

CONVERSATIONS - PETER AND JESUS - MATTHEW 18

Forgiveness is crucial part not just of our horizontal relationships and their reconciliation, but it's also a crucial part of our vertical relationship with God, and our reconciliation with Him.

To hold to misconceptions about forgiveness can cripple our forgiveness.
Luckily for us –this conversation in Matthew 18 sheds light on forgiveness
...both what it is and what it isn't.

READ MATTHEW 18:21-35

Peter asks more questions of Jesus than all the other disciples combined in the Gospels.
I'd love to one day thank Peter for asking questions that sparked conversations like this one.

Then Peter came to him and asked, "Lord, how often should I forgive someone who sins against me? Seven times?" "No, not seven times," Jesus replied, "but seventy times seven!"

"Why 7?"

Religious leaders held to the belief that forgiving someone 3 times was enough.
After the third time you're off the hook for forgiveness and retribution is fair game.

Amos 1:3: Thus says the LORD; For three transgressions of Edom, and for four, I will not turn away its punishment...

Peter's suggestion of 7?

Twice that of the typical standard with one added for good measure!

Jesus replies - 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.
Forgiveness is not quantitative, it's qualitative.
Forgiveness is not math, it's a mindset.
Forgiveness is not a checklist. It's a lifestyle.

The Parable of the Unforgiving Debtor - MATTHEW 18:23-35

The Kingdom of Heaven can be compared to = God is the king. The king is God.

Talents and Denari.

A talent was 6000 dinarius – or 6000 work days.
I've heard it estimate as **600 million dollars**. I've also heard it estimated into billions.
But the math we do know: this man owed the equivalent of **6 million work days**.
And the bottom line: Again. The number doesn't matter.
The point is it was an insurmountable debt.

Why?

The King is God. The King does what God did for us – forgive a debt we could never pay.

Colossians 2:13 & 14 says:

When you were dead in your sins... God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross.

You've maybe heard it said:

We owed a debt we couldn't pay so Jesus paid a debt he didn't owe.

"Please be patient with me and I will pay it all" –(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.

"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.

Here's what should make us pause when we read this. It should sober us up quick:

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 - which again is 6 million workdays... we're talking over 200 life sentences, and that's being generous...

We're talking an eternity.

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 extra credit, it's foundational in the life of a believer.

So we had better get it right.

And I think one way we get it wrong is we've tied forgiveness to forgetting.

FORGIVE AND FORGET

Ultimately, in ways we'll look at, this can cripple our ability to forgive and leave us tied up and bound – just like the man at the end of the parable.

This man in the parables problem wasn't some inability to forget - it WAS his forgetfulness.

When he seemingly forgot the infinite amount he was forgiven and refused to forgive and abused the man who owed pennies in comparison... people are upset and tell the King who had previously forgiven his debt.

Matthew 18:31 – The King doesn't respond: *What debt? What are you talking about?"*

The king forgave the servant his debt. But 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?

Because we're called to forgive and forget!

Hebrews 8:12 (quoting Jeremiah 31:34... when scripture quotes scripture and God doubles down its important to pay attention...)

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

The idea that sometimes flows from this verse goes something like this:

If you were to confess the same sin twice God wouldn't know what you're talking about.

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

His omniscience is an eternal quality that my repentance doesn't suddenly strip him of.

He forgets nothing. He remembers everything. Because he's all knowing.

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

Because I believe when we close scripture tonight and walk out of this building with a renewed perspective on forgiveness, the word “remember” is the one we should cling to, not “forget.”

Because God **not remembering** read in plain English would seem to indicate he forgets it.

Remember and forget are antonyms and opposites. So “not remember” means forget. Done deal.

But if you read your Bible and the rest of its content with this perspective you'll come across some wild passages...

Noah and his family had been pent up in an ark being tossed to and fro by a catastrophic flood chapter 7 closes with the floodwaters covered the earth for 150 days

...and then at the outset of chapter 8?

God “remembers” Noah.

Like he was binging Netflix and remembered saving Noah was on his to do list.

Or one book over in Exodus – The Israelites had suffered slavery and genocide at the hands of the Egyptians in Exodus, not for a matter of days but centuries

...and then it says **God “remembered” his covenant with the Israelites.**

Reading these passages should give us pause.

Does that mean he just up and forgot about Noah or the entire nation of Israelites?

You can see how this could wreck your theology real quick. Worshipping a forgetful God.

A God who could forget about you or randomly clock out on being sovereign over your life.

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

One Jewish scholar broke it down this way, *“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.”*

It's why in scripture when God remembers someone/something we see a response.

What Hebrews is speaking to when it says “God will no longer remember their sins” isn’t Divine amnesia. It means your sins will no longer be God’s focus and he will no longer respond accordingly. His focus is instead of Jesus’ all sufficient sacrifice, and his response is grace and mercy.

This is why the idea of “**forgive and forget**” is a churchy myth... and it hurts many. Application “forgive and forget” looks like:

“I will act as if the sin had never occurred and live as if I don’t remember it”

It’s self-induced amnesia. But this doesn’t result in spiritual or emotional maturity. Burying hurt and burying our head in the sand more often results in emotionally handicapped people who aren’t walking in the fruit of forgiveness.

“Forgive and forget” causes us to misplace and fumble two things: trust and consequences.

TRUST

If we truly forgive and forget, then we have to treat them like nothing happened. Forgive and forget becomes a free pass back into the circle of trust - a full and immediate restoration of the relationship with all of the trust and privileges that includes.

Because of this, we struggle to forgive because we think:

“if I forgive that person I open myself up to be hurt again.”

We get this idea that forgiveness means an immediate extension of relationship.

Listen, the same way trust is earned over time, forgiveness can often be walked out over time. It’s as much a journey as it is a momentary decision. The feelings may take time to catch up. Give yourself time.

And when we’re given forgiveness... we can still get it wrong. If someone has forgiven us, well then naturally we expect them to move on and get over it. If they don’t then *they’re* unforgiving and the problem is now theirs. But forgiveness is a decision walked out emotionally over time. Trust and restoration takes time.

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 just rush to toss him your trust.

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.

When you let those who have hurt you live rent free in your mind, it’s YOU that loses your freedom. Like the man at the end of the parable, you’re imprisoned by your own unforgiveness.

CONSEQUENCES

Some of us may raise our eyebrows that Paul would say these things about Alexander if he'd *truly* forgiven him.

Forgiveness doesn't mean canceling all consequences.

And this doesn't just effect us horizontally and person to person. It can effect our relationship with God.

When we've repented of wrong we might think:
*"I repented, but I'm still suffering the consequences.
Shouldn't God have removed all traces of my sin?"*

God cleans our slate. He no longer focuses on our sin.
But our actions still cause brokenness and bear consequences.
In this life forgiveness simply means we get another chance.

You may still be walking in the consequences of that affair.

You may still be walking in the consequences of drunk driving.

You may still be walking in the consequences of that lie.

But that doesn't define you.

Grace means you get another chance.

What will you do with it?

See King David committed adultery, murder, lied, and more... all in one massive ordeal with Bathsheba. Despite his repentance, there were consequences. The death of the child they conceived through adultery, as well as ongoing painful consequences that would play out in his family through generations. But he got a second chance. And he laid hold of it. And 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.

That's forgiveness.

That's grace.

Forgetting may not be the fruit of forgiveness.

But remembering is the fuel for forgiveness.

The lifestyle of forgiveness we are called to as Christ followers is fueled by remembering.

The wildest part of the parable we opened with perhaps isn't the ending that shocks us. It's the forgetfulness of the first servant that seems so impossible it's borderline comedy. It's like he doesn't remember he'd just been forgiven hundreds of lifetimes worth of debt.

Yet we walk in his shoes when we walk in unforgiveness, clinging to grudges and choking the flow of forgiveness that's meant to flow from the cross and through us.

When we remember the debt we couldn't pay.

When we remember the cross.
When we remember what Jesus did for us.
When we focus less on **what people did TO us**,
And more on **what Christ did FOR us** –
forgiveness seems possible where it once seemed impossible.

Forgiveness flows from this remembering.

We aren't defined by what's been done to us.
We are defined by what Jesus did for us.

That's why if there's a word to take home with us, it's REMEMBER.
It's how Jesus' grace truly takes root in our lives. And our identity as forgiven.

And if there's a verse to take home with us, one illustrated by Jesus' parable, it's
***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.*

Forgive anyone who offends me? HOW?? Not by forgive and forget.
In fact Paul says we forgive BY remembering. Remember the debt that was paid for you.

For forgiveness to transcend a tally and become a lifestyle,
we have to replace the scoreboard with a cross.
Like Peter we want to keep count. Jesus wipes the slate clean.

We're provided with the symbol of forgiveness that should fuel ours = **THE CROSS**.
Jesus on the cross as he paid the price - **"Father, forgive them..."**
There was a price to be paid.

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

The Bible speaks often of "**Sharing in Christ's suffering**" (2 Cor 1:5, 1 Peter 4:13, Rom 8:17)
We often think of this as being mocked for our faith, being persecuted, or something similar.
But Christ suffered so greatly because he was walking out forgiveness.
Walking out forgiveness isn't as quick and easy as "*forgive and forget*" makes it sound.
Sometimes it may feel like death. But it's the death that precedes resurrection life.

**Peter would receive an answer and a parable in his conversation with Jesus in Matthew 18.
But later he would receive an application IN JOHN 21, as he received forgiveness for denying
Christ 3 times.**

Peter told Jesus he would never fall away and he would stay with him to the end, hell or high
water. But Jesus tells him that before the rooster would crow, he would deny Christ three times.
And sure enough Peter denied Jesus after his arrest three times, no doubt fearful of his own, and
there went the rooster crowing.

You have to wonder if every time Peter woke up in his agricultural culture to a rooster's crow... every time he heard a crow in the morning – did he remember his three denials? Did he remember the weight of guilt and shame?

And yet when Jesus forgives him and restores him and reaffirms his love for him in John 21 I don't think it's a coincidence that he asks Peter early in the morning over breakfast. Roosters very well could have been crowing.

See - Jesus wanted Peter to **remember**.
Not his guilt. But God's grace.

The fruit of these conversations in Peter's life is what he passes on to the Church:

1 Peter 3:9

Don't repay evil for evil. Don't retaliate with insults when people insult you. Instead, pay them back with a blessing. That is what God has called you to do, and he will grant you his blessing.