



Sept. 17, 2023 Mt. 18: 21-35 & Exodus 14:19-31

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Stone, Naomi. [Awakened](#)

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ENTERING THE SCENE:

Henri Nouwen teaches us that: Forgiving does not mean forgetting. When we forgive a person, the memory of the wound might stay with us for a long time, even throughout our lives. Sometimes we carry the memory in our bodies as a visible sign. But forgiveness changes the way we remember. It converts the curse into a blessing. When we forgive our parents for their divorce, our children for their lack of attention, our friends for their unfaithfulness in crisis, our doctors for their ill advice, we no longer have to experience ourselves as the victims of events we had no control over. Forgiveness allows us to claim our own power and not let these events destroy us; it enables them to become events that deepen the wisdom of our hearts. Forgiveness indeed heals memories.”
Have we ever experienced this form of freedom?

Mt. 18:21-35

21 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?**" 22 Jesus answered, "I tell you, not **seven times**, but **seventy-seven times**. 23 Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to **settle accounts** with his servants. 24 As he began the **settlement**, a man who owed him **ten thousand talents** was brought to him. 25 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**. 26 The servant **fell on his knees** before him. 'Be **patient** with me,' he **begged**, 'and I will **pay back** everything.' 27 The servant's master took **pity** on him, **canceled the debt** and let him go. 28 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 **demand**ed. 29 His fellow servant **fell to his knees** and **begged** him, 'Be **patient** with me, and I will **pay you back**.' 30 But he **refused**. Instead, he went off and had the man **thrown into prison** until he could **pay the debt**. 31 When the other servants saw what had happened, they were greatly **distressed** and went and told their master everything that had happened. 32 Then the master called the servant in. 'You **wicked** servant,' he said, 'I **canceled all that debt** of yours because you **begged** me to. 33 Shouldn't you have had **mercy** on your fellow servant just as I had on you?' 34 In **anger** his master turned him over to the **jailers** to be **tortured**, until he should **pay back** all he owed. 35 This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you **forgive** your brother **from your heart**."

DISCUSSION QUESTION: Do you find it easier to forgive than to accept forgiveness? If so, why?

PRAYER: Lord, somehow it seems easier to forgive than to accept being forgiven. I suspect that is because I often find it easier to give than to receive as well. Being forgiven and gracefully accepting a gift seems to put me in the inferior position and I would much rather be on top at all times. Help me to truly recognize that only you are on "top" and that even my next breath is a gift from you. Help me to receive your forgiveness, and your gifts, with grace so I might be grace filled for others. Amen.

WORD STUDY AND QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:

HOW MANY TIMES / UP TO 7 TIMES / 7 TIMES 70 TIMES: The Rabbi's taught that 3-4 times were sufficient to forgive so Peter must have felt that he was going way above and beyond with his seven times. Jesus stretches Peter to beyond his limits with the 70 times 7.

Does your faith stretch you above and beyond your forgiveness limits often? Does knowing that you are the recipient of unlimited forgiveness comfort you?

FORGIVE: Forgiveness is probably the most prominent characteristic of Jesus' God.

What claim does this make on us?

SETTLE ACCOUNTS / SETTLEMENT: We often think of our death as the time that we must “settle accounts” with God.
Does this make God a bookkeeper?

10,000 TALENTS: This fantastic sum is equivalent to over eleven times the income of Herod’s kingdom.
Why do you think Jesus set up this story with such an outrageous number?

100 DENARII: This sum would come to about a hundred day’s wages.
How does this small sum help you to understand the point Jesus was making?

NOT ABLE TO PAY / REPAY / PAY BACK: All these words indicate a debt that was due.
Is there a connection with the word debt and all unforgiven acts?

WIFE / CHILDREN / ALL THAT HE HAD: A debtor and his family could be sold into slavery in order to repay his debts.
Is this system still in place today? If so, where?

SOLD / DEBT: Our debtor faced the equivalent of life in prison for his debt, so those who wanted his freedom would be required to sell anything they had to redeem his life.
Have you ever had to give up everything to rescue someone in need? Has anyone ‘rescued’ you?

FELL ON HIS KNEES: Both debtors fell on their knees in this story. One received unlimited forgiveness, the other harsh ‘justice’.
Have you ever been either of these debtors? If so, what happened?

PATIENT: To be patient is to bear a suffering or delay. Both servants pleaded for patience.
Why did one receive it and the other did not?

BEGGED: To beg involves an acknowledgement of a need.
Do you think Peter learned what Jesus was teaching in this story? If so, can you give an example that might prove that he did?

PITY / MERCY: Pity often evokes a response of mercy.
Has your pity ever called forth mercy from you? Why?

CANCELLED: The plea by the servant touched the heart of the master so deeply that he wrote off the debt.
What point is Jesus making here?

GRABBED / CHOKE / ANGER: The plea of the second servant did not touch the heart of the first servant, showing that the great debtor had not learned from his experience. The master’s anger was now needed if the first man had any chance to “get it”.
Have you ever had to be harsh with someone because they couldn’t seem to learn any other way? If so, how did it feel?

DEMANDED / REFUSED: Both words indicate hardness of heart.
Do these words give you a clue to the point of this story?

DISTRESSED: Those witnessing the transaction between the two servants were upset when they saw what was happening.
What do you think caused their distress? What do you think enabled them to take corrective action? Have you ever been in such a position? If so, what did you do?

TRHOWN INTO PRISON / TORTURED / JAILERS: A lack of freedom can be the worst form of punishment known to humanity.
What kept the first servant from being free enough to forgive as he had been forgiven?

WICKED: To be wicked is to be morally bad in principle or practice.
What made our first servant wicked?

FROM YOUR HEART: The heart was seen as the center of the person.
Have you ever had to forgive someone from “your heart”?

PARALLEL TEXTS: Mt. 18:21 // Mt. 6:12; Lk. 17:4; Mt. 18:23 // Mt. 25:19; Sir. 28:4;
Mt. 18:33 // 1 Jn. 4:11; Mt. 18:35 // Mt. 6:12; James 2:13;

OTHER TEXTS OF THE WEEK: Sir. 27: 30- 28:7; [Ps. 103: 1-4, 9-12](#); Rom. 14: 7-9; Mt. 18:21-35;
Revised Common Lectionary: Ex. 14: 19-31; [Ps. 114](#); Rom. 14: 1-12; Mt. 18: 21-35;

SUPPORTIVE INFORMATION:

Pat Marrin, the editor of Celebration puts it this way: "From stumbling block to cornerstone, Simon Peter had lived the Gospel he would announce to others. This was why Jesus had appointed him leader. They would see in his face the same look of love Jesus had shown him and know that he was telling the truth. "Don't be afraid. God's love has pursued you even in your sin, found you and given you new life."

Forgiveness means tapping into a wellspring of compassion that encompasses the hurt and sucks the venom out, so that we can go forward making a positive contribution without hatred. Elizabeth Johnson

I believe with all my heart that the Gospel is all about the mystery of forgiveness. When you "get" forgiveness, you get it. We use the phrase "falling in love." I think forgiveness is almost the same thing. It's a mystery we fall into: the mystery is God. Richard Rohr

The disruption of the expectations of revenge finds precedent and endorsement among the sayings passages, at 5:38-43 and 18: 21-22. The first of these, the revision of the law of Talion, adapts the Q Source to Matthew's purpose. The teaching of Jesus reverses the expectation of retaliation invoked by the reference. The reversal in turn confirms the inhibition of expected revenge exhibited in Matthew's plot. Significantly, this text belongs to a family of scenarios that preview the possibilities of negotiation and non-retaliation.

The second moment, 18: 21-22 is that of Peter's question concerning forgiveness, with Jesus' reply. The injunction to unconditional forgiveness is assigned an outlandish number – seventy times seven –echoing Lamech's boast song of seventy-sevenfold revenge in Gen. 4:24. As the modern political theorist, Hannah Arendt, has proposed, forgiveness is the single initiative that satisfactorily serves to conclude the chain of violent, reciprocal recriminations that result from revenge. Given the cycle of violence, forgiveness can claim to be the opposite of revenge.

However, the obligations of revenge grip the abused party with the necessity and force of the demands of justice. The story formula demonstrates this, as we recognize from our experience with any of its variations. In its neglect of sanctions for harm done forgiveness seems to reflect a shocking disregard for the requirements of justice. Here we see that Matthew, guarding against any tendency to disvalue justice because of the sayings on forgiveness, has employed the language of warning and vindication. But conversely, against the suggestion that an ethic of forgiveness enjoy only provisional status until vengeance can be worked, or the implication of a divided standard that would posit a vengeful God demanding a nonviolent Christian disciple, Matthew has placed linking sayings that connect divine virtue to the non-retaliatory love of enemies (5: 48) and forgiveness (6: 12 14-15). In parabolic commentary on these sayings, the story of the Unforgiving Servant (18: 23-35), Matthew fails to resolve the paradox of the God of both justice and forgiveness. Indeed, He heightens the tension, as an unconditionally forgiving God forgives disciples on the condition their forgiveness be unconditional. The parable breaks upon the point it makes.

Beck, Robert R. The Banished Prince: Nonviolent Resolution of Conflict in the Doubled Plot of Matthew. Pages 15-16.

To Matt. 18:21-22 (Luke 17:3-4) cf. [Gospel according to the Hebrews](#) (in Jerome, *Against Pelagius*, III.2)-He says, "If your brother has sinned by a word, and repented, receive him seven times a day." Simon, his disciple, said to him, "Seven times a day?" The Lord answered, "Yes, I tell you, as much as seventy times seven times! For in the prophets, also, after they were anointed by the Holy Spirit, a word of sin was found. A marginal note on 18:22 - The Jewish gospel has, immediately after *seventy times seven*: "For in the prophets also, after they were anointed by the Holy Spirit, a word of sin was found in them."

FORGIVENESS IS LOVE'S FIRST NAME

When God decided to create the world, God foresaw all the sin that human beings would commit. The only way God could continue was to decide to forgive the world before creating it. Strange as it may seem, the commitment to forgive comes before the creation. Old Jewish story

"Forgiveness is the fragrance the violet sheds on the heel that crushes it." Mark Twain

"A Christian will find it cheaper to pardon than to resent. Forgiveness saves the expense of anger, the cost of hatred, and the waste of spirits." Hannah More

"Humanity is never so beautiful as when praying for forgiveness or else forgiving another." Jean Paul Richter

On our inbreath, we should concentrate on receiving life from God. That inbreath is life sustaining. On our outbreath we should give everything we have back to the universe. Our outbreath may be the last we ever take, and, at the end of our life, we want to make sure we have given everything we have back to the world. Jewish Meditation.

But forgiveness is not an emotion... Forgiveness is an act of will, and the will can function regardless of the temperature of the heart. - Corrie Ten Boom



This story is peculiar to Matthew; and often when Matthew resorts to his own material he stresses God's inexorable judgment. Matthew has lived through the Jewish war. It is possible that he was in Jerusalem when the Romans stormed and destroyed the city in a murderous battle. He knew something about the wrath of God and the inescapable judgment of history. He can help us to face the bloody throes of modern world wars and revolutions.

Kunkel, Fritz. Creation Continues. Waco, TX. Word books, Pub. 1973. Pg. 203.

SIRACH 27:30-28:9 [180 BCE] 3rd CE= Ecclesiasticus [The Church Book] Precursor of rabbinical schools of Pharisees & Sadducees

Wrath and anger are hateful things, yet the sinner hugs them tight. The vengeful will suffer the Lord's vengeance, for he remembers their sins in detail. Forgive your neighbor's injustice; then when you pray, your own sins will be forgiven. Should a man nourish anger against his fellows and expect healing from the Lord? Should a man refuse mercy to his fellows, yet seek pardon for his own sins? If

he who is but flesh cherishes wrath, who will forgive his sins? Remember your last days, set enmity aside; remember death and decay, and cease from sin! Think of the commandments, hate not your neighbor; remember the Most High's covenant, and overlook ignorance.

In a provocative article "Peter: How a Flawed Disciple Became Jesus' Successor on Earth," Pheme Perkins we find: "A young man left his fishing along with his brother; one or more years later, he finds himself called back to the task by the risen Jesus; a Jerusalem ministry followed by a sudden departure and finally the martyr's death. Jesus repeatedly called upon Peter to follow him. Peter will spend almost all his adult life "fishing for people" in the name of Jesus, whose teaching captured his heart when he was young. But he never forgot those lessons from the boat." Bible Review. Feb. 2004. Pages 12ff.

18.21–22: Forgiveness. 21: Church, see 16.18n. Seven times, rabbinic sources indicate that one is only required to seek forgiveness three times (e.g., b. Yoma 86b–87a). 22: Seventy-seven times, the same phrasing as Gen 4.24 (LXX).

18.23–35: Parable of the unforgiving servant. See Lk 7.41–43. This parable is found only in Matthew's Gospel. The "debt" in question probably has nothing to do with material wealth. Although Matthew references wealth several times throughout the Gospel, in the parable the talents refer to spiritual goods rather than physical ones. Hence, Matthew is linking debt to sin. This connection is already present in Aramaic-speaking Judaism, where the term "ob." could connote both "debt" and "sin." Other Matthean passages also address the theme of "debt." Most notably, the "Lord's Prayer" in 6.12 reads "forgive us our debts"; in Luke's version (11.4), the word "sin" appears in place of "debt." In the Torah and the rabbinic writings, debt is also linked to sinfulness (see m. Avot 3.17; Gen. Rab. 85.2; 92.9; etc.). 23: King, traditionally interpreted as God; the allegorical connection also appears in rabbinic sources (b. Ber. 33b; b. Hag. 16a; t. Ber. 6.18; t. B. Kamma 7.2; t. Sanh. 8.9; t. Sukk. 2.6). 24: Ten thousand talents, millions of dollars in today's currency (see Esth 3.9), probably representing sin (see 6.12n.). 25: Ordered him to be sold, biblical and Roman law allowed debt-slavery (Ex 22.2; 1 Sam 22.2; Isa 50.1; Am 2.6). 35: My heavenly Father will also do, harsh eschatological judgment.

Forgiving and being reconciled to our enemies or our loved ones are not about pretending that things are other than they are. It is not about patting one another on the back and turning a blind eye to the wrong. True reconciliation exposes the awfulness, the abuse, the hurt, the truth. It could even sometimes make things worse. It is a risky undertaking but in the end it is worthwhile, because in the end only an honest confrontation with reality can bring real healing. Superficial reconciliation can bring only superficial healing.

- Desmond Tutu

Accountability and healing from "another human being" was deemed so necessary in the history of Christianity that it became an official and designated role in the community, and even a "Sacrament." Someone had to be trained and prepared for the dumping, ventilating, releasing, and forgiving that humans always need. Someone had to be prepared to sit in the "mercy seat" (**Exodus 25:17-22**) and declare with authority that what God forgives, they dare not hold against themselves or one another. There often needs to be a human mirror to reflect the unseeable divine gaze, especially if our heads and body are bowed in shame. Richard Rohr

The most important step out of the karmic law is forgiveness. Eckhart Tolle

SUGGESTED READINGS:

Links to all the books mentioned in this guide are on The Ark web site: www.theark1.com

Aurelio, John R. Fables for God's People. Crossroad, NY. 1988: **The Sack**; Page 25.

Greeley, Andrew. When Life Hurts. Thomas More Press, Chicago. 1988. **Being Truly Sorry**: Pages 43f.

Hays, Edward. The Ethiopian Tattoo Shop. Easton, KS. Forest of Peace Books. . **Judgment Day**: Pages 157f.

<https://www.ncronline.org/news/spirituality/can-anyone-refuse-mercy-another-himself>