

Matt 18:21-35
“Whose Counting”

We are great at keeping score. Many say they practice forgiveness, and many will tell you that forgiveness has limits. That old saying, “fool me once shame on you, fool me twice shame on me”, is truly the way of the world. I may let you off one time, but not twice, and certainly not three times. No wonder cancel culture has taken over. No forgiveness, no mercy! You say the wrong thing or do the wrong thing, you offend me and/or my constituents and you are done. This is how many function. Thus, I am not surprised Peter asked the question he asked. It was a reasonable question considering the teaching of the day that no one should be forgiven more than 3 times. A teaching that the rabbis developed from Amos chapter 1. In retrospect, Peter’s offer of seven times was very generous given common practice. Certainly, to forgive a brother or sister who sinned against you seven times was to practice extreme forgiveness. In response to Peter’s question Jesus gives this parable. So today, I want to share three things about forgiveness we learn from Jesus’s response to Peter.

First, if you are counting you are missing the mark. No record keeping is allowed. **V22** “²²“No, not seven times,” Jesus replied, “but seventy times seven!” Now, if you are like me, you did the math. 490 times per individual. The point of Jesus’ response is not to do the math. It is not to count. The point is for the disciple of Jesus Christ forgiveness is to be without limits. The idea that I will forgive but not forget won’t do. We must forgive and forget. In forgetting we avoid allowing the past to

dictate our response in the present. Yes, the memory of a past offense of a brother or sister will remain but it will only influence us in ways that we allow it to. In our forgiveness of one another we must be like God.

Psalm 103:12 “He does not punish us for all our sins; he does not deal harshly with us, as we deserve.¹¹ For his unfailing love toward those who fear him is as great as the height of the heavens above the earth. ¹² He has removed our sins as far from us as the east is from the west. ¹³ The Lord is like a father to his children, tender and compassionate to those who fear him. ¹⁴ For he knows how weak we are; he remembers we are only dust.

Matt 5:43-48 ⁴³ “You have heard the law that says, ‘Love your neighbor’ and hate your enemy. ⁴⁴ But I say, love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you! ⁴⁵ In that way, you will be acting as true children of your Father in heaven. For he gives his sunlight to both the evil and the good, and he sends rain on the just and the unjust alike. ⁴⁶ If you love only those who love you, what reward is there for that? Even corrupt tax collectors do that much. ⁴⁷ If you are kind only to your friends, how are you different from anyone else? Even pagans do that. ⁴⁸ But you are to be perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect.

Eph 4:31-32 ³¹ Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of evil behavior. ³² Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you.”

Col 3:12-14 ¹² Since God chose you to be the holy people he loves, you must clothe yourselves with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. ¹³ Make allowance for each other’s faults, and forgive anyone who offends you.

Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others. ¹⁴ Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds us all together in perfect harmony.”

Church, if love is the defining characteristic of the faith community, and it is, forgiveness is its primary practice.

Second, forgiveness of others is the only reasonable and acceptable response to the forgiveness of God. V23-29

²³ “Therefore, the Kingdom of Heaven can be compared to a king who decided to bring his accounts up to date with servants who had borrowed money from him. ²⁴ In the process, one of his debtors was brought in who owed him millions of dollars. ²⁵ He couldn’t pay, so his master ordered that he be sold—along with his wife, his children, and everything he owned—to pay the debt. ²⁶ “But the man fell down before his master and begged him, ‘Please, be patient with me, and I will pay it all.’ ²⁷ Then his master was filled with pity for him, and he released him and forgave his debt. ²⁸ “But when the man left the king, he went to a fellow servant who owed him a few thousand dollars. He grabbed him by the throat and demanded instant payment. ²⁹ “His fellow servant fell down before him and begged for a little more time. ‘Be patient with me, and I will pay it,’ he pleaded. ³⁰ But his creditor wouldn’t wait. He had the man arrested and put in prison until the debt could be paid in full.”

Two important observations here. First, the size of the servant’s debt was such that he could not pay it and the judgement of the king was just. The application here is our sin debt was beyond our capacity to make right. As such, God would have been just to simply condemn us to eternal death. But like this king God

had pity on us. Through Christ he has forgiven us of our enormous sin debt.

Second observation, had this servant done the math he would have been just as merciful towards his fellow servant as the king had been towards him. In this case he should have counted! Sisters and brothers do not fail to remember how great of a sin debt God has forgiven you through faith in his Son, Jesus the Christ. And in remembering give that same forgiveness to others less you suffer this man's fate.

Luke 6:37-38 ³⁷Do not judge others, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn others, or it will all come back against you. Forgive others, and you will be forgiven. ³⁸Give, and you will receive. Your gift will return to you in full—pressed down, shaken together to make room for more, running over, and poured into your lap. The amount you give will determine the amount you get back.”

We should never expect to receive what we fail to give. Forgiveness of others is the only reasonable response to the forgiveness of God.

Finally, fail to practice forgiveness like this, risk facing God's wrath. V31-35 ³¹“When some of the other servants saw this, they were very upset. They went to the king and told him everything that had happened. ³²Then the king called in the man he had forgiven and said, ‘You evil servant! I forgave you that tremendous debt because you pleaded with me. ³³Shouldn't you have mercy on your fellow servant, just as I had mercy on you?’ ³⁴Then the angry king sent the man to prison to be tortured until he had paid his entire debt. ³⁵“That's what my

heavenly Father will do to you if you refuse to forgive your brothers and sisters from your heart.” Why was the king irate? So much so, that he took back what he had given, forgiveness. I believe it was the sheer hypocrisy of this servant. To be on the receiving end of such an enormous gesture and not do the same when presented the exact same situation was beyond the stomaching of the king. Now, let me ensure we are uncomfortable, if you are harboring unforgiveness towards someone and you profess to be among the forgiven of God I am warning you. Forgive and do so now or risk facing this man’s fate.

Matt 6:14-15 “¹⁴ For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, ¹⁵ but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.”

In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.