

Matthew 18:21-35 ²¹ ¶ Then Peter came to Him and said, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" ²² Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven. ²³ ¶ "Therefore the kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. ²⁴ "And when he had begun to settle accounts, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. ²⁵ "But as he was not able to pay, his master commanded that he be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and that payment be made. ²⁶ "The servant therefore fell down before him, saying, 'Master, have patience with me, and I will pay you all.' ²⁷ "Then the master of that servant was moved with compassion, released him, and forgave him the debt. ²⁸ "But that servant went out and found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii; and he laid hands on him and took *him* by the throat, saying, 'Pay me what you owe!' ²⁹ "So his fellow servant fell down at his feet and begged him, saying, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you all.' ³⁰ "And he would not, but went and threw him into prison till he should pay the debt. ³¹ "So when his fellow servants saw what had been done, they were very grieved, and came and told their master all that had been done. ³² "Then his master, after he had called him, said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. ³³ 'Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?' ³⁴ "And his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him. ³⁵ "So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses."

It's not ridiculous

Ever say something ridiculous to make your point? I am sure you have. It called hyperbole. Like "I would rather die than have the Vikings win". Everything in this parable that Jesus uses is ridiculous. Jesus uses some ridiculous numbers to illustrate his point. A denarii was the daily wage for an average laborer. And a talent was about 6,000 denarii. So that meant for the average

laborer (which were the people Jesus was talking to), to pay off one talent you would need to work 6,000 days assuming that you spend none of your wages on food, clothing, home etc.... so really assuming you can save 50% of your income (which you probably can't) it would take you 12,000 days to pay back one talent of debt. So people today generally work 5 days a week, but they worked 6 and so it would have taken one worker 38 years to pay back one talent, and this servant owed ten thousand talents, so he would have needed to work 387,000 years to pay back that debt and that isn't even including interest. Like I said, ridiculous. Everything about this is ridiculous. No king would have had that much money to lend. And if he did, he would lend it with interest. And even if he could lend out that much and without interest, he wouldn't lend that much to a servant who couldn't possible pay him back. And if he did, he wouldn't, he couldn't forgive him that much. And the servant, having been forgiven a debt that would take him 387,000 years to pay off, goes in complete ingratitude and hardness of heart and shows no forgiveness toward a fellow servant how owed him

just a hundred denarii, a debt that could be paid off in less than 1 year. Like I said, ridiculous, how could anybody be so ungrateful and hardhearted.

But you know what? All these things might seem ridiculous, but Jesus uses this parable to show us these things aren't ridiculous. While this is a parable, it is not hyperbole. It is not ridiculous to compare the debt we owe to God to a debt that would take 387,000 years to payoff. In fact, that is generous. Jesus used that big number to show we aren't capable of paying it off. And while it is ridiculous that God would freely forgive such a huge debt, it is true. It is not hyperbole. God has forgiven our unforgivable debt despite how much it cost Him. And sadly it isn't ridiculous to propose that someone having graciously been forgiven such a unforgivable unpayable debt would turn around and be so ungrateful and hard hearted to another human being. We, you, and I do it all the time.

You know what prompted this parable? Peter thinking he was being generous. Our sermon text today follows on the heels of

our one from last week where Jesus taught them and us that our faith should be like the faith of that little child, humble, un-presumptuous, not putting ourselves first. Peter kind of gets it. In fact, he thinks he is being very humble and loving. The rabbis at that time taught that you should forgive a person for a sin three times. So Peter having kind of heard what Jesus had just taught about the humility of faith that puts others' souls above our earthly needs thinks he is being safe and generous by suggesting that he should forgive someone who sins against him up to 7 times. It doesn't say this in our text, but I imagine Jesus putting his head in hands at that point and shaking it in dismay and frustration.

These questions are very much connected. How much should we humble ourselves? How many times should we forgive someone who sins against us? Peter thought there should be a limit to how much we should forgive, how much we should humble ourselves and put up with other people hurting us? Peter thought it was ridiculous to expect us to have someone walk over us again and again, to hurt us again and again and still forgive them. Jesus'

point in our parable- there is no limit to the number of times we should forgive, that we should unhesitating and unreservedly forgive no matter how many times or how badly we have been hurt.

Sidenote: I am not saying, and more importantly, Jesus is not saying that for example a wife has to stay in the house of a husband who is beating her or a husband has to stay with a wife who has cheated on him. An abused wife should get out of such a circumstance and a cheated on spouse may divorce without guilt but even while they do those things and the hurt, physically and emotionally, might seem as deep and insurmountable as the ocean, yes you should forgive them.

Do you find that ridiculous? Do you find it ridiculous that God calls on you to forgive from your heart someone who has hurt you so badly? Someone that you married and gave your whole life to only to have them cheat on you as if you and everything you had together was a tissue to sneeze in and throw away. Do you find it ridiculous that God calls on you to forgive from your heart

someone who has hurt you so badly, someone who has sexually molested you or physically abused you? Many certainly do find that ridiculous and our sinful nature like Peter's certainly does. But it is not ridiculous either that God calls on us to do it nor ridiculous to expect us to do it willingly from our heart.

Why? Because God in Christ has freely forgiven me. That is really the only ridiculous thing that God has done. That He would love the world so much that He would give His only begotten Son to take the sin debt of you and of all the world and take it upon Himself to pay off what we could never possible payoff . We couldn't pay off one sin. Not with all the blood of beast nor with our own blood. And all men's attempts to justify themselves and make payment for their sin only add to their guilt for by the deeds of the law no flesh is justified before God for by the law comes only the knowledge of our sin.

We tend to be like Peter. We like to think we are generous with others and that the whole world has a sin trade imbalance with us meaning we delusionally think that others sin against us

more than we sin against them. This is part of our sinfulness - the inability to see how great the extent of the sins we export to others are. We see our sins as honest mistakes and that our debt to others isn't that great and should be easily forgiven but others sins against us as many and grievous and so like Peter we want to limit the amount of sin and pain we bear from others. That is ridiculous. When we do that we are being just like the unforgiving servant in our text, no hyperbole involved.

Jesus bore the uncountable and unbearable debt of our sin. He bore that which was unbearable, crying out from suffering the punishment for all the sin of all the world "My God, My God why have you forsaken me."

It is not ridiculous for Jesus to compare our sin to a unpayable debt, for that is exactly the extent of your and my sin. It is not ridiculous for Jesus to compare us to the hard hearted ungrateful servant in the parable because we often are. It is not ridiculous for Jesus to ask us to forgive even the worst sins against us. Why? Because of what is ridiculous. That God in Christ would

forgive your sin debt. And yet He has. That is ridiculous.

Ridiculously gracious. Ridiculously amazing. Ridiculous but true.

Amen.

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