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Parables: Forgiveness

By Bryan Hodge

“He that cannot forgive others breaks the bridge over which he must pass himself; for every man has need to be forgiven.” – Thomas Fuller

“Never does the human soul appear so strong as when it forgoes revenge, and dares forgive an injury.” – E.H. Chapin

Jesus set forth two parables that we will classify as Forgiveness Parables. Let’s notice:

The Two Debtors (Luke 7:40-47)

The setting (7:36-39): Jesus is a guest for dinner at Simon’s house. Simon is a Pharisee. A woman of sinful reputation comes to Jesus and begins to wash his feet with her tears, and wipe them with her hair, and anoint them with fragrant oil. Simon wonders how Jesus, if he be a prophet of God, would allow such a woman near Him.

The Parable (7:40-43): Jesus’ parable speaks of human tendency. Generally speaking, the larger the debt forgiven, the more gratitude. Simon understands this.

The Application (7:44-47): “Simon, you have misjudged this woman. Yes, she has had a sinful past, but she has been forgiven. It is for this reason she honors Me.” Wayne Jackson commented on verse 47, “Perfect tense – an act in the past with abiding results. The Lord was not forgiving her sins at this point in time, rather he was stating what her present condition was. This woman had obviously received the Savior’s pardon on some previous but unrecorded occasion” (The Parables in Profile, p. 53). J.W. McGarvey commented, “Her love was the result, and not the cause, of her forgiveness” (The Four Fold Gospel, p. 295).

The truth is none of us can pay for our sins (7:42). This woman grasped how much she needed the Savior. Simon failed to grasp this point (cf. Luke 18:10-14). Do we grasp how lost we would be without the Savior? How appreciative we should be!

The Unmerciful Servant (Matthew 18:23-35)

The setting (18:21-22): Peter want to know how many times one is required to forgive. He asks, “Up to seven times?” Some Jewish rabbis taught that one was required to forgive up to three times, based on Amos 1:3, 6, 13; 2:6. The idea of seven times may have come from Peter literalizing Jesus’ teachings (Luke 17:3-4). Jesus answers by throwing out a large number (seventy times seven) to say in effect, “Peter, you are not even close.”

The Parable (18:23-35): Two men are considered. One owed the King a very large debt (10,000 talents, the E.S.V. Study Bible calculates this at about \$6 billion). The man could not repay the debt. However, the King forgave him. The other man owed the first man a debt (100 denarii, the E.S.V. Study Bible calculates this at about \$12,000 in today's terms). The first man, unlike the King, refuses to forgive the debt, but committed him to debtors prison. When the King heard of this, he reinstated the debt of the first man.

The Application: God has greatly forgiven us. How can we refuse to forgive others. The truth is - our forgiveness will be forfeited if we refuse to forgive others. As the King did to the unmerciful servant, Jesus said - "So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses" (18:35). Jesus taught us to pray, "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors" (Matthew 6:12). Moreover, he warned, "If you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (Matthew 6:14-15).