

Episode #835 Matthew 18 Part 5-Parable of the Unforgiving Slave

I. The purpose of the gospel of Matthew is to present Jesus as the Christ, the King of Israel. It is another grand treatise like John to prove to Israel Who Jesus really is. It is the book of being “in Israel,” in contrast to believers today who are “in Christ.”

II. Last time Peter asked the Lord if he should forgive one who sinned against him seven times, and the Lord told him that instead he should forgive without limit. He used the example of a king who was settling accounts with his slaves and had one called before him who owed ten thousand talents. We discussed that a talent was a typical year’s wage for an average laborer, so he owed a sum he could never hope to pay.

III. Parable of the Unforgiving Servant. Matthew 18:21-35.

- A. Verse 25. Instead of being a cushy household slave, he would be sold for whatever menial labor he could perform. This was mentioned in the law, as Bullinger points out, in Exodus 22:3 and Leviticus 25:39, 47, though not under these exact circumstances. Greek has no word for “wife,” so this reads “his woman.” This selling would be to recoup as much of the debt as he could. Of course, none of this selling would come close to ten thousand talents, but it would be the most he could ever get.
- B. Verse 26. “Fell down” is *proskuneo*, which men and angels refuse in the New Testament. This lord symbolizes the heavenly Father, and so such worship is appropriate. This patience is *macrothumia*, patience without losing one’s temper. It was a silly claim that he would pay all. He would take ten thousand years to earn this much! But we are in just such a helpless condition, and often have a similar foolish idea that we will earn our salvation with God.
- C. Verse 27. “Compassion” in Greek references the bowels, thought to be the seat of emotions. Consider how emotions affect your bowels, and you will get the reference! The Lord is typically the one moved this way, though He has this king, the good Samaritan, and the father of the prodigal son be moved with compassion in His parables. “Forgave” is *aphiemi*, the same word Peter asked the Lord about.
- D. Verse 28. The Greek word actually means fellow slaves. A denarius was a typical day’s wages. A hundred days’ wages is a lot, but could very well be paid off. Notice he took him by the throat, uncouth behavior compared to his king!
- E. Verse 29. Begged is the Greek *parakaleo*, encouraged him to give him mercy. Patience again is *makrothumia*, do not lose your temper, bear with me. Notice that this fellow slave’s words exactly match those of the first slave to his king.
- F. Verse 30. “Would not” is the Greek *thelo*, meaning he was not willing or did not desire to have *makrothumia* patience. Whether or not he planned to sell his family and all that he had we are not told. Perhaps a slave did not have that kind of authority.
- G. Verse 31. That a man so richly and generously forgiven could act in such an unforgiving way seemed almost monstrous to the other slaves! They unfolded or made plain the story to their lord the king.
- H. Verse 32. He calls him *poneros*, meaning bad, in the immoral sense. “Begged” is the word as in verse 29, though this is the first time it is used of the first slave. That, of course, is what he did when he fell down at the king’s feet.
- I. Verse 33. Compassion and pity are the same word in Greek. The word is “mercy” in Matthew 5:7. This is the point of the parable. The Lord has had so much mercy on us, that it is nothing but monstrous for us to refuse to have it on our fellow slaves.

- J. Verse 34. This shows the incorrect nature of translating this word “torturers.” What good would torturing a man do in seeking to get repayment from him? Would torture cause him to bleed money? This word is *basanistes*, and comes from *basanos*, the touchstone, used to test metals and reveal their quality. It meant a thorough and revealing test. Only as the Roman Empire degenerated to the point where prisoners were questioned by torture did the word degenerate to mean “torture.” Here, these men are going to thoroughly and revealingly test this slave in order to discover every last red cent they can squeeze out of him in any way possible. Of course, seeing his wife and children sold into slavery will be a kind of torture, but this is not the meaning of this word. Remember that he owed ten thousand years’ wages! He is never going to be able to pay all, so he will never be free again.
- K. Verse 35. Heavenly is *epouranios*, the first occurrence of this word that is most important in the book of Ephesians. Your super-heavenly Father, or your most exalted or most elevated Father. Of course this is a reference to God. This is a law for the kingdom. Even in the enlightened world then, men might be guilty of a slight, intended or not, against another. These ought to be forgiven in that world of love. But if one refuses, what if God held us 100% responsible for every little slight against Him that we perform? We would be in trouble indeed! In the kingdom, all are expected to bear with one another and forgive. Yet our rule is in Ephesians 4:32 and Colossians 3:13, we are to forgive as we have been forgiven. Paul’s appeal to Philemon is God’s appeal to us in the dispensation of grace.

IV. Conclusion: The Lord taught Peter about the need for unending forgiveness by telling a parable of a king with a slave who owed him a staggering amount, and yet out of compassion forgave. When the slave would not forgive a fellow slave who owed him a much smaller amount, however, the king rescinded his forgiveness and held him accountable for all. We too should realize it is monstrous not to forgive others their slights against us when we have been forgiven such a great weight of guilt. Yet we are to forgive because we have been forgiven, not to forgive in order to be forgiven. We are already greatly grace in the dispensation of grace. We should learn from this, yet realize that these are rules for God’s coming kingdom.