

The Parable of the Ungrateful Servant

Good morning Southwest Family

Fellowship! Today we are going to be starting our Summer in the Parables series, the Stories Jesus Told. It will be a fun and enlightening journey into the stories Jesus told and used to help believers and those listening understand the secrets and the wonders of the Kingdom of God.

A parable is defined as “a simple story used to illustrate a moral or spiritual lesson, as told by Jesus in the Gospels.”

Now this definition does a basic job in helping us understand the use of Parables, but Klyne Snodgrass has a different take on what Parables are and what they mean, he explains that, possibly no definition of parables will do, for any definition that is broad enough to cover all the forms is so imprecise that it is almost

useless. He does share two definitions of parables that I want to share with y'all,

"A parable is a literary creation in narrative form designed either to portray a type of character for warning or example or to embody a principle of God's governance of the world and men.

"At its simplest the parable is a metaphor or simile drawn from nature or common life, arresting the hearer by its vividness or strangeness, and leaving the mind in sufficient doubt about its precise application to tease it into active thought."

No definition covers all of the Parables or applies perfectly to each, but I do believe Jesus used Parables to engage the listener by telling stories that were interesting, vivid, fun and engaged the mind and heart.

For the next few weeks we are going to have some fun with these simple interesting stories Jesus told and go through a few with a

little bit of summer flare. What I mean by that, is I will be wearing fun, colorful, floral, Hawaiian-esque shirts for this series and I would encourage you if you would like to, to wear colorful, fun, floral, Hawaiian shirts or dresses, or whatever else during this series.

Story time is always more fun with imagination and costumes and props so this is part of our journey through the Parables, we will be wearing these fun colorful shirts, dresses, or whatever you want. Sometimes when I imagine in my head Jesus sitting the disciples or crowds down to tell them a Parable, I picture him using puppets or costumes or different voices to tell the story, I know that's silly and most likely not culturally accurate but part of our Summer in the Parables will be fun and colorful and I believe it'll help us connect with and understand the stories a bit more.

I went on a missions trip to Macedonia while I was in college with a team of college students and we learned how to do a full play in Macedonian. Here is a **picture of us**, I'm the light blue pencil in the top left. It was a play about God's love and grace that was written to convey this message to kids. Now, our team didn't learn Macedonian in two weeks but we had audio tracks that we lip-synced to and we understood it enough to know when our dancing and movement cues were.

We ended up performing this play across the country like 6 or 7 different times. We wore colorful costumes and learned funny dances and lines that helped engage the crowd. When we display and teach God's truths and the gospel in fun, vivid and engaging ways, it really does draw people in and help tell the story.

Jesus definitely could have just simply explained certain teachings, or simply broken

down certain theologies, doctrines or understandings of the Kingdom of God for people but his use of stories and illustration and metaphors and so on, helped paint a colorful picture of what he was trying to say. It drew in the listener and required an open heart and mind to hear fully what he was saying. He also would hide spiritual nuggets in his stories that were only decipherable if the person listening had a childlike wonder and aspiration to know and understand Jesus and his divinity more.

I want to show y'all a quick video/song from the original animated Aladdin real quick to help express this point. Let's watch. (2:34 Friend Like Me) The Genie could have simply just told Aladdin, hey, I'm a great friend and I can grant you any wish you want. It would have been simple, to the point and gotten his message across but it wouldn't have been as profoundly impactful in drawing Aladdin in. It wouldn't have

sparked his interest, mind, and curiosity as much. The Genie used color and fun to make it more relatable, understandable and engaging. This is part of why I believe Jesus used Parables, they were fun, engaging, vivid and a bit more interesting to listen to than their typical synagogue teachings.

Today we will be diving into the Parable of the Ungrateful Servant. But before we do let's read the two verses before the Parable starts as it gives context to what Jesus is trying to teach.

Matthew 18:21-22,

21 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?"
22 Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times."

Peter was inquiring about what is the proper amount of times to forgive someone, and

he feels noble and humble and good about the fact that he offers the number 7, he wouldn't just forgive a person once or twice or thrice but seven times. But Jesus turns around and throws out 77 times. Now some translations have seventy times 7 or different variations. The number doesn't matter as much as the message, that forgiveness is perpetual and not a set limit. We have been eternally forgiven and therefore we should continuously forgive. This number completely blew out of the water Peter's number he offered up.

Stanley Hauerwas says this about Jesus' reply to Peter, "But Jesus's reply reminds Peter that he is to learn to be the forgiven. Jesus tells him not seven times, but "seventy-seven times." There is **no limit to the forgiveness offered by the Father through the Son**. If there were a limit to the Father's forgiveness, then Peter would no

longer be a disciple. The demand that Christians learn to forgive one another presupposes that we are a people who have *first been forgiven*." (Matthew Commentary)

Continuing on in Matthew 18 to our Parable in verses 23-35,

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 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.

28 “But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred silver coins. 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. 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.

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

This story teaches us that we are forgiven so we must forgive. We are loved so we must love. And that we must replicate grace and kindness to others. But it also shows us that if we do not show others mercy when we have received immense mercy then God will treat us like this ungrateful and unforgiving servant. We will be cast out and aside, needing reconciliation and redemption.

Un-forgiveness is a brutal poison and is against God’s heart. The servant saw the gracious King turn into a just ruler. His grace was gone and the punishment of his actions were upon him, because of his un-forgiveness. The cost of un-forgiveness is immense.

That leads us into our first point for today,

The cost of un-forgiveness is this, God's mercy is not given to those who do not forgive others.

This also means a lack of forgiveness leads to a lack of reconciliation and a lack of love. When we do not forgive others and choose to harden our hearts we become closed off to the grace and the forgiveness that Christ did and does for us.

NT Wright says it this way, "Forgiveness is more like the air in your lungs. There's only room for you to inhale the next lungful when you've just breathed out the previous one. Whatever the spiritual, moral and emotional equivalent of the lungs may be, it's either open or closed. If it's open, able and willing to forgive others, it will also be open to receive God's love and forgiveness. But if it's locked up to the one, it will be locked up to the other."

When you are unable to forgive others, not only does this hurt you but it hurts the person you have hurt or wronged or vice versa. It hurts you because you are unable to receive forgiveness and mercy yourself, just like the servant in the Parable. He initially received forgiveness but then we he did not show his fellow servant forgiveness, his heart was not able to receive it any longer and he was thrown in prison and punished.

Our forgiveness of others is not what achieves us grace or what saves us, but the presence of forgiveness in our hearts and in our lives shows the heart change caused by the grace we have received. When we choose to not pour out the love and grace we have received to others, we are rejecting the grace we have already received. The cost of un-forgiveness is big, it is dire, it shows the true reflection of our hearts.

Jesus explains earlier in this chapter that confronting one another, holding one another accountable and loving them requires forgiveness, reconciliation and challenging one another to flee and turn from sin.

This Parable of the Ungrateful Servant parallels our own indebtedness to God due to sin. Just as the king forgave the servant's enormous debt, God has forgiven us our enormous debt of sin through Christ. When we fail to extend forgiveness to others this reveals a lack of understanding of the forgiveness we have received and it minimizes the great cost Jesus paid for our sins.

It also shows a misunderstanding of what we are called to do, earlier in Matthew 18 Jesus is teaching them how to lift one another up, how to hold one another accountable, how to carry each other's burdens. God forgave us of our enormous debt of sin, and now calls us to help

carry each other's burdens. We are called to help one another live lives removed and separated from sin. The Holy Spirit is our ultimate guide and helper but our brothers, sisters, and community also partner with us to help us through this.

Like we talked about last week, a part of loving one another and being brothers and sisters in Christ to one another includes holding each other accountable, calling each other out of lives of sin, and helping one another shed light on the things we do in the dark. I know that feels uncomfortable, I know that feels scary, but that is part of our reconciliation and freedom we are promised through Christ.

In verses 15-17 it says, "15 "If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over. 16 But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every

matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.’ 17 If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector.”

We cannot speak the truth out of love, or constantly and properly carry the burdens of others if we are hiding sin or not able to carry our own load. We need the Holy Spirit, our community, and the church to come alongside us and help us live a life free from sin. We have already been promised that freedom and reconciliation and now we must live in a way that submits all things to God and fights to live a life removed from sin.

The cost of our un-forgiveness takes a toll personally and relationally. It cuts us off from the mercy of God when we choose to not show mercy and forgiveness to others, and this keeps us from seeking reconciliation. When we live out

of the love Christ has for us and live through the forgiveness he has given us, we realize how much more so, we are supposed to give forgiveness and love to others. And as we freely give these things to others and seek reconciliation we see the blessings that come with that as well.

Reconciliation comes with some pretty amazing promises. In verses 19-20 it says, “19 “Again, truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. 20 For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them.” When we come together and reconcile, forgive one another, strengthen our relationships with one another, and then through these new relationships seek God together, he is listening, he is involved, he is ready to work with us through the Spirit, even more so than when it

is just one of us gathered seeking him and loving him.

Because when we learn to forgive freely, reconcile freely and love freely, we experience all the blessings of God's mercy, grace and love.

This leads into our second point for today

We are called to forgive freely, because we were forgiven freely.

In the Parable the servant is forgiven of an enormous debt and it is assumed that because of this he should learn to forgive others who owe him. He was forgiven freely so he should forgive freely. But he didn't. But the message of this Parable is still clear, that is what should have happened. This has become such a big part of the Christian faith that it is even incorporated into the Lord's Prayer. There is even like worded language from this Parable.

Some translations of the prayer say "And forgive us our trespasses, As we forgive them that trespass against us," others say "And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors," and even others say, "and forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us."

You can see that through many different translations, the message is the same, we acknowledge that we have been forgiven freely of our trespasses, our debts, and our sins and because of that we forgive those freely that trespass against us, we forgive our debtors, and forgive those indebted to us.

Forgiveness is not just an option or a good moral practice, but an essential characteristic of a follower of Christ. Forgiveness is the state of contentment, gratitude and faith that we live

through as Christians. We realize the immense grace and love that has been shared with us, and then through that we realize it is our duty to live through that, and through that forgive others, seek reconciliation, and live through that outpouring of love.

N.T Wright talks about forgiveness, saying,

“Every time you accuse someone else, you accuse yourself. Every time you forgive someone else, though, you pass on a drop of water out of the bucketful that God has already given you.”

We are called to forgive because Christ has already forgiven us of so much. But when we turn around and accuse someone when we have already been freed and forgiven, it causes us to accuse ourself and bring judgment back on ourselves. Just like the man in this Parable, he was forgiven of a major debt and rather than being immediately grateful and learning from the

grace he was given, he turns around and shows a lack of what he just received towards this servant under him. It's the hypocrisy and the utter inability to be affected by the love and forgiveness that he was shown that shows the true colors of the servant in the Parable.

For some historical context of this transaction in this Parable. In our translation we read from today it said 10,000 bags of gold but some say 10,000 talents. Which a talent is the weight in gold of a man. Now men were smaller back then but still conservative estimates puts 10,000 talents of gold or 10,000 bags as the modern day equivalent of \$14 billion.

So this man after just being forgiven the debt of \$14 billion turns around and throws a man in jail for 100 silver pieces which is the rough modern equivalent of \$2000. Still a decent amount of money, but merely a brush in the pan of the \$14 billion he was just forgiven of. This

further illustrates the rash difference and the unforgiveness in the servant's heart.

The lesson of this story is that the servant should have walked away with a heart affected by this immense forgiveness. Just like how we walk away from the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. That \$14 billion is a metaphor for our indebtedness of sin. It is what Christ redeemed us of. The man should have walked away and been able to forgive others, love others and walk in a true freedom knowing he's been set free from a condemned past.

Unfortunately for him and for us he did not learn to do this. Just as we do not learn how to properly forgive, how to properly pursue reconciliation, and what each look like.

N.T Wright has this to say about how some of us approach forgiveness and reconciliation, "Many of us prefer to pretend there isn't a problem. We can refuse to face the facts,

swallow our anger or resentment, paper over the cracks, and carry on as if everything is normal while seething with rage inside. Or we can simply avoid and ignore the other person or group, and pretend they don't exist.

Many Christians have taken the paper-over-the-cracks option, believing that this is what 'forgiveness' means - pretending that everything is all right, that the other person hasn't really done anything wrong. That simply won't do.

If someone else - another Christian in particular! - has been offensive, aggressive, bullying, dishonest, or immoral, nothing whatever is gained by trying to create 'reconciliation' without confronting the real evil that's been done. Forgiveness doesn't mean saying 'it didn't really happen' or 'it didn't really matter.'

In either of those cases, you don't need forgiveness, you just need to clear up a misunderstanding. Forgiveness is when it did

happen, and it did matter, and you're going to deal with it and end up loving and accepting one another again anyway.”(MATTHEW FOR EVERYONE)

Forgiveness is not forgetting and letting it go, it is not choosing to not confront or pursue reconciliation, it is choosing to love yourself and others enough to make the hard choice to reconcile. To make the hard choice to confront those who have hurt you, to make the hard choice to receive someone confronting you with patience, kindness, attentiveness and love. Because seeking out reconciliation is not easy but is so worth it.

That leads us into our third point for today, We must live through gratitude and grace so that we can forgive and reconcile freely.

Part of this is to live in response to God's forgiveness by extending forgiveness to others.

Forgiving others doesn't mean minimizing the wrong or denying the pain but rather entrusting justice to God and allowing His grace to work in our hearts. Forgiveness is a process that requires continual surrender to God's transformative work, leading to freedom, reconciliation, and restored relationships.

Part of this Parable that I think often gets missed or overlooked is verse 31, "31 When the other servants saw what had happened, they were outraged and went and told their master everything that had happened."

When the other servants who knew how much the first servant had been forgiven and had his debt cancelled saw him not extending forgiveness or cancelling of a much smaller debt, they were enraged and wanted to make it right. They saw the evil and lack of gratitude and grace in this man's heart. He had received exponential

blessing and forgiveness but would not return that to another.

This is like us when we have been forgiven of everything and yet we can hold onto bitterness and grudges over little, minute things. It's like the second part of the NT Wright quote I shared earlier says, **“Every time you forgive someone else, though, you pass on a drop of water out of the bucketful that God has already given you.”** Our ability to forgive and extend grace to others isn't even something to take pride in, or boast about, because each time we forgive it is but a drop of water out of a bucketful that God has already forgiven us.

Living through gratitude and grace teaches us that it's not about how much grace or forgiveness we have shown others, it's not about how good we have been, its not about how faithful we are. It's about how much forgiveness

we have received, the grace that we've been freely given, and the faithfulness we share in Christ. When it becomes a measuring game or a determinant of how good were doing we get into sticky waters of works righteousness. NT Wright says,

“If you're still counting how many times you've forgiven someone, you're not really forgiving them at all, but simply postponing revenge. 'Seventy times seven' is a typical bit of Jesus' teasing. What he means, of course, is 'don't even think about counting; just do it.’”

Living through gratitude and grace requires just doing it, when it comes to forgiveness and reconciliation. Just seek it out, confront the issue, don't run from it. Don't act like everything is okay, that hurts you and the other person, which then hurts the body of Christ, the church. In order for the church to fully healthy and vibrant and growing we must remain vigilant in

fighting for reconciliation, constantly forgiving one another and living through gratitude and grace.

Those other servants in the Parable who were onlookers were fighting for reconciliation, they were making sure that this ungrateful servant, this servant who was not affected in the least by the mercy extended to him, would answer to his actions and would be challenged to reconcile. They cared about the community and the people involved enough to confront the issue.

This whole chapter of Matthew 18 is about relationships and how to deal with others. It's about challenging one another, holding one another accountable, forgiving one another and reconciling with each other. Among other things that we didn't cover. When it was talking about holding each other accountable in verses 15-17, if a person refused it all the way up to the church

and community confronting them, then they were to be excommunicated or treated like a tax collector or pagan. Their ways were so far gone they needed to be cast out so they could contemplate their actions and seek out reconciliation. **EXCOMMUNICATION NOT FOREVER**

Sometimes a harsh reality check, excommunication or cut off from a community is the type of tough love needed for someone to confront their issues or problems and this leads to reconciliation. This servant who had had a massive debt cancelled and forgiven was minority grateful that he was not thrown in prison or punished, but that forgiveness did not affect his heart. He was not living through gratitude or grace. If he had, he would've forgiven the debt of 100 silver coins from the other servant.

But the bystander servants saw this and held him accountable by telling the master. Part

of living through gratitude and grace is learning how to love through truth. And part of that loving through truth involves holding others accountable. That leads to true forgiveness and strong reconciliation among believers. When we fight for reconciliation it requires accountability and going to one another in love to live lives removed from the clutches of sin and death.

It's hard and it's uncomfortable but in order for us to continue developing in our faith journeys and growing as the church (here around us) and the Church across the world, we have to learn and be okay confronting one another, loving one another through truth and helping to carry each other's burdens.

I mentioned last week that I have an awesome community of people who confront me and challenge me when my pride and fear begin to control certain aspects of my life. When my sin clouds my judgment or direction. I am so

thankful for those people. I am so thankful that they do not choose to do the easy thing and just ignore it, just act like it isn't there, just act like everything is okay. Part of living through gratitude and grace is seeking reconciliation and forgiveness through confrontation, challenging one another, and carrying one another's burdens.

A couple weeks ago I shared the story of my childhood best friend that invited me to play basketball during a blizzard and that was the night I didn't end up helping my brother in law set up lights at the church. Well shortly after that time, my best friend and I kind of drifted apart. He went to a different middle school, made some new friends and so did I. It was still hard and was upsetting to me.

I didn't understand why we had to hang out less or stop being as good of friends just because of that. I became bitter, I became really upset with him and his family. I was starting to let

un-forgiveness permeate my heart. The sudden pull away that I felt in this super close friendship I had had for 7 years was tough.

But in high school he ended up coming back to my high school, we ended up becoming closer friends again, never as close as it was prior but still close. For a couple years before he came back I had to really battle those feelings of un-forgiveness, I didn't desire reconciliation, I was comfortable with my bitterness and anger.

But as time went on and as I knew we would be back at school together I decided to let it go. I decided to submit it to God, I had some conversations with him that it hurt me. Probably not enough but hey we were 14 year old boys figuring out emotions. I confronted the issue, I forgave him, and it allowed us to become friends again. It has allowed us to remain in contact every so often over the years even after high school. And none of that would have been

possible if I had held onto the un-forgiveness. It wouldn't have been possible if I hadn't confronted the issue and sought reconciliation.

Now don't get me wrong there are definitely people in my life that I did not live through gratitude and grace, that I didn't seek reconciliation with, and that I didn't freely forgive because I've been forgiven. And honestly I regret a lot of those, I regret those I've hurt and I even regret NOT trying to mend relationships with those that have hurt me.

I did just try to forget and act like it didn't matter with certain people, and there were definitely people I counted how many times I had forgiven them and held it against them. Neither of those things are true forgiveness or help achieve reconciliation.

Let's learn from this Parable of the Ungrateful Servant and learn how not to

approach forgiveness and grace from his actions. Let us never forget the immense debt God has forgiven us of in our sin and because we have been forgiven freely that we learn to forgive freely, not live in the bitterness and pain of un-forgiveness, and lets learn to live through gratitude and grace as we seek reconciliation and to live out of love.

Let's pray...

As you go today remember to forgive freely, because you have been forgiven, and let's live through gratitude and love. Have a great day!