



WEEK THREE: THE UNFORGIVING SERVANT

Read Matthew 18:21-27

It is interesting in this passage that it is Peter, often the one who charges in 'where angels fear to tread', as we say should be asking this question: *"Lord, how often should I forgive someone who sins against me? Seven times?"* One has the feeling that he thinks this would be somewhat magnanimous! The response of Jesus is: *"No, not seven times, but seventy times seven!"* One can almost see the incredulity on the face of Peter and the other disciples. Remember, the law said *"an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth"*

"And a man who injures his countryman - as he has done, so it shall be done to him [namely,] fracture under/for fracture, eye under/for eye, tooth under/for tooth. Just as another person has received injury from him, so it will be given to him." (Leviticus 24:19-21)

The New Testament view of forgiveness is of a different order, which many non-Christians, and some Christians, find hard to accept.

One writer puts it this way: *"Forgiveness is something no-one finds easy and yet it is something none of us can live without. It should therefore be obvious that any religion or theology which is to take seriously the human condition needs to have something to say on this most crucial of issues'.*

- Have you ever been in a situation where you have found it exceedingly difficult or even impossible, to forgive?
- Let us see if we feel the same way after we have completed this study.

Read again verses 21-27

The following is an explanation as to how much money is involved.

"We might not immediately appreciate the magnitude of a debt of ten thousand talents. To get some idea of it, we should refer to several other passages of Scripture:

· *Exodus 38.24-29 provides a summary of the amounts of precious metals that were provided for the construction of the Tabernacle: over 29 talents of gold, over 100 talents of silver, and over 70 talents of copper.*

· *To give a sense of the wealth of Solomon's kingdom, 1 Kings 10.14-15 records that in one year Solomon received over 666 talents of gold into his treasury.*

An ancient talent weighed between 50 and 60 kg (about a hundredweight). The parable does not indicate whether the debt was in gold or silver talents, but in one sense it hardly matters. Silver is currently valued at around £350 per kg, so a silver talent would have a value of about £20,000; ten thousand silver talents is about £200 million. It is estimated that a silver talent would have paid 6,000 days' wages (20 years) in the ancient world, or one year in ours. Gold is currently valued at around £28,000 per kg, so a gold talent would have a value of about £1.5 million; ten thousand gold talents would be worth about £15 billion!"

Eye-watering amounts, I'm sure you will agree, and Peter too would have appreciated that the debt was way beyond the means of the servant to repay. Even for us, it would take hundreds of lifetimes to earn that kind of money. Here however, is a servant who was a slave and had nothing with which to make any contribution whatsoever to paying off this debt. Given that was the case, Peter could appreciate the enormous generosity of the king (verse 27).

- Can you recall what Isaiah 55:9 says?
- Read Colossians 2:13 and note the word ALL.
- What point is Paul trying to make here do you think?
- If the parable had finished at this point, what would you have felt about the king and the man?

Sadly, that was only scene one.

Read verses 28-35

As you read these verses, it almost takes your breath away. Here is a guy who owed billions in today's currency and another who owes a few pounds. You would have thought that the bigger the debt, the greater the thankfulness. However, the enormity of what his master has just done seems to have bypassed him!

- Why do you think the unforgiving servant was seemingly unaware of the enormity of what his master had just done?
- Try and put yourself into the unforgiving servant's position? What would you have done?
- What good was done by throwing him into prison where he had no means of earning money?
- Have we ever been in a situation which required us to have a very forgiving heart?

- Are there things that you think could never be forgiven or should never be forgiven?

Let's look at verses 31-35 again.

- What was the outcome of the servant's failure to forgive?
- Did he deserve it?
- What do you think verse 35 means for us?

There is a noticeably clear message in this parable. **WE MUST FORGIVE.**

I heard a psychiatrist say this: *The greatest need of mankind is forgiveness.*

Medically, it has been shown that unforgiveness can be the root cause of some illnesses. It can certainly cause depression and bitterness which may sour a person's outlook on life and prevent healthy relationships.

Luke 12:48b: "From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked."

- Do you feel you have been given much?
- Is it reasonable for much to be required in return?

If we refuse to forgive, that is a sin. If we receive forgiveness from God, we must in turn forgive others who hurt us in whatever way. Remember the Bible says:

"For I, the LORD, love justice; I hate robbery and wrongdoing. In my faithfulness I will reward my people and make an everlasting covenant with them.

9 Their descendants will be known among the nations and their offspring among the peoples. All who see them will acknowledge that they are a people the LORD has blessed." (Isaiah 61:8-9)

Micah 6:8 "He has shown you O man what is good, and what does the Lord require of you but to do justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God."

If you have any doubts about forgiveness, read John 3:16 and 17:

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

God gave the greatest thing he had, FOR US.

- Do you still feel the same way about forgiveness as you did before we started this study?

- Let each of us, this coming week, consider whether we need forgiveness ourselves, or if we need to forgive someone who has hurt us in any way.

And one last thought. At the end the first week's study, we said together the Lord's prayer which says:

Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us

If we want God to answer our prayers, **WE MUST FORGIVE OURSELVES AND OTHERS.**



Prayer:

Father God, thank you for your forgiveness, your love and your mercy which triumphs over judgement. May we find in the grace given to us, the grace to forgive others.

Amen