

Know Mercy? Show Mercy!

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[0 : 00] Amen. Please remain standing for the reading of God's holy word. Well, Matthew 18, 21 to 35 is the text this morning, and Jesus is trying to help his disciples with their unbelief, and us as well.

So, that's a great prayer for us as we look at the scripture in any passage, right? As we think about the gospel and what it means to us. One of the ways we grow in faith is through repentance and faith, is continually turning away from unbelief and trusting in the good news of the gospel.

The heading in your Bible in this section, Matthew, probably says something like the unmerciful servant. You know, if you know mercy, you got to show mercy.

That could be the title of this section. If you've been freely forgiven, then you must also freely forgive. We know, though, that forgiveness is a struggle for Christian people as well as all humans. It's a struggle for you. It's a struggle for me. I need this message, this word from the Lord. Jesus has been teaching on the importance of forgiveness and reconciled relationships in Matthew 18, that very familiar passage to us.

[1 : 28] And Peter follows up with a question on how many times he's required to forgive. So, Jesus may be a little bit frustrated with his disciples. He tells this compelling story, brief but compelling story in response.

So, Matthew 18, reading from verse 21. Then Peter came up and said to him, Lord, how often will my brother sin against me and I forgive him? As many as seven times?

Jesus said to him, I do not say to you seven times, but 77 times. Therefore, the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants.

And when he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him 10,000 talents. So, side note, a servant might work 20 years to earn one talent.

So, if you do the math, times 10,000, that's 200,000 years of debt. So, since he could not pay, his master ordered him to be sold and his wife and children and all that he had and payment to be made.

[2 : 38] So, the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, have patience with me and I will pay you everything. And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt.

But when the same servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him 100 denarii. And 100 denarii would amount to about four months wages. Okay, so that Jesus is making a comparison.

He wants us to see 200,000 years, four months. Big difference, right? Servant who owed him 100 denarii and seizing him, he began to choke him saying, pay what you owe.

So, his fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him, have patience with me and I will pay you. He refused and went and put him in prison until he should pay the debt.

And when his fellow servant saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed and they went and reported to their master all that had taken place. Then his master summoned him and said to him, you wicked servant.

[3 : 42] I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant as I had mercy on you? And in anger, his master delivered him to the jailers or literally the torturers until he should pay all his debt.

So also, Jesus says, my heavenly father will do to every one of you if you do not forgive your brother from your heart. Amen.

This is the word of the Lord for us this morning. Amen. Let's pray and give him thanks. Father, we give you praise for your word, give you praise for worship that you have brought us into worship this

morning.

We thank you for the team of people who have worked so hard to practice and to bring us into praise and song of you this morning, the good news.

Father, in Proverbs 4, you said that you want us to keep your words in our hearts for they are life to those who find them and healing to our whole being.

[4 : 51] You said above all else to guard our hearts for from our hearts flow the springs of life. So we ask you today to help us to guard our hearts, especially in our struggle to forgive from the heart.

Help us. Show us how. Give us the power from your mighty power because it's your power that you have forgiven us of our sins and cleansed us and wiped away the debt and paid it yourself through the blood, the shed blood of your son, Jesus.

And we praise you in his name. Amen. Amen. You can be seated. Thank you, praise team. Thank you. So this is a rhetorical question.

It's a question, you know, that doesn't really require an answer. Have you ever struggled to forgive someone? Maybe a great debt or a great wrong or maybe even a minor offense you struggle to forgive.

It's, you know, you wake up in the middle of the night thinking about that offense. I'm sure we all have. So think for a moment, is there a person who comes to your mind right now or persons that come to your mind as you think about the struggle to forgive?

[6 : 16] Ruth Ann Batstone, she has this little book called Moving On, Beyond Forgive and Forget. She shares a story about Paul and Tina at a difficult time with their 17-year-old daughter who was going through some rebellion in her teenage years.

And on one occasion, she lied to her parents that she was going over to a friend's house for a sleepover and come to find out that the friend's parents were out of town and they were planning a big party.

And they had invited, you know, all kinds of boys and girls and they had a big party. I know that may sound familiar to some of you from your own teen years.

So no public confession required. But we've been there, right? At every turn, Paul and Tina were catching their daughter in another lie.

And Paul said at one point, I know it's wrong to feel this way toward my own child, but I don't even want to talk to her. I don't want to forgive her. The struggle to forgive.

[7 : 26] C.S. Lewis, in The Problem of Pain, he's quoted as saying, forgiveness is such a beautiful word until you have something to forgive. Can you relate to that struggle?

You know, because offering forgiveness is a struggle, we need God's help every day. We need his power. We need God's help in our struggle to understand, first of all, how much we have been forgiven.

So Jesus is trying to emphasize in this parable. And we need God's help every day to understand the damage that we do to ourselves in withholding forgiveness. Peter needed supernatural help. He needed help to forgive. Maybe Paul and Tina would have asked Jesus the same question Peter does. How many times do I have to forgive my daughter for lying and for being rebellious?

Is it possible that Peter had someone in mind? Someone came to his mind when he was asking Jesus, how many times do I have to forgive?

[8 : 35] Some of the Jewish rabbis had come up with a rule. They were good at creating extra biblical rules, you know, and they came up with this rule that you were required to forgive at least three times. And so perhaps Peter had that in mind and he was thinking, well, it's pretty generous of me to say up to seven times.

I mean, that's more than twice what the rabbis required. But Jesus, his answer requires a lot more costly forgiveness, right?

He says not seven times, but 77 times. Or another way to translate the Greek is 70 times seven, 490 times. So in other words, forget about the number, Jesus is saying.

Just, you know, don't, you can't keep track. You shouldn't try to keep track. Imagine if you tried to carry around a notebook with you. You had your little notebook in your pocket and you wrote it down every time that, you know, how many times you had forgiven.

You know, it would have to be a notebook, maybe the size of an 18-wheeler, right? Because throughout your life, every week, there's probably something that comes up in your mind that you need to forgive and maybe forgive again.

[9 : 51] Lewis points out the hard truth that we often need to forgive over and over again for the same one offense. Because the flesh and the devil tend to keep bringing it back up. You know, we don't need to forgive 490 offenses, but you may need to forgive one offense 490 times.

You know, how often does that happen to you? You know, where you catch yourself saying to the Lord, Lord, we dealt with this. I, you know, I'm past that.

I've, I've, I've asked you to forgive me and I've forgiven that person, but I need to forgive again, right? Somebody said that forgiveness is, is, uh, it's a destination that we, uh, you know, it's not a one-time act, but it's, it's, it's the journey.

And every day you may need to get up and ask the Lord to blow wind into your sails to get you to the journey on the journey of forgiveness. So we need to pray often, uh, Lord, would you help me again?

We need his power, his help. Instead of just giving Peter and his disciples a truth principle, uh, Jesus tells them this story. He wants them to think about it for themselves and wants them to apply it.

[11 : 03] And this master storyteller, our Lord Jesus, he has three main characters in his story. I guess you could call them the king, the choker, and the chokie in his story, right?

There's the wealthy king and, uh, he's a good steward of his business. So he wants to settle accounts with those who owed him money. And he calls in this unbelievable debt by the first servant of 10,000 talents.

And the disciples, uh, they didn't need to do the math to know that this was a crazy amount of money. Uh, that would, you know, take something like, uh, 3,000 lifetimes for this servant to pay back what he owed.

Uh, they knew that Jesus was just trying to emphasize a point. Uh, you know, this servant with this ridiculous amount of debt, he begs the master for a patience.

He says, so he could pay back everything, pay back everything he owes. So his offer to pay back was just as ridiculous as the ridiculous amount that he owed, right?

[12 : 10] It's impossible. There's no way that he could live long enough to pay back that kind of debt. And the servant's only hope was to fall on the mercy of the king.

To fall on the mercy of the master. And Jesus says, the servant's master took pity on him. Cancel the debt and let him go. Uh, this would have been shockingly extravagant generosity on the part of the king.

They're like, what? He's gonna just forgive that kind of debt? Uh, is he really a good businessman, you know? But he writes off the debt because of his compassion.

He took pity, his compassion for the servant. And we know that when a debt is canceled, it doesn't mean that it's just an accounting thing. You know, someone has to pay the debt. The debt has been run up.

And, uh, you know, we, we've loaned money to our kids at times with the expectation that the loan would be paid back. Like, you know, a down payment on a car or a house or, uh, help them with, uh, first month, last month deposit, uh, to get into a place.

[13 : 22] But you know what they say about loaning money to family members, right? If you, uh, you need to consider it as a gift. And if it does come back, you'll be blessed. You'll feel blessed.

And if it doesn't, well, you know, we have compassion on our kids, right? Uh, we'll just absorb the cost if it doesn't come back. Uh, we're, we're willing to take pity if they can't repay.

And this decision by the king was a very costly decision. The debt had to be paid by someone. And the king, he had to pay the debt himself. You know, can we as God's children ever fully understand in this life, how much debt that we've been forgiven, how much debt that you have been forgiven by the king and who it was who had to pay the debt.

Have you ever felt the weight of being in debt? Uh, maybe somebody here has had a failed business and you've had to file bankruptcy. And you know, the pressure of, uh, dealing with creditors that you can't pay.

And you know, the relief of getting the letter from the court saying your responsibility for the debt is no longer a concern. I have a close friend who had to file bankruptcy over a debt that he couldn't pay.

[14 : 39] And it took him years of tedious paperwork with the banks and the creditors, his lawyer, battling back and forth with the banks for the money he owed.

And he told me when he finally got a letter signed by the judge that he was no longer responsible to pay, he sat down and cried. Just the relief off of his shoulders of, uh, these years of dealing with this debt, big tears of relief and joy.

You know, imagine if you ran up a debt, the size of the, the debt of the United States, uh, what? \$30 trillion in debt.

We are now debt to ourselves or to our kids or our grandkids. And you're called in by the treasury department and told that it was time to settle your accounts. Maybe that would be a closer picture of the kind of debt that has been taken care of on your part because of what Christ has done, been paid on your behalf.

You know, how can we fully grasp that fact of that great debt that has been paid for us? And how can we understand how much damage we do to ourselves when we withhold forgiveness for, for some other very minuscule debt in comparison to the debt that we have had?

[16:03] I mean, we can't do it, right? Without God's help, it's impossible. And the unmerciful servant, he didn't sit down and cry tears of joy when this debt was, uh, canceled.

He was obviously not moved by this great act of mercy. And what he did next, next was, was the biggest shock because this, uh, servant, unmerciful servant, he went out and found a fellow servant who owed him a relatively small amount.

And he began to abuse the man, you know, no one likes this guy in, in, in the parable, right? We all think he's, he's the villain. He's definitely the villain in, in the parable.

Ungrateful, unmerciful, undeserving. Everyone listening to Jesus telling this story would agree that, uh, the other servants did the right thing in going to the master and letting them know what this, uh, servant had done.

And everyone would cheer when the master calls him in and says, you wicked servant, right? He's getting what he deserved. Uh, you know what it's like to experience mercy yet.

[17:06] You don't know what it's like to show mercy. So everyone agrees that the master is justified in his anger with this ungrateful servant that he deserves to be turned over to the jailers, to be tortured until he could pay back everything.

Well, who in the parable does Jesus want us to most identify with? Do you think? Which one of these characters is Jesus trying to get us?

You know, when, when a story is told, we tend to put ourselves in the story. We identify with some character in the story. Usually it's the good guy, right? Not the villain. But is it the gracious king? Jesus wants you to identify with him? The servant who owed a hundred denarii or the unmerciful choker? I think he wants us to identify most with the one we dislike the most, the villain.

How do we know that we're more like him than any of these other characters in Jesus's parable?

Well, here's some practical examples and some indicators that we often forget the good news of the gospel.

[18:17] And we need help in understanding how much we've been forgiven and the damage that we do to ourselves and to others by withholding forgiveness of debt incurred to us.

Ruth Batstone, I'd recommend Ruth Batstone's book to you. A little book, but it'd really be a blessing to you personally or in a small group. She has questions at the end of the chapters. It's great for a small group study. Sherry and I got to hear her speak at Sonship Week in Nashville last year, and we picked up this book on forgiveness. And she would actually do a much better job of preaching this sermon than I will do.

But in her chapter, First Steps Toward Forgiveness, she reminds us of some heart-level indicators that show that we often forget the good news. We often forget the gospel.

And we often expect someone to pay down the debt they owe to us due to some hurt they've caused. So think about these things. She asked, do you ever have, do you have what was once a warm relationship with someone you know that has become chilly or cold?

[19:23] Maybe it's that person I asked you to think about at the beginning. Your relationship has grown cold. Or do you sometimes find your heart overflowing with criticism and complaint?

Or do you ever carry out small acts of revenge toward a person? Maybe tiny things that leave no mark, but they're sweet revenge for you.

Or in your heart, have you ever rooted for a person to fail? Or you've gossiped to others in a way that sets that person up for failure? And when he or she does experience failure, do we internally celebrate how much that person deserved it?

Do we spend a lot of time remembering past wrongs? So do any of these things sound familiar to you? It's awful quiet in here. Come on, you can be honest.

We're in church. Sounds familiar to me. You know, we're a lot more like the unmerciful servant than we are like the gracious master.

[20 : 28] We need God's help every day in this struggle to live in light of how much we have been forgiven. To live out of that joy. Those tears of joy for what has been done for us.

And to understand the damage that we do to ourselves when we get comfortable at withholding forgiveness. When we get comfortable with going over and over and over again in our minds of the wrong that was done to us.

We have to acknowledge that some wrongs done to us are easier to get past than others, right? We can probably say that there are normal sins that could be done to us.

And then sometimes there are monster sins that are done to us. Maybe a great evil like physical or sexual abuse toward a child by a trusted adult.

You know, that kind of abuse, that kind of sin leaves deep, deep, long-lasting scars and wounds that are difficult. Much more difficult to get past than, you know, someone who says a word to us that hurts.

[21 : 35] Ruth Batstones, in her book, she recounts that kind of experience that she had as a child. She writes about the evil done to her and its effects and recognizes that only with the power of God's grace and His indwelling Spirit has she been able to experience joy, the joy of forgiveness and write a book about it and give talks about it.

She's experienced forgiveness from this kind of trauma through the strength that she's drawn from Christ. And she says forgiveness is not the same as forgetting.

She has some practical things to say about what forgiveness is and what forgiveness is not. But regardless of the level of struggle to forgive those who may have wronged us, we have to recognize Jesus' command and His warning, right, that if we are comfortable living with an unforgiving heart, that's a dangerous thing for us.

At the end, Jesus gives His disciples the application of His parable. He tells them why He told them this story, what He wants them to do, you know, where they should apply it and why.

He says, in anger His master delivered Him, the unmerciful servant, to the jailers until He should pay all His debt. So also, my heavenly Father, in verse 35, so also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.

[23 : 06] He's telling Peter that the forgiving heart is the evidence of a forgiven heart. So if we are people that never forgive, that we are comfortable with that position of growing in a continually staying in that place of bitterness and unforgiveness, that's a dangerous thing because it may not indicate that there has been true forgiveness that we have experienced and understand the grace of God.

Jesus knows that unforgiveness and bitterness will do some damaging things to our hearts, which He says, the heart, God says, you know, from it flow, that it's the wellspring of life to other people. Beth Stone, she tells a story of Itzhak Zuckerman, who was a Holocaust survivor and a hero for his help with the Polish resistance to the Nazis during World War II, considered a great hero after the war.

But his heroism didn't give him much comfort because he fell into alcoholism and dark depression. And before his death, he spoke honestly in an interview about the bitterness in his soul.

And at one point he said, if you could lick my heart, it would poison you. If you could lick my heart, it would poison you. You know, none of us is immune to this type of poison.

[24 : 39] None of us is immune to allowing this poison to build up in our own hearts. And we need God's help every day in this struggle with forgiveness and this struggle with giving mercy to others.

We need help from the Lord to live in light of the gospel, just to remember how much we've been forgiven. And we need supernatural help that another Holocaust survivor, you probably know her story, Corrie Ten Boom.

She and her sister were in a concentration camp. Her sister starved to death in that concentration camp. But Corrie Ten Boom, she found the strength.

Even though her sister suffered so much and she'd been through so much trauma. But the good news of the gospel made all the difference in her life and her ability to go on and let go of pain and bitterness and vengeance beyond forgive and forget.

And we have the same, if we have the relationship with Jesus, right? We don't have to allow poison to grow in our hearts, the poison of unforgiveness.

[25 : 46] As we've looked at the passage today, you know, where's the Holy Spirit revealing to you your own struggle? You know, where do you need more strength and more grace from God to forgive?

Maybe it's a parent or another adult from your childhood, another family member, or maybe it's an adult child. Maybe it's an absentee parent or an ex-husband or an ex-wife.

Maybe it's someone right here in our midst, right here in the church. Maybe it's church leaders.

Maybe it's a family member, maybe a family member, maybe a neighbor, or a boss.

You know, is there anyone that you're choking because of your refusal to forgive? We can sometimes feel like unforgiveness is our friend, Ruth Batstone says, but really, you know, it can bring a level of comfort, but actually it's this dainty.

It's a dangerous enemy that we entertain. Forgiveness, it's not easy. It's not a one-time event.

That's why the idea of just forgive and forget is not helpful because it's a process that's hard many times, even for small things.

[27 : 12] Would you agree? Even for little things that somehow our flesh and the devil try to bring back to us. It doesn't have to be great trauma that we can entertain bitterness in our heart.

She argues that it's not contingent on another's repentance. So in her case, there was no repentance of the great wrong done to her because the adult family member passed away before she could come to terms with it and deal with it through counseling.

So it's not contingent on another person. It's about my heart before God. That's what Jesus is saying. That from the heart before God, that's what's important.

The only thing that will motivate this kind of heart-level forgiveness is a gospel-saturated understanding of how much we have been forgiven, how much mercy has been shown to us.

And God didn't just forget about our debt, right? He paid for all of it with the death of his own son.

He gave everything to pay for your debt, to wipe it clean. He had to turn away from Jesus, the Father, when he was suffering on the cross with all of our sin debt placed on him.

[28 : 32] And this great transfer took place of our sin being placed into his record. Isaiah says he became sin for us. And we, in turn, got his perfect sinless record placed into our account.

That's what justification is about, right? We are justified freely by his grace. And we are declared to be as righteous as Christ. Even though this great sin debt was hanging over us that we could never pay, not in thousands of lifetimes.

And there's no condemnation. There's no condemnation for those who are in Christ. And there is power available to us to declare that to others who are in our debt.

Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount, remember one of those eight beatitudes, those great blessings was, Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

And he also says, later in Matthew 7, he warns us about judging others. He says, with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. So with the measurement that you judge others will be measured to you.

[29 : 52] With the measure that you show mercy, that you extend forgiveness, will be measured to you. That's a hard saying of Jesus. So for his sake, let's depend on him for help.

Amen. To forgive one another as we have been forgiven in our relationships, in our family, in our church family, in any relationship that you've had in the past.

That's a struggle to forgive. We know where the power comes from. It can't come from within ourselves that we just work it up, that we just say a mantra.

We have to depend on the person of the Holy Spirit who has been poured out in our hearts and forgiven us of our sins. Amen. Amen.