

## **PP Dancing With Porcupines: *Becoming a People of Prayer-Part 12***

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Illus The philosopher Schopenhauer gave an often-quoted example of porcupines trying to get through a cold winter. They huddle together for warmth, but their sharp quills prick each other, so they pull away. But then they get cold. They have to keep adjusting their closeness and distance to keep from freezing and from getting pricked by their fellow porcupines-the source of both comfort and pain.

They are forever coming together and moving apart in a slow dance.

This might not be a bad metaphor for the church

When we are around each other a great deal, it's almost inevitable that we hurt one another

This truth is why we need to learn how to forgive one another from the heart

A forgiving spirit characterizes the new nature of Christians

Jesus modeled this, after being unjustly convicted on trumped up charges, beaten and mocked and nailed to a cross, He looked down on His tormenters and executioners and asked His Father to forgive them

Steven, following His Lord's example, in the midst of being stoned to death for preaching the gospel, fell to his knees begging God to forgive His murderers

Joseph, whose own brothers sold him into slavery and caused him years of suffering, forgave them with great weeping

David, a man after God's own heart, continued to forgive Saul who tried repeatedly to murder him

We're going to take a second look at what Jesus meant when He taught us to pray ***'and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.'***

Last week we saw that all people sin and create a massive debt with God that they are completely unable to pay

When we turn to Christ in faith, God forgives us and gives us salvation, but we continue to sin, and dirty our feet

This sin blocks our sweet fellowship with our Father

As we continue to confess our sins to Him, we must be extending that same forgiveness to those who sin against us

In verse 21 we see that Peter asked Jesus a question on forgiveness and Jesus answered him by sharing a parable

***"Then Peter came up and said to him, 'Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?' (21)***

This was a common question of that day and fueled a great deal of rabbinical debate

The Rabbis consistently taught that the limit of forgiveness was 3 offenses

*"He who begs forgiveness from his neighbor must not do so more than three times"* said one Rabbi

They believed that the Scriptures taught that God's forgiveness extends to three offences and then punishes the sinner for the fourth

People ought not be more gracious than God, so it was limited to three times

Peter exceeded the Rabbis by more than double the amount, but he still put a limit

***"Jesus said to him, 'I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven.'"***

Jesus tells him 490 times, not because on the 490<sup>th</sup> time, one no longer forgives

It was a number so extreme that the idea was that there ought to be no limit to a believer's forgiving spirit

Jesus had earlier in this chapter taught them the redemptive steps to take when a brother

does sin against us (23:15-20)

Now He teaches them through a parable of the true extent of forgiveness

**PP We have three riveting scenes to this great parable:**

**PP 1-Scene One-The Extent of God's Mercy For Us (23-27)**

The opening scene demonstrates the unimaginable display of God's mercy in the salvation of an undeserving sinner

It unfolds with the backdrop of a king collecting money from his servants

***"Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants." (23)***

All citizens of a monarchy are servants, some were in positions of civic responsibility

This servant was a governor in the kingdom, who had charge of collecting taxes and tributes from a specific province for the royal treasury

***"When he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents." (24)***

As the scene progresses, the king goes over the books with his accountants and there discovers that one of his governors, a man with great responsibility, had shorted the treasury 10,000 talents

10,000 talents was an astronomical amount of money

It is impossible to accurately put this amount in today's economic standards

But at one biblical period, a talent was worth 6,000 drachmas, and one drachma was a day's wage for a laborer

**PP** 10,000 talents would have paid the wages of 60 million workers for a day

The entire wealthy province of Galilee yielded only 300 talents annually

Judea, Idumea and Samaria yielded 600 talents for the Roman government a year

But more interestingly, the Greek word for '10,000' was the largest number in the Greek language

Our English word *myriad*, comes from it and is often translated as *countless*

This servant was in an incalculable, unpayable debt to his king

And this represents the debt that every human being faces with God

Do you remember from last week, in Matthew 6:12, that the word '*debts*' is what we have all incurred because of sin and what we are morally obligated to repay to God

**PP** ***"Against You, You only, have I sinned and done what is evil in Your sight,"***

Every sin we commit is done in God's sight, as if it is done right before His very throne  
Friends, all sin has a God-ward direction

It is against God and it has created an unpayable debt that must be paid

When the Holy Spirit convicts a person of sin, he/she faces the overwhelming fact that the enormity of our debt is absolutely unpayable, because the amount is too great and we don't have the right kind of currency to repay it

***"And since he could not pay, his master ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made." (25)***

The sale of family as well as possessions was common in ancient times and it reveals the wrath that the king had toward this official

The servant was legally bound to repay his debt, but this payment wouldn't have even

registered on the books, the amount was so great

*“So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.’ <sup>27</sup>And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt.” (26-27)*

No person can pay the debt their sins have incurred against God  
But the servant prostrated himself before the king and the king’s heart was moved out of pity for him

**PP** The word *‘pity’* is a powerful word meaning to be moved in the inward parts  
It is what Jesus felt when He saw the widow walking along in her son’s funeral  
It is what moved Him to feed the hungry crowds of people who were following Him  
And it is what motivated Him to heal the suffering  
The king felt pity for this man at the center of who he was and he completely wiped out all of the servant’s unimaginable, unpayable, debt  
Friends, we Christians are the servant, we’ve been forgiven a debt that we could not pay

## **PP 2-Scene Two-The Abandonment of God’s Mercy (28-31)**

*“But when that same servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii, and seizing him, he began to choke him, saying, ‘Pay what you owe.’*

Illus King Louis XII of France articulated the feeling of many people when he said,  
“*Nothing smells so sweet as the dead body of your enemy.*”  
This is the sentiment that an unforgiving, merciless, resentful heart produces

The first word of verse 28 is an awful word- *‘But’*

It’s incredibly timely and comforting when used the way Ephesians 2:4 does:

**PP** *“But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ...”*  
(4-5)

However here, it carries ominous and terrible overtones

The governor received an unimaginable gift from the king, he was no longer in debt

It isn’t that he received an extension from debt, having another month to pay it back

He was debt-free, *‘but’* refused to extend that mercy to others

He didn’t happen to see this servant, the sense is he went looking for this man who owed him 100 denarii

How much was this? Again, experts vary widely in their estimation of its value

It is known however, that 1 denarius was worth one day’s wages for a laborer

**PP** The amount here is 100 days wages of a laborer, not miniscule by itself, but completely inadequate in comparison with 10,000 talents

*‘and seizing him, he began to choke him’*-the word means to throttle by the neck

It was not uncommon in ancient Rome for a creditor to wrench a debtors neck

The roman Orator Cicero once said: *“Lead him to the judgment seat with twisted neck.”*

The debtor begged him, but instead of receiving mercy, he received a prison sentence until he could pay it back

One could not earn money in prison

This was no longer about his money, this was about punishment

It's hard for us to imagine someone behaving in this way, and that is exactly the Lord's point to Peter and the disciples

An unforgiving spirit, is an unmerciful spirit which comes from a self-righteous heart

When we do not forgive those who sin against us, we lock them into prison and punish

Unforgiving Christians are prison wardens

When we harbor a grudge, and refuse to forgive, we put the other person in prison and force them to earn our mercy

When we hold grudges and refuse to forgive those who have sinned against us, we are doing exactly what the first servant did to the second

*"Pay me what you owe." "I demand an apology." "Give me my rights." "Let me have what's coming to me." "Treat me like I deserve." "I demand to be treated with respect."*

Parents, have we done this to our children?

Demanded that they live up to a standard that we know we ourselves can't and don't

Husbands, we can do this with our wives and wives with their husbands

***"When his fellow servants saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their master all that had taken place." (31)***

There is a role for those in redemptive community in the lives of unforgiving people

We bring them to the king in prayer

We pray for them and entrust them to the One Who can deal with their heart

We report them to God and entrust them into His wise care

### **PP 3-Scene Three-The Requirement of God's Mercy (32-35)**

***"Then his master summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. <sup>33</sup>And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?'"***

The first servant is brought to the king again except this time, judgment would be carried out

Why? Because the servant, despite receiving God's mercy, refused, chose, to not give that same mercy to another, he lived wickedly

This word '**mercy**' is very interesting to me

It's the first use of the word in this passage

**PP** It means to extend help to those suffering the consequences of sin

The Jews understood that God's mercy when received, should not stop with us

Mercy is a quality that God expects us to reciprocate to others- ***'should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?'***

***“And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers, until he should pay all his debt.”***

**PP** The word *‘jailers’* is better rendered *‘torturers’*

It is the *inquisitor* not the *executioner*

This is His righteous anger, not His Holy Wrath

The word was used for one who elicits the truth by the use of the rack

There are many torturers for the unmerciful, unforgiving believer

Joylessness, a root of bitterness, inability to feel love, depression, high blood pressure,  
joint pain, and loneliness just to name a few

These imprison believers because they will not show mercy

But beyond all these, an unforgiving believer *will* suffer the discipline of God

Why does God hand us over to the torturers?

First, as discipline for disobedient living

Do you remember that we have learned in our study of the Lord’s prayer to ask for God’s  
will to be done on earth as it is in heaven and that it would start in us

God disciplines those He loves in order to drive them back to obedient living which  
makes God’s name hallowed, made great

**PP** ***“For they [earthly fathers] disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, that we may share His holiness...later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.”*** **Heb 12:10-11**

Just as the inquisitor would torture his victims until they fully disclosed the truth, God’s  
torturers have us in order to bring us to full confession of the truth

Until we have a change of heart and forgive our offending brother or sister

God’s discipline of His children is a further display of God’s great mercy

And Jesus is saying that if a child of the heavenly Father refuses to show mercy, all that  
is left is justice and judgment

**PP** ***“For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.”*** James 2:13

If we insist on justice for others who sin against us, withholding mercy, then God will  
give us what we deserve...no mercy for our ongoing sins

Like we saw last week, though the condemnation of the believer is removed, those who  
refuse to forgive will walk with dirty feet and forfeit their fellowship with the Father

Do you know any miserable Christians? They are not walking in fellowship with God

***“So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.”*** (35)

We as Christians are to be marked by a quick and forgiving spirit

Commenting on the rarity of such mercy and grace among believers, John Wesley wrote,  
*“If this be Christianity, where do Christians live?”*

It means completely wiping out the debt of the offender

It does not necessarily mean forgetting the offense, it means that when it is remembered,

it is not accompanied by the resentment, bitterness and anger it once was

Illus One Sunday evening a group of missionaries and believers in New Guinea had gathered together to observe the Lord's Supper. A young tribesman sat down to worship when suddenly a tremor passed through his body. One of the missionaries sitting next to him whispered a question to him, "What was it that troubled you?" The young man told him that "the man who just came in killed and ate the body of my father. And now he has come in to remember the Lord with us. At first I didn't know whether I could endure it. But it is all right now. He is washed in the same precious blood." He then participated in communion with the killer of his own father.

God's mercy propels us to give mercy to those who sin against us