

## Grace Knows No Bounds

Wayne Waibel – 09/13/20

When we read passages like this from scripture, it leaves us more than a little disturbed. Really? God will send us to a torturer unless we forgive our brother his debts. It comes straight from the mouth of our Lord. Why would He say it if it wasn't so? The key to resolution with this particular passage lies in the question that launched it.

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Coming on the heels of last week's lesson outlining the method of conflict resolution within the church, Peter asks an absolutely absurd question. "How many times shall I forgive my brother?" And then has the audacity to offer an equally absurd limitation – seven times. So, Jesus fires back with an equally absurd parable to drive this point home. There is no limit on forgiveness, just as grace knows no bounds.

What is often overlooked in our understanding of forgiveness is that we, too, have been forgiven our debts. We tend to forget that in our pursuit of justice. I was praying with a fellow a while ago, and when we said the Lord's Prayer, he omitted the "forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors" portion.

When I asked him why, he initially claimed it was because he forgot the words. Years later he confessed it was because he had just been cheated by a contractor and was not about to let the guy off the hook with forgiveness. In his mind – that was weak and served only to reinforce the behavior.

Truth is – we were not put here to judge – we were put here to love one another. The inability to forgive carries a steep price in that it renders you incapable of loving your neighbor. And that is your primary mission in this life.

Which is why this parable is easily interpreted as absurd. In first century Palestine, one talent represents several years wages to a common laborer. To be indebted to the tune of ten thousand talents would be an impossible debt to repay. Further – to forgive that debt entirely would be ludicrous. The flip side is the servant's reaction to his fellow servant who owes him a mere pittance. When asked to extend the same forgiveness his reaction is to grab him by the throat and throw him into prison. What did he think was going to happen when his master found out?

The way Christ uses hyperbole to make his point is entirely effective. It is meant to shock. He could easily have responded to Peter's ridiculous question in admonishment, but He elected not to embarrass Peter. Instead he gave the clear message that there is no end to forgiveness.

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The forgiveness Jesus calls for is inseparable from truth telling and accountability within the church. Now more than ever is our time as recipients of a grace that knows no bounds, to reflect the power of forgiveness in both the larger and the smaller matters. The tiny little annoyances that come from personality quirks to the defiant outrages expressed through generations of grudges.

In dealing with the trials of this world you should always know how much you have already been forgiven. I believe it was Luther who said that faith in God naturally brings forth acts of love toward the neighbor. And that is manifesting more and more in the real world.

These days I'm relying on what transpires in my daily journeys as opposed to what nameless and faceless forces in the world tell me I should care about to inform my world view. Some really stunning realizations have taken place as a result. I see more and more people – especially families out for a stroll these days.

Whenever I lock eyes with someone in my out and abouts, I've begun to wave at them – and they all wave back – enthusiastically. And they smile. There is a wealth of goodness out there. It just needs to be acknowledged, and advanced.

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It's not a stretch to take today's scripture lesson on forgiveness and translate that into boundless grace. We are the willing and always undeserving recipients of both. That is God's plan. That's why we are here. The reason for which we were created. God loves us, we in turn love God and one another.

Jesus had his hands full with the crushing oppression of empire, the fate of humanity on his shoulders, and His missional ministry occupying every waking moment. And still he found time to teach, to understand, to forgive – again and again.

We might be inflexible and completely unmovable on an issue. God forgives and Jesus enlightens. We might commit all manner of wrongdoing. God forgives and the Holy Spirit illuminates a right path. God provides an abundance of grace and an endless array of forgiveness.

He took a whiney, disrespectful band of sinners and delivered them from the hands of an oppressive ruler, and in so doing made a great nation of the children of Israel. He has his purpose – we have our flaws – He insists on forgiving – we live an abundant life as a result of His grace.

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One of the truly remarkable things about seeing the fleck in another's eye while completely missing the log in our own is, when we finally do see ourselves in the mirror for who we are, it is accompanied with an abiding grace. The kind of grace that eradicates the failings and the transgressions through forgiveness. The two go hand in hand. They are in lockstep. That is by design.

The redeeming nature of our Lord beckons us to engage with one another fully, and absent malice. I know – it's hard to relent when it comes to grudges. When you witness an unfairness directed at someone you admire and respect – it feels proper to take umbrage. How can you not? But by denying the offender forgiveness, you are blocking both your path to peace and your God's desire to see you reach your full potential.

When Jesus talks about forgiveness, he is speaking of the tiny little trespasses as well. Those are the ones that can really stick in your craw and manifest at the most inopportune times; like as you're trying to dispatch an obligation, or simply say something nice. For some reason, the big sins are easier to forgive than the minor infractions. That's just the way of it. We must strive for that point beyond actions and opinions, when we continually see in every other child of God, a soul never beyond the reach of a transforming grace that knows no bounds. Amen.