

## **SERMON NOTES, RALPH BOWLES**

### **THE FOUNTAIN OF FORGIVENESS**

Matthew 18:21-35

St Andrew's Lutwyche, Sunday 15 May 2011

1. Forgiveness is at the centre of the Christian gospel and the Christian life: Mt 6:12, 14-15.
  - Receiving God's forgiveness we are commanded to forgive others – it is a command of God, not a tentative suggestion!
2. This section of Matt. 18 is about forgiveness in the Christian fellowship: Mt. 18:15, 21.
  - This is not about salvation – about forgiveness of God towards sinners, but of the problem of unforgiveness among Christians.
  - Forgiveness does not come easy for most of us, even within our closest relationships - I sometimes think it is easier to forgive an enemy or a stranger than a close relative or Christian brethren who hurt us.
  - The parable is an illustration of Jesus's words in Mt. 6:14-15.
3. Peter's question (Mt. 18:21) was actually quite generous – he has moved from eye for eye limiting equivalence!
  - There was a belief that forgiveness could be offered a few times, three or four (Amos 1:3, 6,9,11,13).
4. Jesus's answer: Mt. 18:22. – he challenges the keeping count mentality – 70 x 7 – an allusion to the blood thirsty Lamech of Genesis.
  - We are to be the opposite of vengeful, going on and on forgiving! 490 effectively means unlimited.

How can anyone be reasonably expected to have this unlimited capacity and desire to forgive others? We run out of forgiveness power quite quickly!

The Parable of the Unmerciful Servant is Jesus's punchy lesson in unlimited forgiving.

#### **I. THE KING'S AMAZING FORGIVENESS, 18:23-27**

1. This debtor was hugely in trouble with the King – vastly in debt to his Master.
  - A provincial governor due to hand over taxes to the overlord?
  - This debt is so huge it must represent corruption, failure of some kind.
  - Jesus is making a point with this astronomical amount of debt – this man is in a hopeless situation. – an unpayable debt.
  - He and his family will go to debtor's prison, a slavery, for the rest of their lives.
2. The servant pleads for mercy (26) – a conventional plea – this is the man acknowledging, at least formally, his problem.
3. The monarch's response was surprising – he did the unexpected and remitted completely the debt, setting the servant free!
  - This is pity, mercy, grace – undeserved, unexpected, free.
  - The King in the story is untypical of earthly kings, because he is a symbol of God's gracious character.

## II. THE SERVANT'S MERCILESS HEART, 18:28-30

1. The released servant immediately shows how ungrateful and merciless he is, when he runs into a debtor of his.
  - This man owes him a smaller amount (100 days wages).
  - The released servant stands on his rights for justice!
  - He is brutal and unmerciful with his own debtor: 18:28.
2. Others see this inconsistent behaviour and are unimpressed: 18:31.
  - We too can see the hypocrisy and inconsistency of the unmerciful servant.
  - The gracious King responds by serving justice on this man: 18:32-34.

## III. THE CONSEQUENCES OF UNFORGIVENESS, 18:32-34

1. Does this mean that God's forgiveness of us is conditional, after all?
  - No: this is not about loss of salvation, it is about the bondage and torment that comes upon us when we are unforgiving.
  - God is merciful Ps. 103:12.
  - The unmerciful servant was delivered to the tormentors, not the executioners!
  - "The world's worst prison is the prison of an unforgiving heart." (Warren Wiersbe)
  - Look at the lesson appended by Jesus: 18:35. Our heavenly *Father* (still our Father!) will not let us be unforgiving and happy about it.
2. Our fellowship with God our Father is harmed and our experience of the blessings of harmony with God in obedience will be spoiled, unless we are forgiving of our brothers and sisters.
  - This is to be our heart, just as it is God's heart.
  - This is what Matt. 6:14-15 means.
3. The believer here shows that he has not deeply realized or appreciated the grace of God, the forgiveness that is the basis of his whole Christian life.
  - The way we handle the hurts and stings of life will show how deeply and truly our hearts have been grabbed by the gracious forgiveness showered on us by our God in Jesus Christ.
  - It is the cross of Jesus Christ that is the measure of this costly and huge forgiveness.
  - "Christians ought to be the most forgiving people on earth, because they have been forgiven as no one else has." (John MacArthur)

Conclusion:

1. The point of the parable is the gross inconsistency of receiving an immense forgiveness from God and failing to be merciful and pardoning towards others, whose offences against us do not compare with our failures before God.
2. Are we a tank or a fountain, when it comes to forgiving others?
3. There is a blessing from the merciful God for the merciful servant: Mt. 5:7

*Main Idea: Those who receive God's pardon and mercy in Christ must show the same forgiving heart towards others.*