

Matthew 21-08-01b

Let's resume our study now in Matthew chapter 18. We're looking at this parable of the unforgiving servant. And we've noticed that there are some clues of trouble ahead in the fact that this incredible debt is amassed on the part of the servant to begin with.

If you look this up, I've seen various estimates, but 10,000 talents is something on the order of in today's money, \$11 billion, it's no small amount. It was designed, I think, by the Lord to be an amount that is so exorbitant that the impossibility of ever paying it is the main point. It's astronomically impossible to pay.

Now, you could throw me, my family, my extended family, all of you, everything you own, everything I've ever heard of or seen into a pot, and it would not total \$11 billion. It is an impossible debt to pay. And that, of course, in our hindsight, helps us understand the debt that was paid on the cross.

And the amount of forgiveness that was achieved when we were washed in the blood of the Lamb. So it's astronomical. It's astronomical.

Now, when you come down to real terms of this debt that is owed by the fellow servant, it's just 100 denarii. And you don't even have to look this up because you remember Jesus' parable of the day laborers who some are recruited early in the morning, some at midday, and some in the late afternoon. And when they come to receive their wages, each one is paid a day's wage, which is a denarius.

So a denarius was a day's wage. Let's say, for the sake of argument and for the ease of the math, that an hourly rate is \$15 an hour. You work in, let's say it's a 10-hour day.

It's a long day. So that's \$150. So if this guy has a debt of 100 denarii, what kind of debt is that? It's \$15,000.

That's a fair amount. If there were \$15,000 on the line, would you be tempted to shake somebody by the neck to have them pay it to you? Someone owed you 15 grand. That's enough motivation from a materialistic point of view.

This is not a buck 50. It's not \$15. It's not even \$150.

It's \$15,000. That's a pretty good chunk. There's some people that that's all they make in a year below the poverty line.

So it's a not insubstantial amount. Now, why does Jesus not pick an absurdly small amount? I mean, we're basically talking a beam in the eye versus a moat, a great pile of lumber versus a few boards. But why does Jesus pick this large of an amount? What does that introduce into the story? When Jesus is telling this story and someone says, this servant went and found his fellow servant that owed him \$15,000-ish, can you

rationalize if you forget about the preceding scene where this man is forgiven \$15 billion and he's owed \$15,000? Can you rationalize if you forget the preceding scene? Suppose the story had started without the king and without the reckoning of accounts.

A servant went to his fellow servant, found him and said, you owe me \$15,000. Pay me what you owe and shook him by the neck. There's a lot of us that would understand, hey, I've got a family.

I've got mouths to feed. What is it that makes this so poignant and so significant? This treatment of the fellow servant? In the world, is there anybody that wouldn't understand trying to get paid for a debt that is owed? Hey, you know, \$15,000, what's the problem here? Why would you throw rocks at this guy for trying to have the debt paid? What is it that transforms this second scene and makes Jesus point? It's the first scene of forgiveness of this galactic amount of debt. That's what makes the difference.

What makes the difference for us? Why should we be able to forgive each other? Of course, our spiritual ability comes from the presence and power of God's word and God's spirit, but the attitude and the heart that makes us avail ourselves of that presence and that power is what? We are forgiven people. Where do I get the balance? Where do I get the objectivity? Where do I get the love that will enable me to forgive? Where does the balance and the love and the power come from for those around me to be able to forgive me when I sin, when I screw up? We go back to the well of living water, the forgiveness and the cleansing that comes to us through the love of God. God loved the world, that's why he sent his son so that we would not perish, but have life.

So when it is difficult, when we are tempted to put our hands around the throat, where do we get back to objectivity? Where do we get back to the ability to forgive as we have been forgiven? We have to remember that forgiveness. What do you have that you did not receive? We are all victims of grace, objects of grace, beneficiaries of grace, God's love, God's compassion in forgiving our astronomical debt. We have to bring that into the picture.

This story doesn't make a lot of sense without the first scene. Many people would say, you go servant, get that money you're owed. People shouldn't be walking around owing you \$15,000.

So it is the context as always that enables us to understand what Jesus is saying and makes the story have traction. His fellow servants saw what had been done. They were very grieved.

They came and told their master all that had been done. Now, are they snitches? Are they bad servants for letting the king know? This I think reflects and it's stretching the purpose of the parable a bit to read very much into some of these peripheral details, but servants who observe injustice can pray about that injustice when it involves their fellow

servants. We are encouraged to engage in intercessory prayer.

I think you can imagine that the angelic emissaries who are the reconnaissance force, such as we saw in the Myrtle Glade in Zechariah 1, and we see them elsewhere in the Bible, that a report comes up to God. Why is it that the Holy Spirit has to take our prayers and translate them and bring them before God the Father? Because God the Father is not here listening to every single thing I say at every moment that it is being said by every believer everywhere at all times. God filters, God orders, God creates a structure of delegation and only the most important things come up to his level.

Our prayers are brought into the throne room by God the Holy Spirit. So this is the picture we are given and it's impossible for us to even begin to understand the actuality and the reality of God's capabilities, but he presents himself to us for our benefit and as an example for us to be organized, to delegate, to filter, to prioritize, to have trustworthy sources of information that can be relied upon for their accuracy and their truth. And so these fellow servants, as I say, this could reflect the angelic emissaries who come before the King, but our prayers for one another, intercessory prayer is a powerful thing.

James points this out, the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much. And when we pray for each other and bring legitimate grievances, we are grieved, we are aggrieved about the treatment of our fellow servants, especially when it is within the household of faith. You look at these instances of abuse and taking advantage of situations in churches.

The church has sadly got a reputation for abuse of women and in some cases, children within the church, whether it's the ostensible church of the Catholics or many Protestant churches, many Protestant ministries are rocked by scandal because there is a lack of the fruit of the spirit resulting in sin in the camp. And believers who see this can pray to God that the situation be addressed and justice be done. And notice, unlike the first scene, when this servant finds his fellow servant, shakes him by the neck and the guy says, I haven't got it, but I'll pay it.

He says, sorry, no. And this underservant is in prison. He is currently suffering and being punished for this \$15,000 debt.

So when these servants call and say to the king, here's the situation, they are praying for someone who is in an active state of suffering. So his master calls the offending servant and says to him, you wicked servant, I forgave you \$15 billion because you begged me, you appealed to my compassion, you received compassion. Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant? For us, it can be a hard thing when we feel like we have been wronged.

When we are the victim of an injustice, it is one of the hardest things to settle. You bury that thing and it rises to the surface. It will not be quiet.

It whispers in your soul. In the middle of the night, you wake up and you feel this outrage. Outrage against perceived injustice is what has fueled a lot of our social unrest over the last many decades.

And there is a legitimate element of wrongdoing and injustice, prejudice, insensitivity. Many times these are sins of omission. They are things that are even done, and the whole notion behind concepts like systemic racism is that there is an unconscious injustice being perpetrated.

People do it unthinkingly. They're part of a system or they're so conditioned that it doesn't ping the conscience. It doesn't rise to the level of analysis.

Should I be doing this? Should I be a part of what is happening? There is an element of truth in many of these grievances. There was an element of truth when Satan was talking to Eve in the garden. It is when you take a truth and pervert it for evil ends that it becomes compromised.

Science is supposed to be objective truth about the world around us, but it can be taken and perverted and used in twisted arguments. You leave out some science and cite others. In our minds, if we are not objective, if we don't have the cleansing grace of God with the Holy Spirit and the Word of God, we can rationalize our way into, well, this is the 491st time this sin has been perpetrated.

So now Jesus says I have permission to rain all kinds of abuse on this perpetrator. I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. This is what the king brings to the servant's mind in the moment of judgment.

This is what you should have been thinking of. You should have had the ability to forgive this debt based on your own forgiveness. You forgot about your own forgiveness.

That's why you abused and imprisoned and punished your fellow servant, which by extension, when you go back to verse 25, also has an effect on that fellow servant's wife and children and ability to meet obligations. These are always wider than they look. You think you're punishing one person, you may be punishing a whole group and removing that person from situations where they're being dependent upon and relied upon.

And now other things go undone. Even the king's other business is now being undone because you've taken this servant out. He's a fellow servant, meaning he also works for the king and is doing something in the king's household, the king's business, the king's interest.

And by seeing to it that he's imprisoned, you think you're punishing him, but you're reducing what is being done for the king. Should you not also have had compassion in light of what I have done for you? This is where we have to go for the power to rise above our fallen nature and our sinful impulses and do what is right in the eyes of the

Lord. His master was angry.

This picture's the wrath of God, which is revealed from heaven against all the ungodliness in the world. Read Jude. The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all kinds of ungodliness.

When we become ungodly, we fall under the wrath of God. The king was angry and delivered him to the torturers. This is not quite torturers, but this is highly unpleasant until he should pay all that was due him.

Well, what are the chances that he's going to be able to, under any kind of forced labor? The idea of torturers here is basically chain gang. He's going to work off his debt on the chain gang. It's harsh, it's abusive, it's uncomfortable.

There's no creature comforts. You think about the old movies you've seen about chain gangs or books you've read about chain gangs. He's put on the chain gang with harsh taskmasters.

You make the bricks without straw and keep the quota up. Whips, physical motivation of the painful sort. That's what this envisions.

Until he should pay all that was due to the king. So how long is this chain gang situation going to last for this servant? There's no second shot at compassion. This is cut into a portion of your lot with the hypocrites, cast into the darkness, which is outside, weeping, wailing, gnashing of teeth.

And this is a servant. Notice the servant is not slain. He's not executed.

He's not put into a pile with his family and goods and burned. He's going to work off his debt eternally. And the scariest part of this, as I've said many times, is initially he appealed to the compassion of the king and he was forgiven.

Because of his lack of forgiveness to fellow servant, he is like the Clint Eastwood movie, unforgiven. But this is worse. Instead of never having been forgiven, his forgiveness is revoked.

You can lose your forgiveness according to this parable. The man was free, walking around, the debt was erased. But because of something he did, because of an attitude he expressed to a fellow servant, his debt is reinstated.

The \$15 billion is back on the table and will be la olam, ais ionios, unto the ages forever. He's never by any amount of work going to work that debt off. This answers Peter's question.

With this kind of future on the line, how forgiving should I be? Peter's question was numerical. Can I keep track of how many times this person sins and when they reach a

certain number, I don't need to be forgiving anymore? Well, look at the parable and work backwards. Do I want to be in a situation with God where if I've got a besetting sin or I've got an area of weakness and a pattern of failure, that there is a point at which I will come to God and confess my sins and he's no longer faithful and just to forgive me my sins and to cleanse me from all unrighteousness? Sorry, Sam, that's one too many flashes of temper.

Sorry, Sam, that's one too many times where you hurt someone with your tongue. Sorry, Sam, that's one too many times you committed this sin of worry or stressing out others or abusing your authority or whatever it is. Fill in the blank here, gossip, maligning, judging, backbiting, lack of trust.

Whatever is not a faith is sin. How easy is it to sin? How many times do I sin before God says, you know, the blood of Christ only goes so far. You are abusing your forgiveness in the level at which you fail and the level at which you sin.

That's not where the line is drawn. Where is the line drawn? God says our forgiveness is limitless. 1 John 9 doesn't have a footnote that says, unless you do this 70 times.

Where does God draw a line and say, there's no going back from this. There's one sin we can commit and it's too many. Unforgiveness of fellow believers, unforgiveness in the body, unforgiveness amongst the brethren.

This is an unforgivable sin. Why? When I say pop quiz, what is the unforgivable sin? What would you say? Blaspheming the Holy Spirit, sinning against the Spirit. Jesus said, men can be forgiven all kinds of things.

They can even speak against the Son of Man and they will be forgiven. But if you speak against the Holy Spirit, if you blaspheme, if you reject the testimony of the Holy Spirit, you are not forgiven in this life or in the next. And we say, well, that's the witness of the Spirit to Christ and unbelievers who reject the convicting ministry, who reject the testimony of two or three witnesses, testimony in nature, testimony in the heart, eternity in the heart, the Spirit in the heart, the witness of the scriptures, the witness of the word as it is expressed through believers who are in the world shedding that light.

You've got three and four witnesses to the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit imbuing and empowering all of those. You can't understand the scriptures without the Spirit. You can't understand the gospel by looking at believers unless they are filled with the Spirit.

You can't get sin, righteousness and judgment understood if the Spirit does not convict. These are spiritual truths, they're spiritually discerned. And the witness of the heavens, when you come to a consciousness of God, the Holy Spirit is going to lead you from point A to point B to point C and find Christ.

That's the way it works. And we say, okay, so that's the blasphemy of the Spirit. That's

the unforgivable sin.

What if a believer rejects the convicting and the witness and the testimony of the Holy Spirit in their life? What do you think the witness of the Spirit is going to be regarding when we are sinned against by fellow believers? What does the Spirit say? And what happens if we ignore that? Look at this parable, you have your answer. So it is a sobering thing to fail the grace of God, having received it, to not spread it, to not express it, to not reflect it in our dealings with each other. So this is a powerful, powerful example.

We're always going to sin against each other in this life. There is coming a day when we will not sin. And it won't be because we can't sin.

It will be because the impulse to sin will have left us. The proclivity to sin will have left us. We will have such an indelible memory of, it reminds me, I can't remember if I've told you this or not.

I've told Patty, but I went out with her when she was picking berries and I did not spray. And anybody that lives in the country knows blackberries, chiggers know blackberries, they live in blackberries, they get around them, they wait for something to come get those berries and they attack. And there was a planet-wide chigger reunion on my body when I went down there unsprayed.

I lost count after 70 bites, everywhere. I swore that was a dumb thing to do. I'm never doing that again.

And since that time, if my shoes are going to touch grass outside this house, I spray. I did make one slight little flub. I went down to charge up a solar light.

I just walked about two steps to hang the thing on the fence so that it would be in the afternoon sun and I wouldn't get fully charged. Two steps into the grass, walked back. I got two chigger bites for those two steps.

I am back on the firm religion of I don't go anywhere without 40% deep on the lower half of my body because I've learned from experience what an awful experience that is. I don't want to get anywhere near it. This is how we will be in eternity.

We have felt the sting of death, which is sin and the law that defines sin and makes us aware of sin. If you see a glowing hot red item like a potbelly stove and you touch it and you get burned and you blister and you have the scar, you'd never touch glowing cherry red potbelly stoves again for as long as you live. It is not that you can't choose to do it.

It's that you so much don't want to do it because you know the consequence. That is the confidence we have. And to the extent that we live in this life, fleeing youthful lusts, eschewing sin, and recognizing the grace that has forgiven us a \$15 billion debt, not wanting to ever incur that kind of debt again, and being ready and willing and anxious to

forgive each other without keeping track.

Have I hit the 70 times seven yet? Who knows? Not keeping track. I bury that hatchet. I forget those things which are behind.

I live for today and look to the future. Forgetting those things which are behind, I press toward the mark of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus, remembering that I have been cleansed from my old sins. Now you remember that forgetting that is mentioned in scripture.

You look at, for our final passage this morning, turn to 2 Peter chapter one. 2 Peter chapter one. Peter is the one who asks this question.

In Matthew chapter 18, Peter is the one who writes these words in his second letter. And don't let anybody tell you that Peter didn't write 2 Peter. There's so much nonsense going around on that.

It almost makes me crazy. 2 Peter chapter one. Simon Peter, a bond servant and apostle of Jesus Christ.

You think Peter forgot this message about the servant? To those who have obtained like precious faith with us by the righteousness of our God and savior, Jesus Christ, grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is not an abstract wish for grace and peace. Where does grace and peace come from? The knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ and of God.

His divine power, verse three, has given us all things that pertain to life and godliness through the knowledge of him who called us by glory and virtue. See any kind of an emphasis on knowledge here? The like precious faith? That's the body of truth. That's the faith in terms of content.

Like precious faith in verse one. Knowledge of God and Jesus our Lord in verse two. Knowledge of him who called us by glory in verse three.

By which all things that pertain to life and godliness through the knowledge. That's what gives to us exceedingly great and precious promises. This is the content of that knowledge.

Peter is hammering away on what we know. Remember what you know. So that you can be partakers of the divine nature.

What kind of nature does the king have? You appeal to his compassion. He is compassionate. You acknowledge your debt and your inability to pay it.

He takes care of it. Having escaped the corruption in the world through lust. We can escape that.

Having escaped it. Verse five, for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue. To virtue, knowledge.

To knowledge, self-control. To self-control, I heard a British lady say it this way, perseverance. Perseverance.

To perseverance, godliness. To godliness, brotherly kindness. And to brotherly kindness, love.

This is one of the ways we know that of the triad of Christian virtues, love sits on top. You think about faith and hope and love. I can picture that as a pyramid with faith and hope beneath and love sitting on top.

You can put God the Father where love is. You can put the Lord Jesus where faith is and you can put the Holy Spirit where hope is. Look at verse eight.

If these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. Can you spell knowledge? Does Peter understand the importance of this body of truth, these great and precious promises, remembering what has been done for us? Look at verse nine. He who lacks these things is short-sighted even to blindness and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins.

You see the problem, how you can lose everything in the first eight verses? You can miss it, not be the beneficiary, forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins. Therefore, brethren, verse 10, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure. Don't forget what you know.

Don't forget the cleansing and the forgiveness that is the enablement. Remembering that is what enables us to treat each other right, to forgive each other limitlessly, just as God in Christ has forgiven us. Do you remember the memory verse? Say it with me if you do.

And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you. Be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you. Key, bedrock, foundational principle of our faith and our lives expressed here in this beautiful parable by the Lord Jesus.

Let's close here in a word of prayer. Father, thank you for the truth of your word. Thank you for how clearly and how powerfully you explain to us what you have done for us and how we should then live.

We pray that as we reflect on these things, that God, the Holy Spirit will bring them to life in our thinking, in our hearts, enable us to live the life to which we have been called, reflect the glory of the Lord Jesus, both now and in the ages to come. We ask these

things in Jesus' name, amen.