

The King and The Kingdom Part 6

We continue our series looking at the parables of Jesus as they help us understand the king and his kingdom. Turn to Matthew 18:21 as Jesus gives us another glimpse into the nature of the kingdom of heaven, this kingdom of which, by faith in Jesus Christ, we are a part.

Peter comes to Jesus and asks **“Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?”** Jesus answered, **“I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.”** Some scholars believe this exchange may have occurred during the days leading up to the Day of Atonement. The Jews felt they were better positioned to ask God for mercy and forgiveness on the Day of Atonement if they had already made an effort to forgive each other. It could be with that in mind that Peter comes to Jesus to clarify just how many times he was expected to forgive someone. Would seven times be enough? Jesus said 77 times, or some suggest he actually said “seventy times seven” or 490 times. He then tells a parable that illustrates the importance of forgiveness and also shows something of the nature of the king and his kingdom. This parable shows us that when we talk about Jesus and the kingdom of heaven, we are talking about a just and merciful king and kingdom. Understand, God doesn’t say, “Oh, it doesn’t matter how you live, how you act or treat others. There is no punishment, no consequences, live as you please, as long as you are happy and true to who you are. That’s all that matters.” Make sure you get this: God doesn’t excuse sin, he forgives sin. There is a difference. He doesn’t ignore our debt to justice, but he will show mercy and cancel our debt. Thank God for a kingdom of mercy, a kingdom where sins are forgiven. Jesus says, **“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 talents was brought to him. 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. 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.”** Matthew 18:23-27

Look at the opening words of the parable. The kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. God wants to settle accounts with you. From the moment Adam and Eve sinned in the garden, God has been working to settle the account with us, in our favor. God wants to settle the account so you can experience his forgiveness, his mercy,

his grace. He could have walked away and left us on our own, but he wants to settle accounts so we can have a new life and a new future with him.

Consider too, this parable reminds us there will be an ultimate day of settlement, a day of judgment. That's inescapable, but it doesn't have to be scary. It's nothing for us to dread, not if we have trusted in Jesus. This parable shows us that today is the time of mercy, not the time of judgement. We can settle the account now by coming to him in faith and asking for forgiveness.

A servant is brought before the king owing ten thousand talents. The number Jesus used was greater than the revenue of all Israel at that time. It would be like saying he owed a trillion dollars. It wasn't just impossible to repay, it was inconceivable that it could ever be paid by anyone, ever. He owed a trillion dollars and was earning about a dollar a day. Who does he think he's fooling when he says, "Be patient with me and I'll pay back everything." Not in a trillion years!

The master, within his legal rights, orders that the servant, his wife and children and all that he had be sold to pay toward the debt. It sounds cruel and heartless, doesn't it? But that was the way of the ancient world. Was the king truly planning to sell the man and his family? (And we have to be careful in parables if we try to make a spiritual application out of every detail.) Centuries ago St. John Chrysostom suggested the king did this not to be cruel, but to help bring about the man's transformation. The king wanted the servant to see how great his debt was. Chrysostom wrote, **"His teaching purpose was to show him with all justice precisely how much debt he was going to free him from."** ...**John Chrysostom** By ordering the selling of his family and property, the king made plain to the servant the extent of his debt so that when he showed mercy to him, he could also see the extent of the master's mercy, kindness and grace.

In an amazing act of mercy, Jesus tells us, "The servant's master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go." Unbelievable! He canceled this impossible, inconceivable debt. The word used here was a familiar Hebrew expression. To "cancel the debt" meant not only to release the person from the monetary debt that was owed, but also to forgive the person from the injury and wrong their debt and their failure to pay had done. "You wronged me by incurring a debt you could never repay, but I release you from that injury and wrong as well."

The parable is teaching us about the king and his kingdom remember. Jesus is the king and we are the servant owing the debt. All of us have sinned and come short of the glory of God. We owed a debt to God, to justice, to the universe, you name it. It was a dramatic debt, one we

could never repay for our sin and for breaking his laws again and again. I've may have sinned against you, offended you, said things about you, lied to you, but my offenses against you are nothing compared to my sins and offenses against God. I have rebelled against God my Creator, against Jesus, the one who gave his life for me, the one who bore the consequence and burden and punishment for my sins in his own flesh on the cross. I've sinned against him. You have too. We've got a debt but Jesus was talking about us when he said, **"The servant's master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go."**

Am I sure about that? Was he talking about me? The apostle Paul wrote, **"When you were dead in your sins...God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the written code with its regulations that was against us and that stood opposed to us, he took it away, nailing it to the cross."** Colossians 2:13-14 Do you hear what I'm telling you? Jesus took the written note that had all of your sins and violations of God's law, all of your debt written on it, wrote "Paid in Full" across it and nailed it to the cross so everyone could see. The account of your sin has been settled. Paid in full!

A gracious king. A king of mercy, just and good and willing to forgive. That's who he is. Mercy is not getting what you deserved (prison and the loss of everything). Grace is getting what you could never deserve or earn (forgiveness, the cancellation of the debt you could never repay and he adopts you as his child!) He is ready to cancel the debt when we believe and repent and ask him. The hymn says "Grace, grace, God's grace, grace that is greater than all my sin." That's what our king offers us today! Unmerited favor. Forgiveness. Not based on our performance, our good works, our attempts at repaying the debt. Listen, your fifteen cents isn't going to repay the trillion dollars. You can't pay off the debt. You can't earn salvation. It's grace! It's his grace! The bible says **"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith, and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God, not by works, so that no one can boast."** Ephesians 2:8. You can't even boast about the faith you mustered to ask God to forgive you. Even the faith to believe is a gift. It's all grace. That's our king. That's the kingdom! **"He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy."** Titus 3:5 Because of his mercy! Do you get it? Mercy is who he is and what he does. Remember when God declared his name and nature to Moses? **"The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty**

unpunished...” Exodus 34:6-7 He is quick to show mercy to all who repent and turn to him. Leave the guilt behind and come to Jesus! Thank God for the cancelled debt of sin! Thank God for the king’s mercy, forgiveness and grace shown to us!

But look again at the servant in our parable. Somehow, after being forgiven this massive debt, the servant couldn’t believe it, or couldn’t receive it, or perhaps he thought it was too good to be true. Something went wrong somehow. Look at verse 28. **“But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii. He grabbed him and began to choke him. ‘Pay back what you owe me!’ he demanded. His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, ‘Be patient with me and I will pay you back.’ But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. When the other servants saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed and went and told their master everything that had happened. Then the master called the servant in. ‘You wicked servant,’ he said, ‘I cancelled 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 turned him over to the jailers to be tortured until he should pay back all he owed.”** Matthew 18:28-34

What happened with this guy? He’s forgiven a massive debt, a trillion dollars, and now he finds a guy who owes him three month’s wages, a debt that could have been paid back and instead of showing mercy to this guy, passing the forgiveness along, he grabs him by the throat and begins to choke him, demanding payment. What was going through his mind?

“I know the king said I was forgiven and the debt cancelled, but I bet he’ll try to collect on that debt someday. I bet he is still holding that against me. I had better try to get some money and pay him back.” Trust me, \$100 toward a trillion dollar debt isn’t going to satisfy your creditor! It sounds crazy, and yet in a spiritual sense, some of us have been doing this for years.

We come to Jesus and repent of our sins and ask him to forgive us and give us a new heart and a new life. We are saved by grace through faith as we read moments ago. We believe with our head, but somehow we can’t get it into our heart. We can’t accept that he has really forgiven us. His mercy never reaches the level where it transforms us, where it changes us and how we respond to God and to others. We still think God is just delaying his punishment. “How could he forgive me of all my sin, my debt? He’s going to demand payment someday.” We keep

thinking we haven't done enough to earn God's mercy and favor. We live feeling condemned, inadequate, frightened that God is going to come collecting on that debt we once owed for our sin. Can I quote that passage from Titus one more time? "He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy." Titus 3:5. Quit trying to atone for your sins and your guilt and your debt. Jesus did that. Receive his forgiveness today and then start living a life of obedient response to his grace. Stop trying to pay it back and start living in the freedom his forgiveness provides, paying it forward!

You see, when we receive his forgiveness and his grace, it frees us to forgive, to be gracious, to extend mercy. And when we fail to accept and receive God's grace and forgiveness, it makes it hard to forgive others. The unforgiven become the unforgiving and a vicious cycle continues.

Jesus told his disciples when he sent them out to minister, "The kingdom of heaven is near... Freely you have received, freely give." Matthew 10:8 Sadly, many people go through life, unwilling to believe in, ask for and receive God's forgiveness. Instead of freely giving, they end up going through life feeling desperate, threatened, trying to get what they think is owed to them, grabbing others by the throat, demanding payment. This wicked servant had his debt cancelled, but untouched and unmoved by mercy, he sets out to get rather than give. Debt collecting, without mercy, without forgiveness, is a toxic lifestyle that will poison and kill.

In a book written many years ago, *Healing For Damaged Emotions*, David Seamands wrote about this wicked servant and this idea of demanding payment, debt collecting he called it. He wrote, "Think of how you apply this to the significant others in your life: parents who hurt you when you were growing up; brothers and sisters who failed you when you needed help, who teased you and put you down; a friend who betrayed you; a sweetheart who rejected you; your marriage partner who promised to love, honor, comfort and care for you but instead has nagged, or scape-goated or caused you pain. They all owe you a debt don't they? They owe you affection and love, security and affirmation, but since you feel indebted and guilty, resentful, insecure and anxious, since you see yourself as unforgiven and unacceptable, you in turn become unforgiving and unaccepting. You have not received grace, so how can you give it to others? And as you feel tormented, you hurt others. You've got to collect on the grievances, collect on your hurts. You must make all these people who have hurt you pay the debts they owe you." It's what happens when we fail to realize we are forgiven and we in turn withhold forgiveness

from those who have hurt us. Stop living like the wicked servant! Accept the forgiveness Jesus offers and then in turn, go and forgive. Release those folks who have hurt and wounded you from their debts, just as you have been forgiven your debts.

Jesus said from the cross, "It is finished." It's finished. The debt has been paid. God tore up the note against us at Calvary. Stop trying to tape the pieces back together. Stop trying to pay a debt that has already been paid. Stop trying to collect from others what you think is owed to you. Your note has been torn up. Your sins, your wrong actions, your bitter behavior, your hurtful words have been forgiven and his grace applied to your life. Accept his forgiveness and now, forgive them. Tear their note up. Freely you have received, freely give.

Instead of "You cheated me, pay me what you owe me and if not I'll make you miserable the rest of your life..." try this: focus on the grace Jesus has shown to you! "Jesus has freely forgiven me and I didn't deserve such mercy and grace. What a difference he has made in my life. By his grace, I forgive you. You aren't perfect and neither am I but Jesus loves us anyway. I'm trying to learn how to live by his grace and as part of his kingdom. I release you from your debt to me. Let's just focus on loving Jesus and living and loving by his mercy and grace."

Is there someone you've got by the throat? Someone you are refusing to forgive? How about yourself? If Jesus has forgiven you, can you forgive yourself? Take all these debts and hurts from the past, wrap them all up and lay them at the foot of the cross, that place of mercy and forgiveness and peace. Let his forgiveness flood over you and over the wounds and bitter events of your life. Let his forgiveness reach to the wounds inflicted on you, and the wounds inflicted by you. "Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." Romans 8:1

Listen to me. That wicked servant asked for an extension. "Just give me extra time and I'll pay you everything I owe you." God isn't offering you an extension, more time to try to earn his mercy, more time to try to repay the debt you owe, more time to collect old debts you think are owed to you. He offers you forgiveness and then by his grace he helps you as you make his forgiveness your own and you in turn extend that forgiveness to others.

I quoted St. John Chrysostom at the beginning of the message. In his commentary on Matthew he points us to the terrible weight of our sins, our indebtedness that is beyond anything imaginable. Confronted with our sin, holding the letter of indebtedness in our hands, we stand before the master. We are then reminded of his good deeds and the kindness he has repeatedly

shown to us. Chrysostom wrote, **“What then are God’s good deeds? He created us from nothing; he made the whole visible world for us, the heaven, the sea, the earth, animals, plants and seeds. I must be brief because of the infinite number of his works. Into us alone of all that are on earth he breathed a living soul. He planted a garden for us. He gave us a helpmate and set us over all the brute species, and he crowned us with glory and honor. And yet after all this, when humanity turned out ungrateful toward its benefactor, he thought us worthy of an even greater gift – forgiveness.”** ... St. John Chrysostom What a gift we have been given! Have you received it? Have you embraced and believed it, that you’ve been forgiven? And have you shared it with others? I’m telling you, it is an unbelievable feeling to be forgiven and it is equally amazing to release someone else from their debt to you. Freely you have received, free give.

Are you tired of carrying around this burden of sin and guilt? Come to Jesus today. If you are already born again, can you just take a moment to remember and to celebrate God’s amazing grace that redeemed you and forgave you of your sins. Remember that moment when the weight of sin lifted from you! Rejoice in his mercy and grace.

And if there is someone you are holding by the throat, demanding they pay their debt to you, ask Jesus to grant you the grace to release them from your grasp, from your wrath. Become a conduit of his mercy, his forgiveness, his grace. Stop trying to get pay back and pay it forward. Freely you’ve received, freely give!