

The Gospel Rule

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 03 August 2025

Preacher: Jeremy Martinson

[0 : 00] You may have a seat, and please take out your Bible. And you can just hold that in your lap for a moment, and I will ask you to turn to turn to you.

You can hear it the way that the first hearers would have heard it. So you listen. Today, I have the privilege of reading. I'm going to read, and then we'll see what you hear at the end of the parable, all right?

Then Peter came up and said to him, Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him?

As many as seven times? Jesus said to him, I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times.

Therefore, the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. When he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents.

[1 : 30] And since he could not pay, his master ordered him to be sold with his wife and children and all that he had and payment to be made. So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.

And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt. But when that same servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii.

And seizing him, he began to choke him, saying, Pay what you owe. So his fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him, Have patience with me, and I will pay you.

He refused and went and put him in prison until he should pay the debt. When his fellow servants saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed.

And they went and reported to their master all that had taken place. Then his master summoned him and said to him, You wicked servant. I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me and should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant as I had mercy on you?

[2 : 56] And in anger, his master delivered him to the jailers until he should pay all his debt.

So also, my heavenly Father will do to every one of you if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.

What did you hear? What sticks in your mind? You can say it out loud. Yeah.

So good. So good. The two who plead for mercy use nearly identical language. What else? A big debt.

Very good. One more. What else did you hear? Yeah. There's mistakes.

[4 : 08] There's debts that need to be paid and the king wants people to pay up their debts. Yeah.

Very good. Very good. Okay. Why don't you open your Bible to Matthew chapter 18.

Matthew chapter 18. And you can find verse number 21. That's where we're going to start today.

Matthew 18, verse number 21.

And it will be my privilege to pray for us as we begin. Father, thank you for your word. Thank you for the blessing that it is to us.

Thank you for the clarity that it offers our thinking. Thank you for the correction that it brings to our assumptions. Thank you for these true words from Jesus.

This lovely story to make us think. Would you please help us as we spend time now in your word?

We want to hear what you want to say to us.

[5 : 07] So would you please clear out of my mind anything that would be unhelpful or distracting or disorienting? Would you please, blessed Holy Spirit, please come and fill our hearts and illumine your word and help us to understand the things that we see here.

And as we see them clearly, would you also help us to believe and to obey? We ask this for our glory, for your glory and for our good.

In Jesus' name, Amen. How many times should I forgive? Peter's question is not unreasonable. Perhaps this is a question that you also have asked, although maybe you have not asked it out loud, like Peter did. This question assumes that forgiveness is like a punch card. And if you sin against me, I reach into my pocket and I take out my forgiveness punch card and I punch it one time for you and then I slide that back into my pocket so that I can keep track of it for next time.

[6 : 29] Punch card forgiveness is a way that we protect ourselves. It's a way to make sure no one takes advantage of us.

It's how we try to keep relationships fair, even. Jesus does not answer Peter's question with a number.

Wouldn't that have been handy? Instead, he answers with a parable. And here's the fascinating thing about this parable. The math here just doesn't math.

The numbers are so extreme that they're laughable and the debt is clearly unpayable and the mercy that we see displayed is unreasonable and the response to that mercy is unacceptable. Are you ready? If you've been around the church a little while then you may recognize that Matthew chapter 18 is the address for Jesus' teaching on how we deal with interpersonal conflict.

[7 : 49] I hadn't thought about it until this week that this question and this parable comes right after that teaching that Jesus gave about how do we deal with a brother or sister who sins against us.

That's the context for Peter asking this question. It's in verse number 21. Peter came up and said to him, Lord, how often will my brother sin against me and I forgive him as many as seven times? I love Peter. He seems eager to apply Jesus' teaching in verses 15 through 20. He's ready. He wants to apply what Jesus has taught the disciples.

He understands that human nature being what it is forgiveness will be necessary and that forgiveness often requires repetition.

And Peter is ready to forgive seven times more than double what was culturally acceptable. I remember watching my parents playing a game of Monopoly with their friends and they used a pair of words that I was unfamiliar with.

[9 : 17] When a property trade was proposed, sometimes one of the players would say something like this, I want free rent to boot.

Now, English is unpredictable and the word to boot has nothing to do with footwear. To boot originates from an old English word.

It means an advantage or help or a compensation and over time it came to mean in addition to or as a bonus. So, for example, you might say, I will trade you Park Place for your light blue set of properties but I want Marvin Gardens to boot or maybe to make it more practical so you can use this this afternoon.

I will do your chore of sweeping the floor but I want you to play a game with me afterwards and I want a piece of gum to boot.

The Jewish rabbi said that you should forgive three times and the fourth time you did not have to forgive.

[10 : 42] Peter doubles what the Jewish rabbis were teaching at the time and then adds one to boot. I think Peter expects that Jesus will commend him for his graciousness.

Verse 22 Jesus said to him I do not say to you seven times but seventy seven times.

Now your Bible may say seventy seven it may say seventy times seven there's ancient manuscript evidence for both of these whether it's seventy seven or four hundred ninety the number does not change the point.

What is Jesus saying? Well what he is not saying is Peter your punch card that you take out of your pocket it just needs a few more numbers on it.

He is not saying your punch card needs more numbers. Jesus is saying no Peter you need to burn that punch card.

[11 : 53] This is not the way that forgiveness works. And to help Peter and to help us think rightly about forgiveness.

Jesus tells this parable. Verse 23. Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants.

When he began to settle one was brought to him who owed him 10,000 talents. What is a talent?

Well in our culture a talent is like playing the piano or juggling maybe wiggling your ears. Do you want to see it? Pretty good, huh?

That's how we think of a talent. That is not what Jesus has in mind here. A talent is a unit of measurement. It's a unit of weight.

[13:02] It's like pounds for us. So one way of thinking about this talent is by doing some basic math. 10,000 talents becomes approximately 200 metric tons.

A train car full of coal weighs perhaps 100 or so metric tons. This is a very heavy debt.

A talent can also be understood in terms of wages. One talent is approximately 6,000 denarii and a denarii is or a denarius if it's singular is how much you would make for working for one day.

You go to work for a day, you get one denarius as your wage. So again, if we do some basic math here, in order to pay off this debt, this servant would need to work for 164,000 years.

Is he going to live that long? No, of course not. The number that Jesus chose is laughable. He is intentionally exaggerating to make a point.

[14:35] To use it the way we would have heard this, it would be like if Jesus said he owed a gazillion dollars. Well, how much? It doesn't matter.

The biggest number you can think of, bigger than that. so big that it's utterly unpayable and everybody listening knows it.

Verse 25, and since he could not pay, fantastic understatement, Matthew, thank you, since he could not pay, his master ordered him to be sold with his wife and children and all that he had and payment to be made.

So the servant fell on his knees imploring him, have patience with me and I will pay you everything. And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt.

The servant has good intentions. He wants to pay back everything that he owes. And so he asks for more time.

[16:03] But everyone who is listening to this parable understands this debt is unpayable. And that's why the king's response disrupts our expectations.

He does not sell him as a laborer or put his family into prison out of pity, also translated compassion. The king forgives this debt.

This is inconceivable, unreasonable mercy. mercy. It's so beautiful that as you are listening to Jesus tell this parable and you're taking this in, I wonder if the people standing around listening to him are like, so good.

What a display of mercy. I love this story. And then they realize that Jesus is still talking.

verse 28. But when that same servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii.

[17:36] And seizing him, he began to choke him, saying, pay what you owe. And now, we expect that the mercy that he has just received would be a life changing moment for him.

But instead, he finds a fellow servant who owed him a hundred denarii. Now, if you remember, this is how much? A hundred days of work.

It's not an insignificant debt, but it is also very payable, isn't it? You could pay off this debt. Now, remember, he was just forgiven the equivalent of 164,000 years of work.

But instead of paying it forward, as we might say, he seizes the person who owes him, begins to choke him, and demands pay up.

in light of the king's mercy, this response is shocking.

[19:01] Verse 29, so his fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him, have patience with me and I will pay you.

He refused and went and put him in prison until he should pay the debt.

Notice, as Chloe pointed out, how similar the debtor's words are to the servant's desperate plea to the king. We want him to hear his own words coming back into his ears and we want him to wake up like the prodigal son sitting in the pig pen licking his chops at the thought of eating some of the pig's food.

We want this servant to wake up. What am I doing? Why would I treat someone this way after I have been so abundantly forgiven?

But unlike the king, the servant's heart is not moved with compassion. And those who observe his behavior know that this is unacceptable.

[20 : 34] And they reported to the king. Verse 31. When his fellow servants saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed.

And they went and reported to their master all that had taken place. Then his master summoned him and said to him, you wicked servant.

I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant as I had mercy on you?

And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers until he should pay all his debt.

So also my heavenly father will do to every one of you if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.

[21 : 56] With these closing words Jesus corrects three false assumptions. Here's the first one.

Everyone will be saved. This is the lie of universalism. The idea that in the end God will forgive everyone no matter what.

Look again what the king says. He calls the servant wicked and then he hands him over to the jailers until he can repay his debt. A debt that everybody listening knows is unpayable.

Jesus' first correction everyone will not be saved. Second assumption God doesn't get angry.

Now imagine if the king hears what his despicable servant does choking a fellow servant for failure to pay a significantly smaller debt.

[23 : 22] Imagine if the king hears about this and responds with indifference. Imagine if he just shrugs his shoulders and says, oh well, so what?

I guess I don't really care that much.! What would you think of this king? You would rightly say, that's not right.

That's not just. That's not good. You can't tolerate that. it would be unjust to ignore such cold-hearted cruelty.

Jesus' second correction, God does get angry and his anger is righteous. Third assumption that Jesus corrects, warnings about judgment don't apply to those who profess faith.

The first verse of Matthew chapter 18 makes it clear Jesus is speaking to his disciples and from the immediate context verse 21 we know he is talking specifically to Peter responding to Peter's specific question.

[24 : 57] So when Jesus says in verse 35 so also my heavenly father will do to every one of you my followers!

Jesus if you do not forgive your brother from your heart. He is not talking to the crowds in general. He's not addressing the scribes and the Pharisees and so on like Mike taught us last week. He's speaking to those who are his followers.

Jesus' third correction confession. Don't assume that a profession of faith protects you from this warning.

It does not. Just like the debt was unpayable and just like the mercy was unreasonable and just like the servant's response to being forgiven was unacceptable so the warning that Jesus gives is unavoidable.

[26 : 23] Those who receive forgiveness must forgive others and to refuse to do so is not just wrong.

It's dangerous. Why? Because those who refuse to forgive prove that they have not truly received forgiveness.

This raises a crucial question then for every follower of Jesus. How? How should forgiven people forgive? I suspect that we are all familiar with the golden rule.

Kids, do you know the rule I'm talking about? The golden rule? Who wants to tell me? No golden rule followers? The golden rule says that, you know Elam?

Yeah. I think you said treat others the way that you want to be treated. Is that right? That's right.

That is the golden rule. And it comes to us from a portion of Jesus' teaching called the Sermon on the Mount.

[27 : 40] Here's Matthew chapter 7 and verse 12. So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them for this is the law and the prophets.

prophets. The golden rule is a good rule. It teaches empathy. It encourages kindness.

It cautions against thoughtlessness. But notice what Jesus says here in verse number 12. It summarizes what?

The law and the prophets. It's a guiding principle for relationships under the law.

But in this parable, spoken to citizens of a heavenly kingdom, Jesus calls us to something better. Not the golden rule.

[28 : 47] but the gospel rule. Don't forgive merely because you want others to forgive you. Forgive because God has already forgiven you.

Let me ask you, can you repair the relationship with God that your sin shatters day after day after day?

Can you repair that relationship with God? Can you undo every unkind action, every impure thought, every selfish motive, every bad attitude?

Can you undo all of those? forgiveness? Is there anything you could do right now? If you forget all this stuff in the past, is there anything you could do right now to make God turn towards you with forgiveness?

Earn it, deserve it. If God would just be patient with you, can you repay God for every debt, for every wrong that you've done?

[30 : 24] Your sins and my sins, they are uncountable. Your debt was unpayable and the cup of God's righteous anger towards sin was undrinkable but God's love is unmistakable.

He sent his only son, the Lord Jesus Christ and at the cross God made him who knew no sin, him, Jesus, to be sin for us.

Jesus drank the cup of God's wrath that you could not drink.

He paid the debt that you could never pay and through the death and resurrection of Jesus, God, who was previously unapproachable, now welcomes you into his presence and even better, into his family.

His grace for you, child of God, is unshakable. Not even your worst day can make him let go of you. Why?

[31 : 49] Because his mercy is unfathomable. You will never reach the bottom of it. if you have not received God's forgiveness, then I urge you to repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Do it right now. Do it before you leave this worship gathering. Don't wait. That decision will be eternally unregrettable.

Follower of Jesus. God calls you to forgive like him without keeping score. This is forgiveness that forgets how many times it's been given.

Forgiveness that responds to each offense as though it's the very first time. Forgiveness that you might say is unpunch cardible.

By human standards, this forgiveness is unreasonable and apart from the gospel, it is unexplainable. But when you truly experience this type of forgiveness, it is unforgettable.

[33 : 18] it changes your life. Parables are stories that Jesus told to make people think.

They challenge our assumptions, they shake up our expectations, they press us to consider what we believe about God and his kingdom and his call on our lives.

Let's live not just by the golden rule but by the gospel rule. Forgive as God has forgiven you.

Let anyone who has ears to hear hear. Let's pray. good father, we are grateful for your grace.

We're grateful for your greatness, your goodness, your grandeur, and your glory. Thank you Lord Jesus for offering to Peter and your disciples this parable.

[34 : 49] Thank you for the way it makes us think. Help us as we contemplate what we have heard.

Help us as we reflect, not just right now but as we leave this place and as we go about our normal business and enter into the busy work week and enter back into relationships where we know that we have been hurt and offended and someone comes to us again and it feels like the millionth time and we want to take out that punch card.

Would you please help us to remember the unacceptable response of this servant forgiveness and would you cause us to recall your unforgettable forgiveness to us so that we respond by forgiving those who sin against us.

Holy Spirit would you please grant life and faith to someone this morning who is searching and wondering as your word promises if they will call on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ they will be saved.

Grant life and faith so that sinners respond by repenting and believing this gospel. We know that this would be for your glory glory and for their eternal good.

We ask that you would continue to be with us as we continue in our time of worship. May you be honored by all the things that are said and done. Thank you in the name of the Lord Jesus.

[36 : 44] Amen.