

The Parable of the Unforgiving Servant

The disciples had gathered around the Lord and asked several questions. The Lord had already addressed the question of “who then is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” (Matt 18:1), when he was asked “how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him?” (Matt 18:21). Peter’s reply was seven, but notice the answer he received: “I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.” (Matt 18:22). Then Jesus gave the parable of the unforgiving servant.

A king had decided to get payment for his debt, so he called a servant that owed him 10,000 talents. To apply it to us today, one talent was about 6,000 denarii, and a denarii was one days wage. The typical teenager working at a fast food restaurant receives about \$50 for one days hard work. Keep in mind, these people worked all day, not just 8 hour shifts. That’s about 3 billion dollars! The king commanded that the slave be sold along with his wife and kids so that the debt might be paid. When the servant heard this, he “fell on his knees, imploring him, “Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.”” (Matt 18:26). The servant only asked for more time, but the king was so moved that the servant was released and all of his debt was forgiven. The king is truly a merciful man to have just forgiven a debt of 3 billion dollars with no strings attached.

After receiving such an excellent, unmerited favor, one would expect the servant to do the same to others. This is not the case with this servant. The servant finds a man that owes him money, 100 denarii. This debt is far, far less than the money he owed. The man owed him about \$5000, a far cry from the \$3 billion he owed the king. The servant “began to choke him, saying, “Pay what you owe.”” (Matt. 18:28). Again we see the man that owed the money beg for more time to pay the debt, but the difference is, the servant refused and turned the other man over to the prison. His fellow servants saw what took place and reported it to the king. The next verse applies to all of us, “Then his master summoned him and said to him, “You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?”” (Matt. 18:32-33).

God has loved us all so much that he has provided a way for us to be forgiven: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.” (John 3:16). The penalty for sins is death: “For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Rom 3:23). We are all saved from the penalty of our sin by the merciful gift of God. Let us all heed the moral of this story and the warning given at its close, “And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers, until he should pay all his debt. So also my heavenly father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.” (Matt. 18:34-35).