

21 Then Peter came and said to Him, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" 22 Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.

23 "For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. 24 "When he had begun to settle them, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him. 25 "But since he did not have the means to repay, his lord commanded him to be sold, along with his wife and children and all that he had, and repayment to be made. 26 "So the slave fell to the ground and prostrated himself before him, saying, 'Have patience with me and I will repay you everything.' 27 "And the lord of that slave felt compassion and released him and forgave him the debt. 28 "But that slave went out and found one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and he seized him and began to choke him, saying, 'Pay back what you owe.' 29 "So his fellow slave fell to the ground and began to plead with him, saying, 'Have patience with me and I will repay you.' 30 "But he was unwilling and went and threw him in prison until he should pay back what was owed. 31 "So when his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were deeply grieved and came and reported to their lord all that had happened. 32 "Then summoning him, his lord said to him, 'You wicked slave, I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. 33 'Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave, in the same way that I had mercy on you?' 34 "And his lord, moved with anger, handed him over to the torturers until he should repay all that was owed him. 35 "My heavenly Father will also do the same to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart."

I was reading a post at Challies dot com the other day. Here is the first paragraph, because I think it gets at our passage this morning. He says;

There is a question that comes up time and again in those question and answer sessions that happen at every Christian conference—those sessions that are so often a highlight of a good event. It is the question of justice and usually asks something like this: Can it really be just for God to punish people forever? At the recent Ligonier Ministries

National Conference it was phrased something like this: Is it fair for God to punish a person in eternity for temporal sins?

A couple of thoughts struck me. Before I finished reading the premise I couldn't help but think of the audacity and recklessness of the created to pass judgement on the creator. Like He's a supreme court justice that you could write a dissenting opinion position on.

Revelation 19: 1 - 2 say; *Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, for his judgments are true and just.*

His judgements are true and just. That is final. Immutable. Perpetual. Changeless.

So our question is not, is God unjust. That's not in our lexicon of possibilities. God is just. The problem, therefore, is with me. I am finite. My brain is finite. Jesus gets as close to resolution of this question as we'll ever get on this side of eternity in this passage in front of us this morning.

Peter, you've mis-interpretted the problem. You thought your brother owed you \$20,000 dollars and you probably owe God . . . \$1,000,000. No. Your brother owes you \$20,000 dollars but the debt that God has forgiven you was incomprehensible. \$19 trillion dollars.

Our debt was so unfathomable that the only way to pay it was for God himself to send His Son to come and die in our place.

I'm going to camp right here for just a moment. Turn with me to 2 Cor. 5:20, 21 with me.

20 Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. 21 He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

At the cross, we traded places. He gave me His perfect righteousness. I'll stand before God and be declared righteous. A righteousness not my

own, but given to me freely by Jesus at the cross.

And what about the debt of sin I owed. What about the judgement for my sin to satisfy a righteous God.

I can't say it any better than Isaiah did.

*5But He was pierced through for our transgressions,
He was crushed for our iniquities;
The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him,
And by His scourging we are healed.*

*6All of us like sheep have gone astray,
Each of us has turned to his own way;
But the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all
To fall on Him. Isaiah 53: 5, and 6 of course.*

That puts a different spin on the question we began with. God's justice. Is God fair to punish people for eternity when they sinned in time. And the answer is, you don't understand the depth of the value of the offense. The value of the offense is equal to the value of the payment for it. God in human flesh had to die to pay for that offense.

Then, the offense gets magnified because God paid the price that could not be fathomed or paid, and you turned up your nose at Him. Thanks, but, no thanks. I don't need you God. Don't need any favors. Fine on my own.

So, let's look at Peter's question, and the Lord's answer. Thank goodness for Peter. We have so much information available to us here in this book because of Peter. He was inquisitive. He made every possible mistake.

We just get so much useful knowledge because of this one guy. And he makes the whole thing very human. We feel like we know him already.

21 Then Peter came and said to Him, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?"

This question obviously feeds off the discussion we looked at last week. Restoring sinning brothers. Restoring wandering sheep to the flock.

And Peter's thinking about this and his brain is saying, I think I see a loophole here. People are going to take advantage of all this grace. Let's probe a little bit and see where the bottom of this barrel is.

Years ago, Jeff and Donna and me and Pam were business partners in a Sears catalog store here in Tonopah. It was a marginal venture for 2 people, and starvation for four. But that's another story.

We had a Sears rep. She would come out and train us and make sure we were doing things according to Sears wishes. And we had a question for her.

You'll recall that Sears Craftsman tools had a lifetime guarantee, no questions asked. We had this customer who was re-siding his trailer and he bought this little set of drivers that you chuck in your drill, and one of them was the 5/16th driver that fit the screws he was using on the trailer.

And he kept bringing that one thing back all galled out and rounded. And we had to get him the whole set to get that one piece. So we asked our consultant, how many times do we have to do that. This is getting old, and he's obviously taking advantage of his 17.99 original purchase.

And she said, I don't care if you have to get a 55 gallon drum full of those things, you keep on replacing them every time he wants a new one.

Okee dokee then.

That's sort of where Peter's at. We know people, and we know people are going to take advantage of grace. Where's the limit. Seven times??

Now you've got to understand Peter. He's a jew, and their limit according to the scribes and pharisees was 3 times. They had the 3 strikes and your out rule. So Peter is being super duper magnanimous here. Double that and add one just to be irreproachably generous.

Seven times! I know it sounds crazy, but should we go all the way to seven??!

You just know he's expecting a slot to open up in the trinity for that one. Seven times. Mercy! What grace.

22 Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven."

I'm sure fishermen had some basic math skills. If all else failed, Matthew, the tax collector could figure it out. It was the same answer we got at Sears. There's no bottom to this barrel. Endless supply.

And I'm pretty sure I can read between the lines as to the expression on Peters' face because of what comes next. Jesus launches into a parable. A story that teaches by parallel with reality, the lesson that Peter needs to understand.

Here's the lesson. I'm going to give away the punch line. You guys are dealing with chump change, compared to how much your Heavenly Father has forgiven you. Not even worth talking about.

Let's look at it.

23 "For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to

This is the opening line to most of the Lord's parables. This is revelation that we have no way of finding out. This goes beyond all of this world's knowledge, understanding, learning, sensibilities.

The kingdom of heaven is God's realm. The authority to reign of God, in heaven, which we cannot find out, as opposed to the authority to reign of the king of this world, which is apparent around us.

Jesus is going to teach us something that we are helpless to find out on our own. This goes beyond what humans can find out. This is new revelation. Something about the realities of realms we haven't known or experienced.

23 *“For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves.*

God is the king. We are the slaves. God **will** settle accounts . . with every created being.

Because, here's the thing; **We were created to glorify Him with every breath.** And we don't. And that's huge. How huge?

24 *“When he had begun to settle them, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him.*

OK, how much is 10,000 talents. We have records from that period. A talent is a weight in gold. A record has been found that tells about the taxes collected for Rome from the entire region, north to south, east to west that encompasses every where Jesus and the disciples walked. All of Israel. Parts of Edom. North to Tyre. All of it. A years taxes for that entire region was 800 talents.

So, 15 years worth of taxes for an entire country.

Or maybe, this. 10,000 is the largest number those folks had in their system of enumeration. The word for that number is myrian. We get our word myriad. And sometimes it means, an uncountable number.

So here's a guy who owes 10,000 talents. A number that might make it meaningful to us; 19 trillion. Our national debt.

Oh, by the way, this guy is us. You. Me. We owe a Holy God an incalculable debt.

What was the value of the debt that Jesus took upon Himself for each of us at the cross?

I think we mis-calculate. Badly! God has been silent. I must not be that bad. Listen to Psalm 50:21 *"These things you have done and I kept silence; You thought that I was just like you; I will reprove you and state*

the case in order before your eyes. 22 "Now consider this, you who forget God, Or I will tear you in pieces, and there will be none to deliver....

God has been silent. We mistakenly thought we really aren't all that bad. A few little sins, oh sure, but, all in all, not really that bad. Better than the guy next door. Surely. And the folks across the street. Not perfect, sure, but not really very bad. Right?

I need you to bear with me for a few moments. I need to read to you from Deuteronomy 28.

15 "But it shall come about, if you do not obey the LORD your God, to observe to do all His commandments and His statutes with which I charge you today, that all these curses will come upon you and overtake you:

16 "Cursed shall you be in the city, and cursed shall you be in the country.

17 "Cursed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl.

18 "Cursed shall be the offspring of your body and the produce of your ground, the increase of your herd and the young of your flock.

19 "Cursed shall you be when you come in, and cursed shall you be when you go out.

20 "The LORD will send upon you curses, confusion, and rebuke, in all you undertake to do, until you are destroyed and until you perish quickly, on account of the evil of your deeds, because you have forsaken Me. 21 "The LORD will make the pestilence cling to you until He has consumed you from the land where you are entering to possess it. 22 "The LORD will smite you with consumption and with fever and with inflammation and with fiery heat and with the sword and with blight and with mildew, and they will pursue you until you perish. 23 "The heaven which is over your head shall be bronze, and the earth which is under you, iron. 24 "The LORD will make the rain of your land powder and

dust; from heaven it shall come down on you until you are destroyed.

25“The LORD shall cause you to be defeated before your enemies; you will go out one way against them, but you will flee seven ways before them, and you will be an example of terror to all the kingdoms of the earth. 26“Your carcasses will be food to all birds of the sky and to the beasts of the earth, and there will be no one to frighten them away.

27“The LORD will smite you with the boils of Egypt and with tumors and with the scab and with the itch, from which you cannot be healed. 28“The LORD will smite you with madness and with blindness and with bewilderment of heart; 29and you will grope at noon, as the blind man gropes in darkness, and you will not prosper in your ways; but you shall only be oppressed and robbed continually, with none to save you. 30“You shall betroth a wife, but another man will violate her; you shall build a house, but you will not live in it; you shall plant a vineyard, but you will not use its fruit. 31“Your ox shall be slaughtered before your eyes, but you will not eat of it; your donkey shall be torn away from you, and will not be restored to you; your sheep shall be given to your enemies, and you will have none to save you. 32“Your sons and your daughters shall be given to another people, while your eyes look on and yearn for them continually; but there will be nothing you can do. 33“A people whom you do not know shall eat up the produce of your ground and all your labors, and you will never be anything but oppressed and crushed continually. 34“You shall be driven mad by the sight of what you see. 35“The LORD will strike you on the knees and legs with sore boils, from which you cannot be healed, from the sole of your foot to the crown of your head. 36“The LORD will bring you and your king, whom you set over you, to a nation which neither you nor your fathers have known, and there you shall serve other gods, wood and stone. 37“You shall become a horror, a proverb, and a taunt among all the people where the LORD drives you.

38“You shall bring out much seed to the field but you will gather in little, for the locust will consume it. 39“You shall plant and cultivate vineyards, but you will neither drink of the wine nor gather the grapes, for the worm will devour them. 40“You shall have olive trees throughout your territory but you will not anoint yourself with the oil,

for your olives will drop off. 41 "You shall have sons and daughters but they will not be yours, for they will go into captivity. 42 "The cricket shall possess all your trees and the produce of your ground. 43 "The alien who is among you shall rise above you higher and higher, but you will go down lower and lower. 44 "He shall lend to you, but you will not lend to him; he shall be the head, and you will be the tail.

45 "So all these curses shall come on you and pursue you and overtake you until you are destroyed, because you would not obey the LORD your God by keeping His commandments and His statutes which He commanded you. 46 "They shall become a sign and a wonder on you and your descendants forever.

There were more. I spared you some. I didn't finish the passage.

We deserve every one of those curses. They are ours. The charge to our account for our sins. We are cursed because of the sin we were born into. Except, except for something it says in Galatians.

Gal. 3:13 Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us-- for it is written, "CURSED IS EVERYONE WHO HANGS ON A TREE "--

On the cross, Christ bore all of those curses, that rightly belonged on our account. He was crushed for our iniquity. Cursed in our place. Cursed for every one of the elect.

I'm trying to show you that we are this slave. We owe the 19 trillion. The curse of sin is upon us, and we are helpless to repay . . . any of it.

25 "But since he did not have the means to repay, his lord commanded him to be sold, along with his wife and children and all that he had, and repayment to be made.

You can't get blood out of a turnip, right. So the King is going to get what little he can. Sell him and his wife and his kids and his stuff, and I'll at least have that.

26 *“So the slave fell to the ground and prostrated himself before him, saying, ‘Have patience with me and I will repay you everything.’*

He acknowledges the Kingship of the king and agrees with the charge against him. *Have patience with me and I will repay you everything* He doesn't really understand the gravity of the charges against him. Most of us do not. Most of us start right here. I'm sorry, I want to make it right. We can't but it's OK that we have the right heart about it.

27 *“And the lord of that slave felt compassion and released him and forgave him the debt.*

And such is a picture of our salvation. We are really quite helpless to do anything at all about the debt we owe. We typically don't have a clue of the depth and length and breadth of the charge against us. But our Lord graciously removes the charges. Forgiveness and release. Unfathomable.

How very rich this King must be to be able to do that. What grace! 19 trillion dollars of grace. Set free. How rich is He?; Isa. 40:15 *Behold, the nations are like a drop from a bucket, And are regarded as a speck of dust on the scales;*

But now, the unimaginable happens; This makes us sad to think of.

28 *“But that slave went out and found one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and he seized him and began to choke him, saying, ‘Pay back what you owe.’* 29 *“So his fellow slave fell to the ground and began to plead with him, saying, ‘Have patience with me and I will repay you.’* 30 *“But he was unwilling and went and threw him in prison until he should pay back what was owed.*

Is there an echo in the room. This is the same situation playing out. Except the debt in question is 100 days wages. Quite payable. In our economy, perhaps \$20,000. A used pickup truck compared to what this slave had just been forgiven. The national debt.

How bizarre. Incredibly bad form.

This is now a picture story of Peter's question. We've been forgiven the national debt. Someone comes along and sins against us. But on a scale of what we've been forgiven, compared to whatever the offense of our brother to us is, it's chump change.

The generous King just made this slave 19 trillion dollars richer. The debt was real. It's taken away. Released. What's \$20,000 compared to that?

In a few words, a picture story, the Lord Jesus has made us see the absurdity of not forgiving someone else a tiny debt when He has forgiven us an unpayable debt. Absurd!

31 "So when his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were deeply grieved and came and reported to their lord all that had happened.

What is this, but intercession. The saints praying on behalf of their fellow saints. 18:19 *"Again I say to you, that if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is in heaven. 20 "For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst."*

Intercession brings action. The slaves brought the matter to the King, and He immediately intervenes to answer their concern.

This isn't a parable about prayer, but this is a huge lesson for us. This is the working out of the *where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst* promise. We get to see it in action in Jesus picture story.

32 "Then summoning him, his lord said to him, 'You wicked slave, I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. 33 'Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave, in the same way that I had mercy on you?'

This is a rhetorical question. We don't have to be geniuses to answer this question. The answer is in the asking. To not forgive a 20,000 debt

when you've been enriched by the forgiveness of the national debt, is a wickedness equivalent to re-instating that debt.

34“And his lord, moved with anger, handed him over to the torturers until he should repay all that was owed him.

My brain did a funny thing here. For some reason deep in the recesses of my dusty matter I thought that I remembered the ancient translation of this text as *'And having been wroth, his lord delivered him to the inquisitors, till he might pay all that was owing to him;*

So, curious if I was right, I went looking at all of the different translations of this word *basanistais* which is variously translated; torturers, tormentors, jailors, scourgers, but only one time in a very obscure translation that I have never owned, Youngs Literal Translation, is it presented as inquisitor. So I don't know where that came from.

But, curiously, commentary on the word itself is that neither Rome, nor Israel ever did this ongoing punishment to their prisoners. The word depicts a savage torture that is ongoing.

Oriental culture, like Persia, had something like this word. How curious that that culture is reverting to what this word describes. Not just incarceration, but ongoing torture in that incarceration.

35“My heavenly Father will also do the same to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart.”

Forgiveness is a natural fruit that accompanies true salvation. A person who has the Holy Spirit of God dwelling in them, cannot go down this road.

Jesus is making a strong point here. And people get all worked up here fearing that this is teaching you can lose your salvation.

No, no, we don't build our doctrine from parables. We can be guilty of parable pushing. Making them state more than they do. Jesus is making a strong point here, but we have other clear teaching about the

perseverance of the saints.

True indwelt believers, possessors of the Holy Spirit of God, will persevere to the end. We have a christian slang. We call them 'finishers'. Because real christians finish the race. They persevere.

But the severity of not forgiving others is such that Jesus story concludes with someone who would do such a thing, delivered to the tormentors.

Christians, who have been forgiven, had the curse removed, and replaced with a righteousness from God, who have been given the Holy Spirit to live inside their hearts, forgive their brothers and sisters, from the heart. Nothing phony. Real forgiveness. We must do this! To not forgive each other after Jesus was crushed with our curses, is the most dangerous of sin.