



Matthew 18:23–35

23 “Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. 24 As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand bags of gold was brought to him. 25 Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt. 26 “At this the servant fell on his knees

before him. 'Be patient with me,' he begged, 'and I will pay back everything.' 27 The servant's master took pity on him, cancelled the debt and let him go. 28 "But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred silver coins. He grabbed him and began to choke him. 'Pay back what you owe me!' he demanded. 29 "His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay it back.' 30 "But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. 31 When the other servants saw what had happened, they were outraged and went and told their master everything that had happened. 32

“Then the master called the servant in. ‘You wicked servant,’ he said, ‘I cancelled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. 33 Shouldn’t you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?’ 34 In anger his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed. 35 “This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart.”

Reflection

Jesus can tell quite a story can't he? Actually, he's telling us another parable about the kingdom of God. Jesus starts his story with 'the kingdom of heaven is like'

and then all of a sudden we enter a world where a king wants to settle his debts. A man who owed him ten thousand bags of gold (!) was brought to him. Now even today, it's hard to visualise that much gold. And back then, in the ancient mindset, this amount of money would have been almost too much to imagine. In the Greek, it's ten thousand talents. Now 'ten thousand' was the largest number in the Greek language and a 'talent' was the biggest denomination in their currency. So this represented about as much money as you could imagine. Some people have run the numbers (taking into account the pay for an average day's wages in those times) and come up with the astronomical figure of \$2.5 billion dollars. Unsurprisingly, this man couldn't pay. He was about to be sold into slavery for the debt, which was common practice

back then, until the king had mercy on him. Extraordinary mercy. Imagine forgiving a debt that size out of pity and for nothing in return. Then a moment later this forgiven man is choking and sending to debtor's prison someone who owes him around \$4,000. Just a moment ago he's been forgiven \$2.5 billion and now he's sending to prison, which was far worse than slavery by the way, someone who owes him just \$4,000. This gets back to the king who then says,

‘You wicked servant,’ he said, ‘I cancelled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. 33 Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?’

He then throws him into prison to be tor-

tured by the gaolers until he pays back every cent of that \$2.5 billion (which of course will be never). He's going to be tortured in that prison forever. Which is a pretty graphic picture that Jesus is giving us of eternal judgement. But before we can grasp just how awful this would be Jesus then potentially places us in that prison with his punchline:

35 “This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart.”

Which on one level comes across as a very disturbing statement. in fact on many levels. But the one I'm thinking about in particular is that this verse sounds a bit like we earn our salvation by forgiving people.

It sounds a bit like salvation by works. But that's because no story can tell the whole story and this story isn't trying to. The bible is clear that we're saved by faith alone, there's nothing we can do to earn forgiveness, to pay back our enormous debt. Our only hope is grace which is giving someone what they don't deserve. Our only hope is grace and this only comes through faith alone; but equally, faith is never alone. It's always followed by change. Otherwise it's not genuine faith at all. Jesus is teaching us that if we've truly been forgiven, then we'll begin to forgive. You see grace transforms your heart. And a transformed heart leads to a transformed life.

This is the essence of the kingdom of God. A person who has truly experienced the mercy and grace of God will be trans-

formed into a follower of Jesus. They'll be changed from within by the power of his Holy Spirit and live transformed lives, increasingly resembling Jesus. We're saved by faith alone; but faith is never alone, it is always followed by change or it is no faith at all.

Yesterday Jesus told Peter to forgive not seven times but seventy-seven times. Can you actually imagine forgiving the same person for the same sin seventy-seven times? Imagine them coming to you again and again, all sorry, like a broken record, that same look on their face. They're sorry for gossiping about you again, sorry for being so selfish around you again, sorry for being rude to your face for the seventy-seventh time. Can you imagine forgiving them genuinely and unconditionally

from the bottom of your heart after seventy-seven times? ‘Do you have any idea how much harder it is for your Heavenly Father to forgive you for your countless sins’ says Jesus? Think for a moment about the sheer magnitude of what you’ve been forgiven. And do you have any idea of the cost I had to pay for this unconditional forgiveness? I paid your debt. I paid it in full. Let this sink in for a moment, because if it doesn’t sink in then you haven’t truly been forgiven.

Think

We’ve been saved by faith alone; but not by a faith that is alone. Are you like the servant who’s been forgiven a fortune and yet goes on living as if nothing has happened? Because if so, nothing has

happened. Jesus changes lives. Rarely overnight, but gradually, inexorably, little by little until one day you realise that you are almost unrecognisable compared to who you once were. How is your transformation going? Have you given your life fully over to him? Or are there some parts of it that you're holding back? Some sins you're clinging on to?

Do you forgive like your heavenly Father has forgiven you? You can see in our passage that this doesn't mean forgiving people who are unrepentant, but it does mean forgiving your Christian brothers and sisters and mothers and Fathers and anyone in the community of God who may have wronged you. It means forgiving them unconditionally, and as often as it takes, as long as they are genuinely sorry for what

they've done. Who is it that you need to forgive today?

As you think about these questions and our passage today why not step back in time this morning? If you've been a Christian for a while try and think of yourself a year ago, five years ago, twenty years ago. How much have you changed? Are you unrecognisable? What's changed? What still needs to change? Thinking like this should be a cause for celebration. For me personally, the way God has changed my life is the strongest proof that he exists. I cannot in any other way account for who I have become. But in the same breath it lays down a challenge, doesn't it? We all still have so very far to go if we're to become like Jesus. What's the next step for you?

Prayer

Close this morning by praying in response to this passage and these thoughts. And consider again, who is it that you need to forgive today? Then repent. And forgive them today from your heart.