

## Sermon Matthew 18:21-35

*May the words of my mouth, and the meditations of our hearts, be acceptable in Thy sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.*



**Our Gospel today has a clear message for us. Forgive and you will be forgiven. Don't forgive, and expect your debts to come back to you. In Matthew's account, the slave had amassed an unprecedented debt. In reality, there was no way that this slave could ever hope to pay off such a debt. It was an unachievable mark. The king forgave him his debt.**

**However, when it came time for the slave to collect from another, he was unwilling to forgive a minor debt and instead had the debtor thrown into prison until the debt was repaid. He received his just reward. And he was thrown into prison.**

**Now, we had unprecedented debt in regards to God our Father. We had offended Him and owed Him much for His grace. He chose to forgive us our debt as if it never existed. In return, we need to offer that same forgiveness to those around us. Remember, we pray to God for forgiveness in the Lord's prayer: "forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us".**

**Forgiveness is the virtue we value the most, and exercise the least. We all love to be forgiven; we expect it and we want it. But often, we struggle to forgive others; we resist it, and sometimes, we even refuse to do it. Forgiveness is not natural. That's why it's so hard to do. We feel forgiveness is not fair. Our sense of justice wants to be vindicated. Often, we'd rather seek revenge than grant forgiveness. We'd rather push blame onto others instead of taking responsibility and asking for forgiveness ourselves.**

**Forgiveness is like meeting someone for the first time. That means there's no baggage. No history. No grudges. No hidden resentments. To forgive means to start over by giving people a fresh start. In other words, to forgive is to give grace to another, and free ourselves from bitterness and hate.**

**Forgiveness isn't just for others. It's for ourselves as well. Having guilt on our back is never a good feeling. Pride often gets in the way and we don't feel comfortable asking for forgiveness. Instead of humbly coming forward and admitting fault, we allow division in our relationships. By asking for forgiveness, we can sow the seeds of peace, harmony and restoration.**

**We've all done things wrong. We've hurt those closest to us with our words or deeds. We've said things in the height of passion and anger that were designed to hurt. We've hated**

**and we've been stubborn. We've pushed love aside and replaced it with revenge.**

**Just as the man in the gospel message received forgiveness yet failed to forgive, sometimes, we might also look forward to receiving forgiveness from God, yet fail to give that same blessing to those around us. Everyone has impacted relationships with either forgiving, or failing to forgive.**

**Think about how this attitude can affect those closest to us.**

**Ernest Hemingway loved writing about the country of Spain. In his short story, *The Capital of the World*, Hemingway tells of a father and son who had stopped talking to one another. Things got so bad that the son left home. After several years, the father wanted to mend the relationship and so he looked everywhere for his son. When he came to the capital city of Madrid, he decided to go to the newspaper office and take out a big ad in the paper that said this: "Paco, please meet me at noon tomorrow in front of the newspaper office. All is forgiven. I love you. Your Father." The next day at noon, there were hundreds of men named Paco standing in front of the building!**

**I suspect some of us are in need of forgiveness, and also some who need to forgive others.**

**Seeking forgiveness is only half the picture. We need to grant forgiveness freely, willingly, and unconditionally. If we don't**

**forgive others, the pain, suffering and bitterness will eat us alive from the inside out, placing pain on ourselves as well as on the offender.**

**Take a look at how spite can eat away at both sides of an offense. According to a story, in the mid-1800s, there was a wealthy real-estate broker who had acquired a plot of land in an exclusive residential area of New York City. This lot presented an unusual problem. It was only five feet wide but 104 feet long. There was nothing truly worthwhile that he could do but sell it to his neighbor. He went to the neighbor and asked if he would be interested in buying the lot.**

**The neighbor had a beautiful apartment building right next door and could have used the space to expand some of the apartments. However, he laughed at him, and only offered 20% of the value of the land. The broker exploded in anger. He broker was enraged, and he stormed out. Within a few days, he had hired a team to build one of the strangest structures ever conceived.**

**He built a four story building with units that were little more than a row of tiny rooms. Each was barely able to accommodate a stick of furniture. But, the building was blocking sunlight to the neighbor's apartment windows.**

**When it was finished, the wealthy broker moved into the odd house. He lived there in discomfort for 15 years until his death.**

**The house, which became known as the “Spite House,” stood as a monument to one man’s hate and unforgiveness. There are a lot of Christians who are living in Spite Houses today. Forgiveness is a major part of being a Christian. Jesus told Peter that he should forgive, not 7 times, but 70 times 7. When we refuse to forgive, we begin to allow bitterness to stop us from entering into fellowship with God.**

**C.S. Lewis probably said it best when he said, “Everyone says forgiveness is a lovely idea, until they have something to forgive.” The effects of unforgiving are readily apparent: broken relationships, broken homes, bitterness, anger, resentment, rage, even division in the Body of Christ. Every one of these is found in unforgiving people.**

**It’s easy to see that both giving and receiving forgiveness affect relationships and create a lasting attitude in both the offended and the offender. If we choose to continue with the offense, relationships will continue to be damaged and will result in nothing but perpetual pain. No one makes it through life without being hurt or injured in some form. No one.**

**Perhaps a part of you has died because someone spoke too harshly, or demanded too much, or neglected too much.**

**Everyone gets wounded in life. There is no immunity.**

**So, what can we learn from all of this? Through the grace of god, we have been forgiven for our own errors and**

shortcomings. An unforgiving heart produces nothing but pain. Forgiveness is as much an attitude as it is an action. Forgiveness frees us from hatred and restores us to a loving relationship with God as well as with our fellow man. We are to love our neighbor, and that includes forgiveness.

Love and forgiveness go hand and hand, you can not love without forgiveness, and you can not forgive without love.

God has graciously erased our debt just as the King erased the debt in our Gospel today. As we encounter those around us who have hurt us, we need to remember our own debt that has been erased and treat our offenders with the same kindness God first showed to us. Even for 70 times 7. Forgiveness may be hard for you. Maybe the offense was egregious, and severe. Maybe it boils with hurt. But, we should still find forgiveness for that hurt. Just contemplate in your heart what Our Lord Jesus Christ said, when He was ignominiously dying, hanging in agony on the cross. He said: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

Amen



*Remember the words of our Lord who said, "It is better to give than to receive".*