

## Week of July 25, 2021

### Matthew 18:10-35

<sup>10</sup> “Be careful that you don’t look down on one of these little ones. I say to you that their angels in heaven are always looking into the face of my Father who is in heaven. <sup>12</sup> What do you think? If someone had one hundred sheep and one of them wandered off, wouldn’t he leave the ninety-nine on the hillsides and go in search for the one that wandered off? <sup>13</sup> If he finds it, I assure you that he is happier about having that one sheep than about the ninety-nine who didn’t wander off. <sup>14</sup> In the same way, my Father who is in heaven doesn’t want to lose one of these little ones.

<sup>15</sup> “If your brother or sister sins against you, go and correct them when you are alone together. If they listen to you, then you’ve won over your brother or sister. <sup>16</sup> But if they won’t listen, take with you one or two others so that every word may be established by the mouth of two or three witnesses. <sup>17</sup> But if they still won’t pay attention, report it to the church. If they won’t pay attention even to the church, treat them as you would a Gentile and tax collector. <sup>18</sup> I assure you that whatever you fasten on earth will be fastened in heaven. And whatever you loosen on earth will be loosened in heaven. <sup>19</sup> Again I assure you that if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, then my Father who is in heaven will do it for you. <sup>20</sup> For where two or three are gathered in my name, I’m there with them.”

<sup>21</sup> Then Peter said to Jesus, “Lord, how many times should I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Should I forgive as many as seven times?” <sup>22</sup> Jesus said, “Not just seven times, but rather as many as 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> When he began to settle accounts, they brought to him a servant who owed him ten thousand bags of gold. <sup>25</sup> Because the servant didn’t have enough to pay it back, the master ordered that he should be sold, along with his wife and children and everything he had, and that the proceeds should be used as payment. <sup>26</sup> But the servant fell down, kneeled before him, and said, ‘Please, be patient with me, and I’ll pay you back.’ <sup>27</sup> The master had compassion on that servant, released him, and forgave the loan. <sup>28</sup> “When that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him one hundred coins. He grabbed him around the throat and said, ‘Pay me back what you owe me.’ <sup>29</sup> “Then his fellow servant fell down and begged him, ‘Be patient with me, and I’ll pay you back.’ <sup>30</sup> But he refused. Instead, he threw him into prison until he paid back his debt. <sup>31</sup> “When his fellow servants saw what happened, they were deeply offended. They came and told their master all that happened. <sup>32</sup> His master called the first servant and said, ‘You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you appealed to me. <sup>33</sup> Shouldn’t you also have mercy on your fellow servant, just as I had mercy on you?’ <sup>34</sup> His master was furious and handed him over to the guard responsible for punishing prisoners, until he had paid the whole debt. <sup>35</sup> “My heavenly Father will also do the same to you if you don’t forgive your brother or sister from your heart.”

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### What it means to be forgiven

In our interpersonal lives, forgiveness can be hard fought for and even harder to give. When we’re in the wrong and seek forgiveness, we beg for it - knowing we’ve hurt someone we love is a difficult pain to bear. When we’ve been wronged, the pain of being hurt by someone we love is even more difficult, which is why forgiving can be so hard; it’s much easier to hold a grudge. In our faith, we’ve been assured of our forgiveness. The forgiveness we’ve been given is for much worse than we could do to someone else, it’s forgiveness for generations of building societies antithetical to what God has asked, and thus, increased separation from our Creator. But we’ve been given forgiveness because God knows that reconciliation, though difficult and painful, is worth what can come. As a people who have been given forgiveness, we’re also supposed to forgive, doing as much as we possibly can to achieve the reconciliation that has been gifted to us.

The hardest part of this is what reconciliation actually means. We can’t just say “I forgive you” while continuing to be angry about whatever caused the separation - that’s obvious - but we also cannot say we’ve forgiven someone and allow our relationship to be changed in any way. We have to seek for the relationship to be made completely whole. And that’s where the work comes in. Especially in today’s world of hyper partisanship, we’ve forgotten what it means for wholeness in our relationships. We can “agree to disagree” - which usually just means you agree to not talk about something as to not fight. In that way, it is a great way to cover up a problem, but it does

nothing to address any of the underlying issues that remain, therefore the relationship is not whole. This doesn't mean we have to agree about every little thing, that would be impossible, but to have wholeness in a relationship when there's that kind of disagreement means we *do* talk about the underlying issues and seek to understand one another. When we seek to understand each other's viewpoints we can have empathy for one another, and the problem is no longer a place for division, but a place for celebration of diversity. It's in that diversity that we can actually work together for common goals as a unified body.

The forgiveness we've been given in Christ should lead our lives. It should be the influencing factor in all that we do, especially in our relationship with one another. It's not just what we *should* do, but what we *must* do if we are to be the people God wants us to be. Without God's forgiveness we would be nothing. And unless we can forgive in the same way that we have been forgiven, and seek wholeness with all we encounter, we will return to nothingness. It is forgiveness that gives us life, so we must live it.

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*Holy God - though we have done wrong to you and your creation, living in hate rather than your love, you have given us a second chance. And not just a second chance, but every chance we might need to finally know what reconciliation really means. Help us to find the life you have given us in Jesus Christ, and that by living it, we might be co-creators of the world that you have envisioned for us. Amen.*