

The Parables of Jesus

Lesson 16

Parable of the Unmerciful Servant – Matthew 18:21-35

The Kingdom parables conclude with this story that accentuates God's forgiveness and abounding grace to those who love Him.

Setting for the Parable

Jesus spoke this parable in response to Peter's question, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?" Jesus responded with a parable that demands attention to the importance of displaying mercy, grace and forgiveness. God leads the way in showing us how to show mercy through forgiveness.

Telling of the Parable

One day one of the king's servants was brought before him. This servant owed a tremendous debt to the kingdom of this king. The servant, of course, couldn't pay the huge debt and would never be able to repay it. As was custom for their day, the king ordered that the servant, along with his wife and children be sold to satisfy the payment of this debt.

The servant threw himself down bowing before the king. He pleaded with him for more time in order to pay the debt. The king saw the passion within this servant to repay the debt and save his family from the pain of separation and slavery. The king showed pity and had great compassion on this servant. He gave this servant more than he requested...much more in fact. The servant requested more time but the king forgave the man's entire debt.

Immediately after leaving the king, the servant searched for a fellow servant who owed him a small amount of money. His fellow servant agreed to pay but he needed some time to save the money. The first servant grabbed him by his throat and demanded the money now. The second servant fell to his knees and pleaded for more time. The first servant didn't grant him the time and had him arrested and thrown in prison until he could repay the small debt. Their fellow servants rushed to the king as witnesses to this wicked, unjust act.

The king could not believe what had transpired and called for the first servant to return. The king was furious with the servant and said, "You wicked servant, I canceled 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?" The king then demanded that the servant be tortured and imprisoned until he repaid his debt.

Meaning of the Parable

The parables of Jesus always contain a bold message from Him and this one is particularly strong. We all have accumulated a huge amount of sin against God and there is no way any of us can repay Him our debt.

The parable of the unmerciful servant definitely gives us a graphic picture of the Lord's prayer from Matthew 6:12-15, "And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins."

The king here represents the true King of kings...Jesus. The servant who stands before him represents a person who receives forgiveness and salvation. The monetary debt symbolizes a person's sins against God. The second servant's debt symbolizes a sin against the first servant.

Of all the teachings of Jesus, this one is of utmost importance. Forgiveness of others is no small matter.

A heart willing to forgive others is a sure sign of true forgiveness. Bitterness that takes root inside a person's heart against past sins of others is a bad sign for a Christian. How do our hearts stand up to this incredible test?

Forgiveness is a difficult teaching. It's easy for preachers and teachers to say and teach but extremely difficult to put in to practice.

All we can do is try to put in perspective the amount of love, grace and mercy God has poured out on us and try to apply that to our dealings with others.

If we don't understand His complete and eternal forgiveness we will never be able to understand and apply the lesson of this particular parable.

Get This!

The parables are great for revealing the heart of Jesus and showing us those things which are important to Him. He loves us so much and He wants the best for everyone. Jesus knows the future and how wonderful it will be for those who are gifted with God's grace. His passion is the condition of people's souls and their eternal destination. God saves by His grace...not by our worthiness.

We need to do our best to understand His forgiveness and pour out the same to others. God has paid a great debt for us and we need to work on demonstrating love, mercy, grace and forgiveness to everyone we know.