

Matthew 21-08-01a

Good morning, welcome to the Sunday morning services at Grace and Truth Bible Church. We are continuing our study on this first day of August 2021 in the gospel of Matthew chapter 18 resuming at verse 21. Matthew chapter 18 verse 21.

Let's take a moment to ask God's blessing on our fellowship and on our study and we'll begin. Father what a blessing it is to spend this time together in fellowship and in the study of your word. We're grateful for the grace that provides your presence and your power to us in our daily lives so that we do not have to live in our own strength.

We are forgiven, we are cleansed, we are enabled and empowered by the things you have provided through the work of your son the Lord Jesus Christ. We pray that as we look at this portion of your word together today that your Holy Spirit will help us to see how pertinent it is and where it applies in our daily lives. We ask it in Jesus name.

Amen. Let's begin by reading this section. We have completed the first half of the chapter a little over half in verse 21.

Peter came to the Lord Jesus after the teaching about little ones which is really about fraternal relationships. The nature of our treatment of each other and particularly those who are following Jesus encouragement to deny ourselves and look out for the interest of others. This creates a kind of vulnerability and Jesus said if someone exploits that attitude, someone exploits that willingness to leave yourself undefended as it were, bad things will happen.

And if someone does so what is the nature of restoration? We've looked at that in great detail over the last two weeks so we move forward now in verse 21. Peter came to Jesus and said, Lord how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times. Jesus said to him, I do not say to you up to seven times but up to 70 times seven.

Therefore the kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. When he had begun to settle accounts, one was brought to him who owed him 10,000 talents. But as he was not able to pay, his master commanded that he be sold with his wife and children and all that he had and that payment be made.

You might put an asterisk next to verse 25. It's not often commented on. Verse 26, the servant therefore fell down before him saying, Master have patience with me and I will pay you all.

Then the master of that servant was moved with compassion, released him, and forgave him the debt. But that servant went out and found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii and he laid hands on him and took him by the throat saying, pay me what you owe. So his fellow servant fell down at his feet and begged him saying,

have patience with me and I will pay you all.

And he would not, but went and threw him into prison until he should pay the debt. So when his fellow servants saw what had been done, they were very grieved and came and told their master all that had been done. Then his master, after he had called him, said to him, you wicked servant, I forgave you all that debt because you begged me.

Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you? And his master was angry and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due him. So my heavenly father also will do to you. If each of you from his heart does not forgive his brother, his trespasses.

Well, this parable is very clear. Unlike some parables you'll recall, we did a study of, of all of Jesus parables. And there are many of them that are cryptic.

There are many of them that are stories that require decoding or unpacking the symbolic elements. Not this one. This one is purposely direct.

It's purposely clear. We don't have to figure out much at all. So the first thing to ask ourselves is why is this parable given? What is its purpose? It does two things.

It advances what Jesus has said in the first part of the chapter about the restoring of breaches, the healing of wounds and divisions in the body. And secondly, it directly answers Peter's question about how far should we go in this regard? Being an English major, I look at the question and I look at the answer and I realize that the parable does not directly support or reinforce the numerical nature of Peter's question. Peter's question, when you look at it, Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? So this is repetition of sin.

He did it a month ago, did it last week, did it again today. I did the forgiveness thing last month, last week, yesterday. It's happened again today.

Do I still, how long do I keep up this forgiveness thing? There is no repetition element in the parable. Jesus' answer, of course, is 70 times seven. If I work this math out in my head, that's close to 500 times.

And what the obvious first point is that there is no expiration date. There is no clause in the contract that leaves us free to remain unforgiving of a brother. It doesn't matter how many times, it doesn't matter how many repetitions.

And I ask myself, why would that be? Why would there not be a limit? Well, because look earlier in the chapter, when someone has sinned against me and I go and try to be reconciled, I try a limited number of times. Go one-on-one, go with one or two others, go with a close set of associates who are part of this called out group, the Ecclesia. And if those three tries don't produce a beneficial effect, if I have not gained my brother, then I

don't try anymore.

So you see an opportunity for what my professors in school used to call comparison contrast. What elements are the same and what elements are different about this scenario? Well, and why is the second one unlimited and the first one is limited? One thing I did not point out, and it's worth noting in the earlier case that began in verse 15, if your brother sins against you is the way your new King James puts it here. If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone.

If he hears you, you have gained your brother. So in both cases, someone has sinned against us. There is another case where Jesus says, if your brother has sinned against you, but here, if your brother sins against you, go and explain that fault one-on-one.

And he says, if he hears you, you have gained your brother. That element is missing when you go back with one or two others. And when you go back with a small representation of your, whatever the group is, the family, the coworker unit, the members of your social circle, the fellow believers in your local congregation, whatever it might be.

But it's interesting to me that only in the first case, does Jesus mention the possibility that he may hear you and you will gain your brother. And there is a, an element of decline in the situation if, and it's kind of hard to imagine that if you go one-on-one, the person is unrepentant. And unwilling to be reconciled.

But if you take two or three others, they, they will be usually when you accelerate, when you escalate, this entrenches people in their positions. And so a lot of times that first approach is pretty, pretty important because if it doesn't work, chances are the second and third are not going to work, but you have that limit. This is what's interesting to me is in terms of gaining your brother, being restored to fellowship, being restored to unity and opportunity and the whole being greater than the sum of the parts.

That's what's covered in verses 15 and following. So what is the issue there? If you were going to put it in one word, what would it be? Unity, no division, no schism. There's this temporary difference.

There's a, and there is sin involved to achieve acknowledgement of that sin and restoration to fellowship. This is what we do with God in first John one, nine. What is the issue in verse 21? How often shall my brother sin against me? And I forgive him.

Up to seven times. Jesus said, I do not say to you up to seven times, but up to 70 times seven, which is a polite way of saying there is never a time you don't do this. What is the issue in these repeat offenses? Is there any mention of fellowship, unity, gaining your brother? What is the, what's the operative word here? Forgiveness.

Forgiveness. As Jesus goes on to tell the parable, one thing you notice is the master and

the servant and the servant and the fellow servant are not close. Watch for what kind of relationship exists between these three individuals.

When we read it a second time, the kingdom of heaven is like a certain King who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. When he had begun to settle accounts, one was brought to him who owed him 10,000 talents. The King doesn't say, you know, I know that I've got this huge debtor bring him to me.

I'm going to get this fixed right now. One is brought to him in the process. This is not somebody who stands out in the King's mind.

He's he's not notable for his debt. He's just brought in. He's got this enormous debt, which is something of a surprise to the King.

Evidently he was not able to pay. So his master commanded that he'd be sold with his wife and children and all that he had and that payment be made. The servant fell down before him saying, master, have patience with me and I will pay you all.

The master of that servant was moved with compassion, released him and forgave him his debt. So this is not a matter of this was his favorite servant. This is Abraham's Eleazar in the household and this debt has created a breach.

The issue here is, are you willing to let it go and not seek retribution, not seek justice, not seek recompense. Retribution, justice and recompense are initially on the line. Payment of the debt is on the line.

This parable addresses a different aspect of the things that happen when we sin against one another. It disrupts unity and Jesus puts that first. That is the first thing to try to fix.

And remember when Jesus says, if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault. He didn't say, forgive him. He said, go and tell him his fault.

And if he hears you, you have gained your brother. If he acknowledges, if he homo logeos, if he essentially does what first John one nine indicates that we should do between ourselves and God, this is different. This is making it right.

This is restitution or retribution. There is either a clearing of the debt or there is judgment clearing of the debt or judgment. Now, the great thing is there is only one King in this parable.

And so it's easy to tell the difference between the divine policy and what should happen between servants. So as you continue, that servant went out and found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii. He went out and found him.

The King did not say, show me a list of debts. Who owes me the most? Bring that rascal here to me. The King wanted to settle accounts with his servants, all of his servants.

It's a uniform policy. It doesn't discriminate. It doesn't single out.

He's going to settle accounts with all of his servants. One of these servants, as the books are opened, owes this enormous debt. But the servant, now that this issue of failure and debt has been raised, it's in this servant's mind, the forgiven servant goes out and finds one of his fellow servants who owes him a hundred denarii.

So why would he do this? He's been forgiven the enormous debt. He doesn't have to call in his debt so that he can pay his own debt. He's been forgiven due to the King's compassion.

He was released and the debt was wiped clean. But now debt is on that servant's mind. He goes out and finds a servant that owes him a hundred denarii.

It's, of course, a tiny fraction of the 10,000 talents that he owed. So what does he do? He laid hands on him, took him by the throat saying, pay me what you owe. There is an attitude that's easy to detect here.

When you take someone by the stacking swivel and basically try to shake the money out of their pockets. Does this approach in verse 28, find a fellow servant, lay hands on him, take him by the throat and say, pay me what you owe. How does that comport with verse 15? There's a completely different objective.

There's a completely different spirit, completely different way of treating. His fellow servant fell down at his feet and begged him saying, have patience with me and I will pay you. I will pay you all.

You can see there's a couple of text notes there's in your, in your New King James. Generally speaking, the NU text, which is the Nessel Allen UBS, United Bible Society text that leaves some of these expansions out. They don't materially affect the meaning.

I'm just going to ignore them. I'll read them if I forget to leave them out. But his fellow servant fell down and begged him saying, have patience with me and I will pay you.

Be patient. What is the fruit of the spirit? Love, joy, peace, long suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance. Do you see any of those in evidence in this treatment of a fellow servant? Is he joyful? Is he peaceful? Is he expressing love? Is he forbearing, long suffering, patient? Is he gentle? Is he good? Is he faithful? Is he humble? Is he self-controlled? He said, be patient, but he would not.

He went and threw him into prison until he should pay the debt. So interestingly, in verse 31, his fellow servants saw what had been done. They were very grieved.

They came and told their master all that had been done. This is interesting to me because it underscores the idea that the angels of these little ones behold the face of

the father in heaven, that there is something of a reporting system. We like to think that God is instantly aware of all things all the time, but God is not presented that way in scripture.

You can go back to Genesis. You can go back to the time of God saying, I will go down and see if these reports are true. I will go see for myself.

God goes down and does a reconnaissance in Sodom. Shall I hide from Abraham what I'm about to do? So God employs his servants to keep track of his fellow servants and his angelic servants report on what his human servants are up to. And this again is Jacob's stairway.

We always call it Jacob's ladder. As a little side note, if you look at that word in Hebrew, it's not two poles with rungs. It's a staircase.

It's steps like I would imagine. In fact, I've had dreams about the staircases that would be at the sides of the central area at the Naval Academy in Bancroft Hall where we used to stand watch inspections. There were stairways at one of each side.

You know how it is when you dream in long years ago, that place would get big and dark and strange. And these what they call ladders in the Navy, which is stairways, would be gigantic and twist and turn and go into vast lofty regions. And, you know, Bancroft Hall was not always a mother bee as they like to call it.

It was more of a torture palace in some ways when you're a plebe. So I would occasionally have dreams. But whenever I think of the stairway here that Jacob saw in his vision at Bethel, I think of this very long, vast stairway that goes up.

And why why don't angels just pop up and pop down? Why don't they why don't they transport like on Star Trek? And in my mind, this is an extra free, no charge bonus point. But why would the angels who in other instances are sometimes pictured with wings, why wouldn't they fly to heaven and glide down to earth? They're traipsing up and down this staircase. One thing about being up on a high level, if you've had an apartment or in a dormitory or whatever, and you go up and down with stairs, if you're on the fourth deck, the fourth floor, and you're going up and down.

When we worked in Dallas, we were on the ninth floor and we would occasionally take the stairs all the way up. And it's two two flights with a landing between each floor. So you've got 18 of these little lengths of steps to trudge.

It gives you time to think if you're wanting to be hasty, if you're wanting to be impulsive, if you're wanting to be thoughtless and rushing in where angels fear to tread, trudging up a long stairway gives you time to think. It gives you some objectivity as your muscles tire and as your heart rate and breathing rate increase. And it seems to me that perhaps this stairway gives the angels a chance to process what they have observed and to plan

their presentation to God and to think about it themselves and what it means.

And there is an element of time on a stairway introduced into the picture. In the same way in verse 15, when we talked about approaching someone who has sinned against us, we want to prepare. We want to do what Daniel did before he approached the Lord about the sins of the nation and the opportunity for that breach to be healed and for restoration after the 70 years that he read about in Jeremiah.

So in the same way, this hastiness, this impulsiveness and this emotionalism that you see in verses 28 and 29 and 30, there's not thought, there's not the opportunity to chew on this a while. He is completely without patience, goes and throws him into prison until he should pay the debt. So his fellow servants saw what had been done.

They were very grieved. They were probably grieved and aggrieved at this imbalance and told their master all that had been done. So his master, after he had called him this time, notice it isn't the servant being brought to him as a part of a big process.

Now he calls him his master. After he had called him, said to him, you wicked servant, I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you? Does that just as phrase that forgiveness, just as you have been forgiven? Where have we seen that before? When you pray, forgive us our debts as we forgive those who are our debtors.

Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. In the same way, to the extent that we love because he first loved us, we forgive because he first forgave us. We have patience because he was patient with us.

We have the example of the Jesus Christ who endured so much on our behalf. How much can we endure for the sake of one another? It's a very clear point as soon as you read the parable, but there are a couple of things that are not immediately apparent unless you engage in close reading. The first of these was back up.

I said, put a, put a star by verse 25, the original debt, the 10,000 talent debt that is owed to the king, justice demands his master commands the law of the land. The king commands that he be sold with his wife and children and all that he had and that payment be made, not just our own life is affected by unforgiven sin. How did this situation arise in the first place? How did this servant amass a 10,000 talent debt? How many talents does it take to support a modest home with a wife and children when you have a job where you are getting taken care of? You're being recompensed.

How can you amass a 10,000 talent debt? It would be just to demand payment of that debt. Now, wouldn't it have been better for the servant if the king had weekly reviews of accounts? And as soon as this servant was 10 talents in debt, five talents in debt, some sort of payment plan was put in place. Is this the king's fault that this is almost a one-

time settling of accounts? It's not a regular thing.

Otherwise this guy could not have racked up 10,000 talents in debt. There is a problem already manifest before you ever get to the unforgiveness part. There's something wrong with this servant.

Where is his conscience to get into the king for 10,000 talents? Where's your conscience? Where's your self-respect? What kind of thinking says, well, he's the king. He's got a lot of money. I'll just soak him for it.

I'll take it and use it for my own purposes. And he doesn't even care that this debt is being tracked. Maybe he knows that the king has a reputation for compassion.

I don't know. But how as a servant do you abuse a relationship such as this servant has with the king? The only way he could be in debt for 10,000 talents is to abuse and take advantage of his relationship to the king. That's the initial problem.

And a symptom of it is the symptom of the problem, not being rightly related to the king, not taking it seriously when a debt is owed to the king, not coming and making sure that debt is taken care of while it is small. That's a serious, you might call it character flaw. It's a serious omission of responsibility on the part of this servant, isn't it? You look at somebody that's got \$85,000 in credit card debt and you say, \$85,000, what's the matter with you? Right? And I'm picking something big because a lot of us have had significant credit card debt.

I don't think mine's approached anything like that number, but it can get away from you. It's convenient because nobody comes calling. Nobody starts, you know, hauling away your stuff or putting you in a debtor's prison as they used to do a few hundred years back.

But there is an element of irresponsibility when debt greatly exceeds income. There are times, you know, medical bills and things. I'm not talking about that.

This is a routine situation. There is a servant in the employ of this king and he somehow arrives at this staggering total of debt and he wasn't worried about it. It's not till he's brought before the king and the king says, well, you know, the consequences of a debt this large and the consequences extend, look at verse 25 again, beyond yourself.

Consequences of unaddressed sin and excessive debt is a sin. What is excessive debt? When is taking advantage of credit and taking out mortgages and using your credit card and carrying a balance for a while? Student loans. When is this crossing the line into sin? What does scripture say? Owe no man anything.

That does not mean do not take out loans. It means don't ever get behind in your payments. Don't maneuver yourself into a position and fail to plan ahead that, well, what

if I suffer an injury? What if I lose my job? How will I cover these debts? I need to have some savings so that I can cover my monthly payments.

The biblical standard is not that you don't have a balance, but that you're not behind. If I pay my monthly bills, I owe no man anything. Even if I've got a mortgage, even if I'm paying off a balance, even if I'm whittling down a loan, I'm paying the interest and the people who gave me the loan are happy.

They are happy to have me as a client. They are happy that I am a good client who makes his payments on time, who covers the interest, doesn't get behind, isn't tardy, doesn't bounce checks, right? So the standard is, owe no man anything. This is out of Romans chapter 13, verse eight, owe no man anything, but to love one another.

Our debt is to love. We owe love to each other. We owe it.

It is due to one another. Owe no man anything except love. And that means look out for the interests of others ahead of our own interests.

We can look out for our own interests, but also for the interests of others. And this includes our dealings with the world. This includes our dealings in the financial realm.

And it is absurdly easy to run up debt that is dangerously precarious. If I get sick and I got to take days off that are unpaid, I'm not going to have enough money at the end of the month, then I will owe a man something. And that's against God's command.

That's against God's guidance. And it enters into the realm of sin. So here is someone who owes a sinful amount.

There's no way a servant in his capacity can pay. That's why even if he is sold and his family and everything that he has, he's in the red on a balance sheet, way in the red, thousands of talents in the red. Liquidate this man, everything he has and his whole family in slavery and servitude isn't going to cover it.

That's a sinful amount of debt. Can't pay it. In the same way, looking of course at the very obvious central truth of this, that all of us have a debt that we cannot pay to God in terms of sin.

Someone had to pay it for us. And God, the father sent his son to make that payment so that he could wipe our slate clean. And that is a bit of a veiled reference in this, but I want to pay special attention.

His wife and children and all that he had is commanded to be forfeit. And you know what happens if somebody amasses a great debt, a guy amasses a great amount of debt and then dies and that debt descends on his heirs and assigns his widow and anybody that's party to his estate is now on the hook to liquidate the estate, whatever there may be,

and inherits that debt. From the standpoint of sin, we cause those around us to suffer when we sin.

It is not limited to us. It metastasizes, it spreads, it has a negative effect on those around us, unaddressed sin. This would have never happened if he had kept short accounts.

He did not. So that's the first lesson out of this parable. We're going to pause here and take our break.

And when we come back, we will look at the second half and the second great lesson that comes from Jesus' words here as it pertains to Peter's question, what should my durability be when it comes to forgiving my brother? It's a great question. Well, we'll pause here and take our break. And when we come back after our special music, we will answer that question.