Matthew 18 • The Kingdom of Heaven

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Chapter 18 begins by saying, *"At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?"" (ESV)*

And we've known for some time that this was one of their favorite topics. And I think that they were probably hoping Jesus might point to one of them or something, because I think some of them were convinced they might be, yeah, it might just be me, I don't know.

But love how Jesus responds. It says, *"[2] And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them [3] and said, "Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. [4] Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.*

[5] "Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, [6] but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea."

Stop there for just a moment. Let's talk about these verses because they're very important.

First of all, you need to understand that when Jesus talks about children here or little children, He's not literally speaking of little children. He's talking about believers. Okay. And that may have sounded weird to the audience at the day hearing that from someone who was around in His early 30s and yet that's what Jesus meant and He's using what we call, the language of similarity. You'll notice how many times He uses the word, like.

In other words, He doesn't talk about little children being the only ones who enter the kingdom. You got to be a little child to enter the kingdom of heaven. He says you have to be, like a child.

And what Jesus begins to say, as He talks about this situation, they're asking, well, *"Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?"* He says, well, okay,

pump the brakes here guys. Before we even talk about who's the greatest, let's talk about how you get there. Because you're all making all sorts of assumptions here as it relates to the kingdom of heaven, so let's talk about how you get there in the first place.

And the first statement He makes is, *"Truly, I say to you,* (and this is in verse 3) *unless you turn* (and by the way, that's repentance, *unless you turn*) *and become like* (*like*) *children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."* And that's the first statement that He wants to make. *"…unless you turn and become like"* a child.

When He refers to a child in this way, He's talking about the natural humility and open heartedness that characterizes little children. There is an honesty and a simplicity about children. Sometimes they're a little too honest. You ever noticed?

I was watching a video just this last week. It was just hilarious. I think it was recorded on their doorbell as they were walking out. And this young dad is walking out with his little girl. She's probably 3. And she says to him, as they're walking out the door, daddy, I love you. And he says, I love you too, sweetie. And then the little girl says, but I love mama more. And the dad goes, thanks for that. But that's kids, they'll just tell you what's on their heart because there's no guile, there's no deception. It's just, I'm just going to tell you what the deal is here.

And that is what Jesus is referring to when He speaks of becoming like a child, because you see, that's the first step to even coming to a place of being saved as a believer. We have to accept the fact in all humility that I'm a sinner and there's nothing I can do to change that. There's nothing… I'd like to go to heaven, but there's absolutely no way for me to get there.

On my own, there's nothing I can do. There's nothing I can say. There's no possible goodness that I can achieve in my life. I'm lost and there's nothing that I can do about it. Right?

That's the attitude that we all have to come to, to even come to a place of salvation, so that we might turn to Jesus as our Savior and say, Lord, save me. And so it has to begin there. It's that simple humility and attitude of just openness. Yeah. It's amazing, isn't it? How we get older and we become very independent, and very prideful, and very self-sufficient, and I can do it. Don't tell me what do or I don't want anybody telling me.

And then we get into our teenage years which is of course, the height of our intelligence. And nobody can tell us anything, because we're 15 now. I remember my parents trying to tell me things when I was 15, and I was like, you guys are so dumb. Why aren't you as smart as me? Isn't that funny? Little children are just so open and so responsive.

And so He now begins, He goes on to answer their question. And it's in verse 4 where He says, *"Whoever humbles himself like this child* (right there, that He says) *is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven."* And that's something because it's just the opposite of the greatest in the kingdom of man.

The kingdom of man has its own standards for greatness and of course it includes wealth and power and influence. And all those other things that the world looks up to and says, this is what greatness is and so forth.

And Jesus takes a little child among them and says, *"Whoever humbles himself like this child* (what you're seeing here) *is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven."* And I think that's just, it's just so cool.

He goes on to say in verse 5, *"Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me,..."* And here again, Jesus is making a connection between Himself and those who come to Him by faith. Again, we're not talking about children, physically, we're talking about believers. And He says, whoever receives a person like that, who has come to Me by faith, receives Me.

And this is an interesting statement and I got to tell you something, I've been reading the Bible for a lot of years, and I still haven't figured out the implications of this verse. I don't really, I don't really get it, to be completely honest with you.

He who receives you, He's saying, receives Me. And I wish I knew the full implication of that but it is a powerful statement of connection with Jesus. Is it not? To say to you and me, if someone receives you because you're in Me, they have received Me. Wow!

But by the same token, this connection with Jesus carries a warning, which He speaks of in verse 6 by saying, *"whoever causes one of these little ones* (again, not children, but believers) *...to sin,* (right?) *it would be better for* (them He says) *...to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea."*

We don't use millstones, at least here in the America anymore, but they were used to mill grain and grind it into flour and so forth. And they were huge, big, heavy.

And He says if somebody is the agent of sin in your life. In other words, causing you, drawing you, dragging you into sin, oh, mercy. He says, it'd be better for that person to be drowned in the depths of the sea.

In other words, what Jesus is saying is, first of all, His concern for you is such that He cares about anyone who might be the cause of your stumbling into sin. And He expresses His justice related to that by saying that there is a judgment that awaits such an individual. A very scary and very sobering judgment as well.

And then in verse 7 you'll notice He says, *"Woe to the world for temptations to sin! For it is necessary that temptations come, but woe to the one by whom the temptation comes!"*

And this is another sobering statement. And when He uses that phrase, *"it is necessary for temptations to come,"* He's simply saying that it's inevitable. When you live in a fallen world, there's going to be fallen activity that goes on in that world. And that's sin.

And we know that the world that we live in is fallen because the people who live in it also are fallen and so it is inevitable that temptations are going to come along. These sorts of things are going to happen. We know that.

He says, *"but woe to the one* (through whom or) *by whom the temptation comes!"* And it's a very serious sort of a warning about those who would incite others to enter into, to sin. There's a very, I don't want to overuse the word, sobering, but it is sobering. A very serious statement related to that.

But then as we read on we find out that we also as believers have a responsibility as it relates to sin. And he says in verses 8 and 9, *"And if your hand or your foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life crippled or lame than with two hands or two feet to be thrown into the eternal fire. 9 And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into the hell of fire."*

Jesus is using imagery here and it's not the kind of imagery that I probably would use or you would use because it's the imagery of amputation and self-

mutilation. And it's not a very fun thing to think about. It's a very graphic sort of a thing, but the words were never meant to be taken literally, and His audience would have known that.

That this isn't something that He's telling us to do. He's not telling us to mutilate ourselves. How do we know that? Well, it's simple. Your foot doesn't cause you to sin. The eye is not the cause of sin. The hand is not the cause of sin. Sin begins in the heart. But Jesus is using imagery, and a very graphic imagery at that, to describe the requirement on our part. This is our responsibility to do what may be needed at times to separate ourselves from that which is causing us to sin.

And you see, I can tell you that it's a very common thing among humans to talk a lot about sin and bemoan sin in our lives, but not do anything about it. In other words, to not try to take anything related to sin out of our path. You see, the apostle Paul actually talks about this very same principle in his letter to the Romans. And it's a very simple statement. I'll put it up on the screen for you. From Romans chapter 13, it says,

Romans 13:14 (ESV)

...make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

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This is a very interesting statement: *"...make no provision for the flesh."* What does that mean? Well, let me give you an example. If I was going on vacation and I asked you, you were my neighbor, and I asked you to look in on my house, and maybe even go in there and check and make sure things are okay. I might leave you the code to my garage door or the key to my front door. And in so doing, I would be making provision for you to have easy access into my home because I'm going to be gone, and you need to have that access right?

Now, think about it. As Paul is saying, *"...make no provision for the flesh."* That means give it no easy access to sin. If there is an area of sin in your life that you continually fall to take away its access to that sin. Remove the access, the ease of access, whatever that may be. That's really what he's saying.

And you can tell that in this illustration that He's making about this, He realizes and acknowledges to us that taking away this access is not going to be easy or convenient. In fact, it's probably going to be painful and that's why He uses the illustration of cutting off one's hand or foot, or gouging out one's eye. Horrible thought, but a very painful sort of a picture.

And He's acknowledging to you and me that this issue of removing sin's easy access into our lives, it's going to be painful. In fact, it's probably even going to be a little bloody and you're not going to want to do it. I can't even imagine gouging out my own eye. It's a horrific thought.

I think Jesus is trying to make us aware of the fact that sometimes taking sin's access away in our lives is going to be just as horrific of a thought as it relates to the inconvenience or the difficulty of how that's going to play out. And yet, it's necessary. And those are hard verses to read, in terms of what they mean.

Verse 10. *"See that you do not despise one of these little ones.* (again, we're not talking children, we're talking believers) *For I tell you that in heaven their angels always see the face of my Father who is in heaven."*

This is probably one of the most comforting verses in the Bible, or at least it should be, in terms of understanding God's care for the lives of each and every person who's come to faith in Jesus Christ. He says, first of all, do not despise them because I tell you they're angels.

And that gives us the idea that, and this is by the way where guardian angels come into play. It's not a term that you'll necessarily find in those exact words, but we know that the angels are ministering spirits sent to help those who are being saved as we're told in the Book of Hebrews.

And He says here, in this interesting paradoxical statement that these angels are not only with my children, but they also constantly behold the face of My Father in heaven. In other words they're in the presence of the Father and they are in the presence of the children at the same time. The sons of God, the sons and daughters of God. And so it is a beautiful picture of God's care and concern on behalf of all of us.

Now, as I'm reading through this chapter, the next verse that I'm going to read is verse 12. But if some of you have a different Bible translation that you're holding, such as the New King James Version (NKJV), which by the way is a great translation, you're going to find that there's a verse 11. But there isn't in the ESV. And this really distresses a lot of people and I get this question all the time. Why is it some Bibles omit certain verses of the Bible?

Well, you have to understand they're not omitting anything. The reason that the ESV doesn't have verse 11 is because the Greek manuscripts they used to translate the ESV did not include verse 11. And verse 11, by the way, in case

you're wondering, says in the New King James, *"For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost."*

But you see, that statement doesn't appear in the manuscripts, the Greek manuscripts that the ESV used to translate the Bible. This is something that a lot of people don't understand.

I had a sweet lady write to me this last week and say, pastor Paul, where are the original Bibles kept? And I had to say, sweetie, there's no such thing as original Bibles. What we have are manuscripts, Greek manuscripts. And what is in existence today are copies of copies of copies of copies of Greek manuscripts. But we don't have the original Greek manuscripts, they've been lost. But we have copies of copies of copies of copies.

And in fact, the New Testament is the most well attested document in all of antiquity. And what that means is, that's a fancy way of saying we have more copies of the New Testament than we have of any other book or document in antiquity.

What that means is even scholars who don't believe that the Bible is the inspired Word of God believe that what we have in the New Testament is what the original authors penned because of the overwhelming evidence of documents that we possess concerning the New Testament writings. Plus, we also have quotations from the early church fathers of what they read in the first century, second century, and so forth.

We know that what we have is legit, okay? But, within the context of different Greek manuscripts, which are the gatherings of manuscripts that were found in different places, there are, at times, verses that either have been added or were omitted. We don't know which.

It's funny because when people write and they see that verse 11 is missing, for example, in the ESV, they'll say, why was that verse taken out? That's their assumption. My question is, how do you know that verse wasn't added in? Because you don't. You think that it was there from the beginning because it's in another Bible like the New King James. But that's just because they were using a different set of manuscripts to translate the Bible, all right?

If anybody tries to convince you that there's some kind of a conspiracy going on where certain Bible translations are leaving verses out because there's things they don't want you to know or something stupid like that, it is just absolute nonsense.

And let me just tell you, the differences in Greek manuscripts that do exist are so incredibly minor no actual doctrine of the Bible is ever contradicted or messed with in any way between any of the Greek manuscripts that we have. Any of the verses that appear in one but not in another don't affect any doctrine at all. Alright? So please know that. There's, people love controversies and people write books and they put them out there and they say, there's things that they don't want you to know. And it's just dumb. They're just looking for an audience.

But that's why verse 11 doesn't appear in the ESV. It's not in the Greek manuscripts that the ESV translators used to translate the Bible.

Verse 12. *"What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go in search of the one that went astray? **13** And if he finds it, truly, I say to you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine that never went astray. **14** So it is not the will of my Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish."*

And this is a very simple parable to describe God's care and love for those of us who are dumb enough occasionally to stray. And we've probably all been there. I don't know if we've all been there but most of us probably have at one time or another.

And the simple parable is to communicate to you and me that God cares. And He would leave, He would leave the other 99, because there's safety in numbers. He would leave them to go in search for the one that wandered off to bring that one back. And it's just a beautiful personal statement that is made about God's love and care for His children.

Now next, Jesus goes on to deal with interpersonal offenses and how to deal with them. I mentioned in first service that I know this never happens here at Calvary Chapel, but it can in other churches. Come on you guys. You're all going, really? No, it happens everywhere. This is important information. How do you deal with it when someone sins against you? Well, it's easy.

Verse 15. *"If your brother sins against you,…"* write about it on Facebook. That's the way it should go. You just do a post and then everybody knows. And they know they're a dirty, rotten creep, and to stay away from them. Boom! Done! Alright, let's move on.

Actually, that's not what it says. It says, *"If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone."* So the first step, when someone sins against you, is not to tell anyone, but to go to that person. Just you and him or her, and sit down humbly and explain the situation for what it is. But this, of course, tells you and me that we need to be able to explain what was done wrong from a biblical standpoint and why it was wrong.

And to do so with a heart of love. The Bible tells us we're to speak the truth in love. (Ephesians 4:15) And so we don't go to the person to bash them over the head with it or make them feel horrible or whatever. We go to simply explain, this is what happened, this is why it's a problem, and this is a situation that we need to reconcile to.

Well, Jesus anticipates the different responses. He says at the end of verse 15, *"If he listens to you, you have gained your brother."* Great. Wonderful. You're done. You can stop there. You can move on. You can just carry on with life.

But you see, there's also a possibility that the person won't listen to you. And they won't acknowledge the fact that what they did was wrong. And in verse 16 He says, *"But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses."*

Now why is that important? Because you see, you're bringing a charge against them. And He says, it is important if this person has already shown a tendency towards stubbornness and an unwillingness to acknowledge their actions, to make that same charge in the presence of witnesses so that it's not just you against them.

That can be a problem you see. Because then it's like here's what I saw, here's what this person saw, well who's going to say what really happened? Or what really is going on here? So you're going to now make this same charge in front of other witnesses so that they can know and acknowledge what is going on. Right? So now you've taken a couple other people.

And then verse 17, *"If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church."* Now I want you to stop there for just a moment. I know we're in the middle of a verse, but you might be wondering, where does the church come in here? I mean, it's out of left field, isn't it? We haven't even started a church yet.

Well, it's not the first reference to the church in the Bible. You'll remember that after Peter acknowledged who Jesus was a couple of chapters ago, Jesus said *"and upon this rock I will build my church."* (Matthew 16:18) He already, we

already know that there's going to be this gathering of people. The word, church is, ecclesia and it's what we are. It's not a building. It's not a denomination. It's not an organization. It's people. We are the church.

And so it is only at this point where the, where you've gone to your brother or sister personally. Where you have taken another couple of individuals with you and we're still not getting anywhere that you would speak it to the church.

And the reason He's talking about doing this is because this person is in and part of the church. This person who did this sin against you. And we've been told many, many times that sin is like leaven or yeast, and it has a permeating, corrupting ability. And if it is not stopped, if it is not addressed, if it is not acknowledged, it can have a very corrupting influence in the body of Christ if we just let it go, you see. So this is why it needs to be told to the church that they might understand what's going on here, be warned by it, but also respond to it.

And that's what he says in the second part of verse 17, where He says, *"And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile* (or) *and a tax collector."* And that's just an ancient way of saying, an unbeliever. Let him be to you like somebody you would withdraw from or pull away from. And so we're to treat that individual as an unbeliever.

And again, the reason is not because we hate them. The reason is because they have repeatedly been confronted with their issue and their sin, and they have refused to acknowledge it as such in the light of God's Word. And what we're talking about here, is we're talking about church discipline.

Can I just tell you as somebody who's been a pastor for about 40 years, church discipline is one of the toughest things to do, especially today. Not only is it difficult from the standpoint of just confrontations are never fun. But, we've got about 2 000 years of mucking things up in the body of Christ, and we've created all these splinter groups. And now we've got cities that are big, and you've got multiple churches.

And frankly when you confront somebody with their sin, a person who refuses to acknowledge it, it's just an easy thing just to leave and go to the church down the street. And I just won't tell anybody there, you know. It's just too easy.

Church discipline is predicated upon the idea that I'm part of a family and I'm accountable to that family, you see. And accountable meaning that if they speak to me even the hard things about my life, I'm willing to listen, and respond.

But you see, that, it's just too easy to say, ah, forget it. You guys are a bunch of judgmental Christians, you're all hypocrites. I'm going to go somewhere else, go to church, but I'll be careful not to tell them what I'm doing. Because they might do the same thing. Yeah, they probably would.

Church discipline is rarely done well, and it is often done badly. Unfortunately. Because there are steps. And this isn't the only passage that speaks of church discipline. The apostle Paul addresses it as well in his epistles. And it needs to be done very carefully. Very prayerfully. Very gently. Very lovingly. And often it is not. And frankly, some of us have earned the title of judgmental Christians because we've not done it very well. But there is a need for accountability within the body of Christ. Unfortunately, it just very rarely happens.

Now, as we get into verses 18 and 19, Jesus is going to make some important statements. But I want you to know something as we read these verses. These verses are constantly quoted out of their context and they are therefore misunderstood and misapplied.

And I want you to know, what is the context here? Well, the context of what we've been talking about most recently is church discipline. Issues of sin, forgiveness, and that sort of thing.

We've got church discipline going on and the decision of the church as to how to deal with an individual who has stubbornly and repeatedly refused to acknowledge their sin. Okay? That's the context.

In that context, listen to what Jesus says in verse 18. *"Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."*

Oh, if you could stand on top of all the books that were written about binding and loosing, you would be really, really tall. But very few of them take into consideration the context in which the statement is made.

And what Jesus is doing here is He's telling us that when the process of dealing with someone who has fallen into sin is done correctly and the church makes a decision related to that person and their sin, whatever they have bound or whatever they have loosed in terms of their decision as a church will be binding also in the eyes of the Lord. That's what He's saying.

It's not this weird, wacky idea about binding and loosing and how I'm going to go around binding the devil. And binding this and binding that and loosing this

and it's just, we have just gone wackers on these verses without understanding the context.

And verse 19 is another one that is often misapplied. He says, *"Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. **20** For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them."*

And again, the context is the church coming together to make difficult decisions about people caught. And Jesus is saying here, it's never going to be the decision of one single individual to say, this is the way it is. It's a collective agreement of the saints.

Now Jesus is going to talk on forgiveness. *"**21** Then Peter came up and said to him, "Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?""*

And Peter's trying to be a little bit extra gracious here because you see the Jewish rabbis taught that you are only obligated to forgive someone three times, and on the fourth time, you're done. You can say, that's it. I refuse to forgive you from here on out.

I love Jesus' response. But *"**22** Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times."* Which is a way of communicating an unlimited number. Jesus is basically saying you are never free from the obligation to forgive someone. I don't care what they've done and I don't care how many times they've done it.

Does that make you uncomfortable? It should. It should make all of us uncomfortable because we're being faced with a requirement from the Word of God, that is a very strong requirement and Jesus is going to punctuate it with a parable here in just a moment. But we're dealing with something like forgiveness, which is really challenging.

And I've learned some things about forgiveness over the years. There are some important dynamics, I think, to keep in mind concerning forgiveness. And the first one is, I truly believe that there are times when forgiveness is simply unreachable from a human standpoint. My human standpoint. I'm not saying God's. I'm saying that there are times when things can happen in our lives or to us or to our loved ones in such a way that forgiveness is just simply beyond us.

But you know what else? I've come to believe that God is not so much concerned with your ability to forgive as He is your willingness to forgive. Because if you're willing, if you're simply willing to forgive, He is able to supply whatever you're lacking. And I find in my life, I'm quite often lacking. I come up short regularly. But that's one of the reasons I come to God, is that I understand that He's able to take care of what I lack because He doesn't lack anything.

And so if it's forgiveness that I just can't bring myself to, I know that if I come to Him, He will supply what I'm lacking. And I believe in my heart that is what He cares most about is just my willingness to say to Him, I can't do this but I know You can. And so Lord, make me able. Make me able.

There's one other dynamic about forgiveness that I find often in the lives of Christians and I find that it is a misunderstanding among believers about the definition or how they would define forgiveness. And it often comes into play when someone has been hurt very, very badly by someone who has never repented and is continuing to be just as hurtful and dangerous and toxic as they ever were.

And I will go to the person who's been hurt as a pastor and I will say, have you forgiven that person? And they will say, well, no, I haven't forgiven them because if I do that, I just got to open the door and let them back into my life to do everything, all the hurting and all the abusing that they were doing in the first place. And it's at that point that I help them to understand that what they've done is they've misunderstood or frankly they've confused forgiveness with reconciliation.

Now, reconciliation can follow forgiveness but they are not the same thing. They are two different things. And it's important for believers to understand that because if they confuse forgiveness with reconciliation, they will actually withhold their obedience from God when He tells them to forgive. Because they feel like they can't, either for themselves or their family.

It's like, I got to protect my family. I can't let that person back into my life because my children are still at a very vulnerable place in their growth. And if I forgive this person, they're just going to come back and they're going to do all the same junk that they were doing before. And we just can't do that. I can't do that. No, I haven't forgiven that person.

No, you see, you've confused forgiveness and reconciliation. And it is such an important thing to understand. If someone has been emotionally and physically

and even spiritually abusive and dangerous in your life, you are obligated to forgive them. You must. But you are not obligated to reconcile with someone if it means allowing them the freedom to keep hurting you and the people in your life. That's not necessarily a part of forgiveness because, you see, forgiveness is all about retaining the debt that they owe you.

Remember how Jesus said we're to pray, Forgive us, our debtors, forgive us our debts as we have forgiven our debtors. (Matthew 6:12) A debt is something someone owes you because they've hurt you. And you can release them from that debt. And you can say, you're forgiven. I hold nothing over your head. And I believe, personally, it is important to begin to pray for that person. And I mean, not just pray that God would judge them, but to pray that God would bless them.

I've had people ask me many times, pastor Paul, how can I know if I've really forgiven someone? And I tell them, when you pray for them, you know you've forgiven them, when you know you mean your prayer for them. When you—cause I'll be honest with you.

If you're praying for somebody who's hurt you badly and they're still hurting people, you're not going to mean it at first. When you start to walk out in obedience, praying for someone who's hurt you, you're not going to mean it. And I don't care whether you mean it or not. You do it out of obedience.

And eventually you're going to find God's going to change your heart. And suddenly you're going to realize while you're praying, I really mean this. You've gotten there. You've gotten to the place you need to get to, and He'll bring you there. He's faithful to do that. But that's what forgiveness is all about but you can continue to protect yourself.

There has been one time in my entire life that I needed to forgive someone, and I knew I needed to forgive them. But I also knew that I didn't want anything anymore to do with them because they remained a danger to me and my family.

And so I don't expect this to happen a lot in your life. I mean, I don't know what kind of drama you go through, but it shouldn't be like an everyday thing, I forgive you, but I'm not going to have anything to do with you. Pretty soon you'll be living like a hermit.

It's only happened once in my life, but I know that I know, that I know, that I know, that I've forgiven that person, even though I said, we're done. Go your

way, go in peace. I'll pray for you. You pray for me, but there's going to be a distance. But I forgive you, I release you. It's so important.

And Jesus goes on to explain why it's important in the following and final parable. Listen to this, verse 23 and following, *"Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. [24] When he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents."*

Here's what you need to know about 10,000 talents. In the Greek, this is the largest Greek numeral and this is the largest Greek reference to currency. It doesn't get any bigger than this. Alright? In other words, this is all meant to say this is an unpayable debt. It's so big. It's so massive. There's no way in a hundred lifetimes this guy could have paid this debt. Alright?

And that's what it goes on to say in verse 25. *"And since he could not pay,* (and the master knew it) *his master ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made. [26] So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.' [27] And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt. [28] But when that same servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii,* (and that wasn't a small amount, but it was certainly payable) *and seizing him, he began to choke him, saying, 'Pay what you owe.' [29] So his fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you.' [30] He refused and went and put him in prison* (and that means debtor's prison, and that was something they did to people who couldn't pay their debts) *until he should pay the debt.*

[31] When his fellow servants saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their master all that had taken place. [32] Then his master summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked servant! (and that's an important statement right there) *I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. [33] And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?' [34] And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers,* (your New King James Bible says, *the torturers*, yikes) *until he should pay all his debt."*

And again, that means he was cast into debtor's prison. It was a way that they exacted payment from people during that time.

And then we come to this final and sobering statement. *"[35] So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart."* All right, let's talk about this as we close here this morning.

First of all, most of this parable is very simple to interpret. Because it's just helping us to understand the standpoint of our debt that was forgiven through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross, compared to the debt that is owed to us by others who have sinned against us. And basically what the parable is telling you and me is it's not, you can't compare the two.

Your debt against the Lord was so great, so as to be completely unpayable, whereas what people have done to you doesn't even compare. Okay? And the reason it doesn't compare, you say, well, pastor Paul, why doesn't it compare? Well, I'll tell you why. Because whatever somebody did against you, that was one sinner against a sinner. But what you did against God was a sinner against a holy, righteous, pure God. And that's the difference. And if you don't get it, then just pray about it, I suppose. But it's massive and that was the point of the parable.

It's a very simple message. You've been forgiven. Now do the same. That's it. It doesn't get any deeper or more complex than that. You've been forgiven. Your debt has been wiped out so do not have the audacity to hold someone else's debt over their head because what Jesus is saying here is essentially, it is a great evil to do that.

Notice in the parable, the master said to the servant, *"you wicked servant."* People, it is an act of wickedness and nothing less, for you and me in light of how we have been forgiven, to carry someone's sin over their head. And so you see, most of the verses here are pretty easy to interpret as it relates to the simplicity of our obligation to forgive.

Now, as we come to the last 2 verses of the chapter, that part isn't so easy. And I got to tell you, there have been a lot of different opinions about what Jesus is saying here when He says that *"...my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart."*

And there have been some people who frankly have interpreted that statement by saying, well, we're talking about a loss of salvation here. But you see that creates very, very serious theological difficulties to interpret it that way.

Namely, we basically take faith as the means of our salvation, which is what the Bible teaches, and we replace that with forgiveness. We're saved by forgiving

others. And that, see, that just isn't square with the Word of God. In fact, it contradicts the Word of God.

Every time you come to a passage like this in the Bible that seems to suggest that salvation is predicated upon something like forgiveness or good works or something like that, you've got to view it through the lens of Ephesians 2:8 and 9, which says, it is by grace through faith that you have been saved and this not of yourselves, it is the gift of God lest anyone should boast. Right?

The Bible teaches that we cannot be saved by our good works. It is impossible. So this passage cannot be saying that if you refuse to forgive somebody, your salvation will be lost. I refuse to believe that. Again, it would be a contradiction.

Let's just say, and I think the best takeaway from this passage is what I've already said. Unforgiveness is a form of wickedness, the height of which we can scarcely understand in light of what God has done for us.

We've been forgiven. I sit here today a forgiven man, and believe me, I didn't deserve it, but I needed it, and I know it's the same with every single one of us. We sit here today completely forgiven because we've put our faith in Jesus Christ. Now, go do likewise.

And if you come up against a situation for which forgiveness is too great an ask, then cry out to the Lord your God and tell Him what He already knows. You can't do it, but He can, and you're willing to let Him do it in you, amen? Let's stand together. We'll close in prayer.

There's a wonderful passage in the Book of Colossians. Let me show you this on the screen as we get ready to close in prayer. Paul writes,

Colossians 3:12-13 (ESV)

Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.

Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.

If you need prayer, come on up front after we're done.

Father, thank You so much for the Word that challenges and convicts us and makes us uncomfortable.

And Lord, we've all been hurt in different ways, some more serious than another. And in some cases, Lord, we recognize that this thing called forgiveness may in fact be outside of the realm of our ability. And we confess that to you as fallible human beings. But we also confess, Lord, that through the power that is resident in us through Your Holy Spirit, You have given us the ability to meet every demand of godliness, including forgiveness.

And so Father, we come to You today and we confess those areas that have been hard to forgive. And we ask You, Lord, to enable us to forgive. And Lord, I pray that we would get busy praying for the people that have hurt us the most, so that our hearts can be truly free.

Do that work in us, Lord God, that we find so difficult in and of ourselves. To release others from the debt owed to us. But I pray my father God that we would do it just as You have done it for us. To do it completely, to do it in love.

We thank You. We praise You. We worship You. King of kings, Lord of lords, soon coming Redeemer.

In Jesus name we pray and all God's people said, amen.

Have a good rest of your day.