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Matthew 18:20 3-35

"THE FREEDOM OF FORGIVENESS"

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Intro:

Whenever we read things in the Bible about: "turning the other cheek" or "God for giving us as we forgive others" or "for giving 70x7," who is not eventually reacted: "That's unrealistic! Let's talk about the real world!"

"That may be OK in some cases, but you don't know what this guy has done to me!" Or: "if I give this guy a break, or show the least sign of weakness, he will take advantage of me." Or: "some things are unforgivable!" Or even: "I'll forgive, but I can't forget."

I think, if the church is known, we have as much trouble with forgiveness as with anything that our Lord taught us. Doubtless, in this room today there are people nursing scars, holding grudges, or even secretly wishing for a chance to get back at someone who has done you wrong. And, if I cannot show you how true and practical our Lord's teachings are, you may never know the blessed "Freedom of Forgiveness."

That's what Jesus' parable is trying to teach us: The Freedom of Forgiveness. Look at it clearly with me, please. I see two major ideas: The Glorious Freedom of Knowing that our Sins Are Forgiven, and The Glorious Freedom that comes when Week Forgive Others.

I. THE GLORIOUS FREEDOM OF KNOWING THAT OUR SINS ARE FORGIVEN.

In this story, the king forgives his servant a huge debt. In that day, a talent was 6,000 denari. 10, 000 talents was 6 million denari. A denari was \$.20. Just think of a 1 1/4 million-dollar debt.

Now there was no way the servant was going to be able to pay it back. He pleaded for more time and promised to repay; but, face it: it was impossible. Nevertheless, the king had compassion, and in an amazingly graceful move, he forgave him the whole debt. The man went away Scott free.

What a beautiful picture of God's forgiveness that He shows toward us! Our sins are much like a debt. We owe God respect, love, and obedience for making us and putting us on this planet and giving us all that we have. We should at least pay Him respect and obedience of His laws. But we have not done so like we should. Romans 3:23 "For all have sinned and come short of God's glorious ideal." Romans 1:21 "when they knew God, they glorified Him not his God, neither were thankful but became vain:" each time we rebel and sin against Him, we go deeper into His debt. And there is no hope of our paying Him back. We may stall for time and make promises, but we cannot do it. In fact, the accounting sheet for our sin debts grows longer each day that we live. It is impossible for us to pay it off.

But our gospel: our good news: says that Jesus paid it for us; and, if we will ask God to forgive us, for Jesus' sake, we will be completely forgiven. The entire debt will be dropped. We will be free! It's like being 1 1/4 million dollars in debt and having a dropped instantly.

Oh, how many of us remember that day when God lifted that load of sin. What a joyous relief! What they freedom! How we appreciate Jesus for making it possible.

By the way, if you are still in debt to God for your sins, please don't ignore them. Don't rationalize that you are no worse than others. What does that matter? You are still in debt! Don't bargain with God, like the man in this story: "Give me more time. I'll pay." You can pay off your sin debt.

Listen, Jesus already paid it. Trust His finished work. Ask God to forgive your sins for Jesus' sake: and go free!

However, that initial first forgiveness is not all that is involved. God offers us continued freedom from the guilt of our sins. This is a place where many Christians do not live up to their divine operating assets. Christ as provided daily

forgiveness and freedom from guilt and anxiety that our daily sins cause. I John 1: 8-9, 2: 1-2 (Read).

An American lady attended Christian women's conference in Germany. On the bus ride, she was seated next to a beautiful young girl named Jean, whose vocabulary consisted of two words: "yes" and "no." No matter what the lady said, Jean had the same two answers. Jean sat looking in her lap and even missed the beautiful German landscape.

After arriving at the hotel, the American lady learned that Jean would be her roommate for a week. On about the third day, they started to talk more freely. When the subject of forgiveness came up, Jean said dourly, "God never forget a me."

"Of course, He did," was the American lady's reply. And to prove her point, she reminded Jean that God says He buries our sins in the deepest sea (Micah 7:19): that He will put our sins as far from Him as the East is from West (Psalms 103:12). God says that He puts our sins behind His back (Isaiah 28:17). But Jean held fast. "God never forgave me."

By this time, the American lady's repertoire of verses on forgiveness was just about exhausted. In desperation, she pleaded, "Jean, God says if we confess our sins: Jean! Have you ever really confess your sins?" "No" came the answer. "Well, I don't care what you have done. I want you to pray silently right now and confess your sin to God."

She then prayed for Jean and waited. After a few moments of silence, she heard a long sigh. She opened her eyes to see Jean stretched out across the sofa. "It's gone," she said. "My sin is gone! I did what you tell me to do. I told God my sin, and it's gone."

Much to the astonishment of all who knew her, Jean became a radiant, vibrant, non-stop stalker! Apparently, all who are guilt had been bottled up and weighing her down and bending her entire personality. But now she was free to become her brightest self. "Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sin is covered." (Psalms 32: 1).

Friend, have you discovered the blessed freedom of accepting God's continuing forgiveness of all your sins (I John 1:9)? If not, confess them today,

claim God's promise, stand tall, like yourself again, and move out for the best, which lies ahead. You Are Free!

"But what if I've confessed but still feel troubled?" One of two explanations may help:

You must learn to forgive yourself as much as God has forgiven you. Let your self off the hook. You're punishing your self will not help. Christ already suffered enough. Don't waste His suffering.

But we must also learn the difference between guilt and godly sorrow. James (4:9) declares "Let there be two years for the wrong things you have done. Let there be sorrow and sincere grief. Let there be sadness instead of laughter, and gloom instead of joy." (Living Bible). In 2 Corinthians 7:10, Paul speaks of "that godly sorrow that works repentance unto salvation."

In other words, it is our remorse and sorrow for a particular sin that makes us change our mind about it. These new thoughts about its awfulness will help us to avoid it the next time. Without some godly sorrow, we would not be as eager to avoid the same situation. Some sorrow is helpful and not to be avoided.

But, you see, sorrow and forgiveness are separate issues. Forgiveness is complete upon confession. God forgives the entire debt just like the snap of a finger. We are free! So let go of the sorrow as soon as you are forgiven.

But there is another side of forgiveness. That is:

II. THE GLORIOUS FREEDOM THAT COMES WHEN WE FORGIVE OTHERS.

Because the king had forgiven the man 1 1/4 million dollars, he could not understand why that same man could not overlook a measly 20 bucks that someone else owed him. So God expects us to forgive as we have been forgiven.

This is where it gets hard for us. We reason: "I can't forgive after what they've done." "It's not fair for them to get off so easily."

But fairness is never the motivation. We forgive other people's sins because we have been forgiven so much by our God. The grace we've received becomes the

grace we extend to others. For giving others is not an option to begin with. It is a command.

Of course, there is a cost of forgiving. No one said that it would be easy. It is costly. When the king in the story forgave the 1 1/4 million-dollar debt, it cost him 1 1/4 million dollars to let the man off. Forgiveness is costly to the forgiver.

Forgiving cost God His only Son. Forgiving cost Jesus Christ His Life. Forgiveness will cost you and me something, too.

A Christian lady saw her husband, who was stricken with terminal cancer, got fired from his job, because some of his peers wrote a letter to his superiors, blackballing him. Life insurance and hospital benefits were bound up with that job. Because he was fired, he lost both. When the wife found out about it, she did not say, "Praise the Lord, anyhow!" Frankly, she was furious. She had thoughts of hatred, vengeance: even murder: toward the ones who had written the unfair letters. Her reactions frightened her.

So, she went to her living room, close the doors, got down on her knees and prayed. She saw the sun come up the next morning before she finished dealing with all the hatred in her heart. But, with the help of God, she forgave.

That forgiveness costs are emotionally. It broke her heart to see her husband devastated, and to know that I man with terminal cancer had nowhere to turn for a job to support wife and five children.

Forgiveness cost her will. She longed to justify her husband, to prove the author of the letter wrong, to punish the person who wrote it. These desires had to be sacrificed to obedience. Forgiveness is costly.

But, if the cost of forgiveness seems too high, you might compare it with the cost of not forgiving. While forgiveness is costly, failure to forgive is even more costly.

In the parable of the unforgiving servant, Jesus taught that the one who is forgiven, and then refuses to forgive, will be delivered to the torturers (tormentors) (verses 34, 35). How ironic that it is the unforgiving one who is tormented, not the offender!

I know many Christians who are tormented because they refuse to forgive. Two sisters came up to the guest speaker after a seminar on "forgiveness."

Both had been sexually molested by an uncle 15 years before. The speaker could not help but agree with them that it was awful and there ought to be some kind of retribution. But that is God's business, and He moves in mysterious ways, and at His own time schedule. Their business was to obey God, forgive the uncle, and let go of the anger. He pleaded with the sisters to forgive. "Call the uncle and telling you forgive him," he urged. But they both said, "I can't." "I can't" really means "I won't."

One sister said that she felt like God never answered her prayers. Of course not. Psalms 66: 18 says that if we hold sin in our heart, He does not hear us. Hers was the sin of unforgiveness. Both left the room still in torment.

This episode was contrasted by another woman who understood the freedom of forgiveness. As a teenager, she had been sexually molested by a group of five men. But, instead of clinging to bitterness and self-pity, this woman had forgiven. And in her obedience in her display of the fruits of the Holy Spirit, she had become a dynamic Christian leader, attracting many to the kingdom of God. God had certainly released her from the tormentors and given her a crown of beauty instead of ashes (Isaiah 61: 3). Oh, forgive, and go free, my friend!

Many struggle with insignificant offenses: "She didn't even invite me to the party." "He never return my call." "They never spoke." Let go of it.

Then there are those against whom such horrendous acts have been committed that they dare not speak of them in public. The hurt is deep. The injury is real. The consequences are long lasting.

But it doesn't really matter. The command to forgive is the same, no matter what the offense. Likewise, the consequences of failure to forgive is the same: torment. Refusal to forgive and release the guilty party has a far more devastating effect on the unforgiving one then it does on the one who offended.

That's why God says: Forgive: Turn the other cheek: Forgive 70x7. This is the freedom of forgiveness!

This morning, I may be talking to someone who has been wronged in business until you have almost lost your shirt. Legal retribution may be in order. But, in your heart, you must let go the hatred and bitterness if you are to be free.

You may be smarting from the divorce, where you feel terribly wrong, betrayed, abuse. Let go. Turn them over to God, but forgive and be free to move forward. Forgive and go free from the tormentors!

Your mate may have been thoughtless, harsh, humiliating, cruel and selfish. Resentment is boiling inside and about to make you do something for which you will be sorry. Please search within yourself to forgive and go free from the tormentors.

Apply this, as you will. The principle is inspired. It works!

Why, then, do some people hold on to anger and bitterness? Why, even when they know what God has taught, can some people just not obey and go free?

Often people with a poor self-image will use an act committed against them to gain the attention they long for. While they rehearse the story of being wronged, even to an audience of one, they are centerstage. For a brief moment, they feel important. To forgive would make them lose the sympathy and recognition.

Some people use their unforgiveness to manipulate the other person. They hold the offense over the guilty person's head in order to control them. One man had been involved in a flirtatious relationship with a coworker. For 20 years, his wife reminded him of his mistake every time she wanted her way. She would also use the experience to extract pity from others, who would rush to protect her from any more injustices in life.

There are also those who think some offenses are just too great to be forgiven. Little things can be forgiven, but not "biggies".

Joseph could have felt that way about his brothers. In their jealousy, they first tried to kill him, then sold him as a slave. He was taken to a foreign country, and every time he got a break, someone else kicked him in the teeth. If there ever was a candidate to be bitter, vengeful, and mad at the world, it was Joseph.

But somehow, he forgave. With his brothers, he returned good for evil. And I believe that's why he was so free from hangups and became one of history's

greatest achievers. He rose from a slave in prison to the Prime Minister of the richest and most powerful nation on earth. He even saw how God used other people's wrongs to work together for Joseph's ultimate good.

Listen, friend, I find that there is no sin are crying too great to forgive, according to the Word of God. Christ died to forgive all sin. How can we not forgive someone for whom Christ died?

"Well, I'll forgive, but I can't forget." No, I don't guess you can. God made us with marvelous memory banks. We remember a lot.

And it's a good thing. There are some people I have completely forgiven. I love them. I invest trust in him, but my memory helps me watch them a little more closely, so they don't knife me in the same place again. I never turn my back on them. That's being "why is as a serpent, but harmless as a dove."

When our Lord started His public ministry, He quoted part of Isaiah's prophecy in 61: 1-3:

"The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom to the captives and release for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, and to provide for those who grieve: to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of the Spirit of despair."

The good news is that Jesus heals the brokenhearted. He releases the prisoners of bitterness from the tormentors. He comforts those who mourn over offenses done to them, and over those they have committed. He promises a crown of beauty instead of ashes, gladness instead of mourning, and praise instead of despair.

THE CHOICE IS OURS!