



Preach **Matthew** sermon

(Year A Proper 19)

RELATED

Gen 50:15-21
Ps 103:(1-7) 8-13
Rom 14:1-12

CONTINUOUS

Ex 14:19-31
Ps 114 (or canticle)
Rom 14:1-12

Matthew 18:21-35 (NIV) The Parable of the Two Debtors

Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?"

Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.

Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him. 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.

The servant fell on his knees before him. 'Be patient with me,' he begged, 'and I will pay back everything.' The servant's master took pity on him, cancelled the debt and let him go.

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.

"His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay you back.'

"But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. When the other servants saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed and went and told their master everything that had happened.

"Then the master called the servant in. 'You wicked servant,' he said, 'I cancelled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?' In anger his master turned him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed.

"This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart."

In this passage Peter is looking to put a value on grace. Typical of Peter he wades in where others fear to tread, "How many times should I forgive my brother...up to seven times?" Peter likes things spelled out!

But Peter has grasped the fact that Jesus' teaching on God's grace goes way beyond the laws and intricacies of the Pharisees and Sadducees. They only taught that you had to forgive three times - so Peter doubles it and adds one extra - for good luck! I can imagine him being pretty pleased with himself as he realises that Jesus is talking about something far far bigger, more loving, more generous than the Law requires. Peter was looking for a rule of life, a rule extraordinarily generous but Jesus calls him to grace, and to the, even more generous, obligation of grace.

We are to forgive because of God's extraordinary grace in forgiving us more than we can count. The servant who owed a thousand talents would never be able to pay it back. Yet he was forgiven and the debt discarded. The servant he abused, who owed him 100 denarii's would have been able to repay him, given sufficient time, yet he was not only unwilling to be patient he wanted to be vengeful.

Grace enables us to try to live in the image of God, being generous, as he is generous, being loving, as he is loving, and being forgiving as he forgives us. The truth is that we can never surpass God's love, forgiveness or generosity but we need to be able to try to follow it!

It is far easier to be generous than it is to forgive the seemingly unforgivable, to love the person whose really difficult to like, and yet we kid ourselves that money and sharing of it matters far less than other aspects of our Christian life. In this



parable the theme of financial indebtedness is used

to illustrate the deeper and richer theme of forgiveness and grace. The Greek verb used; *aphienai* literally means to cancel a debt and comes to mean forgiveness. An understanding of the grace of forgiving taught in the parable lets us draw some conclusions about handling financial matters in the light of the kingdom life to which Jesus calls us.

Who do we identify with in this parable? Not many of us would wish to be identified with the servant owing an impossible debt to repay, who then refuses to extend the grace he has received to others. But the fact is that God has blessed us with the riches of both earth and heaven, God has forgiven us more than we can remember, and God gives us all we need and more, much more. God is a God of extravagant generosity; in creating this world he did not just go for function - need grain, vegetables and protein. He created thousands of flowers for beauty, different foods for variety and flavour, more stars than we can count or see with our bare eyes! God is a God of unlimited generosity in his provision for us, and this generosity extends to his forgiveness of our sins, and his love for us beyond measure. How can we refuse to respond generously to such abundance?

When people ask how much should I give to my church and want a calculation it's like Peter asking if 7 times is sufficient. You might as well stand under Niagara Falls and try and fill a teacup with water! Grace means we should want to be generous, even extravagant like God, God loves a cheerful giver - Paul says in his letter to the Corinthians. Why? Because to be wildly passionate, generous and extravagant in love is the greatest feeling in the world, and that's how God feels about us - he wants us to be more like him - so we can experience just how wonderful it is to love as he loves; to be generous as he is, to be passionate as he is! To share in the action of God is a wonderful privilege - to be caught up in his love and grace is a pearl beyond price!

So what should we do, how should we respond? Well it will to some extent depend on where you are starting from. If you are one of our church leaders you will have considered your response to God's generosity a number of times before; you may even like Peter have tried to put a price on generosity - seven times more? But Peter was called beyond calculated generosity into grace. To be true to grace we need to move beyond the question, "how much I should give back to God?" As we mature in giving we need to ask a deeper question: "does my giving really reflect who I am and what I have received from God?" In practical terms we need to begin ask, "What proportion of my income should I be giving to God?" If you have never considered proportionate giving it is time to move towards that act of grace, of trust, of faith and of generosity. If you have then it may be time to move beyond previous calculations in prayer and thanksgiving.

As a member of our church congregation you need to consider the real truth that sharing is the key to receiving blessing. The difference between the Dead Sea in the Holy Land and the Sea of Galilee is life. Galilee teems with life and rich fishing, but both seas are fed by the same source. The difference is that Galilee has an outlet, it does not hold onto its water. The Dead Sea does, it is a dead end and therefore dead. Failure to share means that we will ultimately lose what we ourselves have received as the Dead Sea does, as the forgiven servant did. This is no different from Jesus teaching in the Lord's Prayer that the forgiveness of our own sins is in some manner related to our willingness to forgive others. It is not a threat; Jesus is simply saying that this is how grace works. This is also true of our response to God's generosity. Please think and pray how about how much of God's generosity flows through you to others, through your church and your mission giving, in order that there may be life, in our church, in our world but also in you.





For those of you who have not thought about this before- not even considered your giving as related to your church, think about a parachute jump. Contrary to popular belief, it does not involve jumping - it just means letting go of the plane to experience something new and exciting - and terrifying! This parable asks us to let go of being in charge, of believing that we have all the answers and to find a new freedom and joy. It is not easy to let go but it is worth it. So too is learning to give, to let go of our money is not easy but the freedom and the joy that giving brings is worth the cost. Real giving is not a tip, it is not a token, and it is an act of worship, no less than our worship here today. It is also an act of faith, and trust in a great and generous God.

Seven times more, seventy times more - no that's not what you are being asked for. Just a generous loving response to a God whose generosity knows no bounds but who calls you to share in all he has created for your well-being and sheer joy. Remember the illustration of standing under Niagara Falls and trying and fill a teacup with water! Grace means we should want to be generous, even extravagant like God. Remember that God loves a cheerful giver - because to be wildly passionate, generous and extravagant in love is the greatest feeling in the world, and that's how God feels about us - he wants us to be more like him - so we can experience just how wonderful it is to love as he loves; to be generous as he is, to be passionate as he is! To share in the action of God is a wonderful privilege - to be caught up in his love and grace is a pearl beyond price! Join Him, be a fountain of grace and generosity.

Amen

