

LIP – Nov. 8, 2005

For more about the background to this piece go to our website at <http://www.robinsonchurchofchrist.org/lip.html>

Synopsis of Sunday's Sermon

Forgiveness...specifically 'forgiving others'! We addressed the issue yesterday as we took a look at the parable of the "Unmerciful Servant" in Matthew 18:21-35. The parable comes on the heels of Peter's question, "*How many times should I forgive my brother? Seven times?*" Jesus briefly responds by greatly increasing Peter's 'limit level'. But then He shifts the entire discussion away from 'calculations' and 'limits' (the legalist's approach to forgiveness) to a more basic issue: WHY should we forgive? The parable gives the answer. We forgive — not because of a command from God, a natural forgiving desire on our part, and certainly not because the perpetrator deserves it, but — because God has forgiven us.

Grace, not law, is the force in operation as we forgive others.

Monday's Leftovers

I have a theory I'd like to share with you: *Jesus' parables are always believable, true -to-life, and easy to 'swallow'*. To be sure they often have a catch, a surprise, a twist: a Samaritan that helps a Jew, a cheated master who commends his dishonest money manager, a father that throws a party for a prodigal son. But while these sudden twist might catch us off guard, they never fall into the realm of being preposterous.

But that's where yesterday's parable of the "Unmerciful Servant" gives me pause. The central character in the story owed his king an astounding 10,000 talents. Forget trying to turn that into an exact, modern-day dollar amount. Instead know this fact: The entire amount of tax collect by Rome annually in those days for the regions of Galilee, Judea, Samaria and Idumea combined only amounted to 900 talents. Suddenly a single individual owing his king 10,000 talents seems ludicrous. It doesn't fit into the realm of possibility.

I don't know what to do with that. I'm really only left with three possibilities:

1) My theory is wrong. If so, then perhaps some parables do get pretty wacky. But I'm very hesitant to accept this as an answer. Am I too, stubborn? Maybe, but it seems to run against the grain of Jesus' other parables.

2) This is not really so ridiculous a figure. Perhaps in a prior time (under the Babylonians, Persians, etc.) that amount was more realistic. But Galilean peasants would hardly have been able to relate to such 'another place', 'another era' situations. Jesus tended to always use local coloring in his parables.

One other possibility comes to mind.

3) Jesus felt compelled to emphasize a point. He is about to tell a parable where our sin is compared to a monetary debt. "*But what figure should I use? A 'realistic' figure might leave them with a sense of hope as they reason, 'I can fix this problem.'* No, the figure must be breathtaking." So Jesus here, to make our spiritual condition incredibly realistic, opts to use the most unrealistic of figures.

Given these three possibilities, I'm opting for the last as the most plausible.

How real has your past sin been to you? Do you grasp what it means for God to have totally forgiven all of your sin? Remember the song we sang yesterday. You might want to reflect on the lyrics or, if you dare, even sing it out loud right now: **My sin...oh, the bliss of this glorious thought!...my sin —not in part but the whole! — is nailed to the cross and I bear it no more. Praise the Lord. Praise the Lord, O, my soul.**

And if there is anyone you need to forgive...well, you know what to do.

May we be a forgiven —and a forgiving — church.

-David