

THE COST OF COMPASSION IN CONTEXT MATT 18:21-35
FOURTEENTH SUN. AFTER PENTECOST SEPT 14, 2014

²¹ 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?" ²² Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven.

²³ "Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. ²⁴ When he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. ²⁵ 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. ²⁶ So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.' ²⁷ And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt. ²⁸ 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.' ²⁹ So his fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you.' ³⁰ He refused and went and put him in prison until he should pay the debt. 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. ³² Then his master summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. ³³ And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?' ³⁴ And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers, until he should pay all his debt. ³⁵ So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart."

Text invites us to think about the comparative value of things.

Recently talk about raising minimum wage has cause me to compare it to what wages used to be.

I remember my first hourly wage job I was paid \$1 per hour.

but let's look at that in context. I was 14 years old.

gas was \$.36/gallon, 1st class stamp was \$.06

median household income was \$8,700

So, how much is 10,000 talents in text? Depends on context.

Talent is worth 6,000 denarii, which is one day's wages.

So if one day's wages were \$100, servant owes \$60 million

and his fellow servant owes him \$10 thousand.

I have heard Jesus talked about money more than any other topic

These verse are probably counted in that statistic.

But, of course, this text is not about money at all but forgiveness,

It is about what one owes, deserves and needs.

And what looks right to us as we think about these things

depends on the context.

A SERVANT SEES REPAYMENT AS REASONABLE
PETER SEES OUR FORGIVENESS AS GENEROUS
ALL NEED TO SEE THE GREATNESS OF GOD'S GRACE

A SERVANT SEES REPAYMENT AS REASONABLE

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Bible doesn't tell us what kind of servant this man was.

I wonder if an accountant. He could have been tax collector,
responsible for collecting money from others
and passing it on to the king

That might account for how he owed King so much.

To him it could seem normal to go around demanding payment.

He had just come very close to being thrown in prison
for not making his payment to the king.

What is he going to do? Make sure it doesn't happen again!

This other servant owes him about three month's wages
and to him it seems reasonable to expect payment.

Like this man's fellow servants, we may sometime see others
doing things that seem terrible or even inexcusable.

We may see them on u tube video snippets

People may even do bad things to us.

But from their point of view the behavior may seem reasonable

because they see in in a context we don't see:

maybe what that other person did to them first,

or abuse they experienced earlier in life,

or pain or the pressure they were experiencing.

That is not to say that any of these things is an excuse

But the point is that we ourselves do bad things

and things that look bad to others

and are very good at excusing our behavior to ourselves

in view of the context that we see it in.

So we are very good at excusing our feelings or behavior
but not very good at accepting the faults of others.
It is when we ourselves are bankrupt, morally or literally,
we may have most unreasonable expectations of others.
The context or our own spiritual and emotional needs
which grows out of our own faults and failures
including our failure to put ourselves in their shoes,
can make it very hard for us to be forgiving of others.
because in context in which we look at things,
both our faults & our lack of forgiveness look reasonable

So, it is no wonder

PETER SEES OUR FORGIVENESS AS GENEROUS

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brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?" ²²
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mercy on you? ³⁴ And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers,
until he should pay all his debt. ³⁵ So also my heavenly Father will do
to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.

Peter's question is in the context of verses right before this
which we heard in last Sunday's Gospel

"If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault,
just between the two of you. If he listens to you,
you have won your brother over. (Matt. 18:15)

Peter seems to realize: Oh, it is not like we might assume -
is up to one who sinned to make first move, come apologize.
I should go to him, seek to be reconciled & then forgive.

Peter's question is also in the context of traditional rabbi's rule
you should forgive particular sin 3 times. 3 strikes & out.

Peter doubles that and adds one to a symbolically divine 7.
In this context, Peter seems very generous.

Peter always seems eager to over achieve,
walking on water, pledging endless loyalty, pulling out sword,
but he keeps falling short, as he does here.

There are two ways to translate Greek words of Jesus' reply

One translation is 77 times. This one is 70 x 7: 490.

but either way it is hardly worth the effort of keeping count
and if we need to know which is right, we miss the point.

Reason we may miss point is focus on law, human thing to do
just as to err is human - and it is also very human to
have a hard time forgiving or asking for forgiveness.
In this parable, as often in life, the law produces no benefit.
Law said person could be sold as slave for debt, with family.
but even that could not come close to repaying the debt.
He could legally have his fellow servant thrown in jail
but then how could he earn money to pay his debt.
When we focus on keeping laws and rules we do the same
We hold on to grudges and mistakes of others
and may even hold their whole families responsible
even though it benefits nothing and even burdens us
with continued negative accounts and negative feelings.
Jesus says if you operate in context of law it is duty to forgive.
but if you want to go strictly by law you aren't forgiven either.
So what is the purpose of the law? Luther says of this parable:
We are like servant, don't care or think about debt of our sin
until we are confronted by the master.
Then we see our need for mercy
so that we see the value of God's forgiveness.

ALL NEED TO SEE THE GREATNESS OF GOD'S GRACE

²³ "Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king
who wished to settle accounts with his servants. ²⁴ When he began to
settle, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. ²⁵
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. ²⁶ So
the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, 'Have patience with me,
and I will pay you everything.' ²⁷ And out of pity for him, the master of
that servant released him and forgave him the debt.

Jesus' listeners may have laughed because they knew context.
King Herod's yearly tax revenue was maybe 2,000 talents.
What kind of king lets servant 10,000 talents behind?
In this context, the king's behavior looks reasonable.
He might as well just forgive because no way can he repay.
But contrast this with what servant asks for: patience, more time.
In more time he would probably just get deeper in debt.
This is what debt of sin is like. We owe God perfect obedience.
Even if we could start being perfect from today on,
we still wouldn't be repaying any of our past debt.

We are like someone upside down in mortgage.

What we owe is more than we are worth.

So God, like this king, looks at things from a different perspective'
which looks upside down to our way of thinking,

not in view of what we deserve but in view of what we need.

Instead of patience, God, king, gives greater: mercy, compassion.

Literally, the Greek word here means a gut wrenching feeling
that results in an outward action.

God's action is Jesus' taking our place in debtor's prison.

If you loan or invest \$100 and it is a bad investment,

what does it cost you? \$100. Forgiveness is costly.

Because of the debt of our sins, we owe our whole life.

The wages of sin is death.

What does it cost God to forgive us? It cost's death,

the death of Jesus Christ, our God and savior.

Now, in the context of what the king has done for him,

the servant's behavior is not reasonable but ridiculous

and Peter's question is not generous but jaded.

Only explanation for servant's behavior is he doesn't believe king.

Apparently doesn't see himself as blessed and forgiven.

He insists on doing things himself & keeping own accounts.

He still thinks of himself as desperately needy.

Or maybe he took forgiveness for granted as if King owed it.

as some assume government or God owes all we need.

This is the kind of thinking that keeps us from being forgiving,

lack of faith that we are generously forgiven.

He just received gift of \$60 million. How would you act?

Maybe squander it like most who win lottery.

I don't suggest you do this with money, but we can afford

to be delightedly extravagant with forgiveness.

In context of God's unlimited riches of grace changing our life,

our forgiveness of others is just loose change.

A SERVANT SEES REPAYMENT AS REASONABLE

In view/context of what we do & experience, we may question

whether we really need forgiveness and others deserve it.

PETER SEES OUR FORGIVENESS AS GENEROUS

In view of context of law we think of forgiveness as a duty

ALL NEED TO SEE GREATNESS OF GOD'S GRACE

in context of wonderful gift of gospel, God's forgiveness

for ourselves and others becomes joy & delight