

Mat 18: 21-35

The parable of the unforgiving servant...Forgiveness is a very powerful concept!

(Show the Balloon and prick it!)

As a child we have all broken something or other, and how our parents treated us afterwards probably had a great impact on how we see God in all of this...When something bad happens or we cause something to go wrong or to break we expect to be scolded and punished... we do our time... and then its over, or is it? Do we, or our parents continue to carry that which is broken? Do we continue to cling to that feeling of hurt, anger or resentment?

Think about those times when we were just let off the hook... and there is no punishment...just simply forgiven...how did that feel...GOOD...it's freeing!!!

When I was young my sister and I were having a pillow fight I ducked out of the way of her throw only to have the pillow score a direct hit on the end table lamp...I saw the lamp go over the light make a popping sound the lamp shade was all askew on the floor...then we held our breath and waited for the yelling to pour forth from my Mom's mouth in the next room...I was scared thinking about the consequences and time seems to stand still in those instances...My Mom in a relatively good mood, came around and said what did I tell you about pillow fights in here...she then calmly picked the lamp up, replaced the broken bulb, righted the shade and asked if we were hurt...she then said it's OK.

My sister and I exchanged glances and it was as if the weight of the world had been taken away from us! And for a 6-year-old, it had ...and I still remember that incident today!

We often feel this way after getting pulled over, a missed bill payment etc...time seems to stand still and we wait for it...when something goes wrong we wait for the retribution...we wait for the consequences...then maybe we see it isn't so bad or we are forgiven by the one we wronged and it's ALL Better...It's gone! We are free of the weight of it! We are forgiven...how many times in our lives have we been let off the hook...seven times...for me it's been more like seventy times seven!

When Peter gives his response to Jesus he thinks he is being oh so generous with forgiving a wrongdoer at seven times...I believe Jewish law was 4Xs, so Peter thought he was being very generous here...imagine having to forgive someone seven times...that really stretches what we think is humanly right...then Jesus, once again, blows Peter out of the water with 77 xs!

The parable he uses further expresses God's unlimited mercy and forgiveness for our wrong doings. When he says this slave owed 10,000 talents Jesus was using the biggest number they knew at the time, along with the largest monetary denomination...it'd be like me saying today a hundred thousand trillion...

10,000 talents exceeded King Herod's treasury 10x over. It equaled about \$10 million dollars today vs. the 100 denarii which was about 3 months wages for a Roman soldier, about \$20 dollars today. \$10M vs \$20bucks!

Jesus was exaggerating the wage differences to show the unlimited mercy of God and the pettiness of our own ways. He further goes on to say that in the end... God's limits will be those that we set for ourselves... God's limits will be those that we set for ourselves! WOW!

From this parable we can learn a few things:

Only the forgiven can forgive...just like you can't give love if you can't love yourself...

People who can't forgive wind up in their own chains.

See you can't out forgive God – Jesus is the gift that keeps on FORgiving!

In Greek, the verb to forgive is *aphiemi*, meaning to let go or to set free! Jesus came so that we would be set free of the weight of our own trespasses...our own shortcomings.

Alexander Pope said ...to err is human...but to forgive divine...

...And no one can EARN forgiveness... it is another free gift from God, like the story of the lamp and my sister, it was a free gift from our Mom... we certainly didn't earn it...it is part of God's Amazing grace to us. Thus we are EXPECTED and REQUIRED as Christians to reflect this same mercy and

compassion towards our fellow man...especially with the small things...like 20 bucks!

Now I don't think that God wants us to be pushovers, nor are we expected NOT to feel anger or hurt! And it may not let the other off the hook when it comes to abuse or violence...there's consequences! But I think what Jesus is asking US to do is to be in a state of openness and love, ready to forgive when it is appropriate to do so...be ready to love one another...and ourselves!

God's forgiveness is immeasurable but contingent upon us forgiving others...Does this sound familiar: forgive us our trespasses AS WE forgive those who trespass against us...I used to attend to an elderly woman who had trouble letting go of anything and she tape recorded every trespass ever against her in her life...she was a good Christian and I pointed out to her that as she prayed the Lord's prayer so often had she not noted this line... she looked at me and said Ohhhh I changed that part! ...I laughed and said are you praying the Lord's prayer or just "YOUR" prayer!

See unfortunately, many times the only person carrying the weight and the burden becomes her. She suffered needlessly for perceived transgressions against her...many, many, years ago...and no one remembered but her...for us many of those hurts may seem quite small, but when allowed to germinate and replayed over and over they can become quite big for that person...

Have you ever did something to hurt someone, maybe you didn't even realize that you did or said it, and then a month later you get into a fight with that person and they are overtly angry as they bring the weight of their world crashing down upon you...

You might not have even been aware that this person had been harboring this hurt and feeding it over a week or a month's time...and this persons feels quite justified in letting you have it! That is our pettiness...our 100 denarii... 20 bucks worth WITH LOTS AND LOTS of INTREST tacked on!

Have you ever noticed that carrying around feelings of hurt and resentment tends to grow bigger and then shows itself as self-righteousness...more importantly in God's eyes.... Carrying these feelings widens the gulf which separates us from the other person...We fracture and cause harm to the Body of Christ! ...Them and us...This was the crime of the unforgiving servant!

God wrote this principle into our very DNA. We not only damage our relationships with others, but scientists have shown that holding on to all this negativity causes a great deal of harm to our own bodies as well!

The body rebels against us holding onto such a state of unforgiveness...it's a lot of work to harbor resentment and it takes its toll on the body through stress...it's ironic that the two places that this is seen most prevalent is in our gut and in our hearts...LEVAV (the center of your being). It's a two-way street, by not forgiving we are bound by our own chains, thus causing suffering

and literally heartache to ourselves! It's like as Mark Twain said about revenge...it's like drinking poison and hoping the other person dies...you do more harm to yourself over time.

We must let go and set ourselves and the other free to once again become a healthy member of the whole...the body of Christ! But we know this is easier said than done. It is God's will that we should be in harmony with one another and made whole!

PAUSE!

Forgiveness is that miracle a child experiences when that which is broken is mended and made whole:

A toy.....A lamp.....A car.....A hurt in our world

A relationship with an estranged family member...friend... neighbor or with those we consider the "outsider...the other"!

HOLD UP THE BROKEN (broken item) BALLOON!

The broken once again made whole by an act of forgiveness. God mends what is broken by human sin...our shortcomings.

And Jesus freed us of these shackles by sacrificing himself on a cross! When we give our hearts to Christ, we let go and trust that all will be well in God's hands. Our sins are taken from us...we are now free and whole in God's love!

And now as Christians we are called to treat others in the same way!

When we forgive ...all that remains is freedom and love...Whole and new!

LET THE BALLOON RISE

Dear Lord, Forgive us our trespasses...AS WE forgive those who trespass against us! Free us of our burdens O Lord, and give us the strength... and the courage to free others...

and in doing so we will come to find that we have freed ourselves in return.

Your faithful servant,

carmen