

The Ungrateful Debtor

Lesson * 18: (Mt. 18:21-35; Lk. 17:3-4; COL 243-251)

This story is commonly known as the parable of the two debtors. As we study this lesson together we will find that the central theme of the parable is the stark contrast between the unlimited forgiveness of God and the unforgiving spirit of man. Let's jump right into our study.

The Parable's Occasion

1. What significant question did Peter ask Jesus? "Lord, how oft shall my brother _____ against me, and I _____ him? Till _____ times?" (Mt. 18:21)
2. Why did Peter suggest the number seven? "The _____ limited the exercise of forgiveness to _____ offenses. Peter, carrying out, as he supposed, the teaching of Christ, thought to extend it to seven, the number signifying _____." (COL 243)
3. What did Jesus reply to Peter's "generous" willingness to forgive? "I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy _____ seven." (Mt. 18:22)
4. What did Jesus mean by the figure of seventy times seven? "Christ taught that we are _____ to become _____ of forgiving." (COL 243)

Note: Ellen White has stated in another place: "And we are not only to forgive seven times, but seventy times seven. **Just as often** as God forgives us, we are to forgive one another." Review and Herald, April 8, 1902.

5. In which way did the spirit of Lamech contrast with the spirit of Christ? "If Cain shall be avenged _____, truly Lamech _____ and _____ (Gen. 4:24)

Note: Christ spoke of forgiving seventy times seven, but Lamech, who was of the wicked genealogy of Cain, talked about taking vengeance seventy times seven.

The Symbols of the Parable

1. Who is represented by the king who took account of his servants? _____ (Mt. 18:35)

Note: "Christ is represented by the king, who, moved with compassion, forgave the debt of his servant." (COL 244)

2. Who is symbolized by the servant who was brought in before the king? _____ (Mt. 18:35)

Note: “Man was under the condemnation of the broken law. He could not save himself, and for this reason Christ came to this world, clothed His divinity with humanity, and gave His life, the just for the unjust.” (COL 244)

3. Who is represented by the fellow servant who owed one hundred pence? _____ (Mt. 18:35)
3. **Thought Question:** What do you suppose is represented by the unpayable debt of the first servant? _____

The King’s Servant

1. What occupation did the servant have in the king’s realm? “Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, which would take _____ of his servants. And when he had begun to _____ . . .” (Mt. 18:23-24)

Note: The servant was not a slave. He was rather an employee. The words “take account” and “reckon” are financial terms (see, Lk. 16:2). This seems to indicate that the servant was an administrator of the king’s monetary assets. Most scholars believe he must have been responsible for the revenue in one of the provinces belonging to the king’s realm. The enormous debt he owed his lord indicates that he was one of the high officials in the king’s government.

2. Did this servant come of his own accord? “And when he had begun to reckon, one was _____ unto him [the king], which _____ him ten thousand talents.” (Mt. 18:24)

Note: The Greek terms used seem to indicate that this man was already under suspicion of embezzlement. The passive tense of the verb indicates that he did not come of his own accord but rather was brought by the king’s guards.

3. How great a debt was incurred by the king’s servant? “One was brought unto him [the king] which owed him ten _____ talents.” (Mt. 18:24)

Note: The debt was enormous and utterly unpayable. Ten thousand talents is equivalent to 470,448 pounds of silver and ten thousand talents of silver are equal to 100 million *denarii*. The enormity of this amount can only be understood when we realize that a *denarius* was the daily wage for a common worker in the Roman Empire. Furthermore, as Joachim Jeremias has pointed out, the enormity of this debt can only be understood “if we realize that both *muria* [thousand] and *talanta* [talent] are the highest magnitudes in use (10,000 is the highest number used in reckoning, and the talent is the largest currency unit in the whole of the Near East.” (Joachim Jeremias, The Parables of Jesus, p. 210)

We, like the king’s servant, have broken God’s holy law. We have forfeited our right to freedom. We deserve to perish. The enormity of our debt to God is impossible to pay.

4. When the king commanded that the servant, his wife, his children and all his possessions be sold, how did the servant react? “The servant therefore _____ down, and _____ him saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all.” (Mt. 18:26)

Note: The servant deserved the sentence which was pronounced against him. He did not argue about his guilt or innocence. He repented, humbled himself, confessed his wrong, promised to make restitution and threw himself on the mercy of the court. Actually, he did not realize that his debt was so great that, no matter how good his intentions, he could never pay. Scholars have calculated that if this was a high government official it would have taken him at least 15,000 years to pay the debt!!

We cannot pay the debt we have incurred because of sin. . We cannot argue our case before God. We cannot earn salvation by our own works. All we can do is repent of our sins, confess them and throw ourselves upon His mercy.

5. What lesson can we learn from the servant’s offer to pay his debt? “He did not realize his _____. He hoped to deliver _____. . . . So there are many who hope by their own _____ to merit God’s _____. They do not realize their helplessness.” (COL 245)
6. What did the king do when he saw his servant’s penitence? “Then the lord of that servant was moved with _____, and _____ him, and _____ him the debt.” (Mt. 18:27).

Note: What an illustration of grace! The undeserving servant was relieved of his debt simply because the king had compassion upon him. Notice that the king did not make the servant work off his debt. This would have been impossible. The debt was completely forgiven simply because the man, in his dire need, cried out to the king for mercy! He was not forgiven because of his goodness but rather because of the goodness of the king.

The Measure of God’s Forgiveness

The Bible uses several analogies to illustrate the magnanimous forgiveness of God. Let’s examine several of them:

1. According to Micah 7:19, how fully does God forgive our sins? “Thou [God] wilt cast _____ their sins into the _____ of the sea.”
2. For thou hast cast all my _____ behind thy _____.” (Isa. 38:17)
3. As far as the _____ is from the _____, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us.” (Ps. 103:12)

4. I have _____ out, as a thick _____, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins: return unto me; for I have redeemed thee.” (Isa. 44:22)
5. I, even I, am he that _____ out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not _____ thy sins.” (Isa. 43:25)
6. If we confess our _____, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to _____ us from all unrighteousness.” (I Jn. 1:9)

The Unforgiving Servant

1. After the servant’s debt was forgiven by the king, what did he do with one of his fellow servants? “But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellow servants, which _____ him an hundred pence: and he laid _____ on him, and took him by the _____, saying, Pay me that thou owest.” (Mt. 18:28)
2. How did the fellow servant react when the servant took him by the throat? “And his fellow servant _____ down at his feet, and _____ him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay the debt.” (Mt. 18:29)

Note: The servant not only pleaded with the king. He also worshiped him as the Greek word *proskuneo* in Mt. 18:26 indicates. But the fellow servant did not worship the servant. This would indicate that the king in this parable represents Christ who receives our penitential worship.

3. Did the servant manifest mercy for his fellow servant? “And he [the servant] would _____: but went and cast him into _____, till he should pay the debt.” (Mt. 18:30)
4. What is represented by the servant’s unwillingness to forgive his fellow servant? “Their own _____ against God, compared with their brother’s sins against them, are as ten thousand talents to one hundred pence—nearly one _____ to one; yet they dare to be _____.” (COL 247)

Note: The word “pence” used here is a reference to a *denarius* which was the daily wage a common laborer was paid. Though 100 *denarii* was a considerable debt (100 days of labor), it could be paid in the course of time with a little effort. In contrast to 10,000 talents (100 million *denarii*), 100 *denarii* was “peanuts”.

5. What did the king do when he found out that the servant had been unwilling to forgive his fellow servant? “And his lord was _____, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should _____ all that was due unto him.” (Mt. 18:34)

The Parable’s Central Lesson

1. According to Ellen White, what is the central lesson of this parable? “He who refuses to _____ is thereby casting away his own _____ of pardon.” (COL 247)

2. Is Ellen White correct in her assessment? Notice the words of the king to his servant: “Shouldst not _____ also have had _____ on thy fellow servant, even as I had _____ on thee?” (Mt. 18:33)
3. When Jesus said, “Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors” was He teaching that we do not have to pay our legitimate debts? “By this He did not mean that in order to be forgiven our sins we must not require our just dues from our debtors. If they cannot _____, even though this may be the result of unwise management, they are not to be cast in prison, oppressed, or even treated harshly; but the parable does not teach us to encourage _____.” (COL 247)
4. If a brother or sister sins against us, what should we not do under any circumstances? “Our Lord teaches that matters of difficulty between _____ are to be settled within the _____. They should not be opened before those who do not _____ God. If a Christian is wronged by his brother, let him not _____ to unbelievers in a court of justice.” (COL 248-249; see also I Cor. 6:1-3)
5. What wise counsel is given to us by the apostle Paul? “And be ye _____ one to another, tender hearted, _____ one another, even as God for _____ sake hath forgiven _____.” (Eph. 4:32; see also Col. 3:13)
6. What sobering truth did Jesus teach in the Sermon on the Mount? “For if ye _____ men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also _____ you. But if ye forgive _____ men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive _____ trespasses.” (Mt. 6:14-15)
7. Why will God not pardon us if we are unwilling to pardon others? “He who is unmerciful toward others shows that he himself is not a _____ of God’s pardoning grace. In God’s forgiveness the heart of the erring one is drawn close to the great heart of Infinite Love. The tide of divine compassion flows _____ the sinner’s soul, and _____ him to the souls of others.” (COL 251; see also Jn. 7:37-39. **Hint:** We cannot give what we have not received)
8. What is the great lesson of the parable? “But the great lesson of the parable lies in the _____ between God’s compassion and man’s _____; in the fact that God’s forgiving mercy is to be the measure of our _____.” (COL 251)
9. **Thought Question:** What do you suppose Ellen White meant when she said the following words: “We are not forgiven *because* we forgive, but *as* we forgive.” (COL 251)_____

