

WHAT GRIEVANCES DO I HAVE AGAINST OTHERS?

MATTHEW 18:28-35

OUR COMMON PRAYER IS THAT GOD FORGIVE US OUR SINS AS WE FORGIVE THOSE WHO SIN AGAINST US.

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What Grievances Do I Have Against Others?

Matthew 18:28-35

Last week we examined our personal debt to Jesus Christ. In other words, Jesus was describing what our judgment would look like when we come before Him with our sin. He described our debt in terms of billions of dollars. It is an unpayable debt. But because of His incredible passion, He was willing to freely forgive the debt and absorb the loss Himself. We were helplessly and hopelessly lost. God demonstrated His love for us by sending His One and Only Son, Jesus to die for our sins and pay the debt we owed. When we place our faith and trust in Jesus, He freely forgives our sins and cleanses us from all unrighteousness.

If you remember from our series through the “Four Spiritual Laws” you will remember that we were saved for the purpose of living abundant lives in Christ. In other words, He has plans for each one of us. Listen carefully how Paul explained this concept to the Ephesian Church: “⁸God saved you by his special favor when you believed. And you can’t take credit for this; it is a gift from God. ⁹Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it.

¹⁰For we are God’s masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so that we can do the good things he planned for us long ago” (Ephesians 2:8-10 / NLT).

Let’s review this. We are saved freely by the Grace and Love of God through Jesus Christ. However, Paul went on to say that we are God’s special masterpiece. In other words, He has saved us for a purpose. And as we went through the series on the pursuit of holiness, we found out that His purpose is to make and mold us into the men and women He wants us to be and we are to become more and more like Jesus every day. Some of the works that God has prepared in advance for us to accomplish is to forgive others who have hurt us in order to show them what the love of God is all about. Forgiveness is one of the acts God has prepared us for. If we are Christians, then we have the potential to forgive those who sin against us. Not only do we have the potential, God expects us to extend forgiveness. When Jesus taught the disciples to pray, He said we should pray this:

“¹²and forgive us our sins, just as we have forgiven those who have sinned against us”
(Matthew 6:12 / NLT).

Let's talk about this just for a moment. In Jesus' summary of the greatest commandments He said we should love God and love one another. Here is what I want us to understand. We ought to love others because Jesus first loved us. We ought to be generous with others because Jesus was generous with us. We are to forgive others because Jesus forgave us. As God's children, we are commanded to imitate our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

The problem is that we want to receive all these blessings from God but we are not often willing to share the blessings with others and when it is painful or difficult, we don't often want to be a blessing to others. Let me give you an example. My friend called me to his church to preach on revival. I started the series with the text we are studying through this morning. I thought I would be clever and ask the people how many had forgiven their enemies. The first time I asked the question, about 20% raised their hands. The second time I changed the question asking them how many of them would be willing to forgive their enemies. This time about 80 % raised their hands. Finally, I said that Jesus said that we are supposed to forgive our enemies like He has forgiven us. So I now asked how many are willing to forgive their enemies. Everyone in the congregation raised their hands except one little old lady sitting in the front row. I asked her to stand and state her name. She said, "My name is Ms Jones." I said, "Do you mean to tell me that you are unwilling to forgive your enemies?" to which she responded, "I don't have any enemies." "Mrs. Jones, that is very unusual. How old are you?" I asked. "Ninety-three." she replied.

I'm usually pretty careful about asking people to speak in the service, but she was such a cute old lady. I said, "Mrs. Jones, please come down in front and tell the congregation how a person cannot have an enemy in the world. All of us could certainly take a lesson from you. The little sweetheart of a lady tottered down the aisle, picked up the microphone and said in a loud, clear voice, "It's easy, I just outlived all those idiots."

OPPORTUNITIES TO FORGIVE (VS 28-30)

That's not exactly what we are after here. Our goal is not to outlive all our enemies. Our goal is to forgive them. I've already alluded to this. The Lord's Prayer is prayed privately and publicly by Christian Churches all over the world. Here is the main idea of this morning's prayer. **OUR COMMON PRAYER IS THAT GOD FORGIVE US OUR SINS AS WE FORGIVE THOSE WHO SIN AGAINST US.** I have come to realize over all my years in ministry, that many people pray prayers and sing hymns mindlessly. In other words, they have never taken time to think about what they are praying or singing. I think that oftentimes we come to church and participate in the worship service, without giving much thought to what we are doing. Whether or not we take our prayers seriously, God does. We pray in the Lord's Prayer:

*“¹²and forgive us our sins, just as we have forgiven those who have sinned against us”
(Matthew 6:12 / NLT).*

Do we really mean that? Do we really want God to forgive us the same way we forgive others? If we are not willing to extend forgiveness to others, and we pray this prayer, are we asking God to withhold His forgiveness from us? Let's start from this premise. As verses 28-30 illustrate, God will provide us with plenty of opportunities to forgive others. **SINCE WE ARE ALL**

SINFUL, THERE WILL BE PLENTY OF OPPORTUNITIES FOR US TO PRACTICE AND EXTEND FORGIVENESS.

Let's keep in mind that we are God's masterpieces. We were handcrafted by God to do good works. In verse 28 we see the guy from last week's text with an opportunity to be like Jesus. If we have successfully put ourselves in this guy's shoes last week, we should feel extremely lucky to have gotten off scot-free. We should be filled with extreme euphoria, gratefulness, and a feeling of being blessed. However, my hunch is that the guy in this morning's text is a lot like us. He still doesn't think his debt was that great. He somehow fooled himself into thinking that he could have paid his debt on his own. He really didn't understand what the King did for him. And I don't think many of us really understand what Jesus does for us. Please forgive me for hammering this point but there can be no reconciliation between human beings unless we are truly first reconciled with God.

I know that many of you have a hard time believing that you are totally evil and just as evil as murderers, thieves, and drug dealers. Let try to put it in terms we can understand. If God were to come here this morning and clean the slate for us, and then said, from now on, I'm going to judge you on your behavior. By tonight, each one of us would be condemned to hell for eternity. I know what you want to say. You want to say, "What do you mean? I didn't do anything so bad that I deserve hell." Listen if you tell a little white lie, if you curse, if you become proud about one little thing, if you overeat, or have one too many drinks, if you do one little thing or fail to do one little thing, you cannot stand in the presence of God because God is absolutely perfect. We know that we don't spend enough time in prayer, Bible study, Bible memorization, and other spiritual disciplines. The Bible is absolutely clear on this point:

"²³For all have sinned; all fall short of God's glorious standard" (Romans 3:23 / NLT).

I don't know how to say this any other way. I deserve to go to hell every single day and so do you. As we have said many times quoting Jerry Bridges, "We must preach the Gospel to ourselves every day." It is on a moment-by-moment basis that we are preserved from being sent to hell on the spot, for an eternity. I am that evil and so are you.

Unless we understand that, believe that, and internalize that, we will find ourselves in the same position as the guy in this morning's text. He didn't happen to bump into a guy who owed him money. The text reads as if the guy went out looking for people who were in debt to him. He found one and what happens next shocks us. Instead of throwing his arms around the guy and saying, "My friend, the King forgave me of a debt I could never pay, and so I am going to forgive you of your debt to me," he grabbed him by the throat and demanded instant payment. Notice the amount of this debt. It is only a few thousand dollars. There are a couple of important things about the amount of this debt. First of all, it's nothing compared to the billions of dollars the first debtor owed the King. Secondly, this debt is easily payable, unlike the debt owed to the king.

At this point in the story, I have to take a bystander's point of view because I can't identify with the first debtor any more. I don't get his attitude and if you remember what he was forgiven of last week, I'm hoping you can't identify with him any more either. The response of this week's debtor in verse 29 reminds me of Yogi Berra's old saying, It's déjà vu all over again. Just like

the first debtor did, this guy says and does the exact same thing. He falls on his knees and begs for a little more time and a little patience on the part of the creditor. The creditor should have recognized the response and the words because those were the exact words and gestures he made before the King when the King ordered his family to jail. Again, I have to say, I'm expecting the creditor to have mercy on this guy.

But I have to say when I read his response in verse 30 that I didn't see that coming. Instead of having mercy on the guy, he had him arrested, jailed, and sent to debtor's prison. I can't understand this response and I hope you cannot understand this guy's hard-hearted response as well. How could someone who had just been forgiven of billions of dollars not have showed mercy to one who only owed him a few thousand dollars?

This creditor had a chance to act like the King. Just as the king showed him grace and mercy, he could have easily done the same to the one who owed him. The King gave him a chance to spread the love and grace throughout the kingdom. Just think, if everyone would act like the King, that would be a great kingdom to live in. That's exactly what the Kingdom of God is all about. God has forgiven us of a great deal. At any moment in our lives, we deserve to spend an eternity in hell but by the grace and mercy of God, we are spared and forgiven. We are expected to extend to grace and mercy to the people around us. And **SINCE WE ARE ALL SINFUL, THERE WILL BE PLENTY OF OPPORTUNITIES FOR US TO PRACTICE AND EXTEND FORGIVENESS.**

FAILING TO CHOOSE CORRECTLY (VS 31)

I can never seem to understand what happens next but I have seen it over all the years I have been in ministry. As illustrated in verse 31, it's shocking to see people failing to choose correctly. In other words **IT'S UNTHINKABLE THAT CHRISTIANS WOULDN'T FORGIVE OTHERS.** I think I have some idea of why people are unwilling to forgive. Obviously there is no way to reconcile with people who are asking for forgiveness but are not truly sorry or repentant. But for this morning's text, the guy seemed genuinely repentant. At any rate, he used the same words his creditor used with the King.

Let's look at the testimony of the community. There were servants who were present when the King forgave the debtor of his billions of dollars and they were present now when this forgiven debtor became a creditor and showed no mercy for his creditors. They saw both incidents and could easily judge what was right and what was wrong. But this creditor couldn't see. After all, legally, this guy owed him money and legally he could have him sent to debtor's prison. So when he sent the guy to debtor's prison, he did not do anything illegal. But how could he be so blind? I have a theory and it applies to those of us who think we are pretty good.

Here is the way we think. It is clearly wrong, but nevertheless, it is the way some of us think. We don't believe that we ever owed God the billions of dollars that represent the sin in our lives. I know that many of us don't believe that we deserve to go to hell. We have come to think of ourselves as pretty good. So if we were to put ourselves in the debtor's shoes from last week's sermon, and even though God forgave us of our sins through the horrible crucifixion of Jesus, we don't really believe we ever built up this kind of debt to God. We think that all we have to do is keep being good and doing good things.

So if this guy didn't really believe his debt was in the billions of dollars, and then when the King freely forgave him of the debt, he didn't really understand what the King did for him. And so, he was unable to see how little the debt was of the person who owed him.

I want to again hammer this home. Until we come to realize how totally evil we are, we can never understand or appreciate what Jesus did for us by suffering, by being tortured and executed. He did not die for people out there. He died for you and He died for me. If just one of us here existed, Jesus would still have had to suffer and die in the same way. Please take some time during Lent. Rent the movie The Passion of The Christ, watch it alone and ask God The Holy Spirit to make you understand that Jesus did this for you. Until we personalize this, we can never be Christ-like.

In this morning's text we can see that the community clearly understood what was going on. When they saw this, the text says they become very upset. This is a simple matter of justice. They clearly understood the horror and unfairness of this. If we are going to have a healthy community here at Devon, then we must have an understanding community. Because we live in the United States, we have come to believe that everyone has a right to have and express his or her opinion in church. However, that is not true. The church is not run on public opinion or personal preferences. It is run according to the principles laid out in Scripture. As I look back, it is amazing to me that so many of you were led astray or remained silent when the clearly false doctrines were being spread. Even when everything was laid out in writing, and a response to the false teachers was written; many of you didn't have the ability or the will to understand the truth and to stand up against the false teachings. We were clearly devoid of an understanding community. I'm hoping and praying that all of us will take seriously the reading, studying, and the memorizing of our Bibles, and then living out the truths of Scripture. There are no shortcuts to gaining understanding. Building an understanding community takes hard work and commitment.

If that's the case then we like the community in today's text will give wise responses as a community. This community knew exactly what to do. They immediately went back to the King and told him what this wicked servant did. They were so appalled by the wrongness of this whole event, they were compelled to act. I'm hoping that as we move on from here, we will also be wise enough to understand what is going on and because of it; we too will be compelled to act. Keep this in mind; in the face of false doctrine, false teaching, or immorality, failing to take action is just as wrong and sinful as those who are acting out immorally. And now for our purposes today, I want to bring us back to the topic at hand. Christians should always be living in a state of realizing the moment-by-moment grace God extends to us by not pulling the plug on us and sending us to hell. That is why **IT IS UNTHINKABLE THAT CHRISTIANS WOULDN'T FORGIVE OTHERS.**

LOST OPPORTUNITIES FOR FORGIVENESS (VS 32-35)

For me, the saddest part of the story is to think there may be many lost opportunities for us to extend forgiveness to one another as described in verses 32-35. When we act out in faith, it is one of the signs we are authentic believers. However, **FAILING TO FORGIVE THOSE WHO SIN AGAINST US INDICATES WE ARE NOT FOLLOWERS OF JESUS.**

A logical assessment of the situation is made by the King in verses 31-32. I would just like you to hear the King's assessment as Jesus told it:

³² ... *You evil servant! I forgave you that tremendous debt because you pleaded with me.*
³³ *Shouldn't you have mercy on your fellow servant, just as I had mercy on you?" (Matthew 18:32-33 / NLT).*

Look, it really doesn't matter how good or bad any of us think we are. This wicked servant thought he was pretty good. I'm sure many of us think we're pretty good. But in the end, it doesn't matter what anyone thinks. What matters is what God thinks. God addresses this guy as wicked. I'm begging all of us to get this right lest we make the same mistake as the guy in this morning's text. God's logical assessment starts from the premise that each one of us are filthy sinners deserving of an eternity in hell. Only if that is so, does this morning's text make any sense at all. If we are authentic Christians then we have to understand that Jesus rescued us from hell. He continues to rescue us from hell, and at the judgment, He will again rescue us from the eternal fires of hell. It is from this premise that we live the Christian life. Everything we have and everything we are comes as a direct gift from God. On our own apart from Christ we are pieces of garbage. It is only through Christ that we become saints, princes and princesses fit to spend eternity with Him in heaven and to accomplish His works here on earth. The logical assessment is that God has extended us grace, mercy, and love. Therefore we are to become His instruments of grace, mercy, and love as we offer these to others.

The logical assessment didn't work out too well for the unmerciful servant and the logical conclusion is not going to turn out so well either in verse 34. The angry King sent the man to prison until he had paid every penny. And if you remember from our study last Sunday, this debt was impossible to pay. This man, his wife, children, and generations to come would all die in prison. If we are not authentic Christians then we will spend eternity in hell. That's how long it will take all of us who think we are good to pay our insignificant debt.

I love the Gospels and I love the fact that the Apostles were so slow to understand because Jesus will make the logical application for us in verse 35. The Apostles would often tell Jesus that they didn't understand so Jesus would explain it to them. This whole passage started back in verse 21 when Peter asked Jesus how many times he had to forgive people who sinned against him. Jesus quickly pointed out that Peter started with the wrong question. Peter should have asked Jesus how many times Jesus would forgive him when he sinned against God? Jesus put the whole question in perspective by showing Peter that God had forgiven him of all his sins freely by grace through faith. Jesus rescued Peter from the fires of hell. And if Peter truly understood that, it would naturally follow that Peter would also be willing to forgive those who sinned against him and harmed him because in comparison to how badly we sin against God and how much He forgives us of; the amount of forgiveness we have to extend to people who sin against us is relatively small. Please let us hear what Jesus' summary of the whole situation and please hear Him speaking to each one of us individually:

³⁵ *That's what my heavenly Father will do to you if you refuse to forgive your brothers and sisters in your heart" (Matthew 18:35 / NLT).*

I'm not sure where we came up with the idea that we could pick and choose which sayings of Jesus we would obey and those we would ignore. It seems to me that Jesus is saying that He has forgiven us of an infinite amount of sin that we should spend eternity in hell for. And because of that, He expects us to extend forgiveness to others around us. If we don't, then the confession we made to Him was not authentic and therefore not saving in any way. In the Lord's Prayer we pray to God that He will forgive us our sins the same way in which we forgive those who sin against us. Are we comfortable with that formula? Please, let's take the Word of God seriously. Jesus makes this a test of whether or not we are authentically Christian. Now let me say that it will be truly a long journey to forgive those who have sexually, physically, or emotionally abused us. But even then we need to get to forgiveness in order to be set free from the pain. But for routine offenses against us Jesus puts the test to us like this. **FAILING TO FORGIVE THOSE WHO SIN AGAINST US INDICATES WE ARE NOT FOLLOWERS OF JESUS.**

I know that we often pray and sing things from memory and we often get caught up in the harmony and melody of songs and forget to think about the meaning of the words. When we pray things from memory we often do it mindlessly. But one of the messages I'm preaching this morning is that Jesus means what He says, and He takes seriously what we say. When we pray, "Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us," Jesus takes those words seriously regardless of whether or not we do when we say them. **OUR COMMON PRAYER IS THAT GOD FORGIVE US OUR SINS AS WE FORGIVE THOSE WHO SIN AGAINST US.**

Let us commit ourselves to obeying God and take seriously what we pray and sing. As we end this sermon, please turn in your hymnals to reading # 632. Let's read this prayerfully, consciously and intentionally. I will read the plain text. You will respond by reading the bold text.

"Come now, and let us reason together, says the Lord. Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool.

No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying Know the Lord, for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.

Who is a God like You, pardoning iniquity and passing over the transgression of the remnant of His heritage?

He does not retain His anger forever, because He delights in mercy.

If you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.

But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

Peter came to Him 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 seventy times seven.

Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ also forgave you.

If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.

My little children, these things I write to you, that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.

And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.”