**Matthew 18:21-35 September 13, 2020**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our text for this morning comes from the Gospel of Matthew the 18th chapter here re-reading these words. “Peter came up and said to Jesus, ‘Lord how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times? Jesus said to him, I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven.” This is our text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

We live in a culture of scandal. It’s just a fact of life. The most influential people of our society; politicians, celebrities, and world leaders are what we hear about on the news and in magazines even in the midst of a global pandemic. Even when there are hurricanes, and wildfires. No matter what kind of disaster is going on there always seems to be room for scandal. We hear the rumors, and then we see the facts. Husbands cheating on their wives. Business leaders embezzling money from a company. Even seemingly innocent and kind individuals being charged with murder. These days scandals aren’t even so much about what someone does and the evidence against them, it’s about what someone is accused of doing, or what someone said, whether it be on the internet or otherwise. The interesting part about our world today and how it deals with scandal is that even if an individual receives forgiveness from the other party, from the company, from the victim, or anyone else, in the grand scheme of public opinion, it doesn’t seem to matter. Forgiveness is withheld. But it’s not just a truth of scandal in the wider sense of the world, think about your own families, your own friends, or former friends I should say. Have you forgiven them for the scandals or problems that have arisen in your own private life? Or have you withheld forgiveness from them?

Forgiveness. That’s what so many individuals seek for their public personas in our culture today. It’s also, what Jesus is speaking about here in Matthew chapter 18. Jesus and Peter have a discussion regarding the frequency of forgiveness. Peter asks very innocently if 7 times is enough to forgive his brother who sins against him. Jesus, tells him not 7, but seventy, times seven is the appropriate amount, and then illustrates this point by telling him the parable of the unforgiving servant. Peter’s questions are not just for himself. The wording of Jesus answer in the Greek shows that when Jesus responds he is talking all of them. They all wanted to know, where the line was when it comes to a healthy amount of forgiveness. Jesus tells all of them, the appropriate amount of forgiveness, and that it is not quantified or checked off on a list. Forgiveness was to be given freely and continually for those who have sinned and repented of that sin to God.

Although, Peter’s questioning shouldn’t be overlooked. His curiosity of 7 times being appropriate, was actually very lenient. 7 times was over double what many rabbis of Jesus’ time considered to be an appropriate amount of forgiveness for your erring brother. Which begs the same question in our lives today, perhaps you’ve contemplated this question that Peter asks. How many times do you have to forgive someone? I mean honestly? If you were the one to decide, in your mind, right now, how many times would you honestly say that someone deserves a second chance and is forgiven what they do wrong? Would anyone seriously say 7? 7 times that they can mess up, betray your trust, and you’ll forgive them and let them back into your life? Not when it comes to the Pharisees. For them, you can remember it with a baseball analogy. 3 strikes and you’re out. 3 was enough in their eyes, but not in the eyes of God. And Jesus’ point wasn’t that even after you have forgiven someone 490 times you were done with them. Forgiveness is given from the heart, in response to the mercy shown to us as children of God. Children transformed by God’s love and mercy in our lives. Jesus was pointing to the forgiveness that God gives to His children as an example of how we are to forgive each other.

It’s important to remember that Jesus ministry transformed the lives of the disciples. These men came from various occupations and vocations, and had different backgrounds, yet Christ taught them the truth. He called them to be His disciples, and from that point on their lives completely changed. They were transformed by the truth of the Gospel. They all went out, teaching the people about Jesus Christ, telling the people the amazing things Jesus had done, and being so adamant in their belief and in the faith that God had given them, and the charge they had, as eye-witnesses of the wonders of God, that they *died* in their faith. They would rather die than to give up the life that Jesus had given to them, by His death and his resurrection.

That’s the transforming nature of God’s love, and his mercy, and his *forgiveness*. And that is what Jesus is speaking about to the disciples. Peter’s question was very simply wondering where the line was when it comes to allowing his brother to sin against him without consequence, and without punishment.

But a better question is this: How can we, who have been forgiven by God completely and totally, fail to forgive our brothers and sisters in Christ who have sinned against us? It’s the question that Jesus is asking us in the parable of the unforgiving servant. A servant comes to the king with a debt that is truly beyond our understanding. For the reader of Jesus’ day, to hear that this man owed ten thousand talents, would have elicited a shocked response. Biblical scholars have said that this debt’s amount was so huge, that if this man was a common laborer, it would have taken him 60 million years to pay it off! The fact that he was even able to borrow this much is an amazing feat. Ten thousand talents, was a death sentence, it was an impossible debt, and it was what this servant owed. He is facing a never ending life of slavery in order to pay back his debt, and yet, the servant begs the king for forgiveness. He asks for patience, and promises to pay everything, even when it is impossible for him to do so.

That is our reality as sinners. We are hopelessly in debt. In very simple terms, we aren’t just in debt up to our eyeballs we are drowning in our debt when it comes to sin. Because sin is not just the moments when we feel the weight of what we have done wrong, and the guilt of our unrighteousness, sin is every infraction against the perfect standard of God Law. Which means that we should constantly be refraining from sinning against ourselves and our neighbors, and should instead always be doing what God demands of us. We should not just be refraining from the harm of those around us but we should instead by helping them and supporting them in every physical need. And every time we fail, and sin against God, we only heap up more sins that must be paid for. And paid, as we talked about last week, not with gold, or silver, but with blood. With suffering, and with death.

The amazing thing is that the king shows mercy to this man. Jesus says out of *pity* for him, the master of that servant released him and *forgave the debt*! That aspect of this parable can often be overlooked when it comes to the second scene that we see played out before us. This king doesn’t just give him more time, to accomplish the impossible task of paying off this debt. The servant believes he can pay it off eventually, but the King, in his wisdom, mercy, love, and pity, forgives the entire debt. While he was still a servant to the king he was free of the debt that he himself had accumulated. It’s an amazing illustration of God’s love for us.

That love, and mercy should transform our lives to turn from our unrepentant sin, to seek forgiveness in God’s house, and to instead show forgiveness and love to those around us. But we are as guilty as this servant. For the servant goes and demands the hundred denarii from his fellow servant. In comparison to the debt that was forgiven of this servant, this amount is nothing, its chump change. Yet he doesn’t listen to the cries of patience and mercy that this fellow servant makes. He instead chokes him and throws him in jail.

I bring up the scandal of our culture and lives as Americans to illustrate the fact, that while we claim to be a country that loves second chances, and wants to help those in need, in reality, we are very unforgiving. We are very unforgiving of those caught up in the scandals and rumors, even when they are caught and repentant. This is true of our feelings about companies, of political figures, of celebrities and sports stars, but more than that, it’s true of our relationships with neighbors, co-workers, fellow members and especially those we love the most, like family members, children, parents, husband, and wives. When we sin against those we love, and against those around us, we beg for forgiveness, and pray for patience and understanding, but when those we love sin against us, we turn the tables on them. And we withhold forgiveness. Or we keep a record of past wrongs and make sure to remind them of all of their mistakes.

But that is not the forgiveness that we see from the king who forgave the debt of his servant. And it certainly is not how God has forgiven us. It’s not how God has shown love and mercy to us, by sending His Son, into this world, to save us from perishing under the weight of our sin. To save us from eternal torment, hoping to be free from the debt that we could never hope to repay. Instead He gave us a gift. A priceless gift of His own Son, so that we would not perish, but have eternal life. And he has promised to forgive us, and forget our past wrongs. So complete is God’s forgiveness that David writes that as far as the east is from the west, so far does God remove our transgressions from us. He takes away our sin in such a complete way, out of compassion and love, that we are free forever from the weight of our sin.

The lesson that Jesus is teaching, isn’t that we must forgive our brother or else we will not receive the forgiveness that God gives. God’s mercy is not conditional, and the mercy that we show to others is simply done out of thankfulness to God. In light of this truth, the question isn’t how we could possibly forgive our brother and sisters in Christ when they sin against us, but instead how could we not forgive our brother and sister in Christ, when they sin against us when we have been forgiven of such an unfathomable debt? How can we not, see our lives, and everything we have, as a result of His love, and His mercy, and His *forgiveness?*

May God bless you with His mercy and love in your life. For we all have been given a gift that we can’t ever repay. And in response to that gift, in our sanctified and holy lives as God’s children, we are equipped to go out to our brothers and sisters in Christ, in love, and in mercy, and forgive them. For God has blessed us with His gift of salvation, and that gift transforms our lives and sinful hearts to freely forgive, love, and show mercy to everyone.

Amen.

The peace of God which surpasses all human understanding keep our hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Amen.