

Sunday School Lesson for the Month of June, 2021

When Forgiveness Is Hard

Matthew 18:21-35

(Sunday, June 6, 2021)

If we were to search the New Testament for the person who seemed most human it would most likely be Simon Peter. “Simon bar Jonah,” as he was known when Christ called him to be one of his disciples, was known for experiencing and expressing great extremes in his emotions. He seemed to show his weakness more than the other disciples.

For example, this parable Jesus related in this month’s text was prompted by one of Peter’s emotional questions for Christ. I do not know the details behind the question, but it is likely that Peter’s problem was more serious than just a disagreement with one of the other disciples. It may be, when you take a look at the Sermon on the Mount, that Jesus’ piercing words about forgiving, loving and praying for one’s enemies was causing Peter some problems with his conscience.

You remember the Jewish Rabbi had laid down guidelines that said, to forgive a person three times was adequate enough, well Peter knew that Jesus’ teachings went beyond those guidelines. How far? Peter was not sure, so he decided to extend the requirements of the Rabbis and say that seven times would surely be enough. In asking the question, he thought that Jesus would commend him for his generosity in having such great patience toward his enemy. However, Peter was not prepared at all for Jesus’ response.

Jesus responded to Peter with a story. It was a challenge addressed to Peter as well as each one of us. It probes deeply into our hearts and conscience and makes us face the deep truth about this matter of forgiveness. I have discovered that one of the hardest things in Christian growth is learning how to forgive.

I. Forgiveness is Revealing

- A. Forgiveness is never easy. This is true because forgiveness means the forgiving person (the innocent party) fully acknowledges the wrongdoing of the offending one and lets the guilty one go free! Forgiveness means that one is able to live genuinely with a love that is able to go beyond the

problem and extends to the person involved. This mirrors God's forgiveness towards us.

(Sunday, June 13, 2021)

- B. Jesus set the story in the context of God's grace when He begins with the statement, "the Kingdom of Heaven is like." Listen, Jesus on purpose made the debt the servant owed the King a huge one (10,000 talents would amount to about \$12 Million in our money). The point Jesus was making, of course, is that our debt to God is totally and forever beyond the possibility of payment. When the King demanded that the man and his family be sold into slavery as payment on the debt, the man fell on his face and begged the King for patience. The King had compassion on the man and cancelled his debt.
- C. The King's forgiveness was based on the man's attitude, not his ability to pay the debt. The King freed this man of his debt by paying it himself, which he did when he crossed it off the books. The King forfeited \$12 Million Dollars – money that was due him. Jesus describes the magnitude of God's forgiveness toward us in this. He wanted to impress on Peter that when we stand before God, there is no way we can pay our sin debt. Therefore, God's forgiveness reveals not only his immeasurable grace, but our total hopelessness without it.

(Sunday, June 20, 2021)

II. Forgiveness is demanding!

- A. The next scene in this story focuses on the human nature of man in contrast to the nature of God. The servant who had been so marvelously forgiven left the King's presence and went out into the streets where he was no longer in the overwhelming atmosphere of the King's grace and forgiveness. He was forced to rub shoulders with ordinary people. To reckon with his own kind. We see then how quickly he forgot about mercy when he easily remembered a grudge, he had against someone else. This man changed when he left the King's presence. He wasn't the same man at all. He met a man who owed him 100 denarii (about \$20 dollars) which was 500,000 times less than what he owed the King! In spite of this, the servant demanded that his debtor repay the money. The

poor man begged for mercy and patience, promising that he would repay all of it. But the servant refused to show mercy and patience and forgiveness. He threw his debtor into prison until he could pay the debt.

B. But what happens when we have difficulty forgiving those who have hurt or wronged us? When we refuse to forgive someone or when we limit our forgiveness, we are exercising a power play to keep that offending person in our debt. We may enjoy this feeling of being able to keep this person under a dark cloud of guilt, but in doing so, we are exposing ourselves to a deadly spiritual radiation that attacks peace, joy and contentment. It will eventually turn one into a critical, negative person who manifests everything but a Christian spirit. It can even have physiological repercussions and make us physically or emotionally ill.

(Sunday, June 27, 2021)

C. What does it mean when we do forgive and set free someone who has wronged us? True forgiveness is experienced only in relationship and is known only in reconciliation. When God forgives us, His forgiveness brings about an amazing and wonderful relationship. We are reconciled to God, and we begin to enjoy a fellowship with Him that the world can never know nor take away. Consequently, when true forgiveness is experienced, reconciliation is brought about.

The bottom line of this story Jesus tells is that God expects us to manifest the same spirit of forgiveness towards others that He has shown toward us. The genuine forgiveness that we extend to those who offend us is in reality, God's forgiveness extended through us. Forgiveness is hard, yes, but there's a bountiful harvest produced in the life of one who practices it.

To forgive is divine!