

Good morning! For those of you that don't know me, my name is Matt – I am the director of youth and outreach here at Eagle Ridge and it is my pleasure to be up here this morning delivering this message. We are in the middle of a series called "Kingdom Stories" which has been going through some of the parables that Jesus taught. Now, each of these parables is an allegory – a story with a hidden meaning. Sometimes the hidden truth is difficult to decipher and other times it's a little easier – but in all cases it requires that you lean in and listen to what Jesus is saying and allow the Holy Spirit convict you and begin the process of transforming you so that you can grow and mature from it. And, of course, each of these stories is an attempt by Jesus to explain a concept that is just too complex, too massive, for us to fully comprehend... this idea of "The Kingdom of God." Something that is all around us – yet invisible. Something that is always growing and changing – but constant.

Our key verse this series is

To those who listen to my teaching, more understanding will be given, and they will have an abundance of knowledge. But for those who are not listening, even what little understanding they have will be taken away from them...¹⁶ "But blessed are your eyes, because they see; and your ears, because they hear. ¹⁷ I tell you the truth, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, but they didn't see it. And they longed to hear what you hear, but they didn't hear it.

Matthew 13:12 & 16-17

And I would encourage you to commit this to heart and meditate on it... pray about it. Ask God to open your ears and eyes and to convict you about these teachings so that you can be transformed by them.

Over the course of this series we've attempted to frame the concept of the Kingdom of God in a couple ways. The first is that **The Kingdom of God is a present reality and a future hope**. This means that it is here and now – those of us that are believers are members of this kingdom and serve King Jesus... but... there's more to come. The other phrase we've been using helps describe the action or mission of this kingdom, it is: **The Kingdom of God is the restoration of God's rule & reign here on earth**. I've been going through this same series with my youth group and every week they tell me they get it... and every week they really don't... So I break it down this way for them: God created everything... He gave it to us... we gave it away to the enemy... and God is slowly reclaiming it all, redeeming it. And every time someone submits to Jesus' authority as King, they become a member of that kingdom. And every time we submit our possessions and finances and careers and actions to the authority of King Jesus, they become resources and tools for the kingdom.

But this kingdom operates very differently than anything we have ever experienced here on Earth. The way things operate seem backward to us and almost unnatural... so Jesus attempted to explain things to his followers in ways they might understand – in Parables. And today, we are going through a tough one. Don't get

me wrong – super easy to understand (at a brain level) – very difficult to apply (at a heart level). So let's dive right in.

We will be in Matthew, chapter 18 starting in verse 21. And this is how it starts:

Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?"

Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times. (Matt 18: 21-22)

Ok, let's pause here and chat because you all need some context about this. Peter... is being a teacher's pet. See, there's this rule in the Jewish tradition that stems from the book of Amos in chapters 1 and 2. In those chapters God says that he will bring judgement on these certain nations and groups of people because they have continued to sin against him and refuse to repent. The language used is "for three transgressions, and for four..." which is written in a mathematically style which actually refers to the concept of "infinity" – in other words... THEY JUST KEEP SINNING... But that's not how the rabbi's interpreted it... they saw 3 and 4 and said... oh! 3 must be okay, but 4 is too much! So... they did what all good religious leaders do... they created a RULE. "Ok people! You must forgive people 3 times.. but if they sin against you 4 times... that's it... you can seek judgement"

So, Peter is hearing all this teaching from Jesus and how Jesus always seems to takes things to the extreme... so he figures if forgiving someone 3 times is the normal rule... forgiving someone

7 times must be what Jesus wants – because – hey – Jesus! And he’s probably thinking Jesus is going to look at him and smile and say “Good job Peter! You’re getting it!” But... instead he gets the “No.... not seven... but seventy-seven” – and actually the literal translation there is seventy times seven – or 490 times. The point being that it’s not something you should be counting! We’re not supposed to be keeping track of the transgressions against us! We’re supposed to forgive... and then he launches into our parable:

²³ “Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. ²⁴ As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand bags of gold^[h] was brought to him. ²⁵ Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt.

²⁶ “At this the servant fell on his knees before him. ‘Be patient with me,’ he begged, ‘and I will pay back everything.’ ²⁷ The servant’s master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go.

Now, I don’t know how this guy ended up borrowing and losing 10,000 bags of gold... but WOW! In modern day terms that would like 4.5 billion dollars – that’s billion... with a B. He’s never going to repay that... ever... a typical day’s wage was a denarii (one silver coin) which is about \$100 today. So... yeah... he’s not paying that back. But, this king does something incredible... almost absurd... he cancelled the entire debt. All of it... gone. How amazingly generous! How incredibly kind! And then the story continues...

²⁸ "But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred silver coins.^[1] He grabbed him and began to choke him. 'Pay back what you owe me!' he demanded.

²⁹ "His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay it back.'

³⁰ "But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt.

Wow... Oh I get so angry at this part! This guy... ugh... this jerk!

³¹ When the other servants saw what had happened, they were outraged and went and told their master everything that had happened.

³² "Then the master called the servant in. 'You wicked servant,' he said, 'I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to.' ³³ Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?' ³⁴ In anger his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed.

YES! Righteous Justice! Go KING! I mean... wow... what a jerk! He's forgiven a debt of \$4.5 billion and the same day demands that someone pay him back 100 silver coins – roughly \$10,000. I mean \$10,000 is a lot of money... but not compared to \$4.5 billion! You just won the lottery – no 100 lotteries - and you're hitting people up for money?!?! Come on! The character of this guy... is just so slimy... so despicable... so... thankless.... Ugh...

And then Jesus finishes the story by saying:

"This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart."

And then I remember that the person in this story.... Is me....

Did you know that Jesus said in Matthew 12:36 that "I tell you that everyone will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken." The king in this story is God... God is a bookkeeper... he knows all of our transgressions, our sins, our careless words... And it is WAY more than we can ever pay back. It would be comparable to trying to pay back a loan of 4.5 billion dollars... it's just not going to happen. And yet, that debt has been paid for us... by Jesus. His work on the cross – for us – completely wiped it out. So much so that it has paid for every sin, every mistake you will ever make ... ever.

But.. that forgiveness comes with an obligation... We are required to pay it forward. And this isn't a "requirement" like the rules we make up for each other... or the rules that religions place on people – like the rabbi's who said you must forgive 3 times... This isn't about a Rule.. this is about following Jesus... This is about doing what he does, looking at Him as our example and attempting to do the same thing in our lives. We aren't supposed to forgive because we HAVE TO. We forgive because we are forgiven. Let me say that again.... I forgive others because I'm forgiven.

This isn't about you and me... it's about me and Him! The source of my forgiveness is Jesus. He is my example. And nothing that anyone can do to me or against me is going to amount to MORE

than what I've already been forgiven for. And let me be clear... People can REALLY hurt us. They can do damage to us. They can commit horrible, unspeakable acts that are NOT deserving of forgiveness.... And so do I. Thank God I don't get what I deserve. I thank God that I don't get what I deserve because I deserve much worse.

But it's more than paying it forward... It's more than doing what's right in the eyes of God (as crazy as that sounds). It's actually what's good for us anyway!!

Unforgiveness tortures us. It chains us up. It makes us angry, impatient, causes us to lash out at others that don't deserve it. We've been hurt - and never forgave and dealt with that pain... and so it comes out in other ways. There's a saying that goes like this: Emotions that you bury... you bury alive... it comes back to haunt you! I read this quote and thought it was great: "Unforgiveness is like drinking poison and expecting the other person to die." You must deal with these feelings and forgiveness. We need to give these things to God. Who do you need to forgive? What thing that happened in your past do you need to forgive?

Maybe it's someone in your past... (my story)

Maybe it's your spouse...

- Requires forgiveness – mutual.
- Live with another flawed, broken person long enough... and they will hurt you
- Mercy and Forgiveness saves marriages.

Maybe it's your parents...

- Unreasonable standards

Maybe it's a boss/coworker...

- Can't control the actions of others, but we can control our actions
- Forgiveness doesn't always change other people (servant in the story) but it does change us!

Forgiveness frees us. It breaks those chains. It allows us to stop keeping score and holding onto the pains we've experienced. We just have to give it to God. We need to trust that God is BOTH a God of Justice and Mercy. He will take care of it all. He didn't miss your pain. He knows what that person did to you... or how you were treated.... And he will deal with them the same way he will deal with you! – and the air just got sucked out of the room – Don't believe me?

In Deuteronomy 32:35 God says "It is mine to avenge; I will repay"

And Jesus says in Matthew 7:2 "For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged and the measure you use, it will be measured to you."

Oh... And, of course, he said it at the very end of our parable today: "This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart." Matt 18:35

This is how it works in God's Kingdom. This is how it operates. We need to know this so we can be faithful citizens in this kingdom and be successful ambassadors to this world we live in.

So... here's my plea... my advice to all of us – including myself... we NEED to let this stuff go! We need to give it to God. It's not about what they did to you... it's about what Jesus did for you. That servant in the story today... that's us. We have been forgiven... Our debt has been paid... A debt that is so massive that there is no way we can ever say Thank you enough... but there's a way we can try... we can forgive others.

Steps toward Forgiveness

1. Identify the pain, hurt, or transgression that you're still holding onto and where that came from.
2. Remember the source of Forgiveness is Jesus
3. Forgive (repeat as necessary).