

Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, “Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?”

<sup>22</sup> Jesus answered, “I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.

<sup>23</sup> “Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. <sup>24</sup> As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him. <sup>25</sup> 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.

<sup>26</sup> “The servant fell on his knees before him. ‘Be patient with me,’ he begged, ‘and I will pay back everything.’ <sup>27</sup> The servant’s master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go.

<sup>28</sup> “But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii. He grabbed him and began to choke him. ‘Pay back what you owe me!’ he demanded.

<sup>29</sup> “His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, ‘Be patient with me, and I will pay you back.’

<sup>30</sup> “But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. <sup>31</sup> When the other servants saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed and went and told their master everything that had happened.

<sup>32</sup> “Then the master called the servant in. ‘You wicked servant,’ he said, ‘I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. <sup>33</sup> Shouldn’t you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?’ <sup>34</sup> In anger his master turned him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed.

<sup>35</sup> “This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart.” (NIV 84)

Theme: Forgive as the Lord forgives.

1. He has forgiven all our sins.
2. We forgive those who sin against us.

You’ve been saying the Lord’s Prayer virtually your entire life. It is a prayer that we say so often that you can say it without ever thinking about what it says. But when you think about what you are praying

for, does any part of the Lord’s prayer give you pause? Do you hesitate at all when you pray this prayer? Think of the fifth petition, “forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.” The hesitation doesn’t come in the first part of the petition—we all want to be forgiven and so we pray and beg God for it. It’s the second part of the petition that gives you pause. It assumes one thing—that you forgive others when they sin against you. But is that always true? Do you want God to forgive you just as or as often as you forgive others? No. Because sadly, the forgiveness we have for others is often lacking.

So today we ask God to lead us to forgive as he forgives. For he has forgiven all our sins and so we always forgive those who sin against us.

Last week we saw Jesus give his disciples the keys to the kingdom of heaven. He gave them the power and right to forgive sins of those who repent or to withhold forgiveness of those who do not repent. So Peter naturally had a practical follow-up question. How many times should I forgive someone? If someone keeps on sinning, when should I finally say enough is enough and refuse to forgive him? Peter thought that a good number would be seven times, which is a number of completeness.

But Jesus responded, **I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.** Some translations have “seventy times seven;” the Greek does allow it. But it doesn’t matter if Jesus meant 77 times or 490 times. The number isn’t the point. Seven is a number of completeness. So 77 times or 70 times 7 indicates an even more complete number. Jesus isn’t saying that we should forgive someone 77 times, but not the 78<sup>th</sup> time. Rather he is saying that we should forgive someone whenever they sin against us. As often as they repent, we are to forgive him. Jesus made a similar point in Luke 17, **If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him. If he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times comes back to you and says, ‘I repent,’ forgive him.**”

Jesus told a parable to reiterate his point. A master had a servant who owed him a large amount of money—10,000 talents to be exact. A talent was really a unit to measure weight. The value of these talents really depends on if they were gold, or silver, or copper talents. Some

estimate that the debt was anywhere from 10 to 20 million dollars; but it could have even more. It was an insurmountable sum. There was no possible way for the servant to repay his master. So he master decided to sell the servant and his wife and kids, and all his possessions to gain back some of his money.

But the servant pleaded for mercy and compassion. **‘Be patient with me,’ he begged, ‘and I will pay back everything.’** And then the master did something unexpected. He graciously canceled the debt. And then he let the servant go. So not only did the servant not have to pay back the large debt, he got to keep his wife and kids too. Of course he didn’t deserve this, but his master gave it to him anyway. Who do these characters represent in this parable? It’s clear that the master in this parable is the Lord. And the servant represents each and every one of us. And like the servant, we have a huge debt. It’s a debt we can’t repay. It’s a debt we owe to God. It’s the debt of our sins. We were born into sin. As children of the devil we could do nothing but sin. Constantly we disobey him. Constantly we go against his will. Even now as Christians we still sin against him. And so we deserve to be condemned. We deserve his wrath and punishment. It is a debt we could never repay. No matter how hard we try, we fall woefully short. If it seems impossible that the servant could repay that debt of millions and millions of dollars, it is even more impossible for us to pay for our sins—to earn our own forgiveness. And yet, in our arrogance, we still try to do so. We say along with the servant, **I will pay back everything.** We think that if we try hard, if we are sincere, if we are better than the people around us, then perhaps God will forgive us. Then perhaps we can earn God’s favor enough to get to heaven. We are often oblivious to the size and scope of our debt. Our sins must not be that serious if we think we can make amends for them. We think that somehow a good day or hour makes up for week full of sin. Somehow we think that we can repay this great debt. And yet, we see the amazing. Our master, the Lord, forgives us. He removes our debt. He does this not because of who we are or what we have done, but through his Son, Jesus Christ. He gave up his life for us on the cross. He took our sins upon himself and suffered through the eternal punishment that our sins deserve. Then, the perfect life he lived was given to us. We are credited with Christ’s perfect obedience. So that God doesn’t see us as sinners, but as pure and innocent children.

So our debt has been removed. Not because we have earned or deserved it. But because of Christ. By God’s grace which we receive through faith, our debt has been removed. We have been set free. We are free from the dungeon of hell. We are free from condemnation. We are free from our sins. Christ has set us free despite our sins, despite the natural desire we have to save ourselves!

But the parable isn’t done. The servant, just forgiven, just set free, left. And then he saw his fellow servant. And this servant owed him some money—one hundred denarii. A denarius was worth a day’s wages for a laborer. Perhaps in our economy today we can say, 100 dollars. That means the debt was about 10,000 dollars. A considerable debt for sure, but nothing in comparison to the millions of dollars that the first servant owed his master.

And yet, what did that servant do? He demanded that he be repaid. When his fellow servant begged for more time, just like he had done, the unmerciful servant said, ‘no.’ He had the other servant thrown in jail until he could pay back his smaller debt. Pretty low, isn’t it? This servant just had his debt of millions of dollars removed, but now he is demanding that his fellow servant repay his much smaller debt. It’s pretty low and yet, you may do the exact same thing. Someone sins against you—it doesn’t really matter what that sin is. Perhaps they spread gossip about you, physically hurt you in some way, or they stole something from you. Again it doesn’t really matter what sin it is. But what is your reaction? You’re hurt; you’re devastated. How could they do such a thing to you?

So you want to get even somehow. Maybe get some sort of revenge. You want them to feel at least is some small way how you felt. They hurt you and you want to hurt them. And what is one way to do that? To not forgive them. They hurt you so bad, what they did to you was so horrible, that even when they repent you cannot forgive them. You figure that they deserve to suffer, they deserve to be punished for what they did to you. So you refuse to forgive and you hold that sin over their heads. Because, after all, it’s what they deserve. Or perhaps we do forgive someone; or at least we tell them that we forgive them. But reality is a bit different—we still hold it over their head, we bring it up here and there, we still use it as leverage to get what we want out of a relationship. Or keep it all inside and hold ill-will against them.

But look what happened to the unmerciful servant who refused to forgive his fellow servant. His master called him to account. **You wicked servant,' he said, 'I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?'** So he gave him over to the jailers.

And not just any jailers these were the torturers. This wicked servant would spend the rest of his days suffering in a dungeon, paying for what he had done.

And Christ promises the same to us when we refuse to forgive someone. **This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart.** Those who refuse forgiveness are refusing to show love to others. They do not act like Christians, for Christians show love to all. Therefore God will punish us. Not just in jail being tortured, but with the torturer, the devil—in hell.

So when you have a hard time forgiving someone who sins against you, look toward Christ. You see the debt that he removed by his suffering and death, his perfect life he gives you, and the eternal life won for you. Be reminded of the huge debt you owed—more than millions of dollars worth of debt. A debt we could never repay, but Christ paid it for us. He released us from this debt and made us free. And compare the debt you owed to the debt someone owes you. The sins your heavenly Father has forgiven you through Christ far outweigh the sins that someone has committed against you. It doesn't matter what sin or sins they are. It is a relatively small debt. And motivated by Christ's love for you, you love others. You show love to them, you forgive them, not holding their sins against them.

And there is one major purpose for doing so. You want all people, including those who sin against you, to join you in heaven. You don't want them to suffer, to be beaten down by their sins. You want them to know the free forgiveness won for them by Christ. Through faith, just like you, they will receive the forgiveness of sins and eternal life that Christ won for them. So you love them as Christ loved you. You forgive them as Christ forgave you.

Conclusion: In the fifth petition, “forgive our sins as we forgive those who sin against us” God does take something for granted—that we forgive others. Let there be no reason to hesitate. Look at the debt our master has wiped away. And when appreciate the magnitude of God's

grace, when we appreciate how much we have been forgiven, we will also want to be forgiving. We too will forgive from the heart to those who sin against us. Amen.