

**The Parables**  
**Matthew 18:21-35**  
**(Parable of The Unmerciful Servant)**  
**“ Don’t Get Above Your Raisin’ ”**

**Introduction**

“Don’t get above your raisin’”. If my father said this to me once, he must have said it a thousand times! It means; never forget where you came from. Sometimes people are wont to forget their humble beginnings and start to think of themselves more highly than they ought. To my dad, this was pretty much the unpardonable sin. He was insistent that his children remain humble. As I have grown older, I have come to understand completely what he was trying to instill in us. Humility is proof positive that someone is truly a believer. **God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble (James 4:6)**. Humility is the first requirement to becoming a child of God (**Matthew 5:3**). A person who has been truly humbled in the presence of God will never get over it, and a person who has been truly humbled in the presence of God will long to forgive others, just as they have been forgiven. It’s just that simple. The Bible tells us that if we humble ourselves before The Lord, then He will lift (raise) us up (**James 4:10**). The born again believer who has been “raised up” by The Lord should never get above his raisin’! We were nothing when He found us, and without Him, we would still be nothing. This is why it is so very vital for a Christian to be forgiving of others. Had we not been forgiven ourselves, we would be hopelessly lost. Therefore, we should long to see others rescued, rather than rejected. Show me a Christian who cares nothing for the struggles of those around him, and I will show you someone who is pretending to be a Christian. When God lives within you, your heart is forever changed. It will become flooded with the same amazing grace and mercy that first rescued you.

When Jesus taught His disciples **The Parable of The Unmerciful Servant (Matthew 18:23-35)**, He was using it to illustrate the importance of forgiveness. He had just finished explaining that we must make every possible effort to bring those who have sinned against us into a state of forgiveness and repentance. He taught the disciples that only as a last resort could someone be written off due to a lack of repentance (**Matthew 18:17**). Which caused Peter to ask, **“How many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me?” (vs. 21)**. This was actually a really good question, for the Pharisees of the day taught that a person should only be forgiven three times before they were completely ostracized. They based this upon a scripture in Amos that showed The Lord forgiving the sins of other nations three times over (**Amos 1:3,6,9,11,13**). The Pharisees falsely surmised that if God would only forgive these nations three times and would punish them after their “fourth sin”, then they should only forgive those who sinned against them three times as well. This is a perfect example of what can happen when a person takes scripture completely out of context. God had mercifully tolerated the sins of the nations for hundreds of years. He is perfectly justified in determining when someone’s time is up. We, on the other hand, have no such qualification.

Jesus answered Peter’s question saying, **“No, not seven times, but seventy times seven.” (vs.22)**. For those of you legalist out there, this doesn’t mean 490 times! Seventy times seven was Christ’s way of saying that our forgiveness of those who are willing to repent should have NO limits. We do not have His permission to withhold our forgiveness... EVER. Let me add my personal opinion here. I do not believe in forgiveness APART from repentance. When someone sins against us and refuses to repent, then it is sometimes necessary for us to break fellowship with them (**vs 17**). This doesn’t mean that we hate them. Actually quite the contrary, we pray for them to be convicted of their sin and repent so that they CAN be forgiven (**Matthew 5:44**). We do not hold their sins against them, but in order to have a restoration of fellowship, those sins need to be dealt with, repented of, and finally forgiven. Pretending that something is ok when it isn’t, is not what we have been called to do. Sometimes, we have to get away from people, but we never stop loving them or longing to see them restored to fellowship.

We are commanded to be forgiving and to show others the grace that God has so freely given to us. **The Parable of The Unmerciful Servant** demonstrates just how God sees us, when we are unwilling to forgive our brothers and sisters. We have no excuse to withhold our forgiveness from others, when we have received the forgiveness of God for ourselves. Our unforgiving hearts are proof the we are

unappreciative of God's mercy, and this is unacceptable for the child of God. He forgave us, so we **MUST** forgive others. There are three things that I want us to look at this morning as we examine the parable: An Insurmountable Sum, An Indifference to Suffering, and The Indignation of The Servants.

### **An Insurmountable Sum**

Jesus begins the story with a King who called in all of his servants (*doulos*, in the Greek meaning *bond slaves*) to give an account of their stewardship. One particular servant had been found guilty of embezzling ten thousand talents (millions in today's dollars) and was brought before the king. Just to put this in perspective, in Jesus' day the annual taxes that Rome collected from the whole region (Idumea, Judea, Samaria, and Galilee) was approximately 900 talents. This means that the servant owed his king eleven times the amount of annual tax for the entire region! There was no possible way that a lowly slave could EVER repay such a sum. It was in fact insurmountable.

The King was understandably upset about losing this much money and ordered the servant, along with his entire family to be sold into slavery to recoup what little he could from this massive loss of wealth. The servant fell upon his knees and pleaded for mercy, to which the King responded with compassion and forgave the debt! The word in the Greek used here for debt actually means "*loan*". The King treated this egregious act of reckless embezzlement as a loan, and then completely forgave any repayment! This is EXACTLY what Jesus did for us upon the cross. We owed God a debt for the recklessness of our sins against Him, and Jesus paid off our "loan" in full. This is why He said "***It is FINISHED***" upon the cross before he died. The word He actually uses is "*Teleo*" in the Greek meaning to "*pay in full*". Jesus paid off our debt to God, a debt that we could never possibly hope to repay.

The servant in the parable had never once thought about his horrible crime until he was summoned to stand before the King. He had been living it up on borrowed time, but when the day of reckoning had come, he stood there before the King convicted of his sin. He frantically begged for the opportunity to repay the loss, but all the while he knew in his heart that he could not possibly repay the debt, even if he served for a hundred lifetimes. His situation was insurmountable, and if the King hadn't responded with mercy, all hope would have been lost. This is exactly how we were, when we lived in the selfishness of sinful pleasure, never giving a thought to the holy standards of God, until we were convicted by The Holy Spirit. After which, we cried out for God's mercy. We received a pardon that day, and as a result, we should be eternally grateful. Our "loan" has been repaid. Our debt of sin has been cancelled. And what should we do as a result? We must live a life that brings honor to The King who gave his life to pardon us. Though the debt has been paid, we must never forget how much was owed! We were humbled before him, and He raised us up. We must never get above our raisin'. We must never forget how we came to this place of forgiveness and restoration. It was all about HIS goodness, and nothing to do with our own merits. Therefore, we have no grounds to think of ourselves more highly than we ought.

### **An Indifference to Suffering**

The unmerciful servant leaves the king's palace forgiven. It should have left the man with an overwhelming sense of gratitude. He should have felt like the weight of the world had been lifted from his tired shoulders, but instead he immediately goes out to look for a fellow servant who owes him a hundred denarii. The average wage in those days was a denarii per day, so the man owed him a hundred days wages, a mere pittance in comparison to the debt that had just been cancelled for himself. This was a debt that could be easily repaid, but the wicked servant demanded immediate payment! The poor man fell to his knees and uttered the exact same words the ungrateful servant had pleaded just hours before in the palace of the king: "Be patient with me, and I will pay you back". You would think that this earnest plea for patience and mercy would have stirred a remembrance in the wicked servant's heart, but it garners no response other than violence. He seizes the poor debtor by the throat and begins to choke the life out of him. How soon he had forgotten the amazing grace of his king!

When we fail to forgive others who sin against us, it shows that we have forgotten where we came from. We came from the palace of The King of Kings. We entered His house as a debtor, and found it to be a house of grace. There is no amount of wrong that others can do to us that even partially compares with the sins that we have committed against God. Jesus warned His disciples that we will be

forgiven in proportion to our forgiveness of others (**Matthew 6:14-15**)! Now I don't know about you, but I find myself in need of forgiveness pretty much daily! I can ill afford to withhold my forgiveness from others, because I am in such constant need of it myself. I never want to forget where I came from. I want to be ever reminded that I just came away from the king's palace of grace, forgiven for a debt that I could never repay. Therefore, it is a small matter for Him to ask that I forgive others as I have been forgiven. Are you harboring a grudge this morning? Perhaps it is past time to let it go. Can you remember a time when you stood before The King and heard him say. **"Neither do I condemn you, now go and sin no more."** (**John 8:11**).

The unmerciful servant was indifferent to the suffering of his fellow servant. Surely, he would not have been so cold and heartless had his king been standing there when he came upon the one who owed him this paltry sum. But sadly, he thought that the small debt owed to him was a completely separate issue. He never put it together, that he would be expected to forgive as he had been forgiven. The thought of this unreasonable reaction to his own good fortune never even crossed his mind. He was sadly misguided, for The King is always watching. He sees our hearts and knows our every action, even the ones that we think are done in secret (**Luke 12:2-3**). His indifference to the plight of his fellow servant was indefensible, and the king would soon hear of it. Listen to the words of Peter, that remind us of how we should respond to the grace given us:

**"His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these He has given us His very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires. For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith, goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love. For if you possess these qualities in INCREASING MEASURE, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But whoever does not have them is nearsighted and blind, FORGETTING that they have been cleansed from their past sins."**

**2 Peter 1:3-9**

### **The Indignation of The Servants**

I believe we will miss a very important truth in this parable, if we ignore the fact that it was the other servants that reported their unforgiving brother to the king. It is incumbent upon those of us within the church to "police" the church. Many Christians will witness one of their brethren committing sin, and for fear of being judgmental, will say or do nothing about it. This is not Biblical. We are required to correct wrongdoing when we see it. Jesus intends for His people to take a stand against all kinds of evil. He had just instructed His disciples to take such matters before the church to be resolved (**vs 17**). Take note of what the other servants did first. When they saw this violent act committed against one of their fellow servants, they reported the offense to the king. We should do that as well. It's called PRAYER. When we see a fellow Christian committing sin, the first thing we should do is PRAY about it. I have learned that God doesn't always want me to "handle" everything that comes up. Sometimes, He handles it Himself by convicting the guilty person so that they will repent, and other times, He will send someone else to correct them. The simple truth is that often times someone else is better equipped to lead someone to repentance and restoration than I. After I have prayed about it, and God gives me the directive to approach someone in sin, then I must pray for His guidance to do it according to scripture. **Galatians 6:1** commands us to approach those in error gently and with our mind set on their restoration. Going in "guns blazing" will rarely accomplish anything positive. So pray, and pray some more, before you try and help someone, making sure that you don't have more of a sin problem than they do (**Matthew 7:3-5**)!

The servants in the parable knew that they could not let the unmerciful servant get away with what he had done to his brother. They reported his actions to the king, and the king was furious. The servant was recalled to the palace. That must have been a very long walk for him to take. I remember

when I was a kid, and I had misbehaved. My father made me go out into the woods behind our house and bring back a switch for him to punish me with. I know that this may seem cruel in today's modern PC society, but when I grew up, parents actually punished their kids for misbehaving. What a novel idea. I suppose that they didn't want us to grow up and be like the rebellious thugs that are so prevalent in our society today! (Thanks mom and dad.) But I digress. Going to pick your own switch was one of the longest walks you could ever take when we were little. Every step was filled with the fear and dread of what would soon be coming your way. I imagine that is what the unmerciful servant must have felt upon his summons to return to the king's palace!

The king was in no mood for further mercies. Since the servant had so maliciously mistreated the man who owed him, he would return the favor. He immediately had the servant cast into debtors prison. It is interesting to note that the Romans didn't consider prison a place of punishment. Prison in Roman times was just a place to hold a prisoner until his actual sentence was carried out. The dungeons of Rome were filthy horrible places, and many prisoners didn't survive their stay in them as they awaited their punishment. Punishment in Roman times was severe indeed. For example, if someone was found guilty of perjury in a court proceeding, they were imprisoned until the day came to receive their punishment. And what was that you might ask? The perjurer would be taken outside of town and thrown off a cliff as punishment for his crime! Sometimes I wish that they would do that in Washington. We might just get a better class of politicians, don't you think?

Punishment for crime was swift and terrible in Roman times. In this case, the man and his family would have been imprisoned for a short period of time while his debts were publicly announced in the town square. If no one came to pay off the debt, then the family would subsequently be sold into slavery to work off every penny. It would take several consecutive life sentences to even come close to paying what was originally owed. The moral of the story is that God isn't the least bit impressed with someone who lacks compassion and forgiveness. Do you like being forgiven? Then learn to forgive others. Many have suggested this parable is proof that a person who falls into sin can lose their salvation, because the man who was forgiven was later re-burdened with his insurmountable debt. This is not the meaning of the story, nor should it be misinterpreted in that way. Jesus just wants us to understand that an unforgiving heart for the child of God is NOT an option. If we have truly been born again, then forgiving will come second nature to us. If we are unforgiving, then it is proof that we do not belong to God. Notice what He says in **verse 35, "This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you, unless you forgive your brother from your heart."** I love the "from your heart" part of that verse. Many times we offer phony forgiveness, but in our hearts we still hold a grudge. Let it go. If you hold a grudge against someone, it is the same as putting them in prison. Every prison must have a guard to watch over the prisoners. When you hold a grudge, YOU become that prison guard. Just release them, so that both of you can go home and get some rest! When we won't forgive others, we end up being more miserable in the end than they ever were. Just ask the unmerciful servant! FORGIVE... because you have been FORGIVEN. Don't get above your raisin'.

And ALL of GOD'S people said... TRUTH!!!