

<sup>21</sup>Then Peter came up and asked Jesus, “Lord, how many times must I forgive my brother when he sins against me? As many as seven times?”

<sup>22</sup>Jesus said to him, “Not seven times, but I tell you as many as seventy-seven times. <sup>23</sup>For this reason the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. <sup>24</sup>When he began to settle them, a man who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him. <sup>25</sup>Because the man was not able to pay the debt, his master ordered that he be sold, along with his wife, children, and all that he owned to repay the debt.

<sup>26</sup>“Then the servant fell down on his knees in front of him, saying, ‘Master, be patient with me, and I will pay you everything!’ <sup>27</sup>The master of that servant had pity on him, released him, and forgave him the debt.

<sup>28</sup>“But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him one hundred denarii. He grabbed him and began choking him, saying, ‘Pay me what you owe!’

<sup>29</sup>“So his fellow servant fell down and begged him, saying, ‘Be patient with me, and I will pay you back!’ <sup>30</sup>But he refused. Instead he went off and threw the man into prison until he could pay back what he owed.

<sup>31</sup>“When his fellow servants saw what had happened, they were very distressed. They went and reported to their master everything that had taken place.

<sup>32</sup>“Then his master called him in and said to him, ‘You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt when you begged me to. <sup>33</sup>Should you not have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had mercy on you?’ <sup>34</sup>His master was angry and handed him over to the jailers until he could pay back everything he owed.

<sup>35</sup>“This is what my heavenly Father will also do to you unless each one of you forgives his brother from his heart.”



Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. “Consider what a terrible thing you just said.” Sixth-century bishop John of Alexandria was working on peace within his fractured congregation. There was one dissenting parishioner who would not reconcile with his fellow members. John prayed the Lord’s prayer with him, and when they said the Lord’s Prayer, John stopped after the 5th petition. “Consider what a terrible thing you just said. Doesn’t the Lord say, *‘If you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your father in heaven*

*forgive your trespasses'* (Matt. 6:15)?" The man fell at John of Alexandria's feet, sobbing, and finally made peace with his enemy. Such is the beauty of forgiving.

Forgiveness may not seem fair. But God doesn't operate on fairness. So often people say, "That's not fair." Is it true that life isn't fair? Yes. God isn't the fair fairy. Bad things happen to good people, and that can make life a confusing experience. *Yet we forget that life isn't fair to us in positive ways.* Good things happen to bad people. How can that be? For one thing, forgiveness.

*This morning Jesus explains how expansive forgiveness is.* He explains that it only starts with him. *Let's work to advance God's kingdom through forgiveness.*

### **The Unfairness Of The Lord's Forgiveness**

- 1. Jesus multiplies it to us*
- 2. Jesus multiplies it through us*

1. Peter asked a simple question. Maybe he was crunching numbers with Judas, the treasurer of the group, and he saw someone constantly coming to them for money—a freeloader. Maybe Peter was getting his fisherman's taxes in order. Maybe his in-laws had come over for a visit. According to some ancient Jewish writings (Talmud), a rabbi would forgive three times—and that was considered generous. How many times should I forgive my mother-in-law *and* the IRS—seven times each? *Was Peter joking? No, he expected his figure to sound generous.* He was expecting Jesus to nudge him and say, "Peter, there comes a point in a man's life when he really doesn't need to forgive."

Jesus quickly runs through some figures mentally. Does he think about how many of Peter's sins he'll pay for on the cross? "Think about this: Seventy-seven times, Peter. And I'll tell you a story—a parable—to explain it."

*Jesus described this unfair world to us. A King decides to settle all his debts.* "I'm tired of our national debt. Forget it! I am canceling all insurance and resetting the debt record. And those who can't pay up now probably can't pay in the future because they're haven't proved themselves in the past. We can take it on a case-by-case basis."

The very first guy who can't pay shows up. He can't pay because he owes this exorbitant 10,000 talents, so Jesus says. It might as well be a gazillion talents. Jesus is talking ceiling here, probably the highest figure a Greek or Hebrew can

imagine. Apparently this guy was playing solitaire on his computer or on social media the whole time he should've been working. Ten thousand talents is a lifetime earnings. He owed the King a lifelong career.

God has called us all to account. It's at a time when we least expect it—at birth, at conception. From the moment sinful flesh comes together and starts to grow, we are sinful. In a fair world, we should all be stripped of our blessings and sold off with our families to work the debt off in hell, which means never, because we're unable to earn any heavenly points by our own thinking, speaking, or acting. It isn't that we always find ourselves actively sinning. Often we simply don't do good works that God has prepared for us. *Often we are simply lazy. We owe God all that good work we didn't do.*

Isn't it amazingly unfair that, when he could have sold this man's family into slavery, this King had the power to let the man go? Isn't it amazingly unfair that, when we come back to God's throne room in prayer and ask forgiveness for the wasted time we're guilty of, he actually forgives us? Isn't it amazingly unfair that, when we commit great sins like cheating, lying, and hating, God actually sees beyond those sins? Isn't it amazingly unfair that, when sinners commit even greater sins like fraud and even murder, God still sees sinners wrapped in Jesus? Isn't it amazingly unfair that, when we persist in asking forgiveness (because we've persisted in our sin), the King persists in saying, "You are forgiven your whole debt. It is an exorbitant 10,000 talents. But I forgive it all."

(It was amazingly unfair that God forgave throughout the Bible: that God forgave King David's murder and idolatry. It was amazingly unfair that Jesus brought to life the daughter of a family who laughed at him. It was amazingly unfair that Jesus told a disgusting criminal on the cross next to him, "Today you will be with me in paradise." It is amazingly unfair that the Holy Spirit rushes into human hearts, tiny or large, at baptism. *It is amazingly unfair that God brings you into his kingdom every time you open the Scriptures, every time you hear that sweet gospel message Jesus died for you and rose from the dead—for you.*)

Every time we ask forgiveness, every time we repent of our sin, by the blood of Jesus God restores our special status – that of love before our Creator.

2. In order to drive his point home, Jesus explained what happened after this servant was set free. The servant took his valuable grace and pretended it was cheap. He served himself by finding his fellow servant and starting a fight. Over

a meager 100 denarii, a hundred days' worth of labor, the servant had his friend spend time in jail. That was after he grabbed the man by the collar and strangled him. The man pleaded for patience and time, just as the forgiven servant had, but this time there was no mercy.

See what happened here? It was only "fair" that the unmerciful servant was unmerciful. But he didn't take time to look around at his new-found forgiveness. He didn't take time to smell the fresh air of freedom. He didn't take time to look up at his King on the cross and see the offering, the sacrificial lamb. He preferred to play by his own rules of fairness.

We too would much rather play by our rules of fairness. So quickly we forget that OUR deeds didn't save us. So quickly we forget that our God has a whole body of complaints against us, if only he would charge us for our errors. So quickly we remember how many rules there are in life. So quickly we give ourselves mental rewards for keeping small rules. Then we boast and brag and expect others to follow our small rules. It's only *fair*.

But in a fair world, not forgiving can have grievous consequences. It can mean disappointing your friends, your superiors, your God, and yourself. Not forgiving can lead to eternal torture.

When the Father sent Jesus to die on the cross he had in mind to free us completely. So we are "*kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave us.*" We don't forgive because it's always easy or it's natural or it's fair, but we forgive just as he forgave us ... even as we love because he first loved us. When we don't forgive, when we refuse to copy that grace God offers to his children, when we choose not to forgive as God did, we do indeed risk forfeiting his forgiveness to us.

Is it possible for sinful man to forgive as much as God did? Absolutely not. God doesn't say that forgiving as much as he has—10,000 gazillion talents—will earn you heaven. But he does force us to think over and pray over those who sinned against us.

Thank God he spilled precious blood for our own un-precious lives. Thank God we have a chance to forgive others when they've spilled our blood. Thank God life isn't "fair." Amen.