

The Unmerciful Slave (Matthew 18:23-35) Pleasant Plains 7-8-2018PM NICK ANGEL

- ***READ Matthew 18:23-35*** All throughout the ministry of Jesus and the accounts of such that are recorded in the Gospels, we find Jesus speaking to His closes disciples and the multitudes by way of parables. Sometimes Jesus spoke these parables in order to draw out higher levels of spiritual thought from the hearers, and other times Jesus is simply trying to help explain a spiritual truth through everyday illustrations. We've all probably heard this described along the lines of Jesus using earthly experiences to teach heavenly truths.
- I would suggest that this parable that we just read together from **Matthew 18:23-35** concerning the unmerciful slave would fall into the latter category of parables taught by Jesus. I don't think there can be much misunderstanding of what Jesus is trying to teach His disciples as He shares this parable with them. We could probably dive straight into the parable right now in our time together and come away with at least a very decent understanding of what Jesus wanted His disciples to understand. However, as good and dedicated Bible students we want to possess more than just a simplistic and basic understanding of God's Word, and we know that in order to do that we most often need to consider the context of the particular text that we might be studying. I'd like to suggest to you this evening that a fuller understanding of this particular parable can be obtained through a consideration of the context that is surrounding it.
- As we begin this evening, I'd like for us to consider the context of this parable because it certainly is key to having a deeper understanding of this particular parable that Jesus shares at this point and time with his disciples. Then following that we will look at three important lessons that we learn from this parable and how it they tie into the context we are about to consider together.

Context is key! (Matthew 18)

A. vv.1-5: Jesus stresses humility.

1. Following the transfiguration experience of **Matthew 17**, it shouldn't surprise us that the disciples find themselves in a bit of a squabble over who would be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. We know that just a couple chapters over we will find James and John's mother coming to Jesus and asking for a special seat for both of her sons beside Jesus when He comes into His kingdom (**Matthew 20:20**) It must be obvious to us that these men thought often of where they stood in the eyes of Jesus and the kingdom.
2. However, Jesus tries to redirect their attention away from thoughts of superiority and instead gives great effort to stress the need for humility within their thoughts and character. He does so by calling a child to Himself and stating the need for His disciples to become like little children in their spirit and character if they wanted to even be a part of the kingdom of heaven. These feelings of self importance and pride needed to be put far away from themselves.

B. vv.6-11: Jesus warns about causing a believer to stumble.

1. Jesus then shifts to focus on strong warnings against doing anything that might cause one of these little ones who believe in Him to stumble. Jesus takes this so seriously that He states that it would be better for the one causing the stumbling to have a millstone hung from his neck and he be thrown into the sea to sink to the bottom and drown. Serious stuff!
2. Yet, Jesus wouldn't ever want for things to get to that point, so He instead teaches that we should be well aware and on the lookout for those things that might lead to stumbling. He uses the illustrations of cutting off the hand or plucking out the eye that might lead to sin, but we understand that this could apply to any number of things in this life that could become stumbling blocks leading to our sin or the sin of others. Jesus's desire is for our righteousness!

C. vv.12-14: The Father wants all to be saved.

1. Unfortunately, Jesus recognizes that sin will find its way into the lives of God's people at times, and He moves on to talk about God's great desire for all people to be saved. He illustrates this with the picture of a shepherd who would leave the ninety-nine sheep who were safely where they ought to be in order to go and find the single lost sheep. Upon finding the lost sheep, Jesus says that the shepherd rejoices more over its newfound safety than over those whom were never lost and remained safe.
2. Jesus states that this is the same way that the Lord sees His people. He wants for all to be saved and for none to perish. He longs for His creation's salvation.

D. vv.15-20: Dealing with the sinner.

1. Sometimes we help to play a part in the salvation of others by seeking to restore them when they get off of that path of righteousness. These next few verses focus on how to handle a situation in which a disciple has been caught up in sin.
2. The first step is to go to that disciple privately to discuss the matter. Hopefully the disciple will acknowledge and repent, but if he or she does not then further disciples are to come in order to further establish the facts of the situation. Again...the hope is for repentance to follow, but if that is not the case again then the whole church is to be brought up to speed in order for all to motivate the guilty party to repent and turn back to God. This is never a fun situation, but we all know the absolute necessity of helping the sinner to see the error of his or her way so that they can make things right and return to God in faithful service.

E. vv.21,22: Peter asks how often one must forgive.

1. Peter then pipes up as he was prone to do and asks just how many times we ought to be willing to forgive the one who sins against us. As humans we all like to know things in clear bounds as far as numbers go, and surely Peter was hoping that Jesus would give him a number that he could keep in mind so that he wouldn't have to continually forgive the person who continually sinned against him.
2. However, while Jesus actually does give a number (490)...He isn't being literal with that number. Instead, He gives this specific number to demonstrate that there is no limitation to the number of times we should be willing to forgive those who come and ask forgiveness for things they have done against us.

F. vv.23-35: Jesus concludes with the parable.

1. Now...take all of these things that we have just discussed and keep them in mind because they are what lead Jesus into sharing the parable that we began by reading together.
2. Humility, stumbling, forgiveness, mercy, and grace are all strong components of this well known parable, and we are now going to finish our time together by considering three simple and yet powerful lessons from Jesus's parable of the unmerciful slave.

3 Lessons From The Parable Of The Unmerciful Slave

I. Our God is merciful and forgiving. (Matthew 18:23-27)

A. The lord had every right to sell the slave in order to collect his debt, but instead chose to have mercy and forgive him his great amount that he owed.

1. The very first thing that should stand out to us is the great mercy and forgiveness that the lord of this parable shows towards the slave that owed him much. It wasn't just that this lord forgave this slave of his debts, but it should stand out to us just how much this lord was willing to forgive! 10,000 talents was no pocket change, but it was an enormous amount of money. Different people render a talent as being worth different amounts. I read one person who said that this amount would equal about fifteen years worth of work. Another said that if these were talents of silver that it would amount to over \$16,000,000 in our money. It was a truly massive amount of money regardless of the conversion you choose to believe.

2. The slave had no way to pay this amount back which was why the lord was going to sell him and his entire family in order to make some amount of it back, but we see Jesus state that the slave threw himself on the ground and begged for patience from his master for he would give every effort to pay him everything that he owed.
 3. It is at this point that the lord is moved with compassion by the actions of this servant. We could imagine the thoughts going through this man's head thinking that he might be separated from his family, and how he'd do anything to keep that from happening. The lord certainly had love in his heart and had a drastic change in heart. Not only would he not sale the man and his family, but he would also fully forgive the debt the man had accrued.
- B. Likewise, our Lord is fully of patience, mercy, and forgiveness, and He wants all to be saved.**
1. We could go elsewhere to consider how patience, mercy, and forgiveness are such integral portions of God's character. Peter's words in **II Peter 3:9** certainly come to mind when we think of the patience of God. He certainly *"is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patience toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance."* He wants for all of His creation to be saved, and this leads to His patience in not destroying us in our sin even though we are all deserving of such punishment.
 2. Yet, we see God's patience, mercy, and forgiveness even within this chapter apart from the parable under consideration. Remember Jesus's words from **Matthew 18:12-14**? Jesus shares this illustration of the shepherd leaving the ninety-nine to seek the one lost sheep because He wants for us to understand just how much he cares about us individually. He truly does want all to be saved, even if it means taking time to go after that one troublesome sheep time after time.
 3. God's patience and long suffering towards men extends even to the worst of men. Just as this lord was willing to forgive the huge debt of this slave, so is God willing to forgive even the worst of sinners. Paul knew this was the case because he felt himself as being worst among sinners because of his actions in persecuting those who belonged to the Way.
(I Timothy 1:15,16) Paul was able to find the mercy of God because that's just how strong God's mercy is. It extends to even the worst of sinners, and we can find comfort in such a thing being true. It should also move us to always seek out the forgiveness of God no matter what our actions might have been in the past. His perfect love and mercy can forgive and wash away even our greatest mistakes because He is that great, powerful, merciful, and forgiving... and He expects us to be the same way towards our fellow man.

II. He expects for His people to reflect His willingness to be merciful and forgiving. (Matthew 18:28-33)

- A. This is seen most readily seen in the teachings that lead up to the parable, but it is also seen in the lord's response to the first slaves mistreatment of the slave who owed him.**
1. Notice in **v. 33** after the lord is made aware of the first slave's evil actions, "Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave, in the same way that I had mercy on you?" We will comment on the ramifications of this slave's actions in our last point, but let's focus firstly on the fact that the lord had an expectation that his mercy would be reciprocated towards his fellow man when they found themselves indebted to him.
 2. This expectation of the lord of the lord has actually already been spelled out to us in the teachings of Jesus found earlier in this chapter. When Jesus spoke of going to the disciple caught up in sin, He doesn't say that this was to be done so that we might be able to berate the sinner and shun him or her from the beginning. Instead, this was to be done for the purpose of producing repentance within their hearts. **(Matthew 18:15-17)** Furthermore, remember that Jesus demonstrated the type of forgiving hearts that disciples ought to possess by being ready to forgive those who sinned against them seventy times seven times! As disciples ourselves, we must recognize that Jesus expects this to be our mentality.

B. We must be patient, merciful, and forgiving towards others for a multitude of reasons.

1. If we are striving to be Christ-like in everything that we do then we must recognize that this was the way Jesus behaved towards those who did Him wrong. Surely there is no greater example of this than the words of Jesus as He hung on the cross just prior to His death. Not only did Jesus willingly forgive the robber who had just previously mocked Him by telling him that he would soon be with Jesus in paradise (**Luke 23:43**), but we also see Jesus showing that forgiving spirit towards all of those who were taking part in His murder as He said, *"Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing."* (**Luke 23:34**)
2. Additionally, we should be willing to forgive because we ourselves have been forgiven of so much by our God. We need to keep in mind that our sins against God are much worse than our sins against other men. We are all on the same level, and though we should treat others as being more important than ourselves the reality is that we are all of equal value. However, that is not the same when it comes to God for He is far superior to us. Our sins against Him are truly heinous because we have transgressed the One who created us and gave us life. Our sins against Him are a slap in His face, and yet He is willing to forgive us. Surely this demands that we be willing to forgive those who have sinned against us, and that our forgiveness be true and genuine.
3. We see that type of forgiveness in the lord towards his servant whom he forgave. He felt compassion within his heart, and he truly forgave this man fully of his debt. Our forgiveness towards others should be of the same kind, and it must be present if we want to encourage them to repent if we find ourselves in a situation such as is happening in **Matthew 18:15-17**. Our forgiveness should be genuine and heartfelt. We should not be a people who say we are sorry and then hold grudges...instead we are to be people who are ready to forgive for the thousandth time, and we are to truly hold no wrong against us because love demands that we do no such things. Love, *"does not take into account a wrong suffered"*, but it, *"bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things."* (**I Corinthians 13:5,7**) We must have this type of mentality because failure to do so on our part will only lead to our own ruin.

III. Our refusal to show mercy and forgiveness to others will move God to withdraw His mercy and forgiveness from us. (Matthew 18:28-35)

- A. The first slave's poor treatment of his fellow slave landed him in a worse place than where he had just escaped from.**
1. After being forgiven of the great debt that he owed to his master, we see the forgiven slave going and finding a fellow slave that owed him a measly hundred denarii which would amount to about a day's wages. Instead of showing the grace, mercy, and forgiveness that had just been shown to him, the original slave took his fellow slave by the neck and choked him while demanding that he be paid back.
 2. This second slave did much like the first and fell to the ground begging and pleading that he aggressor have mercy on Him as he sought to try to repay him what he owed. Unlike the lord who had patience, the aggressive slave threw his fellow slave in prison until he was able to repay everything that was owed. When those other slaves standing around saw what happened, they were very disturbed by the first slave's behavior and went to tell the master what had taken place.
 3. The lord demands that the first slave come to see him, and the lord begins to question the slave as to why he had not extended the same patience and mercy to his fellow slave that had been extended to him? Whatever the slave might have said was not enough to stem the anger of the master because he was furious with the first slave and handed him over to the torturers until he might have been able to repay...which we know was going to be a very long time. Jesus concludes with the bottom line lesson from the parable, we must be forgiving if we desire to be forgiven ourselves.

B. If we do not forgive others then we would be foolish to expect for God to forgive us.

1. We just finished mentioning that we should be forgiving and patient because God has been so patient towards us, and it works the opposite way, as well. If we are not willing to forgive others of their wrongs done to us, then we cannot expect for God to be willing to show us what we are unwilling to show others.
2. This really shouldn't be anything all that surprising to us because this is something that we have seen spoken of by Jesus before. All the way back during the sermon on the mount in **Matthew 6:9-13** we read of Jesus's model prayer and in this prayer He specifically mentions the need to be forgiving towards others. *"And forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors."* Just a couple verses later in **Matthew 6:14,15** Jesus expounds upon this by saying, *"For if you forgive others their transgressions, your heaven Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions."*
3. This should be something that makes much sense to us...yet why do we find ourselves not practicing it at times? Let me suggest that this might be because we see ourselves as something great who deserves more than to be wronged. This ties in with what we saw at the beginning of the chapter when Jesus focuses on humility and being child-like. If we are humble in our mindsets then we don't see ourselves as someone great who deserves that others be horrible punished when they have done us wrong. Instead, we will remember that we too are susceptible to sinning against others and we would want mercy upon us just as we should be willing to give mercy to them. Even more so, we should desire to be forgiven by our God in heaven through whole true forgiveness comes.

Even within a parable that might seem pretty cut and drive in regards to the lessons learned from it, those lessons are often lessons that we need to be ever mindful of because they are lessons that contain strong and deep spiritual meanings. The parable of the unmerciful slave is certainly one such parable as I hope that we have seen tonight. We might read and shake our heads at the behavior of the forgiven slave, but it very well could be that we ourselves have been found guilty of the same type of behavior. May our study this evening remind us of just how much we have been forgiven of, and may we be every mindful of the great need that we ourselves be a forgiving people.

PRAYER *Our great and loving Father in heaven...we approach Your throne being so grateful that You are a God of perfect patience, grace, and mercy because we certainly are a people who are in great need of these things from you. We acknowledge our shortcomings and failures, and we pray that You would strengthen us to learn from our mistakes so that we might live more righteous lives before You. We ask as well that You help us to be a forgiving people. Help us to be always mindful of the grace extended to us, and may we always be willing to extend it to others. In doing so, may Your name be glorified and praised. We thank You for all of Your blessings, especially that of Your Son who died for our sins. Bless us to show our appreciation for His sacrifice as we live righteous lives throughout this upcoming week. It is in His name that we pray...amen.*