

## **Matthew 18:21-35 – "Forgiveness Must Be Extended as Received"**

**Text: Matthew 18:21-35 (CSB)**

**21 Then Peter approached him and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? As many as seven times?" 22 "I tell you, not as many as seven times," Jesus answered him, "but seventy times seven. 23 For this reason, the kingdom of heaven can be compared to a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. 24 When he began to settle accounts, one who owed ten thousand talents was brought to him. 25 Since he could not pay it back, his master commanded that he, his wife, his children, and everything he had be sold to pay the debt. 26 At this, the servant fell facedown before him and said, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay you back everything.' 27 Then the master of that servant had compassion, released him, and forgave him the loan. 28 That servant went out and found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii. He grabbed him, started choking him, and said, 'Pay back what you owe!' 29 At this, his fellow servant fell down and began begging him, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay you back.' 30 But he wasn't willing. Instead, he went and threw him in prison until he could pay what was owed. 31 When the other servants saw what had taken place, they were deeply distressed and went and reported to their master everything that had happened. 32 Then, after he had summoned him, his master said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. 33 Shouldn't you also have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?' 34 And because he was angry, his master handed him over to the torturers until he could pay everything that was owed. 35 So also my heavenly Father will do to you unless every one of you forgives your brother or sister from your heart."**

### **Key Background:**

- **Peter's Question:** Rabbinical teaching suggested forgiving someone three times was sufficient. Peter's suggestion of seven times seemed generous, but Jesus's response shatters all attempts to limit forgiveness.
- **Seventy Times Seven:** This equals 490 times, but the point isn't mathematical - it means unlimited forgiveness. The phrase may allude to Lamech's boast of unlimited vengeance (Genesis 4:24), which Jesus transforms into unlimited mercy.
- **Ten Thousand Talents:** This represents an astronomical sum - possibly equivalent to several billion dollars today. It was more than the annual tax revenue of entire provinces and literally unpayable for any individual.
- **A Hundred Denarii:** In contrast, this was about three months' wages for a common laborer - a significant but manageable debt, especially compared to the first servant's impossible debt.
- **Selling into Slavery:** This was a legal practice for debt collection in the ancient world, though Jewish law had protections. The threat emphasizes the seriousness of the debt and the servant's complete helplessness.
- **Prison for Debt:** Debtors' prisons were common in the ancient world. The debtor would remain imprisoned until family or friends could pay the debt.

- **The Torturers:** Refers to jailers who used harsh methods to extract payment or information about hidden assets. This represents the severe consequences of unforgiveness.

#### Questions from the Story:

- **What question did Peter ask Jesus about forgiveness (v. 21)? What does Peter's suggestion of "seven times" reveal about his understanding of forgiveness?**
- **How did Jesus respond to Peter's question (v. 22)? What does "seventy times seven" teach us about the extent of forgiveness we should offer?**
- **What comparison does Jesus make to explain the kingdom of heaven (v. 23)? Why does he use the image of a king settling accounts with his servants?**
- **How large was the debt of the first servant (v. 24)? What does this impossible sum represent about our spiritual debt before God?**
- **What was the king's initial judgment regarding the unpayable debt (v. 25)? What does this show about the seriousness of our condition before God?**
- **How did the servant respond when facing the consequences of his debt (v. 26)? What does his promise to "pay back everything" reveal about his understanding of his situation?**
- **What was the king's surprising response to his servant's plea (v. 27)? What does the complete forgiveness of this massive debt represent?**
- **How did the forgiven servant treat his fellow servant who owed him money (v. 28)? What does this violent response reveal about his heart?**
- **How much did the fellow servant owe (v. 29)? How does this amount compare to what the first servant had been forgiven?**
- **What did the fellow servant request, and how did the first servant respond (vv. 29-30)? What does this refusal to show mercy reveal about his character?**
- **How did the other servants react to witnessing this injustice (v. 31)? What does their distress and reporting show about the expectation of consistent character?**
- **What did the king call his servant when he learned of his actions (v. 32)? How does the king's question expose the servant's hypocrisy?**
- **What logical expectation did the king express about the servant's behavior (v. 33)? What principle about forgiveness does this establish?**
- **What was the king's final judgment on the unforgiving servant (v. 34)? What does this severe punishment represent?**
- **What warning does Jesus give about God's response to those who don't forgive (v. 35)? What does "from your heart" tell us about the nature of true forgiveness?**

- **How does the contrast between the two debts illustrate the relationship between God's forgiveness of us and our forgiveness of others?**
- **What does this parable teach us about the connection between receiving God's grace and extending grace to others?**
- **How does this story challenge us to examine our own attitudes toward those who have wronged us?**