can be for us to forgive someone who has wronged us, committed a crime, or done something harmful – it may be very challenging, or perhaps even seem impossible.

(Slide 2) Just like us, Peter found it really hard to forgive people who hurt him. So, he asked Jesus how many times he should forgive others, whether forgiving others seven times would be enough. Here, the “sin” referred to is not small or trivial mistakes or errors. It refers to very evil and serious crimes that could ruin a person’s life and tear apart their family.

At that time, most rabbis or teachers of the law taught that the maximum limit for forgiveness was three times. So when Peter talked about forgiving seven times, it was considered a very big number in those days.

But Jesus went beyond Peter’s limit, saying, “Not seven times, but seventy-seven times.” He doesn’t mean Peter should forgive exactly 490 times. The point Jesus is making is that when forgiving others, do it habitually, so much so that you can’t even count how many times you’ve forgiven them, day after day.

Jesus then speaks a parable about the unmerciful servant. When He begins this parable, He says, "the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants." It's important to focus on the fact that this parable starts with the phrase "the kingdom of heaven." Forgiveness is something experienced by the people of the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, it means that without forgiveness, we cannot experience the kingdom of heaven. In the Lord's Prayer, we always say: "forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us." Forgiveness is at the core of prayer, at the core of our faith, and at the core of salvation.

Some people might think like this: "Yes, Pastor. We should forgive. But how can we forgive someone who makes our lives difficult?"

(Slide 3) So, Jesus is telling a story. There was a servant who owed his king ten thousand talents when settling accounts. Because the currency units are different, you probably can't even fathom how much ten thousand talents were. At that time, one denarius was the wage a laborer earned for a day's work. One talent was about 5,000 denarii, which means a laborer would need to work for about 14 years to earn one talent. So, 10,000 talents represented an amount of money that a laborer would have to work for about 140,000 years to earn. In modern money, it's like owing \$3.48 billion. This means that the amount was impossible for the servant to repay through his efforts.

Whether the debt would be forgiven depended entirely on the king's decision. When the servant realized he couldn't pay, the king told him to sell everything he owned, including himself, his wife, his children, and everything he had, to repay the debt. The servant then fell down and sincerely begged the king for mercy.

Seeing the servant trembling and pleading with the king, the king felt compassion for him. So, he let the servant go and forgave all of his debts.

(Slide 4) After having all his debts forgiven, the servant left with a joyful heart. However, he soon met a fellow servant who owed him a hundred denarii. He grabbed his fellow servant by the throat and shook him, demanding an immediate repayment. Although the fellow servant fell down and begged for some more time to pay, he showed no mercy and had him thrown into prison until the debt was repaid.

In Luke 6:41, Jesus says, "Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye?"

Friends, what was the mistake of the servant? Where did he go wrong? His mistake started when he forgot that his king had shown mercy and forgiven all his debts, even though he could never repay them with his own abilities.

Friends, we are all debtors to God. Just like that servant and his king, God has forgiven us a huge amount of debt that we could never repay with our abilities. Forgiveness begins with realizing that God has forgiven us first. Forgiveness starts with understanding that we owe God a debt we can never repay, but God has forgiven all our debts.

Some people may still like this: "Pastor, why do you talk about forgiveness?" "Forgiveness is too difficult." "Forgiveness is impossible."

(Slide 5) Friends, forgiveness is not something we do by our own strength. Forgiveness is not by our own abilities. Forgiveness is what Christ, who lives within us, does. It's done by the power and ability of Christ, not by our own power or abilities.

When we try to forgive others by our own strength, we feel that forgiveness is impossible. When we attempt to forgive others by our own abilities, we cannot truly forgive. Forgiving by our own strength is not authentic forgiveness; it is merely tolerating. That's why Peter mentioned forgiving seven times as the maximum he could endure to Jesus.

However, continuous forgiveness is only possible through the power of Christ. True forgiveness starts with remembering the heart of God, who came to this earth for us, was crucified to forgive our sins, and keeps forgiving us without conditions. When the Holy Spirit touches our hearts and dwells within us, all the evil within us disappears. In those moments, the Spirit provides us with the strength to forgive those who trouble us. When we rely on the strength and ability given by the Holy Spirit to forgive others, we can finally become free from the unclean things within us. It's only then that we can experience the kingdom of heaven in our lives.

Friends, do you find forgiveness difficult? Do you feel that forgiveness is impossible? If you do, it's a sign that we need to keep praying for forgiveness. It's a sign that we need to seek God's strength. It's a sign that we need to invite Christ into our hearts.

Forgiveness begins with the remembering that Jesus Christ came to this world for us to pay for all our debts and sins.

(Slide 6) *Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing, tune my heart to
sing thy grace; streams of mercy, never ceasing,
call for songs of loudest praise. Teach me some melodious
sonnet, sung by flaming tongues above. Praise the mount! I'm
fixed up-on it, mount of thy redeeming love.*

May the Holy Spirit touch and lead your hearts, so that you may remember God's grace and love towards you, and that your lives may be transformed through Christ, and by Christ. Amen.