

## MYTHBUSTING - MATTHEW 18:21

Looking at the half truths that hurt us and the distortions that derails us.

Jesus was in the business of mythbusting.

### MATTHEW 18:21-22

*Then Peter came to him and asked, "Lord, how often should I forgive someone<sup>1a</sup> who sins against me? Seven times?"*

*"No, not seven times," Jesus replied, "but seventy times seven!"*

Churchy mythology about forgiving from 2000 years ago?

Forgiving someone 3 times was enough. After the third time retribution was fair game.

**Amos** contained God's judgments of nations that went like this:

*Thus says the LORD; For three transgressions of Edom, and for four, I will not turn away its punishment...*

**Peter's suggestion of 7?** More than twice that! And he added one for good measure.

It wasn't one of Peter's foot in mouth moments. This was well thought out.

### Jesus - Not seven, but 70 times 7 times

The Greek is unclear and the translation of the # Jesus gives differs, some make it 77...

And I find it ironic, because what Jesus is making clear: *the number doesn't matter*

We are called to forgive without keeping count.

It's not quantitative, it's qualitative.

**It's a lifestyle.**

### MATTHEW 18:23-35 -

*The Kingdom of Heaven can be compared to ...* (God is the king. The king is God)

Context: many translations: **Talents and Denari.**

These are words that we don't grasp in our culture.

A denari was the equivalent of a day's wages. The math: the equivalent of **6 million work days.**

In terms of talents: about **600 million dollars** or into the billions.

Bottom line: it was A LOT, an insurmountable debt.

*"Please be patient with me and I will pay it all"* - this was impossible.

It was a debt he couldn't pay. Yet rather than scoff at him, the king forgives him.

Fast-forward and this forgiven man is confronted by the second man's debt owed to him.

Context: **4 months** of pay. We're talking thousands of dollars instead of millions or billions.

*"Be patient with me and I'll pay it."* Sound familiar?

But the man forgiven much more by the king--- unlike the king --- isn't having it.

The King catches wind of this and **reinstates the debt** of the man who had been forgiven.

Then he hands him over to the jailers to be tortured until he can pay the debt- i.e. eternity.

The Our Father:

*“Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.”*

And Jesus makes it crystal clear in verse 35 - *this is how my Heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart.*

**Forgiveness is not an option, it's a requirement.**

Jesus is saying a transformed heart will give the same mercy and forgiveness that it's received. If that fruit isn't present? That's a sign our heart still needs to be made new.

Forgiveness isn't extra credit. It's key. So we had better get it right.

And it doesn't look like **“forgive and forget”** and the mythology that gets built around this.

The king forgave the servant. But when the servant was a knucklehead and was brought back before the king for being unforgiving himself, what does the king do? He doesn't draw a blank. He knew all too well what had been forgiven, and he reapplied it.

Some of us may think – well then he wasn't very forgiving in the first place. Why?

Mythology that's been built around verses like: **Hebrews 8:12** (quoting Jeremiah 31:34)

***“I will forgive their wickedness, and I will never again remember their sins.”***

The mythology based on this verse goes something like this: If you were to confess the same sin twice all you'd get from God the second time is a confused, blank stare.

Here's the problem: The God we worship is **omniscient**.

He forgets nothing. He remembers everything.

Those stories in the Bible about things he forgave? From King David's transgressions to the Apostle Paul's murderous persecution? He isn't up in Heaven unaware of them.

We have to look at the word that is translated **“REMEMBER”**

If you read your Bible and the rest of its content you'll come across some wild passages...

Genesis – Noah and his family had been pent up in an ark being tossed to and fro by a catastrophic flood... and then **God “remembers” Noah.**

Exodus – The Israelites suffered slavery and genocide at the hands of the Egyptians in Exodus, and then it says **God “remembered” his covenant with the Israelites.**

Reading that should give us pause.

So... he told Noah to get in the Ark, a floating zoo as He flooded the Earth... and then promptly forgot about him? And he forgot about the Israelites while they suffered three centuries of slavery in Egypt? You can see how this could wreck your theology of God quick.

But the word translated “REMEMBER” in both the Hebrew and Greek speaks to the person's responding to something.

The Jewish scholar Nahum Sarna has said, *“In the Bible, ‘remembering,’ particularly on the part of God, is not the retention or recollection of a mental image, but a focusing upon the object of memory that results in action.”*

Biblical remembering is less about **head activity** and more about **hand activity**- a response. It's why in scripture when God remembers someone or something we see action on His part.

It's not saying that he forgot Noah's existence or his covenant with the Israelites any more than he erases sins from his memory. He just not longer responds to our sins in judgment.

This is why the idea of “forgive and forget” is a half truth that hurts. We aren't called to aspire to self induced amnesia. That doesn't result in spiritual maturity. It more often results in emotionally handicapped people who haven't truly walked in the fruit of forgiveness.

The harm: *“I'll never be able to forget what they did. So I guess I can't forgive them.”*

## **TRUST**

When we subscribe to forgive and forget, forgiveness is a free pass back into the circle of trust. *“...if I forgive that person I open myself up to be hurt again.”*

If we have to forget the wrong, then we think have to treat them like nothing happened. We have to provide a full and immediate restoration of the relationship- with all of the trust and privileges that includes.

But trust is earned over time. Forgiveness is walked out over time. It's as much a journey as it is a momentary decision. And it's a decision where the feelings often take a while to catch up.

**2 Timothy 4:14** - *Alexander the coppersmith did me much harm, but the Lord will judge him for what he has done. You too should beware of him...*

Paul had forgiven. But he hadn't forgotten.

He was telling Timothy, don't toss him your trust flippantly.

Yet his forgiveness was evident in the fact that he'd moved on. He trusted God to take care of it, so he didn't need to. He left justice in God's hands and didn't let Alexander live rent-free in his mind.

That takes trust in God. It also speaks to my third point:

## **CONSEQUENCES**

Some of us may raise our eyebrows that Paul would say these things about Alexander if he'd truly forgiven him. It's because we think forgive and forget means a *Frozen* brand of forgiveness where we “let it go”

This half truth can hurt us when we've repented of wrong but we think:

*“I repented, but I'm still suffering the consequences.”*

*Shouldn't God have removed all traces of my sin?"*

**Spiritually** God doesn't forget what we've done, but he cleans our slate.

**But in this life?** Our actions still cause brokenness and bear consequences.

In this life forgiveness means we get another chance.

What will you do with it?

David. Committed adultery, murder, lied, and more in one big ordeal with Bathsheba.

Despite his repentance, there were consequences. The death of their child as well as ongoing painful consequences that would play out in his family.

But he got a second chance. And he laid hold of it. He doesn't go down as David the adulterer and murderer. He goes down in scripture as a man after God's own heart, a man who fulfilled God's purposes for him in his generation.

< **Drew Elliott's testimony** >

I would tell you tonight:

**Forgiving may not mean forgetting, but forgiveness is fueled by remembering.**

Often like the servant in the parable, we forget the wrong we've done and remember the sins of others. So we end up choking those that wrong us.

Before Christ Drew was driving around with a bat and an itch for payback.

The Drew that had been forgiven by Christ was ready to forgive.

When we focus not on **what people did TO us**, but **what Christ did FOR us** – forgiveness seems possible where it once seemed impossible.

Rip me off of 4 months pay and I'm going to be angry.

But then I look in the mirror and remember the 600 million.

Jesus on the cross as he paid the price - **"Father, forgive them..."**

There was a price to be paid. One we couldn't pay, just like the servant to the King.

What does our King ask of us? **PAY IT FORWARD** - Give what you've received.

**COLOSSIANS 3:13** - *Make allowance for each other's faults, and forgive anyone who offends you. **Remember**, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others.*

The Bible speaks often of "**Sharing in Christ's suffering**"

- **2 Corinthians 1:5, 1 Peter 4:13, Romans 8:17** -

We often think of this as being mocked for our faith, being persecuted, or alike.

But Christ suffered so greatly because he was walking in forgiveness.

Walking out forgiveness looks different in each instance, but often it's sufferable in the moment.

Yet we- made in Christ's image- conquer evil the same way he did at the cross. By bearing offense with forgiveness.

It may feel like death. But it's the death that precedes resurrection life.  
And like Jesus' death and resurrection, it shows others the goodness of God.

It doesn't just restore horizontal relationship, it is a powerful tool that allows people to move toward a deeper intimacy in their vertical relationship with God.