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# Gospel Forgiveness

## Matthew 18:21-35

*Dan Turner*

**Introduction** This morning I want you to meet Dick and Jane (factitious characters that represent common experiences)

1. Dick and Jane

- a. At home – a disagreement grown into displeasure grown into...  
*Jane felt not cherished. The date night was planned weeks in advance. The baby sitter had already come. And yet, her husband Dick was still at the office. 20 minutes late Dick walks through the door looking fatigued. Jane makes a gesture and comment with little to cover her digging sarcasm. Dick retorts the same with a dose of self-justification. They leave on their “intimate” date with little to share. Days later the tension remains. Dick says, “Hey, about the other night – sorry”. Jane with no eye contact says, “Oh, don’t worry about it”. Sin had crept into their marriage and created a barrier between them. What is the solution to such a division?*
- b. At church – a small offence followed by steady resentment followed by...  
*Dick and Jane loved their new church. Friendly, caring, good teaching; it was all found here. Soon they were asked to help in the nursery. This went well. Next they were asked to teach 4-5 yr olds. This went fairly well also. As the months rolled on people began to assume upon them their responsibilities. Anyone who could not fulfill a scheduled event, Dick and Jane were asked to fill in. Faithfully plodding along, this couple began to see how no one asked them over to their home, few if any said, “thank you” for their spontaneous services, little came to them except when someone needed help. Anger, resentment, self-righteousness grew to dominate their thinking. Coming to church now was a legalistic striving with thoughts only on their personal hurts. What is the solution to such an anger?*
- c. In crisis – harsh discovery followed by harsh words followed by...  
*Dick and Jane had been married for 18 years; with relative happiness. They seemed to share all things in common. And then it happened. Jane used Dick’s user name to log in on their home computer. She stared at the seemingly endless Instant Messages from a woman craving her husband. The 6 month affair was revealed and Jane’s heart was crushed. Moving madly between “I want you dead” to “What have I done to cause this” she struggled with hatred and guilt. When Dick’s remorse over sin was expressed Jane’s revenge over betrayal was felt. What is the solution to such a rift?*

From ordinary to serious, these made-up stories have something in common. It is the world in which all of us live. It is the experience of sinning and being sinned against. It presents a need to practice forgiveness. It is closer to each of us than we would like to admit. And it is the topic for today's message.

Please open your Bibles to Matthew 18 as we continue our series titled *Of First Importance*.

### **Where we have been & are going**

#### **Recap**

As we begin our third week in our study on the uniqueness of the gospel and its transforming power we come to a topic of utmost need. Today, we look at *Gospel Forgiveness*.

June 1<sup>st</sup> we started the series with a look at *Gospel Repentance*. The expression of God's acceptance and the recognition of his love turn us from our sin and turn us to our Savior. This lifestyle of *Gospel Repentance* introduced us to last week's message called *Gospel Worship*. When we sense much forgiveness in Christ we began to show much love for Christ. Public expressions of adoration for the Savior can be anticipated as we know the fullness and finality of Christ-centered forgiveness.

This leads us naturally to the message this morning. As we will notice, Christians are the most forgiven people on earth. And as a result, we are *to be* the most forgiving people on earth. To witness an increase in desire to give forgiving grace to those who wrong us we need to listen with our hearts to Matthew 18.

#### **Matthew 18**

Chapter 18 is bracketed by an occasion. In v.1-2 Jesus begins to instruct his disciples. Then in Chapter 19:1 we read, "Now when Jesus had finished these sayings...". These literary markers tell us that chapter 18 holds together as one unit.

#### ***Life in the Kingdom***

Perhaps we could say that the topic of this chapter is *Life in the Kingdom*. I say this due to the fact that in v.1 the disciples ask him about greatness IN THE KINGDOM. Jesus then goes on to talk about relationships and concern over sin in the kingdom. This clues us to the topic Jesus addresses; namely LIFE in the Kingdom – living within Christ's domain (kingdom) while living under Christ's reign (authority).

Today's message can be viewed as two messages. The first message I will preach is in outline form. I will not have the time to unpack this message. My aim here is to simply scroll down through Chapter 18 using bullet points to communicate the content and flow of the chapter. This will take us around 5-7 minutes. You can use this outline to guide you through the chapter looking for implications and applications for your life and ministry.

But the focus I want us to take this morning will not be on the entire chapter. Rather we will land on the last point from the chapter and highlight *Gospel Forgiveness*.

Let's get started by first reading Matthew 18:1-20. Then we will take a few minutes to outline the entire chapter. Next, we will read and ponder the last part of this chapter and the final point of our outline. Lastly, we will bring out some principles from this point at the conclusion of the message.

<read 18:1-20> As you paid attention to the first 20 verses read aloud, you may have sensed some basic things regarding Kingdom Living.

### ***It is relational***

First: There are family terms Jesus uses throughout his instruction; terms like little ones, children, brothers and Father. This is covenant language and relates to how we are to treat one another as believers in Jesus Christ.

### ***It is serious***

Second: Did you sense the tone of the chapter? There is a seriousness with Jesus' instructions as seen in how he uses the phrase "truly I say to you" (2x), the use of the term "Woe" which means judgment (2x) and how he talks about punishment: "to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea", "thrown into the eternal fire" (2x), "perish", "Let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector". "in anger his master delivered him to the tortures", "my heavenly Father will do to every one of you if...". These phrases shape the tone of the chapter.

### ***It is personal***

Lastly, another basic observation needs to be pointed out that may yield for us great personal application in the end. As I read the passage did you hear the repeat use of the word "one"? For example, in v.2 he uses "a" child to illustrate something important to his instructions. Then six times he uses the word "one" (cf. v.5,6,7,10,12,14). The single concern over "one" person in the Kingdom stands out clearly and perhaps has personal application for each of us this morning.

To take the message of the passage to heart we will be outlining the chapter and then underlining a point from the chapter.

## **Outlining the Chapter**

**18:1-35**

Let's begin the teaching of this chapter by first outlining the chapter.

What this chapter is talking about seems to be "Kingdom living". Characteristics of kingdom living are unpacked for us as we pay attention to the flow of the chapter. To summarize the chapter we can say:

*KINGDOM LIVING requires humility that expresses itself in spiritual care for one another with ongoing forgiveness of each other.*

Breaking down this summary sentence we can see what kingdom living requires.

- Humility (1-4)
  - Childlikeness

- I am lowly (simple, ordinary = not needing to be viewed as “the greatest”)
- I am loved (trusting, unquestioning, resting = needing and enjoying its father)
- In spiritual care for one another with ongoing forgiveness of each other (5-32)
  - What it is
    - Receiving believers in need (5)
  - What it entails
    - Not causing believers in need to sin (6-7)
    - Being savagely serious over personal/relational sin (8-9)
    - Demonstrating extraordinary efforts to help bring back straying believers (10-20)
    - Pursuing radical, ongoing and non-optional forgiveness of each other (21-35)
      - The point: The most forgiven people are to be the most forgiving people
      - The probe: People who do not forgive freely are people who do not know what it means to be fully forgiven. And those who do not forgive freely are those who are not forgiven. They will undergo everlasting torment.

## Underlining a Point

**v.21-35**

With this as an outline of the chapter let's focus the remainder of our time upon v.21-35 and what life in the kingdom requires. Picking up Jesus' instructions over life in the Kingdom, follow along with me as I read v.21-35.

<read v.21-35>

All of the above teaching of Jesus prompted Peter to come to Jesus and ask a question over forgiveness. “Lord, how often will my brother sin against me and I forgive him? As many as seven times?” Alluding to Genesis 4:24, Jesus response is mind-blowing. He uses Lamech's revenge as a measure for his disciples' forgiveness. In effect he says, “my people will respond to sin profoundly different than the world does. The hallmark of a follower of Jesus is ongoing forgiveness for others.

Now to illustrate both the necessity and means of this type of forgiveness, Jesus tells a story; The Parable of the Unforgiving Servant. The story is as plain as it is painful. To recap the story in sentence we see that:

*The most forgiven people are **to be** the most forgiving people.*

### The most forgiven people

**v.21-27**

The first part of the summary sentence can be seen in v.21-27; *The most forgiven people.*

The king in the story wishes to settle the accounts with his servants. One of his servants owes him 10,000 talents. A talent was a monetary unit worth about twenty years' wages for a laborer. Think about the size of this debt. If my math is correct this debt would equate to 200,000 years wages. Imagine having such a

debt over your head. How would you feel? What would you say? Where would you go?

Since the debt could never be repaid, the servant cries out for mercy. And the gracious king grants the mind-boggling forgiveness. He cancels out his debt fully and finally (cf. Col.2:14).

Here we see a Christian's status. The amount of our debt to the Lord due our sin is unpayable. It is impossible to work off the debt of sin in order to satisfy the King. No amount of good deeds will wipe out this debt. No amounts of Bible reading and Flock attendance and tithing will even dent the debt owed to our King as a result of our God-belittling, Christ-neglecting, hell-deserving sin.

Left to ourselves we are hopeless (cf. Eph.2:1-3). But acknowledging the reality of the debt due our sin, humbly crying out for mercy to our King and receiving the forgiveness found completely in Christ's death on the cross, we hear the Apostle Paul say, "*And you who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross (Col.2:13f)* Oh the forgiveness; full and free, we find in Jesus Christ!

Listen to Milton Vincent as he reflects upon the riches of the gospel<sup>1</sup>. "The deeper I go into the gospel, the more I comprehend and confess aloud the depth of my sinfulness. A gruesome death like the one that Christ endured for me would only be required for one who is exceedingly sinful and unable to appease a holy God. Such an awareness of my sinfulness does not drag me down, but actually serves to lift me up by magnifying my appreciation of God's *forgiving grace in my life*. And the more I appreciate the magnitude of *God's forgiveness of my sins*, the more I love Him and delight to show Him love through heart-felt expressions of worship".

This "depth of my sinfulness" and the inability to "appease a holy God" is illustrated in our parable as being the 200,000 years wages of debt found in v.24.

What kind of people are we to be whose unpayable debts are forgiven fully and freely in Christ? What tendency should we have toward someone who hurt us?

### **Are to be the most forgiving people** **v.28-35**

The second part of the summary sentence can be seen in v.28-35; *Are to be the most forgiving people*.

The point of this parable starts to become clear as we notice the contrast in v.28. "But when the same servant (the one whose unreachable debt was forgiven) went out he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii".

The parable continues as the forgiven servant finds someone who owes him 100 denarii. This currency equates to approximately a days wage of labor. This

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<sup>1</sup> Milton Vincent, "A Gospel Primer for Christians", *Focus Publishing*, p.33,

means that this servant owes his master around 1/3 of a years' wages. As we follow the story we can notice that he does not have the wherewithal to repay him immediately. The response from the "forgiven" master is striking.

He seizes him and begins to choke him saying "pay what you owe"! The fellow servant falls down and pleads with him for patience and mercy. The master will have no part of this. Instead, he orders this servant to be thrown into prison until he can repay the master.

This double standard of desiring to be forgiven but refusing to forgive came to the King's ear. In anger, the king summons this wicked servant into his presence and pronounces judgment. He was to be delivered to the torturers until his 200,000 years wages was worked off. Imagine being roommates with torturers for the rest of your life.

In verse 35, we come to Jesus' conclusion to his parable. "so also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart".

What are we to take away from this sobering passage?

- Gospel forgiveness
  - Is taught by Jesus Christ
    - Pointing out its authority
  - Is found in the kingdom
    - Locating it in the local church with its resources
  - Comes from truly being forgiven
    - Recognizing the implications to the parable
  - Can be stirred up through biblical warnings
    - A brief instruction on how warnings function
  - Is non-optional, ongoing & seriously enforced
    - Being aware of its weightiness and extent
  - Is called upon today
    - A call to obedience prompted by faith in the gospel

## Conclusion



**Title**

**Text**

**Speaker**

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## **Introduction**

## **Heading**

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## **Conclusion**