

# Stories Jesus Told

## The Unforgiving Servant

Matthew 18:23

January 23, 2021

### The Context:

Peter asked Jesus a question: *"How many times do I have to forgive the person who sins against me... 7 times?"*

Peter's question was not intended to get Jesus' opinion so much as it was to toot his own horn of grace and mercy --- Toot! Toot!

You see, the Rabbis limited the act of forgiveness to 3 offenses – Peter thought he was being exceptional by extending forgiveness to 7 times --- the number of perfection.

Jesus responded, *"Actually, Peter, 70 x 7"* {Bummer for you, Peter}. Then to illustrate His point, Jesus told a story.

### The Parable {Matthew 18:3-35}:

**Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants.** <sup>24</sup> As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him. <sup>25</sup> Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt. <sup>26</sup> "The servant fell on his knees before him. 'Be patient with me,' he begged, 'and I will pay back everything.' <sup>27</sup> The servant's master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go. <sup>28</sup> "But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii. He grabbed him and began to choke him. 'Pay back what you owe me!' he demanded. <sup>29</sup> "His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay you back.' <sup>30</sup> "But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. <sup>31</sup> When the other servants saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed and went and told their master everything that had happened. <sup>32</sup> "Then the master called the servant in. 'You wicked servant,' he said, 'I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. <sup>33</sup> Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?' <sup>34</sup> In anger his master turned him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed. <sup>35</sup> "This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart.

Stan = owes the KING 10,000 talents x 75 lbs./talent = 750,000 lbs ---- As of 01.05.2021 GOLD was \$1953.50/oz. = \$31,256/lb. = **\$23 Billion, 442 Million!** He will NEVER be able to pay this back!!

- In keeping with the custom of the day, the king ordered Stan and everything connected to him to be sold in order to pay off the debt. Terrified, Stan begs the king for some time, promising to repay the debt in full. In a startling turn of events, the king forgives the debt completely and Stan is free to go.

Pete = owes STAN 100 denarii = **approximately \$16.00**

- Fresh from his experience with the king, Stan runs into Pete on the street, grabs him by the throat and demands the debt be repaid. Pete begs Stan to give him some time and he would repay the debt in full... Hmmm, sounds familiar. However, Stan refuses to forgive Pete's debt and has Pete thrown immediately into prison.

The incident is reported to the king. Stan is called on the carpet for his lack of compassion and mercy and thrown in jail --- things do not end well for Stan.

### The Lessons:

And we say, **AMEN!** Justice was served!

Stan got exactly what he deserved!

But then these words of Jesus haunt me: *"Should you not have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?"*

Uh, oh!! The unmerciful servant is **ME!!!**

We --- you and me, all humanity, are “Stan”. This is a **VERTICAL DEBT**. We owe God a debt we cannot pay. Just as **\$23,442,000,000.00** is a mind-blowing figure, so is the magnitude of our debt to God and that’s the point --- **IT’S AN INSURMOUNTABLE DEBT**.

When confronted with the truth, “Stan” is terrified because the consequences for not paying this debt are high:

- **Romans 6:23** - For the wages of sin is death....

The debt is unpayable and unless the King chooses to forgive the debt, “Stan” = we, you and me – are in trouble.

Still trying to manage on his own, “Stan” promises, that given time, he can repay the debt himself.

- **Genesis 3:7** - Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; **so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.** {their attempt to “take care of” the debt themselves}

Well, the King, knows that “Stan” has no ability to pay, so instead, the King chooses to forgive the debt by transferring it to Himself in the Person of Jesus.

- **Genesis 3:15** - And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; **he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.**

How would you like to get a credit card statement one month that shows a **23 ½ BILLION DOLLAR** balance and the next month receive a letter that says, **PAID IN FULL?** Well, that is, in essence, what Jesus did.... He “took on = assumed” our unpayable debt on the cross.

- **Isaiah 53:6** - We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.
- **2 Corinthians 5:21** - God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

**WHEW!!! Praise God and Thank you!!!**

“Stan” however, has a medical condition called “**Debt Amnesia**”. He easily forgets the debt he owes God = a debt that cost the life of Jesus. As a matter of fact, most days it never crosses his mind at all and he might even begin to think that he never had a debt in the first place.

When reminded of the debt and the cost of removing all traces of it, “Stan” might be a bit ambivalent ---- **I mean what person in his right mind takes on a debt he doesn’t owe** --- but he is not awed or moved by this debt forgiveness as evidenced by what he does next....

Now “Pete” .... he represents you and me, all humanity too, but this is a **HORIZONTAL DEBT**. These are the “**debts**” we owe each other – the things we do to each other every day that need forgiveness = **\$16.00**.

“Stan” not only refuses to forgive the insignificant **\$16.00** debt “Pete” owes him, he goes out of his way “**to make Pete pay**” and by doing so, reveals that he sees no value in the **23 ½ BILLION DOLLAR debt** forgiveness he has just received.

**It. Doesn’t. Matter. To. Him!!**

That is what Jesus was telling Peter. By withholding forgiveness or by putting a limit on forgiveness --- after all, 7 times seems reasonable --- we are in fact stating that the debt we owe God and the forgiveness that has been extended to us is irrelevant.

We are literally throwing God’s forgiveness back in His face, “**no thanks, I’m good, don’t need it, don’t want it.... I’ll get by on my own.**”

There is **NOTHING** a fellow human can do to you that comes close to what you have done to God by your rebellion.

I know it doesn’t feel that way when your husband has an affair or a drunk driver kills your family, but it’s true.

Now, you may be prepared to argue that you’d consider forgiveness, if the offender would just fess-up, come clean, crawl on his hands and knees into your presence and **BEG** to be forgiven. You might be willing to get off your high horse – maybe....

Let me direct you to the following verse:

- **Romans 5:8** - But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Before we knew we needed to be saved. Before we decided we wanted to be saved. While we were **STILL THE ENEMIES OF GOD**, we were extended forgiveness and “**here is the ground upon which we should exercise forgiveness toward our fellow sinners**” {EGW – COL 245}.

This is a difficult thing to hear because sometimes **IT IS SO HARD TO FORGIVE – NEVER MIND TO ENDLESSLY FORGIVE!!**

But as Christ followers we must again... and again... and again... and again.

Martin Luther King Jr - *"Forgiveness is not just an occasional act. It is a constant attitude."*

C.S. Lewis - *"To be a Christian means to forgive the inexcusable because God has forgiven the inexcusable in you."*