

Matt 18:21-35 Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "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...."

Dear Fellow Redeemed People of God:

There are some pretty scary passages in the Bible. But there is one in particular that scares me to death. It's in this same book of Matthew. Jesus just gets done teaching the Lord's Prayer to his disciples, which is awesome, but then he has to go and add these words: ***"If you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins"*** (Mt 6:14-15). Doesn't that just send chills down your spine? Our whole eternity depends on God forgiveness. I mean, if someone pumped all the oxygen out of this room right now, there is one thing we'd need more than oxygen: God's forgiveness! And here God is saying, *"If you don't forgive others, I won't forgive you."* And we're saying *"Guilty as charged!"*

Matthew 6 and 18 are gut-check portions of the Word. We can't just ignore this and go whistling past the graveyard hoping to avoid our past skeletons. These are not suggestions. These are eternal truths written in concrete. Today we see from Jesus that **"Forgiven and Forgiving Go Hand-in-hand"** (1) *We have been shown mercy*, (2) *We are to show others mercy*.

1

Jesus is the master storyteller. You can just picture his words in your mind. The first guy owes a huge debt to the king, 10,000 talents. Assuming that's silver, we're talking perhaps \$4 billion dollars in today's money! But after the debtor pleaded for patience, the king actually cancelled the servant's debt. A huge gift and act of mercy! But then that same servant found a fellow servant who owed him 100 denarii -- about 45 bucks. And he grabs the poor guy and starts to choke him. He gets up in the guys grill and screams, ***"Pay back what you owe me!"*** The man pleads for mercy and patience. But no, the guy throws him in jail.

Jesus' meaning is clear. Our sin-debt to God is enormous! We have original (inherited) sin that we're born with. We have actual sins every day -- both sins of commission (things I do that God tells me not to do) and sins of omission (things I don't do that God tells me to do). And we carry out these sins in three different ways: thoughts, words, and actions. It's a pile of sins to the moon! And these aren't just little boobos that we can dismiss or rationalize. Every sin is an act of rebellion against the King and a disgusting stench in his nostrils! We deserve to be punished forever.

Yet, the reality is, we are not punished for our mountain of sins. The debt has been totally cancelled. The prophet Micah wrote, ***"Who is like you, Lord, who pardons sins and forgives transgressions....You do not stay angry forever, but delight to show mercy"*** (Mic 7:18). God's justice was fulfilled in Jesus' life and death. His time on the cross wasn't just about Roman cruelty, it was about God's love.

A little boy asked a U.S. Park Ranger if the Washington Monument was for sale. The ranger asked how much the boy had. He checked his pocket and said, *"39 cents."* The ranger said, *"You need to understand three things, son. 1st, 39 cents isn't enough. 2nd, the fact is, 39 million dollars isn't enough to buy the Washington Monument. And 3rd, if you're an American citizen, the Washington Monument already belongs to you."*

Likewise, we need to remember 3 things about God's forgiveness. 1st, we can't earn it, not even one little piece. 2nd, it's not for sale. And 3rd, thanks to Jesus, it's already ours!

That's wonderful news, and that news affects us hugely. We have been shown mercy, and now God wants us to show mercy. God wrote through Paul, ***"Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you"*** (Eph 4:31-32).

So, back to the beginning of the sermon. The happy part is that we are forgiven. The scary part is that we just aren't very good at forgiving others. God says, ***"If you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins."*** For one thing, we set limits on forgiveness. Jesus' story was told after Peter came to him with a question: ***"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."*** (Jesus may actually be saying 70x7 times [490]). The point is, just as God continually forgives us stubborn sinners day after day, so we will be led by his grace to keep on forgiving those who sin against us the same way. God says, ***"Why should I forgive you if you refuse to forgive others?"***

This, of course, is not the way of the world. The world wants retaliation, not reconciliation. Oh, the world talks a good game about reconciliation, but it's not real forgiveness. It means I get to vent and get even -- and only then will I feel better.

We humans are experts at ***"keeping a record of wrongs."*** A couple met a new neighborhood family. The father introduced the children: ***"This is Pete, he's the clumsy one. Then there's Kathy with mud on her shoes. She's the sloppy one. And finally is James, who will be late for his own funeral."*** That father did a knock-out job of gluing faults and mistakes to his children. How would you like to be known for your weaknesses and goof-ups?

Just as Jesus gives us a fresh start every day and does not glue our sins to us, so we should not pin sins on others and hold their foibles against them. In forgiveness is freedom - a freedom we live in every day because of Jesus' love! As someone said, ***"Forgiveness should be like a canceled mortgage debt, torn in two and burned up. Some say they've cancelled the debt, but they really want to keep it on file."***

I read that Leonardo DaVinci had a huge argument with a man and, in retaliation, painted the man's face as Judas Iscariot into the Last Supper. However, when he tried to paint Jesus' face, just couldn't do it right until he removed the enemy's face from Judas. True story or not, it leaves an impression: We've been forgiven by our beautiful Savior. We now have a deep *need* to get rid of anger, bitterness, and grudges, and ***"forgive from the heart"*** those who have hurt or offended us. Is there someone in your life who needs your forgiveness and whom you need to forgive? Do it today!

Amen.