

My friends, in the ancient world, cruel treatment, was practised, against debtors, often, without regard, to the debtor's ability, or intention, to repay. In Athens, I learnt, that prior, to the establishment, of democratic rights, a creditor, could demand, slave labour, of his debtor, or of members, of the debtor's family, as surety, guarantee, of payment.

Now Roman law, provided punishment, by imprisonment, to the debtors. But, the imprisonment, was both harsh, and cruel, so as, to force, the debtor, to sell, whatever property, they might own, secretly or not, or to have, the debtor's relatives, pay their debt. In fact, the creditor could even demand, slave labour, of the entire, family, so that the debt, might be worked off. Now there were, suppose to be, legal restrictions, to prevent extreme cruelty, but, BUT, in spite, of the laws, the entire system, of debts and their payment, was recklessly and at times, ruthlessly abused, some 2000 years ago.

And so, it is, into that context, that we hear, our reading, today, from,
Matthew Chapter 18 and verses 21 - 35 (NIV UK)
The Parable of the Unmerciful Servant

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.

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, cancelled 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 cancelled 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.”

My friends, as with, so many, of the parables – teaching stories - of Jesus, the parable, of the debtors, arose, out of a question, that was posed, to Jesus. Simon Peter, said to him:

**Master, if my brother sins against me,
how many times should I forgive him ? Seven times ?**

Now, for me, even, as he asks, that question, my mind, cannot help, but think, about children, and how they, will sometimes, confess something, they do wrong, expecting, to get praise, from a teacher, or a parent, because they, were so, honest.

I think, in a similar way, Simon Peter, by asking, this question, is not expecting, rebuke, but praise. He is expecting, Jesus, to say:

"Excellent Peter. You, go to the head, of the class. You get A+."

I wonder, if any of us, have done something similar, as a child, “I broke the vase, but I glued it back together... it looks great, doesn’t it ? Or have we ever done something similar as an adult, or even as a follower, of Jesus. “Jesus, today I only swore 7 times !!”

Now, it must be said, that in relation, to Peters question, and According to Jewish law, Peter had the right, to think, that he had, done something good.

For as one commentator, suggests, scribal law, said: "If a man, transgresses, one time, forgive him. If a man transgresses two times, forgive him. If a man transgresses three times, forgive him. If a man transgresses four times, do not forgive him."

My friends, it seems here, that what Peter, has done, is to take, this law, **of limited forgiveness**, multiply it by two, and add one, and then sit back, with a smile, upon his face, and say: **Now, how is that, for being, a great guy ?**

You see, Peter, thought, he had figured, **Forgiveness Out**, right up, until Jesus spoke, and I am confident, that Peter was taken more than a little aback, when, Jesus said you must forgive, not seven times, but **seventy-seven times !!**

To Conclude : I am told, that some years ago, when the books, of a certain Scottish doctor, were examined, after his death, it was found, that a number, of accounts, were crossed through, with a note: "Forgiven--too poor, to pay." But the physician's wife, later decided, that these accounts, must be paid, in full, and she proceeded, to sue, for money. When the case, came to court, the judge asked, **but one question**. Is this, your husband's handwriting ? When she replied, that it was, he responded: "There is no court, in the land, that can obtain, a debt, once the word, forgiven, has been written."

My friends, that is, the good news, that the Gospel, offers, to you and me, today. For we had, sinned against God, in thought and word and deed, but God, in His love, sent his son Jesus, and he died upon the cross, to pay the debt, for our sins. In our book of life, across our debt, the Saviour has written "**Forgiven--too poor, to pay.**" For there was nothing, we could do, to pay the price, for our sins, but God did, GOD DID. And once a debt has been cancelled, there is no one, who can, collect on it. For God, wipes it out, of his mind.

For when it comes, to Forgiveness, what a God, we have, for as Micah, Chapter 7 and verse 19 says in The Message Version: **Where is the god who can compare with you— wiping the slate clean of guilt, Turning a blind eye, a deaf ear, to the past sins of your purged and precious people? You don't nurse your anger and don't stay angry long, for mercy is your specialty. That's what you love most. And compassion is on its way to us. You'll stamp out our wrongdoing. You'll sink our sins to the bottom of the ocean. You'll stay true, to your word.**

Finally : My Friends, How amazing, how wonderful, is our God, for God's attitude, is not, "I'll forgive, but I won't forget," but rather, "Forgiven, Forgotten, Forever." Yes, **"Forgiven, Forgotten, Forever."**

Friends, if only, IF ONLY, we could do that. If we could, forgive others, like that; If we could, forgive, ourselves, like that. And perhaps, just perhaps, we like Peter, must come to understand, that **Forgiveness, must be learned**, and it is learned, at the foot of the cross.

Thanks be to God. AMEN

And so now, a moment of silence, as we think, of our need, of forgiveness, and perhaps, our need, to forgive others, and then the Lord's Prayer.

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come;
thy will be done;
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation;
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
the power and the glory,
for ever and ever.
Amen.

Well, Thank You for listening. Hope to see again, on Sunday,
But for now, may the blessing and peace of God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be with you, and those you love,
this day and always Amen.