

"The master of that servant had compassion....and forgave him the loan." Matthew chapter 18 verse 27

In reply to a question from Peter about how many times he should forgive someone who has sinned against him, Jesus suggests that there is no limit and that the grace of forgiveness is an attitude of the heart. Then he tells a parable to illustrate why this should be.

He speaks of a servant who owed his master a huge amount of money. Unable to pay it back, he throws himself at his master's feet begging for more time. Moved with compassion, his master forgives him the whole debt and he goes away free. Encountering a fellow servant who owes him a very small amount of money, he grabs him by the throat and demands repayment. When the master hears of this, the servant is thrown into prison until he can pay back everything he owes. Then Jesus warns that this is how God will treat us if we do not forgive from the heart.

It's an uncompromising passage, which clearly implies that when God forgives us our sin he clearly expects a change in us which produces a corresponding attitude in us towards others.

The servant who was forgiven so much must have gone away from his master rejoicing at the grace that had been given him, but his failure to extend similar grace to his fellow servant demonstrated that his master's grace towards him had not really touched his heart. Perhaps the foolish man had some idea that he was particularly favoured by his master. Perhaps he thought that he somehow deserved his master's forgiveness.

But the point of the story is that his deserving was the last reason he would have forgiven him. His mercy towards the servant came from his gracious heart of compassion. Jesus illustrates God's incredible undeserved favour towards us by making the amount the servant owed absurdly huge. It was ten thousand talents. The footnote in my bible tells me that a talent is worth about 6000 denarii, or twenty years wages for a labourer. The fellow servant he subsequently bullied for repayment of his own debt owed him a hundred denarii.

So if we call ourselves Christians, it's as well to nurture within ourselves and appreciation of how much God has forgiven us, lest we go away rejoicing in our salvation and thinking that we must have done something pretty good to deserve it. Our debt of sin is huge and we don't deserve it. And we would also do well to let God produce within our hearts the reflection of his heart of grace so that we will look with compassionate forgiveness on those who have wronged us.

Prayer.

Father, your grace is immense. I acknowledge that I was going my own way in rebellion against you, not even aware that I owed you my very existence. Thank you so much that you sent Jesus to pay that enormous price for my sin so that I could be reconciled to you and set free. May your Spirit so work in my life that I will never refuse to forgive anyone who I feel has wronged me. In Jesus' name, amen.

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