

The Unmerciful Servant

Message 1 of 5 in the series: "Once Upon a Time: Parables that Jesus Told"

A. Jesus often taught using parables.

Parable = "placing one thing by the side of another" = a short story that explains spiritual truths by using everyday objects and relationships = an earthly story with heavenly meaning.

1. Jesus taught the crowds using parables to reveal spiritual truth to those who were seeking it, even if they had little education or religious training. "Jesus always used stories and illustrations like these when speaking to the crowds. In fact, he never spoke to them without using such parables. This fulfilled what God had spoken through the prophet: 'I will speak to you in parables. I will explain **things hidden** since the creation of the world.'" Matthew 13:34-35 (NLT) (*Psalm 78:1-3*)
2. Sadly, the self-righteous, religious leaders in Jerusalem rejected Jesus and were not seeking spiritual truth. Although they were highly educated, their pride made them spiritually blind, so they didn't understand Jesus' parables at all. "You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving. **For this people's heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes.** Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them."

Matthew 13:14b-15 (NIV) (*Isaiah 6:9-10*)

Life Application: "He who has ears to hear, let him hear!" Matthew 11:15 (NKJV)

B. One day Jesus answered a question about forgiving others by telling an amazing parable about an unmerciful servant.

"Then Peter came to Him and said, 'Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?' Jesus said to him, 'I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven. Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. And when he had begun to settle accounts, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. But as he was not able to pay, his master commanded that he be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and that payment be made. The servant therefore fell down before him, saying, "**Master, have patience with me, and I will pay you all.**" Then the master of that servant was moved with compassion, released him, and forgave him the debt. But that servant went out and found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii; and he laid hands on him and took *him* by the throat, saying, "Pay me what you owe!" So his fellow servant fell down at his feet and begged him, saying, "**Have patience with me, and I will pay you all.**" And he would not, but went and threw him into prison till he should pay the debt."

Matthew 18:21-30 (NKJV)

Note: 1 denarii = 1 day's wages. 100 denarii = 5 months' wages. 1 talent = 6000 denarii = 23 years' wages.

"So, when his fellow servants saw what had been done, they were very grieved, and came and told their master all that had been done. Then his master, after he had called him, said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. **Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?**' And his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him. So, My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses." Matthew 18:31-35 (NKJV)

1. When forgiving others, we are not to keep score. "'You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. A second is equally important: '**Love your neighbor as yourself.**'" Matthew 22:37-39 (NLT)

"Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud or rude. It does not demand its own way. It is not irritable, and **it keeps no record of being wronged.**" 1 Corinthians 13:4-5 (NLT)

2. We've all sinned so many times that we can NEVER repay God and set things right.

Sin = deliberate, determined, independence from God.

"No one is righteous—not even one. No one is truly wise; no one is seeking God. All have turned away; all have become useless. No one does good, not a single one. Their talk is foul, like the stench from an open grave. Their tongues are filled with lies. Snake venom drips from their lips. Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness. They rush to commit murder. Destruction and misery always follow them. They don't know where to find peace. They have no fear of God at all." Romans 3:10b-18 (NLT)

“The human heart is the most deceitful of all things, and desperately wicked. **Who really knows how bad it is?**” Jeremiah 17:9 (NLT)

3. God has paid the penalty for all of our sins by sacrificing His own son, Jesus, on the cross. “For **the wages of sin is death**, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord.”
Romans 6:23 (NLT)

“All of us, like sheep, have strayed away. We have left God’s paths to follow our own. Yet **the Lord laid on him the sins of us all.**” Isaiah 53:6 (NLT)

“For **God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin**, so that we could be made right with God through Christ.” 2 Corinthians 5:21 (NLT)

“Jesus knew that his mission was now finished, and... he said, **‘It is finished!’** Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.” John 19:28a & 30b (NLT)

IMPORTANT: We must respond to God’s gracious gift of forgiveness through His Son. “**But to all who believed him and accepted him**, he gave the right to become children of God.” John 1:12 (NLT)

4. The amount that others sin against us is small in comparison to the massive amount we have sinned against God.
5. God expects and commands us to forgive as generously as we have been forgiven. “Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of evil behavior. Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, **forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you.**”
Ephesians 4:31-32 (NLT)

“This, then, is how you should pray: ‘Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And **forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.** And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one.’ For **if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.**”
Matthew 6:9-15 (NIV)

6. The Holy Spirit will empower us to forgive people whom we don’t want to forgive. “For God is working in you, **giving you the desire and the power** to do what pleases him.” Philippians 2:13 (NLT)
7. Forgiveness is NOT the same thing as reconciliation. “An **offended friend is harder to win back than a fortified city.** Arguments separate friends like a gate locked with bars.” Proverbs 18:19 (NLT)
8. Unforgiveness is a sin that is toxic to our souls and to our fellowship with other believers. “Work at living in peace with everyone, and work at living a holy life, for those who are not holy will not see the Lord. Look after each other so that none of you fails to receive the grace of God. **Watch out that no poisonous root of bitterness grows up to trouble you, corrupting many.**” Hebrews 12:14-15 (NLT)

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Connect Group Discussion Questions:

1. Why did Jesus often use parables in his teaching? Why do you think some people instantly see deeper spiritual truths in Jesus’ parables while others don’t? (Matthew 13:14-15 & 34-35)
2. Read Matthew 18: 21-35. What stands out to you in this parable? With which character can you most identify?
3. Discuss the following statements:
 - When forgiving others, we are not to keep score. (Matthew 22:37-38, 1 Corinthians 13:4-5)
 - We’ve all sinned so many times that we can never repay God and set things right. (Romans 3:10-18, Jeremiah 17:9)
 - God has paid the penalty for all of our sins by sacrificing His own son, Jesus, on the cross. (Romans 6:23, Isaiah 53:6, 2 Corinthians 5:21, Romans 5:6-8, John 19:28-30)
 - The amount that others sin against us is small in comparison to the massive amount we have sinned against God. (Matthew 18:32-33)

- God expects and commands us to forgive as generously as we have been forgiven.
(Ephesians 4:31-32, Colossians 3:13, Matthew 6:9-15)
 - Unforgiveness is a sin that is toxic to our souls and to our fellowship with other believers.
(Hebrews 12:14-15)
4. What do we do if we don't want to forgive? (Philippians 2:13, Romans 12:2, Ezekiel 36:26) How can we help each other forgive?
 5. Why is forgiveness only a necessary part of the reconciliation process between people in conflict? (Proverbs 18:19) How can we help each other reconcile?