

Session 10 – The Parable of the Unmerciful King (Part 2) | Matthew 18

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Matthew 18:1-22 | Context of the Passage (see part 1 for full detail)

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- An outline for review:
  - Verse 1 - This verse sets the tone for the entire passage: **who is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?**
  - Verses 2-6 – The one who **shall humble himself as a little child**.
  - Verses 7-11 – Woe to the offender of the little children.
  - Verses 12-14 – The parable of the lost sheep as an illustration of God’s desire for the children to be in the Kingdom.
  - Verses 15-17 – The importance of remaining in the nation and not being cast out among the *ethnos*.
  - Verses 18-20 – The glorious power of the Kingdom-era nation of Israel.
  - Verses 21-22 – Forgive until the Kingdom comes (70x7=490 years from release from Babylon).
- Additional comments on the context:
  - Just about every commentary available assumes the church to be Israel and the Kingdom and thus makes an utter mess of these verses.

Matthew 18:23-35 | The Parable

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- Verse 23 –
  - It is important to note that the parable begins with **therefore**, thus connecting it to the previous discussion on greatness in the Kingdom (v. 1) and the related aspect of forgiveness (vv. 21-22).
  - Note that **the kingdom of heaven is likened unto...**, and if we say *salvation-by-grace is likened unto...* we will end up with huge theological problems so unacceptable that this parable alone should cause us to question the Kingdom=Church dogma.
- Verses 24-33 –
  - The parable itself: a man forgiven of a huge and unmanageable debt is given grace, and then he turns and allows no grace given to his own debtors.
  - Does this in any way *prove* that salvation was *by grace through faith* in the dispensation in which the story is given? Not at all, and for these reasons:
    - The means of salvation is not the topic of this parable.
    - The parable begins with a king who would **take account of his servants** (v. 23), which is opposite of 2 Corinthians 5:19.
    - The servant whose debt was forgiven ends up being **delivered to the tormentors** (v. 34) rather than being shown continued grace, thus *works were required for this servant*.
  - The point of the parable is that the nation needed to *forgive until the Kingdom comes* (70x7).
- Verses 34-35 –
  - The outcome of lack of forgiveness was *torment* until **he should pay all that was due unto him**. Could this be a reference to the Tribulation? Roman Catholics take this as a teaching about *purgatory*.
  - Verse 35 is crystal clear: **if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses** then the audience would be **delivered...to the tormentors** (v. 34).
  - To make any attempt to apply this to the Christian life is to totally *wrongly divide the word of truth*.

- A sampling of the shameful applications:
  - John Piper: *“The greatest risk we face as a church in these days is not that we may lose an organ, or that we may lose money, or that we may lose members, or that we may lose staff, or that we may lose reputation. The greatest risk is that we may lose heaven. Because one way to lose heaven is to hold fast to an unforgiving spirit and so prove that we have never been indwelt by the Spirit of Christ.”*
  - Dan Doriani (Southern Baptist Journal of Theology):
    - *“In case we have any doubts, Jesus gives us a key to the interpretation of the parable in the last verse, “This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart” (18:35). The significance of each character in the parable is clear:*
      - *The king represents God the Father, as he calls people to account for their sin, extends mercy to us, but then requires us to show mercy.*
      - *The steward or debtor is “you”—a man or woman to whom God offers mercy.*
      - *The debt, by implication, is what each person owes to God.”<sup>1</sup>*
    - *Doriani also says, “If we love God’s grace, then we must extend grace, or we don’t understand grace at all. A failure to forgive, Jesus’ parable says, raises doubts that the one who was wronged ever tasted God’s grace. A refusal to forgive casts that person’s forgiveness into doubt.”*
    - *One wonders how this interpretation aligns with Ephesians 2:8-9.*
  - Stuart Weber – Holman New Testament Commentary (SBC) *“In this parable Jesus spoke in hyperbole about his anger toward an arrogant, rebellious child. The language may be exaggerated to cause us to take the teaching on forgiveness seriously.”<sup>1</sup>*
    - *When you are not a dispensationalist, you have to give excuses for what the Bible says.*
    - *The excuse of Weber is hyperbole and exaggeration.*
  - These kinds of interpretations are why so many Christians *doubt* God’s grace and *doubt* their salvation, and how so many preachers bring *guilt trips* on believers.

## What is the Mystery?

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- All true parables reveal a mystery of the Kingdom.
- In this parable, the nation of Israel learned that:
  - The nation needed humility
  - The nation needed to get things right with each other.
    - *If the nations are going to be judged for what they do unto the least of these my brethren, then the nation itself must treat its brethren with respect.*
  - The nation that could not come with humility and forgiveness (both are works) would enter a time of torment (v. 34).

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<sup>1</sup> Dan Doriani, “Forgiveness: Jesus’ Plan For Healing And Reconciliation In The Church (Matthew 18:15–35),” *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* Volume 13 13, no. 3 (2009): 29–30.