

MORE TO THE STORY: The Unmerciful Servantⁱ Matthew 18:21-35

INTRODUCTION:

Good morning, church family. Welcome to those of you that are guests today. Thank you for entrusting us with your Sunday. It is our prayer that our church already feels like home to you.

We love with our guests. We would ask you to text the keyword, TBCMP, which stands for Trinity Baptist Church Mt. Pleasant, to the number 94-000. When you text that keyword to that number, you'll be sent a link back that will take you to a form to enter basic contact information. It then notifies us, and we have the privilege of following up with you.

Or you can stop by Guest Connect located in the lobby. We have a team that would like to meet you and give you a gift as a way of saying thank you for being with us this morning. I will make my way there as well and I look forward to shaking your hand this morning.

SERIES OVERVIEW:

We have been in a teaching series we have called, "More to the Story," where we are working our way through some of the parables of Jesus. So far, we have looked at the Parable of the Sower, or more aptly called the parable of the soils. We've studied the parable of the mustard seed, and last Sunday, Jeremy Thomas did an outstanding job preaching on the parable of the hidden treasure and the pearl of great value. Today we are looking at the parable of the unmerciful servant. So, I want to invite you to grab your Bibles and turn with me to Matthew chapter 18. We are going to be in verses 21-35 today.

By way of recap, we defined what a parable as a teaching aid that teaches something unknown (spiritual) by relating it to something that is known (tangible). It is to cast a spiritual truth alongside something that people would know. It's an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. And these parables were powerful and shared by the Master storyteller, Jesus.

OPENING ILLUSTRATION: Story of Forgiveness – Jim Elliottⁱⁱ

In 1953, Jim and Elisabeth Elliott, missionaries, began preparations and strategic plans to share the gospel with Huaorani tribe in the Amazon region of Ecuador. But due to a misunderstanding, The Huaorani tribe killed Jim and his

colleagues. His wife, Elisabeth was at home with their 10-month-old daughter at the time of Jim's death. The following year Elisabeth returned to the rainforest to live with and preach the gospel to the very tribe that murdered her husband. Her decision to forgive the most devastating event in her life, paved the way for her to reach the Huaorani tribe for Christ.

I'm amazed at Elisabeth Elliott's ability to forgive. I'm not sure I would be able to forgive, let alone return to the very people that took my loved one's life! I mean, sure, they need Jesus, but I'm not sure I'm the one to bring them to Him. I don't think I could let go and just forgive them. What about you?

The truth is that we all carry unforgiveness. We tend to hold grudges and hold onto unforgiveness in our hearts toward other people. Think about it. It's the person you ghost when they text you and you're like, "I'm not writing you back." The person you dread seeing at the holidays. The person that when you walk down the aisle at Brookshires and you see them then turn around, go the other way and act like you didn't even see them. Or the person you fake being cordial with but on the inside, you're thinking about how much you can't stand them. Or the person you just can't believe would act "normal" after just offending you the day before.ⁱⁱⁱ We all carry unforgiveness to some degree.

In our parable of study this morning, in Matthew 18, Jesus meets this issue with a powerful story. So, as we study through the parable of the unmerciful servant, we are going to look at the parable, the point, and then the practice, the application of the truth in this parable.

MESSAGE:

So, let's look, first, at...

1) **The Parable.**

And let me set the context for us here. Matthew 18 is all about living life as a citizen of the Kingdom of Heaven. So, as we are going to see, Jesus says that life in God's family is marked by forgiving one another. Jesus tells this parable to answer a question Peter asks. Let's look at the parable in its entirety and then look at the components in the story. Matthew 18:21-35.

*²¹Then Peter came up and said to him, "Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as **seven times**?" ²²Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you seven times, but **seventy-seven times**. ²³"Therefore the*

kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to **settle accounts** with his servants. ²⁴When he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him **ten thousand talents**. ²⁵And since he could not pay, his master ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made. ²⁶So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, **‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.’** ²⁷And out of pity for him, the master of that servant **released him and forgave him the debt**. ²⁸But when that same servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him **a hundred denarii**, and seizing him, he began to choke him, saying, ‘Pay what you owe.’ ²⁹So his fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him, **‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you.’** ³⁰He refused and went and put him in prison until he should pay the debt. ³¹When his fellow servants saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their master all that had taken place. ³²Then his master summoned him and said to him, ‘You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. ³³And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?’ ³⁴And in anger his master **delivered him to the jailers**, until he should pay all his debt. ³⁵So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.” So much here. Let’s key in on a few things.

Peter asks Jesus a question because Jesus was just talking about how to resolve conflict with others. So, naturally, Peter asks the question everyone else is asking but didn’t want to ask. But you can tell that Peter is beginning to understand Jesus’ heart for forgiveness. He asks how many times we should forgive someone. And then he throws out the number 7 times.

Now, at this time, there was a Jewish teaching that taught that you were to forgive someone 3 times. Kinda like our culture today; 3 strikes and you’re out. So, Peter mentioning 7 times was being very gracious and generous. Peter’s like, “I think I understand Jesus. Take what was taught, times 2, plus 1.”

But look what Jesus says in verse 22. ²²Jesus said to him, **“I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times**. The way this would have been understood is 70 times 7. That equates to 490 times. But can you imagine keeping track of that? “Okay, that’s number 287. You’ve got 203 more chances and then I’m done with you.” That sounds crazy, right? And that’s Jesus’ point. Jesus was saying that forgiveness, in God’s Kingdom, is to be unlimited.

So, Jesus tells about a king that wanted to settle accounts with his servants. The idea here that it was judgment day, time to make good on debt owed. And in this story, there was obviously differing levels and rank of servants.^{iv} The first servant had to be over the second servant mentioned in this parable.

So, the king comes to the first servant and demands repayment. We are told that he owes the king 10,000 talents. A talent is a weight of gold. Some would estimate this to equal up to billions of dollars.^v But that’s not the point. The word translated 10,000 is where we get our English word, “myriad.”^{vi} It was the largest numerical term in the Greek language and was often used to talk about an innumerable number.^{vii} So, Jesus is saying the first servant owed the king a limitless amount of money. In other words, it was an unpayable debt.

So, when the servant couldn’t pay the debt, the king was going to sell him and his family into a lower position of servanthood. So, that servant fell on his knees and begged the king, **“Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.”** To which the disciples hearing this would have probably laughed. “Yeah right. There’s no way you could repay that amount.” But because the king had pity on the servant, he forgave him and released all debt owed. That’s amazing!

The story continues. The servant who had just been forgiven an innumerable amount of money then went to a servant below him and demanded that he be repaid. In fact, we’re told that he seized and choked this other servant. And we also learn that this other servant owed 100 denarii. To put that in perspective a day’s wage at that time was about 1 denarii per day. So, 100 denarii would have equated to a little more than 3 months wages.^{viii}

The servant that owed 100 denarii did the same thing the first servant did. He fell to his knees and asked for patience to repay it. That request should have struck a chord with the first servant because it’s the exact same words he said to the king. But that first servant didn’t grant forgiveness and threw the guy in prison. The guy forgiven of the unpayable debt demands someone pay him a relatively small debt. And when the servant couldn’t pay, he was thrown in jail.

And yes, the same appalling you are feeling now was felt by everyone that watched this unfold. So, they went and reported the first servant’s actions to the king. And the king was so mad, that he threw the first servant in jail. The literal word there means, “one who tortures.”^{ix} So, he was left to be tortured by his unforgiveness.

That's the parable. So, now, let's look at...

2) The Point.

What is Jesus' point in sharing this story? I think it is simple. **Forgiven people forgive people.** People that have been forgiven, in turn, forgive others. We are to see ourselves as the first servant. And the principle is clear. God has forgiven us of such a great debt, that any debt owed to us is absolutely insignificant in comparison. You might say, "But Pastor Chris, you don't know what they did to me!" You're right, I don't. But I do know that you and I both have offended an infinitely holy God and there's no way we could ever repay the cost of our sin.

Romans 6:23 says that, "*The wages of sin* [what we earn because of our offending God] *is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord.*" The cost of our sin demanded the payment be made in Christ's blood by way of death on a cross. Because of sin, we owed a debt we could not pay. But Jesus paid that debt on our behalf. So, then, since we have been forgiven we should then extend forgiveness.

In Luke chapter 7, we read about a story of a sinful woman anointing Jesus' feet with ointment. She was weeping and drying her tears with her hair. A Pharisee watching this unfold was quick to point out the sin of this woman and that Jesus was allowing her to touch Him. To which Jesus said, "Her sins, which are many, are forgiven, and as a result she expressed great love. But the one who is forgiven little, loves little.

When we understand the weight of our own sin, and the inability we have to repay our sin debt, we would turn to Jesus, fall on our knees, and beg for His forgiveness. And when we do that and find He is faithful to forgive our sin, we would then in turn be willing to forgive others. Forgiven people, forgive people. Let's be honest. We have received such extravagant grace that we should find it within ourselves to extend that same grace shown us.

We have looked at the parable and the point of the parable. Now, let's look at...

3) The Practice.

I think we can all see the principle in this parable. But the hard question is how do we live this out? And I want to make mention of a couple of things here. And I'm working from the assumption that we all need to work on forgiveness.

1) Allow God to help you forgive.

Let's be honest, forgiving others that have wronged us is hard. And there are some circumstances that make it harder than others. But, in those instances we need to lean on The Lord to help us forgive.

I also want you to know that forgiveness does not equal trust. In other words, there are consequences to sin. Just because you forgive someone doesn't mean you trust them fully. I read a definition of forgiveness as, "**when you give up your right to punish someone for what they have done to you.**"^x I like that because I can give up my right to punish and still not trust completely. The king that forgave the servant of an innumerable amount of money can forgive the debt but not lend money to him in the future. Make sense?

Now, we have to realize that forgiveness is something that is commanded by God. And this parable shows us that we should forgive others who have wronged us on the basis that we have been forgiven. It would be hypocritical to receive God's forgiveness and not extend forgiveness to others. But the question is, are we to forgive and forget?

I think that it is impossible for us to "delete" events from our memory. Yes, God, through the blood of Jesus remembers not our transgressions. Praise The Lord! But I think that speaks more to the certainty of our salvation than it does to our ability to completely forget a wrong that's been done to us. But we can relinquish our right to punish the wrong. That is within our power and to trust that vengeance is mine says The Lord.

So, I think the appropriate response would be to forgive those that have offended us and move on with our life. As much as possible, we should forget what is behind and press on toward what is ahead. We should forgive just as Christ forgave us. But sometimes the consequences of one's sin against us, though we can forgive them, results in a lack of trust.^{xi}

Now, having said that, I think it is important to point out the fact that we can often confuse consequences and punishment. We tend to weaponize consequences, don't we? And when we do, we're still holding onto our right to punish, and that is no longer forgiveness.

One of the ways I see this play out is in marriage. When our spouse offends us, we say we forgive them, but we tend to add that offense to a record of wrongs,

to use as a weapon, when we need it. But Paul says love doesn't keep a record of wrongs. Marriage has to be filled with forgiveness. Because to not forgive leads to bitterness. And bitterness in marriage will destroy it.

Now, I also know in a room of this size, there are those that have experienced such heinous sins committed against them. Perhaps it is some form of abuse, or some other devastating act against you or someone you love. And to say you need to forgive your offender seems like it is trivializing what's been done against you. That's not what I am trying to do here. There is help and there is healing from whatever wrong has been done to you. And in those circumstances, you need to allow The Lord to help you forgive, remember the definition, to relinquish the right to punish your offender. You may not forget and there may be consequences but take that offense to the cross where you can find freedom.

If you need help overcoming abuse in your life, we want to come alongside you. I want you to know that there are resources available to you should you need it. If you are struggling to forgive, I want you to reach out to us. You can email info@trinitytx.org. And I promise you that it will be held in confidence. But by reaching out to us, we can then share with you resources that might be able to help you in your hurt. If you don't reach out to us, please reach out to someone.

The first point of application is to allow God to help you forgive. The second practice we learn from this parable is to...

2) Understand that unforgiveness will torture you.^{xii}

In the parable we studied, the king went on after having forgiven the first servant. But that servant that wouldn't forgive his fellow servant wound up being tortured in jail because of his lack of forgiveness. Unforgiveness will torture you. If you don't forgive, you will be poisoned. There's an old saying, "Unforgiveness is like drinking poison and expecting the other person to die."^{xiii}

What happens when you live with unforgiveness? You relive the offense. Your offender doesn't relive the offense, you do. Holding onto unforgiveness creates hauntings in your mind. You still carry it, but your offender doesn't. And it is you and I that is left tortured. Unforgiveness will haunt us.

You know what else unforgiveness does? It causes you to wrestle with your own forgiveness. The inability for you to forgive someone makes you wonder if

God can really forgive you. And if He can't or worse, won't forgive you, then do you have the peace of eternal security? But God does forgive us. And He urges us to forgive others for our own benefit.

But even more than that, there is a practical side of having to confront your own forgiveness. Remember when the disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray? And he gave them what we call The Lord's Prayer. Our Father, in Heaven, hallowed be your name. Your Kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in Heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. **And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.**

When we fail to forgive, we forfeit nearness to God. Because we are so preoccupied with and holding onto an offense, it consumes our thoughts and occupies our minds. And when heart and mind space is taken up by unforgiveness, there's no room for The Lord to move in those spaces. Unforgiveness will torture you. It is to our benefit to forgive others.

There is freedom in forgiveness. Letting go of hurts is like running free. Forgiveness is the key to unlocking the chains and baggage that weigh us down. Where are you harboring unforgiveness? What do you need The Lord to help you forgive. Maybe the forgiveness you need is to forgive yourself.

CONCLUSION:

Maybe you're here today and you've never been forgiven of your sin. The Bible says that we all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. But God demonstrates His love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us. And we experience salvation and God's forgiveness by trusting Jesus as Lord and Savior.

The Bible says that we are to be born again unto a relationship with Jesus. That there is a moment in our lives that we turn from our sin and turn to Jesus. Have you had that moment? Have you trusted Jesus as Lord and Savior. If not, or if you have questions about what that means, our elders will be here to visit with you about that at the end of our service today.

Maybe you are here today, and you are holding onto unforgiveness in your life. Maybe you need to talk with someone about how you can find freedom in forgiving the wrong that's been done to you. Our elders would love to pray with you and help you walk that out. [PRAY]

ENDNOTES:

ⁱ Works consulted in preparation for this message: David Platt, "Christ-Centered Exposition: Exalting Jesus in Matthew," Holman: Brentwood, 2013; John MacArthur, "The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Matthew 8-15," Moody Publishers: Chicago, 1987; David Guzik, "Enduring Word Commentary: Matthew 18 – Qualities and Attitudes of Kingdom Citizens," published by Enduring Word Ministries, accessed online: <https://enduringword.com/bible-commentary/matthew-18/>; Mark A. Copeland, "The Parables of Jesus: The Unmerciful Servant," published by Executable Outlines, accessed online: https://executableoutlines.com/topical_series/parables-of-jesus/pa_11.html; Ray Fowler, "God's Forgiveness and Ours," published by Ray Fowler.org, accessed online: <https://www.rayfowler.org/sermons/matthew/gods-forgiveness-and-ours/>; Skip Heitzig, "Expound: Matthew Chapter 18," message taught at Calvary Albuquerque, May 2, 2012, accessed online: <https://calvarynm.church/connectwithskip/teachings/#/series/55/sermon/814>; John Elmore, "The Forgiven Forgive," sermon preached at Watermark Church, accessed online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rbcVmq6qyE8>.

ⁱⁱ <https://vision.org.au/faith/elisabeth-elliott-exhibit/>.

ⁱⁱⁱ Examples taken from John Elmore.

^{iv} MacArthur, page 147.

^v Platt, page 246.

^{vi} MacArthur, page 148.

^{vii} Strong's Concordance, 3463, murios.

^{viii} Enduring Word Commentary, <https://enduringword.com/bible-commentary/matthew-18/>.

^{ix} Strong's Concordance, 930, basanistés.

^x What about Jesus?, "Does forgiveness mean there are no consequences?," article published by What About Jesus, accessed online: <https://whataboutjesus.com/forgiveness-mean-no-consequences/>.

^{xi} There is a good article on this on Got Questions. <https://www.gotquestions.org/forgive-forget.html>.

^{xii} Adapted from John Elmore's sermon.

^{xiii} The Teaching Lady, <https://bibleteachinglady.com/unforgiveness-is-like-drinking-poison/>.