





The Wicked Servant

Matthew 6:14-15; 18:21-35

Mark 11:26

Parables of Jesus

Teach the lesson from Matthew 18. The other scriptures are given for reference as Jesus briefly stated in those passages. This lesson starts off with a question from Peter to Jesus. In the previous verses, Jesus has been teaching about offenses, and how to make reconciliation. After this sermon, Peter comes to Jesus and asks him how many times he should forgive someone who sins against him. Seven times? Some translations even say, How many times do I *have to* forgive him.

Jesus' response was not what they expected.

He said, "Not seven times: but until seventy times seven." If you look at the word that Jesus actually used here, it not only meant this, but it actually meant "countless times." Jesus was not telling Peter to count up to 490 times and then he no longer needed to forgive. What he was saying was basically, do not keep count.

Forgive so many times that you are not keeping records anymore.

Then Jesus tells a story, a parable. He begins the parable as he begins so many others,

"The kingdom of heaven is like..." He is showing a contrast between what we expect as normal and the way that God sees things. A study of the gospels quickly shows that the kingdom of heaven is upside down to the normal human way of thinking. It is a completely different way of thinking than human philosophy. Jesus taught this again and again, showing people that they were not thinking as God thinks.

He begins with "a certain king." This king wanted to settle his accounts with his servants. The interesting thing about the word that Jesus uses here for "account" is that it can also be translated as "word, what someone has said, a person's doctrine or reasoning." We often view this story in the context of money for illustrative purposes, but the word choice Jesus used is unique because it clearly can be used for so many different situations.

Discuss: The king had loaned money to his servants. Different servants had borrowed various amounts.
Discuss what they possibly did with the money.
Discuss the ability to pay it back living on a servant salary.

This king brought in a man who had borrowed "ten thousand talents." Some Bibles translate this as ten thousand bags of gold. A look at the words in the original Greek that the New Testament was written in reveal that a talent of gold weighed approximately 200 pounds, or 100 kilograms. This would be approximately 2 million pounds, or just less than 1 million kilograms of gold. This is an extremely large amount of money, an outrageous amount of debt that this man owed to the king.

The man could not pay. There was probably no way that he could pay back a debt of this incredibly large sum.

Because he could not pay, the king commanded this man to be sold, along with his wife, and his children. He made the order to sell everything the man owned to repay his debt.





The Wicked Servant

Discuss: This was a very serious situation.

Imagine what it would have been like if you were there. This man is in shock, the king is speaking to the guards, the officials, telling them to take this man away, gather his whole family and bring them to the place where people are purchased as slaves.

The king is telling the guards to confiscate his home and all his belongings and sell them, to liquidate them to pay this man's debt.

The servant is desperate. He pleads for his life.

He falls down at the king's feet, begging for mercy. He worships the king, in complete humility he recognizes the king's power over his own life and the lives of everyone dear to him. He begs the king for patience, telling him he will pay everything back.

Discuss: It is very doubtful that the servant has the ability to pay back this debt. The king is very wealthy, and he is a servant.

The king is "moved with compassion." The king is incredibly kind. He is powerful, but full of compassion for this servant, and the king can obviously see that this servant cannot possibly ever repay the debt. Not only does he withdraw the command for judgment on the servant and his family, he takes away all obligations, and **completely forgave him of the debt. It was erased. The servant owed nothing.**

But, did the servant appreciate the grace and mercy that had been given to him?

That servant went out and found one of his fellow servants who owed him money. That means that this would have been one of his equals, someone who he worked with. This servant owed the man "one hundred pence," which is equal to about three or four months worth of wages. This was minuscule in comparison to ten thousand talents that this servant had owed the king. When the man who had his debt forgiven found the servant who owed him money, it says,

"He laid hands on him, and took him by the throat, and said, pay me everything."

Discuss: This is harsh! This man has just been forgiven a HUGE debt for an enormous amount of money.

But then he finds someone who owes him money and laid hands on him? What does that look like? He must have grabbed the man and put him in a throat chokehold and threatened him.

This is nothing like the compassion and the kindness that the king showed to this man. And all for a small amount of money compared to what he originally owed.

His own offense was much greater than the amount for which he was holding this man accountable.





The Wicked Servant

Then the second servant fell down at the first servant's feet and begged him for forgiveness. He said the same thing, begging him to have patience and promising to pay back all of it.

But the first servant *would not*. He put the man in prison until he could pay the debt.

Discuss: How can he pay back the debt if he is in prison?
Is he able to work and earn money in prison?
Will he ever get out?

The other servants that worked with these two men saw what went on, and they were very upset. They went and told their lord the king everything that had happened.

Then the lord, the king, called the first servant to come meet with him. The king said,

"You wicked servant! I forgave you all of the debt because you begged me." Shouldn't you have had compassion on your fellow servant just like I had pity on you?

The king was very angry, and he delivered him to the tormentors, until he paid everything that he owed.

Discuss: The word used here means "torturer." These were the jailers who were assigned to torture prisoners.
How can he repay when he is being tormented?
How can he pay such a large amount?
This seems like unending torture; this is unimaginable punishment.

Then Jesus simply ends the parable with a statement. This is what our heavenly Father will do to us if we do not forgive *from our hearts* those who trespass against us.



Jesus in the Story



This is a hard story; we have all been tempted with unforgiveness, feeling as if we are “owed” something by someone.

But as followers of Christ, we know that God’s love abounds, and his love covers a multitude of sins (1 Peter 4:8). 1 Corinthians 13 outlines what love looks like, and the way that we should love; it shows us perfect love (1 Corinthians 13:4-8). **This perfect love illustrates perfectly the love of Christ toward us.**

There is one sin that is unforgivable to God, and that is the blasphemy of the Holy Ghost, or Holy Spirit (Matthew 12:31). But this story and the statements of Jesus in Matthew 6:14-15 and Mark 11:26 seem to clearly say that if we do not forgive others, we will not be forgiven.

Unforgiveness is dangerous.

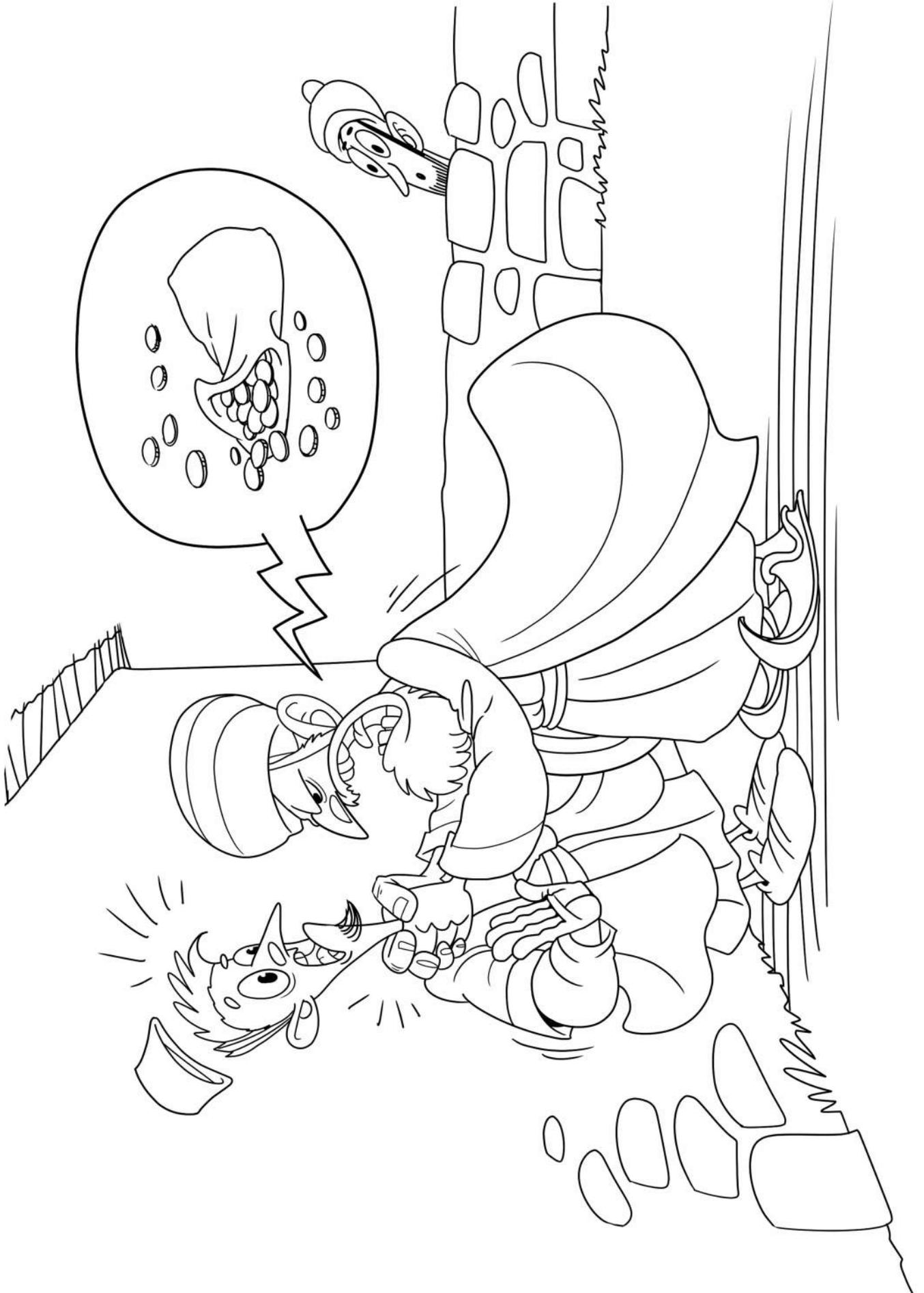
As Christians, it is our responsibility to bear the image of Christ. Christ is seated in heavenly places (Ephesians 1:20) and in order to further the kingdom on the earth he has to work through the members of his body, us as Christians. We are the representatives of Christ on this earth to others. It is our responsibility to show forgiveness to others in the same way that the Father has shown forgiveness to us.

God the Father gave us his most prized possession, his Son, as an offering for our sin. Jesus paid the ultimate price for our sins and forgave us of an amount so large that we could never repay. It is not possible by our own actions to ever pay back the debt that we owed to the Father. But he had compassion on us and graciously forgave us.

Who are we to behave as the wicked servant?

Who are we to judge others and hold them accountable for their debts when we have been forgiven so much? And we should not think of ourselves more highly than we should (Romans 12:3) to think that we are an exception, and our sin was any less than anyone else. All have sinned (Romans 3:23) and regardless of our individual sins, we all fall short of God’s standard of perfection. There are not some sinners that are worse than others; we are all sinners and unless we repent we will all perish. (Luke 13:1-5)





Lesson Questions & Memory Verses

33. The Door

1. Who comes in the door?
2. Who do the sheep follow?
3. Will the sheep follow a stranger? Why or why not?
4. What does it say we will recognize if we know Jesus?

John 14:6

Jesus said to him, I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

34. Who Is My Neighbor?

Read Matthew 25:35-40

1. Jesus said, I was hungry and you gave me?
2. I was thirsty and you gave me?
3. I was a stranger and?
4. I was sick and you?
5. I was in prison and you?
6. When we help others, who are doing it for?

Matthew 22:37-39

...You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.

35. The Wicked Servant

1. How many times did Jesus say we need to forgive? Explain.
2. What did the master give to the man who owed a very large amount of money?
3. What did that man do when his worker owed him a little bit of money?
4. What does God say he will do if we do not forgive others?

Mark 11:26

But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses.

36. The Lost Sheep

1. How many sheep did the shepherd leave behind?
2. Where did he leave the other sheep?
3. Where did he take the one lost sheep after he found it?
4. What did Jesus say happens in heaven when someone repents?

Isaiah 53:6

All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.

